

ACSF-Oxfam Rural Resilience Project

Case Study: Putney, VT, USA

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**Making the Invisible Visible: Resilience as Concept and Practice and the Challenges of
Class in Putney, Vermont**

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Summary of Research Findings

Putney, Vermont, is a town of 2,700 people and a long history of involvement in alternative lifestyle movements. Putney is one of the many places to which people came when they went "back to the land" in the 1960's and '70's. Additionally, it was the original home of the well-known 19th century utopian Oneida Community, a community which, after being ousted from Putney, relocated to Oneida, New York. Overall, Putney is characterized today by several kinds of division--the two most notable are those between people with privileged access to money, natural resources and work, and those who are not as privileged. Also, a division between "native" Vermonters (some of whom are Abenaki or indigenous North Americans, but most of whom are not--those who grew up here who stake strong claims to place based on long family history) and "flatlanders" or those who relocate to Vermont or own second homes here. Further, 94.8% of Putney's residents identify as the category called "White Alone." The result is that Putney lives up to Vermont's reputation for being the "whitest state in the nation," only recently marginally displaced in the 2010 census by Maine, which has a few more percentage points of whiteness. As such, although all marginalizations occur intersectionally (that is, one cannot consider "class," "race," and "gender" as mutually exclusive categories for the analysis of oppression and marginalization), many of the dilemmas facing Putney manifest on the surface as dilemmas of "class" and income inequality. Racial discrimination and

racism are present, as they are across the nation, but due to the predominance of white people of Vermont, those particular issues are much less immediately visible because there is less contrast.

This report outlines, in ethnographically rich format, the contours of these divisions, and how they affect the processes and practices of building local resilience, primarily through the Transition Towns model.

Overview of Transition Towns and Transition Putney

"Transition Towns" is the name of a community organizing model that was developed in the community of Totnes, England, with the guidance of Rob Hopkins--it was first publicized in 2005. The model was outlined first in *The Transition Towns Handbook* (2008) and in subsequent other texts (Transition Handbook #2) and through numerous online resource-sharing tools such as videos and discussion fora. The model has a stated goal of "helping local communities develop resilience in the face of the triple crisis of economics, environment, and energy" (ibid). Those who become involved with the Transition model are community organizers and activists who are aware of the intersecting challenges posed by economic instability, global climate change and habitat destruction, and a foreseeable decline in readily available energy sources (a phenomenon sometimes known as "peak oil").

Participants in the model worldwide, therefore, are striving to organize under a new iteration of the old adage, "think globally, act locally." Transition Towns as a model asks participants to consider what resources their local community will need in a time of crisis--whether because there is no more fuel to run the trucks to deliver food to the community, whether extreme weather renders the community inaccessible and damaged, or otherwise. Transition Towns then asks participants to consider what resources, under- or unrecognized, already exist in their community, how to connect people with the resources they (will) need, and how to network those resources in a way that makes the community more able to withstand the shocks anticipated by different facets of the "triple crisis."

As of September, 2013, the Transition Network website (<http://www.transitionnetwork.org/>) registered 462 "official" initiatives and 654 "muller" initiatives in 43 countries. The majority of these initiatives are clustered in the Global North, in Europe, North America and Australia, with a scattered few in South America, Asia and South Africa. A "muller" initiative is usually constituted by a few people who find the Transition model to be useful, and are considering how best to mobilize it in their community. An "official" initiative is a group of people in a community who have put in considerable time and effort to begin the work of determining how to build resilience in the face of peak oil, climate change, and economic instability in their particular place, using the methods, frameworks and practices of Transition--a group which has passed a vetting process by Transition's "national hub" in their country.

My dissertation fieldwork, and research for ACSF/Oxfam, is situated in Putney, Vermont, in the network formed and partially maintained by Transition Putney. Transition Putney is an official Transition initiative, and has been so since 2010. The mission statement for Transition Putney reads "*Transition Putney engages the creativity, expertise and skill-sets of our friends and neighbors in the design of a sustainable, resilient, socially just and mutually supportive community. We collaborate to embrace the extraordinary challenge and opportunity of climate change, peak oil and economic instability. Together we reinvent, rethink, rebuild and celebrate our community and the world around us.*" (<http://www.transitionputney.net/home/mission/>)

Transition Putney organizers, here and elsewhere, identify peak oil, economic instability and climate change as threats. Collapse and secular visions of the apocalypse are on the minds of those organizing under the explicit banner of "local resilience." "Where will the food come from for me,

my family, and my community once the food trucks stop running to the grocery stores?" ask my informants (fieldnotes July and September, 2013). The kitchen floor, cupboards and refrigerator of one informant overflow with food. This is because she "wants to be able to have a three-month supply of food in the event that the shit hits the fan." (fieldnotes October 2013) Similarly, another informant told me that the installation of multiple different sets of solar panels will help in the event of a grid collapse (regionally or nationally), which was implied to be as likely by a "natural disaster" such as Hurricane Irene (of 2011) as it would be by social unrest that would bring hungry displaced people from New York City to Vermont. Even though the panels will be grid tied until then, she suggested, if the grid goes down entirely, there are enough people around Putney who can figure out how to wire up a local electrical system from those multiple panels so that there can be pockets of publicly available electricity (interview, Sept. 2013).

I offer these moments of ethnographic detail in order to highlight the reasons that I have chosen to situate my research on local resilience-building efforts in the context of Transition Putney. Visions of economic collapse, environmental catastrophe, peak oil, and the resulting potential for social unrest with the disappearance of all systems as we have come to know them haunt the future for people involved in this model. Some approach the work through a practice of hope for positive transformation that can occur with resilience building, and some harbor dark and fearful visions of a threatened future, of what might be called a secular apocalypse. These overarching visions for the future serve to drive resilience-building efforts in this area.

I chose Putney's Transition initiative in particular for several reasons. First, it is productive to consider the matter of resilience in the context of a community that is already thinking at least partially in those terms, because my scholarship will directly benefit their process as well as benefiting directly from their considerations and work. Second, the particular questions that are raised about resilience in rural North American communities are starkly highlighted through the lens of Transition Putney's already-existing efforts to build resilience. And third, Vermont's long self-recounted folk history of community strength, neighborliness, and what we might now call local resilience underpins the ways that community is built, divided, or challenged in this context, providing an opportunity for insight into folk genealogies of what resilience has looked like.

Transition Putney, like all Transition initiatives, started as four or five people who had "gotten excited" about the model. In this case, one woman in the community found the Transition Handbook and brought it to another man, telling him "you have to read this. Right now." So he did--and they began to collaborate with others in 2009 to work with the activities the model suggests. Transition Putney is officially governed by a consensus-based structure of organizing, where anyone from the community can offer a project idea or plan an event under the aegis of Transition.

The distributed organization structure centers around the "core group" which is made up (or meant to be) of members of each of the "working groups" of Transition Putney. The "working group" structure allows community members and others to be involved where they are most comfortable and excited--someone interested in the Community Garden working group, for instance, need not be involved in the Local Currency working group, though both groups fall under the organizing structure of Transition Putney, and in theory, anyone can join any group. During my first months in the field, the new core team for Transition Putney met twice a month to hear updates on progress or activity from all the working groups, to propose new ideas, and to discuss requests or suggestions from community members and other organizations.

Though there was a core initiating team of seven people in Putney, that core team (as with all Transition core initiating teams) was intended to dissolve after the official "launch party" for the initiative. The idea was that at that point, the core team and their collaborators would have

generated enough excitement in the community at large through events and activities that the initiative would be "self-sustaining" on the distributed energy of the community, as many different people step forward to offer workshops, host films or book discussions, or organize "reskilling" workshops. Knowledge sharing of this sort is key to the success of the Transition model.

In Putney's case, after the official launch, the core team did not step back from organizing, and one or two people sustained the momentum of planning and hosting events over the period of a year or two. This resulted in some negative feelings toward those central core organizers, and in the exhaustion of those organizers' ability to keep planning and holding events. Though a new core team is now in place, momentum for the work of Transition's events has fallen off dramatically in the community over the last year. The rocky road presented by the switch from one core team to another has been cited by other local Transition initiatives as the thing they do not want to happen. "We don't want to turn out like Transition Putney" (fieldnotes, Nov 2013) so we'll do this another way. Currently, participants in Transition Putney are "figuring out next steps" for the initiative (fieldnotes, Nov 5th 2013).

The community profile I outline here responds to the matter of governance, civic capacity, natural resources, and economic resources with particular reference to the "Putney" that is defined by state and federal jurisdictional boundaries.¹ Putney's jurisdiction is contained within Windham County, a county in the southeast of Vermont, a state in the northeast section of the United States of America. Vermont is bordered on the east by the Connecticut River and New Hampshire, on the south by Massachusetts, and on the west by New York State.

Methods

This research project sought to follow the methods outlined in the Rights for Resilience framework as laid out by Walsh-Dilley et. al (2013). I offer first some observations on the successes and challenges of mobilizing this framework in the field, as a way to ground the data analysis that follows. I then offer a Community Profile that will ground the Challenges and Threats overview that follows it. I conclude with commentary on Broader Themes and offer a loving critique of resilience as concept and practice.

The project focuses on three primary methods for collecting qualitative data: the "community forum," the informal or semi-formal interview, and extended participant observation on the part of the researcher in the life of the town.

To meet the suggested "community forum" methodological suggestion, I facilitated and hosted several "Local Resilience Community Discussions" in affiliation with Transition Putney. I requested interviews or informal research-oriented conversations with several participants of these fora, in addition to interviewing others whose participation and commentary at other events suggested a willingness to participate in research on the subject of resilience. My long-term ethnographic fieldwork, which is ongoing, means that I live and work in the community that I am studying. As such, every event that I attend at the town library, and every time I get coffee in the village, and all casually made observations create the context and ground of my broader observations about resilience and community, and create the opportunity for connections that lead to interview-related qualitative data collection.

The community forums were quite useful in terms of producing interesting content in observation and discussion. However, they were not as successful in terms of having large

¹ Needless to say, here as anywhere such boundaries are heuristic and arbitrary at best, and destructive and misleading at worst. I will, when appropriate and necessary, highlight the inadequacy of the mapped jurisdiction to deal with the complexities of community as concept and practice.

participation in raw numbers. Over two events, a total of eleven people participated in these discussions, most of whom were there because of the event's affiliation with the Transition Putney group. This was productive for hosting a small-group discussion in and of itself--small group discussions are ideally between four and nine people, which allows each person's voice to be heard. I facilitated these discussions in an informal manner, guiding conversation to touch both on matters of concern for participants as well as on the central themes of this research. I structured the discussions around three questions:

1) *What are some challenges that you and / or your community have dealt with in the last five or ten years? What are some ways that people have responded to those challenges?*

2) *Where is the "local" in local resilience? What counts as local? Who is in it?*

3) *There are many definitions of resilience floating around out there. What can it mean here, in this place, in particular?*

These questions were deemed highly useful by participants—"fundamental," in one participants' words; "I had never thought about these questions before" commented another. I relied on my skills as a facilitator to structure a differently styled but still directed conversation to emerge, even without the World Café format².

Six participants consented to complete the exit survey. Of these, five noted that their primary ethnic identity is "white" or "WASP." Three participants were female, and eight were male. Only one survey respondent was female. One noted his primary ethnic identity to be "born again hippie." All attendees read to the researcher as white. One attendee noted their annual income range as between \$0-\$25,000, four noted theirs between \$25,000-\$50,000, and one noted his as between \$50,000-\$75,000. Based on comments by all participants (not limited to survey respondents), while several had never been to a Transition Towns event before that evening, most had been to multiple Transition Towns events, both in Putney and in surrounding communities.³

² I had designed the discussion to be facilitated in the style of a World Café, which is a model for coordinating group conversations used often in community and social movement circles--again, such that each person's voice is heard and input is appreciated. I suggest that future Rural Resilience Researchers are trained in this, or another, specific model of organizing community participatory discussions. There is a phenomenal range of activist and organizer tools available for running this kind of discussion, and it would seem useful to send researchers into the field with more familiarity with such tools than they might otherwise have gained in an academic setting. This model relies on having three to five small tables, with seats for four or five people each--over the course of addressing the three iteratively designed questions presented to the participants in the Café, participants shuffle from table to table, in musical chairs style. This enables participants to diversify the kind of people they're talking with in each small conversation, while keeping each conversation to a size that feels socially manageable among "strangers." Further, the World Café style of facilitation suggests covering each table with paper and pens for drawing and taking notes--the physical remnants of conversations left behind by those at the table during the last question can serve as a jumping-off point for discussion of the new question. As such, the participation of only five people per forum meant that this iterative discussion model, where people interact with different peers at each stage, culminating in a wrap-up "harvesting the knowledge" session with the large group, was not feasible.

³ I write elsewhere (Boke, C. 2013. "The Local' as a mode of life: the politics of resilience-building efforts in the Transition Towns movement." presented at the Institut Nationale pour Recherche Agricole, Dijon, France, Nov 20, 2013) about the ways in which Transition initiative here is recognized and visible as a project that belongs to people of greater socioeconomic mobility--e.g. it becomes inscribed as "classed," limiting its desirability among those who don't identify with its language, presentation, and desires. It is usually Transition participants who are most well-versed in thinking about resilience, since the model itself is based on a notion of "building community resilience in the face of the triple crisis of economics, environment and energy." Ironically for this forum, some of the most dug-in and involved participants in the Transition model were unable to attend.

Seeking a Diversity of Voices

I had anticipated to a certain extent that these discussions would not include a wide diversity of community voices simply by dint of their identification with Transition Putney. As such, I glean a diversity of voices for my analysis here from conversations—ranging from highly informal to structured interviews—with a broad variety of community members in a variety of settings. The process of "hanging out" long enough to have enough informal conversations and develop relationships with the people that this research relies on has been the most productive aspect of the research effort so far. Any researcher, in making her face, her voice, and her presence known in a quiet way, in the way that one comes to be co-present in community with other community members, is doing invaluable work towards building trust with that community. No research, and certainly no healthy or resilient life, can be conducted without these long-term trust-building efforts at co-presence, at being together with people.

In seeking out individuals for one-on-one interviews, I primarily focused attention on the spectrum of people who participate regularly or peripherally in Transition events, with people working at local businesses (primarily the General Store), with a few town officials, as well as on ongoing conversations with farmers whose produce and products goes to market at the local Putney Farmers' Market. As part of the ongoing work of this dissertation research I am seeking out low-income folks who are *not* farmers (most farmers are also low income) to discuss the matter of resilience. Building those connections is outside the purview of this report, thus most lower income voices represented here are those of farmers. The distinct lack of the voices of a diversity of individuals living with low incomes means that I draw a particular *kind of* conclusion in this report about the challenges of income inequality.

Here I offer an analysis of data I collected via participation and conversation primarily with middle- and high-income individuals, with backgrounds of primarily white privilege, with equal consideration given to the experiences of female-identified and of male-identified individuals. Thus, my conclusions about the challenges around income inequality revolve primarily around the dilemma of *how people can communicate about it*, rather than attempting to articulate *what those challenges particularly are based on individuals' voiced experience*. The exception to that is the work with low-income individuals who farm; I have used the data gleaned from those individuals' conversations with me first to inform my analysis directly, and next to do further archival research on the problem of poverty in Putney. It is from the combination of those qualitative and archival data that I analyze challenges around socioeconomics here.

All those who are quoted gave oral consent for their comments to be used. Any names used here have been changed.

Community Profile

Economic Resources

Overview: Putney's economic resources connect broadly to the education industry, the tourist industry, and to some extent to manufacturing (through a single paper mill). Though they are not in the majority in the town, a socially significant number of people in town have access to wealth and resources beyond those they earn or create in town—via trust funds, investments, retirement savings, or other means. An even more significant number of people live in economically marginalized circumstances described in greater detail below. This marked socioeconomic divide is most visibly characterized for the marginalized by experiences of food

insecurity, changes in jobless benefits and federally-funded food aid programs, a disparity in access to education and resources in the town, and the need to drive long distances for work, as well as to work more than one job. Further, the divide is characterized for those with access to resources (many of whom were not born and raised in Vermont) by a sense of non-belonging and a sense that their place in the community of "locals" is tenuous at best.

Who is connected to markets? Who isn't? Are labor markets locally accessible? How do labor markets work?

According to the 2010 U.S. Census, Putney's population fluctuates around 2,700; in 2012, 17 children were born to Putney parents, and 20 people died. These numbers are reflected in a general sense across the state of Vermont that "young people are leaving" (fieldnotes July 24, 2013) primarily due to lack of available appropriate livelihoods, and secondarily due to rising costs of living spurred not only by increases in the cost of food but also by rising housing costs, rented and purchased. I suggest that the increase in both food and housing costs is connected in part to the marketing of Vermont (and of towns like Putney) via the "Made in Vermont" brand as a place and set of images to desire. Further, I suggest that the desirability of Vermont's idyllic rural setting, including but not limited to its ability to market its "local foods" and "local way of life," serve to draw in high-paying out-of-state residents whose presence makes it possible for prices to go up. One might go so far as to call this a kind of rural gentrification (see e.g. Hines 2009; Nelson and Nelson 2010).

Putney, like many small towns in this part of Vermont, is characterized socioeconomically by a marked disparity in income and financial stability. According to the U.S. Census of 2000, of 613 families in Putney, 50% of the families in the town make a combined income of \$50,000 a year or less. 4.7% of families, or 29 families make upwards of \$150,000 a year, as compared to the 3.9% of families statewide who draw down similarly high incomes. The median family income in Putney is \$50,170, slightly higher than the state median of \$48,625. 51% of Putney's school age children qualify for the federal free or reduced lunch program, a number that strikes many of my informants in Putney as painfully high, and is above the state average of 40% qualifying.

There are many small businesses in Putney, including the stores and restaurants in the village center. Small businesses run by craftspeople (e.g. The Vermont Weaving School) seek to diversify the kinds of markets they can access, seeking to sell a range of goods and services. These small business people market themselves by creating craft objects or items for sale--many also reach consumer markets by offering paid workshops teaching their others how to make such objects. Additionally, southern Vermont is increasingly populated by those interested in spiritual and healing practices--small businesses focusing on those practices include The Gaia School of Healing, Medicine for the People, and other small-scale practitioners of healing arts who offer opportunities for people to become paying students of herbal or natural medicine. Additionally, in the last four years especially, federal subsidies combined with improvements in photovoltaic technologies mean that small companies whose specialty is the installation and maintenance of solar photovoltaic arrays are cropping up all over the region.

The largest employers in the town are the SoundView mill and a variety of educational institutions. Putney is home to Landmark College, the Putney School, The Greenwood School, The Putney Grammar School, and the public Putney Central School. Landmark College, the Grammar School and the Putney School are private institutions, whose tuition ranges from \$15,000 to \$70,000

per year⁴. These institutions bring into the town some revenue that might not otherwise be there in the form of local expenditures by visiting parents and families (as well, obviously, as students). That said, overall, Putney residents who are not independently financially stable experience a range of hardships with regard to the availability of jobs and access to sources of reliable income. Due to a lack of locally available jobs appropriate to their skills and needs, a significant portion of residents who do have paid work need to commute between 30 and 120 minutes one way to access labor markets. The coexistence of these two extremes of the socioeconomic spectrum in Putney means that some peoples' dilemmas are invisible to others.

What is exchanged, and by whom? Groceries, Crafts, and Travel to Affordable Markets

**Welcome to fabulous Putney, Vermont! What happens here stays here
(except that nothing really ever happens here).**

So reads the tag line on a light blue cotton tee-shirt that I recently purchased from the Putney General Store at the intersection of Westminster Road and Vermont State Rt. 5. This tag line, which brings to mind the great tourist destination of Las Vegas (what happens there stays there), serves to mock itself gently, and markets the quiet rural idyll of Vermont generally, and Putney specifically, to tourists who may want to remember their visit. The General Store claims heritage as the “oldest general store in Vermont,” having been started on the site in 1796. It was most recently re-constructed in 2010, after a second fire in 2009—arson is suspected, but the culprit has still not been apprehended. Just a year prior, in 2008, the first fire that destroyed it was merely accidental.

The daytime shopping and socializing traffic of Putney’s residential community--those working in the village itself, on farms in the area coming into the village for lunch, or on road or construction crews--is now split between the Putney Cooperative Market and the new, very clean and shiny General Store, about three-quarters of a mile north of the Co-op on Rt 5. That split—some folks head to the Co-op for their coffee and others to the General Store—mirrors to a certain extent some of the other social and economic divides that characterize Putney, and, indeed, many similar small Vermont towns.

General stores have served historically as a source for food items and hard goods for the kitchen, farm, and home. A contemporary general store always caters to both local and tourist populations. Towns like Putney carry the weight of “Vermont charm,” meaning that through the summer and into the fall “foliage season” bikers and car-traveling tourists come through looking to pick up some of the cuteness marketed under the Vermont brand. According to the Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development, Vermont’s state economy draws some 43% of its income from tourism, well above the national average of 21%. According to general observations made in the Putney Town Plan of 2006 (re-adopted in 2011), Putney draws a large proportion of its cashflow from similar tourist revenues. Thus, the General Store in the village center carries an entire freezer case of ice cream products and has a deli counter and many supplemental foods such as chips for lunch—there are tables to sit at, a full-service deli, and daily copies of the local newspaper, the *Brattleboro Reformer* as well as the *New York Times*.

A pharmacy just opened upstairs, and limited household and farm goods (cleaning products, housewares, limited parts for farm and household machinery, etc) are available there. Something like 100 square feet of floorspace is devoted to wine, and several options for memorializing a

⁴ <http://www.landmark.edu/> ; <http://www.putneyschool.org/> ; <http://thegrammarschool.org/> ; <http://www.greenwood.org/> ; <http://www.putneycentral.org/>

stopover in Putney, including the tee-shirt mentioned above, bumper stickers, and postcards. On October 17th 2013 the General Store opened an espresso bar, signalling a change in the clientele that frequent the store as well as customers flocked in to avail themselves of the combination of wireless internet service and espresso drinks. Unfortunately for the Putney Co-op, that opening coincided with the breakdown of their own espresso machine, which meant that the Co-op lost some of its regular fancy-coffee customers to the General Store for about a week. Prices at the General Store are on average lower than at the Co-op, and where the Co-op provides only food and health and beauty products, the General Store aspires to serve broader needs.

That said, its recent change of ownership and second reconstruction means that this, the “oldest general store in Vermont,” doesn’t feel very old or well established. Even though some of the cashiers are also farmers and livestock owners, chatting with me about anticipating their ponies being angry at having been left out in the rain all day, the store does not feel like a farmer’s store.. Just up the street near the General Store there are several small craft stores, as well as an upscale restaurant, a workout studio, and a theater used for film screenings and live performances, all in buildings that can be dated to the 19th century. The craft stores are frequented by tourists for most of the year, and during the holiday season by other local residents. The Gleanery and the theater both draw significant local crowds, as does Medicine for the People, an alternative medicine and yoga studio that recently opened behind the Town Hall. Around the town you’ll find scattered farm stands during the growing season (as well as larger stands, which are open year-round) where one can buy produce, value-added food products, and sometimes baked goods and assorted craft items.

The families of children who qualify for free and reduced-price school lunches--and many other families as well--cannot afford the price of food at the Putney Co-op, and instead buy groceries locally at Mountain Paul’s Gas Station in Putney or the General Store, although only the latter carries any significant selection of fresh fruits and vegetables. During the summer months, the Putney Farmer’s Market (a project initiated by Transition Putney) offers options for locally grown produce and locally baked or cooked food. Alternatively, for even lower prices, folks travel to Walmart in Hinsdale, New Hampshire, 14.5 miles from Putney, or to Hannaford’s in north Brattleboro, 7.9 miles from Putney, or even further afield. These lengths of transit that folks go to in order to buy affordable food are similar to the trips that residents of other small Vermont towns without village grocery stores make. Weathersfield, VT, for instance is just 30 miles north of Putney, also on the Connecticut River bordering New Hampshire, and has a comparable population of 2,100. Residents of one side of town in Weathersfield—revolving around the village of Ascutney—travel north to the grocery store in Windsor, while residents on the other side of town, nearer to the village of Perkinsville, travel south to the town of Springfield.

Several local stores in the village center focus their efforts on selling to a tourist and gift-oriented market: a craft store, an antique store, a bead store, and a secondhand clothing store all cluster in the village center. A variety of services are also available to Putneyites along Rt 5 in the village, from massage to a family medical practice to an alternative medicine and yoga studio, as well as a web design company and several auto repair venues.

Many people have small gardens and do small scale animal husbandry—primarily chickens, and some people raise ducks or turkeys, while others raise larger animals such as pigs, goats, and sheep. The biggest are cattle—Vermont was long known for its dairy farms, and the area around Putney had some historically massive dairy operations. There has been a collapse of Vermont’s small dairy producers in the last 30 years, with the number of dairy cattle in the state declining from, in 1940, roughly 500,000, compared with a human population of 250,000, to today’s roughly 300,000 cattle to 620,000 people (see e.g. Albers 2002; Courtney and Zencey 2012).

Needless to say, the collapse of small dairy farms and the parallel collapse of small-scale agriculture affected the economic state of the state as a whole, including Putney.⁵ According to the Putney Town Plan of 2011, "specific data is not available on a town level" (2011:46) on the state of agricultural practice in Putney. The planners note, however, that "county-wide data shows between 1992 and 2002 the number of acres of land in farms increased by about 40 percent. So while agriculture as a major industry [at the state and county level] has declined, there has been an increase in the amount of land being used to farm" (ibid).

The plan further notes that "agri-tourism appears to be an increasingly large sector of Putney's economy" (ibid). In conversation with farmers in the area who are supplying the local farmers' market with vegetables and value-added products such as home-made jams and goat cheeses, I found that agri-tourism serves an important role. "Maybe that's how I can keep the farm going," said one informant whose farm is not bringing in enough revenue to support her family. "If I can do agri-tourism where they come to stay at the farmhouse and pay to help with farmwork, that could be a good addition to the business." (fieldnotes Sept 25 2013). Small-scale farms such as the one this informant runs are key to producing the aesthetic appeal of Vermont's farming landscape. At the same time, nearly all small farms operate in a consistently economically marginal state. Middle-scale farms such as Harlow's Sugar House and Green Mountain Orchards, both in Putney, are better able to support themselves via the agri-tourism market based in part on their ability to open road-side stands and encourage active participation in farming--through activities like "pick-your-own" berries and apples in season.

For more on farming in Putney, please see the "Land Use" subheading under the "Natural Resources" section.

Nonmarket Exchange

Exchange in Vermont, and in Putney particularly, is not limited to that mediated by the abstract commodity of cash or involvement with the federal credit/debt system. Some examples of nonmonetary exchange include work-trade for food, which happens primarily on farms where

⁵ See, also, the Putney Town Plan of 2011 for further commentary. It offers further insight into an overview of Putney's economic history:

"The first paper mill, in its current location, dates from before 1820. By 1840 there were two recognizable centers, the "Village" and East Putney. There were two Post Offices and, when the railroad came through in 1850, there were two stations. Railroads opened up the far reaches of the world to Putney, a convenience that lasted 100 years. Paper, wool, tobacco, apples, milk, and ice were among the many products that were shipped by train to New York and other markets in a few hours.....1920 was the low point [of population]. By 1980 the population had rebounded to 1853 inhabitants, just surpassing the 1790 high mark. Part of this new migration is attributable to Putney School and to The Experiment in International Living, both established in Putney about 1935, and to the other educational institutions that followed. The Hickory Ridge School, an elementary boarding started in 1941, lasted about ten years. The Putney Graduate School, started in 1950, became "Putney Antioch", and then moved to Keene, NH, in 1972, and is now Antioch New England. Windham College opened in 1951, and functioned until 1978. The Grammar School opened its doors in 1960, the Greenwood School, a boarding school for boys, took over The Experiment's campus after The Experiment (now World Learning) had moved to Brattleboro. Landmark College, the country's only college level institution for high potential students with dyslexia or specific learning disabilities, now occupies the campus of Windham College...Local revenue is generated through property taxes, State funds, permits and licenses, fees and charges for services, bequests and grants, and other miscellaneous reimbursements. Expenditures are made in the following categories: government, highway, public safety, education, and miscellaneous. Both the Town and School District develop annual budgets and have reserve accounts for future capital expenditures. In 2003, property taxes alone generated a total of \$3,396,934. Expenditures (both Town and School) totaled \$4,264,344, as indicated in Table 1. The various other sources of revenue listed above provided the remaining funds." (Putney Town Plan 2011:9)

people put in hours of labor in exchange for fresh produce, but also in other areas where, for instance, help in building a shed is offered in exchange for meals (as was the case for this researcher during her first residence in the area). The long-standing regional tradition of potlucks means that there are frequent gatherings where the bulk of the food served to a group of people has not been produced at the home or other location where the gathering is held, but rather each attendee (or couple, or family) brings a dish to share of some sort as contribution to the gathering. These exchanges are not thought of as exchanges, but rather as ways to be in community together, to share a good meal and a good recipe, or even just to have a party. Further, the consistent opportunity for individuals to offer or ask for help on projects such as moving a couch, building a structure, or acquiring new appliances (it takes a lot of effort to get a dryer into a basement!) may be glossed as nonmonetary or nonmarket exchange. The lines, of course, are quite fuzzy—as nobody feels comfortable putting dollar signs on such “exchanges,” they are not understood as “nonmarket” as opposed to “monetary” exchange. Rather, they are just “what you do” for your neighbors and community.

Governance

Structure

Putney, like nearly every town with small to medium-sized population in the state of Vermont, is governed locally by a combination of the Town Selectboard and the Town Manager. The Selectboard positions are elected by triennial vote, as are positions as Library Trustees, Auditors and Listers, School Directors, and the Town Moderator (responsible in part for moderating town meetings). There are other elected positions as well. The responsibilities of the Selectboard include the appointment of individuals to other positions—including and not limited to the Conservation Commission, the position of Energy Coordinator, the position of Fence Viewer, the Surveyor of Wood and Lumber, and the Planning Commission, to name a few. The town as a governance structure is responsible for overseeing the fiscal and physical maintenance of the School District and its facilities, as well as the municipal water supply and the municipal sewer system (each of which are consolidated only in the center of the village).⁶ Additionally, the town is responsible for the Class One through Three (public highway) roads in its boundaries, for public services such as streetlights and the recycling station, and for the fire station, its employees and its equipment. The town government is also responsible for the collecting of state and local (property) taxes, as well as collecting usage fees from municipal water and sewer users.

The town manager serves also as the zoning coordinator, and as such she is responsible for overseeing the legality and maintenance of building codes and appropriate permits when residents apply to the zoning commission for permission to construct a new structure or alter an existing structure on their property. The town is also responsible for interfacing with state-level regulatory mechanisms such as Act 250, a provision in the state’s legal framework that outlines tools for assessing the potential environmental consequences of any development. In towns like Putney, the zoning board's guidelines take precedence over Act 250, but there are times when both come into play.

Participation

The United States tradition of annual town meeting, established by European settlers in the years after colonization, first took place in what is now known as Vermont in 1762, according to the Vermont Secretary of State (2008). Vermont's Town Meeting continues to take place on the first Tuesday in March. Until recently, all matters brought to a vote before the citizens of the town were

⁶ See the "Water Resources" map attached.

decided via a "floor vote" at Town Meeting of raised hands in favor or opposing ballot measures. Such matters range from questions of budgets to decisions about regulations and relationships with other entities and more. Run by the Town Moderator (an elected position) using Robert's Rules of Order to ensure "orderliness," Town Meeting has traditionally been a place to catch up with politics as much as with neighbors, and to take active part in the directly democratic process of running a small Vermont town.

Recently, most towns in Vermont have shifted to the use of the privately marked, paper-based system called "Australian ballot" to enable citizens to cast votes. With this move, the directness of democracy that is practiced on the floor of the town meeting has diminished. Many issues important to citizens come to vote come through private Australian ballot rather than by floor vote these days, thus changing the socially visible nature of the voting process as a space for sociality and encountering one's neighbors in (mostly) friendly debate. That said, the tradition stands in Putney as well, and on the first Tuesday in March of every year, one can find an increasingly smaller segment of the Putney population gathered at the public school to hear the issues up for vote that year.

During the course of research for this project, several comments were made to me about the nature of Town Meeting and who shows up. "It's the usual suspects," one person said, by which he meant the people that are already involved in a lot of things, the people who have the time and financial flexibility to be deeply involved in making the life of the town happen. "Mostly educated folks, folks with a lot of school under their belts, folks who are mostly retired, though not all of them. You don't see the old farmers at Town Meeting anymore, except for maybe [that one] who always tells stories about the way things used to be. Mostly it's folks who are not from here originally." (fieldnotes, Nov 7, 2013).

This story, the story of who participates, who feels that he or she has the right to or the time to participate, is a common theme in all of my research findings thus far. The matter of financial stability and education appear to be directly linked to participation in town governance and civic organizing.

Relationship to state/national government

At the level of the responsibilities of the Town Manager and the elected officers of the municipal administration, the relationship to Vermont State government is much more important than the relationship to federal government systems. Though some limited projects might be funded directly by federal monies, those tend to be related to disaster relief efforts rather than ongoing maintenance. In the case of disasters such as 2011's Hurricane Irene, which devastated wide swathes of Vermont (and left Putney relatively untouched), it is the responsibility of the Town Manager to call the appropriate state officer to report damages and needs. Similarly, it is through partnerships between state-level funding, state officials and local officials that initiatives like the recently installed sidewalk along Rt 5 in the center of the village are possible. At the moment the ongoing conflict about the relationship between state and local interests is about a Park'n'Ride at the Interstate exit number and entrance that has been in planning stages for nearly a decade.

Satisfaction

In some ways, asking any contemporary United States citizen whether they are "satisfied" with their governance structure is a recipe for a long-winded diatribe—whether you're asking someone who identifies Democrat or Republican, libertarian or anarchist or Green Party. There is much to be improved upon in terms of the ways in which the federal government supports, and is perceived to support (as well as perceived to demand things of) citizens.

An informant told me that he decided to run for a position on the Selectboard because he was “interested to see how the process actually works,” having “not really known much about town management before.” (Fieldnotes, 11/4/2013) With such elected positions available every three years, and other appointed positions available for citizen participation, there are ample opportunities for citizens to “make their voices heard” in the context of town governance (for instance in writing the new Putney Town Plan, now in the works). Every meeting of the Selectboard and other entities of the town (the Conservation Commission, etc) is open to the public. The public, diverse as it is, shows up infrequently, and when they do, as one town official commented to me, “it’s always the same people who come talk to me” (fieldnotes, Aug 25 2013) about town issues.

Another informant commented to me, however, that “some people would rather complain than get involved to change things” (fieldnotes, 11/8/2013). Indeed, a general sense that “things could be better” emerges from conversations around the town about local politics, and that only a small minority of individuals desire, or are capable of (in terms of time commitment) being involved in determining what “better” might look like for the town. There is also a sense that even the officials at the town level are “the enemy,” or the “them” in us-versus-them (fieldnotes, August 26, 2013). Even when the town officials in question are friends and neighbors or, in some cases, relatives, the officials and their positions become targets of blame and recrimination for everything from high taxes to inadequate public service to the perceived over-reach of not just the federal government but also the *state* government into the lives and livelihoods in this town.

Knowledge sharing

As in any community, there is a wealth of embodied, experiential, and scholastically acquired knowledge held by the individuals and institutions of the community of Putney. Traditional sites for sharing knowledge in Putney include such public discussion fora as Town Meeting, the Selectboard meeting, informal or formal gatherings of small business owners for networking purposes, intentional collaborations between individuals or institutions, and co-working (on farms, in businesses, etc) or collaborative project development.

Some of these knowledge sharing techniques occur regionally, with individuals, businesses and public or nonprofit institutions collaborating between Westminster, Brattleboro, and Putney. Some occur on a more interpersonal scale, as is the case when I spend time working on the farm of one of my informants as she shares her methods for growing vegetables for the local market, or when I cared for the goats of another informant as she and her family went on a week's vacation. The schools of the town, of course, are prime sites for knowledge sharing in the modes traditionally recognized as "teaching and learning."

One of the primary desires that underpins the involvement of a majority of my informants who participate in the Transition Towns model in Putney lies in the model's stated goal to allow "knowledge" to be not merely a set of facts that one learns at school. Rather, Transition Putney's early efforts sought to bring together those who had skills to share with those who wanted to learn them. "Reskilling workshops," as they are called, are a way for members of the community to teach and learn with one another, and to come to recognize the experiential knowledge gained over years of practice as equally, if not more, important than the book-learning acquired at school.

Thus, reskilling workshops on topics as diverse as "bread baking," "bow hunting," "fruit tree pruning," "easy hand knitting," and "foraging for food" have been offered, to name just a few. These workshops were, and seek to still be, sites where a slightly more formalized transfer of knowledge can happen among community members--indeed, where the transfer of knowledge and skill can serve as a method of bringing the community together in new ways. Participants cite the reskilling

workshops as "the most successful way" that they have "bridged the class divide" in town. There are and have been occasional other workshops like these outside the context of Transition Putney, but they usually cost significantly more (Transition's are usually free or very close to it) and they are not routinized in the way that Transition Putney's were for several years. These workshops are cited as one of people's "favorite parts about Transition, that you get to learn from community. [That old time farmer] knows how to fix a baler, but I don't, and I want to!" (fieldnotes Oct 10 2013).

Civic Capacity

For a town of only a few thousand people, Putney has a large number of groups doing what we might call "civic work." To start with the most recently established, Transition Putney is a group aligned with the international social movement coalescing around the Transition Towns model, developed in 2005 to help communities address the challenges they face with regard to climate change, economic instability, and peak oil. Putney's iteration of this model supported in its first years the opening of a Farmer's Market and a Community Garden in Putney next to the Co-operative Grocery store. Transition and its core participants also served as strong support for the revitalization of the Putney Food Shelf, an organization funded by state and local grant money to provide free food which now serves 20-25 people on a weekly basis with no questions asked.

Related to Transition Putney but not entirely of it are the local Gleaning Program⁷ in the Putney/Dummerston/Westminster West/Brattleboro area. Volunteers go to farm fields after farmers have harvested those parts of their crops that are marketable, and the volunteers are allowed to glean many thousands of pounds of food for local and area Food Shelves. Both the Food Shelf in Putney and also Putney Cares serve marginalized populations--where the food shelf gives some caloric stability to families in financial distress, Putney Cares serves as a home and gathering place for elders in the community, offering classes and companionship. The United Church of Putney, as well as Our Lady of Mercy (Catholic) and the Quaker Meeting House are all within walking distance of the center of the village. Other, less institutionalized, communities of faith and worship gather at residences. These less institutionalized communities do not exactly fall under the heading of Civic Capacity, but nonetheless are part of what characterizes the coming together of community members in Putney.

The Putney Conservation Commission and the Putney Historical Society are both directly subsidized by local tax revenues, and as such serve as a cross-over between governance and civic capacity, as many things do in small-town New England. Other organizations subsidized by local tax revenues include Putney Cares, the Putney Community Center, Putney Family Services, the Putney Foodshelf, the AIDS Project of Southern Vermont, Brattleboro Area Drop-In Center, Brattleboro Area Hospice, Morningside Shelter, Vermont Adult Learning, the Windham Child Care Association, the Windham County Humane Society, and the SouthEastern Vermont Community Association (SEVCA)⁸.

Which local organizations are "most important" depends, again, on whom one is asking. For the parents working three jobs between them in an effort to feed their children but not quite being able to make ends meet—especially with the recent cuts to Federal Food Aid—the Food Shelf undoubtedly serves a very important need. That said, a stigma is attached to utilizing the Food Shelf, here as anywhere, despite organizers' efforts to destigmatize it. For elders in the community, the classes and programs offered by Putney Cares, as well as the housing options there, may provide the most important benefits.

⁷ <http://www.vtfoodbank.org/>

⁸ Town of Putney Annual Report, 2012.

For energetic middle-aged people with some free time or some desire to organize or both, the Transition Putney group can serve as a very important way to connect with like-minded people in the community, to discuss relevant local and global dilemmas, and to plan actions that can be taken locally to make the community stronger. The monthly Community Suppers also serve as an important meeting and gathering place where a segment of the community can socialize and eat together. I described above the ways that attendance at Town Meeting is perceived as limited to a “certain population”—so, too, here, my informants explain that Community Suppers are attended by a certain segment of the population of the town, and “actual cross-community conversations and meetings” rarely happen. These may be productive and important indeed for connections within that portion of the community, but not, ultimately, felt to be open to all. Again, here, perceptions of socioeconomic class serve as seeming barriers to interaction.

Quite a few local organizations have explicit links to regional ones—the Food Shelf, for instance, has an ongoing relationship with the Vermont Food Bank, and especially with VFB’s Gleaning Program in Windham County. As may be evident from the organizations’ names, Brattleboro Area Hospice and organizations like that are designed and intended to serve an area beyond the quasi-metropolitan borders of the City of Brattleboro proper. As the nearest larger towns, many civic-service needs that Putney residents experience are served by organizations in Brattleboro or, to the north, Bellows Falls. In this sense, regional connection is much more important than connections to state- or federal-level organizations or connections, though financial support for some of these organizations does also come from those sources. The Putney Historical Society has links to the Vermont State Historical Society,⁹ and the Conservation Commission and the Putney Mountain Association both are connected with state-level and some national organizations with similar conservationist missions. Transition Putney is linked with the Vermont Transition Network,¹⁰ a budding Regional New England Transition Network, and to some small extent with Transition US—this linkage has more to do with online skill and knowledge resource sharing than it does with any kind of financial interconnectedness.

Protests and social movements: These have historically had a fairly large, though in some ways subtle, role to play in terms of the experience of life in southern Vermont. For example, one of the most vociferously protested nuclear power plants in the United States is Vermont Yankee Nuclear Power Plant, located one town south of Brattleboro in Vernon, VT. Putney is within the evacuation zone of VY should it have a meltdown, and anti-nuclear protests have been ongoing since the late 1980s at VY and in the state and federal governments’ halls. In August of 2013, Entergy (the company that bought Vermont Yankee only a decade or so ago) announced that the nuclear plant will be decommissioned due to “economic infeasibility” (Entergy, August 27, 2013). Many long-time activists to shut down the plant attribute this decommissioning in large part to the ongoing protests of the last 30 years, and are celebrating (though the decommissioning will take some number of decades to be completed). Other local residents, some of whose friends and family have depended on the large number of stable jobs offered by Vermont Yankee over these same many years, are angry that the plant is closing, and are worried about their ability to stay in their homes, to find work, and to support their families. A town official commented to me, on the day that the announcement of the plant’s closing was announced, “I’m really concerned about it. There’s 600 something jobs there and the people that live in those communities. It’s a really

⁹ <http://putneyhistory.us/> ; <http://vermonthistory.org/>

¹⁰ <http://www.transitionputney.net/> ; <http://transitionvermont.ning.com/> ; <http://www.transitionnetwork.org/> ; <http://transitionus.org/>

concerning thing, to our economy. I just read something about how I think we have 13 who live here in Putney who work there. So we'll see."

I characterize some of the projects that Transition participants engage in as social-movement-like. Some participants in the movement itself tend to carefully avoid from the idea that Transition Towns is a "political movement," preferring instead to characterize it as "working locally to reconnect communities" through the various projects that emerge out of the model.¹¹ Taken at a global scale, Transition Towns has many characteristics of a social movement. Many of its participants are also involved deeply in protest activities like the movement against the continued construction of oil and natural gas pipelines that gained such attention with the anti-Keystone XL pipeline protests in 2011 and have been ongoing.

Many others are also deeply involved in protest and political organizing around issues such as the labeling of genetically modified organisms (GMOs). That said, when framing the work of Transition Towns in Putney and elsewhere, participants tend to identify their protest-related activities as *not* about Transition Towns, and to insist that Transition Towns is *not* doing "politics," by which they mean lobbying, protesting, or as one person said "taking a side in political debates." I discuss this tension—around politics, resilience, and identification with the local as non-political—in concluding remarks.

Natural resources

Principle Features

Putney is bordered on the east by the Connecticut River. Mixed deciduous and coniferous forests blanket the once-deforested steep hills and creek hollows that characterize much of the western side of Putney, while much of the eastern side, flatter, is given over to farmlands (as are some of the hill plots).¹² Almost every body of water in the town flows west to east, downward from the edge of the Green Mountains towards the Connecticut River. A small mountain named Putney Mountain sits in the center of town, and long-time locals often distinguish living in east Putney from living "up on the mountain." Renting a house, a room, or an apartment "up on the mountain" is more expensive, by and large, and the farmland that runs in a broad swathe by the Connecticut River in east Putney has cheaper rental properties (though buying land there is still quite an expensive prospect!).

A principle natural resource in the area is water--numerous streams of significant size flow through Putney, downhill from the Green Mountains eastward towards the Connecticut River. Indeed, streams here and others like them in other parts of Vermont have been a central component to the ability of small towns to engage in manufacturing, as SoundView Paper Mill does on the side of Sacketts Brook in the center of Putney Village. Additionally, historically Vermont was a site for timber extraction--in fact 100 years ago, all these hills were barren due to clear-cutting. The Connecticut and its tributaries were used to float logs downstream to the lumber mills at various different towns. The small east-flowing rivers and streams that come out of the mountains have been used historically to power grist mills, lumber mills, and other kinds of manufacturing. In the

¹¹ While some are cautious about identifying Transition Towns as "political," other participants are much more willing to see the movement as an explicitly political endeavor. I take up the tension around the concept and practice of "the political" as a productive tension in this movement under separate cover. See Boke, Charis. 2013. "The local" as a mode of life: the politics of resilience-building efforts in the Transition Towns movement." paper presented at the Institut Nationale pour Recherche Agricolturale's *New Forms of Agriculture: Ordinary practices, public debate and social critique* Conference, Dijon, France, Nov 20, 2013.

¹² See "Existing Land Use" map, as well as "Zoning Map" and "Cultural and Natural Resources" maps, attached.

last 30 years, with the outsourcing of many jobs to more centralized locations and to offshore locations with cheaper labor forces, many of these mills have closed, their jobs disappearing.

Farmland and farming, especially dairy farming, sits at the heart of any story of Vermont's recent history. After settlement in the 1770s, logging and cattle were two major economic staples for the region. Though neither logging nor cattle fall under commonly held definitions of "farming," in Vermont, to be a farmer has quite often been synonymous with having cattle (usually known colloquially as "having cows"). And indeed, under the Current Use Act (a tax structure that provides lower rates to those using land productively), "responsible timber harvesting" and animal husbandry are considered the equivalent of the growing of staple food crops. Major food crops are corn, soybeans, barley, spring forage for animals, as well as a variety of vegetables.¹³ As such, classic agrarian idyllic images of Vermont are still common, and serve as one of the aesthetic attractions that tourists flock to Vermont to see. Cornstalks waving around every corner, and rolling fields punctuated with black and white Hereford cows and the occasional bull constitute some of the marketed image of Vermont. The encroachment (as many old time Vermonters think of it) of the interstate highway 91 from Massachusetts started with six miles of constructed highway in 1958, and was completed in 1978. That, in combination with dairy subsidies that favored large-scale dairy farms and a dramatic shift in the way milk was produced and distributed, caused dramatic shifts in the visual impact of Vermont's landscape over the last 60 years.

Land Use

Putney has an area of 26.7 square miles, and, as a glance at the land-use map of Putney shows,¹⁴ a significant portion of the land in the town is either in current agricultural use or is under conservation easements of some sort. Though only 9 parcels of land are listed in the 2012 Town Report as "Farm Use," a total of 70 parcels in town fall under Vermont's Current Use statutes, which provide tax incentives for the active use of woodlots, animal husbandry sites, and agriculture for parcels of over 25 contiguous acres (see Vermont Statutes Title 32; Ch 124). Land on the floodplains of the Connecticut River contains fairly fertile, arable soil, and the same is true for some of the areas surrounding the floodplains—for the area, Putney has fairly productive soils. Water runs off from all parts of the town, eventually, through networks of streams to the Connecticut River, which flows to the Atlantic Ocean. Most households in Putney get their water from dug or drilled wells. There are "public water supply" areas near the village center, which consist of drilled wells that supply the Putney Central School, the village center and municipal offices, and a few other sites. There are also a number of west-east flowing streams in town, one of which flows right through the center of the village and served as the power source for the original mill that was there. (SoundView Paper now occupies the former mill site). Irrigation of the farm fields with which I am acquainted is done either by gravity feed or pump feed from streams, or direct from the well on the property.

Land use in Putney is regulated in part by the town's zoning regulations, which determine where residences as well as commercial and industrial enterprises can be located. The zoning regulatory system is governed on a town-by-town basis in Vermont, and zoning rules are determined (usually) alongside the creation of the Town Plan. The State of Vermont's Current Use statutes allow for land that is defined as currently in production—either as managed woodlot or as agricultural land—to be assessed at a different, discounted tax rate. The applicability of Current Use statutes to plots of land is adjudged by local and by state inspectors. Not all Current Use plots qualify as farms, and not all farms are covered by the Current Use statute.

¹³ These days, it seems as though another major crop Vermont is growing is solar farms.

¹⁴ See "Land Use Map"

Zoning as a governance structure, in combination with a series of state level laws, is vital to the maintenance of Vermont's "natural beauty and scenic charm"—its attractive features that lure tourists in—not to mention the relative cleanliness of its waterways. Some people, however—especially those prevented from engaging in their livelihood by zoning—suggest that zoning regulations serve at least in part to stifle economic growth or even undermine the stability of families and businesspeople who become unable to practice their trade (e.g. opening a motorcycle repair shop or a multi-unit storage facility) at their homes on rural roads zoned for residential use. The effects of zoning regulations fall differently on the shoulders of the 50% (305) of the town's families with an annual income of less than \$50,000 than they do on the shoulders of the 63 families who bring in \$100,000 a year or more. For instance, if one's home is in a place zoned "residential," one would not be able to open an auto-body repair shop, no matter what the size, in one's garage. This fact tends to limit the economic prospects of those with skillsets well suited to "work from home" but who may have limited work opportunities outside the home.

The profile of land use in Putney is a result both of historical necessity—the center of the village formed around a grist mill constructed by a wealthy landowner on Sacketts Brook in the late 18th century—and ongoing local regulatory work.¹⁵

Extractive industries

Major extractive industries in Vermont have historically been related to timber and to the quarrying of stone—elsewhere, granite and marble, and in the Windham county area, gravel and other smaller rocks. Because of intensive logging in the 19th century, the hills of Putney and Vermont more broadly were for a long time bare—most of the afforestation in the state at this point is, at best, second growth forest. Logging still occurs, but is now managed by ideas about conserving woodlands for long-term use and sustainable management.¹⁶ Recently, around the matter of hydraulic fracturing extraction of shale gas, there have been two different sorts of uproar of opposition. The first is around the possibility that there might be shale gas to extract under Lake Champlain. Some organizers concerned with climate change and environmental justice who are aligned with anti-“fracking” (as it is known) movements and with movements to address climate change have mobilized around the possibility of fracking in Vermont. Some of these organizers are also involved in Transition across Vermont. As a part of the conversation about "clean" and renewable energy that is ongoing among Transition Towns communities, hydraulic fracturing takes its place as a matter of concern for Transition participants next to other extractive industrial activities aimed at generating carbon-based fuels (oil drilling and the construction of pipelines, mountaintop removal coal mining, etc). Though these activities may not be happening in Putney proper, they are matters of concern and conversation for people who see the work of producing energy as practices that affect people across regions, continents, and the planet.

In May of 2013 Vermont's Governor Peter Shumlin signed into law a statewide ban on the hydraulic fracturing technique. This move dismayed those who believe that shale gas industry will bring many jobs, and delighted activists who did not want to see the ecological devastation that has been wreaked on Pennsylvania and Texas come to Vermont. The other uproar of opposition around fracked gas is with regard to the possibility that Vermont Gas will build an extension to an existing pipeline system under the financing of International Paper of Ticonderoga, N.Y.¹⁷. Activists call for

¹⁵ See Town of Putney Zoning Guidelines

¹⁶ <http://www.vtfrp.org/HarvestGuidelines.cfm>

¹⁷ see e.g. http://www.burlingtonfreepress.com/article/20130908/NEWS01/309080017/The-business-of-a-natural-gas-pipeline-in-Vermont?nclick_check=1
<http://www.addisonindependent.com/201304vermont-gas-unveils-five-pipeline-routes-ny-mill>

ways to heat and feed Vermonters that are not linked to global extractive industries. These activities are not all that far removed from Putney's tiny village, as SoundView Paper Company has natural gas trucked in daily from Milton, VT, to power its activities.¹⁸

Challenges and Threats

The intersection of social and economic challenge: Labor, Belonging, and In/Outmigration in Vermont

One central challenge to “resilience” in Putney—as defined by the ACSF/Oxfam team—is well reflected in comments made by the Putney Central School’s principal in the 2012 Putney Annual Town Report, when he speaks about reasons for the declining enrollment at PCS.

“...at play is what we might refer to as ‘economic gentrification.’ Even though, relatively speaking, most of Vermont has fared reasonably well over the past few years during the national and global economic downturn, *local factors such as lack of employment opportunities and sufficient affordable housing in Putney have no doubt also contributed to our reduction in student numbers*” (2012:36 emphasis added)¹⁹.

Though this comment speaks for itself, it gives context and texture to the picture of economic challenges in Putney and the area. Economic gentrification as a concept is well-recognized in urban and quasi-urban areas—as people with increasing levels of access to financial and social resources move to an area, the desirability of that area increases proportionally, raising costs (here, property taxes, food costs and rental prices), driving out those with lower incomes. Here, often, this dynamic plays out in such a way that young Vermonters (and even young aspiring Vermonters) cannot make a living with the skills they have, whatever those skills are, in the area, and are forced to out-migrate to find work elsewhere²⁰.

People whose families have been living in Vermont for over three generations, and some since the first European settlements in the 18th century, tend to express strong antipathy towards newcomers—often known as “flatlanders,” since many move to Vermont from the comparatively topographically flatter Connecticut, New York, and Massachusetts. Some of those who move do so permanently, as is the case with every person I have encountered who is involved in Transition Putney, while some purchase second homes in Putney and the area (the story is true for the rest of Vermont as well) to spend summers here.

Though the owners of second homes do not necessarily count directly as tourists, any native Vermonter will tell you that second-home owners are most certainly *not* locals²¹. These second-home owners are the ones who tip the scale of average earnings towards the “high end,” and their presence is a key reason behind rising costs of living in Putney. Many of them are also deeply

<http://www.risingtidevermont.org/stop-the-vermont-gas-pipeline.html>

¹⁸ <https://www.risiinfo.com/techchannels/powerenergy/Soundview-Vermont-Holdings-uses-trucked-compressed-natural-gas-from-NG-Advantage-for-its-recycled-tissue-towel-and-napkin-operation-in-Putney.html>

¹⁹ Town of Putney Annual Report, 2012.

²⁰ This recent *Vermont Life* article (Pasanen, M. and B. Anderson. "Youth Exodus?" in *Vermont Life*. September 2013. <http://www.vermontlife.com/tag/youth-flight/>) articulates nervousness around the perception that Vermont consistently loses its young people due to limited employment opportunities—even while the article suggests that there are more opportunities here for youth than people are aware of.

²¹ In fact, it takes a few generations to “become” a Vermonter. A popular saying by old-timers as they’re known, with regard to whether or not a flatlander’s child born in Vermont is a Vermonter goes as follows “A cat can have kittens in the oven, but it don’t make ‘em biscuits.”

concerned about matters of community connectedness, climate change, peak oil, and economic resiliency. These concerns are often some of the motivating factors behind their purchase of a second home in Vermont—some people purchase such a place in order to be able to “go back to the land” following in the tradition of the last 40 or 50 years, in particular of reifying “living on the land” as the most sustainable and just way of life. All of the people who are explicitly involved in the model I am studying, the Transition Towns model, are transplants.

I heard third-hand an account of a woman who, when asked where she lived, said “Putney.” The person she was talking to then said, “oh, that’s where they have that great co-op, and they’ve got the community garden and farmer’s market, right?” to which the woman replied, “not THAT Putney.” The person sharing this story with me, who did not take part in this conversation directly, speculated that the woman identified more with the working-class community of Putney that eats at the Putney Diner and shops at Mountain Paul's Grocery (a small convenience store) rather than with the middle-class and so-called "creative class" Putney who eat at the Gleanery (an upscale chef-owned restaurant) and shop at the Co-op.

The sense of who “belongs” in what parts of town (the Co-op, the library, Curtis’s Bar Be Cue, the fire station, the paper mill, or the Next Stage theater and arts building) is deeply marked by class difference, and the practice of making class differences. Transition Towns as a resilience-building initiative lands firmly among those projects of making and re-making class differences. According to my Transition Putney informants, the most difficult challenge that they face in resilience-building work locally lies in the class divide in town. Transition Putney organizers articulate their struggle with bringing together participants from different class backgrounds, highlighting the "reskilling" workshops as a site where that was able to happen the most effectively. "Learning together," one woman said, "was the best way that we brought people together who wouldn't otherwise necessarily talk to each other or see each other" (fieldnotes Oct 2013). That said, the projects of building resilience that Transition Putney practices have come to be understood, by virtue of who the organizers are and what the primary motives for organizing are, as primarily the purview of the upper middle-class denizens of Putney. This results in a reinstatement of the classed divides seen between Mountain Paul's and the Co-op, for instance--and means that "resilience-building" becomes a middle-class project rather than something that is, and should be, for "everybody."

Challenges: Overview

1) *Poverty: Lack of diverse employment*

This is related to the loss of high-paced and high-value extractive industries, the loss of local mill jobs (though 106 people are employed at SoundView, other towns' mills and industrial manufacturing sites once employed thousands), limits to the success of local enterprises, and the dramatic decline in the viability of farming as a livelihood. Exacerbating these issues is a decline in affordable housing, and an increase in the cost of food.

The decentralized small manufacturing sites and small-scale farms do not promise a sustainable salary the way they used to in Vermont, when there was a grain mill in every town, and machine-tool factories and lumber mills in every third town or so. Nor is it possible to subsist on hunting and gardening, given the restrictions of hunting and the realities of Vermont’s growing season.

2) *Rising cost of fuel*

Due to the lack of local employment prospects, many people have to travel long distances to go to work. This can mean individual car trips of between 30 and 120 minutes each way—some

drive from Putney to Springfield, Massachusetts, a round trip of 140 miles. The combination of wear and tear, gas, and time spent in the vehicle exacerbates the implications of poverty. Lack of regular public transit makes this issue more difficult.

3) Lack of markets for consumer goods at affordable prices

The combined challenges of poverty and the lack of adequate access to choices of decently-paid work or affordable housing means that many area residents live in a state of relative food insecurity. This is deeply ironic given the huge up-scale market in Vermont and across the United States more broadly for local foods, all of which tend to be out of the price range of low-income people. Food shopping opportunities for rural Vermonters are frequently far away, but in Putney's case the matter is poignantly underscored by the presence of the co-operative market, and now the General Store, each of which offer some options for fresh produce and nutritionally dense whole foods, and both of which are out of the price range of some Putneyites. Walmart, a discount grocery outlet in Brattleboro and in Walpole, NH, and the Hannafords in Brattleboro are the other closest options, and among those options prices vary as well but are generally more affordable than the Co-op in Putney (or the one in Brattleboro).

4) Extreme weather

Hurricane Irene passed through Vermont and left much destruction of infrastructure, homes, and landscape in its wake in August 2011. That recent devastation is still on people's minds, and indeed can be still read in the landscape. Because vegetative growth on the banks of basically all streams and rivers in the state has not had an adequate chance to grow back, whenever Vermont has been struck by heavy rainfall over the last two years (as it was in early July and mid August this year), creeks rapidly overtop their banks and re-create flood damage that had been recently rebuilt after Irene. What appear to be shifts in the hydrological cycle (i.e. not necessarily more rain per annum but in shorter, more intense bursts with longer intervals in between) means a greater instability in the crop cycle as farmers try to predict when they will need to water and when they will need to bank their fields against inundation. Some farmers I know have unreliable dug wells, and have been paying thousands of dollars to have wells drilled on their properties so that they can water their fields from a system that is separate from the system that provides water for the house. Additionally, there is a significant number of people who have not received federal aid or state support for their efforts to rebuild after Irene, or who have only recently received support from FEMA in buying out their storm-destroyed homes (Brattleboro Reformer, 10/26/2013).

On a relatively regular basis in the winter, Vermont, like much of the Northeast, is struck with snowstorms that can qualify as natural disasters in terms of their effects on people's day-to-day lives. Generally, because people are used to these events, they have stocked enough candles, flashlights, canned goods and blankets to last through the two hours to two weeks of being out of power they may face, but not always.

5) Informant-identified challenge: "Lack of desire for involvement in resilience/community building"

The people involved with Transition Towns as a model tell me that the challenges *they* face in building resilience have more to do with how people don't seem to want to be involved (fieldnotes, July 2013). There are, in fact, people involved with Transition work—around ten actively and regularly, and up to 50 at relatively routine events two to four times a month, such as film screenings or discussions. That said, the organizers remember days that there were up to 300 people at their events, and it “felt like the whole town was buzzing.” There's more to say about the ways that Transition Putney has gone into dormancy in the last eighteen months after a “strong start” for two years. So what is meant by “nobody wants to get involved” is that there aren't *enough*

people who are excited enough to sustain the many different directions the movement wants to go in. “This work is for the community,” organizers say, and suggest that resilience and resilience-building is for “everyone” (fieldnotes August 2013). A distinct challenge that they articulate is a lack of community participation in the intentional creation of resilience-building events, skill shares, community conversations, etc.

Resources to Address Challenges

As described above, there are several organizations whose mission it is to support low income families—Putney Family Services and the Putney Food Shelf among them. This is in addition to state and federal welfare programs. In some cases, though, the combined additional challenges of shame in utilizing such services and the inability to access them (for lack of knowledge or other reasons) limits the effectiveness of the organizations.

Though the situation with public transit has gotten better in the last few decades, with a bus line running up and down the Rt 5 Corridor in eastern Vermont, serving towns between Brattleboro and White River Junction, Vermont, those bus routes are limited in times that they run per day and do not meet the needs of enough community members as of yet²².

The Putney Food Shelf and the Vermont Food Bank’s Gleaning Program both strive to provide nutritious and cheap or free food aid to community members in need. Additionally, programs occasionally crop up through groups like Community Action Brattleboro Area, which ran a low-income community-supported agriculture program for several years, which provided further support.

Vermonters, I am told and know from experience, tend to “pull together in a jam.” (fieldnotes, August 2013). That is to say, all those who came through Hurricane Irene, or through any long winter storm, learn how generous a neighbor can be with time and energy and resources when there is a genuine crisis-based need. The consensus among many is that “when something bad happens, we help each other out.” (fieldnotes, September 26, 2013). That kind of crisis-response responsibility, and sense that it is and will be there, even if it’s not always on the surface, is an important aspect of community “resilience.” I am not convinced that this sort of “resilience” is the result of any coordinated organizing effort in the pre-crisis period, though such efforts may not be misguided. One informant tells me that for him, “the concept of community is much more important than resilience,” because it is community that will help people weather the storms, literal and figurative, of diverse crises. This kind of connectedness to “community” is not always equal-access, though--see “Whose Resilience?” for further discussion.

The state (and sometimes the federal) government sets up emergency shelter systems in the worst snowstorms, official patrols are sent around to senior citizens’ houses to see to their safety, and there is a hierarchically organized disaster response team that is mobilized via the town fire chief. Further, the extensive development of grid-tied and grid-islandable solar photovoltaic (PV) arrays in Vermont broadly, and in Windham County specifically, has been done in part with an eye towards making the area more “energy independent,” not only *from* fossil fuels but also *in the event of* a “natural disaster.” Though grid-tied PV arrays do not provide power if the grid itself is down (e.g. if there is a flood at the generator station and it cannot distribute the power, or if there is a catastrophic line failure at a key point in the electrical grid distribution system), they do provide some back-up power in the event of a long emergency. And grid-islandable or off-grid arrays store power in back-up battery systems which, assuming that they, themselves, are appropriately

²² see The Current (local and regional bus transit along the I-91 corridor) website: <http://crtransit.org/>

insulated against disaster, can serve such vital functions as running the well's electrical pump so that a household or neighborhood has access to potable water.

FEMA protocols for disaster response are being explicitly mobilized at the community level. Both officials in local government (who are mandated to do so) and some Transition Towns members articulate a real need and desire to connect with those practices. FEMA's protocols for disaster response are available for perusal at the office of the Town Manager, and when they are activated, they are overseen by the Chief of the Fire Department. Many other resources beyond these hierarchical response-frameworks are also available, although there is a broad consensus from many of my informants that since you "can't really know what kind of disaster you're preparing for" it is difficult to pinpoint which resources to have lined up beforehand (interview, Sept 16, 2013).

As pointed out in the Transition Towns model itself, the diverse experiences that are encapsulated in the lives of those who live here is an important resource. It is a resource that remains somewhat untapped by this particular local initiative, though Putney Family Services and the Putney Food Bank, to mention a few resources, would be good places to start gleaning a better understanding of the diversity of challenges faced *now* by community members who need to survive the present before they can start worrying about the future. Furthermore, intentional coordination and cooperation between groups has a precedent in Putney, and this would perhaps be a good precedent to follow, with Putney Family Services' partnership with Putney Cares, the Putney Food shelf, and others, an effort to pool resources and knowledge.

Summarizing Challenges: Whose resilience? For whom?

The challenges articulated here highlight the ways in which "the social," "the natural" and "the economic" as fields of practice and contestation blur together. In quotidian life, the reality of a winter storm, for example, can present as all three of those challenges--or indeed as a chance for all three of those factors to work together for a feeling of success, safety, and belonging in community. The affective and experienced reality of the storm is drastically different for those who have a neighbor to help shovel, a friend whose house to shower in when the power goes out, and someone to plow the driveway so they can get to work to earn enough for the week's groceries. But not everyone has equal access to the same kind of communities. This is not to say that it is always the wealthy and resource-privileged who will have a positive experience during a winter storm--certainly wealth and access ease the challenge, but they are not the only thing that accomplishes this. Indeed, as has been pointed out to me by numerous people who were born and raised in Vermont, "Vermonters pull together in a crisis." (fieldnotes, August 26th 2013). This sentiment was not echoed nearly as frequently by those who relocated from other places later in life to come live in Vermont, and although there is a sense among participants in Transition Towns (none of whom, to my knowledge, were born and raised in Vermont) that this kind of "pulling together" is possible, there is also a sense that it has to be manufactured--we have to *make* the connections beforehand so that we know they'll be there in a crisis.

These observations prompt me to point out that the kind of resilience that matters for the people who work within the Transition Towns model as I know it here is not synonymous with "resilience" per se, and does not encompass all the different and contested dimensions of the term and of its practices. A significant subset of the people I have spoken with--notably, not those involved in Transition Towns--have asked, when I say I study local resilience, "what IS resilience, anyway?" They tell me they either haven't heard the word, or aren't sure enough that they know what it means to be able to understand what I'm trying to explore.

Resilience is understood by those of my informants who *are* involved in Transition Towns as "preparing for economic and ecological collapse so that we can survive the consequences of the world we've created," "an ability to deal with s**t when it comes up," and "the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties. A resilient community prepares for recovery—through planning and cooperation—before difficulties occur" to name a few definitions. The way that resilience is framed and understood in the contemporary United States is filtered through two primary lenses. The first of those lenses is rooted in a governmentalized, sometimes militarized, approach to thinking about "shocks" and disaster, a definition grounded in language and ideologies framed much in the same way that FEMA and the federal government frames them.

The second of those lenses is rooted in what my informants call a "doomer" understanding of what the future holds (fieldnotes, various, 2013)--an understanding of the future that not only anticipates the *possibility* of calamity, collapse, or (secular) apocalypse, but is in fact *grounded in a certainty that these things are not far off in the future*. Thus the definition of "resilience" among Transition Putney participants, and participants in the Transition movement more broadly, is influenced by both these lenses. Each tends to engender a fearful anticipatory response; there are some for whom a definition of resilience must also include a commitment to hopefulness. Such individuals tell me that "without hope, the despair and fear takes over, and I can't do anything at all about [preparing for the collapsing future]."

Some of my informants, especially those involved in Transition Putney, characterize resilience in terms of the ability to grow one's own food, to produce one's own energy in the form of biodiesel or solar arrays, and to either know how to make, or know someone who knows how to make, all the things that might need to be made in a homesteading situation (chairs, tables, scythes, horse harnesses).

Desirable as they are for some of my informants, and indeed for myself, these objects and skills as such do not encompass all of the ways that resilience might be engaged or practiced. Indeed, the production of such definitiveness around resilience as a set of skills for a state of being ready actually alienates numbers of other people—such as those who might not be able to afford beets at \$8/lb, or who might work two or three jobs and not have time for a vegetable garden, or not have space and financing for a root cellar, or not have the ability to put up three months' worth of food in anticipation of a collapse of regional and national food distribution systems (for whatever reason).

And further, ironically, many of the farmers who work 12-15 hour days, 7 days a week during the growing season to produce the local vegetables and products that are so coveted by those committed to local eating practices²³ are themselves "barely making enough to support their families" (fieldnotes August 2013). This comes out of conversations with the three farmers who supply the fresh-produce based farmstands at the Putney Farmers' Market, as commentary both on their own financial state and on the reported state of their fellow farmers across the region. Historically, Vermont farm families have usually had one or more members of the household who have a job outside the work of the farm—and that history plays out in today's farming. Small farms have a hard time accessing most subsidies provided by the federal government, so reliance on spreading interest in local, especially organic food makes (or breaks) these farmers' livelihoods possible²⁴. They spend three to four days a week during the summer driving many miles from

²³ Which are, as I have said, deeply class marked if only because they're expensive.

²⁴ Recent cuts to federal Food Aid make this all the more difficult. Federal funding for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly "Food Stamps," was cut back on November 1, 2013. According to the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities, "For a family of three, [this] cut [means] a reduction of \$29 a month — \$319 for the

Farmer's Market to Farmer's Market in the region in the hope that they can sell enough of their product to pay off the debt they incurred buying the seed to plant it.

What people want

In order to build happy, meaningfully "resilient" lives, it strikes me that for some people the primary thing that is missing is a "sense of connection." "People want to feel safe," one informant tells me, "and connection to community helps them feel safe." (fieldnotes, July 2011). Whether that connection is to community, to neighbor, to place, or to a set of skills that are useful, there is among the participants in the Transition model at least a sense of longing for community connectedness. Participants in Transition events often cite the "opportunity to talk with my neighbors" or "having a meaningful conversation" as the most exciting or meaningful aspect of their participation in those events. My informants tell me that "doomsday preppers" are doing their preparations out of "fear," and say that these "doomers" think that "talking with people and expressing feelings is naive" and too emotional for the "work of survival."

That said, my informants do not see the desire for and practice of these community connections as naively emotional, but rather as necessary in order "not just to survive, but to thrive." The longings for community and belonging articulated by my informants constitute a set of real, concrete desires. These desires and their affective enactment and maintenance of them—through seeking bodily co-presence, seeking bodily skill-learning opportunities in community, seeking meaningful conversation—are a concrete response to crises real and imagined. One of the real crises that these affective realities are responding to is, I suggest, the utter alienation that contemporary forms of United-States-based consumer capitalism wreaks on individual bodies and lives. "Disconnection," one informant told me, "there's a sense of real disconnection, and people want to reconnect. With each other, with their food, with the places they live."

What people want, II

There are others for whom material needs and wants are much more materially pressing. Wanting to know where one's next meal is coming from, or how one will pay February's heating bill, or what one will do for work if one's vehicle breaks down, have a very different impact on quality of life and ability to function than wanting to talk to one's neighbors. Both are important for healthy lives—but it is much more immediately apparent *how* important regular meals are than how significant conversations with neighbors is. The major disconnect in Putney is that people cannot find ways to regularly communicate across these divides of needs and wants. *If your neighbor's most pressing need is to hear your story, and your most pressing need is to feed and warm your child, it is difficult to establish respectful, community building interaction without significant work to meet your survival needs first.*

For this challenge there are no easy fixes. At the root of every dilemma in this community—whether it's about access to adequate food, class discrimination, the lack of communication among community members of diverse experiences—are a set of conceptual problems. These tensions speak to fundamental characteristics of extractive and consumerist capitalism--alienation, abstraction of labor, disconnection from the landbase--and they present real, physically manifested challenges that must be addressed. The conceptual problems are: an ideology of individualism which creates divisions of labor and separation of spaces of interaction in communities; an attitude towards of money and markets which leads to a stigmatization of labor that is not paid in cash (e.g. child rearing or barter based labor exchange); a hierarchical set of labor relations which

remaining 11 months of the fiscal year — a serious loss for families whose benefits will, after this cut, average less than \$1.40 per person, per meal." Press release, CBPP, Aug. 1, 2013.

concentrates power and resources in the hands of the few, leaving the many to struggle for survival; and finally that the hierarchy of power is invisible, such that those who have access to resources are virtually blinded to the needs and realities of those who do not.

Transition Towns as a model outlines quite clearly the ways in which these conceptual problems work. Efforts to build resilience through the Transition model are premised on an understanding that the "current system is broken;" meaning that individualism, consumption-oriented lifestyles, and fractured communities lead to the current state of unpreparedness for a changing world and a desire for alternative ways to be, to exchange, and to relate to community and landscape. Transition's activity-based community building model goes a long way towards just relations by advocating "listening to our neighbors" and "learning together the skills we need." Indeed, the model's understanding of how these practices can increase resilience speaks directly to the stated goals of the Rights for Resilience Framework.

That said, the model as it was originally written and as it is predominantly taken up in Putney does not sufficiently highlight the particular challenges of class, race, and gender that emerge in any effort to organize community towards justice. I suggest that using the relation building tools of allyship along with practices of solidarity and mutual aid will strengthen efforts to build resilience. In order to be a good ally, in order to operate in solidarity with another person or group experiencing a different form of oppression than oneself, one must start by asking what life is like for others, by listening to stories from diverse backgrounds, and by intervening when needed in a way that does not seize power from those with whom we are in solidarity across class, race, gender or other lines of oppression.²⁵

By carefully attending to the stories and experiences of those whose lives are less privileged, organizers for resilience and justice can better inform not only their practices, but also their own attitudes towards what needs are legitimate (ie broadening the spectrum of what counts as resilience work) and moreover how to confront and address problems in the contemporary world rather than expending all their energy organizing for an uncertain future. These practices--of mutual aid, allyship and solidarity with regard to currently existing oppressions and challenges--is grounded in the work for a just present.

Resilience as a practice, however, is conceptually and practically oriented towards a future, or a set of possible futures--that orientation is problematic when it comes to seeking to involve "everyone" in organizing for resilience because not "everyone has the luxury of planning to be resilient in the future. Rather, many people are struggling in the current moment--resilience as a conceptual framework, in both Transition Towns and other community organizing around the concept, as well as in the Rights for Resilience framework, runs the risk of succumbing to a future orientation that elides the relations of power and privilege that currently oppress diverse groups of people.

Broader Themes: Genealogies of Resilience

As the Rights for Resilience Framework suggests,

"Defining and building 'resilience' are contested processes. There are multiple actors in any given community with different ideas about the form of resilience that is most desirable, and in different positions to pursue resilience."

²⁵ For more on allyship, see especially but not only Mia McKenzie at BlackGirlDangerous (2013), the Unsettling America collective of thinkers (2013); Harsha Walia (2012), and Leticia Nieto's *Beyond Inclusion, Beyond Empowerment: A Developmental Strategy to Liberate Everyone* (2010).

In other words, resilience as a concept and practice looks and feels different, and makes different kinds of demands, in different communities--and even within a community, needs for "resilience building" can be diverse enough to defy a singular coherent definition of the term short of broad generalizations. This observation is borne out strongly in the Putney community, though not as obviously if one is talking only with those involved in the Transition Towns model of organizing.

I would like to suggest that resilience as a concept is inherently problematic, and that anyone mobilizing it—from community organizations to international institutional actors to individuals—must be aware of its histories. It is not just the current definition of resilience that is contested and contestable, different for different members of the community facing diverse kinds of challenges. It is also problematic, both in the practices of resilience building at a civic level here and at other scales, that a genealogy of the term resilience and of the desire for resilience is overlooked. Here and elsewhere it ought not go unexamined that language about and desire for resilience is not a matter only of individual, community, and civic capacity. Rather, it has connections with the present-moment language and practice of the Federal Emergency Management Agency²⁶ and of other national security-focused federal bodies that co-opt the resilience concept to do heuristic work that looks a lot like isolationist protectionism. Ironically, the kinds of protectionism²⁷ that emerge from "resilience" in FEMA and the federal government's terms serve in some ways to foment the very fear and disconnection that my informants are trying to undo.

Additionally, resilience as a concept is underpinned by bodily and ideological histories rooted in Cold War-era civil defense initiatives²⁸ which encouraged individuals and their communities to organize themselves in preparation for a nuclear attack on the centers of power. Such an attack would leave communities at many scales without "direction from above," meaning that they would have to "fend for themselves," and the Civil Defense initiative sought to prepare and train people for that eventuality.²⁹ "Resilience" rhetoric emerges both in terms of preparing for what another informant calls "the econopocalypse" (fieldnotes, Nov 7, 2013), as well as in terms of natural-disaster caused collapses in communications and transport infrastructure, or even the more seemingly benign hike in fuel prices and drop in availability that would change the transport infrastructure as we know it for the worse.

Desire for resilience, and bodily practices of it, in terms such as these runs in strict parallel with that national history of Cold War practices, and their ongoing existence in contemporary national security desires and practices. As Joseph Masco suggests, the offloading of responsibility for survival of a nuclear attack onto private citizens' bodies via the civil defense video trainings on "duck and cover" creates an understanding of a threatened future in which citizens are not merely cut off from the government but one in which the government literally can offer no care or protection. Indeed, this morphs into a set of social understandings that underpin the "survivalist" and the "doomer" approach to dealing with the problems of threatened futures--an individual bunker where one person or one family can survive becomes, in the wake of the Civil Defense program, the only thinkable route to safety for a nuclear attack. Similarly, the responsibility for thwarting

²⁶ See, for example, the FEMA press release on the topic of the "2012 Community Resilience Innovation Challenge Recipients."

²⁷ Not to mention a re-invigoration of a politics that resembles Cold War isolationism, an offloading of responsibility for survival onto individual citizens from the collapsing welfare state, and the broadly fear-producing specter of the "red scare," as Joseph Masco highlights in his work, e.g. Masco, J. 2008. "Survival is Your Business": Engineering Affect and Ruins in Nuclear America. *Cultural Anthropology* 23(2): 361-98

²⁸ see e.g. *The Nuclear Borderlands: The Manhattan Project in Post-Cold War New Mexico*. Princeton: 2008.

²⁹ see Masco, J. 2010. "Bad Weather: On Planetary Crisis." *Social Studies of Science*. 40(1):7-40.[Winner of the 2011 Maurice Daumas Prize from the International Committee for the History of Technology

terrorist attacks in the contemporary security state (underpinned by the history of the Civil Defense program) is communicated as lying largely with private citizens. "If you see something, say something" has become a mantra of the day--not just in airports but in all transit facilities, encouraging a vigilance that automatically suspects any stranger (especially strangers who "look foreign") as a potential threat.

These are just two examples of the way in which a blanket of threat and fear is spread wide over the populace of private citizens, rendering it almost necessary worry ceaselessly about the uncertain future and the multiple different kinds of possible threat that may lie in wait. In brief, I am suggesting here that the resilience concept is so inextricably informed by its genealogical roots in these kinds of histories that it is very difficult to mobilize it differently. Because of these histories, it is very difficult to approach resilience outside of a fear-based, future-oriented framework.

Following from these observations, I characterize Transition participants broadly as motivated by two general sentiments. The first of these can be characterized as one of hopefulness—hope for the possibilities that stretch out before us in a dramatically changed and changing world.³⁰ The second sentiment that guides or underpins action in some Transition participants is one of fear—fear and grief about those parts of the world that have already been lost, and fear about what might yet fall by the wayside. These two sentiments can come hand in hand, but more often an individual will identify more with one than with another. Those who present more on the fearful side of the spectrum tend to be the ones adamantly encouraging planning practices such as those outlined by FEMA and that are implemented, in moments of natural disaster, by the local fire department.

One Transition participant told me "if you want to study resilience, the best thing you can do for Transition Putney is to go talk to the fire chief." (fieldnotes, June 16, 2013) She was adamant that the way I could be most useful would be to become familiar with the ways that the fire station is coordinating town municipal administrators and volunteers in a network of crisis or disaster responders. For her and others like her, the definition of resilience (and, I would suggest, a feeling of safety or security) seems to hinge around a top-down management and coordination method for organizing bodies and response. This fear-based orientation towards resilience as an almost managerial project--the narrative runs that someone will be in charge of it, and some other people will take directions from the person or people in charge, and things will be ok if everyone does their job--serves to disempower creative and collective action outside of the scope of that managerial hierarchy.

For the hopeful people, they tend to communicate with me about the many possible ways that we can re-imagine social spaces and relationships in the aftermath of the disaster (whatever it may be, or many things) that is to come. "We have a really great opportunity here," one person said, "to reimagine what the world can look like." (fieldnotes June 5 2013) "Here," for this person, is constituted by the moment that he understands us to be in, of climate disaster, economic collapse, political immobility and incapacity, and dramatic changes in the status quo of daily life. For this person, "disaster" is "opportunity." But not all share this sentiment, as some people in Putney--those facing long commutes for underpaid labor, for instance--have been living in economic disaster for twenty years and would rather not do so.

This research suggests that the way that future problems and challenges are framed in civil social organizing around resilience is (perhaps too much so) parallel with a militarized method of imagining threats and responding to them. The landscape of threat is so broad as to make it

³⁰ Many of these hopeful people cite ecophilosopher Joanna Macy's *Active Hope* (2012, New World Library) as inspiration.

impossible for any particular response module to actually be effective, but nonetheless the exercise of imagination, and imagined response, creates a sense of preparation that soothes some needs. Frequently invisible (to middle and upper class individuals) class-based tensions emerge around what needs to be prepared, who it needs to be prepared for, and what resilience can and should look like.

In short, both future orientations--the hope-based and the fear-based--towards resilience can be problematic because each makes assumptions about 1) the kinds of problems that may emerge in the uncertain future and 2) the kinds of solutions that would be appropriate to address them. Moreover, by overlooking to a certain extent the currently existing problems for people living with limited class privilege, both the hope-based approach and the fear-based approach limit the applicability of the resilience-building project to broad audiences. I suggest that the preparatory and anticipatory nature of the concept of “resilience building” runs the risk of limiting possibilities for visionary action in response to problems now.

* * *

I entered this research project, as well as my broader dissertation research, with the idea that I would show up at Transition Putney events and hear about all the ways that people are using a resilience-based framework to think about responding to threatening futures. I had an image of myself deep in conversation next to an informant at a re-skilling on lactofermentation or strawbale construction, as we discussed the usefulness and challenges of “local resilience” as a way of thinking about liberatory change for uncertain times. In fact, of course, as is always the case with long-term in-depth research, not only did my convictions about what the “answers” to my research questions would be change, but the questions themselves changed as well.

I have come to consider the following as key questions for anyone interested in building presents and futures based in just, equitable, and ecologically respectful understandings of the world we live with.

- What are the implications of thinking about resilience as part of the historical trajectory I have described above?
- What are the consequences of an understanding of resilience that is rooted in a future-oriented understanding of challenges—that is, an understanding that challenges are things that we must *prepare* for, that are *coming in the future* or maybe felt by some parts of the world now, but not here?
- What are the consequences of such an understanding in a political and economic moment in the United States characterized by actually existing economic instability, by a state that is for all intents and purposes “post-welfare”?
- How does the very preparatory, future-oriented nature of the concept of “resilience building” delimit and defeat the possibilities for visionary action in response to problems *now*?
- Do desires for “resilience” and projects that try to build it serve in part to elide real criticism of existing issues, to disable community-accountable and historically-grounded work for change to the status quo of socio-economic relations in the here and now?
- How is it useful to frame work for justice, equity and stability as something that we’re doing so that we can have it in the future—what is the distinction between this and a politics and practice of prefiguration?³¹

³¹ Prefigurative practices and prefigurative politics are those political commitments to the *means* being as important as the *ends*. That is to say, that the process by which we organize, for instance, the revolution, is as important if not more so than the revolution itself. Proponents of prefigurative politics and organizing practices argue convincingly that in

There are meaningful and at times problematic divides in the Transition Putney and broader Putney community over both the concept of resilience and over the ability (or lack thereof) of practices of resilience to be inclusive across a diverse array of class backgrounds. For some, the word resilience conjures an image of a drastically changed climate, increased natural disasters, and the threat of food insecurity in the future. “We have to reconnect with community in order to be prepared for when the shit hits the fan,” I hear in different versions over and over. Or consider the words of another research participant, when he responded to a question about challenges of the last five or ten years in the community: “We haven’t had any. That’s our problem. There haven’t been any challenges and so we don’t know how to be ready for problems. It’s been too long since we’ve been at war, so people aren’t prepared for difficult things.” (fieldnotes, Oct 26, 2013).

For others, resilience is all about being ready for a future characterized by a lack of cheaply available energy—call it peak oil or peak everything, the future coming down the pike for these people is one of scarcity: of energy, food, potable water, communications. This will be an apocalypse of "anthropogenic climate change and economic collapse" according to my informants and to the Transition community broadly, where it is not the "chosen" who are saved, but rather those who have done enough resilience building in preparation. “I think about when peak everything will hit, and I think about the way that all the things we’re familiar with will collapse, and I think WOOOOOWWW,” one person says as his eyes get wide (fieldnotes June 2, 2013). He articulates excitement about the opportunity to re-think the ways that we relate to one another, and sees resilience building and connecting with community as integral parts of preparing for that collapsing future.

In some ways, imagining the landscape of future threats at this community level, as facilitated by the Transition Towns model, ends up looking a lot like a group of closet generals playing war games. This is not to say that some of these threats aren’t real, or that they aren’t currently actually having important impacts on the lives of people worldwide. Rather, it’s to suggest that the way that future problems and challenges are framed in civil social organizing is (perhaps too much so) parallel with a militarized method of imagining threats and responding to them. The landscape of threat is so broad as to make it impossible for any particular response module to actually be effective, but nonetheless the exercise of imagination, and imagined response, creates a sense of preparation that soothes some needs.

Gender and labor, a brief commentary

There is also an important gendered dynamic of labor I see emerging subtly in communities that frame some of their understanding of the future based on knowledge of the “triple crisis,” whether they understand the problem of the future as one to be dealt with collectively or individually. With many of the small-scale farmers I am working with for this research project, it is women who are doing a bulk of the farm labor and organization or management thereof, while men

order to dismantle hierarchies of power, domination and oppression in the world, we must begin by acknowledging them in our organizing process, and work to eliminate them at the most intimate and seemingly minute of levels. Prefigurative politics suggests that not only will these practices make spaces of organizing for justice and equity less oppressive in themselves, but will also begin to actually change the ways that the world works. That we cannot affect true anti-oppressive change at the level of the state or the nation or the globe--rather, we must start with ourselves and our relationships and work from there. See e.g. Graeber, David (2004). *Fragments of an anarchist anthropology* (2nd pr. ed.). Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press; Gordon, Uri. *Anarchy Alive!* London: Pluto Press, 2007; and Shukaitis, Stephen (2007). *Constituent Imagination: Militant Investigation // Collective Theorization*. San Francisco: AK Press.

have jobs outside the home.³² In the last decade or two, a few interlocking movements have been heuristically remaking the domestic project—i.e. home making, raising kids and chickens, making food—into a radical project, partially in response to the threats of global climate change and a general sense that the extractive capitalist system of production is greatly askew and needs tearing down.

So now, it is possible for a woman who is canning peaches for 8 hours while trying to tend to four small children by herself to constitute that work as “radical” and a particular political orientation to systems change. This is called the “new domesticity” by researchers and activists alike.³³ This research leads me to suggest that analysts and citizens alike examine these decision-making processes around home labor and the radical potential of domesticity. For some, labor has never stopped being gendered—here, though, in the context of rural North America, back-to-the-land ideals and histories underpin many people’s relationships to farm labor, self-sufficiency, and resilience. It is imperative in this context that we use caution as we glorify the work of building local resilience when some of that process of resilience building re-instantiates gendered divisions of labor that echo—negatively—a nineteenth century experience. I suggest proceeding with attentiveness to the ways that ideologies of resilience and self-sufficiency that idealize the nineteenth century rural homestead may end up reproducing relations of power very similar to those of traditional oppressive gender dynamics.

Canning and processing food, growing one's own food is “radical” in a world of industrial agribusiness, but what happens to the radical change-making potential of those practices if they are simply reinstating gendered power relations? I ask researchers and practitioners of resilience alike to consider whether the people who are in these newly gendered situations of self-sufficiency or resilience-building enacting liberatory relations to labor and the gendering of labor. For Transitioners and other resilience builders in Putney and Vermont, part of the work of radically reimagining the possibilities of the future (rather than merely the threats) involves “re-learning” a variety of skills that “our grandparents once had” such as canning and tanning hides. How does a gendering of labor re-emerge in these re-learning processes, and is it liberatory? The reproductive labor that goes into activities like canning and tanning hides is doubtless rooted in a “traditionally female” set of roles. I ask whether the ability to *choose* these roles makes them radical and new (rather than, as some women are still, being forced by circumstance into those roles).

Focusing on Transition: A Loving Critique of Resilience

The Rights for Resilience framework gives us the chance to think through “capabilities” as a useful rubric through which to consider the matter of building resilience. The framework suggests that “Building resilience is not only about moving forward to build adaptive capacity, but also about understanding the structures that facilitate or inhibit resilience. A rights-based approach requires careful engagement with relations of power and the legacies of history. Supporting resilience involves efforts to uncover and work against the root causes of vulnerability and poverty. Further, efforts at structural change, rather than just individual or group adaptation, are also important to developing overall capacities for resilience.” (2013) While there is much here that I agree with, I

³² There are only a few openly trans*folk in the area, none of whom are involved in farming, so the binary gender dynamic of woman in the home (this time constituted as the farm) and man at work (here constituted as away from the farm and house) plays out routinely.

³³ for more on the new domesticity and on critiques of radical homemaking, see e.g. Matchar, E. 2013. *Homeward Bound: Why Women are Embracing the New Domesticity*; and Hayes, S. 2010. *Radical Homemaker: Reclaiming Domesticity from a Consumer Culture*.

suggest that the use of the resilience concept is as potentially problematic in the Rights for Resilience framework as it is in the Transition Towns framework.

Both Transition and the Rights for Resilience framework seek a just and balanced approach to understanding resilience. As I have articulated above, the histories and genealogies of resilience as concept and practice--traceable to Cold War civil defense initiatives and post-9/11 security culture in the United States--are part of what make it appear as a seemingly useful heuristic in the present moment, for Transition Towns, for national security apparati, and for institutions organizing international development programs. I call our attention to the ways in which the fearful and anticipatory nature of the concept can serve to undermine the very projects that organizations like Transition Towns and efforts like the Rights for Resilience framework seek to undertake in addressing challenges that exist in the present moment.

Resilience as a concept can be quite useful and productive, as the Rights for Resilience Conceptual Framework outlines--the framework is careful in its desire for creating new possibilities for just relations out of the concept of resilience. My research leads me to conclude, however, that the use of this concept can paradoxically run the risk of obscuring the very relations of power embedded in the concept of resilience that the Rights for Resilience framework wants to bring to the forefront. This is evident in Putney, where some approaches to resilience are underpinned by a sense of urgency that, while not unwarranted, can bulldoze a diversity of concerns simply because those equally real concerns are not directly linked to the priorities of action for resilience *as imagined and defined by the first people to latch onto the concept as a useful one*.

I would like to suggest that we shift angles on the conversation--that we turn down the volume, as it were, on the resilience concept, keeping it in the wings as a tool for conversation rather than a framing device for producing more just human relations. I offer the preliminary suggestion that we turn to thinking, rather, through an "ethics of care" when attempting to articulate projects and practices for helping communities address the challenges that face them. Feminist geographers especially, along with medical anthropologists, have raised the concept of an "ethic of care" as a productive way of re-thinking analysis of human relations, as much as rethinking the relations themselves. Susan Smith suggests that

while "capabilities" is an inspiring theme, enhancing people's capacity to flourish, it also—potentially—enhances their capability to exclude and oppress: power can always be used in more than one way. So, for me, the most promising of these all-encompassing normative tendencies hinges around an *ethic of care*. Whether in its early, institutional embodiment in the social contracts of welfare states, or in its more recent feminist reworking, this is an ethic that is already rooted in the fact that *everyday life is full of ideas and practices which lean towards what is good, fair and care-full* (Smith 2005, emphasis added).

I follow her suggestion, as well as the work of Feldman and Ticktin (2010), Virginia Held (1995), and Victoria Lawson (2007) as they seek to disrupt and re-imagine the standard notions of how humans can and should relate with one another. My approach to analyzing the productivity, along with the problematic nature, of the concepts of "capabilities" and of "resilience" is grounded in these re-imaginings of what relationship, interaction, and knowledge can look like.

In Putney, community members interested in resilience are often operating at multiple scales of analysis of the "problems of resilience" at once. Considering localness--local food and economies, for instance--to be the ground of any effective resilience-building solution to the collapsing and threatened future, they also think regionally, wondering about the future availability of potable water and trucked-in foodstuffs. They think nationally, at a continental scale, about water, food, and the landscape of federal government political action (with the hint of fear about nuclear or

biological or chemical warfare). And they think globally, wondering about the ways in which extractive industries, seeking profit through the production of fossil fuel energy are affecting and have affected the air, water, and climate of the entire ball of dirt and fire that we live on.

The ability to think simultaneously at multiple levels is of benefit for working through the problems of building resilience, and for conceiving of the many different dilemmas, from the deadly to the minor, that may face this community in the future. These are important things to consider. That said, while the benefits of thinking at multiple scales about resilience are incontrovertible, in *practice* I have observed that such scalar focus tends to elide or overlook the intimate concerns of "others" in the actually existing local community.

These "others" are, as I have described above, unsurprisingly classed and gendered differently, and, in some cases, also raced as different. The immediate and pressing concerns of the "others" of resilience building may seem less urgent because they are "smaller scale," or perhaps simply seem "more personal" in nature. The many experiences of—not to mention research about—structural racism and structural inequality, however, suggest that we would do much better to work at exactly the juncture of these "more personal" problems, especially those which are being experienced by raced, classed, and gendered "others" of resilience-building.

Transition Putney, and the broader Transition movement, has done resilience research a favor by calling our attention to the fact that many of the pressing challenges communities around the world face with regard to climate change, energy availability, food security, and social and economic stability are rooted in conceptual problems which give rise to physical challenges from the petty to the extremely significant.

That is to say, my fieldwork in Putney reveals that it is the conceptual groundings of the contemporary economy--its roots in profit-oriented ideologies of practice founded on "extraction" of labor and resources from population and planet--that create the concrete reality for limited employment possibilities, challenges of food security, and affordable housing crises. The *enactment* (or problems therewith) of the federal and state level fiscal policy, of mortgages, of jobs and joblessness, of welfare, food aid, and emergency services are the visible failures of the contemporary world, but they are epiphenomenal to the conceptual problem of markets as we know them--markets which reduce the capacity of human relationship to abstractions of cash-based value and "resource" based exchange (see Callon 2012; 2013 for more on the relationship between concept and practice of economies). It is this delimitation that feminist scholars such as Noddings, J.K. Gibson-Graham (2006), and Smith suggest is problematic. By reducing all the materials of our relationships to pieces that can be exchanged, especially exchanged within the monetized market system, we move away from the breadth of human experience and we evacuate the full potential of relations to be caring, ethical and supportive.

Though resilience as a concept does good work in moving us forward to think through the concrete realities of rights and challenges of diverse communities across the planet, I have suggested that the concept may limit more than it opens. If the genealogies of resilience can be traced to, and revealed as entwined with, the conceptual groundwork which enables a marketized diminishing of actually existing human relationships, resilience as a concept does more harm than good.

Next Steps in Resilience Research

I suggest, drawing on observations from my field research as well as direct observations made by my informants, we would do well to necessarily entwine our scholarly and analytical work with the "resilience" concept with the "ethic of care" concept. How does our thinking about resilience-

building, at community and "human" scales, change when we take care into account explicitly? What happens if we look to an ethics of care to, as Victoria Lawson suggests, help us “move beyond critique to think through how we are implicated in uncaring relations and to engage in radically open, democratic and transformative practices for change” (2009, 212)?

My field research suggests that rather than throwing the resilience baby out with the bathwater, we ought rather to push our notion of what constitutes resilience as concept and practice *beyond* its current genealogical confines. I suggest that academics and practitioners alike develop a notion of resilience based in Smith's "situational ethics of care," which takes into account first and foremost the *relationships* on the ground in the actual place we're working. Relationships, that is, not only between the people we are working with, but also between ourselves as researchers and development workers and the people with whom we work.

Resilience, therefore, might be best framed not as a checklist of necessary objects and skills, but rather as a set of relations--between and among individuals and groups and their objects and skills. The recognition of these relationships, and of a necessary understanding of them as rooted in an ethic of care for one another, can serve as the ground for all our interactions and work towards justice. This research leads me to suggest that we will work better in community with our informants and with the "others" of resilience work if we start from an ethics of care.

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