Political Ecology of Globality and Diference

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RESUMEN

Este artículo es la introducción a un libro que está en imprenta. El versa sobre la dinámica de la globalidad imperial y su régimen global de colonialidad como una de las características más sobresalientes del sistema mundo colonial moderno a comienzos del siglo XXI. También es, en un sentido literal, geopolítica del conocimiento. Presta de Joan Martínez Allier su definición de "ecología política" como el estudio de los conflictos ecológico-distributivos. Argumenta que una globalidad eurocéntrica tiene una contraparte obligatoria en el acto sistemático de "encubrimiento del otro". Un tipo de "colonialidad global".Usa seis conceptos clave para comprender el argumento: lugar, capital, naturaleza, desarrollo, e identidad. Se basa en el caso de Colombia como escenario de la globalidad imperial.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Región, movimientos sociales, conservación, Pacífico,ecología política, globalidad, lugar, capital, naturaleza, desarrollo, identidad.

ABSTRACT

This article is about politics of difference and sameness that accompany the enactment of globality. Is is about the dynamic of the imperial globality and its global regime of coloniality as one of the most salient features of the modern colonial world system in the early twenty-first century. It is also, in a literal sense, about the geopolitics of knowledge. It develops its argument, in part, borrowing from Joan Martínez Alier´s definition of political ecology as the study of ecological distribution conflicts. It argues that a Eurocentric globality has an obligatory counterpart in the systematic act of *encubrimiento del otro.* A kind of "global coloniality." Six concepts are key to undrstand this argument: place, capital, nature, development e identity, Colombia is a theater of this imperial globality.

KEY WORDS: Region, social movements, conservation, Pacific, political ecology, globality, place, capital, nature, development, identity.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Places and regions in the age of globality

This book is about many different, yet closely interrelated, aspects of social, cultural and biological life at present. It is, above all, about place-based and regional expressions, or articulations, of difference in contexts of globality; this implies setting into conversation place-based and regional processes, on the one hand, with ever changing dynamics of capital, culture and difference at many levels, on the other. This conversation, however, is not about the imprint left on a particular world region by an allegedly unstoppable process of globalization, or even about how this region responds to it, but about an historically and spatially grounded concept of globality as the expression of a condition that is negotiated and enacted at every site and region of the world, thus making scalar markers (local, regional, global etc.) problematic in the best of cases. This conversation affords novel opportunities for examining the politics of difference and sameness that accompany the enactment of globality.

According to some arguments, today's politics of difference and sameness is still deeply shaped by the myths of universality and cultural superiority that since the dawn of modernity —the conquest of America by Spain in 1492— allowed the West to define the identity of the other. Since then, an ensemble of Western, modern cultural forces (including a particular view of the economy) has not ceased to exert its influence –often its dominance— over most world regions. These forces continue to operate at present through the ever-changing interaction of forms of European thought and culture, taken to be universally valid, with the seemingly perpetually subordinated knowledges and cultural practices of many non-European groups throughout the world. Eurocentric globality thus has an obligatory counterpart in the systematic act of *encubrimiento del otro* (the covering up of otherness), to use the expression of Latin American philosopher Enrique Dussel (1992) –that is, in a kind of "global coloniality." This book is then, in a very abstract but real sense, about the dynamic of an imperial globality and its global regime of coloniality as one of the most salient features of the modern colonial world system in the early twenty-first century. It is also, in a literal sense, about the geopolitics of knowledge –whose knowledge counts and what does this have to do with place, culture and power.[1]

The flesh and blood of the story comes from a particular region in Latin America, the Colombian Pacific. Customarily described as a poor and forgotten hot and humid forest crisscrossed by innumerable rivers and inhabited by black and indigenous groups –a *litoral recóndito*, as Sofonías Yacup, a local author and politician had put it already in the 1930s— the region has indeed been integrated into the world economy since the early post-Conquest period through exploration, slavery, gold mining, and the subjection or elimination of indigenous inhabitants. Cycles of boom and bust have succeeded each other over the past two centuries tied to the extraction of raw materials (gold, platinum, precious woods, timber, rubber and, mode recently, biodiversity), each leaving its indelible imprint on the social, economic, ecological and cultural make up of the place.

Only by the early 1980s, however, was the region subjected to an explicit and overarching strategy of incorporation into the national and transnational spheres in the name of development. As a result, by the early 1990s the region had become the stage of an intense cultural politics that brought together development experts, black and indigenous activists, biodiversity conservation advocates, capitalists, fortune seekers, government officials, and academics into a tight space of dialogue, negotiation and confrontation that, albeit for a brief moment, seemed to have an unclear resolution, with local movements and their allies making a valiant and brilliant attempt at providing a workable alternative. Two other factors were crucial in creating the context for the complex encounter: the decided opening of the national economy to world markets after 1990 under neo-liberal dictates; and the reform of the national constitution in 1991 which, among other things, resulted in a law that granted cultural and territorial rights to the black communities (Ley 70 of 1993). By the late 1990s, however, the regime of imperial globality had reasserted itself with force and the region became submerged into a quagmire of violence, intolerance and massive displacement that has affected black and indigenous communities and the environment with particular virulence –a reassertion of the coloniality of knowledge, power and nature, in other words.

Such are the intent and material of the book in their broadest strokes –again, just the beginning. Emerging from this historical materiality, the book is about the incredibly complex

1 Here I also have in mind as well the works of authors such as Dipesh Chakrabarty (2000) and Ranajit Guha (e.g., 1988). For a fuller treatment of the concepts of imperial globality and global coloniality, see Escobar 2004, and the chapter on Development.

intersections of nature and culture, space and place, landscape and human action, culture and identity, knowledge and power, economy and politics, and difference and sameness established by the processes of imperial globality and global coloniality in a particular corner of the world; it is also about what has been called uneven geographies of poverty and livelihoods, and how they are related to historical political economies and culturally-inflected patterns of development intervention (Bebbington 2004). I render this set of intersections and geographies visible and manageable by a particular design in terms of six basic concepts: Place, Capital, Nature, Development, Identity, and Networks. These concepts are both chapter titles and notions that articulate my argument throughout the book; thus, while each concept is developed largely in its respective chapter, most concepts are dealt with in several chapters. To give an example: while "place" is the central subject of the respective chapter (Chapter 1), it also makes significant appearances in chapters on capital, nature, and networks. Another example: "biodiversity" is discussed at length in the chapter on nature, but it also figures prominently in that on development and is also treated in chapters on place, capital, and networks; and so forth. This means the book has a bit of network or recursive logic of its own in that a number of central subjects are treated in somewhat different ways in various chapters, as so many partial displacements of the same topic (a rhetorician might call this feature "theoretical drift"). This also means that while the chapters can to some extent be read independently, or in any order, only by reading the entire book can the reader develop a comprehensive sense of the work. One further detail: while each chapter interweaves theory and ethnographic research, in most cases the more lengthy theoretical debates are relegated to the footnotes (three notable exceptions are the discussion on epistemologies of nature in the Nature chapter, the framework of modernity/coloniality in the chapter in Development, and the discussion on flat ontologies in the chapter on Networks).

I mentioned above that the book is about many subjects. Some of them are: a set of ecological and historical conditions making the Pacific into a very particular place or regional socio-natural world; the State policies of development and pluriculturality that created conditions for the emergence of black and indigenous social movements, and these movements' efforts at steering the region in particular directions as they defend their world and worldviews; the attempts by capitalists to appropriate the rainforest for extractivist activities, by developers to set the region straight into the path of modernist progress, by biologists and others to defend this incredibly rich biodiversity "hot-spot" from the most predatory activities of capitalists and developers, and of course by academics, activists and intellectuals to understand the whole thing, this complicated process that took them by surprise and that found them largely unprepared in terms of solid studies and theoretical approaches. In addressing these questions, the book highlights the tremendous value of activist knowledge for both understanding and action. It is also, for this very reason and perhaps above all, about difference and its politics and the difference they might make, or not, in places such as the Pacific in the age of globality. It is, by the same token, about what theorists call modernity –is it still a viable project in regions such as the Pacific or, on the contrary, do the events happening there suggest that modernity has to be left behind once and for all? Finally, it is about social theory and its efforts to respond more effectively to the dynamics of the real: are there novel approaches in social theory that provide better accounts in this regard, perhaps because they are based not only on more inclusive epistemologies but on more diverse ontologies? If the latter is the case, we would be facing a significant reorientation of theory; as we will see in the chapter on Networks, some are making this bold claim.

It is time to provide a more substantial account of the book's content and structure, although this will still be hardly a sketch in relation to the chapters that follow.

1.2. A Political Ecology of Difference

Joan Martínez Alier (2002) defines political ecology as the study of ecological distribution conflicts. By this he means conflicts over access to, and control over, natural resources, particularly as a source of livelihood, including the costs of environmental destruction. As we will see in the next section, "ecological distribution conflicts" exist in the context of economies, cultures, and forms of knowledge, besides the obvious ecosystem context. In many places, local groups are pitted against translocal forces of many types and engage in struggles to defend their place. It is not easy to conceptualize this defense in all of its dimensions, and this is an important part of the story. In a nutshell, it will be argued that people mobilize against the destructive aspects of

globalization from the perspective of what they have historically been and what they are at present: historical subjects of particular cultures, economies, and ecologies; particular knowledge producers; individuals and collectivities engaged in the play of living with landscapes, living and non-living beings, and each other in particular ways. We shall say that in regions such as the Pacific people engage in the defense of place from the perspective of the economic, ecological, and cultural difference that their landscapes, cultures and economies embody in relation to those of more dominant sectors of society. What follows is as close a summary of chapters as will be provided. This constellation of concepts can be said to provide a basis for a political ecology framework focused on difference. Some important concepts are of course missing (e.g., State, gender, culture, science, or knowledge itself), and some of these will be treated to some extent in various chapters.

1.2.1. Place

Why start with place? For three main reasons. First, and most immediately, because the mobilizations of the past two decades in the Pacific are seen locally as struggles over culture, territory and place. This is particularly the case with the black and indigenous movements who see the aim of their struggle as the control of their territory; it is not farfetched to see these movements as expressions of ecological and cultural attachment to place. In fact, indigenous and black activists together came up in the mid 1990s with a conceptualization of the Pacific as a "region-territory of ethnic groups" that became a gravitating principle of political strategies and conservation policies alike. Place-based struggles, more generally, link body, environment, culture, and economy in all of their diversity (Harcourt and Escobar, eds. 2005). Second, more philosophically, because place continues to be an important source of culture and identity; despite pervasive transnationalization of social life, there is an embodiment and "emplacement" to all human life that cannot be denied. This is readily acknowledged by people, such as the black and indigenous groups of the Pacific, who maintain more embodied and embedded models of social/ecological existence. Third, because scholarship of the past two decades in many fields (geography, anthropology, political economy, communications, etc.) have tended to de-emphasize place and to highlight, on the contrary, movement, displacement, traveling, diaspora, migration, and so forth. In this last regard, there is the need for a corrective theory that neutralizes this erasure of place, the asymmetry that arises from given far too much importance to "the global" and far too little value to "place" –in other words, can we learn not to be so suspicious about the rhetoric of difference and place?. To this end, we shall review not only the deep historical character of this region –in all of its geological, biological, cultural, and political dimensions—but how these processes have always been the object of negotiation. It is against the background of the long history of biological life, landscape and human settlement that today's political, economic and ecological struggles make full sense.

1.2.2. Capital

One of the main ways in which places have been transformed in the past centuries the world over is of course through capitalism. No account of place making can overlook the production of place by capital, and perhaps there are few examples of this as vivid as the transformation of a complex and self-organizing humid forest ecosystem into a rigid monocultural landscape, as it happened in some parts of the Pacific with the spread of African oil palm plantations, or the replacement of the meandering and rooted mangroves by a monotonous succession of rectangular pools for industrial shrimp farming. Marxist political economy has been the main corpus of theory enlightening us on these processes. It is already well known that Marxism was not very good at dealing with culture, and even less so at dealing with nature. The engagement of Marxism with culture and nature in recent decades has been very productive; applying these new frameworks to questions of place will allow us to see the actions of capital in the Pacific in a new light. This is half of the picture, however; for the other half, we have to look at the plethora of economic practices that local groups have either maintained over the long haul or created in recent times. Could some of these actually be non-capitalist practices? How does one decide? As we shall see, mainstream political economy has been unable to see non-capitalist economies in their own right. Besides economic practices oriented towards self-subsistence, some collective shrimp farming practices innovated by local groups in the southern Pacific, in the very encounter with industrial shrimp farming, could be seen in terms of non-capitalist economies. Is this reinterpretation a naïve conceit in the minds of the social groups engaged in them or, worse still, wishful thinking on the part of the

analyst? Or could there be something real in these practices that capitalocentric frameworks have previously rendered invisible? Finally, could theorists and activists plausibly entertain the project of cultivating subjects of economic difference, particularly of non-capitalist economies? A positive answer to the latter may shift analysts and activist perspectives onto a different plane, as we shall see.

1.2.3. Nature

Many environmentalists argue that there is a generalized ecological crisis today. We are, literally, destroying our biophysical environments at record speed and in unprecedented magnitude. Capitalist modernity, it would seem, has declared war on every ecosystem on the planet. Few places exemplify the scale of this destruction as the Pacific since the mid 1990s. Philosophically-minded ecologists argue that the ecological crisis is a crisis of modern systems of thought. Not only are modern science and technology in large part at the basis of rampant destruction, they no longer seem able to provide workable solutions to it. This is why epistemological questions are fundamental when discussing questions about nature, and as such they will be given due importance in the respective chapter; there is, in short, a coloniality of nature in modernity that needs to be unveiled. Again, this is only half of the picture and, as in the case of the economy, we need to search for the other half in the place-based ecological practices of difference existing in the Pacific. In the river settlements, black groups have historically enacted a grammar of the environment –a local model of nature— that maintains a striking difference with modern understandings of nature. This grammar, embedded in rituals, languages, and forms of classification of natural beings that to moderns might look strange constitute the cultural-ecological basis of how they farm and utilize the forests. These "traditional production systems" —as biodiversity experts and activists came to call them in the 1990s— have had an in-built notion of sustainability, one that however has become increasingly impracticable in recent times due to a variety of pressures. Here lies one of the most difficult predicaments for conservation advocates and activists: pushed to rationalize culturally established ecological and environmental practices to insure "conservation," they are aware that in doing so they are also moving away from the long-standing, place-based notions and practices on which a working level of sustainability relied until recent decades. Is it still possible make an argument in favor of "ecological difference" this late in the game, or are activists and conservationists forever doomed to bring nature into the realm of modern planning to insure conservation, and if so how can this be done without reinforcing coloniality (in this case, the subalternization or altogether elimination of local grammars and knowledge of the environment) at both cultural and ecological levels?

1.2.4. Development

Along with capitalism, development has been the single most important transformative force in the Pacific in recent decades. In the early 1980s, the first plan for the "comprehensive and integral development" of the Pacific created the Pacific as a "developmentalizable entity" for the first time. Few before the 1970s gave a dime for the development of this insalubrious and backward region. By the early 1990s, to speak of the development of the Pacific had become de rigueur, and of course entities like the World Bank were quick to jump into the picture. Not everything went according to the developmentalist script, however. While lots of conventional development did indeed take place, often times with negative consequences for local peoples and ecosystems, many projects, especially those under "participatory development" schemes, did enable a certain degree of creative appropriation, even subversion in terms of intended goals, by local groups. This was the case particularly with a number of projects that became linked to the social movements for cultural and territorial rights that swept over the southern Pacific since the very early 1990s, such as the establishment of cooperatives for the commercialization of cocoa and coconut; women's associations for shellfish marketing; innovative popular art-cum-literacy projects that brought low technology radio and printing materials to local groups through which they creatively linked literacy, history and identity; and the biodiversity conservation project for the region which black and indigenous activists profoundly transformed. Drawing on debates on postdevelopment and coloniality, this chapter suggests that these acts of counter-work by locals could reasonably be seen as producing alternative modernities –modern yet different ecological, economic and cultural configurations—but also the inklings of alternatives to modernity –what could be termed de-colonial configurations of nature, culture, and economy.

1.2.5. *Identity*

The 1991 constitutional reform created conditions for an intense period of cultural and political activism on the part of local black and indigenous groups. In fact, as far as the black groups was concerned, one of the most defining aspects of the period was the indisputable emergence of the category of *comunidades negras* ("black communities") as a central cultural and political fact –so much so that collectivities such as the network of ethno-territorial organizations known as PCN (*Proceso de Comunidades Negras*, or Process of Black Communities) adopted this category for itself, the State issued development plans "for the black communities," and do forth. The category took on local force at least at the level of movements, non-governmental and Church organizations, and of course the development apparatus. Most analysts concur with the fact that there was indeed a veritable "relocation of 'blackness' in structures of alterity," as Peter Wade (1997:36) descriptively put it. But the agreement stops here. Could this process be seen as the invention of previously unheard of black identities in terms of ethnicity? And if so, were these identities more the product of the neo-liberal State (e.g., Ley 70 of territorial and cultural rights), or were they rather the result of the decided action by social movement activists, or somewhere in between? An adequate answer to these questions can only be attempted by a careful tacking back and forth between theory and ethnography. Contemporary theory (poststructuralism, feminist theory, and cultural and psychological frameworks in various fields) has given great salience to questions of identity as an expression of the politics of difference; activists unambiguously described their actions in terms of the right to cultural difference and a black or indigenous identity. Generally speaking, what are the relations between the individual and the collective, between culture and politics, between State and social movement action, between activist and expert knowledge that account for the making of particular identities in place-based yet translocal situations? Moreover, even if there were no "ethnic identities" or "black communities" in pre-1990 Pacific local peoples certainly did not have any trouble knowing who they were and how to talk about themselves in relation to others, such as whites –they only did it according to a very different regime of representations of difference and sameness, of belonging. What happened with these previous "traditional" identities once the post-1990s modernist regime irrupted into the picture? As we shall see, there are no easy answers to these questions and, again, we will highlight the process of knowledge about identities by the social movements.

1.2.6. *Networks*

Biodiversity, social movements, capital, knowledge, etc. are all decentralized, dispersed, and most always transnationalized ensembles of processes that operate at many levels and through multiple sites. No current image seems to capture this state of affairs at present more auspiciously than that of the network. The salience of the network concept has to do with cultural and technological processes fueled by digital ICTs (information and communication technologies). There surely is a lot of hype in network talk arising from many quarters (from physics and mathematics to systems science, sociology, anthropology, geography and cultural studies), but there is also indeed a lot of interesting ideas emanating from network approaches, if one may be allowed this label. To give a few examples of its descriptive power for now: the concept of biodiversity was barely known in the late 1980s; by the early 1990s it had become a veritable movement, a transnational network bringing together all kinds of organizations, actors, knowledges, endangered species, genes, and so forth. A movement organization such as PCN, which started as a very regional force, was already embarked on a strategy of transnationalization by 1995-1996. By the late 1990s there were already networks of Afro-Latin American movements and Afro-Latin American women activists, where barely sporadic contacts had existed a few years before. But there are networks of all kinds and all kinds of networks. Is it possible to differentiate between dominant and oppositional networks, for instance, or all they so inextricably tied that even an analytical separation between them becomes useless? Or between local/regional and transnational networks? Or between the hierarchical and centralized networks that have characterized most modern organizations, on the one hand, and the more self-organizing, decentralized and non-hierarchical "meshworks" that characterize many contemporary movements, on the other? Or how does one reconcile being-in-place and being-in-networks? And if so, what difference does it make, anyway, in how we understand not only social processes but cultural and ecological possibilities? Finally, what are the implications of network thinking for social theory, including concepts of scale, space, ecosystem, and the real itself? If

what some theorists are arguing is correct, the network concept would be a reflection of a more substantial re-interpretation of how social reality comes into being –don't the notions of "actor network," "assemblages," and "flat ontology" intuitively point in this direction in the way in which they push us to think in relational and contingent, rather than structural and law-driven, terms about the real?   Do these networks, finally, mandate a significant reinterpretation of entities such as PCN or the biodiversity movement as assemblages of sorts in ways that complicate the findings of previous chapters?

1.3. Thinking from the Colonial Difference

Coloniality, according to Walter Mignolo is, on the one hand, "what the project of modernity needs to rule out and roll over in order to implant itself as modernity and –on the other hand—the site of enunciation where the blindness of the modern project is revealed, and concomitantly also the site where new projects begin to unfold. Coloniality is [….] the platform of pluri-versality, of diverse projects coming from the experience of local histories touched by western expansion; thus coloniality is not an abstract universal, but the place where diversity as a universal project can be thought out, *where the question of languages and knowledges become crucial*" (cited in Escobar 2004: 218; see also Mignolo 2000; Walsh 2006). The notion of coloniality thus signals two parallel processes: the systematic suppression of subordinated cultures and knowledges (the *encubrimiento del otro*) by dominant modernity; and the necessary emergence, in the very encounter, of particular knowledges shaped by this experience that have at least the potential to become the sites of articulation of alternative projects and, in a general sense, of enabling a pluriverse of socio-natural configurations. It should be made clear at the outset that the modernity/coloniality perspective, to be discussed at length in the chapter on Development, is not so much interested in alternatives within the same overall epistemic-cultural order as in those which, arising from the epistemic borders of the modern-colonial world system, might pose a more significant challenge to Eurocentric forms of modernity. Succinctly put, this perspective is not only interested in "alternative worlds and knowledges" but also in "worlds and knowledges otherwise." This is a more innovative theoretical and political proposition; it implies a response to the teleological and eurocentric arguments of the moment on all sides of the political spectrum.

To give a more intuitive entry into this notion: The fact that the Pacific has always been connected to a greater or lesser extent with a dominant national Euro-Andean modernity (and to cultures and economies beyond), has entailed the persistent suppression (often violent exclusion) of black and indigenous knowledges and cultures. This very situation, nevertheless, has been accompanied by an ongoing production by these groups of different knowledges about nature, economy, person, and the world in general. These knowledges are generated in the ceaseless process of living in the epistemic borders of the modern colonial world system, as so many instances of border thinking by black and indigenous inhabitants. Literally speaking, black and indigenous groups of the Pacific –as surely many other groups in the world— have always lived in a pluriverse of culture and knowledge. But they have done so as *dominated* groups, which makes all the difference. Activists of local movements, as will be suggested in this book, are border thinkers since they emerge from this border and produce knowledge that shuttles back and forth alongside the modernity/coloniality, universality/pluriversality interface. This border, even more, constitutes an exteriority of sorts (not an "ontological outside") to modernity. We shall say that these activists conduct their struggle from the colonial difference –in this case, a colonial difference that has to do with blackness, or indigeneity, and with living in particular landscapes and ecosystems.[2]

Thinking from the colonial difference can be particularly enlightening and powerful when done by, or in conjunction with, cultural-political struggles of subaltern groups, such as the black and indigenous movements of the Pacific (of course, struggles such as the Zapatistas' can also be seen as based on and enacting border thinking). There are few ethnographies of coloniality yet or conceived with the goal of illuminating the thinking that goes on from the colonial difference.[3] However, there are a number of notions that could enable the construction of a framework for thinking theoretically and ethnographically about/from the colonial difference. The framework presented below incorporates elements from a variety of proposals, chiefly those of political ecology, modernity/coloniality, politics of place, and diverse economies, all of which will be presented at some length in subsequent chapters. For now, only the rudiments of the framework is necessary.

2. It may be said that anthropologists in particular have always lived with this realization about the colonial difference; this is also the case of ecologists. However, taken as a whole, anthropology and ecology have tended to domesticate difference rather than to release its epistemic and political potential for/into alternative socio-natural designs (Restrepo and Escobar 2005).

I have found it useful to think about the colonial difference under three inter-related rubrics: economic, ecological, and cultural difference (Escobar 2006[1999]). This is so for several reasons. First, the discourse and strategy of movements suggest that they are no longer willing to subordinate culture to economy or vice versa, and for many movements the ecological is of paramount importance. This is because, second, the transformation of regions such as the Pacific by imperial globality is indeed at least a triple transformation, or conquest if you wish: economic, ecological, and cultural; it entails the transformation of local diverse economies, partly oriented to self-reproduction and subsistence, into a monetized, market-driven economy; of particular ecosystems into more modern forms of nature; and of place-based local cultures into cultures that increasingly (have to) resemble Euro-Andean modernity. At the same time, this transformation is far from being complete –it never stops indeed. Academics have customarily thought about these processes in terms of resistance, hybridization, accommodation, and the like. These have been useful notions, yet they have tended to obliterate the potential of difference for worlds and knowledges otherwise. Let us see if it is possible to arrive at an alternative formulation.

We already mentioned the definition of political ecology as the study of ecological distribution conflicts, meaning by this conflicts over access to, and control over, natural resources. In providing this definition, Martínez Alier (2002) was making an extension from political economy as the study of economic distribution conflicts –class distribution of wealth, income, assets and so forth— to the field of ecology. This two-pronged political ecology perspective is still missing an important dimension of conflict, namely, the cultural. It is necessary, in other words, to consider those conflicts that arise from the relative power, or powerlessness, accorded to various knowledges and cultural practices. To continue with the example above: by culturally privileging the capitalist (e.g., plantation) model of nature over the local diverse agro-forest ecosystem model, not geared to a single "product" and to accumulating capital, a cultural distribution conflict has been created. This conflict has ecological and economic consequences, and vice versa, so that economic, ecological and cultural distribution conflicts are often intimately intertwined.

There is added value in including the cultural, and this is to neutralize the tendency to ascribe determining importance to the economic or to the ecological, depending on the taste of the researcher. In other words, economic crises are ecological crises are cultural crises. This also suggests that it is important not to separate these three domains, but to let them pervade and interpenetrate each other. When considered together, the domains of subjectivity and culture, economy, and ecology provide the basis for theoretical insights about how to reorient societies away from the nightmarish arrangements of the present – towards cultural, ecological and cultural practices and singularities that could constitute a tangible alternative to capitalist significations and realizations, fostering the construction of new existential territories. To those who might argue that this amounts to an ecologization of the social, I would say that if indeed it does this could be taken as a reflection of the historical specificity of the framework in question.[4]

One further word about the cultural dimension. Cultural distribution conflicts arise from the difference in effective power associated with particular cultural meanings and practices. They do not emerge out of cultural difference per se, but of the difference that this difference makes in the definition of social life: whose norms and meaning-making practices define the terms and values that regulate social life concerning economy, ecology, personhood, body, knowledge, property, and so forth. Power inhabits meaning, and meanings are a main source of social power; struggles over meaning are thus central to the structuring of the social and of the physical world itself. This concept shifts the study of cultural difference from the modernist ("liberal") concern with multiculturalism to the distributive effects of cultural dominance (coloniality) and struggles around it. If one were so inclined, one could speak of economic, ecological, and cultural justice. If traditionally social movements have tended to emphasize the first dimension, in recent decades they have also addressed the latter two (as in environmental justice and identity-centered movements), often underscoring the interrelations among economy, ecology, and culture. But more than "cultural justice" movements at present are emphasizing what could be called interculturality. I define interculturality as a project, that of bringing about effective dialogue of cultures in contexts of power (Escobar 2006 [1999]). On the movement side, these dialogues are often enacted from the colonial difference. This is clearly the case with groups such as PCN, as we shall see in abundant detail.

Akin to the "women and politics of place" conception (Escobar and Harcourt, eds. 2005), the above argument brings together into one framework discourses and struggles around culture,

3. Three recently completed anthropology doctoral dissertations have a partial focus on coloniality: Carmen Medeiros (CUNY, 2005) provides an excellent interpretation of peasant responses to development in the Bolivian Andes from the explicit perspective of coloniality; Mónica Espinosa (University of Massachusetts, 2004) treats the Colombian indigenous leader Manuel Quintín Lame as a border thinker; and José Martínez (University of Massachusetts, 2004) analyzes indigenous ecological knowledge in Yucatán by appealing to the notion of "coloniality of nature." The work of Freya Schiwy with indigenous video makers in Bolivia also has ethnographic basis; see Schiwy (??).

4. This is what Guattari calls a "generalized ecology" or ecosophy (1990).

often the focus of ethnic, gender, and other movements for identity; environment, the interest of ecology movements; and diverse economies, usually the concern of social and economic justice movements.[5] In other words, this conceptual framework aims to analyze the interrelations created within subaltern struggles (black people's in the case of the Pacific) around identity, environment and economies, in all of their diversities (diverse identities, diverse ecologies, diverse economies). In doing so we aim to demystify theory that ignores subaltern experiences and knowledge of the local economy, environment and culture *in order to relocate their politics of place as key to our understanding of globalization*. As we shall see in the last chapter (Networks), many subaltern struggles can be seen today in terms of place-based yet transnationalized strategies of localization –or, more succinctly, as forms of place-based globalism (Osterweil 2005a). At the theoretical-political level, the focus on difference can also be interpreted in terms of the logic of articulation outlined by Laclau and Mouffe (1985); emerging out the antagonisms that necessarily pervade social life, the logic of difference is a means to widen the political space and increase its complexity. The articulation of struggles across systems of differences may lead to the deepening of democracy –indeed, to questioning the very principles of modern, liberal democracy itself, if conceived from the perspective of the colonial difference. The following table summarizes the framework (See Escobar 2006 [1999] for further detail).

One final word about why so much emphasis on difference and "conflict." First, as the Brazilian liberation theologian Leonardo Boff says, the valuation of difference entails acceptance of complementarities and convergences constructed out of the diversity of worldviews and practices (2002: 26; see also Maturana and Varela 1987). Second, while highlighting power, "conflict" should not be seen as reducing everything to power or to quantitative assessments of inequalities. The emphasis on conflict and difference is not about exclusion or segregation, as some might fear. To continue with Boff, if talk of conflict and interculturality is about justice it is also about forgiveness; if it commands, for instance, reparations it does so in the sense of the acknowledgement of denial and historical injustice rather than revenge. In the best of cases, the language of distribution conflicts entails serious individual and collective confrontations with difference but without (having to) fear; it entails bridge building and technologies of crossing across difference (Anzaldúa and Keatin, eds. 2002). As biologists Maturana and Varela (1987: 246) put it, "a conflict can go away only if we move to another domain where coexistence takes place. The knowledge of this knowledge constitutes the social imperative for a human-centered ethics. … As human beings we have only the world which we create with others —whether we like them or not." This is, in fact, the deepest lesson of biology for these two thinkers: "without love, without acceptance of others living besides us, there is no social process and, therefore, no humanness" (p. 246).

This emphasis of the framework also signals the widespread desire for peace that exists in many places like Colombia –of course keeping in mind the liberation theology dictum that there cannot be peace without justice. To an order of imperial globality enforced through violence, the ecology of difference answers with a debate on distribution understood as the search for a shared sense of peace and justice. As a value, peace-with-justice does not belong completely to the domain of rationality but of ethics; it requires an attitude of transformation, caring, and solicitude in the face of difference and injustice. Peace-with-justice should be seen as always in process, something that can only be approached asymptotically but never really be reached. To the declaration of war on nature and humanity by neo-liberal globalization, there can only be a declaration of peace in which peace is both the means and an end. It is in the light of a planetary sense of ethics and spirituality such as found in the best of ecology and pluralist religious thought and in the best humanist traditions of secular modernity that one may find elements for a workable strategy of peace out of the recognition of conflict. "Peace" –understood as a set of economic, cultural, and ecological processes that bring about a measure of justice and balance to natural and social orders—is the deepest meaning of the ecology of difference that aims towards worlds and knowledges otherwise.[6]

As a PCN leader put it, "*las diferencias son para enriquecer la acción y el pensamiento*" (differences are meant to enrich action and thought). For activists of movements predicated on cultural difference, difference is the very source of a *pensamiento propio* (a thought of one's own); this means that it is important to create differentiation in thought. One often finds among movement activists and intellectuals the notion that difference is the very core of existence, that what persists is difference itself, not any unchanging essence. Difference is what defines being, and as difference is always in the process of being transformed, so is being. The oppressor, the colonizer, the

Context/historical process	Concept/problem	Theoretical/Academic Response	Intellectual /political Project	Social/political responses
Global Capitalism	Economic Distribution (Negation of Economic Difference)	Internalization of Externalities. Environmental Economics	"Sustainable" capitalist development	Environmental governmentality
Reductionist Science and Technology	Ecological Distribution (Negation of Ecological Processes and Ecological Difference)	Highlight Incommensurability of (modern) economy and ecology. Ecological Economics and Political Ecology	Need to re-embed economy in society and ecosystems	Struggles over the environment as source of livelihood; Environmentalism of the poor
Modernity/ Coloniality (Modern Colonial World System)	Cultural Distribution (Negation of Cultural Difference)	Highlight Incommensurability of (modern) economy and pluri-culturality; Political Ecology, Politics of Place frameworks; articulatory politics; de-coloniality	Need to re-embed economy in society, ecosystem, and culture	Place-based struggles for economic, ecological, and cultural difference; social movement networks; autonomy, counter-hegemony; decolonial projects.

dominant seek to occupy the time and energy of the subaltern to preclude difference from becoming an active social force. In places such as the Pacific today, this occupation of the time and space of difference is today effected through brutal acts of repression and imperial models of war, economy and development.   Confronted with this situation and with the ideology of a *pensamiento único* (single thought) that seems to pervade much of the world, activists attempt to create a path for difference to have a breathing space.[7]

The framework of the political ecology of difference (the integrated framework of diverse economies, environments, and cultures) is offered here in dialogue with these efforts, perhaps, as J.K. Gibson-Graham (2006: 30) would have it, as a "global outline of a practical politics" that works by reading world events for difference, rather than just for dominance, and by weaving connections among languages and practices of economic, ecological, and cultural difference. It should be emphasize that this framework is not offered here as a universal approach; on the contrary, *it is a theory of difference that is historically specific and contingent*, it is a response to the present moment that builds on intellectual and political developments in many places, particularly some parts of Latin America. It is also partly a response to eurocentric teleological arguments on all sides of the political spectrum about the alleged universality of the current situation. Above all, it is an attempt to think with intellectual-activists who are attempting to go beyond the limits of eurocentric models themselves as they confront the ravages of neo-liberal forms of globality and seek to defend their place-based cultures and ecologies –it is, in other words, about projects of de-coloniality in and for the present.

1.4. Colombia as a theater of imperial globality

It would seem paradoxical to talk about peace when the world is increasingly nasty and in chaos. Little known is the fact that there are three million internally displaced people in Colombia, a disproportionate number of them black and indigenous. So much violence, often fueled by hatred and racism, one might think, surely needs to be confronted in its own terms. Indeed, and to give just the roughest sketch about Colombia –one of five or six world regions where the struggle for the imposition of the terms of imperial globality is most fierce, but sadly a mirror of what might become more common world wide—let us say that in this country the "cruel little wars" (Joxe 2002)

of imperial globality have been waging for several decades, every year spreading further its fatidic embrace over territories and domains of social life. First, Colombia represents patterns of historical exclusion found in many parts of Latin America but rarely with such depth. Colombia today has the second most skewed income distribution, after Brazil. While it has been aggravated over the last twenty years by successive neo-liberal regimes, it has a long historical basis in the structure of land tenure and industrial capital. Today, 1.1% of landowners control over 55% of all arable land (and as much as one-third of this may be linked to drug money). Over 60% of the Colombian population live on incomes below the poverty line ($2 dollars a day); twenty-five percent live in absolute poverty, that is, they earn less than one dollar a day. The armed conflict that affects the country is well known. It brings together a disparate set of actors –chiefly left-wing guerrillas, the army, and right-wing paramilitary groups—into a complex military, territorial, and political conflict, often intertwined with and aggravated by wealthy drug mafias.[8] From the perspective of imperial globality, all of these armed groups can be seen as war machines more interested in their own survival than in peaceful solutions to the conflict. Massacres and human rights abuses are the order of the day, primarily by paramilitaries but also guerrillas, and the civilian population is most often brought into the conflict as unwilling participants or sacrificial victims.

The sub-national dynamics of imperial globality is pathetically illustrated by the experience of the Pacific region. This rainforest area has been the home to about one million people, 95% of them Afro-Colombian, with about 50,000 indigenous peoples belonging to various ethnic groups. Since the mid 1990s, guerrillas and paramilitaries have been steadily moving into the region, in order to gain control of territories that are either rich in natural resources or the site of planned large-scale development projects. In many river communities, both guerrillas and paramilitaries have pushed people to plant coca or move out. Displacement has reached staggering levels, with several hundred thousand people displaced from this region alone. Starting in the late 1990s, displacement in some areas have been caused by paramilitaries paid by rich African oil palm growers, intent on expanding their holdings and increasing their production for world markets. This is partly done in the name of development with resources provided by Plan Colombia.[9]   In many world regions similar to the Pacific, ethnic minorities inhabit territories rich in natural resources that are now coveted by national and transnational capital. Beyond this more empirical observation, however, lies the fact that imperial globality is also about the defense of white privilege worldwide. By white privilege here I mean not so much phenotypically white, but the defense of a eurocentric way of life that has historically privileged white peoples (and, particularly since the 1950s, those elites and middle classes around the world who abide by this outlook) at the expense of non-European and colored peoples world wide. This is global coloniality at its most material.

The case of Colombia and its Pacific region, thus, reflects key tendencies of imperial globality and global coloniality. The first tendency is the link between the economy and armed violence, particularly the still prominent role of national and sub-national wars over territory, peoples, and resources. These wars contribute to the spread of social fascism, defined as a combination of social and political exclusion whereby increasingly large segments of the population live under terrible material conditions and often under the threat of displacement and even death (Santos 2002; Escobar 2003). In Colombia, the government response has been to step up military repression, surveillance and paramilitarization within a conception of "democratic security" that mirrors the US global strategy as seen in the Iraqi case: democracy by force, and without the right to dissent – a deterrence against common people.

Second, Colombia also shows that despite what could be seen as excellent conditions for a peaceful society and capitalist democracy (e.g., very rich natural endowments, a very large and highly trained professional class of both sexes, and determined cadres of activists that continue their labor of love against all odds), what has happened is the opposite; this has been so in part because the local war is, at least partially, a surrogate for global (especially US) interests, in part because of a rapacious national elite that refuses to entertain more significant social reforms, and also because the war logics (including drug mafias) have taken on a self-perpetuating dynamic. Finally, and more important for our argument, the Colombian case makes patently clear the exhaustion of modern models. Development and modernity, to be sure, were always inherently displacement-creating processes. Yet what has become evident with the excesses of imperial globality in places like the Pacific (but one can think of the Sudan, the Middle East, etc.) is that *the gap between modernity's displacement-producing tendencies and displacement-averting*

mechanisms is not only growing but becoming untenable –that is, unmanageable within a modern framework.[10]

Which brings us back to the question with which I started this section: does it make sense to talk about peace in this context, and if so, how is one to have a reasonable expectation that this talk will not play into the designs of the powerful? We shall retake this question in the book's concluding chapter when we discuss the problematic of transition based on the idea that modernity's ability to provide solutions to modern problems has been increasingly compromised, making discussion of a transition beyond modernity again feasible. Our intuitive question for now is: is globalization the last stage of capitalist modernity, or the beginning of something new? We will address this question from the perspective of the colonial difference, distribution conflicts, and a politics of peace and place in which they find their raison d'être.

1.5. The issue of "literatures"

It is customary for introductions of this sort to situate the work within academic traditions and literatures. This is a practice I will skirt here for a number of reasons, although the reader will find plenty of references to specialized debates in the chapters that follow. I only want to make some very general remarks about literatures here. To start with political ecology: emerging in the 1970s out of the marriage of several ecological-oriented frameworks and political economy, political ecology has been an established field since the 1980s, although a number of works pioneered the approach much earlier. Political ecology today is an interdisciplinary field drawing on many disciplines (geography, anthropology, ecology, environmental economics, ecological economics, environmental history, historical ecology, development studies, science and technology studies) and bodies of theory (liberal theory, Marxism, post-structuralism, feminist theory, phenomenology, post-colonial theory, complexity, and natural science approaches such as landscape ecology and conservation and population biology). More important is the range of questions with which it deals: the relation between environment, development and social movements; between capital and nature and culture and nature; gender, race and nature; space, place, and landscape; knowledge and conservation; economic valuation and externalities; population, land and resource use; and so forth. The range of questions, conversely, refer to problems the very salience of which lends relevance to the field; these include, among others, destruction of biodiversity, deforestation, resource depletion, unsustainability, development, environmental racism, control of genetic resources and intellectual property rights, biotechnology, and some clearly global problems such as climate change, transboundary pollution, loss of carbon sinks, and the like.[11]

How about anthropology? This work could be said to be particularly situated in two domains of recent anthropological inquiry. The first is the trend started in the 1980s with the study of modernity and continued today, in a fruitful manner, with theoretical and methodological proposals focused explicitly on the ethnography of expert (Western) knowledge practices. This approach, pioneered by scholars such as Marilyn Strathern (e.g., 1991, 1992), Paul Rabinow (e.g., 2003), is seeing a sophisticated development particularly in the field of the anthropology of science and technology, including informatics and cyberspace (e.g., Hess 2001, Hakken 2003). The key issue here is how to do the ethnography of situations that are fundamentally shaped by the same knowledge formations of which the ethnographer's knowledge is itself also a product. This has led to novel ideas about critical anthropology (Marcus ed. 1999), emergent forms of life (Fischer 2003), anthropology of the contemporary (Rabinow 2003), network and distributed studies (Riles 2000, Fortun 2003, Osterweil 2005b), and reconstructivist agendas in science studies (Woodhouse et al. 2002; this latter proposal seeks to bring together academic and non-academic knowledge production spheres). This recasting of critical modernist anthropology is important to this study since the study centers largely on activist knowledge practices –in many ways, as we shall see, a modernist enterprise. The second trend in which this book is situated is that of "world anthropologies," an approach intended to pluralize anthropological inquiry by building on styles practiced in a multiplicity of non-hegemonic anthropological locales. As in "worlds and knowledges otherwise," the world anthropologies project aims to foster "other anthropologies and anthropology otherwise." This book could also be read in this light.[12]

With their acute reflexivity, the anthropological study of modernity pushes the boundaries of inquiry towards a renewed critical modernism; however, as I see it, it does not aim to question the project of modernity in the way that, say, Santos, Boff or Mignolo do, nor do they call for a change of paradigm beyond modernity. This is why this book also adopts a framework that has been

10. For local social movements in the Pacific, displacement is part of a concerted counter-attack on the territorial gains of ethnic communities throughout the continent, from the Zapatista to the Mapuche. This happens because the socio-economic projects of the armed actors do not coincide with those of the ethnic communities. See Escobar 2003 for an extended discussion of these issues, and the last part of the chapter on Place.

11. For well-known statements on political ecology, see the excellent collections by Biersack and Greenberg, eds. (2006); Haenn and Wilk, eds. (2005); Paulson and Gezon (2004). See also Brosius (1999); Bryant and Bailey (1997); Rocheleau et al., eds. (1996); Peet and Watts, eds. (1996); Schmink and Wood (1987).

12. Of these trends, I have found particularly relevant to my project the proposal for "reconstructive agendas" in science and technology studies and Hess' notion of "post-contructivist ethnography" (2001). What does it mean to develop "near-native competence" in the field of social movement activism? On what basis can the ethnographer claim "better knowledge" and how can s/he bring this knowledge to bear on particular situations? On world anthropologies, see WAN Collective (2003); Restrepo and Escobar (2005); Ribeiro and Escobar, eds. (2006); and the project's website, www.ram-wan.org

variously called "geopolitics of knowledge" (e.g., Mignolo 2002) in the humanities and "critical geopolitics" in geography (Slater 2004). While these proposals are connected to poststructuralist and postcolonial theory, they are based on more than that; in particular, they bring fully into the picture the contributions from outside mainstream Eurocentric theory in order to put these theory's categories in question; these tendencies also engage fully with attempts to re-imagine the world's geographies of power and knowledge in conjunction with social movements and developments such as the World Social Forum process. And besides questioning Western discourses, these trends pay attention to the epistemic potential of local histories embedded in, or arising from, the colonial difference, locating there the most meaningful sources for political action and for alternative world constructions. These local histories have remained largely invisible in eurocentric theory precisely because they been actively produced as non-existent –as non-credible alternatives to what exist— through which what Santos (2004) calls "sociology of absences." The point is thus to move towards a sociology of emergences that enables the identification and enlargement of the range of knowledges that could be considered credible alternatives. In a way, this book is devoted to this sociology of emergences by foregrounding the contributions of a particular social movement. We shall return to this point in the book's Conclusion.

The last body of work within which I would like to situate this work is within the study of social movements. This field has been largely cultivated by sociologists and, to a lesser extent, political scientists and historians. Anthropologists are a late arrival to the field (although not completely; see Nonini, Price and Fox-Tree forthcoming), but there are reasons to believe that the interdisciplinary approaches arising from anthropology will have a noticeable influence on the field as a whole. For one thing, the case can be made that contemporary social movement theories are inadequate to explain the complexity of current forms of collective action –from place-based ecological, women's and ethnic movements to anti-globalization protests (Leyva Solano 2003; Osterweil 2005b; Escobar 2000). For another, a number of emphases are already emerging specifically from anthropological approaches, including the focus on activists as knowledge producers (and hence, how to do the ethnography of knowledge production practices in this context); the blurring of the boundary between academic and activist worlds and knowledges, which a growing number of anthropologists are keen in moving forward for both theoretical interest and political disposition; and a series of concepts and domains of inquiry that arise readily from anthropological situations and reflections, or in particular ways, such as network ethnography, ethno-cartography, mapping of knowledges, ethnography of identities and activist figured worlds, cultural politics, activist anthropology, and so forth. Some of these notions are of course derived from encounters with disciplinary knowledges in geography and sociology or with interdisciplinary fields such as cultural studies.[13]

The idea that social movements should be seen as knowledge producers is one of the main insights of this trend. This insight has many sides to it, beginning with an emphasis on the articulation between knowledge and resistance established by movements themselves; the identification of knowledge as a tool for struggle; the fact that activists more than ever engage in research on their own experiences –often drawing on critical academic theories, and of course engaging with the situations at hand; the relation between activist knowledge production and critical genealogies of thought; and the challenges all of the above pose for more conventional understandings and institutions of knowledge production. More than to debates on epistemology, the recent research is leading to exploratory engagements focused on knowledge production practices with particular movements, in the belief that knowledge is embedded in local contentious practice and in larger historical struggles (Holland and Lave, 2001). The aim is to study the embeddedness of knowledge in social relations, that is, knowledge being produced in dialogue, tension and interaction with other groups, and how this knowledge is enacted and networked.

My own attempt in this book is to build on ethnographic research to identify the knowledge produced by activists about the very topics that are central to the concepts structuring the book (e.g., activist knowledge and analyses about difference and ethnicity, biodiversity, alternative development, neo-liberalism, networks, etc.) and to use this knowledge and analyses to build a perspective from which to conduct my own analyses about roughly the same topics –or, as I like to put it, to build bridges between political-intellectual conversations in social movements about environment, development, etc. and conversations in the academy about the same issues. In this way, this book is only partly an ethnography of knowledge practices per se, and it is not written this way, although it is largely based on ethnographic research focused on activist knowledge, showing the tremendous complexity of its production and its embeddedness in complex social, political, and
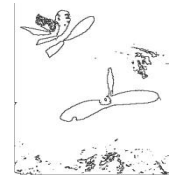
13. I am reporting here chiefly on the Social Movements Working Group at UNC Chapel Hill (www.unc.edu/smwg/). The group, made up largely of anthropologists, also includes participants from sociology, geography and political science. About ten anthropology PhD dissertations are currently in process focusing on social movements. The notion of "network ethnography" in connection to social movements has been under development by anthropology PhD students since the late 1990s at places like University of Massachusetts, Amherst (Mary King; e.g., King 2000) and Chapel Hill (Michal Osterweil, Maribel Casas, Dana Powell, Vinci Daro), and in recent anthropology dissertations by Xochitl Leyva Solano (2002) and Thomas Olesen (2002) for neo-Zapatista Networks, Chaia Heller (2004) on movements against genetically-modified organisms, and Jeff Juris (2004) for anti-globalization social movements in Barcelona. For a recent approach to the sociology of social movement networks, see Diani and McAdam, eds. (2003). In terms of knowledge production, a further step is to examine the collective experiences and expertise built across movements, particularly in the context of the global justice movement. All of this amounts to what one of the participants has referred to as a knowledge turn in both social movements and social movements research (Casas Cortés 2006a; see also Osterweil 2005b; Casas Cortés 2006b; Yehia 2006; and the special issue of the journal Mobilization in preparation by members of the group).

cultural processes. To say it metaphorically, as the Afro-Colombian historian Oscar Almario put it at the keynote address for a conference on "Afro-Reparations: Memories of Slavery and Contemporary Social Justice" which included an opening act by an accomplished drummer from the city where it was held (Cartagena, October 19-21, 2005), this too is *un esfuerzo de la academia para estar más cerca de los tambores* ("an effort from the academy so that it can be closer to the drumming").[14]

1.6. What the book is not about.

Finally, a word about what the book is not about, and that it could have or perhaps should have been. First, this book is not a study of the black cultures of the Pacific, although we will learn a great deal about them along the way. The book will not attempt to make a comprehensive review of the literature on what has been called *Colombias negras* (black Colombias), which has grown steadily and tremendously since the late 1980s. As Restrepo (2005) has argued, there is at present a veritable community of argumentation — which includes very significant participation by Afro-Colombian scholars, intellectuals and activists— around many different aspects of the past and current experience of black peoples in Colombia. Being largely restricted to the Pacific, this book falls within the limitations identified by Restrepo for studies of the Pacific –"pacificalization" (excessive emphasis on the Pacific), and "ruralization" and "rivercentrism" (privilege given to the rural groups of the rivers of the Pacific). At the same time, however, the book decenters the Pacific in other ways, including by referring it to globality. Let me add, in passing, that studies of the *Colombias negras* today involve many disciplines, paradigms and perspectives as well as topics of research and debate (e.g., mobility, histories of enslavement, marginality, discrimination and difference, economic contributions, identities, movements, modernity, displacement, urban cultures, cultural production, and so forth). These concern rural and urban groups from many parts of the country.

More importantly perhaps, the book is not about race and/or racism, fields in which I am not an expert. Let me, however, state clearly that the situation of the Pacific evinces the long-lasting and widespread anti-black racism that continues to exist in so many regions and countries of the world. Anti-black racism is one of the most damaging structuring features of modernity and a central aspect of coloniality. I hope this book's cultural-political analysis contributes to unveil practices and mechanisms through which this racism is effected and maintained. Third, the book says little about indigenous peoples of the Pacific. Peter Wade (1997: 35-39) is right in saying that the study of black and indigenous groups in countries like Colombia needs to be undertaken in unison since the dynamics of race and ethnicity addressing both sets of actors are intertwined in ways that the social sciences have not been able to ascertain. While it is true that the indigenous presence in the southern Pacific (where this work is chiefly located) is scant as compared to the northern Chocó region, the absence of an adequate treatment of indigenous groups and struggles is a limitation of the study, although some attention is given to black-indigenous relations, especially at the level of their respective movements. The book, finally, is not about policy and does not explore policy implications; I have done some work in this vein in Colombia, and in many ways these policy concerns pervade the entire work.[15]

With these caveats in mind, let us then begin our journey into this particular place-world called the Colombian Pacific.

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14. One final word on literatures: Throughout the book, I have privilege works that do not circulate widely in the metropolitan English-based academy; certain works currently in vogue are thus absent, even if they could be relevant. Second, I have been unable to update completely the vast literatures on some subjects, such as biodiversity conservation, or the anthropology of globalization. I can only apologize to the authors, including some friends, for the failure to include some recent works that should have been there.

15. The activist and policy-oriented aspects pervade this work but I will not highlight it specifically unless it is particularly pertinent. Among the activist-oriented activists in which I have been involved are: the preparation and running of workshops (including a seven-day workshop on ecological river basin design, held in the coastal city of Buenaventura in August 1998 with about 25 river community leaders and activists, which I designed and coordinated with Libia Grueso of PCN, out of which came more refined notions of territory and region-territory); grant-writing and fund-raising for projects in the southern Pacific (largely through Danish NGOs and a few smaller funding sources in Colombia and the US); participation in workshops with NGOs implementing projects in the Pacific; helping organize international trips by PCN activists to academic and activist events; collaborating on writing papers and collective works with activist and environmentalists; participating with activists on government and policy-oriented meetings and in human rights, solidarity, and urgent appeal campaigns (e.g., to stop gold mining, denounce paramilitary atrocities, or warn on displacement situations); dissemination of information; and so forth. Face-to-face and electronically, in Colombia, the US, and elsewhere these multiple activities over the more than twelve years since I first went to the Pacific give a particular character to the book, which surely would have been very different – and I am certain poorer scholarly and politically—without this decided activist and policy-oriented dimension. I would like to think that these activities can be properly seen as integral to one's professional practice, at least within a world anthropologies perspective.

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