for – a society in which male leaders held themselves accountable to an organized and enfranchised female electorate, not one in which women shared ultimate political authority with men' (p. 120). For their part, the leaders of the PUP 'always sustained a tension between mobilizing and responding to women on the one hand, and containing, condescending to, and domesticating them on the other' (p. 218).

Asserting that gender has been central to the production of the Belizean nation, Macpherson acknowledges that this centrality has been complex and contradictory: 'While the modern state, colonial or national, has developed as an institution of hegemonic masculine authority, it has maintained that authority not only by forging vertical alliances with men, alliances that have reproduced female exclusion and/or subordination but also, and sometimes simultaneously, by incorporating politically active women's demands and expectations into its rhetoric and practice' (p. 12). And while women activists 'partially succumbed to paternalistic party clientelism … they also made nationalist legitimacy in part contingent on recognizing women's rights and working to solve their problems' (p. 280). Indeed, it was the failure of successive PUP administrations to solve these problems that finally led to the emergence of Belizean feminism and autonomous women's organising (p. 280).

Macpherson's book will become required reading for scholars of Belize and an important interlocutor for scholarship on the Caribbean. Well beyond these audiences, however, Macpherson's nuanced approach to agency and hegemony position this book as an important contribution to scholarship on colonialism and anti-colonialism, resistance and accommodation, and the production of political subjectivities and political alliances more generally.

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Arturo Escobar, *Territories of Difference: Place, Movements, Life, 'Redes'* (Durham NC and London: Duke University Press, 2009), pp. xvi+435, £57.00, £13.99 pb.

The product of more than a decade of theoretical reflection, activist engagement and ethnographic research, this book is a tour de force: an epic account of a social movement in struggle, against daunting odds, for 'another world'. The protagonists are activist intellectuals who belong to the Process of Black Communities (*Proceso de Comunidades Negras*, PCN), a leading organisation of black Colombians, whose base is the Pacific coast region. They drive the narrative with their words and practice, and their knowledge guides the book's analytical interventions. The breadth of these interventions is staggering – from the social construction of nature to the coloniality of power, from grassroots development to identity politics – and is rendered more impressive still by Escobar's concerted effort to highlight lesser-known theoretical contributions from outside the global North. Although one is left with doubts as to how far the PCN has managed to advance toward 'alternatives to modernity', the knowledge they produced along the way, which Escobar has transcribed into elegant, theoretically provocative prose, conveys great hope and inspiration.

The setting is the emergence of the Pacific region in the 1990s: a theatre for state-driven development plans, for biodiversity conservation projects funded by multilateral agencies, and for an 'explosion' of mobilisation around black and indigenous culture, identity and collective rights. This mobilisation yielded an impressive list of

achievements by the decade's end: a proliferation of identity-based organisations engaged in negotiations with the powers that be, fruitful experiments with alternative economic practices, and most concretely, titles to 4.8 million hectares of territories for black communities. The new century, however, brought a sombre denouement: massive displacement of these communities in the face of violence instigated or condoned by the state, appropriation of land by African palm entrepreneurs and other powerful economic interests, and a dissipation of the collective effervescence that characterised the previous decade.

For those, like myself, who have avidly read, taken inspiration from and argued with Escobar's writings over the years, a striking feature of this work is the added measure of sober pragmatism, exemplified by the activists' constant need to negotiate and compromise, and by Escobar's inclination to mediate between starkly opposed theoretical positions (including some that might previously have been his own). For example, Escobar critiques radical constructivist approaches to nature and fashions a re-encounter of sorts with positivist science; he notes that poor people, trying to make ends meet, often have limited room for manoeuvre toward utopian economic alternatives; in a nod to the strategic wisdom of the PCN, he endorses the 'counterwork' that engages the state and seeks, for example, to transform World Bank-funded development projects from within; and instead of insisting on a full-throttle drive for 'alternatives to modernity', he settles for a hybrid vision that combines reformist and utopian imaginaries.

Constant mediation between grounded practice and political-theoretical vision, applied to six distinct topics (place, capital, nature, development, identity, networks), makes for a very demanding analytical mandate which Escobar meets with two textual strategies. The first – a strikingly original approach sure to be widely emulated – is cumulative recursivity. Escobar tells the same basic story – of black community mobilisation for a distinctive 'life-giving' cultural-political project – six times, each with a distinct set of theoretical interventions, each tightly woven in dialogue with the analysis of black activist-intellectuals themselves. (Only in the last chapter – on networks – does this dialogue unravel, when a long exegesis of complexity theory leaves the PCN mute.) The second textual strategy is to pack the footnotes with elaboration on nearly every important point in the text, from theoretical provisos to additional ethnographic detail, all of which is crucial to a full grasp of the story. Through the footnotes, for example, we come fully to appreciate the central role that Escobar himself played in the processes he narrates, and we visualise the series of activist workshops that provide the primary source of ethnographic data for his analysis. The footnotes also highlight the constructive tensions between the PCN's (and Escobar's) theoretically resonant political vision, on the one hand, and the protagonists' more heterogeneous, at times contradictory, on-the-ground practice, on the other. These tensions, in turn, are where my critical questions about the book begin.

The compelling cultural-political vision of the PCN is place-based resistance, subsistence-oriented production, and territorial autonomy. Yet the striking state responsiveness to the central demand (4.8 million hectares granted in less than a decade) points to a parallel process whereby territorial recognition must also have followed a political logic from above. We can piece together this parallel process from the footnotes, but we gain little overall sense of how the two political logics interacted, especially after territorial rights were achieved. The onslaught of violence, appropriation and displacement explains a good deal of this silence, but if black

communities retained control of territories anywhere, Escobar does not go there, and therefore he has little basis to reflect on how the 'place-based' political vision has fared in relation to dominant actors and institutions and to competing visions from below.

A more pointed version of this question pervades the analysis of development, which Escobar frames with a stark dichotomy between capital-centric dystopia and 'life-giving' alternatives such as the 'Traditional Production Systems' (TPS). 'Ever-increasing consumption and material well-being' is not the 'main aspiration in life' of poor rural people (p. 149), Escobar asserts; the TPS, with its subsistence ethos, more accurately encapsulates the 'development' aspirations of black Colombians in struggle for territorial rights. Even as examples emerge that complicate this portrayal of the TPS as ideal for rural black economic development (for example, individual proprietor shrimp farming and agricultural cooperatives that produce for the market), the stark dichotomy remains intact. Yet especially from the footnotes, we get fleeting glimpses of other black actors – variously identified as elites, liberal politicians, youth, and members of black organisations other than PCN – who have very different development aspirations. My point is not to question Escobar's choice to highlight the PCN, but rather to note the relative absence of ethnography that situates the PCN in what appears to be a crowded and politically diverse field – of rural Blacks, not to mention *mestizos* and Indians. Since the book elides this heterogeneity, it is hard to gauge its role in the PCN's achievements, or in the denouement that followed.

The analysis of identity, which begins with a perplexing disavowal, raises the same question from another angle. While affirming that racism played a formative role in constituting the Pacific region and in politicising PCN activists, and while quoting PCN statements that express what one might well construe as racial consciousness (for example, 'we are part of the struggle for rights of black people throughout the world' (p. 223)), Escobar warns us that the book will not be about 'race or racism' due to his lack of expertise in these fields (Introduction, n. 18). Instead he uses the term 'black ethnicity', which fits well with other PCN discourse (for example, 'one becomes part of the *comunidades negras* not because you are black, but through practices that reflect the cultural values of these communities' (p. 220)). 'Ethnicity' in this usage stands for a particular politicised subjectivity: place-based, adamantly non-Western and non-modern, carriers of 'primitive environmental wisdom' (p. 118) and adherents of a worldview (*cosmovision*) that takes more inspiration from indigenous traditions (see, for example, p. 152) than from the African Diaspora. We learn little about black Colombians across the country, or even in the Pacific region, who occupy different subject-positions. What politics do their distinctive ethnic identities embody? How do PCN activists make the case for representing 'the entire black community of the country' (p. 222), given their commitment to this particular expression of 'black ethnicity'? These unanswered questions leave the book positioned as, first and foremost, an ethnographic account of the PCN, a powerful and inspiring black social movement, and a theoretical elaboration on this political vision; they confirm Escobar's choice not to analyse the diverse social field in which the PCN moves, or to explain how it has fared since its inception.

Perhaps complexity theory, Escobar's preferred framework for thinking through the future of black activism in Colombia's Pacific coast, might help us put these choices in perspective. The premise of this theory is that modernity produces greater complexity than we can comprehend, given the analytical tools that modernity itself

has bequeathed. The best alternative is to abandon modernist pretentions of universal comprehension, embracing instead the irreducible heterogeneity of signification and the corresponding pluralism of the political. Let me push this premise one step further: surely one of the greatest sources of complexity in social formations like the Colombian Pacific is the way diverse social actors – activists of the PCN and many others – engage in constant negotiation with one another, with dominant actors and institutions, and with the hegemonic ideas of their times. Although these complexities are not ignored in this book, they do not comprise its central purpose either. At times one senses that Escobar sees them as quibbles that distract attention from his principal mandate: to accompany, document, and theoretically amplify an exceptional social movement, in hopes of igniting political imaginaries and helping to envision a way forward. Fair enough – but the quibbles have a cumulative recursivity of their own, which leaves this reader wishing for a slightly wider swathe of ground truth, *not* in the name of positivist social science, but rather, in the name of complexity theory, and the complementary activist-scholar premise that our utopian commitments are strengthened by direct engagement with the contradictions and conundrums of the struggles that inspire us most.

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Amy Nunn, *The Politics and History of AIDS Treatment in Brazil* (New York: Springer, 2009), pp. xxiii + 186, $79.95, hb.

Amy Nunn's book provides the reader with a wealth of information about the Brazilian response to the AIDS epidemic. While it complements other books and articles written on the subject, *The Politics and History of AIDS Treatment in Brazil* elevates our understanding of the topic to a new level. Nunn constructs the narrative as a puzzle where every piece counts and little by little the bigger picture is revealed. It is possible to say that the sophistication of her analysis consists of showing that sometimes we must first understand the trees in order to truly see the forest. With an impressive attention to almost all aspects of what she calls 'the development of Brazil's AIDS treatment institutions', her method has paid off with a book that it is a must-read for all of us interested in understanding how Brazil, against all odds, became a model country that is successfully managing the AIDS epidemic and inspiring changes in health policies at the global level. The book is compact, with seven chapters flowing together without losing momentum, beginning with a discussion of how public health was rediscovered and interpreted by Brazilians in the 1980s after almost two decades of military dictatorship. Nunn's methodology is eclectic and combines interviews of key actors with intensive historic research, including examinations of archives and publications of governmental and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), as well as literature review.

In the book's Introduction, Nunn tells the story of Ezio Távora, a well-known Brazilian activist living with HIV. Ezio's trajectory, as presented by Nunn, illustrates the path of a nation via the life of an HIV-positive person – from denial to embracing and respecting the rights of its citizens living with HIV and AIDS. Ezio survived the bad times of the Brazilian response to the epidemic because he was able to pay for his treatment, but since 1996, as described in detail by Nunn, Brazil has been providing AIDS medicines free of charge through the public health system,