

Gringos and Caimitos

A political ecology of coloniality in a marginalized farming
community

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Abstract:

This study examines articulations between place, power, and difference between social groups in a farming community of afro-descendance and foreigners appropriating land in Ecuador.

It is an iterative-inductive ethnography that combines the extended case study with autoethnography to move between layers of systemic structures, intersubjectivity and subjectivity. Socio-ecological space is understood in terms of nature regimes read through the lens of decoloniality. Local models of organic natures are constantly threatened by capitalist natures, why collaboration between lighter versions are formed protecting ecology and to a certain degree the autonomy of the villager. However, these versions still pertain within modern/colonial paradigm, why coloniality to some extent becomes reconfigured in the community by the logic of hierarchical dichotomies of white man and all other(s) Even when it is detrimental to the intentions. Why I propose self-reflexivity, a reflection on one's positionality and a responsiveness to historically subjugated others, as a way to decolonize the gringo and bring forth other ways of being in the world.

to Jonny

Acknowledgements

This might just be another thesis, and not even a good one for that matter. But it is my work and it has been a long journey towards accepting and realizing this. And most importantly it will be a done thesis, showing that it is possible to finish even after years of warring with oneself. I am most grateful for all the many people who have been part of this journey. I have been very fortunate in receiving the support that I have needed. I know many are less privileged and once they fail to follow the set format of a university degree, they will be facing extra bills and labyrinths of bureaucratic demands which goes counter to what one really needs when met with life's tough realities, and finishing studies seems like a vague dream.

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Introduction

Topic

Who has the right to determine the future course of an entire village and the territory? In Caimito different social groups are negotiating, competing, struggling, and merging over the uses of the land. New settlers from the Global North and from the capital Quito have since the millennium appropriated land in Caimito for different activities. These interventions have protected the bio-physical space and Caimiteños from becoming fully incorporated into capitalist regime whilst improving standards of living, but have also stratified the villagers in terms of wealth and influence, and hierarchical dichotomies are reconfigured when white man imposes his interest and epistemes. Read through the lens of decoloniality it becomes possible to discern the articulation of coloniality on the villagers and eco-social space, and the antagonistic process of oppression and resistance as inhabitation of a shared fractured locus at the colonial difference as a place of making new sense.

General framing, research questions, and aim

My thesis is a political ecology multiscale research (Paulson and Gezon, 2004) investigating the articulations between place, power, and difference as they play out in the locality of Caimito. “Political ecology can be defined as the study of the manifold articulations of history and biology and the cultural mediations through which such articulations are necessarily established” (Escobar, 1999, p 3). Like humans, geophysical space or place can be seen as constituted or in the forming in its relation to cultural practices over time and its nature – “the existence of an independent order of nature, including a biological body” (Ibid., p 3), what Paulson calls socio-ecological space. In this sense they can both be seen as actors engaging in dialectical exchange but to understand the contemporary situation, it becomes essential to also place them within a historical and political context to understand the power dynamics of the interlocking systems of coloniality.

I will do so through the lens of decolonial theory as an extension to the anti-essentialist framework on the nature regimes of the political ecologist, Arturo Escobar. This framework allows me to examine the manifold forms that nature takes in Caimito as co-constructions of interrelating regimes with different perspectives and management of nature, namely organic

and capitalist. Decolonial theory offers an extension to the understanding of power articulation between the regimes, as one is operating under a hegemon paradigm that Quijano has named modernity/coloniality (2007). Modernity is an epistemological framework that is bound up with European colonial projects of categorizing the world and its inhabitants into binary opposites (Lugones, 2010) with the construction of races as a premise to colonize and enslave those who were non-Europeans while extracting all resources of their lands, a logic of coloniality that continues in present times (Quijano, 2007). Decolonial turn also offers the space in which the multiplicities of those who have been constructed as 'other', contest to the repressive universalism of the Global North, and come together as embodied subjects to create social change (Maldonado-Torres 2016). This shows that other thoughts and knowledges, and ways of being in the world are possible, rather than that of hegemon modernity/coloniality alone. The modernity/coloniality research program - un paradigma otro (Mignolo cited in Escobar, 2007), counters modernist narratives by inquiring at the borders of systems of thoughts, aspiring towards non-Eurocentric modes of thinking. It is an academic and social movement stemming out of Latin America, operating under a modified world systems perspective, while concerning the cultural and political reality of Latin America, bringing the subaltern knowledge of social groups that are exploited and oppressed (Escobar, 2007).

In my thesis I will explore how coloniality and decoloniality are articulated in Caimito, a rural village of cacao farmers in Ecuador. I will look at how power dynamics of the interlocking systems of coloniality are mediated between locals of mostly afro-descendance, and gringos with various forms of relation to Caimito. This will be done by analyzing the nexus of the following three questions:

How is coloniality articulated in Caimito? How are people mediating and resisting coloniality? And how is socio-ecological space part of these power dynamics?

With a critical reading over the hidden power struggles in the socio-ecological space of Caimito, my aim is to reveal obscured dogmas that reproduce hierarchical dichotomies and inequality, whilst also giving voice and space to the disclosed inner worlds through partial connection shared, in the hope that it will cultivate processes of decoloniality.

I will draw from my experience of living and working in the community under my internship period in September 2017 to February 2018, and subsequent visits throughout 2018. This thesis is an extension of observations in my internship paper (Diggle, 2020), why some information and parts are reapplied to build up this thesis. In this paper I examined interpersonal experiences and emotions between members in the village, and me as fieldworker, volunteer, and friend, to reveal traps in ethnographic fieldwork and unmask unequal power relations, scratching at the surface of bigger structural exploitation. Furthermore, I draw on a great amount of secondary information from my network in Ecuador and media platforms. As such, my methodology is ethnography and autoethnography, following the framework of the extended case method (ECS) (Buraway, 1998).

Background

La provincia verde is how Esmeraldas is known in popular tongue - the province of green rich vegetation with resources in plentitude, where the land of Ecuador comes down from the Andes highland, and ends in the Pacific Ocean. Esmeraldas, one of 24 provinces in Ecuador, is located in the Choco bioregion, a 100.000km² biodiverse corridor from the Panama Canal to Cabo Pasado in the Province of Manabi (Boada, 2006). It ends in the Pacific Ocean with Galera San Francisco, one of Ecuador's first ocean bioreserves (Ministerio de Ambiente, 2015). Coastal towns like Atacames and Mompiche are popular holiday destinations amongst middleclass city-dwellers from the highlands and Quito, and the few foreign tourists who venture to these rural parts of Ecuador. Esmeraldas is one of the least developed provinces in Ecuador (Davidov 2016, Veuthey and Gerber, 2011). Afro-descendance have historically been concentrated in Esmeraldas and continues to have the highest percentage (Garner, 2007, Rahier, 1999, 2014). Black people were brought in from Columbia and the West Indies in the nineteenth century to build a coastal railway connecting Quito to Guayaquil, the port of commerce (Garner, 2007). Esmeraldas became a location inhabited by diasporic Africans. These maroons did not only escape enslavement, they "employed various methods to mediate their relationship with colonial authorities and native peoples" (Medina, 2006, p116). Later, Black Esmeraldeños played an important role in

the armed revolt that led to the liberal revolution in 1985, but they were not granted the same rights as indigenous people by the new president Eloy Alfaro. Furthermore, they did not receive official recognition for their military effort, nor in the onward narratives on nation building (Foote, 2006). They were written out of history. During the 1912-1916 civil war, *Guerra de Concha* Esmeraldas was subjected to a policy of malevolent neglect; it was excluded from state projects and cleaning through education, as it was reported as consisting of inherently dangerous people (Ibid., 2006). Esmeraldas and its people have historically been associated with violence, laziness, and backwardness, those are traits attributed to the people who historically have inhabited the space (Rahier, 2014).

Nation building in Latin America is based on what Garner calls the 'Moral economy of Whiteness'. This states that nation-building and race making is a processual and contextual intersection, while otherness is based on discourses of cleanliness originating from the Spanish rule of blood *Limpia de Sangre* that stratified societies into social class and racial hierarchy highly bound up with the mestizo identity that is still an obstacle for social mobility and access to democracy. Strategies for cleaning up the population or civilizing them have been blanqueamiento¹ and exclusion (Garner, 2007).

Geographical locations remain inherently racialized; populations are represented as belonging to a certain area despite internal migration and mix of populations (Radcliffe and Westwood, 1996). When San Lorenzo went from a black dominated place to a white dominated place with economic changes to cash economy in the 1970's a racial strategy of 'whiten up' in terms of values, speech, and behavior was deployed (Schubert cited in Garner, 2007). A material shift in the local economy was followed by an identity adaptation: "Only when white Serranos begin to dominate the business and political worlds of the black Costeño, does blanqueamiento appear a worthwhile objective: and then only in selected arenas" (Garner, 2007, p98).

In 1997, an afro-descendant won the beauty contest *Reina de Esmeraldas* for the first time, but this was followed by acts of blanqueamiento shortly after. The *Reina* reduced her blackness by changing her hair and eye color. She was negating the fact that only white or white-mestizo were considered ladies of intellect, respect, and education, while blacks were

¹ Changes in appearances to fit into norm of whiteness

only women of low-class. Most white-mestizos in Ecuador are included in the middle classes and national elites (Rahier, 1999).

Pressure from international legislations and political movements led to an adaptation in the constitution in 1998, declaring Ecuador a pluricultural y multiethnic country (Rahier, 2014), but even so, dominant national discourse of nationality continues to erase Black people from the national picture, and maintains racism that delegitimizes the struggle and organization for Black identity (Johnson, 2007). Even with the emergence of new traditional presentations of the afro-descendants culture “Blackness continues to be denigrated and located primarily at the margins of national identity” (Johnson, 2009, p.386). In a national census from 2010 on cultural identity, 71,93% of Ecuadoreans identified as mestizo, 7,03% as indigenous, and 7,9 % as Afroecuatorians. Yet in Esmeraldas, 43,91% identified as Afroecuatorians, making this by far the highest province (INEC, 2010), but what do these number actually tell us?

Ecuador’s economy is mainly based on exports of primary products: oil, bananas/plantains, shrimp, flowers, coffee, cacao, and fish products. Typical for economic modes based on monoculture and oil extraction, Ecuador’s economic situation has been a succession of booms and crises (Veuthey and Gerber, 2011). Banco Central de Ecuador (n.d.) ranked Esmeraldas as 7th in gross value of the 25 provinces in 2017. However, economist Estefania Suarez used the human development index and excluded extractivist activities, which moved Esmeraldas to 23rd (Suarez, 2019). The biggest net income of the provinces comes from the refinery of the Amazonian crude oil via the Trans-Andean pipeline (Banco Central de Ecuador, n.d.). The refinery used to be on the outskirts of Esmeraldas capital city, but as the city expanded, the area around it became more populated, so it is now inside the capital city. Other sources of income are agriculture and shrimp farming. The increase in monoculture has led to a drastic land-use change that is characterized by the loss of most of the natural ecosystems in the coastal region (Larrea Maldonado cited in Veuthey and Gerber, 2011). Many villages are turning into places that depend on cash-crop. Estero de Platano, a village in canton Muisne, is such an example, where previously subsistence came from sea or farming, it is now dependent on cacao as a cash-crop, and the villagers are having to deal with “the prospect of land developers making a bid for beachside property

and are themselves negotiating involvement with ecotourism activities.” (Davidov, 2016, p30).

Caimito, a small village in the same canton, shares the collective memory and material lived reality of what the colonial history, slave trade and diaspora, and later green revolution have done to the Americas with the place’s unique history, locality, and people.

Research methodology

My methodology is ethnography and I adhere to the epistemic tradition of reflexive science by applying ECM (Burawoy, 1998). In this framework, ethnographic data collection is done to allow for a multisystemic analysis used to extend on existing theory (Ibid., Samuels, 2009). Questions of power are quintessential including the power relation between researcher and participants. Positivist sciences enigma of objectivity is challenged, and the researcher aspires toward engagement with the subjects (Barata, 2010). I take this subject and object question a step further when I apply an autoethnographic and feminist approach by putting myself as scholarly activist under the loop to examine interpersonal experiences and vulnerabilities that I share(d) with social groups in Caimito (Behar, 1996).

Ethnography

Ethnography is an iterative-inductive research which means that it is a design that evolves throughout the course of the study (O’Rielly, 2009). Ethnography draws on a range of methods that involves contact with people in the context of their daily lives and cultures, observing what is taking place and closely listening to what is happening, and asking questions (Ibid.), but also participating in the social and cultural activities of everyday life (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw, 1995).

As a human ecologist scholar I do not only examine the human experiences and cultural practices in daily life, but I also bring Caimito into a larger context by drawing extra-local forces instrumented by coloniality as power regime, thus having a critical and a multiscale approach, that accords with ECS. Furthermore, I have a feminist approach in my forming of social relations to the place that enlightens and expands how I “produce knowledge” in fieldwork.

The Extended case study

ECS is a method that Burawoy takes up after the Manchester school of social anthropology. ECS, as elaborated by Burawoy, belongs to the reflexive model of science which has the intersubjectivity of researcher and subject of study as opposed to positive science (1998).

Reflexive science springs out of the irrevocable gap between positive theory and its practice that has been thoroughly criticized by postmodern scholars with the extreme consequence of some dismissing science all together. They fail to distinguish the pivotal difference between the models: "A self-critical positive science concentrates on context effects but thereby obscures the functioning of power. Constructing "detachment" and "distance" depends upon unproblematized relations of power. A self-critical reflexive science, on the other hand, takes context for granted, but displays the effects of power so that they can be better understood and contained. The limits of reflexive science lay the basis for a critical theory of society, by displaying the limits of human freedom" (Ibid., p24-25). ECS adds the contextual level of critical theory of society to the reflexive science while also displaying the effects of power, thus extending the model. It incorporates reflexive science to ethnography by 1) extracting the general from the unique, 2) moving from the "micro" to the "macro", and 3) connecting "the present to the past in anticipation of the future" (Ibid., p5).

What differentiates this model from grounded theory or deduction is that theory is neither a result of ethnographic research, nor is it a top down theory that controls the whole process. Theory is a guiding principle, but not determining (Barata, 2010). Burawoy arrives at a big picture by connecting his observations from various concrete situations. Whilst working as an expiate in the copper market and doing research with undergraduates on "postcolonialism" and Zambianism, he was very much part of the world he was studying and criticizing. He writes that beyond the predicament in ethnography of individual involvement are the predicaments of "producing theories, concepts, and facts that destabilize the world we seek to comprehend" (Burawoy, 1998, 4). We can either contain this, as is the positive science approach, or we can advantage it, as is done in the reflexive model. We can take advantage of the destabilization we produce when we root ourselves in theory that guides us in our dialogue with participants. Though we come into the field with our preconceptions

and frameworks, “they are more like prisms than templates, and they are emergent rather than fixed” (Ibid., p11). The dialogues between participant and observer give “an everchanging sieve for collecting data”. Dialogue and context are the main assets for the extended case study. Context is reality itself and must be studied to understand the content and form of dialogue; it is the “point of departure but not point of conclusion” (Ibid., p13). The extended case study consists of four dialogical contexts, which resembles the way that the ethnographic iterative-inductive research operates. They are intervention, process, structuration, and restructuring that I will elaborate on in my theory section.

Autoethnography

As an extension to the reflexive science premise of intersubjectivity of researcher and subject I also use autoethnography. I bring in subjectivist experiential writing to account for the subjective intensity of ethnographic fieldwork (Marécha, 2010) and I argue that this act makes myself as researcher accountable and reflexive towards my positionality and the infliction I create, which is important to counter coloniality within the act of doing ethnography (Diggle, 2020). A position I take up after Behar, that the emotional and subjective response of the observer in the relational exchange gives transparency: “what happens inside the observer must be made known” (1996, p.6) for when humans observe other humans. When I write autoethnographically I am conveying a specific standpoint and voice that accounts for my emotional and embodied experience, but it also reveals situated cultural influences of broader social relevance (Marécha, 2010). Knowledge is a joint force between the people worked with and the scholar. Joint forces are formed between the ethnographer and the people whose life worlds they are trying to understand (Burman, 2018), or partial connections as Haraway calls them (1991). These connections build the more they are subjected to the challenges of the members’ everyday life, as the more meaning has been acquired and jointly constructed in relationship with the people they have been working with. Writing the text is a constant negotiation and mediation between the people’s views, logic, and construction of their world (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw 1995). Reflexivity helps us to understand that peoples’ worlds are not determined by reified structures and other variables but are negotiated meanings constructed through

relationships. Therefore, putting one's self under the reflexive lens helps us to appreciate how our rendering of the world of those we study are also informed and constructed by the relationships we have formed (Ibid.). With her vulnerable observer approach, Behar takes reflexivity a step deeper by transcending boundaries between ethnography and autobiography (1996). To write vulnerably requires the ability "to draw deeper connections between one's personal experience and the subject under study" (Ibid., p.13) and to know "what aspects of the self are the most important filters through which one perceives the world, and more particularly, the topic being studied" (Behar, 1996, p.13). In my writing I draw on these shared connections in the form of shared positionality and/or shared vulnerabilities.

I do so to spare my informants from the discomfort of revealing their vulnerabilities and the undesired repercussions that can follow from sharing personal experiences. However, I have chosen not to anonymize the name of the village and organizations because I cannot write about contextual forces without localizing in time and space.

Power relation within a community is also a delicate matter. The community is burdened with conflicts within and without. I am not interested in the content of these, but in the root causes effecting on the conflicts. Without adequate training, it would have been ethically wrong and a hint to white imposter syndrome. Furthermore, I could have risked my social position of trust that I shared with people there. When power dynamics and conflicts are a delicate matter, talking about experiences of racism are even more so. This is why I did not probe deeper into this topic, and I did not understand the depth of it until after I had time to process it all. People were not openly talking about their feelings and emotions but putting words on emotions are not the only way to share them.

This leads me to my next point on the nondiscursive intangible emotions that are part of social processes. As I was still improving my Spanish, I was left to use different perceptive cognition than the dominant one of language. Reading situations and people, when done right, allows one to share the feelings and emotions of another, and when one has similar unconscious hurts, one reacts to this, setting a pattern of power dynamics. One on one, I could tune in without being overwhelmed by my reactive behavioral pattern stemming from

othering and exclusion that I experienced growing up, but both kinds of situations bear valuable information to be studied, and both were painful yet deeply meaningful experiences.

This was my first time doing long-term field work. I had not done ethnographic research like this before, and I was very unsure about my role in the community. My insecurities intersecting with the social dynamics in Caimito awoke a deep lack of self-esteem and value of my own life that previously lay dormant. It offset a profound sense of despair as it resonated well with the even deeper colonial wounds of the people I was immersed with.

I could have stayed at the visible level of exchange of material and immaterial resources between the locale and the extra-local together with social processes and external forces, but to me that would not give a full picture. It would not bring the sensational aspect or life into my writing. It would only capture the structural and relational inequality and resistance to imposition, and as important as these are, the psychological levels are all encompassing in power plays, and if we ignore these we will not be able to dismantle the interlocking system of coloniality.

Theoretical framework

Intervention

Intervention is the meeting of a social context of the participant(s) and the construction of a new social context, of the scholar engaging in the field they wish to study. Intervention creates perturbations that are unpreventable and can be appreciated as they can transmit hidden secrets of the participants' world. As Burawoy writes: "A social order reveals itself in the way it responds to pressure. Even the most passive observer produces ripples worthy of examination, while the activist who seeks to transform the world can learn much from its obduracy" (Burawoy, 1998, p17). In intervention, we examine the ripples that we as scholars create with our presence in the lives of the people and the places we are studying (Ibid.). But as I read it, these perturbances are not necessarily restricted to our intervening, but could also be changes in other contextual structures, be it social or natural, that we can observe and experience while in the field. As a scholar activist, I am intervening in the life world of

the Caimiteños causing perturbations with my presence, in the same way as all other social groups who set their foot in the territory of Caimito, but the scale of perturbations varies greatly, and these perturbations are what I have been observing while equally learning through being immersed in the lifeworld of the Caimiteños.

What has been described as context effects in the interview situation are an aggregation of different factors into four contexts that in reflective science are perturbations to be studied (Ibid). Though Burawoy does not clearly state so, I opine that these contexts can, to some extent, be applied to other ethnographic methods such as participatory observation, and I would even argue that they also apply to all human agents and groups that intervene in daily life in locale socio-ecological space.

Interview effects: the characteristics of the interviewer such as gender, race and class, or the interview form itself such as questions and order of questions can significantly affect the responses and cause reactivity (Ibid.). The privileges adhered to me due to being from Denmark and non-black became clear. Being a single woman traveling and without a partner and children was also a strange phenomenon that caused a lot of perturbances (Diggle, 2020). In the same manner, foreigners with different relations to the place created different scales of perturbations by being white, upper or middle class, highly educated, and from the Global North.

Respondent effects: some questions have an undesired ambiguity for the respondent as the meaning can be different depending on which “world” one comes from (Burawoy, 1998). I will extend this to also entail differences in appearance, attitudes, and behaviour, influencing how one interprets and reacts to a situation. This is clearly seen in differences in organization of activities and planning.

Field effects: interviews are always taking place in political, social, and economic contexts. Responses are shaped by extraneous conditions such as point in time and places. It is not possible to disentangle unmediated impacts of external conditions from the impact of the interview (Ibid.). Caimito is a rural and marginalized geopolitical location, which is why it takes a long time for political implementations to manifest, while at the same time it is one of the first places to feel it when there is a cut in supply, such as electricity and public

transportation. Furthermore, it is important to include the effects of the biophysical and natural world, for example weather, which has a great influence on a farming community in the tropics.

Situation effects: attitude and knowledge are constituted in social situations, not as residing in the individual (Ibid.). Moving the chin and underlip to signal the direction of something being talked about is an example of a social constitution that has meaning between Caimiteños in specific situations, but for unsocialized foreigners this signal can cause misunderstandings.

These effects, especially the ones arising from differences between the scholar and informants, can occur throughout a study. My cultural attributes and those of my informants did not change under the course of my internship, but they became less explicit and problematic as my lifeworld became more immersed with the lifeworld of the Caimiteños. The same can apply for foreigners who settle in Caimito.

Process

From intervention comes process. Here we move from situated knowledge to social process. Situational experiences come from moving with the informants in their lifeworld's over space and time. It is a comprehension of the situation that tries to recover "situational knowledge" of the people we engage with. Situational knowledge comes both as discursive and nondiscursive. The discursive dimension of the social is reached through interviews and informal dialogue. The nondiscursive, which is the unexplicated/unacknowledged/tactical knowledge, or consciousness, is a dimension that underlies all social interaction and can be analyzed through participation and exchange.

Situational knowledge consists of multiple understandings and is linked within a specific space and time consisting of the partial view of the different actors. Like other sciences it is necessary to perform some reduction, but here this reduction is an aggregation of situational knowledge into social process. Multiple readings of single cases are aggregated into social processes, a move which is always dependent on prior theory (Ibid.). I have used Escobar's anti-essentialist political ecology theorization of regimes of nature to guide me in my aggregation of situational knowledge into social processes. Escobar theorizes how nature

becomes culturally constructed and socially produced to manifold multiple and multiform natures, and shows how a contextual meaning and understanding of nature is necessary in order to understand social struggles, collective identities, and production of expert knowledge (Escobar, 1999).

Situation entails the occurrence of human agents together in the same place and time and thus in relation to one another. This format produces conditions for practices that reproduce relations (Burawoy, 1988). The biophysical and human-agents also operate on relational terms. The social and historical articulates the biophysical and vice versa. "Each articulation has its history and specificity and is related to modes of perception and experience, determined by social, political, economic, and knowledge relations, and characterized by modes of use of space, ecological conditions, and the like" (Escobar, 1999, p4). Particular structures of power reproduce certain relations by operating on certain schemas of norms, beliefs, and theories. This is seen in the distribution of resources, that Burawoy calls regimes of power extended from Marxist theory of production and power of capital. He says that "[W]e can compile situational knowledge into an account of social process because regimes of power structure situations into processes" (Burawoy, 1998, p18). As seen with nature, regimes of power influence social processes in the locale in their creation of certain types of landscapes.

Nature is experienced differently depending on social position, and it is produced by groups differently throughout history, thus creating different landscapes. Escobar discerns three overall regimes. Articulations occur between and inside the regimes, where identity is a result of the production of these. Regimes are social natures that are relational and co-produce each other. They merge the biological and historical. "The three regimes are thus the subject of tensions and contestations; biophysical laws, meanings, labor, knowledge, and identities are important, although with diverging intensities and configurations, in all of them" (Escobar, 1999, p5). He says to approach the regimes with regime-specific modes of analysis namely specific affinities, commitments, and theoretical orientation: 1) capitalist nature in terms of historical materialism, 2) organic nature through anthropology of local knowledge, 3) technonature by science-and-technology studies.

Capitalist nature regime

Drawing on Marxist perspective, Foucault, and feminist scholars, Escobar shows how capitalist nature comes to be the hegemonic regime as “a product of a particular phase in history – patriarchal capitalist modernity” (Ibid., p7). Capitalist nature emerged in post-Renaissance Europe and grew with capitalism and modern episteme in the late 18th century by creating new ways of seeing: the observer was placed outside of the context of the observed that became passive and manageable, with the consequence that women and landscape became objectified in particular ways by a totalizing male gaze. A gaze that was instrumental to the birth of modern sciences enabling an integration of vision and expression of opinion from the individual scientist into rational discourse. Expanding in line with the developments of optical technologies, and crystallized into “a world picture”, where nature is constructed as “a resource for us to use as we wish” (Heidegger as cited in Escobar, 1999). Together in the “aspects of the emergence of “Man” as anthropological structure and the foundation of all possible knowledge” (Ibid., p6), the domination of nature is the basis for instrumental rationality. It was a requirement for capitalist modernity to develop rational forms of management of resources and population that Foucault has coined governmentality; “a quintessentially modern phenomenon by which increasingly vast domains of daily life are appropriated, processed, and transformed by expert knowledge and the administrative apparatus of the state” (Ibid, p6). In capitalist modernity, nature was primarily turned into a commodity through mediation of labour. Nature and society were separated ideologically as Marxist perspective has shown. Use value and exchange value in the production of nature was fused to create surplus, and consequently, social and institutional differentiation allowed humans to emancipate themselves from nature by enslaving part of the population. Furthermore, as capitalist production of nature gave way for “society” to emerge from “nature”, a “second nature” was produced (Smith in Escobar, 1999) which was regulated by social institutions in exchange for commodity and “nature(s) produced by humans”. As “second nature” and society achieved a unity in a generalized production under capitalism with the development of science and machines, the production of nature became the dominant reality, making capitalist nature a hegemonic regime with great ecological implications.

Organic nature regime

Escobar draws mainly on earlier concerns of ecological anthropology from scholars such as Descola and Strathern, and on phenomenology such as Ingold, to conceptualize the regime of organic nature as local models in modulations with culture and local knowledge that debunks nature/culture dichotomy. By using the word organic, he re-signifies its meaning from a cultural essentialist, and at times colonialist association of the word with “purity”, amongst others, with forest people’s embeddedness in nature that exists within environmental discourse, to instead grant it as a historical regime with a relational understanding of organic and social life: organic life originates and is upheld via its continuous exchange with the environment.

The “anthropology of local knowledge” is what Escobar identifies as the proper analysis to study local knowledge of organic nature. It has shown that for many rural communities, nature and culture are not separated ontologically. Dichotomies have been imposed on local models of organic nature by capitalist regime. The continuity of the biophysical, human, and supernatural worlds can, in their complexity, be grasped in the study of rituals, as symbolic mediation that integrates human interactions with the natural world. Local knowledge transcends conventional understanding of production, like a Marxist conceptualization, when they are symbolically mediated; rituals integrate the human interaction with the natural world by establishing links between the biological, human and spiritual world. Clearing of forest for planting can be a ritual that brings the villagers, spirits, ancestors, and crops together. These kinds of “relationship between symbolic and productive relations can be highly complex” (Ibid, p8). It calls for a practice-oriented view that emphasizes the embodied aspect of local knowledge; knowing cannot be separated from doing, and knowing and doing cannot be separated from being. There is a continuity of nature and culture where knowledge has embodied aspects seen in ideas of enskillment², and performativity. Thus, strengthening the critic hierarchical dichotomies of nature, culture, theory, and practice. Models of local knowledge must be situated “in the larger contexts of power and articulation with other nature regimes and global forces more generally” (Ibid, p10). As such, they

² “situated practical acts with the environment” (Escobar, 1999, p9),

provide us with an understanding of organic and social life (Ibid).

Techno-nature regime

Escobar draws on post-humanist feminist Haraway, molecular biology, and Artificiality and Virtuality, in his conceptualization of techno-nature. Techno-science unsettles the relationship between the social and the natural. The social reinvents the natural. Techno-science mediates between biological and historical, and forms new links between humans and nonhumans, and organic and cultural. This gives rise to new possibilities such as the cyborg and problematics of realities, as well as new formations of collaborations between social groups (Ibid.).

Reproduction of the regime of power is assured from the inside and from the outside. The reproduction from the inside is what can be observed in the realm of participant observation through distribution and use of resources and schemas. An analysis of the social forces is necessitated to reveal the reproduction from the outside field (Burawoy, 1998).

Structuration

The social process takes place in an external field that has its own autonomous dynamic, a wide field of relations that is beyond the view of participant observation. The external field is where we look for the conditions of existence of the locale social processes that we are researching. It is a move from "*social processes to delineate the social forces*" (Ibid., p.15). Social forces that impress upon the locale. The locale and everyday world are studied from the standpoint of its structuration.

Cases are not independent, but inversely determine each other. The principle of structuration is to locate social processes in the locale in relation and in mutual determination with social forces of an external field. It is necessary to apply theory if we want to examine how, what, and with what effects a force imposes on the locale (Ibid.).

Coloniality

The imposition of capitalist nature regime on local organic nature models is encouraged by its configurations on patriarchal, capitalist, and modern epistemes (Escobar,1999). This

thought has evolved into the stream of decoloniality. Coloniality/modernity are two sides of the same coin. Modernity is an epistemological framework that is bound up with the European colonial project (Mayblin, n.d.) of categorizing the world and its inhabitants into binary opposites, with the construction of races as a premise to colonize and enslave those who were non-Europeans, while extracting all resources of their lands. As Quijano explains: “For underneath that codification of relations between Europeans and non-Europeans, race is, without doubt, the basic category. This binary, dualist perspective on knowledge, particular eurocentrism, was imposed globally hegemonic in the same course as the expansion of European colonial dominance over the world” (Quijano, 2000, p542). Lugones argues that the racialized-other/colonized became subjects in colonial situation in the first modernity as aberrations of male perfection. The modern, colonial hierarchical dichotomous gender system with the European man as norm, was imposed on the colonized. The civilizing mission used hierarchical gender dichotomy as judgement. Turning them into human beings was not a goal but turning them against one another was. The colonized was reduced to sex and not gender, because they were “not human in species—as animals” (Lugones, 2010, p.743). Therefore, it was the discernment between genders and sexes that permitted the racialization under colonial rule. The categorial, dichotomous, hierarchical logic is central to modern, colonial, capitalist thinking about race, gender, and sexuality. The interior of the racialized other was colonized as their memories and senses of self and relation to land were being erased, justified by the civilizing project or the missionary practice of Christianity. “One can begin to appreciate the tie between the colonial introduction of the instrumental modern concept of nature central to capitalism, and the colonial introduction of the modern concept of gender, and appreciate it as macabre and heavy in its impressive ramifications” (Ibid., p.745). The erasure of what Quijano calls “colonization of the imagination of the dominated”; the subordination of other cultures than European, was linked to colonial/modern concept of nature, as binary opposition to white man the ruler that allowed for capitalist commodification of natures including the people inhabiting them. This logic of coloniality precedes in contemporary Eurocentric imperialism and hegemon culture, not only because of material inequality and unequal exchange, what Hornborg calls the zero-zum game as the economic and technological expansion of the capitalist core at the expense of

its peripheral areas (2011), respectively the Global North and the Global South in this context, but also because coloniality continues to be instrumental in the interior of people, erasing other ways of being and seeing the world, while imposing hegemon epistemes and ontology (Maldonado-Torres, 2016). What Hooks calls “Imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy” reminding us of the interlocking system that is defining our reality. These are systems that work and impose on us simultaneously, why it is not possible to understand if we only look through the lens of either race, gender, or class (Jhally, 1997). The impositions are experienced differently according to one’s attribution to hierarchical dichotomies and categorial logic. “To me an important breakthrough, (...) was the call to use the term white supremacy, over racism because racism in and of itself did not really allow for a discourse of colonization and decolonization, the recognition of the internalized racism within people of color and it was always in a sense keeping things at the level at which whiteness and white people remained at the center of the discussion. In my classroom I might say to students that you know that when we use the term white supremacy it doesn't just evoke white people, it evokes a political world that we can all frame ourselves in relationship to”(Ibid., p.7). As Maldonado-Torres writes building on Sartre, “(...) the perceptions that others have of oneself are often taken as confirmations of or challenges to one’s own sense of who one is. The social arena is the space of these encounters where subjects meet others. For a subject who is trying to have others confirm her or his own sense of being, sociality can feel like hell” (Maldonado-Torres, 2016, p.13). If race is only experienced as a hell by the ones who are attributed as racialized others/non-human beings, people of privilege will not feel obliged to change, as they are not suffering under racial categorization. However, when changing the term to white supremacy, white people are called into responsibility for the unequal socio-political-material reality. As Hooks, I think there is great strength in conceptualizing the system of domination as an interlocking system of imperialism, white supremacy, capitalism, and patriarchy, which I see to be the same as coloniality and why I will call it the interlocking system of coloniality, not to obscure, but to include all the logics of hierarchical dichotomies into the hegemon paradigm of coloniality. This paradigm was felt and present in Caimito in the interiors of people, in the interrelations of people, and in the material reality and ecological nature. However, this does not mean

that local models of organic nature that are attributed as racialized others are deterministically run over by the interlocking system of coloniality turned into capitalist natures and subjects. Which leads to the fourth and final dimension of the ECS.

Restructuration

Science is in a state of continual revision; it offers no final truth. In the fourth dimension we elaborate on existing theory. Our interest lies in how our case can contribute to the restructuring of theory that we arrive at, by the principle of dialogue that unifies all four dimensions (Burawoy, 1998).

Burawoy describes this process in the following manner: "In our fieldwork we do not look for confirmations but for theory's refutations. We need first the courage of our convictions, then the courage to challenge our convictions, and finally the imagination to sustain our courage with theoretical reconstruction." (Ibid., p.20).

Theorization of social process is extended to theorization of the broader social forces within regimes of power. This is done firstly by deconstruction of the regime of power that forces succession on the locale social process. Then a rejection of theories that attribute to the ideology of the regime of power e.g. erroneous discourses. Finally, a reconstruction of applied theory; the new perspectives of the relations between the locale social process with the extra-local forces (Burawoy, 1998).

Politicized hybridity

The final level of Escobar's paradigms of nature draws from debates on hybridization, explaining the regime's ability to incorporate multiple constructions of nature, crossing boundary of their own and integrating undertakings from another in creating unique collective identities, using both local and transnational cultural resources, while maintaining locale autonomy. A process is advanced with the arrival of techno-nature that he identifies as political strategy for social groups in their negotiation with trans-local forces while maintaining a degree of autonomy. Hybridization can be articulated amongst different types of regimes and their corresponding social actors within, transcending locality. Where both dominant discourses such as capitalist and techno-natures form alliances, can be seen in the

appropriation of genetic resources from life space and marginalized people with organic nature and techno, or capitalist natures as seen in how “third world actors” have become noticeable in international development discussions. Escobar calls for a political view of hybridization and challenges Latour’s apolitical view. It is important to look at the relations of power in the production of nature’s/cultures amongst networks of different regimes, not only discerning in terms of moderns or pre-moderns. This includes power relations in knowledge production (Escobar, 1999); is it the epistemes of euro-centered modern networks that discerns over the place and practice of the local?

How do we maintain anti-essentialism without marginalizing the biological? Much like the assertion made by Haraway that we must situate ourselves and reflect on our partial connection (1991), Escobar explains: “we need to acknowledge that we are always positioned observers and that our observations always take place in continuous interaction with the world and ourselves. It is only from a perspective of fully accepted interactivity and positionality that we can pursue consistency in our scientific accounts of reality” (Escobar, 1999, p15). We must make explicit our ecological attachments that are increased by our participation in regimes and cultures including our scientific dogmas (Escobar, 1999).

Colonial difference: a place of decoloniality and self-reflexivity

Colonial difference is a concept by Mignolo, building on the argument that the thought paradigm of modernity that stems from the geopolitical space of western Europe has erased the possibility of even thinking that other local histories are emitting knowledge. It is a connector of all the different people who, throughout history, have been on the wrong side of the modern/colonial world system and whose local stories have been silenced by discourses based on modernity and eurocentrism (Mignolo, 2002).

Colonial difference is also a connector between hegemon modern/colonial perception of reality and the perception of realities outside of it. It is a borderland – a bridge - what Lugones calls the fractured locus, that is a place of resistance, unveiling what is obscured; the resister that is oppressed by the colonizing construction of them. A resistant subjectivity is an infra-political process that is a subjectivity that is more than the imposition of hegemony, and this is a process that has been continuously taking place through all time:

But, instead of thinking of the global, capitalist, colonial system as in every way successful in its destruction of peoples, knowledges, relations, and economies, I want to think of the process as continually resisted, and being resisted today. And thus I want to think of the colonized neither as simply imagined and constructed by the colonizer and coloniality in accordance with the colonial imagination and the structures of the capitalist colonial venture, but as a being who begins to inhabit a fractured locus constructed doubly, who perceives doubly, relates doubly, where the “sides” of the locus are in tension, and the conflict itself actively informs the subjectivity of the colonized self in multiple relation (Lugones, 2010, p748).

An antagonistic process of oppression and resistance that takes place intrapersonally, interpersonally, and between persons and space - is an inhabitation of a shared fractured locus at the colonial difference. That is a place where one sees both sides and creates new sense. This process is also called decoloniality or the decolonial turn away from the validation of modernity/coloniality and its methods of naturalized war and ontological separation. A transition from isolated self-hating subjects to embodied humans, bridging out to others (Maldonado-Torres, 2016).

To decolonize, the person sees their two renditions of themselves, the dehumanized version of coloniality, and the one without configurations by coloniality: “To see the coloniality is to see both the jaqi, the persona, the being that is in a world of meaning without dichotomies, and the beast, both real, both vying under different powers for survival. Thus to see the coloniality is to reveal the very degradation that gives us two renditions of life and a being rendered by them. The sole possibility of such a being lies in its full inhabitation of this fracture, of this wound, where sense is contradictory and from such contradiction new sense is made anew” (Lugones, 2010, p.751-752). It is forming a new episteme based on a sense of communality as a response to hegemon coloniality. It is not subordination and it is not formed with the superiors that constitute hierarchical coloniality. It must come from the colonial difference because of modern man’s occupation with the colonial difference. To have this dialogue would involve his own redemption, but it will also be his self-destruction. Dialogue is possible and necessary from the colonial difference for those who resist dehumanization. We have to see the colonial difference and resist the epistemological habit

of erasing it. The fractured locus in resistance to coloniality is the point for forming coalitions. It is the space in between/the boarder land/the inter-subjectivity that is the colonial difference that we need to dwell in. Coloniality as power infiltrates all aspects of being, but are met with people of different logic than the one of capitalism. These are bodies whose resistance stems from the fractured locus. Resistance is a shared communal process (Ibid.).

In Escobar's nature hybridity it is possible for actors of different regimes to form coalitions. To do so as a political ecologist we must acknowledge our positionality and engage in self-reflectivity with our continuous engagement in the world. But the question remains, is the decolonial turn possible for the ones superiorly positioned in hierarchical coloniality? And what would that process entail? Lugones says that it will be *his* self-destruction to do so but also redemption indicating a death in *his* perception of the self, the world and *his* role and relation to it, *he* has to kill the colonizer in *himself*, but from this arise something new, new life and ways of being and seeing the world. I think a first step in the process of decoloniality of a non-black person of privileged position would be to embody a humble responsiveness towards the multiplicities embodying the fractured locus at the colonial difference. It is time to listen and make space.

Map of area of interest



Figure 1: Map of the Peninsula Galera San Francisco showing the natural vegetation with different levels of human activity (Instituto Nazca, 2008).

Analytical body

Locating Caimito in time and place³

Ecuador is divided into provinces, further divided into Cantons, Parroquias, and Recintos. I have been told that this is a relic from the past colonial structures in Ecuador. Recinto Caimito belongs to Canton Muisne and Parroquia Quingüe in the Province of Esmeraldas. Bio-geographically, Caimito is located on the peninsula of Galera San Francisco, the name of the marine reserve, and part of the Chocó bioregion. There are 12 villages in the peninsula, and Caimito is one of, if not the only, village that is still inside the tropical forest, as there is not much of the corridor remaining. Within few kilometers the biotopes change drastically throughout the peninsula due to different practices in agriculture. At first sight, Caimito is a long stretch of road on Via San Francisco with a scattering of houses approximately 1km long, but there is more to it than this: on each side, until the neighboring villages Union Manabita and Quingüe, respectively 1,5km and 2 km from Caimito, the land is divided into properties or fincas, mostly forested, which are cultivated or conserved.

The area became gradually settled in the 1930's with people migrating from the North of Esmeraldas in search of land for agriculture and fishing. After several years of having worked the land they could legally access, ownership was processed in the 1960's. In the 1940's, Caimito had a higher population than today. Located at the seashore it was a port of local commerce, as it was easily accessed, even at rough sea (Ruales, 2016?). In 1954, Paulina's⁴ mother came by boat from Esmeraldas to be Caimito's schoolteacher. At that time the people of Caimito were foraging in the bountiful tropical forest and sea. They would exchange goods with other communities at sea or walk to Quingüe at low tide. When the town was eventually destroyed by the sea, the families settled in an upper part in the forest, and agriculture became the main livelihood activity. They used a farming practice developed in close relation to the local natural environment. Unlike many other places, forest was not cleared on a large scale for human activities (Ruales, 2016?). Caimiteños derive mainly from

³ As I am extending on observations on a case that I elaborated in my internship paper "The Caimito - Testimonies from my internship period autumn 2017" (Diggle, 2020), I am using information and text from that paper, especially in this section.

⁴ During my time in Caimito I was staying in the household Paulina, she is my main local informant and also one of the most social-political active persons of the community.

two genealogies with each generation having between 3 and 10 children (Bonnet, 2007?). Looking at the families in terms of a smaller nucleus consisting of parents and children, there were 14 families with farms ranging from 5-30 hectares of land in 2000 (Ruales, 2016?). This remains approximately the same today. Paulina's father, the father of the largest family branch, was the first to inhabit the forest together with his family in 1967. By 1980 most people had moved from the coast into the forest to today's location of Caimito. They have paths connecting their forest fincas to the beach. Around 1975, a gravel road connected Quingüe to Bunche (a village just before Muisne), which opened another path for exchange. In the 1980's the area was badly hit by the weather phenomenon El Niño, and maintained it isolated from development (Ibid.) such as infrastructure. In the 1990's electricity was installed in the houses along the main road. Not until 2007 was the paving to connect Quingüe and Cabo San Francisco finished, making transportation more accessible for Caimiteños and the other villagers. With the road improvement, vans were changed to buses and people could commute more easily. Paulina's oldest daughter had moved to Esmeraldas for college at the age of 12. Similarly had her other daughters moved to pursue college. Nowadays the older kids take the bus to and from Cabo San Francisco for their college degrees. The younger kids either walk or take the bus to the neighboring village Union Manabita. Education is no longer taking kids away from home and it is even possible to get a University degree in Esmeraldas city and be back home on the weekends. Normally the students would live with their relatives. Paulina had been able to support her youngest daughter's dream of studying biology in Manabí, providing for student accommodation, food, and study expenditures, including study fees. This was not cheap and demanded a lot for Paulina to sustain. Having two long-term gringas⁵ staying helped.

Three or more houses collapsed during the big earthquakes with epicentre in Muisne and Manabi in April 2016. In the aftermath, infrastructure of Caimito was improved with cable network for fast line telephones, yet only 7 out of the 41 houses had a telephone in 2017. The same year, internet was installed in Casa Nave which is owned by a collective of Gringos

⁵ Broadly the term gringo/a refers to people from outside of Esmeraldas. Mainly it refers to nonblack foreigners but also Quiteñeans are considered gringos/as. The term also annotates that it is a person of privilege and affluence compared to the locals.

called Asociación Ecolado. From this house, cables connected to the house of Javier, who was my internship supervisor, and ended at Paulina's place.

Different worlds meeting

I was just another gringa passing by, yet I failed to acknowledge this, or I was struggling to mediate this. I wanted to be as sincere as possible, and for them to know I cared about their lives, their autonomy, their stories, their joys, their sorrows. I wanted to prove that I was not just another gringa passing by. I could have fooled myself, in fact I did for a long time. My mental schemas of longing and belonging guided, lured, and controlled me. I wanted to be part of the community, I disliked all others coming in and messing with the village, upsetting the rhythms, coming with their schemes, their money, and their will. I could not compete with that. All I had to offer, was me. I wanted what was best for the community, but who knows if my intentions were purer than the gringos of material influence. All I had was a dream of a project, without any form, for us to co-construct. The gringos could back their dreams up with wealth. They brought prosperity with them, I brought turbulence – emotional turbulence. I came from another place - another world from that of Caimito of Ecuador, Latin America. The reality I come from is one in which the majority are white, have brick houses, dishwashers, and money coming in every month. Most people were educated and everyone in my generation was pushed into higher education to make a career. Where I come from the majority do not have to worry about basic needs, so they can invest their worries unto other topics or indulge in the sweetness of capitalism. I wanted to see what was on the other side of this - of an existence outside a safe bubble. Real life, real sweat and blood, and tears and laughter. I never felt that I belonged in the bubble, or maybe I continuously felt rejected from it. I tried years on end to be accepted, but continuously I bounced right back. Why at one point I simply stopped trying and realized “hey, you are a bubble - this is not real. I'd rather be on this side of the surfactant film”. Whatever that is, it is scary, a void that I struggled to find meaning in. Tugging at every sleeve that might have some answers - so much uncertainty. To think that I had somewhat semi-decided this for myself, no one would believe. Slowly I stumbled upon, or actively sought peers that equally kept distance from the illusionary bubble. Arrogantly I mistook people in Caimito to also be

such peers, demanding autonomy before the bubble threatening to swallow them whole. But mainly they did not. They did not have the same opportunities of opting out, as I cleverly thought I was doing. They were working hard to be recognized as a way to reach freedom and new opportunities. I struggled to understand why one would strive to this. In time I learned to understand, as I came to appreciate my opportunities to always opt back to the same when things got tough, and of course I did, never having really left, always one foot inside and the other out. I can see why we want to maintain our “bubble existence” here in the Great North and everywhere else, as being without hurts, physically and emotionally, while being within is like being in a straitjacket, and I so badly wanted and still do want to strip myself of mine, but what has that got to do with anything? With Caimito? The straitjacket was not as such a straitjacket, but a hex of unlimited opportunities, but it came with a price, a price of autonomy that was an investment of one’s life into upholding a system that was running wild, going straight off the cliff, and most importantly it obscured how our bubble was growing by sapping on the energies of other worlds.

Caimito had been on the map for some time for people who were seeking land appropriation, a ticket out under the charism of protecting the natural habitat. Paulina was, at the time I was there, president for Asociación Caimito Sustentable (ACS), and the only member of Permaculture Caimito originally from Caimito. While on paper I was assigned to ACS, it was Permaculture Caimito that I mostly engaged with during working hours. She was one of the people most involved in the mediation between the locality and gringos. Two biologists, as the first foreigners, bought 80 hectares of land. Out of that land, 16 were underway to be sold to an English biologist for conservation and 30 were owned by a German marine biologist, a professor at the Universidad San Francisco de Quito, a big part for conservation and the other for forest farming. Occasionally biology students would have excursions to Caimito. One such student doing her dissertation on cobra was taken out by the locals to hike through the tropical forest to help her find and catch local specimens. We walked through the forest in our rubber boots this time aiming for the waterfall, not the pristine forest, and two small snakes were caught on the track. One of Paulina’s nephews quickly showed how to catch a snake, pinning it down with two sticks and catching it by placing two fingers on each side behind the jaws. He shoved them in a plastic bag, but not

without showing them. Paulina had told me horror stories of how big cobras had attacked her uncle when he was saving her from being bitten as a child, and many years later when her middle daughter was almost bitten. One dark evening when we were walking her niece home, Paulina had insisted on carrying her new torchlight. As we turned our backs after departing with her niece, at the step leading up to the house, the counters of a great snake slithered in the high grass beside the road. Big enough to eat a cow she told me. I felt quite stupid for being easygoing on the flashlight and a chill fell on me thinking about what might have been out there the nights that I had been walking outside in the dark. But this biology student from Quito stayed on. She had picked a good spot to do her nightly observations for her thesis. I knew just how life in the jungle came to live, as it lulled me to sleep each night. The thought of being alone deep in the jungle, I felt was not for the delicate.

Out of the wave of biologists coming from Quito was Eduardo, originally from Peru with a grandfather from the United States. After working as a tourist guide in the Amazon some years, he returned to finish his degree, appalled by what he had experienced of the petrol industry. Together with his wife, he moved to Caimito in 2002. As many people explained, he just fell in love with the place. He wanted to be near the jungle. First, they settled kilometers into the tropical forest. From working in conservation, sprang the necessity to work with sustainable farming, so he became farming oriented and started to grow cacao like the locals. He ended up buying land in the neighboring village but kept his affinities with Caimito. Early on, he had, with a group of Quiteños and one Englishman John, bought 10 hectares of land in the middle of the village leading down to the coast. They bought the land for conservation and for constructing the house, Eco Aldea between 28 of them. Some of the same group of people constructed Casa Voluntaria that became a place to host foreign volunteers. John became a permaculturist entrepreneur and in 2011 he formed the Asociación Ecolado that between them, bought a big part of land and three years later they began the construction of Casa Nave to be a shared house that the families could in turn inhabit. Javier from Madrid was the latest settler to Caimito. He had, after his master in sociology, gone to Ecuador where he first worked as a volunteer coordinator at an NGO project in the Amazon forest. Later he came to Caimito and also fell in love with the place. With a little persuasion by Eduardo, he stayed. His parents bought a house on the land that

originally belonged to Paulina, in addition to a bigger part of land at the opposite end of Caimito towards Quingüe, to have his forest finca.

Changes in land and practices

Improving and stabilizing means of income and livelihood was an ongoing need while also protecting the natural environment from deterioration. Many initiatives have been taken over time to improve standards of life and autonomy of the villager while protecting the ecological space, and many initiatives have combined the two interests, with agricultural practices being a center of attention, but also small-scale eco-tourism. Many social organizations have been formed in trying to meet these needs such as ACS, Permaculture Caimito, and the cacao coops.

Caimito was left out of development and big scale tourism occurring in the area and was left devastated after El Niño in 1997. This made it possible for Caimiteños to organize their territory administratively and politically forming a shared identity of agroecology committed to life and appropriate use of the land, and in more recent years focusing on small-scale eco-tourism. In 2007, the community started assembly processes, and in 2009 they reached an agreement for protecting and conserving the forest that led to the formation of the organization ACS in 2012 (Ruales, 2016?). Through this organization and the communal-based assembly for making decisions with regards to collective interest and the territory, the infrastructure of the village improved, and they attained funding that helped initiate various projects, such as their own portable water system⁶, a beach shelter with barbecue facilities and compost toilet for camping at the beach, and the construction of a tourist friendly beach track that takes approximately 20 minutes to descend through the tropical forest and river down to Caimito beach. Local women have also organized themselves around small-scale tourism, taking turns in offering services to tourists and volunteers, or hosting bigger events

⁶ Junta de Agua Portable JAHP: community-based water system where each household pay monthly expenses. In 2013 they won recognition, given a 2nd prize for their water system for under 120 users (<https://www.habitatyvivienda.gob.ec/juntas-de-agua-recipientes-reconocimiento-por-su-destacada-gestion/>). Having their own water system improved the community's resilience by providing them not just with water, but also a more independent livelihood. This stands in contrast to the neighboring village Quingüe, who had their water supply cut off by the local authorities when they failed to pay the water bill, and villagers were left to collect water from the polluted mouth of Rio Quingüe.

like conferences and workshops, consisting of cooking meals, providing accommodation, and cleaning, either in Centro Comunitario, or in casa particular.

The agricultural practice in close relation with the natural environment is a characteristic of Caimito and was taught between generations. Only one family used agrochemicals, the rest working with the help of their machetes, canastas, and the occasional mule. They would grow a broad variety of tropical fruits, yucca, and corn for subsistence, and re-generational cacao as a cash-crop. They were certified as organic fincas through the local farmer co-operation Asociación Eco-cacao, part of the bigger Unión de Organizaciones de Productores de Cacao Arriba Esmeraldas (UOPROCAE), formed in 2014 (Conexión Chocolate Ecuador, n.d). As small landholders, Caimiteños were especially vulnerable in terms of changing market prices and yields. This is seen in the changes of agricultural production that Caimito has undergone over time, traces that can still be read in the natural environment. Paulina told me that her father's generation first planted lemons and oranges to export, until one year the season's yield was destroyed by a pest, so they changed their plantations to coffee. With the price fall for coffee on the liberal market it became futile to continue growing, so once again they changed crop, this time to cacao, which is still the main crop. UOPROCAE was fighting to make 50 cents per pound of fresh cacao beans the minimum pay, which is still not much compared to the amount of embodied labor and embodied land invested into harvesting that pound. At the time of my stay in the village, the pay was 40 cents, with a harvest every fortnight between February and November, and June till September as high season for cacao in the area. In 2016, 23 out of 25 tones were harvested in the high season that year. The yield varies a lot depending on the number of trees, the quality of soil, tree health, and weather. Paulina had many cacao trees in good shape and earned 230\$ on her cacao produce that year. The income of producing cacao was not a sufficient means of income. This is why Caimitenians were on the lookout for alternatives.

Permaculture entrepreneur John had recommended Paulina to cultivate Sacha Inchi as he estimated that there would be a growing market for the oil that was becoming a popular substitute for other types of vegetable oils as it was rich in omegas. As it is a parasitic plant, like the passion fruit that needs sunlight, land had to be cleared. Together with Theo, a young German volunteer, and Mateo from a neighboring village and his nephew, we helped

Paulina clear a parcel of her finca, approximately an acre, and made new terraces with estacas, sticks of the Gliricida or Eritinas trees, that would grow roots and become small trees to keep the formation of the terraces, hindering land erosion, with the occasional pruning and clearing of monte⁷ that would be placed in the terraces to compost thus creating new soils over time. Unfortunately, I was out of town when it was planted, and I was not able to follow the cultivation process, but on one of my visits 8 months later, Paulina had harvested her first produce of Sacha Inchi. Time will show if there is any success in introducing this Amazonian crop to the area.

This practice was an integration of different approaches. Building terraces was a practice that had been introduced to the area by Eduardo, and that together with the formation of Permacultura Caimito was promoting, in combination with other techniques and principles. Normally villagers would clear a parcel of land with their machetes, ideally as close to the ground as possible, and sow right into the ground. In other places they practiced slash and burn. The removal of plant material and trees made the slopes vulnerable to erosion, especially under heavy rains, with the risk of losing both crop and living organic soils. Furthermore, a clear slope was difficult to work on. The construction of terraces worked to hinder this, but it was intensive in the initial phases. This was a re-generational agriculture practice likely approximated from ancestral indigenous practice, and clearing a plot of land for cash-crop was not. Caimito was already producing cash-crop in the form of cacao. The difference being that the cacao tree was not planted as a monoculture but planted amongst other trees and plants. Forrest fincas was a practice of the Caimiteños. Many other villagers like Union Manabitaños would grow monoculture cacao in between pasture lands. This process of Sacha Inchi conflicted with the principals of ACS, but given that it was only an acre of land, not much harm was done to the natural environment. Despite this, Paulina invested quite a lot into this project. What happens if it becomes a success, or if it is not a success? Or when it stops being a success? What new crops and practices will be introduced to make a gain on the liberal market of zero-sum game, and what would happen if Caimitenõs did not try?

⁷ Monte is all plant material that is not crop.

Men sought day labor in construction, fishing, or farming, while women oversaw family households and the fincas and provided for the occasional foreigner. The young men would find construction work outside the peninsula and sometimes in other provinces when there was no job to be found in the village, keeping them away for periods of time. In fact, many inhabitants had migrated from the village for education, looking for job opportunities, for health reasons, or taking care of sick family members. Most family members that had left resided in Esmeraldas city, but also Guayaquil, Quito, and Los Rios. Some sold their land while others maintained their house and land for vacation. There were also empty holiday-homes bought by Quiteños. In everyday life, many houses would stand empty and quite a few were slowly decomposing as a result of the warm humidity.

It varies if families had divided their land between parents and the different children, or maintained it as shared land later to be divided. The ability to subsist on farming becomes more and more difficult as each family have less and less land to cultivate when the plots become smaller and more land is being sold off to people from outside the community, not to mention as the climate induced deterioration of ecosystems accelerates.

Obviously, Caimiteños have something to gain when they sell their land and invite foreigners into their community, as the affluence that they bring trickles down to everyone else; improving wealth for some with the installation of internet, gifts and loans, and in the form of paid labour in construction work and farming, most consistently from Asociación Ecolado. It took more than four years to construct their house and their plans of more houses means more jobs for local young men. Additionally, when gringos are in town, they hire local women to cook for them. In this way Caimito is benefitting economically and the development of the village expands. Young men are able to buy motorcycles from the money earned which gives them freedom of movement, while women remain dependent on the instable bus schedule, walking, or catching a ride in another man's vehicle.

Furthermore, longtime employment keeps men from working in the fincas, and one woman would equally not be working, as she was cooking lunch for the working men. So, if the men engaged with construction over longer periods over time, they would have to do double work if they wanted to grow crops for subsistence or harvest cacao to sell. Some would harvest the occasional crop when ripe such as platanos, bananas, and citrus fruit, and the

few that would invest the time and energy to clear a parcel of their land could plant corn. Ultimately, wealth becomes differentiated unequally across families and genders. Some young men belonging to some families were hired, while others were not, and the families who have been part of the land mediation were the ones that clearly benefitted from the presence of the Asociación Ecolado as the bond between them continued. Therefore, the introduction of paid labor in the village creates class structure and reinforces gender roles. The volunteer exchange follows similar patterns. A volunteer would pay for food and accommodation while putting 4-5 hours work in a finca. Paulina would take in the volunteers, but unlike the presence of Asociación Ecolado and their projects, the volunteer program operated under ACS, which meant that it had the structure to become more equal in the share of interest between Caimiteños, while also supporting the women of the village financially and with labour.

Competing nature regimes in Caimito

In terms of Escobar's theory, Caimito is a clear example of a hybrid nature, where organic nature regimes and capitalist nature regimes compete and intersect in different forms over time. This is illustrated with changes in crops and practices, the formations of communal assemblies with ACS, and various organizational settings that were all trying to mediate the interest of the local knowledge of organic nature with dominant capitalist production and commodification of nature. It is a continuous battle for the organic nature of the local model, to not be overthrown by capitalist nature or swallowed whole in the big machinery, and left unrecognizable and destroyed in sight of a popular holiday destination when the carnal rapture of bank holiday has peaked and all tourists have packed their bags and are clogging up the highways returning back to the cities or their home countries in the Great North. The beach and local settlements are left desolate, overtrodden and strewn with trash, with a few local people seen working continuously, while stakeholders' cash out big checks of their investments. This was a luring threat already undertaken in 2016, and had been excavated without communal consent. ACS had been bypassed by Caimiteños, who had their holiday-homes at the mouth of Rio Caimito at the seashore, and a council member in the prefecture of Esmeraldas. The 5-7 meters broad road had made serious damage to the

tropical forest and fincas that it cut through. No measurement had been taken in terms of inclination, rainfall, springs, and risk of erosion. The reason for making the road was to make the houses at the beach accessible for the owners, but it was widely believed that the interest behind it was also the creation of big-interest tourism that would undermine the community-based ecotourism, and go against the shared interest of ACS. These are clearly actions that produce capital natures that threaten the autonomy of the village and the organic nature that they dwell in.

Permaculture Caimito was a newer organization that ideally would bridge the concerns of liberal market dependency and protection of local nature and the people. It was like an extension of the work of ACS focusing on the agricultural praxis, protection of nature, and the improvement of the living conditions of the people by introducing permaculture to the area and hosting courses.

The members of Permaculture Caimito consisted of a series of guest lecturers while four of the teachers were part of the local community. Of them, Paulina was the only one originating from Caimito and a woman.

The expenses paid from participants was to cover the participation of locals in each course, to enable them to learn farming after the principles of permaculture, while also cover a small salary for the teachers. The course I participated in was their third, with a long pause between the first and the second. The second ended shortly after I arrived in September 2017. It had been a success because participants had come from abroad and locally, and more Caimiteños were engaged. Different households had been cooking for the students who had been applying the theory onto different family farms. In this way, the benefits of having the course was spread out between families in Caimito. The third course started in October and ran over 8 weeks. We were only three participants. The course was dis-organised and only the content of the eight theoretical classes was settled. Since the course ended the organisation of Permacultura Caimito seems to have dissolved. As I will relay later, the organization was not without its articulation of power and negations, but even more visible was the articulation of power from the other dominant group of gringos in Caimito. Asociación Ecolado, the latest group, showed promises of more permanent interventions in their configuration. The pretense of safeguarding pristine nature and doing

the occasional permaculture projects and finca can be valuable for the autonomy of nature and the people when in close collaboration with local organic nature models, like with Permacultura Caimito. But when intersecting with hegemonic capitalist paradigm it can be instrumental, especially when it comes in disguised form such as second wave hippies that as opposed to the original hippie movement, are coopted into capitalist regime.

In some regards Permaculture can be understood as a practice built on science-and-technology, but can you say that it creates techno-nature? It builds on technical analysis of life systems and seeks to improve on nature – by taking different measurements that catalyze natural laws and principles to improve and regenerate natural habitats and yield. Many permaculture techniques derive from ancestral indigenous practices, yet putting aside the appropriative tendency of permaculture, what clearly differentiates permaculture practice from the ancestral agriculture praxis, is that it is based in natural sciences. It might try to transcend and integrate different faculties, but in many cases do permaculturists actually achieve this? Would it not equally acquire a detachment and reconfiguration away from the modern/colonial paradigm that it is essentially constructed within? To do so requires a responsiveness to the people living on the other side of the colonial difference, especially when settling in a territory of a marginal group of people coming from a position of privilege. As such, permaculture belongs within the modern, capitalist system, albeit with the intention of emancipating the regime that it was construed in. So in terms of Escobar's theory on the regime of nature, and having Caimito as case of example, we can possibly define permaculture as the scientific and embodied practice of producing organic nature that to various degrees includes local knowledge and the people who dwell within, while also serving as an extension of the modern/capitalist paradigm that easily produces capitalist nature and reconfigures class, gender, and racial structures.

Gringolandia

Gringos care for life, they care for nature and the life of their kinds, they to some extent also care for the life of other human beings (the Caimiteños), but they enact their white supremacy when they say we know what is best and we have the power to back that up in the form of our epistemes and capital. We purchase land, we decide for our land, and we act

to ingratiate our interest amongst the Caimiteños who have influence in steering the social processes and wealth. It is one thing to not invite the people who are not engaged in the collective processes in ACS, but it is another to deliberately exclude families because they are of less influence and including them will complicate the process, while instead inviting all the gringos present in the village and members of Permacultura Caimito, and the two families of the same branch who were most influential. This is what happened when Asociación Ecolado arranged a dragon dreaming workshop; a method that combines “mindful culture” with “modern business approach” by bridging between “consciousness work and project management” (Dragon Dreaming Institute, n.d.). Theo and I used our invitation to the workshop to make elbow room for those who were not invited. We went around knocking on houses of families who normally assisted in community meetings. Our invitation awoke an uneasy tension, as they had not been included, while again they did not display much surprise. The adults reacted with disinterest, they had other things to spend their day on, while the younger grown-ups were intrigued. As such, three of them joined the workshop the following day. The action of Theo and myself was not condoned by the people of Asociación Ecolado, but the members of Permacultura Caimito welcomed the inclusion. There was a growing tension between Asociación Ecolado and Permacultura Caimito as they were competing on the same permacultural principles. Permacultura Caimito intended on a people-based approach for transformation, aiming at improving collaboration with mingas, educating and promoting re-generational agriculture to improve soil fertility, biodiversity, avert environmental damage and improve agricultural outcome, and hence subsistence for each family. They had bought land and chosen to settle down in the community. They wanted to create change from the ground-up. Furthermore, they brought in volunteers and permaculture students that while learning and working also helped in the local farms and supported the members of the organization by paying for food, lodging, and classes that were to help the ground-up change. Ideally this help would have been spread out to benefit the whole community equally. Yet Asociación Ecolado functioned in quite other terms. Together they had bought a big area of land and created jobs for the local men (and women) by having the young men construct their house for 10 dollars a day, and hiring two local men to work in their forest finca, and whenever they were in town they would have local women

cooking their meals in exchange for money. Mostly Paulina would cook, but when there were larger groups of people, other households would be involved. But Gringolandia, as the group jokingly came to be called, came with big plans and dreams of building an ecovillage of gringos, producing crops to sell, having a village store, and having beach bars and restaurants for tourism to introduce a new clientele of the self-conscious bohemian gringo. “But – the times they are a changing” I was told by one of them when she was sharing big dreams with Theo and me, as we were sorting cacao beans into different sizes for toasting, and afterwards peeling them in the modest house of Mateo and his family, speaking in English so they did not know what we were talking about. I felt deeply disturbed by the attitude of development as coming in one form or another, and the attitude of; “we are actually bringing the best prospect of a future for Caimito, see how African palm oil, shrimp farms, or pasture lands are spread all over the peninsula”. Gringolandia was a way out of the threats continuously posed by agro-industry and mega-tourism, but were they themselves not imposing another threat? She seemed to be aware of this when she said that you can choose to change with the times, or the times will force you to change. What disturbed me was not only the prospect of Caimito losing autonomy, but her naturalness; “of course, we (I) have the right to decide the course of the future of Caimito”. I think that Bob Dylan would be appalled if he knew that his song was paraphrased to use as grounds for executing domination over other’s life! I felt very disillusioned by permaculture. Neoliberalism had found its way in the form of permaculture entrepreneurs earning big money on greening the agroindustry. Another example being a project of a different associate that had been contracted to design an African palm plantation using permaculture principles somewhere else on the peninsula for an influential businessman. To me it seemed like a self-serving sidetrack in permaculture. First to buy plots of land, and then to impose ones interest on the original inhabitants by bringing them and the land further into a neoliberal market, albeit a greener one, but still one that would further stratify the community into those who would profit and those who would not, and of course it would be the association of gringos right on top, gaining most. And this, they would be able to do not only because they originated and resided in the Global North, but from profiting as an entrepreneur in a greening agroindustry. Coloniality was using permaculture as a hiding, and it went completely against

what permaculture had meant to me and what Permacultura Caimito was standing for with the autonomy and sustenance of life. Permaculture movement have been criticized for being, patriarchal, neoliberal, and white supremacist (Moyle 2015; Roberts 2016, 2017; Maxwell, 2019).

Like all other positive initiatives to counter neoliberalism, they run the risk of playing into the exact mechanisms that it pertains to oppose; why a people centered approach is essential - without dealing with the human beings, a philosophy/system will only feedback into the same loop that it seeks to transcend.

Humans have got to decode their role in the metrics of imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy continuously, which arguably is built into the three ethics of Permaculture: care for the earth, care for people, and fair share of resources or originally redistribution of surplus. But as the redistribution of surplus has been reinterpreted as fair share of resources, the permaculture concept has neared the basic tenets of capitalism, and is no longer opposing unequal exchange, why the movement to a large extent has been co-opted, now working within the same system that is causing the catastrophes it tries to counteract. Too often, we become complacent or give up on people, only focus on the aspect of caring for earth, as seen in many environmental discourses of the Anthropocene. But then we fail to see the interconnectedness between human suffering and natural degradation that in this time of history is stirred by the modern/colonial paradigm, an interlocking system of imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy that defines our reality by dichotomizing all lifeforms and matter in hierarchical dichotomies permits subjugation and exploitation of the constructed and produced other. Hence on the interlocking systems of coloniality, without approaching and transcending these systems in the interior of our own beings and how we engage with the world, we have little hope of emancipation and a just and livable world. Why I join in the cry for decoloniality: "For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house" as the renowned quote by Lorde goes. (1980, p99)

Permacultura Caimito was not without its faults, but power took its form more discretely in the social processes; it was obvious that decision making was done by Eduardo and Javier,

both high educated Gringos. Often Paulina would be waiting for the call of Javier, telling her what the days plan was, or she would be caught surprised when they told her about changes of plans or new ideas that they would have discussed between themselves.

As mentioned, they were working with the people on more equal terms than Asociación Ecolado; they had empathy and concern with the inhabitants of Caimito and saw themselves as part of the community, but it was hard when people did not follow their perspective. When Javier first came to Caimito there had been a project organized by the local cacao-coop for incorporating the minga system⁸ in the vicinity. People were divided into teams and the team-leader would get a small pay. It was working well until funding for the project ran out, then structure for mingas slowly fell apart. It was the experience of working together on the farms and learning from accomplished farmers that had got Javier hooked on the life of Caimito and buying his plot of land. Permacultura Caimito tried to reinstate the working mingas again. It ended up being between the members within the organization. We tried different forms of working in mingas, but without finding a functional format that could last. Mateo felt that he was working more on others' land than what he was getting in return, and often Eduardo would have to work on other projects or Javier having back problems at the time, cancelled work.

Trying to change people was not an easy affair, like trying to get caimiteños to apply re-generational farming practices of building terrace. Due to being work intensive, most locals would give up before they saw results. Many small deceptions over time of failed projects had caused them to give up on getting people to change, which is why they were more interested in involving the younger generations.

Davidov did research in Estero de Platano on the difference in temporalities between local villagers and actors such as NGO workers from Yanapumpa working on projects related to tourist infrastructure. She found that NGO temporalities did not include present day reality and immediate worries about economic insecurities that were part of the villagers'

⁸ Minga is a Quichua concept describing a communal practice most common in the Andean highland. It is a social process where the community comes together to work on a project. In Caimito it was also known as Cambia manus, a practice where smaller groups take turns in working each other's farms, making work more sociable and effective.

temporality. The NGO workers failed to acknowledge the concerns expressed by the local women of fairness in work and immediate concerns with recuperating expenditures. Instead they were dismissed for being uncommitted and unable to comprehend the basics of marketing and business (Davidov, 2015). To a lesser extent the gringos in Permacultura Caimito failed to acknowledge the Caimiteños need to have fast results for their time and work. The members of the group were more affluent than the people they were trying to reach. Especially the gringos who did not have to be concerned for their economic situations in the same way.

I observed a similar misunderstanding when a nonprofit group of veterinarian students came to do a day of free castration and sterilization on dogs and cats in the area. The project had been organized with the Marine Reserve Galero San Francisco from a concern for the wildlife, but also for the quality of life of the pets. Many people came from around the peninsula with dogs, and the set up was in Casa Comunitaria. Javier and a local employer of the reserve had done a good job spreading the word. It was a big success, except for one dog that died from a complication. Javier was blamed for the dog's death and the owner claimed that he owed her a new one. Javier had several dogs to give and was saddened by the death of the dog, but clearly the dog had been undernourished and not fit to undergo a surgery, which the vets should have seen. He did not give one of his dogs. His dogs were well kept and enjoyed regular feeding and attention. Gringos came with another understanding of the role of domestic animals, especially dogs. In Caimito dogs were adopted to be guards, warning the arrival of people, while for gringos they were an extension of the family. These two views had a hard time coming to terms with one another. Imposing animal ethics on marginalized people does not seem fair as it disguises socioeconomic differences and undermines local knowledge and practices.

One of the reasons for the failure of Permacultura Caimito to become an integrated extension to ACS was that the members reconfigured coloniality when they maintained a Eurocentric mindset. Even though they were working directly with the people and trying to involve them, they maintained patriarchal authority as experts of development using their positionality as privileged gringos to exert judgements over good and bad agricultural practice, work ethic, and time management. They became disillusioned with the local

inhabitants for giving up on the minga system, for not continuing to apply the re-generational farming practices taught, and for not following advice that was given out of welfare of the person, the community, and the environment. So, they started to give up on people, thinking that they would not change. In some ways they took into consideration the economic insecurities of the locals because many of their initiatives were to improve the livelihood of the villager and the village as a whole, but they did not comprehend to fully extend the present day reality and immediate worries about economic insecurities why the villager would stay with practices and activities that gave immediate pay-off, or were pre-known to give end results. Permacultura Caimito was ambitious, but failed because they had not decolonized themselves of their epistemic dominance, patriarchal management, and white man's burden syndrome.

Decolonizing gringos

What was missing was the act of self-reflection on one's own positionality in the imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy and how one is producing and reproducing these systems. Are there situations where it is okay to enact one's privileges, and in that case when? Is it acceptable to get one's paperwork faster through using one's whiteness, class, and masculinity at the immigration office? What are the intentions behind our actions, and for whose interest are we acting, reacting or proacting?⁹

And how does our positionality influence how we engage and relate with the others of different positionality than us, less fortunately positioned in this case, and in actual fact are people who originate in the area that we are visiting or choosing to settle in?

Can we put our own preconceptions aside knowing that they are "interlocking systems of domination that define our reality" and the imposition of these on all others are causing the destruction that we seek to mend when we say that we want a green transition and even

⁹ The practice of self-reflexivity and positionality are mostly used to describe the ethics and responsibility of the researcher and subjects of study relations, but I think that this practice should not only be limited to research. I take inspiration from the black feminist Bell Hooks and decolonial scholars when proposing this. Fitts writes that "As insiders and outsiders, we are intimately connected to the communities that we study. The burden is on the feminist researcher to produce knowledge that has implications for social change. We must sustain contemplative practices of self-reflexivity and remind ourselves of the underlying intentions of our work—that is, to create a just and humane world." (Fitts, 2011, p115)

social justice? Then just maybe, we can accept that we cannot trust our preconceptions, that we actually need to learn from others to see differently and learn a way of being outside of the modernity/coloniality paradigm. Coming from a city into a jungle it is clear, we need a local guide to teach us how to move through the jungle, but after some time of immersion the cognitive schemes restart and reclaim authority. When one has little or no experience of subjugation, one has very little reason to stop dominating others, but knowing that this is a root cause, it should make us seek to change this tendency within ourselves. If we want autonomy for others, we must stop claiming authority over them in all manners, and if we want to live in community with them, we must put our egos aside and engage in sincere dialogue. Buddhist philosopher and peace builder Ikeda points to three basic principles for sincere dialogue. The first is to listen carefully to what is being said, the second is to have deep respect for the person(s) you are talking with, and the third is to learn something new (Ikeda, 2014). With this approach he has engaged in many dialogues with renown leaders transcending all differences. These are basic ethical guidelines for how to engage with others, but they become even more important when two worlds are meeting, and one holds historical and material power over the other.

Much is to be learned from people who live in the margins of the world system, not because they have an essential pureness in connection with nature, but because they know social and natural processes and forces of the location and being in the setting, and more importantly they know life from the margins and life of intersecting systems of dominations on the wrong side of the colonial difference in terms of having social processes and forces working against you. They reflect our own Eurocentric obscurities when we enact hierarchical dichotomies either imposing or being imposed by them. It is not necessary to travel far to experience their configurations to life forms, but within one's own habitat they remain more subtle, so are less likely to create discomfort and the will to change¹⁰.

Furthermore, we can learn from people who embody truths outside coloniality and may

¹⁰ Bell Hooks has in a book of the same title "The will to change", written about how both men and women alike need to have a will to change the preconceptions they hold on masculinity and love to change the patriarchal system (Hooks, 2004)

discover within ourselves a similar fractured locus that we can begin to embody, not to claim victimization¹¹, but to expand on the multiplicities in the fractured locus:

The passing from mouth to mouth, from hand to hand of lived practices, values, beliefs, ontologies, space-times, and cosmologies constitutes one. The production of the everyday within which one exists produces one's self as it provides particular, meaningful clothing, food, economies and ecologies, gestures, rhythms, habitats, and senses of space and time. But it is important that these ways are not just different. They include affirmation of life over profit, communalism over individualism, "estar" over enterprise, beings in relation rather than dichotomously split over and over in hierarchically and violently ordered fragments. These ways of being, valuing, and believing have persisted in the resistant response to the colonality (Lugones, 2010, p 754).

And there is much to be learned – not for self-interest but for the communal

At the end of it all, it is life itself that I am afraid of, the pain of being alive – the evil one meets, and the evil that oneself exhibits. But there is no life without pain and there is nothing without life. I am afraid that what I touch will be ruined, that my presence and deeds will create turbulences causing chaos. I forget that moving the ground can make hibernating seeds wake up and sprout into being. Without movements – chains of vibrations – there equally will be no life. I do not want to be afraid anymore, I want to take to the scene and spread my fragrance, like any other particle, seed, being – I too have an important role to play in upholding the structure of life, as has everyone else, life simply would not be the same without us – and that is indeed a shame – why we cry over our lost ones. Life is not the same without them, we miss their unique fragrance. Maybe we cannot say that people, animals, or nature have an essential core that is immutable, but we can say that we all have life, and that life takes its form in innumerable ways - always undergoing changes in correspondence with its environment; the beings, nature, and phenomena it is surrounded

¹¹ Hooks warns non-black people not to make the generalization that we all suffer under racism. Anti-racist work that focuses on shared victimization obscures reality. Black people do not have coercive control over white people as is the case the other way around. Those in position of power and privilege need to divest on terms of one's ethical and political understanding of racism and rejection of domination – to unlearn racism. (Hooks 2015, p.9)

with and meets over time. At the same time it plays out its own uniqueness, contributing to forming other beings, nature and maybe even phenomena throughout its life time, and sometimes even after its presence lingers on as it has encoded itself onto the lives of others in their memory. All we live, lives on in our memory, we can leave proof in the form of writing, photos, and spoken word. They only come to life when read as cognitive and spiritual imagery, but too often they become reified attempts to hold on to the past, a past that can never be again, then we too become dead living beings. We need to give them new lives, new uses, and forms, spark fresh creativity into these readings and let them live through and together with us, creating new forms of being in the world. Life is a continual construction of one life form building onto the next. There is nowhere else like the tropics where you can experience that spark of life where you feel everything is buzzing, and even the material things glisten and vibrate as fungus and insects take residence in your house. Life continues with or without our presence. This little fact can give rise to great despair as we ourselves become unnecessary, then thinking that we might as well not be, it can be an excuse to opt out when pain becomes too much, it can give rise to the need for dominance as we prove ourselves indispensable in denial of our own impermanence, we can indulge our way through life only caring about making the most of this life unregards to the trial of destruction left behind, because die must we all. But we can also choose to let this fact inspire us to do our very best, to never let the trial of life stop by doing continuous self-renewal in our interplay with all life forms in our environments across time and spaces, so that when we do leave this existence, our life has gone to improving the circumstances of other life forms, so that they can perform their unique dance in the cocreation of life. Paulina understands this when she says that “Caimito Sustentable is a local nonprofit organization who sees the need to care for the future generations coming after us, to leave behind healthy areas of living, a place where people feel free to act, unlike the big cities where if one does not have money to buy a cup of water, one cannot drink because they do not have that money to buy. Unlike here we have everything we need because these lands are an inheritance of our fathers and we will continue to conserve them” (Ruales, 2016? my translation).

Conclusion

Caimito is a place where different regimes meet. Caimiteños have built a strong tradition of community ensembles with the organization Asociación Caimito Sustentable, that is inclusive for all who share the interest of protecting the natural environment and their means of living within it. Protecting while also improving livelihoods, demands an ongoing mediation with the outside forces that they are dependent on. Caimiteños have turned away from monocultural production and are equally resisting big tourist ventures. Instead they have opened their community for gringos, gringos that buy land for conservation, holiday homes, forest farms, with the occasional one who settles down. This is why a lot of the forest around Caimito has remained, and infrastructure and living standards have improved over time. Alliances between Caimiteños and gringos preserves the natural environment and the autonomy of the villager, but only to a certain extent. It is not only wealth that gringos bring with them, embodying Eurocentric logics of coloniality, they reconfigure hierarchical dichotomies of white man and all others. Seen in how they undermine community processes to exert their own will, or the introduction of paid labour that shows traits of class structure and reinforcement of gender roles. For now, it remains at a subtle level, but with prospects over the construction of an eco-village for gringos and building tourism infrastructure, it can be expected that inequality and white supremacy will be enhanced. Gringos collaborating within the ACS are not imposing a threat to the autonomy of Caimito, but they still impose coloniality when maintaining epistemic authority over ethics, management, and agricultural practices. Is the decolonial turn also for gringos? I propose to engage in reflexivity through positionality, responsiveness, and nourishment of partial connections shared as a way to decolonize the gringo. I argue that it should not only be a practice for the scholarly activist but for all. This could have positive implications for the process of dismantling the interlocking systems of coloniality. It starts with a commitment to stop imposing our ego onto others and tune in to the connection shared with the person, the lifeform that is right in front of us. How can we encourage one to grow, to expand their potential, their life if we cannot give up spaces for others?

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