

And who likes that? Discourse and fantasy amid Colombian development

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ABSTRACT

Processes of globalization often render feelings of diminished agency in local actors, what Gerard Toal has termed a “global vertigo”. This paper draws on Gibson and Graham’s work on the relationship between agency and discourse within transnational economic processes in order to provide an analysis of a few facets of the Colombia-U.S. Free Trade Agreement. What becomes clear is that while similar dynamics have continued to predominate transnational discourses of economic development historically with regards to Colombia, alternate discursive strategies may be emerging within the context of transnational alliances which are increasingly enabled through processes of globalization.

Keywords: Colombia, globalization, free trade, discourse, agency

¿Y a quién le gusta eso? Discurso y fantasía en medio del desarrollo Colombiano

RESUMEN

Los procesos de globalización a menudo causan sentimientos de una agencia disminuida en actores locales, lo que Gerard Toal ha definido como “vértigo global”. Este artículo estudia el trabajo de Graham y Gibson y la relación existente entre agencia y discurso dentro de los procesos transnacionales para proveer un análisis de algunas facetas de Tratado de Libre Comercio entre los Estados Unidos y Colombia. Está claro que mientras las dinámicas similares han continuado predominando en los discursos transnacionales del desarrollo económico históricamente en relación con Colombia, algunas estrategias discursivas alternativas han estado emergiendo en el contexto de las alianzas transnacionales que aumentan su capacidad a través de los procesos de globalización.

Palabras clave: Colombia, globalización, libre comercio, discurso, agencia.

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Introduction

Since moving to Miami in August, I am constantly learning what things not to discuss. In general though, empanadas and aguaceros are okay; Dwayne Wade and bachata, yes; traffic, inevitable. Revolution in Latin America, though, Cuban history, or the shortcomings of global capitalism—much, much riskier. It only took me one sit down chat with my Cuban roommate during my first month here to learn that lesson. Several hours later I had connected some of the dots and become aware of important threads of discourse that undergird social and political realities for many people living in the south Florida area. Discursive regimes flow through and collect around given geographies, animating conflict, determining both norms and knowledge around different objects and practices. Having just moved to Miami from Colombia, the sharpness of the dynamic interactions of flows and contradictions among divergent discourses was still fresh to me.

I had moved to Barranquilla, Colombia in order to work, to teach and to do research in January of 2011. It is a fascinating time to be in the country, a place that has purportedly gone from being a potentially “failed state” roughly a decade ago,² to a supposed exemplar

more recently.³ Regardless of the validity of either claim, the state has undergone dramatic shifts in recent years, and as the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with the United States was enduring a final stage of negotiation this past summer, rhetorical pitch in the country about the possible consequences of the agreement often seemed at a frenzied level. As an outsider, it was fascinating to observe and participate in the flows of discourse that emanated from so many different places to animate both belief and agency. During this period I became interested in the divergent levels of discourse in Colombia surrounding processes of globalization, specifically neoliberal economic integrations, and also with how people understand and practice a sense of agency within such a context. This paper is an initial step within the broader contours of these research goals.

Even within the States, though, the Colombia-U.S. FTA has been described in a number of ways. Former President George W. Bush, pleading with congress to pass the accord, claimed that to delay its passage any longer was a slap in the face to democracy in our hemisphere (Trujillo, 2007). Others have claimed that it represents the next round in annihilation of local economies, such as the Colombian small farm agriculture of *campesinos* not

yet ready to compete with the “factory” farm system of the United States (Brodzinsky, 2011). For more than 5 years this economic accord has been debated and fiercely argued. The goal of this paper is to analyze the discursive dynamics that have animated and enabled certain perspectives or analyses to be validated regarding modernization and economic integration while rendering others marginalized. Drawing on a variety of development theorists and comparing different official documents, I seek to identify a few of the consistent discursive practices that under-gird processes of economic integration and to analyze their presence within the discursive regimes surrounding the U.S.-Colombia FTA.

Agency and Discourse

Yet, if what motivates larger research goals are concerns about agency, why begin at the level of discourse? Let me offer the following example. One of the great benefits of my time in Colombia has been the ability to sustain relationships with politically active communities via social media since coming to Miami in August. I remember the frustration many of my colleagues felt just after the passing of the FTA this fall. The FTA was also happening within the context of a major struggle against the privatization of higher education in Colombia, and the general trend toward privatization inherent in neoliberal reform. Someone posted the following on one of the discussion boards:

² For the perspective of Colombia as a failed state at the time, see Picker, Thomas. “Anatomy of Plan Colombia.” *American Interest*. 5.2 (2009): 71-77.

³ For example, consider O’Hanlon, Michael E., and John Wolfowitz. “Using the Colombia Model in Afghanistan.” *Brookings Institution*. Nov. 2011.

Quiero mi educación de calidad y no quiero pagar un peso NOJODA. Quien sacará la cara por este país si nadie estudia de verdad, o ¿es qué piensan convertirnos en la central de empleos de manufacturas más grande del sur ahora que le dieron el culito a los gringos con el todo lo puede TLC ? PARO EN ESTA MIERDA...

I want my education to be quality and i don't want to pay a cent for it GODDAMNIT. Who will stand up for this country if nobody studies, right? or is it that they think they are going to convert us into the biggest employment manufacturing center in the south now that they are giving up their ass [putting out] to the gringos with everything the FTA can do? LET'S GO ON STRIKE ON THIS SHIT!

To which someone added the comment:

Nos quieren poner de culo los gringos y a los europeos para que nos mamen!!! y a quien le gusta eso? ser violados y maltratados por psicópatas asquerosos
AVAMOS A VERDE QUE ESTAMOS HECHOS, COLOMBIA,

They want us to give up our ass to the gringos and to the Europeans so that they can screw us up!!! and who likes that? to be violated y mistreated by foul psychopaths

WE ARE GOING TO SEE WHAT WE ARE MADE OF, COLOMBIA,
(My translation)

The implications of penetration, potency and agency intersect, and the language immediately reminded of Gibson and Graham's work on "Querying Globalization" (2006). The argument they made inspired by an article written by Sharon Marcus which problematized discourses that emerged within activist responses to rape. Marcus' contention is that, in the aftermath of so many movements to promote awareness about rape, these very movements are actually reifying the very discourse which undergirds rape as a violent act. Within it, women are always already rapeable, already victims, already powerless, and men are always already able to rape (Marcus, 1992).

Gibson-Graham (2006) likewise wants to problematize those narratives in which neoliberal policy is proposed as the relentless invader, the global penetrator and the "sole initiator of a spatially and socially expansive economic circuitry of infection" (p. 164). Their point is, it's not the actual capacities of individuals or communities to act but rather the constellation of discursive objects which always already determine which roles are active and which are passive, which enables, or disables, the degree of agency that one performs:

His belief that he has more strength than a woman and that he can use it

to rape her merits more analysis than the putative fact of that strength, because that belief often produces as an effect the male power that appears to be rape's cause. (Marcus, 1992, p. 390)

Arturo Escobar, in applying Gibson-Graham's call for a more diverse understanding of the economy to the processes of globalization within Colombia (2008), also points to the paralyzing consequences of much of the contemporary discourse around economics: "Most variants of this discourse have endowed capitalism with such dominance and hegemony that it has become impossible to conceptualize social reality differently" (p. 74). What remains then, in analyzing the relationship between discourse and agency is to evaluate the trends deployed in dominant discursive regimes, and to dissect how and what they confer in terms of possibility for local agents. Once this is done it becomes possible to begin to construct strategies over and against the dominant discourse.

Methodology

The methodological approach, then, for such a study comes from Foucault's "The formation of objects" in *Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972), in which he analyzes how a discursive object emerges. A discursive object is not a monolith, or even a constant. Rather it is comprised by a series of exterior relations, and analyzing these relations provides insight into the discursive object, in our case, the

dominant discourse around policies of development and globalization in Colombia. First examined are *surfaces of emergence*; these are the immediate domains within which emerges an object. In this case, one might consider places like legislative offices in Bogota or Washington DC, World Bank Offices, Chambers of Commerce, Offices of Trade Representatives, etc.

Next are considered *authorities of delimitation*: the professionals recognized by the state as authorities to delimit, designate, and name these process of globalization as a particular type of object or practice, such as politicians, transnational corporations, and the IMF. Lastly are *grids of specification*: these are those systems according to which different kinds of objects within globalization processes are divided, contrasted, related, regrouped and classified as elements within globalization discourse, which may include IMF reports, labor plans, and Plan Colombia.

Escobar and development discourse in the beginning

In his book *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World*, Escobar (1995) asks, “[i]f discourse is the process through which social reality comes into being, if it is the articulation of knowledge and power, of the visible and the expressible,” he continues, “how can the development discourse be individualized and related to ongoing technical, political, and economic events?” (p. 39).

Like Foucault, he understands development discourse as a “system of relations.” This discursive practice manages what is possible: “who can speak, from what point of view, with what authority, and according to what criteria of expertise; it sets the rules that must be followed for this or that problem, theory, or object to emerge and be named, analyzed, and eventually transformed into a policy or a plan” (Escobar, 1995, p.41).

In analyzing this genealogy, he describes an “economic mission” that took place in Colombia from July 11 and November 5 of 1949 by the International bank for Reconstruction and Development (now World Bank), with the intention of creating a development strategy meant to usher the country into the modern age, out of its backward ways. This was the first such mission of its kind. He quotes their initial report on Colombia’s prospects at various stages, so let us look at an excerpt in its entirety:

One cannot escape the conclusion that reliance on natural forces has not produced the most happy results. Equally inescapable is the conclusion that with knowledge of the underlying facts and economic processes, good planning in setting objectives and allocating resources, and determination in carrying out a program for improvements and reforms, a great deal can be done to improve the economic environment by shaping economic policies to meet

scientifically ascertained social requirements. ... Colombia is presented with an opportunity unique in its long history. Its rich natural resources can be made tremendously productive through the application of modern techniques and efficient practices. Its favorable international debt and trade position enables it to obtain modern equipment and techniques from abroad. International and foreign national organizations have been established to aid underdeveloped areas technically and financially. All that is needed to usher a period of rapid and widespread development is a determined effort by the Colombian people themselves. In making such an effort, Colombia would not only accomplish its own salvation, but would at the same time furnish an inspiring example to all other underdeveloped areas of the world. (p. 25).

A few patterns can be seen in this short example which may be helpful later as we look at contemporary discourse. First, the promise for Colombian economic bliss is enhanced by setting it against the backdrop of the country as backwards—failed—one which, until the potential of this unique moment to finally make their resources “productive,” has yielded “most [un]happy results.” Second, the hope is levied on the guarantor of scientific measurable and technical equations which will be ensured by the modern and efficient techniques “from abroad.” Lastly, this lucrative proposal

is contextualized as Colombia's chance to be the example par excellence for all other "underdeveloped" places in the region and beyond.

Finally, before comparing these trends to more recent texts on Colombian development, it's important to note one of Escobar's other points concerning economic development in general which is applicable with regards to U.S. policy towards the region today; that is, development theory's consistent embeddedness with policies of militarization, especially in interactions between the U.S. and Latin America. Development discourse as a function of modernization theory, as with neoliberal globalization processes today, has emerged within a context of coloniality and intervention, and as such remains inextricably connected to realities of force and militarism (Ianni, 1971; Harvey 2003). As development discourse emerged contemporaneously with the cold war and is definitionally animated by asymmetrical relations between the so-called first- and third-worlds, other types of geopolitical agendas imbued relations and projects. As the three major inter-American conferences took place in the wake of the Second World War, and many Latin American nations intended to set a progressive national agenda moving forward, negotiating that process with the U.S. brought other concerns to the fore:

As the terrain for the cold war was being fertilized, however, these conferences made evident the serious divergence

of interests between Latin America and the United States ... While the United States insisted on its military and security objectives, Latin American countries emphasized more than ever economic and social goals. (Escobar, 1995, p. 29).

At the Rio conference of 1947, Escobar avers, pacts of military assistance were signed between the United States and Latin American countries.⁴ Accordingly,

⁴ Francesca Miller notes that 1947 was a watershed year in international politics: "It marked the end of the postwar détente with the Soviet Union and opening of the cold war. ...In the Western Hemisphere, in many instances, the political openings that appeared in the postwar enthusiasm for democracy proved brief: democracy became secondary to anti-communism" (124). Miller in turn links the subsequent militarist developments in Latin America to industrial trade concerns. "Part of the impetus for the conference should also be understood as the desire of the weapons industry to continue its profits in the post-war era. Latin American states were a likely market, as they had not been fully armed during the war and, unlike Germany and Japan, were not under disarmament strictures following the war. This factor, combined with the desire of national militaries to build up their power, contributed to the creation of the 'need' to arm the hemisphere against possible Soviet penetration. The shift in the attention of the inter-American diplomatic community from social and economic reform to a focus on anticommunism was a position embraced by most Latin American governments" (124). This movement, however, was not uncontested, as a simultaneous meeting was held alongside the Rio Conference in Guatemala City by the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) which attempted to chart hemispheric advancement apart from armament projects, releasing a statement that read in part: "The First Inter-American Congress of Women meeting in Guatemala, representing mothers, wives, daughters of our

these pacts innately linked security agendas with development projects (Escobar, 1995, 34).

Despite the soaring rhetoric about salvation, freedom, and poverty which surrounded development discourse, other motives were guiding the regional alignments which spoke more to first-world hegemony in the hemisphere and what has been called the "paranoid style of American politics" (Hofstadter, 1964). While militarization isn't perhaps a stated object within the discourse or an acknowledged aim, when looking at past and current permutations of modernization theory one can still see that increased militarization is the subtext for so many organizations and agreements, what we could call a *climate of emergence*, or so opined, for the North in relation to the South's economic integration.

Contemporary Discourse around the FTA

David Slater, in *Geopolitics and the Post-Colonial: Rethinking North-South Relations* (2004), has considered the historical transition from development discourse and modernization theory to contemporary neoliberal policies of globalization at

Continent, has resolved in a plenary session to denounce the hemispheric armament plan under discussion at the Rio Conference, asking that the cost of the arms program be used to support industry, agriculture, health and education for our people" (quoted in Miller 126). For more see Miller's *Latin American Women and the Search for Social Justice*, Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1991.

length, both in terms of their similarities and differences. Whereas modernization theory involved the building up of infrastructure and heavy government investment, Slater notes that “in contrast... neo-liberalism has given greater emphasis to private capital, to competition, accumulation, deregulation, open economies, leaner states and market-oriented progress.” Nevertheless, he concludes,

in terms of their commonality, both perspectives have provided a legitimation for the projection of Western power, based on the presumption of occidental supremacy and a belief in the benign diffusion of such power. There is also a parallel in the way that, while modernization theory came to give more weight to order and political control, similarly the neo-liberal perspective mutated from structural adjustment to a more overtly political focus on the nature of government and social organization. (Slater, 2004, p. 113).

Turning attention, then, to the current moment of neoliberal integration with Colombia, it becomes apparent that within the discursive contours of these expressions of Western modernity abides continuity.

The FTA was initially signed in Washington, D.C. back in 2006. The Colombian Congress worked to ratify the deal in 2007. Nevertheless, the economic accord

sat in limbo for 5 and a half years, held up in the U.S. Congress, in part due to opposition by politicians who saw it as necessary to attend to Colombia’s human rights issues. The Office of the United States Trade Representative (USTR) has provided the “United States - Colombia Free Trade Briefing Material”, a guide to the negotiation process which purports the FTA’s benefits and coaxes public support.

According to the timeline in “Briefing Material”, in early July of 2007, “[h]ouse leaders issue[d] statements indicating they would be willing to consider the Colombia FTA once ‘concrete evidence of sustained results’ in reducing violence and impunity in Colombia are shown.” Others argued that the Colombian economy wasn’t ready for this type of trade, that it was in fact too underdeveloped, that large sectors of its economy would be destroyed as they are unable to compete with the heavily subsidized U.S. imports. And some U.S. citizens were wary about the merits of trade liberalization altogether after feelings the negative effects of NAFTA. According to a poll conducted by NBC News and the Wall Street Journal in 2010, the percentage of US residents surveyed who believe FTAs hurt the country rose to 53% from 32% in 1999. Another poll by the Pew Research Center shows that over 60% of both Tea Party sympathizers and union families are against FTAs (Belkin and Murray, 2010).

As the “FTA Briefing Material” goes on, however, it advocates that the FTA would ‘open a significant new export market’, ‘level the playing field for American business, farmers, ranchers, and workers’, ‘strengthen peace, democracy, freedom and reform’, ‘promote economic growth and poverty reduction’, and ‘anchor long-standing ties with a vital regional ally.’ George W. Bush argued that the FTA is essential to United States national security.

Considering the discourse around the FTA in light of the trends acknowledged in the initial World Bank report above, similar dynamics can be readily identified in the “Colombia FTA Facts” sheet released by the USTR and found in the “Briefing Material” publication. First, just like the World Bank report in 1950, the promise of Colombian reform is sold against a caricatured perception of national failure:

In 2000, much of Colombia was controlled by three terrorist groups and ruthless narcotics trafficking cartels. With U.S. assistance and trade preferences under ATPA, [Andean Trade Preferences Act] the Colombian people are transforming their nation. ... The progress Colombia has made is real but critical challenges remain. The terrorist and paramilitary groups are weakened but not defeated. Violence continues to threaten all sectors of Colombian society as well as cause displacement and economic hardship. The people of Colombia are address-

sing these problems aggressively and decisively, but need the continued help of the United States. The U.S. - Colombia Free Trade Agreement is a critical tool to provide licit jobs and economic alternatives to violence. (“United States - Colombia Free Trade Briefing Material”, 2008).

While there is no doubt that the Colombian has been plagued by severe violence and instability, the historical conflict has developed in a way far too complex to be reduced to “terrorists” — a dubious term itself considering that the Colombian conflict has historically been described in terms of civil war, while “terrorism” invokes a discursive strategy meant to legitimize certain forms and agents of state-sanctioned violence over others. Terrorism, lately, is more an ideologically-loaded, U.S.-injected application of affairs which locates a Colombian national struggle within the larger U.S.-led, international military campaign, the so-called Global War on Terror (Oslender, 2007). Moreover, the term “failed states” rarely reveals *whose* interests are being failed, and “is often used as a prelude to intervention of some kind — a further compromise of territorial sovereignty” (Elden, 2009, p. 63).

Second, we likewise see the guarantee of success which modern techniques of efficiency from abroad can ensure:

Through continued U.S. assistance and approval of the U.S. - Colombia

Free Trade Agreement, Colombia can become a self-sufficient partner in the region. As such, Colombia will derive the full benefits of the global economy, and can join the growing partnership of countries along the Pacific coast of the Americas to solidify open markets and strengthen democracy in the region. The resulting increased economic activity will create additional jobs and opportunities in the formal sector and will positively influence Colombia’s efforts to reduce poverty. (“United States - Colombia Free Trade Briefing Material”, 2008).

The text reads like with a cause-effect clarity that would lead one to believe that the authors were describing a simple process, and not the complex and uneven integration of diverse systems of judicial, cultural, and economic processes between nations that has been termed “free trade”. Many of the assumptions embedded in that statement are at the least contested, while numerous communities worldwide are also dis-enjoying the (un)predictable consequences of being integrated into the global economy. Tarsicio Mora, president of the CUT Labor Federation in Colombia expressed grave concerns about the impact of the FTA on the Colombian economy. “Our country isn’t developed, it does not have the expertise much less the requirements for trade at this level,” Mora said. “The country should be clear as to who is responsible for the coming massacre, because industry, large and small businesses are going

to be hit because we are not in a condition to compete” (Brodzynski, 2011).

The third and final aspect of the discourse regime of the “FTABriefing Material” that mirrors the initial report on Colombia by the World Bank is this notion of Colombia as an example for other nations. There is a desire to promote and project a certain type of neoliberal integration onto and through Colombia, or any other possible country for that matter, that might be seen as a replicable model in other places.

Supporting Colombia, a key U.S. ally, increases stability in our Hemisphere, thereby strengthening our security and economic interests in the region. ... By embracing democratic governance and open markets, Colombia has made a strategic choice for a better future for its people, and needs our support in doing so. (“United States - Colombia Free Trade Briefing Material”, 2008).

“Colombia’s success is our success”, the imperial logic seems to go; a success in the broader region, the brochure goes on to confirm, which represents a model that can be replicated on a larger scale. Paul Wolfowitz and Michael O’Hanlon (2011), not surprisingly, have even gone so far as to argue that we should replicate our last decade of policies with Colombia in Afghanistan. This leads us to the subsequent point made by Escobar earlier: the conflation of military aims with development discourses.

In the market for militarism

The sentiments of international labor activist Bill Fletcher exemplify that neoliberal integration is not simply a matter of development or working conditions, but is inextricably linked to issues of empire and militarism:

The international situation is about more than multinational corporations. Corporate globalization and military intervention are intertwined. In the labor movement there's an absence of understanding about the relationship between the two. ... Unions in the rest of the world are not simply asking us whether we will stand with them against General Electric, General Motors, or Mitsubishi. They want to know: What is your stand about the U.S. empire, about aggressive wars or coups d'état? If we have nothing to say about these things, how can we expect to have any credibility? (Chomsky, 2008, p. 222).

As Elden (2009) points out, the so-called Global War on Terror is not only global in its scope but global in its *goal*, that is, "to make the world safe for capitalism" (2009, p. xix).

While the aims of this essay are to analyze the emergence of dominant discourse about transnational neoliberal processes in Colombia, every turn reinforces the primacy of programs of militarism as the context through which these economic

policies surface. According to Escobar, the relationship between military concerns and the origins of development has scarcely been studied (1995, p. 34). If this was the dynamic through which development theory originally came into being, little has changed in the interim. Colombia, the country with the most graduates from the School of Americas, is a robust example of this relationship. Plan Colombia, initially proposed by Colombian president Pastrana in the late 90's, was an initiative he envisioned as a "Marshall plan for Colombia", intended to bring peace to the country through a negotiated settlement with the guerillas alongside new social policies aimed at addressing the country's grave inequality, for which they would need aid from the international community.

However, the U.S. quickly became involved in the process. Although the U.S. initially proposed the plan as an international initiative with European and other countries equally contributing to the cost, it quickly became clear that the U.S. was interested in a military plan, despite Pastrana's intentions, and any international financial momentum the plan may have had largely disappeared. While some officials have maintained a different story, the final proposal is widely reported as having been drafted in Washington, in English, and then sent to Bogota for ratification.

What was initially a development plan aimed at peace and social welfare quickly

became a plan in which a small percentage of a budget would be attached to social programs at the cost of an intensely escalated militarization of the conflict with the guerillas. Some \$8 billion and unquantified violence later, there is a view by many that sees the FTA as in concert with U.S. militarism and general policy towards Colombia. In other words, that the FTA is not a unique moment of multilateral cooperation but rather continues the sustained and uneven discursive conflation of economic progress with security policies is apparent:

[t]he FTA is not a result of globalization bringing two countries to be equal trading partners as its authors state. The FTA instead is an example of the U.S. continuing its policy agenda towards Colombia that has existed for over 50 years. This agenda grossly benefits the U.S., destabilizes Colombia, and keeps Colombia dependent on U.S. military aid. (Declan, 2010, p. 2).

Always the Same Fantasy

Having reviewed various surfaces of emergence and authorities of delimitation for the fabrication of this object of Western economic development and neoliberal integration in Colombia, having touched on seminal IMF reports and recent ones, the talking points of heads of state and trade representatives, clear patterns have held: 1) Colombia foregrounded as a failure in need of intervention; 2) economic success guaranteed by outside experts; 3)

Colombia as an example for other states; and 4) the conflation of military aims with economic programs. Yet despite these consistencies, against this backdrop of official statements and policy justifications abide a myriad of contradictory concerns, fears, and evidence of the failure of the prescribed courses of action; it therefore begs the question, What rules govern this discourse?

To answer that question let us turn to the work of James Ferguson. He's focused on the small country of Lesotho (1994). In it he likewise examines a World Bank report on the region which calls on development and international economic engagement to solve local problems. To his surprise the reports diverged seriously from all known scholarly work on the country; however, it is not that the authors were unintelligent or unthoughtful but rather that within the *rules governing the discourse* the assertions were in fact coherent. In describing this discursive divergence, he is not simply telling a particular story on Lesotho, but is rather pointing to a certain style of knowing necessary to transnational economic integration.

Indeed, there may be inconsistencies in the report, Ferguson affirms, but they are *purposeful*: "The statistics are wrong, but always wrong in the same way; the conceptions are fanciful, but it is always the same fantasy" (1994, p. 55). The World Bank report, and texts

like it, regardless of where it may be wrong, is precisely correct within development discourse in that national conflicts are described in such a way as to require outside forces to integrate into the economic and political infrastructure despite other discourses "on the ground" that describe those conflicts or possible solutions differently.

Conclusion

This, of course, brings us back to the initial question: how is agency, then, understood and performed in the face of hegemonic processes termed globalization? When the values and possibilities for a particular discourse prescribing profoundly consequential actions are pre-determined in distant and deafened centers of power, is there recourse—ways to interject what has been marginalized into the official narrative, methods for contravening the discursive dominants, or strategies altogether for forming affective communities apart from the consequences of these regimes? While this is still the bulk of the research that lies ahead of me, it does seem that the very elements of globalization are creating the conditions for generating and sustaining meaningful spaces of resistance and flows of alternative discourses, what David Slater and others have described as a globalization from below.

Despite living outside of Colombia now, through the privileged spaces

where connections and flows are easily maintained I am still able to keep contact with a variety of activist communities. These venues and capacities are sites of counter-discourse, where new possibilities about agency can be imagined, conversed and linked, where transnational networks are bound and strengthened, where the solidarity of the power-to has, at least, the conditions of existence to be equal or greater than the power-over.

As these fresh capacities develop and spread, perhaps they simultaneously offer advanced conditions for new discursive modes of globalization that the dominant ones largely haven't appreciated or considered until now: these include more *elastic, flexible* surfaces of emergence where a greater array of subjectivities count; also, *moral* authorities of delimitation, which demonstrate that value is calculated beyond the economic; and lastly, where there might be *intersectional* grids of specification that testify to the integration of systems and relations through which life abides. In this spirit, let us invoke the reminder proffered by Dorreen Massey: "There is an overwhelming tendency both in academic and political literature, and other forms of discourse, and in political practice, to imagine the local as the product of the global but to neglect the counterpoint to this: the local construction of the global" (2005, p. 121).

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