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Beyond
Northern
Epistemologies

Edited by Boaventura de Sousa Santos

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Preface

This book is the third in a series of five volumes that present the main results of an international research project that I have conducted under the title *Reinventing Social Emancipation: Towards New Manifestos*. The project's core idea is that the action and thought that sustained and gave credibility to the modern ideals of social emancipation are being profoundly questioned by a phenomenon that, although not new, has reached in the past decades such an intensity that it has effected a redefinition of the contexts, objectives, means, and subjectivities of social and political struggles. This phenomenon is commonly designated as globalization. As a matter of fact, what we usually call globalization is just one of the forms of globalization, namely neoliberal globalization, undoubtedly the dominant and hegemonic form of globalization. Neoliberal globalization corresponds to a new system of capital accumulation, a more intensely globalized system than previous systems. It aims, on the one hand, to desocialize capital, freeing it from the social and political bonds that in the past guaranteed some social distribution; on the other hand, it works to subject society as a whole to the market law of value, under the presupposition that all social activity is better organized when organized under the aegis of the market. The main consequence of this double change is the extremely unequal distribution of the costs and opportunities brought about by neoliberal globalization inside the world system. Herein resides the reason for the exponential increase of the social inequalities between rich and poor countries, as well as between the rich and the poor inside the same country.

The project's assumption is that this form of globalization, though hegemonic, is not the only form and that, in fact, it has been increasingly confronted with another form of globalization. This other form, an alternative, counter-hegemonic form of globalization, is constituted by a series of initiatives, movements, and organizations that combat neoliberal globaliza-

Social Movements and Biodiversity on the Pacific Coast of Colombia

Arturo Escobar and Mauricio Pardo

INTRODUCTION

Tropical rainforests have become the scenes of intense disputes and renewed undertakings for both older and more recent forms of capitalist penetration. The encroachment of capitalist enterprises in the Colombian Pacific had until recently focused mainly on agro-industrial and extractive industries, as well as on transportation, energy, and port infrastructure projects. Now, however, multilateral agencies of natural resources and biotechnology multinationals have begun viewing the use and regulation of tropical rainforests' living species as potentially profitable. Hence, in different parts of the world, groups of local people who have traditionally inhabited these areas are organizing against the rapid advance of these powerful economic and political agents.

In the Colombian Pacific these facts have had strong manifestations. Black and indigenous organizations have challenged the government in order to obtain legal recognition of their lands and authority, to counter the actions of timber, mining, and palm oil industries, as well as government projects that aim to build roads, hydroelectric plants, and ports in the region. More recently, these organizations have begun to participate in discussions against the marketing and patenting of species traditionally used or contained in their territories. The control of their lands constitutes the focus of their struggle, which also includes respect for their cultural specificities, the autonomy to decide their future, and the protection of their traditional knowledge.

In order to strengthen their struggle, these local communities' organizations have resorted to networks of allies at local, national, and international levels. Thus, black and indigenous movements have designed cultural and ecological policies that articulate different aspects of their search for the well-being of their peoples through a constructive use of natural resources. These movements participate in circles of groups with similar interests—other

ethnic organizations, international groups, local NGOs, and academic sectors—to voice their demands and positions in both national and global venues. The actions of these social movements concerned with biodiversity and the right to maintain their traditional knowledge are part of a broader view of society and nature, and defend cultural policies that oppose the dominant views engendered by the agents of capitalism.

Indeed, these movements' struggles transcend a simple desire for reform. By demanding the recognition of their rights, by constructing internal forms of authority that are alternatives to the power of the state and of capital, and by stimulating alternative systems of knowledge, they display emancipatory aspects. However, the spreading of the Colombian internal war to the Pacific imperils the goals of ethnic movements and threatens their future.

In this chapter, we analyze these facts in light of contemporary debates on biodiversity, the emergence and dynamics of ethnic movements in the Pacific, and their positions regarding nature and biodiversity.

NEW APPROACHES TO THE TROPICAL FOREST: THE IRRUPTION OF BIODIVERSITY

The capitalist system has used diverse exploitation regimes in tropical forests all over the world, particularly in the region of the Colombian Pacific. In most cases, both extractive and plantation regimes have caused great ecological damage in these fragile ecosystems. Hegemonic discourse has presented these vast territories as uninhabited and inhospitable, wild lands that need to be subdued in order to contribute to the economy and production of the national states containing them. More recently, the abundance and heterogeneity of tropical rainforest species and their biochemical, genetic, and molecular structure began to be considered as valuable resources over which different and conflictive use-strategies compete—interests represented by the state, capitalists, and social movements.

Inhabitants of these extremely humid wooded areas—whether tribal natives, forcefully displaced populations, such as labor for extractive companies, or peasants from other regions—have, in most cases, developed highly sustainable production forms that have low impact on the ecological system.

Recently, local rainforest populations have invoked the defense of their ancestral territories and the protection of the environment as their most noteworthy form of resistance against capitalist projects of exploitation of natural resources. They have demanded low-scale production systems based on reciprocity and cooperation, with an enormous symbolic load in terms of the relationship between society and nature.

The reason why so much attention is given to the rainforest nowadays is

based on what we could call "the irruption of the biological" as a central social fact in twentieth-century global policies. After two hundred years of systematic destruction of life and nature, survival has emerged as an aspect of crucial interest for both capital and science through a dialectical process initiated by capitalism and modernity. Conservation and sustainable development have become pressing issues for capital, forcing it to modify its prevailing logic of destruction.

Events that have taken place during recent years in tropical rainforests suggest that what is at stake transcends policies for the defense of resources and the environment, or even policies concerning representation. One crucial point is defined by the multiplicity of constructions of nature in its most complex dimension: the contrast between the meaning/use practices of the various social groups. The existence of a cultural politics of nature in the social movements of rainforest inhabitants is evident, and it is also clear that its lessons extend beyond the forest itself. One of the most noteworthy aspects of this cultural politics is the resulting organized response in the shape of social movements.

"Cultural politics" is understood as the process that takes place when conflict arises between social actors who are shaped or characterized by different meanings and cultural practices. The notion of cultural politics is based on the assumption that both cultural meanings and practices—in particular those theorized as marginal, oppositional, minority, residual, emergent, alternative, dissident, etc., all with respect to a dominant cultural order—are sources of processes that can be considered political (Álvarez *et al.*, 1988). This cultural politics alters the practices and familiar understandings of nature, at the same time as it attempts to free local ecologies, both mentally and in nature itself, from systems deeply rooted in class, gender, ethnic, and cultural domination.

The concept of biodiversity has transformed the parameters through which nature is valued, and also the disputes over the access to natural resources. The idea of biodiversity emerges from a quantification of the number of species in determined areas. These areas acquire a new visibility that makes them the object of a renewed interest on the part of actors as diverse as environmental movements, scientific and academic establishments, and indigenous organizations. Views of the environment acquire a rationality factor in which both the intervention of expert and technical knowledge and the sophisticated character of capitalist intervention sharply contrast with the control of natural resources on the part of local inhabitants (Instituto Humboldt, 1998: 18–22). The assignment of patents to living organisms or their components, deliberately disregarding the authorship of native peoples, is defined and argued in detail by Shiva (2000: 13–24) as outright biopiracy.

Projects for the "conservation of biodiversity"—almost invariably financed by northern NGOs and the World Bank's Global Environment Facility (GEF)—involve national planners and local communities in the complex policies of technoscience, which consider the genes of certain wild species as the key to the conservation of fragile ecosystems; this occurs in countries as different as Costa Rica, Thailand, Ivory Coast, Colombia, Malaysia, Cameroon, Brazil, and Ecuador. According to the basic argument, the genes of wild species constitute a precious library of genetic information, a source of wonderful medicines, and, perhaps, a stock of foodstuffs that could become very valuable products through biotechnology. Thus, the rainforest would be preserved at the same time that substantial profits were obtained, which would also benefit local inhabitants. The increasing interest in biodiversity is the result of a problematization of the biological, since it places rainforest areas in a crucial bio-political global position.

The key to biodiversity conservation, according to the view of the dominant institutions, resides in finding ways of using tropical forest resources that guarantee their long-term preservation. Such use must be based on a scientific knowledge of biodiversity, appropriate management systems, and adequate mechanisms that establish intellectual property rights protecting discoveries that might have commercial applications. Also known as "gene hunting," the prospecting of biodiversity presents itself as a respectable protocol for saving nature (WRI, 1993), since it is considered that the source of benefit and profit in terms of conservation resides in the genes of those species. Prospecting activities are already taking place in some "hot spots" of the Third World, with prospectors from North American and European botanical gardens, pharmaceutical companies, independent biologists, and Southern NGOs among others.

The apparatus for biodiversity production involves a series of different actors—ranging from northern NGOs, international organizations, botanical gardens, universities, and corporations to recently created Third World institutions for biodiversity, Third World planners and biologists, as well as local activists and communities. All of these have their own interpretive frame concerning biodiversity—what it is, what it should be, or what it could become. This discursive formation can be theorized as a network with a multiplicity of agents and places where knowledge is produced, debated, used, and transformed.

Thus, there are conflicts about how to get to know biodiversity and the ways in which it is known. Both scientific knowledge about the chemical components of species and traditional knowledge of the medical or economic use of those species are avidly pursued by pharmaceutical and biotechnological multinational companies, research centers, and state institutions. The biodiverse dimension of nature generates new fields of

attraction for these varied actors and their respective interests. Commercial companies work on one of the most dynamic lines of contemporary capitalist accumulation in pharmacology, biotechnology, and genetics. State agencies manifest contradictory positions, oscillating between opening access to biological resources to national and multinational companies, placing biological resources under state control, or protecting the rights of the native inhabitants of biodiverse areas. In scientific and academic centers, some studies focus on the strictly biological while others conceive of biodiversity as part of a social reality that, in its turn, can be considered either as an unproblematic space or as the arena of conflict over access to and control of natural resources (GRAIN-GAIA, 1998).

A critical perspective on biodiversity from the viewpoint of political ecology includes the following set of propositions:

- 1) Although biodiversity has concrete biophysical referents, it should be considered as a recent discursive invention. This discourse is articulated through a complex network of actors, from northern international organizations and NGOs to scientists, prospectors, local communities, and social movements.
- 2) Through the cultural politics they generate, social movements propose a particular vision for the conservation and appropriation of biodiversity. By linking biodiversity to the defense of culture and territory, these movements offer an alternative framework for political ecology.
- 3) Particular aspects of the debates about biodiversity—namely, territorial control, alternative development, intellectual property rights, local knowledge, and conservation itself—acquire new dimensions; they can no longer be restricted to the technocratic and economic prescriptions of the dominant positions. Marginal localities such as communities and social movements have begun to be considered as centers for innovation and emergent alternative worlds.

At the risk of oversimplification, it is possible to distinguish four main positions produced thus far by the biodiversity network. Each of these positions is in itself heterogeneous and diverse, and the network as a whole is therefore extremely dynamic and changing (Escobar, 1997a):

1. *Resource management: the 'global-centric' perspective.* This is the vision of biodiversity produced by dominant institutions, particularly the World Bank and the major northern environmentalist NGOs backed by the G-8 countries (World Conservation Union, Nature Conservancy, World Resource Institute, and World Wildlife Fund, among others). It offers a set of prescriptions for conservation and the sustainable use of resources at inter-

national, national, and local levels. It also suggests appropriate mechanisms for resource management, including scientific research, *in situ* and *ex situ* conservation, national biodiversity planning, and the establishment of appropriate mechanisms for compensation and the economic use of biodiversity resources, mainly through intellectual property rights. This position originates in dominant views of science, capital, and management (WRI/IUCN/UNEP, 1991; WRI, 1994: 149–151). The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) has a preeminent role in disseminating this perspective.

2. *Sovereignty: Third World national perspectives.* Although the positions of Third World governments vary considerably, the existence of a national Third World perspective can be asserted. Without fundamentally questioning the global-centric discourse, this position seeks to negotiate the terms of the treaties and the strategies concerning biodiversity. Aspects not yet agreed upon—such as *in situ* conservation and access to *ex situ* collections, sovereign access to genetic resources, ecological debt, and the transfer of technological and financial resources to the Third World—are important topics in negotiation agendas.

3. *Biodemocracy: the perspective of progressive NGOs.* An increasing number of southern NGOs consider the dominant and global-centric perspective to be a form of bio-imperialism. Bio-democracy sympathizers emphasize local control of natural resources, the suspension of development mega-projects and subsidies for capitalist activities that destroy biodiversity, support for practices based on the logic of diversity, a redefinition of productivity and efficiency, and the acknowledgement of the cultural base of biological diversity.

4. *Cultural autonomy: the perspective of social movements.* The social movements that construct a political strategy for the defense of territory and of culture and identity tied to specific places and territories generate a cultural politics mediated by ecological considerations. Aware of the fact that "biodiversity" is a hegemonic construction, activists nevertheless acknowledge that its discourse opens up a space for the configuration of culturally appropriate developments, which can oppose more ethnocentric and exploitative tendencies. Theirs is the defense of a whole lifestyle project, and not only of "resources" or biodiversity (Escobar, 1997b).

From the four discourses about biodiversity just outlined, a fundamental asymmetry can be inferred between science and modern economy, on the one side, and the practices of nature, on the other.

The current phase of the globalization of capital implies that crucial issues

related to the legal frameworks within which capitalist transactions are carried out (especially those that concern commercial and industrial property rights and trade regulations) are formulated in multilateral international arenas upon which core capitalist countries and multinational companies exert vast influence and power.

Conferences of Parties on the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) have been taking place around the world since the establishment of the Convention by more than 150 countries at the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro. In 1994, Colombia ratified CBD through Law 165, known as the Biodiversity Law. In the conferences, it was agreed that information and access to resources would be gradually opened for developed countries and private companies, but there is not yet protection for poorer countries and their local populations. There is strong pressure on the part of multinational pharmaceutical companies and the governments of advanced capitalist countries concerning controversial issues such as intellectual property, biotechnological patenting, and the privatization of biological phenomena, which are yet to be decided upon (Flórez, 2000; Instituto Humboldt, 2000: 56–59).

Nevertheless, CBD agreements, as well as those to be approved in the future, cannot affect previous conventions between countries. For this reason, the few international agreements for the protection of biodiversity, the rights of people bearing traditional knowledge, and long-term inhabitants of highly diverse environments, are subject to the WTO-regulated market dictatorship and regional agreements, with the risk of commercial sanctions. The imposition of purely capitalist criteria which ignore the consultation and debate processes has taken place, for example, in Andean countries that signed the Cartagena Agreement and that had already accepted biological patenting and exclusive commercial property of new plant varieties (see Andean Pact Decision 391 of 1996). In these agreements, the Andean Community declares the state as the sovereign owner of tangible genetic resources, i.e., of organisms in themselves (plants, animals), whereas traditional knowledge associated to indigenous and peasant groups is considered as an intangible component owned by such groups. Thus, it is the state that controls natural biological resources, disregarding the collective intellectual authorship of ancestral inhabitants in the development of species. According to Andean Pact agreements, when issuing licenses or patents to private companies, the state protects tangible patrimony, whereas local populations that own intangible patrimony must establish private agreements with the commercial companies (Instituto Humboldt, 2000: 59–60).

Thus, the future of the rights of ethnic minorities to control their own biological resources as well as their traditional knowledge depends to a great extent on the mobilizing of ethnic organizations and other sectors of civil

society such as NGOs at the international and national levels, since within the current institutional framework the positions in favor of the market are predominant and also count on better resources to impose their points of view. Few governments, especially in Latin America, are willing to question the WTO or risk their reputation as sensible commercial partners of advanced capitalist countries. Those governments will not dare to challenge the WTO's free market principles in order to privilege the rights of local communities to control their traditional knowledge and to be recognized as the authors of the genetic realities of the varieties that they have domesticated.

The general position of the governments of core capitalist countries, as well as multinational companies, is cynically advantageous: free access to all natural resources but private property and restricted access to them once they have been appropriated and processed by industrial companies. Millennial knowledge about use, the domestication of species, or diversity conservation in traditional territories is not considered to be the patrimony of ethnic groups for which they should be given recognition and adequate compensation.

Intellectual property rights and patents are fundamental legal artifacts for the capitalist economy. These rights must be registered and enforced by special entities; they not only protect inventiveness and effort on the part of individuals and companies, but they also frequently entail a privatization of social use-values for individual profit. For ethnic groups, the privatization of components or biological properties derived from their knowledge or use also involves intrusion and threats to their territory and their autonomy, even if, as in the Colombian case, the rights to their land and autonomy have already been legally established.

Within a Western framework, profit emerges from innovations, which must be protected by intellectual property rights. However, in many peasant communities, innovation springs from within tradition. When a language of intellectual property rights is imposed on peasant systems, the benefits from community innovations end up increasing external capital (Gudeman and Rivera, 1990; Gudeman, 1996).

REDISCOVERING A REGION: THE COLOMBIAN PACIFIC REGION

The Colombian Pacific region is a vast tropical rainforest area around 960 km long, its width fluctuating from 80 to 160 km (roughly 700,000 km²). It extends from Panama to Ecuador, and from the slopes of the western mountain range (*Cordillera Occidental*) to the Pacific ocean. An approximate 60 per cent of the population inhabits a few cities and large towns, while the

remaining population dwells in riverbank areas along the more than 240 rivers flowing from the mountains to the ocean. Afro-Colombians, descendants of slaves brought from Africa at the beginning of the seventeenth century for gold-mining activities, form the majority of the population, although the number of indigenous inhabitants amounts to approximately 50,000. The latter belong primarily to the Embera and Wounan ethnic groups and inhabit the northern part of the department of Chocó. Indigenous communities have maintained specific material and cultural practices, such as multiple economic and survival activities (involving agriculture, fishing, hunting, collecting, and small-scale mining), extended families and kinship relations, strong oral traditions and religious practices, particular forms of knowledge, and the use of diverse ecosystems, etc.

The black groups maintain and have developed cultural practices of African as well as of indigenous and Spanish origin: complex systems of rainforest utilization, extended families, special dances, oral and musical traditions, funerary rituals, witchcraft, etc. These activities are increasingly articulated with modern urban forms, due in part to internal and external migrations as well as to the impact of commodities, the mass media, and development programs. Although the region has never been isolated from world markets—gold and platinum bonanza cycles, precious woods, rubber, and timber industries (Whitten, 1986), and, as we soon will see, genetic resources, have linked the ethnic communities to the world economy—it was only during the 1980s that the region began to be taken into consideration and that policies were devised for its development.

What is now taking place in the Pacific region is unprecedented: large-scale development plans, new fronts opening for capital accumulation (such as African palm tree plantations and shrimp nurseries), and numerous indigenous and black mobilizations. Within this emerging imaginary, the Colombian Pacific region occupies an important place as a launching platform for the macroeconomy of the future (Escobar, 1996). The discovery of biodiversity in this region is one of the main components of this new imaginary.

Three main actors—the state, capital, and social movements—struggle to define the future of the region. Behind these actors stand different political and cultural orders whose genealogies and whose connections with socio-economic and cultural rationales must be clarified. The study of each actor's cultural politics is important because the future of the region will depend, in great measure, on the ways in which it will be defined and represented. The cultural politics concerning nature in this region is based on three fundamental processes, which were simultaneously developed after 1990: 1) radical policies of opening to world markets, favored by the government in recent years, with special emphasis on the integration of Pacific-basin economies

into those of the rest of the country; 2) new sustainable development strategies and biodiversity conservation; 3) more numerous and increasingly visible mobilizations among black and indigenous populations.

The present situation in the Colombian Pacific region is very special because the various factors involved in the debates about biodiversity, patents, and intellectual property rights over the use of biological species are deeply interconnected here. This area has been acknowledged as one of the most biodiverse in the world (García Kirkbride, 1986); its rural zones constituted by rainforests are inhabited by ethnic indigenous and Afro-Colombian groups deeply engaged in organizing themselves in defense of their rights. Moreover, the fact that the Colombian Constitution and Colombian laws acknowledge the rights of ethnic groups, and that Colombia officially participates in international fora about biodiversity, make the Colombian Pacific region one of the most crucial arenas for contemporary debates about biodiversity.

Since the late 1980s, the government has been pursuing a wide-ranging policy of integration with other economies of the Pacific basin. The Pacific Ocean—renamed “the sea of the twenty-first century”—is perceived as the socio-economic, and to a lesser extent cultural, space of the future.

ETHNIC MOBILIZATION IN THE PACIFIC REGION

Since the early 1970s, indigenous groups from all over the world, especially Colombia and elsewhere in Latin America, have renewed with particular intensity their struggle for survival. They now demand specific rights based on ethnic difference and no longer solely as agrarian social sectors in search of basic rights. These mobilizations have had an impact on multilateral arenas such as UNESCO, the ILO, and the UN. In particular, ILO agreement #169 involved a detailed acknowledgement of the rights of indigenous peoples of the world, and was sanctioned as law by many of the signatory countries. This was the case in Colombia, with the approval of Law 21 of 1991. However, as Flórez (2000: 5) notes, there is no national legislation or international agreements for the explicit protection of traditional knowledge from undue appropriation by multinationals buttressed by the governments of capitalist metropolises. The regulation of such activities is thus one of the urgent issues that ethnic movements see the need to target.

The irruption of the concept of biodiversity and its varied consequences has taken place in Colombia within a context of three decades of indigenous struggle and one decade of black community struggle for the collective ownership of their territory, respect towards their socio-cultural particularities, and autonomy of indigenous authorities. As a result of this collective mobilization of indigenous and black communities, Colombian legislation,

by way of different constitutional regulations, laws, and decrees, now acknowledges these rights. But the ability of the Colombian state to enforce its own laws is extremely weak.

Indigenous peoples from the region are the minority group. Numbering around 50,000, they are almost all located in the northern portion of the department of Chocó. A much smaller group is based in the southern departments. In Chocó, black inhabitants have been organized since 1980 through the Embera Wounan Regional Organization (Organización Regional Embera Wounan, or OREWA). OREWA includes 150 local community councils or governments (*cabildos*). In the southern portion of the Pacific coastal forests there are much smaller regional organizations made up of Embera groups, known in the region as *eperara siepidara*. There are around 7000 Embera organized under the Antioquia Indigenous Organization (Organización Indígena de Antioquia, or OIA) and in the larger communities of the Chamí area in Risaralda. They inhabit the slopes of the mountainous range adjacent to the northern part of the Pacific coastal plain in the departments of Antioquia and Risaralda, areas that have been the object of intensive colonization for almost a century. In the space between the mountain range and the Pacific jungle, in the Department of Nariño, around 5000 members of the Awá community are organized around the Union of the Awá People (Unión del Pueblo Awá, or UNIPA).

The organization of rural populations from the Pacific started to develop twenty years ago. At the time, a group of young indigenous high school students, supported by Catholic missionaries and inspired by the emerging organizations of indigenous peoples from the Cauca department in Colombia and other parts of Latin America, created the Embera Wounan Regional Organization of Chocó. This organization engaged in a struggle for the recognition of indigenous territories, respect for their culture, and the organizational linkage of all indigenous communities in the region. Two decades later, OREWA successfully registered property titles in reservations corresponding to the majority of indigenous lands and established local councils (*cabildos*) in almost all of the indigenous communities in Chocó (Pardo, 1997: 233). Throughout, OREWA has had to confront timber companies, mining businesses, road construction, hydroelectric projects, and, more recently, attempts to develop research on biological and genetic resources without previous consultation. The above-mentioned processes of organization in the areas adjoining the mountain range in the departments of Antioquia, Risaralda, and Nariño, as well as in the lowland coastal forests of Valle, Cauca, and Nariño, are somewhat more recent.

In the early 1980s, black population groups of the Atrato River, organized under the Atrato Integral Peasant Association, or ACIA (Asociación Campesina Integral del Atrato), involved the association, with missionary support

in the defense of their territory and natural resources against large timber companies, which had obtained great concessions from the state. After intense mobilization and tortuous negotiation with the government, ACIA achieved the acknowledgment of the communities' right to access and protection of enormous territorial extensions vital for their survival, and which previously had been considered wastelands. Only in recent years has the banner of cultural difference become the most important element of this black organization, particularly as a result of a new movement in the Pacific region. In this sense, there are two main factors: first, the developmental and capitalist assault on the region, fueled by the process of economic opening and the region's integration into the country; and second, the constitutional reform process that culminated in the election of the National Constituent Assembly and the replacement of the Constitution of 1886.

For the black communities of the Pacific, this was a unique opportunity to construct their identity according to cultural, political, and socioeconomic demands and proposals. Given the fact that blacks did not succeed in securing their own representatives to the 1991 Constituent Assembly, their situation was presented by the indigenous representatives. The cultural and territorial rights of black communities were finally included in Law 70 of 1993, two years after the promulgation of the new Political Constitution.

ACIA's experience in the middle Atrato region and its demands for the recognition of the collective character of the territory and its cultural distinctiveness were crucial in the process that led to the recognition of the rights of black populations in the 1991 Constitution. They were also fundamental for the emergence of a dynamics that led to the organization of the black communities in the whole Pacific area. In Chocó, shortly after ACIA, other organizations began to form along other rivers, such as the Baudó, the upper and lower San Juan, and the lower Atrato. Later on, as a sequel to Constituent Assembly discussions, activist organizations emerged in the greater urban centers with the aim of stimulating the organization of black rural communities within departments.

The new constitution gave unprecedented rights to ethnic and religious minorities and explicitly recognized specific rights for indigenous peoples, granting them unalienable territories in the form of reservations and recognizing their political autonomy. The constitutional change provided a new context for a series of social processes, black and indigenous organizations being the most visible among these. The new constitution ordered the promulgation of a law for the safeguarding of the territories, society, and culture of the black communities in the rainforests of the Pacific and similar areas. As a consequence, the government presented Law 70 of 1993, which was approved. This law established the creation of collective territories for the black communities of the Pacific, their administration by community

councils, and other measures for the protection of the culture and society of these social groups.

The actions undertaken by black populations ten years ago with the aims of presenting their case to the Assembly, exerting pressure for the promulgation of Law 70, and participating in their own development, have extended the organizational process to the majority of black populations of the Pacific. These started as nuclei of urban activists, which disseminated information and educated black river-dwellers on the possibility of securing their territories as well as their own cultures. Later, in 1992, in order to promote debate on legislation related to black communities, the government provided resources for organizing workshops in the whole Pacific area. These resources were mainly awarded to incipient organizations in the departments, a fact that allowed them to consolidate their influence.

Mobilization and discussion during the Constituent Assembly (1990–1991) in preparation for the drafting of Law 70 (1992 and 1993) and its later disclosure were financed by the government, with significant leadership on the part of some fluvial basin organizations from Chocó and organizations from the departments of Valle, Cauca, and Nariño. In the latter, between 1993 and 1998, the Process of Black Communities—PCN—a network made up of more than 140 local organizations, played a leading role in the struggle for constitutional rights for black communities and the defense of their territories.

The PCN's most distinctive feature is the articulation of a political proposal whose character and base are mainly ethno-cultural. Their vision is not that of a movement based on a catalogue of "needs" and demands for "development" but that of a struggle presented in terms of defending cultural differences. Therein lies its most radical character. The PCN coordinated departmental organizations known as *palenques* in Valle, Cauca, Nariño, and on the Atlantic coast. With the advancement of the process of registration of collective territories, the influence of the PCN at the national level and that of the *palenques* at the departmental level has diminished as community councils consolidate.

At the third National Assembly of Black Communities (Asamblea Nacional de Comunidades Negras), where the PCN was formally constituted in September of 1993, the participants proposed goals such as the following: 1) reaffirming identity (the right to be black); 2) the right to the land; 3) autonomy, especially in the realm of politics; 4) the right to construct an autonomous perspective of the future based on black culture (Grueso *et al.*, 1998).

Considerations about biodiversity and the rights of local populations over the region's biological and genetic resources occupy a prominent position in the mobilization agendas of both indigenous and black organizations of the

Pacific. Very important among contemporary anti-hegemonic expressions, the ethnic-territorial movements of the Pacific, be they Amerindian or black, have succeeded in removing vast territories from private, individual, and mercantile land property regimes and in placing them under local population control for sustainable use.

The struggle of these groups for controlling their territory and their natural resources has developed on several fronts: against the crudest extraction methods such as strip-mining and forest devastation; against infrastructure work such as roads, ports, and hydroelectric plants threatening community welfare; against capitalist forms of agro-industrial exploitation that endanger ecological viability or access to land (such as shrimp nurseries, palm tree plantations, and palmetto trunk heart exploitation); against attempts to explore genetic resources on the part of multinational companies; or against state regulations (such as in the case of access to mangrove areas and their inclusion in collective territories or the viability of including artisan mining in the mining code).

Thus, these movements have been struggling against different forms of exclusion, domination, and exploitation. Analogous to what Santos and Santos (2000: 18) observe, the movements have achieved creative results regarding the contradictions that emerged in the process of collective action, and have developed emancipatory relationships while confronting established power in different situations.

For activists, the defense of particular cultural practices of riverbank communities is a strategic decision, inasmuch as these practices are seen not only as forms of resistance against capitalism, but also as elements of an alternative ecological rationality. In this way, the movement is constructed on the basis of networks of cultural practices and meanings that are deeply rooted in riverbank communities and are part of their active construction of worlds (Melucci, 1989). Nevertheless, the movement conceives these networks as bases for the political configuration of an identity related to the encounter with modernity—the state, capital, science, biodiversity—rather than to timeless essences.

As prescribed by Law 70 (1993), the registration of Black Collective Territories in the Pacific has been taking place since 1997. The first title was granted to some localities of the Lower Atrato river in March of 1997; in February of 1998, the government gave ACIA the collective ownership of around 650,000 hectares in the Mid Atrato. Since then, smaller collective territories in different parts of the Pacific area have been legalized, in a process that has considerably changed organizational patterns in the three southern departments. The leadership of urban activists from the main towns and cities of the Pacific (Buenaventura, Guapi, and Tumaco) has progressively receded to give way to the community councils created by Law 70 as collegiate administrators of collective territories.

Most of these community councils have formed in sub-regional organizations, which, although they have not explicitly given up departmental organization, have gradually gained independence and autonomy. As collective property is legalized, urban activists lose their influence on rural communities, in spite of the fact that they are still quite visible and maintain communication with governmental institutions. Thus, the organizing pattern that has prevailed in northern Chocó since the mid-1980s, when the movement started—sub-regional associations of adjacent riverbank communities joined in the struggle for collective territory—is gradually consolidating in the southern part of the Pacific region (Pardo, 2000: 339). This is what activists and analysts of the black community movement have labeled “ethnic-territorial organizations.”

Indigenous and black movements are thus involved in complex networks of national and international relations that help them deal with the isolation and anomie that the hegemonic system has imposed on them. Not only have they joined networks of anti-hegemonic globalization, but also several alliances and strategic coalitions have been implemented among black and indigenous organizations. Since indigenous communities began organizing seven years before black populations, this previous experience enabled them to support emerging black organizations in 1987, particularly ACIA. Shortly thereafter, in 1989, ACIA and OREWA promoted the creation of the Peasant Association of the San Juan River (ACADESAN), which led to the first meeting between black and indigenous communities. As a result of this meeting, the bold idea of creating an inter-ethnic collective territory was proposed (OBAPO, OREWA, and ACIA, 1990–1991). OREWA and other black organizations continued coordinating mobilizations to the point of jointly supporting the indigenous candidate of the Chocó region to the Constituent Assembly of 1991. The indigenous representative was elected and had a significant role in securing the titling of collective territories for black populations (Wade, 1995). Currently, in the Chocó region, these organizations continue coordinating their positions regarding certain issues, as well as their participation in public entities as mandated by legislation.

In the region to the south of Chocó, the indigenous population is considerably smaller and their organizations more recent. In this area, black organizations have formed in departmental federations (the so-called *palenques*), many of which are coordinated at the national level by the PCN (Process of Black Communities). These organizations' joint actions have recently produced important results regarding demands to include mangrove areas in the collective titles. The Ministry of the Environment argued that mangrove areas were considered public and therefore could not be part of collective titles. However, the organizations stated that the public status of the mangroves was violated when the state itself permitted shrimp companies

to construct gigantic pools that seriously altered the mangrove ecology. Finally, in 2000, the government accepted the demand to include the mangroves in the titles, although not as unalienable property. In claiming control over mangrove areas, the movements continue to broaden their conception of nature-territory as a vital space of complex and varied interactions between populations and the environment, therefore fighting against the increasing incursions of capital to commodify nature.

Indigenous organizations form part of the Colombian National Indigenous Organization (ONIC), which maintains active and permanent international contacts with other ethnic, human rights, and environmental organizations that support grassroots movements. Black organizations have also established relations with international entities. International committees, mainly European, have visited the areas struck by war and violence. Both indigenous and black organizations have developed projects funded by international organizations from different countries. European Catholic organizations have been constant sponsors of indigenous organizations and of ACIA. Both black and indigenous leaders regularly participate in international forums and voice their positions. PCN activists, for example, have attended numerous international meetings, as part of both anti-globalization networks as well as black and environmental activist networks (Escobar, 2000). More recently, black and indigenous movements have been forced to appeal to all possible national and international contacts to seek solidarity and support in view of the brutal impact of war on the populations and territories of the region.

THE WAR EXTENDS TO THE PACIFIC

For six years, the struggles of grassroots organizations of the Pacific for the control and humanist use of their territories and natural resources have been dramatically affected by the irruption of the war that has devastated many other Colombian regions. The intensification of military confrontations has revealed that in addition to the economic, geopolitical, and biotechnological dimensions that led to different disputes for the region's control, its military character must also be considered. The region's characteristics make it a privileged space for the circulation of illegal weapons and drugs. The vast wilderness areas are ideal sites for armed groups to operate in. Within the geopolitics of war, military control of this territory has become immensely valuable. Paramilitaries are striving to extend their control towards the northwestern part of Colombia and in this way insure domination over the strategic Panamanian border. All armed groups want to control the passageways to the Pacific as well as the fast-growing coca plantations in areas inhabited by the black communities that are expanding towards the north of Nariño.

Furthermore, activities carried out by social movements regarding territorial control have affected the interests of capitalist investments in the region, which include timber, gold, and palmetto extraction industries, as well as extensive cultures of shrimp and African palm trees. This situation easily results in the emergence of armed groups that seek either to blackmail the companies or to harass social movement activists, which quickly degenerates into open confrontation between paramilitaries and guerrillas, with the occasional presence of the army.

As illustrated in the works of Romero (2000) and Uribe (2000: 25–26), confrontations among armed groups rarely lead to direct combat between their protagonists. The most generalized tactic is to insure territorial control by manipulating the local population through terror. When one of these armed organizations attacks another, it does so by eliminating or expelling the civilian population that had been previously subdued by their adversaries. For years, the northern sector of the Pacific region had been a rearguard for FARC. As part of the paramilitary project to dominate the Colombian northwest, in late 1996, these groups began raiding the populations of the lower Atrato, killing numerous people and leaders as well as forcefully displacing the majority of the population. The surviving leaders of the local black peasant organization, the Peasant Organization of the Lower Atrato (OCABA), which had received the first title for collective territories established by Law 70, were forced to flee and the organization virtually disappeared (interview with OCABA leaders, Quibdó, 1998). Thousands of inhabitants from the Lower Atrato River and the Chocóan Urabá were displaced, resulting in tremendous overcrowding at Quibdó, the capital of the department. Faced with governmental inefficiency, other social organizations expressed their solidarity by stepping in to obtain funding for meeting the basic needs of the affected population. The paramilitaries continued to move southwards, and by early 1999 were already in control of the principal populations.

For years, the Antioquia Indigenous Organization (OIA) proclaimed an “active neutrality” towards the armed conflict. This reluctance to get involved led to retaliation from FARC, which killed various indigenous authorities in Urabá and the western part of the department. This has deeply affected Emberá-Katio communities, whose members constitute the greater part of the organization. Shortly after, paramilitaries were making similar accusations and killing other community leaders.

In March of 2000, FARC tried to recuperate the lost territory by destroying the towns of Vigía del Fuerte and Bellavista in the mid-Atrato region, the heart of ACIA territory. A few months after the death of the Bellavista parish priest and a secular missionary, their boat having been attacked by a paramilitary motorboat, the entire population of the village of Neguá had to flee to Quibdó.

There is a permanent anxiety, and new confrontations are expected to happen at any given moment (Wouters, 1999: 265).

In the Nariño department, the southernmost part of the Pacific region, the war has also arrived with devastating consequences. The trajectory between Pasto and Tumaco, one of the two roads that connect the Andes with the coast in Colombia, has been a war area for approximately five years. In the neighboring area of Barbacoas, there is a strong ELN presence, and in the outskirts of Tumaco there have been threats and selective assassinations of black leaders who have denounced the abusive expansion of palm tree plantations and shrimp nurseries (Agudelo, 2000).

On the other road that leads to the Pacific, from Cali to the Buenaventura international port, the situation is also quite serious. FARC and ELN have been attacking this area for two years, and the paramilitaries have also begun to dispute the region. Similar situations have been occurring in the Pan-American route between Cali and Popayán. As is often the case, local communities have been the victims of killings, the destruction of towns, massacres, displacement, and generalized terror.

Thus, the region's situation is grim; the majority of the territories in which black and indigenous grassroots organizations operate are sites of armed confrontation. Armed groups aim to gain territorial control by inflicting terror on local communities. Faced with this situation, the priorities of the ethnic organizations often tend to center primarily on survival and denunciation, while the projects of territorial and natural resource protection have to be put on hold.

Accordingly, black and indigenous organizations have had to rely on previously constituted networks of national and international groups that support grassroots and human rights organizations. The Chocó organizations, particularly ACIA, have joined a campaign that gathered diverse sectors of the population together with the goal of declaring the region a “Peace Territory.” The PCN has proposed the creation of “Protection Territories” for the southern departments, in which attacked or threatened civilian populations can seek shelter and rely on international monitoring systems (Agudelo, 2000). In recent years, displaced black communities have formed organizations that work closely with the ethnic-territorial organizations.

In mid-2000, the situation of indigenous communities in western Antioquia and in other parts of the country was so serious that the United Nations made a special appeal to the Colombian government to protect these communities caught in the middle of war. Nevertheless, towards the end of 2000, a FARC squad killed an OREWA leader, as well as the mayor of Juradó, on the coastal Panamanian border. Practically all major international human rights organizations have asked the Colombian government to act and protect defenseless populations caught in the crossfire.

However, the situation of displacement and aggression towards civilians has reached such dimensions in Colombia that the cases occurring in the Pacific region are just a few of the many in the rest of the country. Indeed, today Colombia is experiencing one of the most serious situations of displaced communities in the world, with more than two million people forcefully expelled from their homes.

ETHNIC MOVEMENTS AND BIODIVERSITY

Will social movements from the tropical forest be able to become important actors within the discourses that are shaping the future of the wilderness? Will they be able to jointly participate in the production of both technoscience and society, of nature and culture, which has been set in motion by the biodiversity network?

The adoption of cultural difference as the articulating concept of political strategy was the result of several historical factors, and was also linked to the wide-ranging debates fostered by constitutional change. In their re-interpretation of regional history, activists from the Pacific not only departed from an integrationist perspective, strongly rejecting the myth of racial democracy, but also highlighted the fact that black and indigenous communities from the Pacific have historically favored their isolation from both the national society and economy. They recognize, however, that such an ethics of isolation and independence is less and less plausible under current integrative tendencies and in view of the unavoidable presence of the mass media, modern commodities, etc. In this sense, the relationship between territory and culture is of the greatest importance. Activists conceive the territory as "a space for the creation of futures, of hope, and continued existence." The loss of territory is equated with "a return to the era of slavery."

It is from this recognition that an interest in diversity both emerges and provides a gateway to the future. It is not by chance then that several black professionals linked to the movement have decided to participate in a national project for biodiversity. Negotiations with the Bio Pacific Project (Proyecto Bio Pacífico, or PBP), a governmental conservation and research project financed by the Global Environment Facility, led black and indigenous organizations to participate in the planning process by disseminating strategies for the awareness and divulgation of biodiversity throughout the region. The activism of social ethnic movements has also succeeded in securing the participation of their representatives in the general assemblies and boards of directors of the regional corporations, which are the environmental authorities at department level. They also participate in the Institute for Environmental Research in the Pacific (Instituto de Investigaciones Ambientales del Pacífico), which inherited

from the PBP both the archives and the mission of research and conservation of biodiversity in the Pacific region.

Even though they are aware of the risks that such participation entails, they are convinced that the discourse on biodiversity opens up possibilities that they cannot afford to ignore. Biodiversity can also be an important element in the formulation of alternative strategies for development. As activists themselves point out, they do not want any kind of conventional development, and yet they are less clear about what they do want. They also recognize that experts—ecologists, anthropologists, biologists, planners, etc.—can be important allies, which points to the possibility of a collaboration between experts and activists from social movements.

The notion of "territory" is a new concept in social struggles in tropical forests. Peasants are involved in struggles about land throughout Latin America. The right to a territory—as an ecological, productive, and cultural space—is a new political demand, which is presently promoting an important re-territorialization, i.e., the formation of new territories motivated by new perceptions and political practices. Discourses on biodiversity and capitalist dynamics in its ecological phase open up spaces that activists attempt to use as elements of struggle. This dialectic presents a series of paradoxes for the movement, including contradictory aspects such as defending local nature and culture by means of a language that does not reflect the local experience of nature and culture.

There are theoretical grounds for anticipating alliances between local communities and technoscience. The political advantages of such alliances cannot be discarded beforehand. The case of a certain number of Third World NGOs that have succeeded in articulating opposing views circulating inside the network, mainly due to new practices and new means such as electronic networks and preparatory UN meetings, can be instructive.

The ways in which nature has been understood and related to in the Pacific region are being transformed by the increasing penetration of capital, development, and modernity—including discourses about sustainable development and biodiversity. Present-day landscapes of both nature and culture are characterized by their hybrid character. Hybrid natures supposedly assume special forms in tropical forest areas. There, popular groups and social movements would seek to defend, through new practices, organic nature from attacks on the part of capitalist nature, in a possible alliance with techno-nature. In places such as the Colombian Pacific region, struggles for cultural difference are also struggles for biological diversity. What types of nature will it be possible to design and protect under these circumstances? Is it possible to construct a cultural politics about biodiversity that does not further promote the colonization of natural and cultural landscapes so typical of modernity? (Escobar, 1997b).

The struggles in the tropical forests of the world are positioned precisely at the point of convergence of different historical epistemic regimes, whose hybridization constitutes a unique form of postmodernity. These struggles would have exemplary stories to tell us about what "nature" has been, about what it now is, and about what it will become in the future. If it is true that philosophical practice is the creation of concepts—the construction of possibilities for life through new ways of thinking, imagining, and understanding (Deleuze and Guattari, 1993)—and that nowadays such a task implies renewing resistance against capitalism, activists in the tropical forests might be able to keep the dreams of other lands and peoples alive for the future. Utopian? Perhaps. But let us keep in mind that "utopia designates the conjunction of philosophy with the present. [. . .] Through utopia, philosophy becomes politics, bringing to an extreme the critique of its era" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1993: 101). Some of these utopias of nature and culture can be seen in the dissident practices of indigenous and black activists in the Colombian Pacific region.

DISPUTES OVER BIODIVERSITY IN THE PACIFIC REGION

In the face of national and international pressure related to the natural and genetic resources of this region, organized black and indigenous communities have prepared to wage an unequal and strategic struggle for control over the last territorial space in which they still have significant cultural and social influence. With respect to the possibility of diminishing state and capital predatory activities, discussions on biodiversity are of the greatest importance for indigenous and black movements. They have amply demonstrated the lesser impact of traditional systems on biodiversity, while deconstructing the perception that forests are being destroyed by poor indigenous people and blacks. Future developments related to biodiversity will be conditioned by three factors: the issue of peace and violence in Colombia, the ability to imagine and implement alternative development strategies, and the persistence and strength of the movement.

The construction of notions of territory and region in the Colombian Pacific is very recent. Early response on the part of black communities and organizations to the capitalist assault on the region of the middle Atrato (in timber and mining, especially) from the mid-1980s on was important for the construction of such notions. This assault, following William Villa's (1998) correct analysis, not only promoted the erosion of traditional production practices and the communities' modes of settlement and appropriation of the environment, but also forced these communities to delimit and defend their territory from outside invasion. This appropriation of the territory took a definitive turn when ACIA (Asociación Integral del Atrato) entered the

scene; ACIA not only introduced the issue of ethnicity into the discussion but also started questioning the state. These struggles mark "the beginning of a new territorial order for the Pacific and the verification of the efficacy of a political discourse that articulates black cultural identity with a specific form of territorial appropriation" (Villa, 1998: 441).

It can be said that this articulation between cultural identity and territorial appropriation underlies the political ecology of the social movement of black and indigenous communities. The demarcation of collective black territories and indigenous reservations has led activists to develop a conception of territory that emphasizes articulations between settlement patterns, uses of space, and meaning/use practices concerning resources, which are expressed, in the case of indigenous populations, in ancestral cosmologies.

The "traditional production systems" of riverine communities, more oriented towards local consumption than towards the market and accumulation, have operated as forms of resistance. They have been sustainable to the point that they have allowed for the reproduction of cultural and biophysical ecologies and the definition of biodiversity as "territory plus culture." A vision of the Pacific as a "territory-region of ethnic groups" is closely related to this definition: a cultural and ecological whole that constitutes a space laboriously constructed through the daily cultural and economic practices of black and indigenous communities.

The territory-region is a conceptual unity as well as a political project. It is an attempt to explain biological diversity from within the eco-cultural logic of the Pacific. The territory is the space where communities appropriate the ecosystem through complex interactions with it. In contrast, the territory-region articulates the communities' life project with the social movement's political project; in other words, it is a political construction in defense of the territory and its sustainability. The territory-region strategy is essential to the strengthening of specific territories in their diverse ecological, economic, and cultural dimensions.

Could we say that this represents an alternative approach to biodiversity or even a legitimate political ecology? If the territory is an assemblage of projects and representations from which a whole series of behaviors and commitments can pragmatically emerge in aesthetic, social, cultural, and cognitive time and space—i.e., an existential space of self-reference from whence "dissident subjectivities" can emerge (Guattari, 1995a, 1995b)—then it is clear that the movements in the Pacific are promoting such a project. In this sense, what is at stake with respect to indigenous reservations and black collective territories is not "land," or even this or that community's territory. It is the concept of territoriality itself as a central element in the political construction of reality based on the cultural experience of ethnic groups. The struggle for territory is therefore a cultural struggle for autonomy and self-determination.

Territory, political autonomy, natural resources, authorship of developments, and biological uses are therefore all part of the same complex problem. The continued existence of rural ethnic groups is concomitant with access to their traditional territories and control over the natural resources contained in such traditionally managed territories. Therefore, the survival of ethnic groups also depends on the implementation of legislation protecting and guaranteeing cultural specificity and political autonomy. In this context, the struggles of ethnic groups to exert control over the uses of the biodiversity found in their territories, as well as over the applications of traditional knowledge associated with biodiversity, constitute an essential factor for their cultural and political survival.

In order to promote innovation in local emergent communities such as those in the Colombian Pacific region, while considering as well the applications of their knowledge in the global economy, it is necessary to consider the ways in which global knowledge can be linked to local practices in a positive manner. This approach directly opposes dominant proposals based on intellectual property rights and is related with the political ecology that social movements have configured. As Martínez Alier argues (1996), the conflict inherent to the debates on biodiversity, between economic and ecological reasoning, needs to be politically resolved. Otherwise, conservation strategies will result in the commodification of biodiversity. Is it possible to defend a post-economistic ecological production rationale? In practice, it appears that social movements are the strongest champions of "ecological economies." At least they refuse to reduce their territorial and ecological demands to the exclusive terms of the market, and this is a valuable lesson for any strategy aimed at biodiversity conservation (Varese, 1996).

Analogous to what Visvanathan concludes in his research in India, the ethnic movements of the Colombian Pacific face capitalist rationality with the logic of age-old production practices. These practices are in many aspects incompatible with the institutionality and discursivity of development grounded on a particular predatory and instrumental version of science and economy. Visvanathan states that the issue of traditional knowledge should be founded on a corpus of principles that questions Western knowledge; in other words, a worldview grounded on the creative use of nature and the moderate satisfaction of the needs of every society (Visvanathan, 2000: 36–42). Attempts to establish a fragmented vision of life (as genetic or biochemical components) and traditional knowledge (as having only potential capitalist value) in national legislations and international agreements can lead, according to Santos (2000: 22–24), to the rejection of native peoples' rights to be acknowledged as integral societies, carriers of non-fragmented knowledges and non-separable biological, economic, or social practices.

The ethnic groups of the Pacific region and their organizations have taken important measures with respect to biodiversity management and its related knowledge. The indigenous organizations OREWA, of Chocó, and OIA, of Antioquia, have issued bylaws on both the use and dissemination of traditional knowledge, whereby demands for those interested in researching natural resources are established. These organizations declare that traditional knowledge is the collective property of indigenous peoples. They affirm that all research projects must clearly benefit their community and that they must be submitted to previous consultation and analysis within local communities and the organization. Finally, all ulterior uses of research results must be agreed upon with the organization. OREWA has gone even further, indefinitely prohibiting any investigation related to traditional knowledge and genetic resources. Black organizations have also become aware of the importance of controlling the access to and use of traditional knowledge and research in collective territories. Most organizations require a consultation process for research projects.

Indigenous and black leaders have started taking part in international debates about biodiversity. The Conference of the Parties of the CBD, in Buenos Aires in 1996, for example, included indigenous and black delegates from Colombia who together agreed to propose a moratorium for research projects on biodiversity until the collective rights of ethnic groups are guaranteed. Colombian ethnic groups have already been able to see at close hand examples of uncontrolled bio-prospecting, such as an attempt to patent in the US some components of *yagé*, a sacred hallucinogenic, and the non-authorized collecting of blood samples from indigenous groups that were later sent to the US.

Biodiversity is a construction that constitutes a powerful interface between nature and culture, giving rise to a vast network of localities and actors through which concepts, policies, and ultimately cultures and ecologies are debated and negotiated. This construction is increasingly present in the strategies of social movements around the world. The social ethnic movement from the Colombian Pacific region, as we have seen, has generated a cultural politics that has significant ecological concerns, including biodiversity. It progresses through the slow and laborious construction of Afro-Colombian identities and the re-affirmation of indigenous identity, both of which are interconnected with alternative constructions of development, territory, and biodiversity conservation.

Although still incipient and precarious, the articulation of a linkage between culture, nature, and development represents an alternative framework of political ecology for discussions about biodiversity. One thing is clear: the distance that separates dominant discourses on biodiversity conservation and the political ecology of social movements is enormous and

perhaps increasing. As we have shown, these movements' struggles have different and complex facets. They challenge the nation-state in order to achieve the right to exist as different societies with their own authorities and norms. They confront numerous economic agents who seek to profit from their territories and ancestral knowledge. They resist the irruption of war agents who do not respect any right. They create and extend local and international circuits of dissident actors that question the hegemonic order. These aspects of their struggles join the efforts of others who are building and connecting anti-hegemonic projects of diverse origins. Thus, these social movements are, to a greater or lesser degree, emancipatory expressions that strive for "the transformation of power into shared authority, the transformation of despotic might into democratic rights, and the transformation of regulatory knowledge into emancipatory knowledge" (Santos and Matias, 2000: 36).

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Part IV

THE RESISTANCE OF THE SUBALTERN: THE CASE OF MEDICINE