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# Culture sits in places: reflections on globalism and subaltern strategies of localization

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## Abstract

The last few years have seen a resurgence of interest in the concept of place in anthropology, geography, and political ecology. “Place” — or, more accurately, the defense of constructions of place — has also become an important object of struggle in the strategies of social movements. This paper is situated at the intersection of conversations in the disciplines about globalization and place, on the one hand, and conversation in social movements about place and political strategy, on the other. By arguing against a certain globalocentrism in the disciplines that tends to effect an erasure of place, the paper suggests ways in which the defense of place by social movements might be constituted as a rallying point for both theory construction and political action. The paper proposes that place-based struggles might be seen as multi-scale, network-oriented subaltern strategies of localization. The argument is illustrated with the case of the social movement of black communities of the Pacific rainforest region of Colombia. © 2001 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

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I am not worried about the opening of borders; I am not a nationalist. On the other hand, I do worry about the elimination of borders and of the very notion of geographical limits. This amounts to a denial of localization that goes hand in hand with the immeasurable nature of the real time technologies. When a border is eliminated, it reappears somewhere else.

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If there is a solution possible today, it lies in reorganizing the place of communal life...the main question is to regain contact (Paul Virilio, *Politics of the Very Worst*, 1999).

### **Introduction: culture and the marginalization of place<sup>1</sup>**

The question of “place” has been newly raised in recent years from a variety of perspectives — from its relation to the basic understanding of being and knowing to its fate under globalization and the extent to which it continues to be an aid or a hindrance for thinking about culture and the economy. This questioning, of course, is not coincidental; for some, placelessness has become the essential feature of the modern condition, and a very acute and painful one in many cases, such as those of exiles and refugees. Whether celebrated or decried, the sense of atopia seems to have settled in. This seems to be as true of discussions in philosophy, where place has been ignored by most thinkers (Casey 1993, 1997); theories of globalization, that have effected a significant discursive erasure of place (Dirlik, 2000); or debates in anthropology, which have seen a radical questioning of place and place making. Yet the fact remains that place continues to be important in the lives of many people, perhaps most, if we understand by place the experience of a particular location with some measure of groundedness (however, unstable), sense of boundaries (however, permeable), and connection to everyday life, even if its identity is constructed, traversed by power, and never fixed. There is an “implacement” that counts for more than we want to acknowledge, which makes one ponder if the idea of “getting back into place” — to use Casey’s expression — or a defense of place as project — in Dirlik’s case — are not so irrelevant after all<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is, in many ways, more personal than it is commonly the case; it has gone through many turns and twists. The argument owes much to the work of, and dialogue with, historians Arif Dirlik and Wendy Harcourt, whose support and interest I greatly appreciate. It was first presented at the biannual meeting of the Society for Cultural Anthropology in San Francisco in May, 1997. Between 1997 and 1999, I presented the paper at a number of places and received rich feedback. The discussion was particularly useful at universities in Chicago, Chapel Hill, Bogotá, Copenhagen, Oxford (Geography), Barcelona, and Manchester. I should also mention discussions at the 1998 and 2000 Annual Meetings of the American Association of Geographers (AAG), and at the workshop on “Producing Place(s)”, organized by Scott Salmon at Miami University, Oxford, OH, 12–13 May 2000. I believe that the paper changed significantly as a result, and I thank all of those whose insights made it richer. I also want to thank Terry Evens for useful comments, and geographers Julie Graham, Erik Swyngedouw, Dianne Rocheleau, David Slater, and Doreen Massey for their inspiring work and interest in the paper, as well as three anonymous reviewers for the journal. Although this paper is written chiefly from an anthropological and ecological perspective, and I am only a neophyte in the field of geography, I hope it contributes to the growing dialogue between anthropology and geography, a dialogue that has seen active and lean periods since the beginning of the century if not before, and which today promises to enrich both disciplines, for instance around work being done at the intersection of environment and development, space and place, culture and economy.

<sup>2</sup> A refined outline of the concept of “place” is beyond the scope of this paper. See Casey (1993, 1997) for such an attempt within philosophy. I take place in an empirical and analytical sense — that is, as a category of thought and as a constructed reality.

To be sure, the critique of place in anthropology, geography, communications, and cultural studies of recent times has been both productive and important, and continues to be so. New spatial concepts and metaphors of mobility — deterritorialization, displacement, diaspora, migration, traveling, border-crossings, nomadology, etc. — have made us aware of the fact that the principal dynamics of culture and economy have been significantly altered by unprecedented global processes. Yet there has been a certain asymmetry in these debates. As Arif Dirlik argues (Dirlik 1998, 2000), this asymmetry is most evident in discourses of globalization, where the global is often equated with space, capital, history and agency, and the local with place, labor, and tradition. Place has dropped out of sight in the “globalization craze” of recent years, and this erasure of place has profound consequences for our understanding of culture, knowledge, nature, and economy. It is perhaps time to reverse some of this asymmetry by focusing anew — and from the perspective afforded by the critiques of place themselves — on the continued vitality of place and place-making for culture, nature, and economy. Restoring some measure of symmetry, as we shall see, does not entail an erasure of space as a domain of resistance and alterity, since both place and space are crucial in this regard, as they are in the creation of forms of domination. It does mean, however, a questioning of the privilege accorded to space in analyses of the dynamics of culture, power, and economy.

This is, indeed, an increasingly felt need of those working at the intersection of environment, culture and development, despite the fact that the development experience has meant for most people a sundering of local life from place of greater depth than ever before. Not only are scholars and activists in environmental studies confronted with social movements that commonly maintain a strong reference to place and territory, but faced with the growing realization that any alternative course of action must take into account place-based models of nature, culture, and politics. While it is evident that “local” economies and culture are not outside the scope of capital and modernity, it also needs to be newly acknowledged that the former are not produced exclusively by the latter; this place specificity, as we shall see, enables a different reading of culture and economy, capitalism and modernity. The inquiry into place is of equal importance for renewing the critique of eurocentrism in the conceptualization of world regions, area studies, and cultural diversity. The marginalization of place in European social theory of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has been particularly deleterious to those social formations for which place-based modes of consciousness and practices have continued to be important. This includes many contemporary societies, perhaps with the exception of those most exposed to the de-localizing, disembedding and universalizing influence of modern economy, culture and thought. The reassertion of place thus appears as an important arena for rethinking and reworking eurocentric forms of analysis.

In what follows, I attempt to articulate the rudiments of such a defense of place by relying chiefly on two recent sets of work: poststructuralist feminist geography and political economy, on the one hand; and a relatively small, but growing, number of works in anthropology that already begin to outline an anthropology of place, on the other. I start with these works and discuss them from the double perspective of the social production and cultural construction of place. I illustrate some of these

points with a brief discussion of an ethno-ecological movement in Colombia which defines its strategy in terms of the defense of territory and culture. This is followed by a discussion of the larger social and political contexts that could make a defense of place socially and politically meaningful. This includes inquiring about the extent to which the dichotomizing debate on the local and the global can be transformed by introducing concepts that are useful for ascertaining the supra-place effects of place-based politics, such as network and glocality. In the conclusion, I discuss the broader implications of the “repatriation” of place into anthropology — and, to a lesser extent, geography — for debates on the relation between theory and practice and for conceptions of culture. Much that would have to be considered for a more comprehensive framework for the defense of place is left out, including important issues such as the historical dimension of place-making; the impact of digital technology on places; place, nation, race, class and gender; and, of great importance but a much larger undertaking beyond the scope of the present paper, a place-based theory of difference.

In the last instance, the goal of the present paper is to examine the extent to which our frameworks of analysis allow us or not to visualize actual or potential ways of reconceiving and reconstructing the world from the perspective of manifold place-based practices. Which new forms of “the global” can be imagined from this perspective? Can we elevate place-based imaginaries — including local models of nature — to the language of social theory, and project their potential onto novel types of glocality so that they can appear as alternative ways of organizing social life? In sum, to what extent can we reinvent both thought and the world according to the logic of a multiplicity of place-based cultures? Is it possible to launch a defense of place with place as a rallying point for theory construction and political action? Who speaks for place? Who defends it? Is it possible to find in place-based practices a critique of power and hegemony without overlooking their embeddedness in circuits of patriarchy, capital and modernity?

Part I of the paper retraces the recent treatment of place in anthropology, from those works that focus on the relation between identity, place and power in a deterritorialized world to those that reassert their intellectual commitment to place, such as the phenomenological perspectives on place and landscape. Part II shifts to a handful of authors in poststructuralist feminist geography and political economy who self-consciously articulate a defense of place and place-based economic practices. Part III presents the most relevant features of the social movement of black communities in the Colombian Pacific, as a movement of ecological and cultural attachment to a territory. Part IV, finally, suggests some guidelines for a defense of place-based identities and practices in contexts of globalization.

### **Culture sits in places: the avatars of place in recent anthropological literature**

The disregard of place in Western theory and social science has been most pointedly stated by phenomenologists. For philosopher Edward Casey, this disregard has

been endemic and long-standing. Since Plato, Western philosophy — often times with the help of theology and physics — has enshrined space as the absolute, unlimited and universal, while banning place to the realm of the particular, the limited, the local, and the bound. Seventeenth and eighteenth century philosophers, from Descartes to Leibniz, assumed that places are only momentary subdivisions of a universal and homogeneous space. For this to happen, space had to be dissociated from the bodies that occupy it and from the particularities that these bodies lent to the places they inhabit. Scientific knowledge welcomed this notion of the void, even if a void with extension and structure that made possible the Cartesian project of a *mathesis universalis* and the mathematization of nature (see also Foucault, 1973: 71–77). Despite the hegemony of space, again following Casey, there has always been an undercurrent of interest in, and theorizing of, place which has remained understudied from this perspective and that extends from Aristotle to Irigaray, Bachelard, Foucault and Deleuze and Guattari in our times and that includes, of course, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty earlier in the century. This interest in place has spilled over into disciplines such as architecture, archaeology, anthropology, geography, and historical ecology. And although “this interest leaves place itself an unclarified notion” (Casey, 1997: xii), its contours begin to be appreciated. Common to many of these tendencies is an anti-essentialist notion of place, an interest in finding place at work, place being constructed, imagined, and struggled over. One could say that today there is an emerging philosophy and politics of place even if it still is clearly under construction.

The disregard of place in the social and human sciences is the most puzzling since, as Casey passionately argues, it is our inevitable immersion in place, and not the absoluteness of space, that has ontological priority in the generation of life and the real. It certainly does so in the accounts and practices of most cultures, echoed in the phenomenological assertion that, given the primacy of embodied perception, we always find ourselves in places. We are, in short, placelings. “To live is to live locally, and to know is first of all is to know the places one is in” (Casey, 1996: 18). Place is, of course, constituted by sedimented social structures and cultural practices. Sensing and moving are not presocial; the lived body is the result of habitual cultural and social processes. It is thus imperative that we “get back into place” (Casey, 1993) and reverse the long-standing disempowerment of place in both modern theory and social life. This means recognizing that place, body, and environment integrate with each other; that places gather things, thoughts, and memories in particular configurations; and that place, more an event than a thing, is characterized by openness rather than by a unitary self-identity. From an anthropological perspective, it is important to highlight the emplacement of all cultural practices, which stems from the fact that culture is carried into places by bodies — bodies are encultured and, conversely, enact cultural practices. “Personal and cultural identity is bound up with place; a topoanalysis is one exploring the creation of self-identity through place. Geographical experience begins in places, reaches out to others through spaces, and creates landscapes or regions for human existence” (Tilley, 1994: 15).

This also means that people are not only “local”; we are all indissolubly linked to both local and extralocal places through what might be called networks — of

which the kula ring and internet networks would be contrasting variations in terms of the ways in which they connect persons and places. Places concatenate with each other to form regions, which suggests that porosity of boundaries is essential to place, as it is to local constructions and exchange. Locality, in this way, becomes marked by the interplay between position, place and region; by the porosity of boundaries; and by the role of the lived body between enculturation and emplacement (Casey, 1996: 44), or between embodiment and enmindment, as Ingold (1999) put it in talking about the relation between person, organism and environment. Against this view militate migration, wars, the new information and communications technologies (NICTs), speed and, of course, the abstractions of space and much of Western thought (Virilio 1997, 1999). Casey's "region of places" is the opposite of Castells' (1996) "space of flows" that is seen as characterizing today's Network Society<sup>3</sup>.

I will argue that some social movements are taking the lead in this "getting back into place" to which Casey summons us. Not only social movements, of course, because there are multiple sources in this endeavor including, among others, feminist body politics, phenomenological biology, new forms of dwelling in architecture, alternative thinking on land and community, and the like. In commenting on the economic prejudice against the small and the desecration of nature and rural communities in the United States, Wendell Berry (1996), the poet farmer, for instance, underscores ways of being rooted in the land; this leads him to envisage the historical possibility of creating "the party of the local community", that is, of local communities becoming more aware of themselves in their opposition to a postagricultural, postnatural, and posthuman world that he sees as insidiously settling in. This party has a double commitment: to the preservation of ecological diversity and integrity, and to the renewal of local economies and communities. As we shall see, this double goal of transforming ecology and economy can provide a powerful interface for the renewal of place-based theory and practice.

Among the scholarly efforts, geography and archaeology have made strides in recent years. After a period of initial interest on place in geography from various perspectives (Relph, 1976; Tuan, 1977; Pred, 1984; Keith & Pile, 1993; see Entrikin,

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<sup>3</sup> Manuel Castells' first volume on "The Information Age", *The Rise of the Network Society* (1996), a magisterial and essential book for understanding today's economy and society, provides nevertheless an example of the erasure of place Dirlik talks about. For Castell, the rise of a new technological paradigm based on information, electronic and biological technologies is resulting in a network society in which "the space of flows" overtakes the "space of places", and where "no place exists by itself, since positions are defined by flows...Places do not disappear but their logic and meaning become absorbed in the network...structural meaning disappears subsumed in the logic of the metanetwork" (p. 412). In this new situation, places may be switched off, leading to their decline and deterioration; people and labor are fragmented in the space of places, as places get disconnected from each other ("elites are cosmopolitan, people are local", (p. 415). Global culture overpowers local cultures, and the resulting world is one of pure Culture and no Nature, which amounts to the true beginning of History. While Castells seems to maintain a certain nostalgia for places where face to face interaction and local actions count (such as the Paris quarter of Belville who saw him come of age as a young intellectual), it is clear that for him the new paradigm is here to stay. This is one of the many instances of the asymmetry in globalization discourse that Dirlik is talking about.

1991 for a useful review) the discipline, at least economic geography, tended to focus on the relation between political economy and space characteristic of late twentieth century capitalism, broadly speaking. This prominent trend included analyses of postfordism, uneven development and the urban question, and the articulation between global capital and local culture specific to particular geographical locations (see, among the most well known works, Harvey, 1989; Smith, 1996; Pred & Watts, 1992). Issues of globality and locality, modernity and postmodernity, capital, region, and urban space saw a very fruitful theorization under a political economy approach reinvigorated with considerations of culture, modernity, and novel forms of inquiry into the dynamics of urban restructuring. The guiding concern in these analyses continued to be the spatial shifts of capital specific to the growing global orders. The geography of place has more recently reappeared within this important school of economic and political geography through a variety of concerns. These include, among others, a re-examination of the struggles around the reconfiguration of scale by state, capital, and social movements in ways that challenge the pre-eminence of the global (Swyngedouw, 1998); a renewed interest on “the production of place” through a complex, and often contradictory, set of spatial dynamics of capital and governance; attention to the impact of neo-liberal policies on the reconfiguration of places and regions, such as inner cities or model urban development schemes and local responses to them; and a keen theorization of scale and scalar politics (Swyngedouw 1998, 2000; Peck, 2000). Beyond these trends, a number of geographers are finding themselves drawn back to place, and form a multiplicity of perspectives, including psychoanalysis (Pile, 1996), the post-structuralism of Deleuze and Guattari (Doel, 1999), and phenomenology and post-structuralist feminist geography, to be discussed at some length below<sup>4</sup>. Needless to say, some of these tendencies are in tension with each other, if not in outright conflict<sup>5</sup>.

A notable current in archaeology, mostly in Britain and growing out of the work of Raymond Williams but influenced by phenomenology and feminism, is finding a source of inspiration in theorizing landscapes in terms of people’s very different

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<sup>4</sup> If the scholarly programs at the annual meetings of the American Association of Geographers (AAG) is any indication, the interest in place in geography skyrocketed recently. At the 1998 Boston Annual Meeting, there were less than five organized sessions with “place” in the title. At the Pittsburgh 2000 meetings, on the contrary, the number at least doubled, and there were a number of papers on place in other sessions (such as in the political ecology series). Of course, this does not mean either a substantive treatment of the subject nor a unified perspective. On 12–13 May 2000 a working conference on “Producing Place(s): Economy, Governance and Resistance in the New Global Context” took place at Miami University in Oxford, OH. This conference, which I attended, was convened by Scott Salmon and attended by 16 people, mostly geographers. The meeting was devoted to developing new forms of political economy analysis of economic and urban transformations from the perspective of scalar analyses centered on place.

<sup>5</sup> For Doel (1999), for instance, speaking from the perspective of chaosology and nomadology, many of the phenomenological and feminist approaches to place (from Tuan and Entekin to Massey) are problematic because of their “sedentary fixation” which, in his view, needs to be abandoned in geography. Doel’s view is not necessarily inimical to the view of place as both event and location developed in this paper. Enthralled by the “insatiable deterritorialization” preconized by a number of post-structuralist writers, however, Doel’s thought-provoking book, it seems to me, continues to privilege space and capital, even if according to a postmodern processualism that differs from that of political economy.

understandings and engagements with the world. These archaeologists acknowledge that different forms of dwelling are linked to differential empowerment and to the suppression of view-points by dominant ways of seeing. By looking at prehistoric sites like Stonehenge, they develop a sense of how prehistoric people appropriated and contested both landscape and the past, developing in the process a sense of identity and an understanding of their world. Landscapes emerge from these works as always living sites that recreate their pasts in different ways, as continually being renewed (Bender 1998, 1993; Tilley, 1994; Hirsch & Hanlon, 1995). Cultural anthropologists have begun to draw on these theories to show the extent to which local people's engagement with the landscape, in some Andean communities for instance, reveals that the landscape is endowed with agency and personhood. The enduring connectedness of people with the land results from an active engagement with it; rather than a reflection of "tradition", it is an integral part of the contemporary modern life of these communities, even in cases in which such connectedness might be a vehicle for the exercise of power over them. Persons and their environments, places and identities, are thus mutually constituted (Harvey, 1999). A related, but mostly non-phenomenological, approach is taken by historical ecologists who look at the dialectic between humans and natural environments as it is made manifest in the landscape (Crumley, 1994).

It is already well known that the growing concern with the globalization of economy and culture has produced important changes in how socio-cultural anthropologists look at place. From the late 1950s on, anthropological political economy underscored regional and transnational forms of connectedness, in part as a critique of territorially-bound notions of culture (e.g. Cole & Wolf, 1999[1974]). This was a fruitful trend, that reached its highest peak with Wolf's magisterial work (1982). The concerns with representation of the 1980s equally contributed to dismantle ideas of culture as whole, bounded and coherent and to complicate the easy conflation of place, culture, and identity. These trends are already well established and resulted in the decentering of place and locality as privileged sites of culture. The consequences of these critiques are being worked out in a series of directions. The most clear direction seems to be toward an emphasis on the production of cultural difference as precisely what has to be explained, not taken for granted. Here the focus is on the relation between identity, place and power — between place making and people making (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997). The transnational flows of people, media, and commodities characteristic of global capitalism mean that culture and place become increasingly deterritorialized (Appadurai 1996, 1991; Hannerz, 1989). Locality and community cease to be obvious, and certainly not inhabited by rooted or natural identities but very much produced by complex relations of culture and power that go well beyond local bounds. Most clear in the case of refugees and diasporic peoples, this condition affects all communities worldwide to a greater or lesser extent. New metaphors of mobility (diaspora, displacement, traveling, deterritorialization, border crossing, hybridity, nomadology) are privileged in explanations of culture and identity. Some authors see contemporary people as "migrants of identity", where identity "is treated as a search, either physical or cognitive, and is conceived of in terms of fluidities — of time and space, time or space" (Rapport &



Dawson, 1998: 4. This entails the loss of place as metaphor for culture. Moreover, deterritorialization and “non-places” (Augé, 1995) become paradigmatic figures of our times.

These critiques have been extremely productive. It was also usually assumed in these anthropological critiques that places nevertheless continued to be important for both ethnography and the production of culture (Gupta & Ferguson, 1992). However, it is possible to say that the concern with mobility and deterritorialization, while necessary, has made many researchers lose sight of the continued importance of place-based practices and modes of consciousness for the production of culture. They have become more concerned with the space of political economy and geography, understandably so given their focus on local effects of global power relations. There has been, it would seem, a certain discursive excess in the critique of bounded notions of culture that has made many researchers turn attention away from the fact that next to the delocalizing effects of translocal forms of power there are also, even if as a reaction to the latter, effects of boundary and ground making linked to places. People continue to *construct* some sort of boundaries around their places, however, permeable, and to be grounded in local socio-natural practices, no matter how changing and hybridized those grounds and practices might turn out to be. To capture the place specificity of the production of place and culture thus becomes the other side of the necessary reconceptualization of culture as deterritorialized and transnationally produced. To paraphrase Basso (1996), culture sits in places (and in bodies and biophysical ecologies, if your wish), even if it is by no means restricted to them. The anthropology of place is the other, necessary side of the anthropology of non-places and deterritorialized cultures. It is important to keep in mind the power of place even in studies of placelessness (and vice versa). To make this assertion does not mean that place is “the other” of space — place as pure and local and in opposition to a dominating and global space — since place is certainly connected to, and to a significant extent produced by, spatial logics. It is to assert, on the contrary, that place-based dynamics might be equally important for the production of space, or at least they are in the view of some place-based social actors.

I also want to emphasize that to speak about place in this way does not mean that place is fixed, permanent, unconstructed or unconnected. As Massey (1997) so lucidly showed, a “global sense of place” that recognizes both global constructedness and local specificity is neither an oxymoron nor needs to be reactionary. This is because if the experience of movement and non-place has become fundamental for modern identity and everyday life, the experience of place continues to be important for many people worldwide. Place and non-place are more than contrastive modalities. There are high cultural and political stakes in asserting one or the other. It might indeed be true that places and cultures have always lived with, and accepted, an inevitable hybridization. This does not make them necessarily less local, nor more global, only differently so; the point is to find out how people, as Jonathan Friedman put it, “practice the local in the global”, that is, of examining the practices through which people construct places even as they participate in translocal networks (1997: 276). In other words, what I am also suggesting is that it might be possible to approach the production of place and culture not only from the side of the global,

but of the local; not from the perspective of its abandonment but of its critical affirmation; not only according to the flight from places, whether voluntary or forced, but of the attachment to them. This is what ecology allows you, indeed forces you, to do, as we shall see. It is what some social movements are also demanding from theoretical analysis. Even when social movements originate transnational networks, these might be operational strategies for the defense of place. In some of these cases one may speak, with geographer Sarah Radcliffe in referring to South American indigenous networks, of “non-diasporic transnational identities” (1998; see also Radcliffe, 1999 for a discussion of ambivalence in processes of recomunalization and changing sense of nation and ethnic identity in Ecuador in the wake of unprecedented indigenous mobilization). In this provocative term lies the possibility of linking space, place, and identity in ways that are not accounted for either in conventional models of identity that conflate place and identity nor in the newer ones that relate identity to mobility and diaspora.

An awareness of the newly created invisibility of place in the most transnationally-oriented literature is already surfacing in anthropology, particularly in those works that most clearly engage with the work of phenomenologists and/or feminist geographers such as Doreen Massey (Moore, 1998; Raffles, 1999; Kirsch, 2000). Some recent ethnographic orientations seem to take account of this fact, without disallowing, but precisely building on, the notion of culture as deterritorialized. Some, for instance, emphasize the dialectic of place and world, home and movement. How do people construct narratives and practices of home in a world of movement (Rapport & Dawson, 1998)? In these works, the sense of belonging and of movement or displacement are relationally produced. This view of home is somewhat conditioned by the concentration on Euro-American ethnographic cases, which entail an historical intensification of disembeddedness (the tearing apart of space away from place that Giddens has identified as a paradigmatic feature of modernity, 1990); this feature, according to these authors, would seem to push people to invest place and home with personal agency to counter these tendencies.

More generally, places might be seen as self-consciously constructed by people through active processes of work (Wade, 1999), narratives (Raffles, 1999; Berger, 1979), and movement (Harvey, 1999)<sup>6</sup>. In the environmental arena, people’s senses

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<sup>6</sup> Tim Ingold made the point that once we abandon the abstract notion of space, it is necessary and sufficient to map the relation between place, environment, and movement for an adequate conceptualization of place making (comment made in the discussion period after my talk at Manchester, 16 May 1999). In *Pig Earth*, John Berger (1979) gave a wonderful description of the role of narrative in place making. In discussing his relation as a writer to the place he was writing about, he argued that “what distinguishes the life of a village is that it is also a *living portrait of itself*: a communal portrait, in that everybody is portrayed and everybody portrays...And one must remember that the making of this continuous communal portrait is not a vanity or a passtime: it is an organic part of the life of the village. Should it cease, the village would disintegrate” (p. 9, 11). And he adds, referring to himself: “The stranger’s contribution is small, but it is to something essential” (p. 11). So with the fieldworker. (It should be pointed out, however, that place-based narratives are seldom self-contained; on the contrary, they are usually linked to, and in conversation with, larger narratives past and present, as shown by Gudeman and Rivera (1990) in their analysis of peasant economic narratives in the Colombian Andes.)

of place have been shown to change with the deterioration of local landscapes following the environmental impact of activities such as mining (Kirsch, 2000 for an example from Papua New Guinea; Kuletz, 1998 for the impact of uranium mining and nuclear waste disposal on Native American places and senses of place in the Western regions of the United States). This trend, still barely visible, self-consciously broaches the exciting and difficult task of bringing together phenomenology and political economy (see also the forthcoming volume by Campbell & Milton, 2000, with contributions at this intersection that take Ingold's work as a point of departure). The crucial importance of this trend for the defense of place as project should become increasingly appreciated. The point in these works is not only to show how long-term habitation and commitment to place are unsettled by larger political economies, but how local groups develop "strategic countermeasure[s] to the deterritorialized space" represented by those forces (Kuletz, 1998: 239). A related, but different angle is taken by Pramod Parajuli, who has developed a substantial and promising conceptualization of place-based grassroots forms of governance based on ecological ethnicities and a simultaneous revitalization of ecology and democracy, and very much in opposition to destructive trans-local forces (Parajuli 1996, 1997).

Other recent attempts focus on the field of relations that become significant to people of a given social group as they mobilize through different world regions (Olwig & Hastrup, 1997). By examining cultural sites that are identified with particular places and yet accommodate the global conditions of people's lives, these authors convey a textured sense of both local and non-local processes at work in the production of place and culture. Caribbean people form the island of Nevis, for instance, "sustain a home" through processes of both deterritorialization and attachment to place that brings together Nevisians from the island with those that have migrated to New Haven, Leeds, or the Virgin Islands in the shared maintenance of the family land and house back on the island. These networks of relations, however transnationalized, evidence the existence of cultural sites of certain sustenance and permanence (Olwig, 1997). While this approach, of course, has clear precedents in anthropological theory, particularly in earlier works on networks and migration, they have achieved great theoretical coherence in terms of encompassing the manifold and contradictory spheres of life in which people are involved today, including the dialectic of dwelling and traveling, localizing and globalizing (see also Clifford, 1992).

Related approaches highlight the efforts by social groups to construct boundaries around them, and the creative ways in which people might use external or global conditions for further attempts at defensive localization. Belonging, these authors find, is often expressed in terms of attachment to locality; however, this does not mean that these expressions are drawn out of context. Indeed, the interesting question is how people mobilize politically notions of attachment and belonging for the construction of individual and collective identities, including the conflict that this local mobilization might entail with broader political and economic interests (Lovell, 1999). Needless to say, it is necessary to acknowledge the social importance of the senses of attachment and belonging of the powerful, and their intensification at particular historical conjunctures. In these cases, boundary making around places is also

often linked to reactionary politics; not infrequently, boundaries authorize a politics of fixity and interdiction which in practice leads to exclusionary goals. The attempt at keeping Latinos out from California and Texas, or the concept of Fortress Europe that embodies the wave of xenophobia in many Western European countries at present, are only the most well known cases in this regard. Again, while these processes are certainly prominent in global times, they are by no means the only possible projects for constructing places and identities, local and regional worlds. There are cases where a progressive cultural politics of place making is based on democratic, pluralistic, and non-exclusionary goals. The Zapatista's Chiapas, or the Colombian Pacific constructed by social movements (below), are illustrations of emancipatory projects linked to the construction of places and regions.

An altogether different approach is taken by another current of thought — minor but not marginal in anthropology, and derived of a minor branch of Western philosophy — that suggests a focus on place in an entirely different, and powerful, manner. For phenomenological anthropologists, the seemingly increased complexity of everyday experience is not necessarily a call for more sophisticated theoretical frameworks — certainly not of the kind that grant ontological and almost magical status to concepts such as “globalization” — but for greater sensitivity in capturing the intersubjective process of shared experience, the ways in which the world is always in the making, by focusing on the domain of everyday, immediate practical activity and on the embodied and place-based lifeworld of practical and social life. For these anthropologists, “it is the *social* reality of the lifeworld and forms of *social* consciousness which are of critical interest” (Jackson, 1996: 19). It is not that social structures and discourses are not important, but that the subject, and place, always participate at least in how these forces are played out. The phenomenal world can never be totally reduced to outside forces (p. 22). In fact, “place is an irreducible part of human experience, a person is ‘in place’ as much as she or he is ‘in culture’” (Tilley, 1994: 18). At stake here is the power analysts assign to existential versus structural factors. For phenomenologists, experience is located within relationships and between persons, and is not produced solely by objective structures or subjective intentions. The task of anthropology becomes to recover the bodily, place-based, and practical aspects of social life, lest we participate with our abstractions about globalizing processes and structures in what Ranajit Guha (1988) has descriptively called “the prose of counter-insurgency”. For a phenomenologist like Jackson, the discursive suppression that accompanies globalocentric and logocentric frameworks amounts to political oppression. (I shall come back to this point when I invoke a contemporary critique of capitalocentrism and globalocentrism; I will also argue that the irreducibility of place signaled by phenomenology has important theoretical and political implications.)

Those studying “senses of place” following in this tradition are less interested in place as the site of contestation than in something they considered more basic, the perception and experience of place and the local constructions of particular localities. Paraphrasing Geertz, one may say that these scholars regret that while anthropologists have studied in places, they have not studied them. For as Feld and Basso rightly say, ethnographic accounts “centered on native constructions of particular

localities — which is to say, the perception and experience of place — [are] few and far between” (Feld & Basso, 1996: 16). The aim of these ethnographers is to underscore the cultural processes through which places are rendered meaningful by looking at local knowledge, localized expressions, language, poetics and performance. How do people encounter places, perceive them, and endow them with significance? Appealing to phenomenological and hermeneutic positions in their accounts of perception, meaning and experience, these anthropologists discuss with great lucidity senses of place, emplacement, and meaningful modes of dwelling. Quite a different project, that linguists and linguistic anthropologists approach from the related perspective of the relation between language, naming, and place (see for instance Samuels, 1999; Gnerre, 1998).

A final trend linked to the investigation of place is found in ecological anthropology, and concerns the study of local knowledge and local models of nature<sup>7</sup>. Generally speaking, political ecologists and ecological anthropologists have reopened, with increasing decisiveness and eloquence, the project of demonstrating that many rural communities in the Third World “construct” nature in strikingly different ways from prevalent modern forms; they signify — and, thus, use — their natural environments in very particular ways. Ethnographic studies in Third World settings unveil a significantly different set of practices for thinking about, relating to, constructing and experiencing the biological and the natural. This project was formulated some time ago (Strathern, 1980) and has achieved a remarkable level of sophistication in recent years (e.g. Descola & Pálsson, 1996). There is, of course, no unified view on just what characterizes local models of nature. Perhaps the most well-established notion today is that many local models do not rely on a nature-society dichotomy. In addition, and unlike modern constructions with their strict separation between biophysical, human and supernatural worlds, it is commonly appreciated that local models in non-Western contexts are seen as often predicated on links of continuity between the three spheres. This continuity might nevertheless be experienced as problematic and uncertain; it is culturally established through symbols, rituals and practices and is embedded in particular social relations which also differ from the modern, capitalist type. In this way, living, non-living, and often times supernatural beings are not seen as constituting distinct and separate domains — certainly not two opposed spheres of nature and culture — and social relations are seen as encompassing more than humans. In general terms, it could be said that local models of nature constitute ensembles of meanings-uses that, while existing in larger contexts of power, can neither be reduced to modern constructions nor accounted for without some reference to local culture and grounds and boundary effects. Cultural models and knowledge are based on historical, linguistic, and cultural processes that, while never isolated from broader histories, nevertheless retain certain place specificity. In addition, many of the mechanisms and practices at play

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<sup>7</sup> See Ingold (1992, 1993) and the volumes by MacCormack and Strathern (1980), Gudeman and Rivera (1990), Hobart (1993), Milton (1993, 1996), Restrepo and del Valle (1996) and Descola (1994); and Descola and Pálsson (1996). This last volume is devoted to examining cultural models of nature and to debunking the nature/culture dichotomy.

in nature constructions, such as boundaries, classifications, representations, cognitive apprehensions, and spatial relations, are significantly place — specific.

This brief overview of the avatars of place in recent literature reveals an increasingly coherent, even if diverse, set of approaches and concerns with the problematic of place and culture. This convergence takes place in a world that is significantly different in ontological and political terms than in our most recent past — the world of hybridized identities and hybridized domains of being and thought that accompany what too hastily perhaps we refer to as “globalization”. There are questions about these trends that would have to be addressed at a later time. For instance, the seeming geographical and epistemological differentiation of present trends; scholarly and political interest in place seems to be stronger in England and in some of the Scandinavian countries than in other parts of the world, although it is also emerging in some locations in Asia, Africa, and Latin America (in some ways, it was always there). One would also have to ponder about the apparently forceful comeback of phenomenology in studies of culture and nature, and wonder whether it is not related to the perceived deepening of the denaturalization of body and nature brought about by pervasive environmental destruction and new biotechnologies. Following in this vein, one would also have to question the apparent disregard on the part of many phenomenologists for resituating their inquiries into place in larger contexts of power, a feature that is beginning to be remedied in those works that link phenomenology and political economy already mentioned. For now, it is important to register and map provisionally the anthropology of place that seems to be in ascension.

What also emerges from these works is the ability to further differentiate between place and “the local”. The local and the global are scales, processes, or even levels of analysis, but certainly not places or locations as discussed here. The theorization of scale and scalar politics in geography of recent times has been very useful in this regard (Swyngedouw, 1998; Peck, 2000). Nevertheless, it is impossible to provide a definition of place that works from all, and for all, perspectives. As indicated earlier, in this paper place refers to the experience of, and from, a particular location with some sense of boundaries, grounds, and links to everyday practices. At the risk of being redundant, it is necessary to reiterate that all of these are constructed, and not only by place-based processes. Boundaries and links to places are certainly neither natural nor fixed, and while boundaries do not exist in a “real” sense, their construction is an important aspect of the active material and cultural production of place by groups of people that, while heterogeneous and diverse, do share what Virilio (1997, 1999) calls the *hic et nunc* (here and now) of social practice. They do share many other things with “absent others” as well, as Giddens (1990) put it, and increasingly so, as with Virilio’s notion of telepresence. And as Ingold (1993) so perceptively has discussed, places can only have boundaries in relation to the activities of the people (the “taskscape”), or animals, for whom they are recognized and experienced as such. Even “natural boundaries” such as rivers and mountains follow this logic of construction. That places are also constituted by capital and “the global” should be clear by now; more on this below.

To sum up and restate the main points made so far, current scholarship on place emphasizes two aspects of place making: the production of place by capital and

global forces, following a political economy approach; and the “senses” or, more generally cultural construction of place — how places are endowed with meaning and the constitution of identities, subjectivities, difference and antagonism, following phenomenological, interpretivist, and constructivist paradigms. The advantages of cross-fertilizing these two currents should be apparent by now, with the concomitant blurring of boundaries between geography and anthropology, political economy and post-structuralist tendencies and epistemologies. Finally, the continued vitality of place for social practice is attested by phenomenologists, for whom body and place are ineluctably the bases for human existence; by ecological anthropologists, in their discussion of place-based models of nature; and by a number of struggles and social movements that, to a greater or lesser extent, take place and place-based modes of consciousness as both the point of departure and goal of their political strategies.

### **Place, the local and the global**

Local knowledge is a mode of place-based consciousness, a place-specific (even if not place-bound or place-determined) way of endowing the world with meaning. Yet the fact remains that in our concern with globalization place often drops out of sight. A handful of recent works try to move beyond this paradox by working through some of the epistemological traps that constrain theories of globalization. At the same time, they provide elements for thinking beyond development — that is, for a conceptualization of postdevelopment that is more conducive to the creation of new types of languages, understanding and action<sup>8</sup>. Novel debates on economy and place in poststructuralist feminist geography and political economy seem particularly useful in this regard. In these works, place is asserted against the dominance of space, and non-capitalisms against the dominance of capitalism as an imaginary of social life.

Let us start with a enlightening critique of capitalocentrism in recent discourses of globalization. This critique is intended to enable us to free up the space for thinking about the potential value of other local models of the economy in ways that also apply to models of nature or development. Geographers Julie Graham and Katherine Gibson present a powerful case against the claim, shared by mainstream and left theories alike, that capitalism is the hegemonic, even the only present form of economy, and that it will continue to be so in the foreseeable future. In this view, capitalism has been endowed with such dominance and hegemony in these theories, that it has become impossible to think social reality differently, let alone to imagine capitalism’s suppression. All other realities (subsistence economies, “biodiversity economies”, Third World forms of resistance, cooperatives and minor local initiat-

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<sup>8</sup> The notion of “postdevelopment” has become a heuristic for re-learning to see and reassess the reality of communities in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Is it possible to lessen the dominance of development representations when we approach this reality? Postdevelopment is a way to signal this possibility, an attempt to carve out a clearing for thinking other thoughts, seeing other things, writing in other languages (Crush, 1995; Escobar, 1995; Rahnema and Bawtree, 1997).

ives, the recent barter and solidarity economies in various parts of the world, etc.) are thus seen as opposite, subordinate, or complementary to capitalism, never as sources of a significant economic difference. Their critique applies to most theories of globalization and even of postdevelopment, to the extent that the latter situate capitalism “at the center of development narratives, thus tending to devalue or marginalize possibilities of noncapitalist development” (Gibson-Graham, 1996: 41). By criticizing capitalocentrism, these authors seek to liberate our ability for seeing non-capitalisms and building alternative economic imaginaries<sup>9</sup>.

This reinterpretation challenges the inevitability of capitalist “penetration” that is assumed in much of the literature on globalization:

In the globalization script...only capitalism has the ability to spread and invade. Capitalism is presented as inherently spatial and as naturally stronger than the forms of noncapitalist economy (traditional economies, “Third World” economies, socialist economies, communal experiments) because of its presumed capacity to universalize the market for capitalist commodities...Globalization according to this script involves the *violation* and eventual death of “other” noncapitalist forms of economy...All forms of noncapitalism become damaged, violated, fallen, subordinated to capitalism...How can we challenge the similar representation of globalization as capable of “taking” the life from noncapitalist sites, particularly the “Third World”? (Gibson-Graham, 1996: 125, 130)

From this perspective, not everything that emerges from globalization can be said to conform to the capitalist script; in fact, globalization and development might propitiate a variety of economic development paths; these could be theorized in terms of postdevelopment in such a way that “the naturalness of capitalist identity as the template of all economic identity can be called into question” (Gibson-Graham, 1996: 146). They could also be conceived of, as Mayfair Yang does in her farsighted application of Gibson-Graham to the changing and multiple Chinese economies, in terms of the hybridity of economies; what she means by this is that many of today’s economic formations in China are composed of both capitalist and a whole array of non-capitalist forms. With this reinterpretation, Yang challenges us to entertain the idea that “indigenous economies do not always get ploughed under with the entrance of capitalism, but may even experience renewal and pose a challenge to the spread

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<sup>9</sup> The argument is more complex than presented here, and entails a redefinition of class on anti-essentialist grounds that builds on Althusser’s work and on the post-structuralist Marxism of Resnick and Wolff (1987). Briefly, at issue is a reinterpretation of capitalist practices as overdetermined and the liberation of the economic discursive field from capital as a single overarching principle of determination. Coupled with a transformed definition of class that focuses on the processes of producing, appropriating and distributing surplus labor, this reinterpretation yields a view of the economy as constituted by a diversity of class processes — capitalist and non-capitalist — thus making visible a variety of noncapitalist practices by women wage earners, peasants, household, communal and self-help organizations, cooperatives, subsistence economies, etc.



of capitalist principles and stimulate us to rethink and rework existing critiques of capitalism” (Yang, 1999: 5).

What is certain is that we no longer seem to be sure about what is there “on the ground” after centuries of capitalism and five decades of development. Do we even know how to look at social reality in ways that might allow us to detect elements of difference that are not reducible to the constructs of capitalism and modernity? The role of ethnography has of course been particularly important in this respect. In the 1980s, a number of ethnographies documented active and creative resistance to capitalism and modernity in various settings<sup>10</sup>. Resistance by itself, however, is only suggestive of what is going on in many communities, stopping short of showing how people actively continue to create and reconstruct their lifeworlds and places. Successive works characterized the local hybridized models of the economy and the natural environment maintained by peasants and indigenous communities. The attention paid, particularly in Latin American anthropology and cultural studies, to cultural hybridization is another attempt at making visible the dynamic encounter of practices originating in many cultural and temporal matrices, and the extent to which local groups, far from being passive receivers of transnational conditions, actively shape the process of constructing identities, social relations, and economic practice (see Escobar, 1995 for a review of this literature). These lines of inquiry have reached sophisticated levels in the provision of nuanced accounts of the encounter between development, modernity, and local culture in postcolonial settings (see, for instance, Gupta, 1998; Arce & Long, 2000). These bodies of literature, however, are yet to be related systematically to the project of rethinking place from the perspective of practices of cultural, ecological, and economic difference among Third World communities in contexts of globalization and postcoloniality. This link might enable researchers to foreground the political aspects of their critique, not infrequently rendered intractable by the emphasis on the heterogeneity, hybridity, localization, and differentiation of forms and practices.

If the goal of Gibson-Graham was to provide an alternative language — a new class language in particular — for addressing the economic meaning of local practices, and if the goal of the postdevelopment literature is similarly to make visible practices of cultural and ecological difference which could serve as the basis for alternatives, it is necessary to acknowledge that these goals are inextricably linked to conceptions of locality, place, and place-based consciousness. Place is central to issues of development, culture and the environment and is equally essential, on the other, for imagining other contexts for thinking about the construction of politics, knowledge and identity. The erasure of place is a reflection of the asymmetry that exist between the global and the local in much contemporary literature on globalization, in which the global is associated with space, capital, history and agency while the local, conversely, is linked to place, labor, and tradition — as well as with

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<sup>10</sup> The most important were those of Taussig (1980), Scott (1985), Ong (1987) and Comaroff and Comaroff (1991). Fox and Starn (1997) moved beyond everyday forms of resistance to consider those forms of mobilization and protest that take place “between resistance and revolution”. For a review of some of this literature, see Escobar (1995), Chap. 4.

women, minorities, the poor and, one might add, local cultures<sup>11</sup>. Some feminist geographers have attempted to correct this asymmetry by arguing that place can also lead to articulations across space, for instance through networks of various kinds (Chernaik, 1996); this leaves unresolved, however, the relation between place and location, as well as the question of boundaries.

More fundamental perhaps in Dirlik's analysis are the consequences of the neglect of place for current categories of social analysis such as class, gender, and race (and we should add the environment here), which make such categories susceptible of becoming instruments of hegemony. To the extent that they are significantly sundered from place in discourses of globalization and deterritorialization, contemporary notions of culture do not manage to escape this predicament, for they tend to assume the existence of a global power structure in which the local occupies a necessarily subordinate position. Under these conditions, is it possible to launch a defense of place in which place and the local do not derive their meaning only from their juxtaposition to the global? A first step in resisting the marginalization of place, continuing with Dirlik's exposition, is provided by Lefebvre's notion of place as a form of lived and grounded space and the reappropriation of which must be part of any radical political agenda against capitalism and spaceless and timeless globalization. Politics, in other words, is also located in place, not only in the supra-levels of capital and space. Place, one might add, is the location of a multiplicity of forms of cultural politics, that is, of the cultural-becoming-political, as it has become evident with rainforest and other ecological social movements<sup>12</sup>.

Dirlik suggests that "glocal" could be a first approximation for moving towards giving equal attention to the localization of the global and the globalization of the local. The term "glocal" was initially coined in the late 1980s in association with processes of capitalist restructuring (Swyngedouw personal communication, 1998); this term is gaining some currency for moving away from binary divisions between the local and the global (see below). But the concrete forms in which the two-way traffic between globalization and localization takes place, let alone its equalization, is not easily conceptualized. Even the local of social movements against capital and

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<sup>11</sup> This is very clearly the case in environmental discourses, for instance, of biodiversity conservation, where women and indigenous people are credited with having the knowledge of "saving nature". Massey (1994) already denounced the feminization of place and the local in theories of space. For a good example of the asymmetry Dirlik talks about, see the quotes from Castells' book above (footnote No. 3).

<sup>12</sup> Lefebvre's distinction has been taken up recently by Soja as a way to move beyond the binarism of much social theory and to reinfuse politics with considerations of place. Building upon the work of Lefebvre and of feminist and postcolonial theorists, Soja suggests a notion of Thirdspace that transcends the binarism of the first space (material space) of positivist science (geography, planning, etc.) and the second space (the conceived space of theory and design) of interpretive theories. Thirdspace involves both the material and the symbolic; it is closest to "space as directly lived, with all its intractability intact...the space of 'inhabitants' and 'users'" (Soja, 1996: 67). Soja's "trialectic" of lived, perceived and conceived spaces — while provisional — may be seen as providing the grounds for a strategic political choice in defense of place and lived space. Would it be possible to think about first, second and third "natures" in a similar way (first nature as biophysical reality, second nature as that of theorists, managers and symbolic constructions, and third nature as that which is lived by people in everyday life)?

modern natures is globalized in some ways, for instance, to the extent that social movements borrow metropolitan discourses of identity and the environment (Brosius, 1997). Conversely, many forms of the local are offered for global consumption, from kinship to crafts, music, and ecotourism. The point here would be to distinguish those forms of globalization of the local that could become effective political forces in the defense of place and place-based identities, as well as those forms of localization of the global that locals might be able to use to their own advantage. As Virilio put it, “I love the local when it enables you to see the global, and I love the local when you can see it from the global” (Virilio, 1999: 112).

To construct place as a project, to turn place-based imaginaries into a radical critique of power, and to align social theory with a critique of power by place requires that we venture into other terrains. This proposal resonates with, and moves a step beyond, Jane Jacobs’ idea that “by attending to the local, by taking the local seriously, it is possible to see how the grand ideas of empire become unstable technologies of power with reach across time and space” (1996: 158). To be sure, “place” and “local knowledge” are no panaceas that will solve the world’s problems. Local knowledge is not pure or free of domination; places might have their own forms of oppression and even terror; they are historical and connected to the wider world through relations of power, and in many ways determined by them. The defense of local knowledge proposed here is both political and epistemological, arising out of the commitment to an anti-essentialist discourse of difference. Against those who think that the defense of place and local knowledge is undeniably romantic, one could say, with Jacobs (1996: 161) that “it is a form of imperial nostalgia, a desire for the ‘untouched Native’, which presumes that such encounters [between local and global] only ever mark yet another phase of imperialism”. It will be necessary, however, to expand the inquiry into place to consider broader questions, such as the relation of places to regional and transnational economies; place and social relations; place and identity; place, boundaries and border crossings; place and alternative modernities; and the impact of digital technology, particularly the internet, on places. What changes do occur in particular places as a result of globalization? Conversely, what new ways of thinking about the world emerge from places as a result of such an encounter? How do we understand the relations between biophysical, cultural, and economic dimensions of places?

The notion of cultural models of nature and non-capitalist practices does not do away with the need to rethink capitalism and globalization; this is a vexing question. It does point to the weaknesses of capitalocentrism, however: the fact that what Marxism and other progressive frameworks have been called upon to transform is this impossibly large monster that cannot be changed, a Capitalism that is immune to radical reconceptualization and the position of which seems to get further entrenched in the very act of critique. But is it possible to see it otherwise? “What if we theorize capitalism not as something large and embracing but as something partial, as one social constituent among many?...What if capitalism were a set of different practices scattered over the landscape that are (for convenience and in violation of difference) often seen as the same? If categories like subjectivity and society can undergo a radical rethinking, producing a crisis of individual and social

identity where a presumed fixity previously existed, can't we give Capitalism an identity crisis as well?" (Gibson-Graham, 1996: 260, 261). The same can be said about nature (Escobar, 1999a). What this means is that, yes, capitalism operates at all levels of scale; yes, capitalism is always present in the production of place; moreover, capitalism has to operate on the basis of its incorporation of places, and there are probably as many varieties of this incorporation as there are places, despite capital's best efforts at normalizing its conditions of operation. Yet this also means that capitalism is at least to some degree transformed by places; that in the same way as women are not completely defined by their relation to men, places and non-capitalisms are not completely defined by their relation to capitalism and space (Gibson-Graham, 1996); and that, as it has been said about Africans, people in places might create local economies "through socio-cultural practices that engage the West but are not familiar to it", at times giving people "opportunities to incorporate other cultures without being acculturated" (Hecht & Simone, 1994: 138, 71). In a more positive manner, it means that pluralizing the identity of capitalism — capitalisms — demands as well the discursive liberation of places (and the economy) from a total determination by capital, or modernity for that matter. The idiom of localized or hybridized capitalisms and modernities, while suggestive and helpful, does not go far enough. These notions often leave unexamined the question of the genealogies of those practices involved, and their connection to power.

Is it possible, then, to accept that postdevelopment is already (and has always been) under continuous re/construction? That places are always being defended and recreated, and different economies always on the rise? That alternative ecological practices cannot only be documented but are always been struggled for in many localities? To dare giving serious consideration to these questions certainly supposes a different politics of reading on our part as analysts, with the concomitant need to contribute to a different politics of representation. In the field of alternative development, a lot of experimentation is taking place in many localities, in terms of trying out combinations of knowledge and power, truth and practice that incorporate local groups actively as knowledge producers. How is local knowledge to be translated into power, and this knowledge–power into concrete projects and programs? How can local knowledge–power constellations build bridges with expert forms of knowledge when necessary or expedient, and how can they widen their social space of influence when confronted with detrimental local, regional, national and transnational conditions, as it is most often the case?

An anthropology of globalization predicated on the need to identify socially significant discourses of difference (cultural, ecological, economic, political) and the ways in which they can operate as discourses of articulation of alternatives, would examine the manifold ways of constructing culture, nature and identities today, as well as the production of differences through historico-spatial processes which are not solely the product of global forces — whether capitalism, new technologies, market integration, or what have you — but also linked to places and their defense. It is important to make visible the manifold local logics of production of cultures and identities, economic and ecological practices, that are ceaselessly emerging from communities worldwide. To what extent do they pose important, and perhaps orig-

inal, challenges to capitalism and Eurocentered modernities? Moreover, once visible, what would be the conditions that would allow place-based practices to create alternative structures that give them a chance to survive, let alone grow and flourish?

The terrain of social movements, particularly some ecological and ethnic movements, offers a fertile ground for thinking about some of these questions and the politics of place in general. For instance, the notion of territory being worked out by social movement activists and political ecologists in some rainforest areas establishes a relation between place, culture and nature. In the Colombian Pacific rainforest, for instance, activists of the social movement of black communities have developed a sophisticated political ecology framework that links identity, territory, and culture to alternative strategies for conservation and sustainable use of the biodiverse resources of the region. Let us look briefly at this aspect of the social movement before retaking the question of the politics of the defense of place in a more theoretical vein.

### **Social movements and subaltern strategies of localization<sup>13</sup>**

The Pacific region of Colombia is a vast rainforest area about 900 km long and 50–180 km wide, stretching from Panama and Ecuador, and between the westernmost chain of the Andes and the Pacific Ocean. It is known as one of the “hot spots” of biological diversity in the world. Afro-Colombians, descendants from slaves brought beginning in the sixteenth century to mine gold, make up for about 90% of the population, with indigenous peoples from various ethnic groups accounting for about 5% of the region’s population of close to a million. About 60% of the population still live in rural settlements along the numerous rivers that, in the southern part, flow from the Andes towards the ocean. Although the region has never been completely isolated, two factors have brought watershed changes to it in recent years: the radical neo-liberal opening of the country to the world economy adopted by the government after 1990; and the granting of collective territorial and cultural rights to the black communities in 1993 (the so-called Ley 70 or Law 70), following the implementation of a new national constitution in 1991. It was in the context of this conjuncture that the three changes with which this account is concerned need to be situated. First, the increased pace of capitalist extractivist activities, such as the rapid expansion of African palm plantations and industrial shrimp cultivation in the south-

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<sup>13</sup> This is an extremely succinct presentation of the both the region in question and the movement. It is intended to give the reader a sense of the importance of culture, place, and territory for this movement. The concept of “territory” itself is very new, dating from the mid 1980s, and so is the ethnicization of black identities. The defense of territories and ethnic identities have only become political projects in the 1990s. For more background on the region see Whitten (1986), Escobar and Pedrosa (1996), Restrepo and del Valle (1996) and Camacho and Restrepo (1999). The social movement of black communities is analyzed in Grueso, Rosero and Escobar (1998), and the movement’s political ecology framework in Escobar (1998). Finally, the book I am currently writing on these issues has a chapter on place from which the brief remarks included here are adapted. The book is based on eight years of research, including over 20 months of ethnographic fieldwork starting with a year-long period in 1993.

ern part of the region. Second, the growing concern with the destruction of biological diversity, leading to the implementation of an innovative project for its conservation, with the region's social movements as one of the project's main interlocutors. Third, the rise of important ethnic movements, particularly the social movement of black communities.

How can the production of this peculiar "rainforest" region be analyzed in terms of place? Generally speaking, the "Pacífico biogeográfico", as the region is known, is constructed through processes involving the human, biophysical non-human, and machinic worlds operating at many scales, from the microbiological to the transnational. These processes can schematically be seen as follows:

1. Historical processes of geological and biological formation. Geologists and paleo-scientists present a view of the region in terms of geological and evolutionary time in ways that account for its specificity, particularly its unusually high levels of endemism and biological diversity.
2. Historical processes constituted by the daily practices of the local black, indigenous and mestizo communities. Through their laborious daily practices of being, knowing, and doing the communities have been actively constructing their socio-natural worlds for several centuries, even if in the midst of other forces.
3. Historical processes of capital accumulation at all scales, from the local to the global. Capital is doubtless one of the most powerful forces constructing this and most rainforest regions of the world. Nevertheless, the construction of the Pacific as place cannot be explained solely in terms of capital. Indeed, it could be posited that forms of non-capitalism exist and are actually being created today out of the dynamics of place-based cultural and ecological practices, even if in the decided engagement with capital and the state.
4. Historical processes of incorporation of the region into the State, particularly through development representations and strategies. These processes have taken on great importance in the last few decades, when the government finally sought to incorporate the region fully into its development apparatus. In the early 1980s, the Colombian Pacific was for the first time represented as a "developmentalizable" region by state discourses. Capital and development constitute a two-pronged strategy for the territorialization of the Pacific as a modern space of thought and intervention.
5. The cultural-political practices of social movements. After the 1990s, black and indigenous movements became an important contender for the representation and construction of the Pacific as place and region-territory. These movements have set into motion a cultural politics which operates chiefly through a process of ethnicization of identity in close connection with ecological and alternative development strategies.
6. The discourses and practices of technoscience at all scales, from the local to the global, particularly in the areas of biodiversity conservation and sustainability. "Biodiversity" has become a powerful discourse and has originated a network of sites that embraces ever more domains of cultural, political, and ecological action.

Since the early 1990s, the biodiversity network has become an important element in the struggle over the Colombian Pacific as place and territory.

In a very schematic fashion, these processes can be further divided into two overall strategies. These strategies, let it be emphasized, are not bounded and discrete, but overlapping and in many ways co-produced:

1. Strategies of global localization by capital, the state, and technoscience. Capital, state and technoscience engage in a politics of scale that attempts to negotiate the production of locality in their own favor. Nevertheless, to the extent that these strategies are not place-based, they inevitably induce a delocalizing effect with respect to local places, despite their efforts at articulating with localities. (I will not discuss here those related territorial strategies based on the violence of weapons and intimidation, which unfortunately have gained ascendancy in the region since the late 1990s, causing massive displacement of people in a number of places.)
2. Subaltern strategies of localization by communities and, particularly, social movements. These strategies are of two kinds: place-based strategies that rely on the attachment to territory and culture; and glocal strategies through meshworks that enable social movements to engage in the production of locality by enacting a politics of scale from below. Social movements engage in the politics of scale by engaging biodiversity networks, on the one hand, and through coalition making with other place-based struggles.

Activists of the Process of Black Communities (PCN) have progressively articulated a political ecology framework in their interaction with community, state, NGO, and academic sectors. One of the important contributions of the Biodiversity Conservation Project (PBP) has been to initiate research and conceptualization of the “traditional production systems” of the river communities. For PBP staff and PCN activists alike, it is clear that these systems are more geared towards local consumption than to the market and accumulation; they have operated as forms of resistance, even if they have also contributed to the region’s marginalization. Also commonly appreciated is that traditional practices have been sustainable to the extent that they have enabled the reproduction of the cultural and biophysical ecologies (Sánchez & Leal, 1995). This sustainability has been increasingly put into question for most communities for at least the past two decades. Activists have introduced other important conceptual innovations in this context. The first one is the definition of “biodiversity” as “territory plus culture”. Closely related to it is a view of the entire Pacific rainforest region as a “region-territory of ethnic groups”, that is, an ecological and cultural unit that is laboriously constructed through the daily cultural and economic practices of the communities. The region-territory is also thought about in terms of “life corridors”, veritable modes of articulation between socio-cultural forms of use and the natural environment. There are, for instance, life corridors linked to the mangrove ecosystems; to the foothills; to the middle part of the rivers, extending towards the inside of the forest; and those constructed by particular activities, such

as traditional gold mining or women's shell collecting in the mangrove areas. Each of these corridors is marked by particular patterns of mobility, social relations (gender, kindred, ethnicity), use of the environment, and links to other corridors; each involves a particular use and management strategy of the territory.

The region-territory is a category of inter-ethnic relations that points toward the construction of alternative life and society models. It entails an attempt to explain biological diversity from the endogenous perspective of the eco-cultural logic of the Pacific. More concretely, the territory is seen as the space of *effective appropriation* of the ecosystem, that is, as those spaces used to satisfy community needs and for social and cultural development; it is multidimensional space for the creation and recreation of the ecological, economic, and cultural practices of the communities. For a given river community, this appropriation has longitudinal and transversal dimensions, sometimes encompassing several river basins. Thus defined, the territory cuts across several landscape units; more importantly, it embodies a community's life project. The region-territory, on the contrary, is conceived of as a *political construction* for the defense of the territories and their sustainability. In this way, the region-territory is a strategy of sustainability and viceversa: sustainability is a strategy for the construction and defense of the region-territory. The region-territory can thus be said to articulate the *life project* of the communities with the *political project* of the social movement. The struggle for territory is thus a cultural struggle for autonomy and self-determination. This explains why for many people of the Pacific the loss of territory would amount to a return to slavery or, worse perhaps, to becoming "common citizens".

The issue of territory is considered by PCN activists as a challenge to developing local economies and forms of governability that can support its effective defense. The strengthening and transformation of traditional production systems and local markets and economies; the need to press on with the collective titling process; and working towards organizational strengthening and the development of forms of territorial governability are all important components of an overall strategy centered on the region. Finally, it is clear that communities themselves increasingly have a sense of the loss of territory at present and what it might take to defend it. Those in river communities are prone to point at the "loss of traditional values and identity" as the most immediate source of loss of territory. Other factors seem to converge on this variable; loss of traditional production practices, irrational exploitation of resources, state development policies oriented by purely external criteria, increase pace of industrial extraction, and the existence of totally inappropriate and alienating educational models for the young people are cited as the most common factors associated with the loss of values and territory. In more substantial discussions with community leaders and social movement activists, a series of other factors linked to the loss of territory start to emerge, such as: the spread of plantations and specialization of productive activities; changes in production systems; internal conflicts in the communities; the cultural impact of national media, education and culture; out migration and the arrival of people foreign to the region espousing the ethics of capitalism and extractivism; and of course inadequate development policies, the neo-liberal opening to world markets, and the demands of the global economy.



To sum up, to the strategies of production of locality by capital (and, in different ways, technoscience), social movements oppose strategies of localization which, as we have seen, focus in the first instance on the defense of territory and culture. The idioms of biodiversity, sustainability, traditional production systems, cultural rights, and ethnic identities are all interwoven by movement activists into a discourse for the defense of place and a political ecology framework that enables them to articulate a political strategy. Social movements such as the movement of black communities of the Colombian Pacific can thus be seen as advancing a triple localizing strategy for the defense of their territories: a place-based localizing strategy for the defense of local models of nature and cultural practices; a further strategy of localization through an active and creative engagement with translocal forces, such as similar identity or environmental movements or various global coalitions against globalization and free trade; and a shifting political strategy linking identity, territory and culture at local, regional, national, and transnational levels. Social movements of this type actually engage in a novel politics of scale that is yet to be studied ethnographically. These ethnographies must relate place-based, yet transnationalized, struggles to transnational networks fostered by global discourses of technoscience and capital; they must look at networks in terms of a diverse set of actors and discourses operating at various scales; and they should investigate the ways in which these actors relate to both places and spaces as they “travel” back and forth between places in the network, at various levels of scale<sup>14</sup>.

### **Place, difference, and the politics of scale**

What are the prospects for defense of place projects such as that of the Colombian Pacific? It is important to tackle this question in a general way before concluding. For Dirlik, the survival of place-based cultures will be insured when the globalization of the local compensates for the localization of the global — that is, when symmetry between the local and the global is reintroduced in social and conceptual terms and, we need to add, when economic and ecological difference are similarly rendered into centers of analysis and strategies for action. In the last instance, however, the

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<sup>14</sup> I base this preliminary analysis of networks on my knowledge of, and engagement with, several networks, including the social movement of black communities and its transnational activities; the UNESCO-sponsored project, “Women on the Net” (Harcourt, 1999b), an international network devoted to the study and promotion of the use of NICTs by women’s groups world-wide; and the International Group for Grassroots Initiatives (IGGRI), a coalition of social movements against globalization. I have also followed from a distance the activities of the Geneva-based People’s Global Action Against Free Trade (PGA), which has been instrumental in a number of mobilizations against the World Trade Organization has been since May, 1998. Two dissertations in progress at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, by Chaia Heller and Mary King, also advance a network ethnography, the first in the context of French peasant mobilization against transgenic agriculture (see Escobar & Heller, 1999), the second focused on the activities of a small number of radical NGOs in the area of genetic resources and biodiversity conservation. The last chapter of a book I am currently writing, based on several years of fieldwork in the Colombian Pacific, will be devoted to the theory and ethnography of networks.

imagination and realization of different orders demands “the projection of places into spaces to create new structures of power...in ways that incorporate places into their very constitution” (Dirlik, 2000: 39); this would also entail the release of non-capitalist imaginaries into the constitution of economies and economic structures, and the defense of local cultures from their normalization by dominant cultures so that they can become effective political and life forces. For this to happen, places must “project themselves into the spaces that are presently the domains of capital and modernity” (Dirlik, 2000: 40). Some social movements are pointing the way with their redefinition of the relation between nature and society, the cultural and the political.

This in no way entails reifying places, local cultures, and forms of non-capitalism as “untouched” or outside of history. To give attention to place and local cultures is to destabilize “the surer spaces of power and difference marked by geopolitical or political economy perspectives” (Jacobs 1996: 15). As Jacobs adds, “the dichotomy of the authentically local and the appropriative global has its own problematic nostalgia. At best, the residual category of the local provides the hope for resistance. At worst, the local is seen as succumbing to the global, a compromised space of accommodation” (p. 36). To speak about activating local places, cultures, natures, and knowledge against the imperializing tendencies of space, capitalism and modernity is not a *deus ex machina* operation, but a way to move beyond the chronic realism fostered by established modes of analysis. Surely places and localities are brought into the politics of commodification and cultural massification, but the knowledge of place and identity can contribute to produce different meanings — of economy, nature and each other — within the conditions of capitalism and modernity that surround it.

Massey put it best in talking about the approach to space and place she would favor:

This would imagine the spatial as the sphere of the juxtaposition, or co-existence, of distinct narratives, as the product of power-filled social relations; it would be a view of space which tries to emphasize both its social construction and its necessarily power-filled nature. Within this context, “places” may be imagined as particular articulations of these social relations, including local relations “within” the place and those many connections which stretch way beyond it. And all of these embedded in complex, layered histories. This is place as open, porous, hybrid – this is *place as meeting place* (again, the importance of recognising in the “spatial” the juxtaposition of different narratives). This is a notion of place where specificity (local uniqueness, a sense of place) derives not from some mythical internal roots nor from a history of relative isolation — not to be disrupted by globalisation — but precisely from the absolute particularity of the mixture of influences found together there (1999: 18; see also Massey, 1994).

This is a constructive formulation to which anthropologists might add the need to take into account the necessarily cultural basis of what is specific to place and to a sense of place — including those aspects of place that might be irreducible to the

very same dialectic that geographers talk about. Massey's emphasis on narratives and specificity opens the way for geographers to be more attuned to the cultural dimension of space. Space is not culturally neutral, as it is often assumed. The relationship between space, the natural and the cultural needs to be spelled out more clearly in spatial narratives that tend to take it for granted. The production of space through processes and narratives of capital and development, for instance, is quite different from the space struggled for by social movements (e.g. the "region-territory of ethnic groups" of the Colombian Pacific).

Moreover, although this idea can only be mentioned in passing here, social movements-led networks and glocalities contribute to produce different kinds of space. For the spaces created by capital not only abstract from place but tend to enforce the regularized spaces of modernity; they are driven by mechanisms of de- and re-territorialization that can only take into account what is specific to place up to a certain point. To put it simply, capital operates at the local level but cannot have a sense of place — certainly not at least in the phenomenological sense. To be sure, capital needs to articulate with local conditions, yet this is not the same as saying that capital is place-based, at least not in the way in which place-based struggles are, or rarely so. This idea resonates with Doreen Massey's suggestion that in conceiving of space as always a product of interrelations, that is, as a genuinely existing multiplicity, one must have to acknowledge that "the South" or the cultures of much of Asia, Africa and Latin America "might have their *own* story to tell"; this implies, in turn, that "what is required for the constitution of the spatial is a degree of mutual autonomy, a genuine plurality...An understanding of spatiality, in other words, entails the recognition that there is one more story going on in the world and that these stories have, at least, a relative autonomy" (Massey, 1998: 3; see also Slater, 1998). Again, it is important to highlight the cultural source of this difference and autonomy. Massey is absolutely right in pointing at what she calls "the spatialisation of the story of modernity" as a key problem in the conceptualization of globalization — that is, the fact that what is described as globalization is the universalization of a particular way of imagining cultures and societies as having a particular relation to (national) space. Globalization, in other words, starts with the spurious assumption of spaces already divided-up into parcels (the nation-states), and of places which are already separate, bounded, and subordinate. In delinking the story of globalization from that of modernity, Massey wants to open up the imaginary of globalization to an alterity of space-place forms; it is a way of multiplying the geographical speaking positions for a truly spatialized globalization. I suggest that thinking in terms of glocalities that qualitatively reorganize and recreate space is a way of doing so. For this possibility to become fully visible, however, one has to move to the terrain of culture. The cultural politics of social movements suggests ways for reconnecting space and place in ways that do not yield the standardized narratives of capital and modernity.

These discussions of place already hint at the question of the politics of the defense of place. Theoretically, it is important to learn to see place-based cultural, ecological, and economic practices as important sources of alternative visions and strategies for reconstructing local and regional worlds, no matter how produced by "the global"

they might also be. Socially, it is necessary to think about the conditions that might make the defense of place — or, more precisely, of *particular constructions of place* and the *reorganization of place* this might entail — a realizable project. As I mentioned, in their triple localizing strategy, some rainforest social movements engage in what geographers call “the politics of scale”; they jump from one scale to another in their political mobilization. The results occur at various scales, from the local territories to the construction of regional socio-natural worlds, such as the Pacific as a “region-territory of ethnic groups”. Alternative ecological public spheres might be opened up in this way against the imperial ecologies of nature and identity of capitalist modernity.

It is true that capital and globalization achieve dramatic scaling effects. They control places through the control of space. As geographers point out (Swyngedouw 1997, 1998), we are witnessing an important geographic re-scaling by capital which shifts power primarily to the global level and global forms of governance (for example, NAFTA, the EU, GATT, and WTO). Most times these maneuvers are undemocratic and disempowering; they are fueled by discourses of free trade, development, and the unrestricted work of markets. However, social movements and progressive NGOs often times also create networks that achieve supra-place effects that are not negligible. The various networks of indigenous peoples of the Americas are already well known in this regard, but there are transnational networks emerging around a host of issues world wide. The anti-WTO demonstrations in Seattle in November, 1999 are a case in point. They were actually the result of networks of organizations in ascension since at least the anti-GATT protests in India in the early 1990s. These networks propitiate the reorganization of space from below and some measure of symmetry between the local and the global. They can be seen as creating “glocalities”, that is, cultural and spatial configurations that connect places with each other to create regional spaces and regional worlds. Glocality means that everything is local and global, to be sure, but not global and local in the same way (Dirlik, 2000). In other words, not only capital but place-based struggles reorganize space through networks, and they do so according to different parameters and concerns.

This is also to suggest that the politics of place has to be found at the intersection of the scaling effects of networks, on the one hand, and emergent identities, such as the black and indigenous identities of the Colombian Pacific, on the other. Social movements and local communities are not just trapped in places, awaiting for the liberating hand of capital, technology or development to join the networks of transnational flows of commodities, images, and the like. In constructing networks and glocalities of their own, even if of course in their engagement with dominant networks, social movements might contribute to democratize social relations, contest visions of nature (such as in biodiversity debates), challenge current technoscientific hype (and in the case of transgenic agriculture and genetically modified organisms, GMOs), and even suggest that economies can be organized differently from current neo-liberal dogmas (as in the resurgence of barter and local-currency economies and the continued survival of non-capitalist practices). Social movements suggest that “the gestalt of space” (Swyngedouw, 1997) needs to be approached not only from the perspective of capital’s spatialization but from the side of the production of space

by place-based networks. It is also vital that researchers recognize both the social production and the cultural construction of space; the scaling-up of networks has cultural effects that are often missed in conceptions of space and networks, including those that have been most enlightening and influential (Harvey, 1989 for space; Latour, 1993 for networks; Castells, 1996 for both).

A politics of difference based on place-based practices and networks is greatly aided today by the creative use of NICTs. Information and networking have been shown to be of vital importance to the political strategies of a number of cultural rights movements, including the Zapatista and the Maya culturalist movement (Nelson, 1996), women's movements (Harcourt, 1999b), and other ethnic, environmental, and indigenous movements (Ribeiro, 1998; Escobar, 1999b). It might seem paradoxical at first to use NICTs, known for their de-localizing effects at the service of capital and global media, for a defense of place-based practices. But the fact is that people rooted in local cultures are finding ways to have a stake in national and global society precisely as they engage with the conditions of transnationalism in defense of local cultures and ecologies (Arizpe, 1999). This is so because these networks are the location of emergent local actors and the source of promising cultural practices and possibilities. They are most effective when they rely on an ongoing tacking back and forth between cyberpolitics and place politics — that is, between political activism in the internet and other network-mediated spaces and activism in the physical location in which the networkers sit and live. Because of their historical attachment to places and the cultural and ecological difference they embody, women, environmentalists, and ethnic social movements in some parts of world are particularly suited to this task of weaving the virtual and the real, and culture, gender, environment and development into an innovative cultural-political practice (Ribeiro, 1998; Rocheleau, Thomas-Slate & Wangari, 1996; Harcourt, 1999b; Escobar, 1999b).

The radical lessons of a politics of place do not stop there, and there is a final aspect I would like to mention before concluding. A place-based politics might enable scholars and activists to think about the conditions for what philosophers Spinoza, Flores and Dreyfus (1997) have called “the retrieval of history-making skills”. Working out of a reformed phenomenology, these authors attempt to bring back a contextualized and situated notion of human practice in contrast to the desituated and detached view of people and things fostered by Cartesianism and modern science. To be sure, this attempt takes place fully as a critical project of modernity; however, it can be reinterpreted to illuminate certain unsuspected aspects of the politics of place. While the philosophers acknowledge the historical trend towards uprooted and flexible selves and communities fostered by NICTs, they believe that history-making skills linked to an attachment to place and stable identities have not disappeared and may be creatively recuperated. Why? Because, in their argument, we live at our best when engaged in acts of history making, meaning by this the ability to engage in the ontological act of disclosing new ways of being, of transforming the ways in which we understand and deal with ourselves and with things. Places can be thought of as “disclosive spaces”, defined as “any organized set of practices for dealing with oneself, other people, and things that produces a relatively

self-contained web of meanings” (p. 17). While most activity going on in places can be categorized as daily coping or customary disclosing, there is always the possibility of historical disclosing; this might happen, for instance, when activists identify and hold on to a disharmony in ways that transform the background practices of understanding or the disclosive space in which people live. This life of skilful disclosing, which makes the world look genuinely different, is only possible through a life of intense engagement with a place.

This is in direct opposition to the conventional notion of the public sphere that operates through detached understanding of problems and that results in abstract solutions. Democracy, in these philosophers’ views, requires the rootedness in particularly problems and places (the immersion in the background practices of a collectivity with the risk taking that speaking out of this background entails); only in this way can meaningful public spheres be created, and only under these circumstances can the kind of interpretive speaking through which particular practices and identities might appear as worthy of attention to a mixed community be exercised. Interpretive speaking, in other words, belongs with/in places. Place-based activists, intellectuals, and common citizens (“reticent citizens”, pp. 94–115) do not act as detached contributors to public debate (as in the talk show model of the public sphere) but are able to articulate the concerns of their constituencies in such a way that the relevant background practices are changed. Social movements also fulfill this role at various scales through the networks they create; their actions emerge from the concrete experience of their subworld; at their best, they respect the difference of other subworlds with which they network and interact, even as they cross-appropriate practices of those subworlds. In the process, not infrequently the background practices of all the subworlds involved are transformed<sup>15</sup>. Surely, a new model of politics and of the public sphere is needed if we are to take seriously the challenge of non-historical living these authors see as becoming pervasive. Some argue that this new model of politics can already be observed in networks of place-based struggles, such as certain women’s networks (Harcourt, 1999a) or in grass-roots forms of governance linked to ecological ethnicities (Parajuli, 1997).

In sum, social movements and many progressive NGOs and scholars are finding it increasingly necessary to posit a defense of place and place-based practices against the economic and cultural avalanche of recent decades. Most times, this project does not take the form of an intransigent defense of “tradition” but rather of a creative engagement with modernity and transnationalism, often times aided by NICTs (see also Arce & Long, 2000). These social actors do not seek so much inclusion into the global network society but its reconfiguration in such a way that their visions of the world may find minimum conditions for their existence. Despite tensions and conflicts, they create networks and localities with a more decidedly plural character:

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<sup>15</sup> They give the example of Chico Mendes, who cross-appropriated practices from the Brazilian indigenous movement and the international environmental movement to craft a practice (extractive reserves) that could not have been generated solely out of their own concerns and experience (1996: 113–114). The notion of cross-appropriation provides interesting elements for thinking about social movement networks.

glocalities in which many cultural politics and political cultures can coexist, giving new meaning to democracy. Popular glocalities might be able to establish structures of power that do not impose homogeneous conceptions of the good on all of its participants. Here we might find a new hope for a reasonable pluralism. The fact that a growing number of people and groups demand the right to their own cultures, ecologies, and economies *as part of our modern social world* can no longer be denied, nor can it these demands be easily accommodated into any universalist liberal or neo-liberal doctrine. It is no longer the case, as neoliberal globalizers would have it, that one can only contest dispossession and argue for equality from the perspective of inclusion into the dominant culture and economy. In fact, the opposite is becoming the case: the position of difference and autonomy is becoming valid, if not more, for this contestation (see Gledhill 1997, 1999 for the exemplary case of the Zapatista in this regard; Escobar, 1999c for a general argument). Appeals to the moral sensibility of the powerful ceased to be effective, if they ever were. It is time to try out other strategies, like the power strategies of groups connected in networks, in order to negotiate contrasting conceptions of the good and the value of different forms of life and to re-state the long-standing predicament of difference-in-equality. It is time for thinking more openly about the potential healing effects of a politically enriched alterity.

## Conclusion

It might seem paradoxical to assert that the identities that can be as emerging in the cultural–environmental domain today might simultaneously be attached to place and most open to what remains unimagined and unthought in biological, cultural, and economic terms. These identities engage in more complex types of mixing and dialectics than in the most recent past. The dynamic of place, networks, and power at play today in many ambits suggests that this is the case. Subaltern strategies of localization still need still to be seen in terms of place; places are surely connected and constructed yet those constructions entail boundaries, grounds, selective connection, interaction, and positioning, and in some cases a renewal of history-making skills. Connectivity, interactivity and positionality are the correlative characteristics of the attachment to place (Escobar, 1999b,c), and they derive greatly from the modes of operation of the networks that are becoming central to the strategies of localization advanced by social movements (and, of course, by capital in different ways). Networks can be seen as apparatuses for the production of discourses and practices that connect nodes in a discontinuous space; networks are not necessarily hierarchical but can in some cases be described as self-organizing, non-linear and non-hierarchical meshworks, as some theorists of complexity think of them at present (De Landa, 1997). They create flows that link sites which, operating more like fractal structures than fixed architectures, enable diverse couplings (structural, strategic, conjunctural) with other sites and networks. This is why I say that the meaning of the politics of place can be found at the intersection of the scaling effects of networks and the strategies of the emergent identities. As Rocheleau put it eloquently, this calls for

an interest in “the combination of people-in-place and people-in-networks, and the portability (or not) of people’s ways of being-in-place and being-in-relation with humans and other beings” (D. Rocheleau, personal communication).

It has been said that the ideas and practices of modernity are appropriated and re-embedded in locally-situated practices, giving rise to a plethora of modernities through the assemblage of diverse cultural elements, and that often times this process results in counter-tendencies and counter-development, defined as “the process by which multiple modernities are established” (Arce & Long, 2000: 19). The challenge for this constructive proposal is to imagine multiple modernities from multiple directions, that is, from multiple genealogies of place-based (if clearly not place-bound) practices. It is at this level that “the postdevelopment moment” is of relevance, at least in some recent reinterpretations of the concept. For Fagan (1999), for instance, the construction of a post-development politics must start with a consideration of material struggles and the cultural politics around them, critically engage with dominant development discourse by acknowledging its problems, and imagine transformation strategies fully cognizant of how cultural production is associated with power. “Reconstituted” development workers, researchers, and activists might thus begin to outline a more substantial post-development strategy. More than an anti-development movement, this strategy point at the construction of post-development scenarios that incorporate a pedagogical orientation towards change. A movement towards the defense of place might well be an element in this strategy. This defense is of course not the only source of hope and change, but an important dimension of them.

The critique of the privilege of space over place, of capitalism over non-capitalism, of global cultures and natures over local ones is not so much, or not only, a critique of our understanding of the world but of the social theories on which we rely to derive such understanding. This critique also points at the marginalization of intellectual production on globalization produced in the “peripheries” of the world (Slater, 1998). The critique, finally, is an attempt to bring social theory into line with the views of the world and political strategies of those who exist on the side of place, non-capitalism and local knowledge — and effort to which anthropologists and ecologists are usually committed. Dominance and subalternity, as Guha (1988) forcefully demonstrated, are complex social and epistemological phenomena. Those frameworks that elide the historical experience of the subaltern and that participate in the erasure of subaltern strategies of localization can also be said to participate in the prose of counterinsurgency. Conversely, if it is true that politically enriched forms of difference are always under construction, there is hope that they could get to constitute new grounds for existence and significant rearticulations of subjectivity and alterity in their economic, cultural and ecological dimensions.

In the last instance, anthropology, political geography and political ecology can contribute to re-state the critique of current hegemonies as a question of the utopian imagination: Can the world be reconceived and reconstructed from the perspective of the multiplicity of place-based practices of culture, nature and economy? Which forms of “the global” can be imagined from multiple place-based perspectives? Which counter-structures can be set into place to make them viable and productive? What notions of politics, democracy and the economy are needed to release the



effectivity of the local in all of its multiplicity and contradictions? What role will various social actors — including technologies old and new — have to play in order to create the networks on which manifold forms of the local can rely in their encounter with the multiple manifestations of the global? Some of these questions will have to be given serious consideration in our efforts to give shape to the imagination of alternatives to the current order of things.

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