



RESILIENCE, COMMUNITY ACTION AND SOCIETAL TRANSFORMATION

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People, Place,
Practice, Power, Politics
and Possibility in Transition



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4.3. Enchanting Transition: A Post Colonial Perspective

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4.3.1. Introduction

As concepts like “transition” increasingly become part of our language and thinking about an uncertain future, we need to ask questions about their meanings and uses. This need is especially important when applied to academics and practitioners from the global minority, as they often use language without unpacking the relations of power nested within the knowledge that constructs each word’s particular meanings. Instead, words like transition, when used by those in the global minority, take on an objective quality that makes them appear neutral, commonsensical propositions. The neutrality, however, gives way to a world of subjectivity if we inquire whose transition is at stake when we use the term. When a Transition Town in Europe, for example, thinks transition, that thought may well be distinct from what transition means to an Ecuadorian community fighting against mining or for the Zapatista community of *La Realidad* as it contends with the assassination of one of its school teachers. To explore such distinctions, this chapter provides a set of five case studies, which provide a foundation for thinking about transition and knowledge.

The core proposition advanced maintains that actors in the global minority and global majority hold distinct transition epistemologies. These differences carry importance for thinking about the process of social change in the 21st century, as well as the strategic landscape for contending with the great challenges that lie ahead. In making these arguments, the chapter will first present the case studies, and then enter into theoretical discussion about the different practices and meanings of transition as well as the forms of knowledge embedded within them.



Figure 4.3.1 – Glen Kuecker. Credit: Gesa Maschkowski.

4.3.2. Transition Network: An Overview

The Transition Network came into being in 2006 due to the work of people like Rob Hopkins, Naresh Giangrande, and Peter Lipman. According to its web page, the network's central "role is to inspire, encourage, connect, support and train communities as they self-organise around the Transition model, creating initiatives that rebuild resilience and reduce CO₂ emissions." The focus on the climate crisis also led them to directly engage the challenge of peak oil, especially the need to transition to renewable energy and a low carbon economic system. The network emerged from the process that created Transition Town Totnes, a community in the United Kingdom that began working towards creation of an Energy Descent Action Plan based on research undertaken by two of Rob Hopkins' students at Kinsale Further Education College in 2004 and 2005. The transition concept spread rapidly from these modest origins, a fact that demonstrates the success of the network's attempts at sharing information, creating models for transition, carrying out training events, and otherwise supporting local initiatives. In June 2014, the Transition Network claimed 477 "official" transition communities spanning the world with "hubs" in 16 countries, including projects in 56 different countries. These numbers justify viewing the Transition Network as a significant player in constructing alternative practices for adaptation, transition, and resilience.

The ideas guiding the Transition Network are formally articulated in publications, their web page, and a blog. Published in 2008, Rob Hopkins' *The Transition Handbook: From Oil Dependency to Local Resilience* is perhaps the most important publication.³⁴⁶ It is organized into three sections, each reflecting the overall philosophy of the network. The first section, entitled "The Head," offers a critique of our hydrocarbon civilization and subsequent need for a systemic

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de-scaling necessary for lower carbon consumption. The second section, "The Heart," addresses our feeling of being overwhelmed by the grand scale of the changes needed, and affirms the need to maintain an

optimistic vision of the future. The third section, "The Hands," presents the network's method for taking action, which puts forward a 12-step transition program. In addition to these concepts, the Transition Network embraces Bill Mollison and David Holmgren's permaculture, and it is heavily influenced by "resilience thinking," as advocated by Walter Reid, David Salt and Brian Walker and the Resilience Alliance.³⁴⁷ Collaboration with Richard Heinberg³⁴⁸ and

³⁴⁶ Hopkins, Rob. 2008. *The Transition Handbook : From Oil Dependency to Local Resilience*. Totnes, England: Green.

³⁴⁷ Reid, Walter, David Salt, and Brian Walker. 2006. *Resilience Thinking: Sustaining Ecosystems and People in a Changing World*. Washington, DC: Island Press.

³⁴⁸ Heinberg, Richard. 2010. *Peak Everything: Waking up to the Century of Declines*. Gabriola Island, BC: New Society Publishers.

the Post Carbon Institute,³⁴⁹ as well as the Schumacher Institute³⁵⁰ adds a layer of complexity theory to the network's perspective³⁵¹.

The transition principles articulate a clear set of values that are informed by practice. They offer a vision matched with an orientation toward the pragmatics of how to do transition. They balance between philosophical statements and instruction manual. The transition principles do claim to be an exportable model, which suggests they need to be critiqued from a power/knowledge perspective, especially because of the universal claims inherent to many of the propositions. The original transition principles, however, are silent on many issues, especially questions of politics, a point

that the network addresses in its exchanges with critics, such as that advanced by the Trapeze Collective.³⁵² This friendly critique maintains that the Transition Network inadequately addresses the root causes of the climate and energy crises, and this limitation amounts to the network's inability to confront powerful forces that

Perhaps the Transition Network's greatest asset is its ability to vigorously think through its propositions, and allow them to evolve through active debates with its critiques.

bar transition from happening. The network underestimates the scale of change necessary, has a flawed understanding of the type of change we need, and is willing to work with local governments. The Trapeze Collective's critique emphasizes that the Transition Network is vulnerable to cooptation, and, if too successful, open repression. Perhaps more important, the Transition Network is silent on its position concerning capitalism, which is the fundamental rule-set to the modern system from which it seeks liberation. Perhaps the Transition Network's greatest asset is its ability to vigorously think through its propositions, and allow them to evolve through active debates with its critiques. A debate about Holmgren's "Crash on Demand," for example, opened theoretical spaces for the Transition Network to consider and clarify its position relative to capitalism, especially what role systemic capitalist crises might play in transition.³⁵³

349 <http://www.postcarbon.org>.

350 <http://www.schumacherinstitute.org.uk>

351 Heinberg, Richard. 2010. *Peak Everything: Waking up to the Century of Declines*. Gabriola Island, BC: New Society Publishers.

352 Chatterton, Paul and Alice Cutler. 2008. "The Rocky Road to Real Transition: The Transition Towns Movement and What it Means for Social Change." Trapeze Collective. For Transition Network's response see Hopkins, Rob. 2008. "The Rocky Road to a Real Transition": A Review." (May 15). Available at: <http://transitionculture.org/2008/05/15/the-rocky-road-to-a-real-transition-by-paul-chatterton-and-alice-cutler-a-review/>

353 Holmgren, David. 2013. "Crash on Demand: Welcome to the Brown Tech Future." <http://holmgren.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/Crash-on-demand.pdf>

4.3.3. Junín: Fighting for the Forests

Tucked away in the pristine cloud forests of Ecuador's northern Andean mountains, the community of Junín, with fewer than 40 families, has defeated two transnational mining companies that had planned on building a larger-scale, open-pit copper mine within community lands.

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The people of Junín have endured the violence of paramilitary attacks, animosity from neighbors who support mining, and the hardships of everyday resistance. Their twice-won victory is due to the strength of community, a force more powerful than neoliberal transnational capital.

A mixture of factors makes this community so strong.

First, excessive marginalization combined with the experience of being *colonos* (land squatters) to forge a strong sense of autonomy. Second, the agrarian roots of the struggle morphed into an environmental struggle, adding a sense of importance to their resistance. Third, *campesino* (peasant) lifestyle merged with marginalization and the *colono* experience to foster strong familial and communal bonds defined by mutual dependence and reciprocity. Taken together these factors generated an immovably resilient force against the mining companies.



Figure 4.3.2 – Community of Junín Fighting Against Transnational Mining Companies. Credit: Mining Watch, Canada.

In response to the severe economic crises of the 1990s, the Ecuadorian government turned to neoliberal policies advocated by the International Monetary Fund and World Bank. These policies drastically reduced funds for state programs, and significantly aggravated rural poverty. The policies also excessively marginalized communities like Junín, which were left to compete in a global agricultural market place. Economic marginalization, absence of the state and its services joined to make Junín nearly invisible within neoliberal plans. In the void left by the state, people in Junín had to provide for themselves. They were equipped for this task, because that's what they had always done. Most community members are second-generation rural squatters, people who came from other parts of Ecuador in search of land and with it security. They carved their community out of the forests. The *colono* experience was defined by extensive hardships, and generated a fierce mentality of independence. Marginalized and born within the rough and tumble world of *colonos*, people from Junín possessed high levels of autonomy, they controlled the process of making decisions about what mattered most to their lives.

Community autonomy also came with being *campesinos*. The people of Junín work their own land, and they are their own bosses. Their production makes them food secure, but they have limited local and regional markets for selling surplus production. They maintain a balance between food security and relative poverty as defined by the capitalist market system. Being poor by the standards of the capitalist economy means protecting food security by controlling their own land and its

method of production is a top objective for people living in Junín. Simply stated, community members do not tolerate threats to their economic autonomy. These agrarian roots to community, however, merged with an environmental frame introduced to them by

Reciprocity is the key. Each community member is called up to provide community service when needed, through a rotational labor system called the minga.

outside actors, namely the Church and NGOs. Junín learned that everyone framed the mining struggle as an environmental issue, and they understood the importance of adapting and adopting this movement frame to their agrarian struggle. The environmental discourse added the important element of defending the forests against destruction to their basic struggle, transforming people in Junín into internationally recognized environmentalists.

Another core to community in Junín is how marginalization and the *colono* experience produced strong bonds of mutual dependence and reciprocity within families and neighbors. With less than 40 families, everyone in Junín knows everybody. They pass through the cycles of life together, and know everyone's human strengths and weaknesses. Many families are tightly interconnected through family ties, which form strong bonds of obligations and duties between community members. Surviving the process of settling Junín within a remote part

of Ecuador required high levels of mutual support and dependence. Reciprocity is the key. Each community member is called up to provide community service when needed, through a rotational labor system called the *minga*. It ensures that each community member receives the support needed for surviving in an economy of scarcity. Mutual bonds have a cultural articulation in Junín. It is expressed as an honor code, one that values the “word” of each person. To keep one’s word and defend one’s honor means fulfilling the requirements of community duties and obligations. In a social setting of relative poverty, a person’s most valuable possession is often one’s word. This social-cultural system is vital in keeping the commons together.

4.3.4. Café R.E.D.: Three Transitions

A few blocks from the central plaza in Quetzaltenango, Guatemala’s second largest city, one can find Café R.E.D., a restaurant created by a group of ex-combatants and migrants returned from their pursuit of the “*sueño Americano*” in “*El Norte*”, also known as the United States. The restaurant also houses a grassroots organization, known as DESGUA (Economic Development for a Sustainable Guatemala). The creators of Café R.E.D. designed it to be a “sustainable development” demonstration project. They organized it around the concept of “solidarity food.” The restaurant acts in solidarity with local *campesinos* by purchasing their produce, while DESGUA works with them in capacity building and designing local economies around organic food and permaculture practices. An organic chicken farm in Cajola, about an hour from Quetzaltenango, was one of the first indigenous communities to work with DESGUA, and has several community members working at Café R.E.D. as cooks and waiters. The organizers of Café R.E.D. are inspired by the need to replace the “*sueño Americano*” with the “*sueño*



Figure 4.3.3 – Café R.E.D.’s website.

Guatemalteco." Many of these activists experienced the brutalities and indignities of migrating to the United States, and many found themselves lost in the absurdities of consumer culture. Most, but not all of the folks at Café R.E.D. are indigenous people, Mayan K'iche' and Mam speakers, and they sought to overcome the alienation of labor and culture by leaving the United States and returning to their homes and culture. Their project, therefore, carries a significant element of cultural recovery and reconstitution, a challenging prospect in Guatemala, where the scars of historical memory from the ugly violence of the civil war's counterinsurgency policies remain deep.

Most participants in Café R.E.D. and DESGUA grew-up with Guatemala's counterinsurgency war raging throughout the province's indigenous communities. Some of the worst repression was only a couple of hours away. The Guerrilla movement recruited several of the organizers when they were high school age and almost all of them became guerrilla soldiers, something that requires a radical transformation in one's life. One of the activists was one of the original founders of the revolutionary movement and was a guerrilla commander for over 30 years.

When the civil war ended in a stalemate that led to the 1996 peace accords, many former guerrilla soldiers became deeply disillusioned with the cause to which they had been dedicated, as well as any hope for constructing a more just Guatemala. Disenchanted, many joined the great migration of the 2000s, which found tens of thousands of Guatemalans crossing the border into Mexico, riding the trains north to where they made

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the crossing into the United States. Once there, many worked in kitchens, which gave them the skills needed to undertake Café R.E.D. upon their return. They settled in places like Madison, Wisconsin, and Morristown, New Jersey. The migrants fell deep into the rabbit hole of American consumerism, and became very distant from Guatemalan culture and identity, especially those who came from indigenous communities. Many married, had children, and found regular work that generated their first steady income. The migrant experience and subsequent Americanization constituted a second radical transformation. These were significant re-workings of one's contexts, identities and life engagements, seldom experienced by people in the global minority, except maybe those we ask to become soldiers and fight our wars. Overtime, this group of migrants came to know that something was not right as they felt the disorder of the world they were in. Many felt unstable, psychologically. Seeing it as a nightmare, they decided to give up on the *sueño Americano* and returned to Guatemala. The return

was challenging, as they once again faced the need to rebuild their lives, and once again cross complex borders of identity, meaning, culture, and everyday life. One of them, Willy Barreno, became dedicated to building “*el sueño Guatemalteco*,” which led to the creation of DESGUA and Café R.E.D..

While away, the migrants had kept in contact with their comrades from the armed struggle in Guatemala. They are a tight group, what we might view as a Guatemalan version of the “Band of Brothers.” They had skills acquired in the United States, and several of them had worked in restaurants. As DESGUA looked for projects, the idea of creating a restaurant where they could train others their trade became one of their first projects. Thus was born Café R.E.D., and the idea for solidarity food. They dedicated themselves, as they had to the guerrilla movement and the quest for the American Dream, to the project.

Unpacking the Café R.E.D. story tells us something more than an example of sustainable development. It provides us a narrative of transition, one that involves giving up on a known world three times as they became guerrilla soldiers, migrants, and returnees. It also provides a remarkable story of human resilience, and social resilience, one of the great stories of the Guatemalan people. It also provides both a literal and metaphorical story of epistemic translation, as they are not simply border crossers but epistemic crossers. In their multiple and layered struggles for liberation, epistemic fluency makes them profound humans, able to conceptualize alternative worlds and develop the plan for their own transition to them.

4.3.5. Pariet Project: Knowledge of the Ancestors

Originating in the 1990s, the Pariet Project of Papua New Guinea seeks to overcome tribal conflicts over issues like land as a way to better organize in resistance to clear-cutting of forests, commercial fishing, and extractive mining. The core of the effort is an extensive process of cultural recovery. In particular, the project focused on re-constituting historical memory through their oral traditions, a particular knowledge held by tribal elders that connects community to time and space. Tribal elders can reach back 36 generations through their memory and story telling, a living archive of wisdom about how humans relate with one another, nature, and the cosmos. Zureki Maigao, Chairperson of the Pariet Project³⁵⁴, explains the Pariet Project by stating:

This is now our story. I have been Chairperson for fifteen years. We are Pariet. We have been part of the Pariet story for more than fifteen years. It is slow, it is hard, and it is a struggle to find our roots, our ancestors after so much destruction. But we are stronger than ever before. Under [sic] now the tribal lineage of the Ammam people, we stretch far across the mountains and down through to the other side of the mountains. Pariet has helped us to see who we are. We want our independence and our own way to decide what is for our self-betterment. In my role, I speak with authority. Pariet will see us through. I have the Amman blood, and in my blood, I know this is the way.

354 Nadarajah, Yaso. 2009. Wisini Group of Villages, Morobe Province. *Local-Global* 5: 117.

Nadarajah explains the significance of the Chairman's words:³⁵⁵

It is both a contingent and choreographed story of contemporary intersections as people look in two directions at once: back to a carefully reconstructed past and forward in modern time to the future that brings together different ways of being. Their story includes a symbolic journey by outsiders to their place, a modern chronicle of a political movement called Pariet, a tribal dance and hidden stories that remain unrevealed here; and it ends with the words of their Chairperson, 'I speak with authority', old and new.

The geography of 'their own spaces,' is found here in the in-between places of culture and community, the nooks and crannies of life where modernity has not visited, and when it has, it has not won.

An example of the hybridity of Pariet Project's in-between spaces comes from Naup Waup, the founder of the Pariet Project. Waup is from the tribal community of Wisini, a full day's ride, if the "road" is good, from the port city of Lae in Morobe Province, an hour flight from the capital of Port Moresby. When they travel down the mountains to Lae, most villagers take the forest trails, instead of the modern road. Tribal elders selected Waup, upon his birth, to be the next tribal leader. To prepare for the task the community gave him special treatment as he grew up. Knowing that the modern world was finding its way to Wisini, the elders understood that the next leader needed a modern education, so they sent Waup to Lae for formal schooling. He excelled in his classes, and developed what became a charismatic personality, one that captured attention through energy, intensity, and intelligence. Waup gained a scholarship for university study in Australia, at RMIT University in Melbourne. He studied art. Waup returned to Papua New Guinea, living with one foot in the modern city of Lae and the other in Wisini. He had become an expert navigator between wildly divergent cultures, able to translate meanings, contexts, and epistemologies. Tribal elders passed along their knowledge of the ancestors to Waup, a different form of education that prepared him for some day becoming a tribal elder. Taking from the modern world, and knowing the need to preserve tribal ways, Waup launched the Pariet Project.

Waup is an amazing artist. He does prints that articulate dream visions of the other knowledges of his people. They are intense representations of tribal origin myths that involve the original migration of the founding lineage, as well as the truths of the elders. The art is his way of communicating the hybrid world that makes cultural survival so important and so challenging.

4.3.6. Zapatistas

From the mountains of southern Mexico a revolutionary force awoke the world to the possibility of a radical alternative to the triumph of post-cold war neoliberal globalization. Known as the Zapatistas, indigenous peoples of Mayan origin launched an armed rebellion against the "bad government" of the Mexican state and the economic forces of neoliberalism

355 Nadarajah, Yaso. 2009. Wisini Group of Villages, Morobe Province. *Local-Global* 5: 117.

on January 1, 1994. Their initial rebellion, faced with overwhelming military repression from the Mexican military and civil society's demand for peace, transformed into a new form of revolution, one that did not seek the seizure of state power as the tool for revolutionary change, but instead sought to "have a revolution without taking power." The Zapatista project became a well articulated vision for change, one that converged a program for

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good government and an self-sufficient and equitable economy around the concept of autonomy, which invested the fundamental right to decide within the particular cultural practices of community. The Zapatista revolution was explicitly against neoliberalism, as it saw policies like the North American Free Trade Agreement as the "death sentence" of indigenous people. Their revolution, however, was also anti-capitalist, a point made abundantly clear by

their Sixth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle, which was put forward to the international community in 2005. Their revolution is marked by the longevity of its open rebellion, twenty years and counting, which illustrates the open nature of the rebellion, one that emphasizes process, the "the revolution is the path you walk," over dogma that allows it to be continuously responsive to changing contexts and proactive in formulating new directions in revolutionary struggle. The Zapatistas also stand out because they retain a revolutionary army, one mobilized for the defense of liberated communities throughout Chiapas.

The Zapatista movement anchors its approaches within the "norms and customs" of indigenous communities. These are shaped by half a millennium of encounter with the modern world, which has had an obsessive vision of indigenous people as barriers to the world of Enlightenment. Their resistance is cultural; it merges the continuity of indigenous ways of being, seeing, thinking, and acting, with a knowledge that comes from selective interaction with modernity, where their norms and customs remain subaltern to the way power is constituted by modernity. The practice of autonomy is a cultural proposition, one that actualizes indigenous cosmivision with the arts of resistance and constituting an alternative world. Rooted in distinct notions of time and space, the cosmivision places emphasis on the human struggle to balance between the universe's forces of order and disorder. Modernity, in this view, wrought centuries of disequilibrium, a profound disordering of the universe, so that their revolutionary struggle is the attempt to bring order back to the universe. These norms and customs make the Zapatista movement highly resilient and mark it as a transcendental proposition.



Figure 4.3.4 – Zapatista Cosmovision: “We Want a World Where All Worlds Belong”. Credit: Michael Cucher.

4.3.7. Enchanting Transition

Transition is a core concept for understanding the narrative within each of this chapter’s case studies. For the Transition Network, moving to a post hydrocarbon world of re-localized economies means breaking from the logic of modernity. For Junín, the evolution from colonizers to environmentalists defined their transition, one that placed resistance to mining as the way they made meaning of the transition. Three deep transitions – from peasant to guerrilla, guerrilla to *sueño Americano*, and *sueño Americano* to the return migrant’s *sueño Guatemalteco* – rest at the core of the solidarity food idea that gave birth to *Café R.E.D.*. In Papua New Guinea, cultural recovery and community organizing constituted the transition embraced by the Pariet Project. The creation of autonomy and its radical re-thinking of revolutionary change defined the great transition of the Zapatistas. From these case studies, we can see that there is no single, homogenous meaning to transition. Instead, they show that transition has multiple meanings that are highly contingent upon historical contexts and human experiences. This diversity points to the importance of asking “whose” transition when we deploy the concept in our theoretical and practical work.

A useful approach for thinking about the diversity of transitions present in this essay’s case studies is the Frankfurt School of Sociology’s “enchantment” proposition. Adorno and

Horkheimer (2002), in their *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trace the origins of modernity's dark side as resting with the culture-nature dichotomy created by Bacon and Descartes' "war against nature." Adorno and Horkheimer argue that modern ways of being, seeing, thinking, and acting

seek to exterminate the enchanted world, the ways of being, seeing, acting, and thinking that existed prior to the war on nature. With their secular world of rationality, moderns live in a disenchanted world. To overcome the dark side of modernity and leverage the positive aspects of enlightenment rationality, moderns have to experience a process

To overcome the dark side of modernity and leverage the positive aspects of enlightenment rationality, moderns have to experience a process of re-enchantment.

of re-enchantment. Taking from this framework, we can think of an epistemic continuum that extends between the extremes of enchanted and disenchanted worlds, and where re-enchantment occupies a middle position. We can locate the Transition Network in a space between disenchantment and re-enchantment, while the Pariet Project and Zapatistas would fall toward the enchantment end of the continuum. In this interpretation, *Café R.E.D.* and the community of Junín hold a space within re-enchantment due to their significant engagements in the modern world.



Figure 4.3.5 – Movements' locations on a continuum from enchantment to disenchantment.

Nested within the continuum of transition between forms of enchantment are different forms of knowledge. Through its practices of creating communities of transition, the Transition Network generates knowledge. This knowledge is reproduced through an intentional effort at making its experiences known to a wider public. Knowledge gained from experience is formalized through several mediums, including the Transition Network web page, the blogs of its advocates, and from the intellectual work of researchers. Formalization provides the Transition Network's knowledge with legitimacy that enhances its status. Through repetition and expansion, its knowledge production is embedded within relations of power, because it defines questions that need to be studied, generates the analysis of those problems, and

from the analysis proposes actions to be taken. It defines the “facts” to be known about transition, what is “legible” when transition is discussed, and participates in a wider system of understandings shared by similar organizations, but also the wider world of power/knowledge actors, such as UN agencies, the World Bank, and various levels of government. Resilience, for example, is a concept and proposition known to all of these actors, to an extent that there is a level of “common sense,” meaning hegemony, within its use. As facts are defined and realities made legible, the Transition Network participates in an erasure of alternatives, it necessarily excludes some possibilities from being “facts” and renders some realities “illegible” as it does its work. These are subtle acts, often committed without awareness or critical perspective, or without malicious intent. They do, however, constitute forms of knowledge and power.

The Transition Network produces a particular type of knowledge about transition. First, they define the problem from the perspective of climate change and peak oil, whereby transition becomes a question of breaking free from hydrocarbon civilization. The “facts” of transition become constituted by the scientific discourse about climate change and energy, as well as the political and economic system sustaining the problem. This construction of transition makes the modern system legible, a process that defines the sequencing of transition itself, a movement from the modern system to an “alternative” system, a new reality that is not yet named except for its reference to the system it is transitioning from, such as the “post-hydrocarbon world.”

When we turn to the global majority case studies, however, transition takes on very different meanings. While transition for the global minority means a departure from being modern, for those in the global majority, they are already an alternative. Being an alternative, the global majority case studies act in resistance to modernity either rejecting it entirely or in an effort to engage modernity on its own terms, often in a subaltern fashion that is illegible to the ways

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moderns constitute knowledge. When these case studies articulate their concerns, climate change and peak oil are seldom mentioned, even though the participants are often well aware of those crises. Juxtaposed to these case studies, the Transition Network’s agenda appears to be constituted by the global minority for the global minority. The Transition Network’s

construction of transition renders illegible the “other knowledges” generated by the global majority that constitute different paths toward the future.

4.3.8. Other Knowledges and the Transmodern World

Post-colonial studies offers promising ideas for the task of understanding the other knowledges generated by communities in the global majority, especially those communities, such as the case studies in earlier sections in this chapter, that retain a significant extent of an enchanted epistemic. Post-colonial studies is useful because of its pre-occupation with understanding how forms of colonial power shape the experience of the colonized upon their formal liberation from colonialism. This perspective allows us to understand how the struggle

The knowledge produced by the other transitions of the global majority, is derived from three key sources: first, from the reality of a community's being post-colonial. second, from the everyday life struggles of marginalized peoples and the third form of knowledge is legacy knowledge, those pre-colonial enchanted epistemologies and cosmologies that survived modernity, whether in fragments or in entirety.

for liberation is constitutive of the lived reality for most if not all of the global majority. The challenge of liberation, as explored by thinkers like Homi Bhabha, Franz Fanon and Albert Memmi,³⁵⁶ represents a context distinct from the type of liberation sought by groups in the global minority, such as the Transition Network. The post-colonial condition is a way of being human that has its own ways of seeing and thinking. A significant part of the post-colonial epistemic is the theoretical and practical problem of escaping what appears to be an everlasting condition of having been colonized. The struggle to transcend the

colonial marking constitutes the core meaning of transition for the global majority, a meaning that is radically distinct from that constructed by the Transition Network.

Within post-colonial studies, vigorous debates exist about the theory and practice of liberation for the global majority. Among them are the contested understandings of what it means to be “subaltern,” that exist between scholars from the global minority and the global majority,

³⁵⁶ Bhabha, Homi. 1994. *The Location of Culture*. New York: Routledge. Fanon, Frantz. 1965. *The Wretched of the Earth*. New York: Grove. Originally published 1961; Fanon, Frantz. 1967. *Black Skin, White Masks*. New York: Grove. Originally published in 1952. Memmi, Albert. 1965. *Colonizer and Colonized*. New York: Orion. Originally published in 1957

such as the debate that exists within the Latin American Subaltern Studies group. Their divide was between scholars from the global minority, such as Florencia Mallon,³⁵⁷ who tended to have an ironically eurocentric critique of eurocentricism, and those from the global majority (especially a group of Latin Americanists, led by Anibal Quijano and Quijano and Ennis, Enrique Dussel, Dussel, Krauel and Tuma and Dussel, Moraña, and Jáuregui, Walter Mignolo, and Ramón Grosfoguel), who seek an understanding of the post-colonial condition that is derived from what they see to be a truly subaltern perspective – its “other knowledges” – created by the post-colonial experience.³⁵⁸ Echoing the Frankfurt School's thesis that modernity exterminates the enchanted, their work explains how colonial repression aimed to eradicate other knowledges, and replace them with the modern epistemic. Quijano writes, “The repression fell, above all, over the modes of knowing, of producing knowledge, of producing perspectives, images and systems of images, symbols, modes of signification, over the resources, patterns, and instruments of formalized and objectivised expression, intellectual or visual.”³⁵⁹ Transition for the global majority, therefore, requires untangling all of the complex webs of deeply embedded and interrelated relations of power within economy, authority, gender, and subjectivity and knowledge that are each defined by the modernity's inequities and inequalities, but also the struggle to remain enchanted.³⁶⁰

The knowledge produced by the other transitions of the global majority is derived from three key sources. The first knowledge derives from the reality of a community's being post-colonial.

- 357 Mallon, Florencia. 1994. “The Promise and Dilemma of Subaltern Studies: Perspectives from Latin American History.” *American Historical Review*. Vol. 99; No. 5. (December): 1491-1515.
- 358 Quijano, Anibal. 2007. “Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality.” *Cultural Studies*. Vol. 21; Nos. 2-3. (March/May): 168-178; Quijano, Anibal and Michael Ennis. 2000. “Coloniality of Power, Eurocentricism, and Latin America.” *Neplanta: Views from South*. Vol. 1; No. 3: 533-580; Dussel, Enrique. 2004. “Deconstruction of the Concept of ‘Tolerance’: From Intolerance to Solidarity.” *Constellations*. Vol. 11; No. 3: 326-333; Dussel, Enrique. 2002. “World System and ‘Transmodernity.’” *Neplanta: Views from the South*. Vol. 3; No. 2: 221-244.; Dussel, Enrique. 2001. *Towards an Unknown Marx: A Commentary on the Manuscripts of 1861–63*. London: Routledge; Dussel, Enrique. 1998. *Beyond Eurocentrism: The World-System and the Limits of Modernity.* In Fredric Jameson and Masao Miyoshi. Editors. *The Cultures of Globalization*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998.; Dussel, Enrique. 1996. *The Underside of Modernity: Apel, Ricoeur, Rorty, Taylor and the Philosophy of Liberation*. Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, 1996; Dussel, Enrique. 1995. *The Invention of the Americas: The Eclipse of the “Other” and the Myth of Modernity*. New York: Continuum, 1995; Dussel, Enrique. 1980. *Philosophy of Liberation*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1980; Dussel, Enrique, Javier Krauel and Virginia Tuma. 2000. “Europe, Modernity, and Eurocentrism.” *Neplanta: Views from the South*. Vol. 1; No. 3: 465-478; Dussel, Enrique, Mabel Moraña, and Carlos Jáuregui. 2008. Editors. *Coloniality at Large: Latin America and the Postcolonial Debate*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.; Mignolo, Walter. 2005. *The Idea of Latin America*. Oxford: Blackwell, Mignolo, Walter. 2002. “The Geopolitics of Knowledge and the Colonial Difference.” *The South Atlantic Quarterly*. Vol. 101; No. 1: 57-96, Mignolo, Walter. 2000a. *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledge, and Border Thinking*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, Mignolo, Walter. 2000b. “The Many Faces of Cosmo-polis: Border Thinking and Critical Cosmopolitanism.” *Public Culture*. Vol. 12; No. 3: 721-748, Mignolo, Walter. 1995. *The Darker Side of the Renaissance: Literacy, Territoriality, and Colonization*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.; Grosfoguel, Ramón. 2008. “Transmodernity, Border Thinking, and Global Coloniality: Decolonizing Political Economy and Postcolonial Studies.” *Eurozine*. (July): 1-23. <http://www.eurozine.com/pdf/2008-07-04-grosfoguel-en.pdf> (accessed July 2010).
- 359 Quijano, Anibal. 2007. “Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality”. *Cultural Studies*. Vol. 21; Nos. 2-3. (March/May): 169.
- 360 Mignolo, W. D., 2007. “Introduction: Coloniality of power and de-colonial thinking.” *Cultural Studies* Vol. 21; Nos. 2-3. (March/May): 157.

The second knowledge is produced from the everyday life struggles of marginalized peoples. It is the knowledge about being human acquired from the internal conflicts and dilemmas of people in resistance, the struggle to retain an enchanted world. The third form of knowledge is legacy knowledge, those pre-colonial enchanted epistemologies and cosmologies that survived modernity, whether in fragments or in entirety. These other knowledges are characterized by their diversity. They offer a "pluriversal" truth as against the modernity's universal truth. The post-colonial embrace of difference is rooted in its critique of modern rationality that is informed by the Frankfurt School's critical theory.³⁶¹ It finds the universalism of the modernity to be an oppressive mechanism that obliterates difference through colonial relations of power.³⁶² The post-colonial instead sees diversity as anchored in the way many communities in the global majority have de-centered, localized, and plural ways of being, acting, and thinking that have persisted despite the homogenizing ways modernity has historically constituted difference as binary oppositions such as modern versus traditional or developed versus backward.

The post-colonial condition constitutes a different context and meaning about 21st century transition when juxtaposed to the knowledge generated by the Transition Network. Some post-colonial theorists call this distinct knowledge "transmodernity," and see it as a means for global majority post-colonials to transcend modernity, as against transition from it. Dussel, for example, states that transmodernity "will have a creative function of great significance in the twenty-first century." The diversity of transmoderns, their lived experiences, and legacy knowledges that form the base of the transmodern epistemic is uniquely matched for the creativity and experimentation needed for weathering the perfect storm of 21st century challenges. It is the time of the global majority, when the meek will inherit the earth. Dussel states:³⁶³

"modernity's recent impact on the planet's multiple cultures (Chinese, Southeast Asian, Hindu, Islamic, Bantu, Latin American) produced a varied 'reply' by all of them to the modern 'challenge.' Renewed, they are now erupting on a cultural horizon 'beyond' modernity. I call the reality of that fertile multicultural moment 'trans'-'modernity'."

Beyond modernity the transmoderns return "to their status as actors in the history of the world-system."³⁶⁴ As reconstituted agents unmarked by the condition of colonialism, transmoderns will be their own protagonists in the making of 21st century history. Transmoderns "retain an immense capacity for and reserve of cultural invention essential for humanity's

361 Dallmayr, Fred. 2004. "The Underside of Modernity: Adorno, Heidegger, and Dussel." *Constellations*. Vol. 11; No. 1: 102-120. Mignolo, W. D., 2007. "Introduction: Coloniality of power and de-colonial thinking." *Cultural Studies* Vol. 21; Nos. 2-3. (March/May): 155.

362 Quijano, Anibal. 2007. "Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality." *Cultural Studies*. Vol. 21; Nos. 2-3. (March/May): 168-178. Dussel, Enrique. 2002. "World System and 'Transmodernity.'" *Neplanta: Views from the South*. Vol. 3; No. 2: 221.

363 *Ibid.* p. 221

364 *Ibid.* p 224

survival,” Dussel states.³⁶⁵ His version of transmodernity promises a new humanism, where “these cultures, in their full creative potential.... constitute a more human and complex world, more passionate and diverse, a manifestation of the fecundity that the human species has shown for millennia.”³⁶⁶

4.3.9. Conclusion: Is a New Humanism Possible?

The Transition Network and the global majority case studies considered in this chapter share several points of common ground. Each constitutes a path toward escaping the death spiral of modernity through the creation of an alternative way of being, seeing, thinking, and acting. All are creative responses to the deepening crises of modernity that carry important but nuanced aspects of the type of resilience essential for weathering the perfect storm of the 21st century. There are also important distinctions that mark the Transition Network alternative as a substantially different proposition when compared to the global majority cases. The Transition Network occupies a position of privilege and relative power that comes with being a global minority movement. While facing challenges of counter hegemony, the Transition Network has yet to face the oppression and repression that alternative paths in the global majority routinely encounter. While each produces knowledge that generates power, the Transition Network significantly operates within the power/knowledge regime of modernity. At least one foot remains firmly embedded in the disenchanting world. It does not experience the post-colonial context of the global majority that produces their other knowledges and the proposition of transmodernity. In the final analysis, the Transition Network exists in a distinct epistemic defined by a problematic of disenchantment, as against one coming from the enchanted world struggling for liberation from colonialism and its legacy.

Among the many unresolved questions explored in this chapter, and one that softly lurks within each section, concerns one of the greatest offerings made by the Enlightenment, the challenge of solidarity among humanity in the struggle for liberation. I have explored the question of solidarity in an essay,³⁶⁷ “Academic Activism and the Socially Just University.” It undertakes a critical reflection on my own efforts at solidarity, and through it the essay postulates that solidarity may not be possible. Despite that pessimism, the intent was more hopeful in that I view solidarity as an on-going struggle toward a goal that will always be beyond our reach. It is the effort at reaching the goal that carries the human potential for liberation, and it is a necessary effort, especially now that we face a new historical epoch defined not by the brutalities of neoliberal globalization, but by the prospects of modernity’s collapse. The collapsing structures offer us the opportunity to innovate, create, and transition to something more human. It is the time to realize the imaginary of solidarity, and through that effort to create a new humanism for the 21st century.

365 *Ibid.* p. 235

366 *Ibid.* p. 237

367 Kuecker, Glen David. “Academic Activism and the Socially Just University,” Pp. 42-55. In: Kathleen Skubikowski, Catherine Wright, and Roman Graf. Editors. *Social Justice Education: Inviting Faculty to Transform Their Institutions*. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publications, 2010.

Dussel maintains that transmoderns have the capacity to create the new humanism. In that project, what role do transitioners in the global minority play? One possible answer comes from an interview Rob Hopkins had with Arturo Escobar, a post-colonial theorist who is part of the group that theorized transmodernity. Escobar states,³⁶⁸

“The concept, the practice of Transition that we use for different parts of the world, we have to take into account that they will be inter-cultural conversations, inter-epistemic conversations, different knowledge is going to be involved, and those require translation. Translation across knowledges, across cultures, across histories, across different ways of being negatively affected by globalisation, across levels of privilege and so forth.”

That undertaking requires deployment of critical theory to unpack the hegemonic uses of key concepts, such as “transition” so that we can destabilize the knowledge embedded in their meanings. This destabilization opens spaces for translation between epistemics and traditions, especially between the enchanted, re-enchanted, and disenchanted worlds. Escobar’s provocative statement joins other post-colonial theorists³⁶⁹ in proposing the destabilizing of knowledge in order to decenter it so that we may become “border crossers.”

368 Hopkins, Robert. 2012. “Alternatives to Development: An Interview with Arturo Escobar.” September 28, 2012. Available at: <https://www.transitionculture.org/2012/09/28/alternatives-to-development-an-interview-with-arturo-escobar/>

369 Mohanty, Chandra. 2003. *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*. Durham: Duke University Press; Smith, Linda Tuhiwai. 1999. *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. New York: Zed Books; Anzaldúa, Gloria. 1999. *Borderlands/La frontera: The New Mestiza* (2nd ed.). San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books.

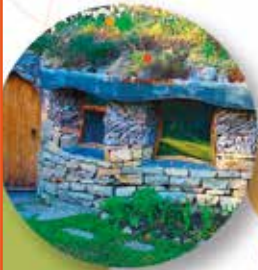


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