



CHAPTER 1

When East Is North and South

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INTRODUCTION

Oceans have been conceived throughout history alternatively as frontiers and routes. They have served both to hold peoples apart and to bring them together. Oceans provide communication paths, but also ways to conquer, plunder, and spoil. The intensification of international and local inequalities and the relentless push of the climate crisis, both caused by the hazardous but foretold outcome of global capitalism, have brought to the spotlight of political and research agendas the critical study of the multiple relationships between human beings and their natural environment. There is a growing sense of correlation between understanding social, individual, and natural phenomena as mutually correlated and not

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as easily compartmentalized subjects. This paradigm of cross-sectional interpretation is brought about by a pursuit of epistemic justice as one of the keys to unlock social justice. The challenges faced by the world today cannot be tackled only with what we have identified as Eurocentric epistemologies. They demand a reconceptualization of spaces, connections, narratives, and experiences that brings to the forefront marginalized epistemologies and creates new channels for assessing not only what is going wrong but also how we can approach potential solutions. This exercise of reconceptualization can take place within certain shared paradigms that mirror our contemporary struggles: ontological and epistemological inequalities that are transnational both in their origins and in their consequences. In this book, we wish to frame the transpacific using decolonial ideas as one of these “concept spaces” that allow the opportunity to seek justice in action through research.

While some works are a brave attempt at bringing complex concepts to a narrower but more concrete, consensual, and manageable understanding, we believe that some ideas need to be explored by adopting an expansive approach to their comprehension. This has been our approach when discussing the transpacific—not presenting it as a territory to be conquered, pillaged, and extracted but as a point of encounter and transit, a place for dialogue and exchange. This conceptualization of contemporary struggles is essential to the framing of the transpacific as part of parallel ongoing demands.

By fostering an environment that not only accepts a plurality of views but actively looks to accommodate analogous, tangential, and even contradicting approaches to the study of our ideas, we seek a double objective. First, we hope to highlight precisely the richness within the idea of the transpacific, avoiding sticking to any particular conception to it while at the same time acknowledging and owning each of our points of enunciation. We do not advocate for an unrestricted, acritical embrace of relativity that would validate any position just for the sake of existing. Instead, we believe that the idea of the transpacific needs to be flexible and malleable, an open-source tool that integrates different meanings within its bosom to nurture abundant and varied perspectives. It may work like a fertile soil from which many different species sprout out or, indeed, like the lush and fecund stock of life that is an ocean. In this book, we find different ways of tackling the idea of the transpacific, either by definition or by method, with varying degrees of similarity. We must avoid mistaking variety with

dissonance and always keep in mind that a healthy ecosystem is that which welcomes balance in diversity.

Our second objective is part of a constant struggle in the quest toward social and epistemic justice. Capitalist modernity has long plundered our bodies, minds, and territories. An imperialist North, tangible in its politics and violence, has discovered, created, and extracted from the South(s). It converted them into commodity factories from which natural and human resources have been removed in order to feed hegemonic and epistemicidal societies. We hereby read, in some chapters gestated in and from parts of these Souths, the voice of the re-existence of those who articulate the struggles for life throughout our eco- and biocidal modernity. We embrace their memories of the territory, silent knowledges, inter-epistemic dialogues, and anti-hegemonic projects, coming from many peripheries. By adopting this stance of plurality, we can fight against structures of knowledge production and reproduction that willingly or unintentionally instill specific interpretations in ways that inculcate exclusivity.

In this introductory chapter, we want to open the debate regarding the idea of the transpacific by briefly discussing our understanding of it. We position our approach to the transpacific in relation to its most recent attempts of critical definition. We also engage with the daunting task of problematizing what we mean by decolonizing transpacific studies. This exercise is intended to contextualize our positions regarding a framework of action and thought that tackles systemic structures of epistemic oppression against non-Western ways of doing and thinking, commonly—but not exclusively—known as practices of decolonization. We also sketch two of the ways in which we identify decolonial transpacific work can be done in practical terms—by rescuing historically marginalized connections and by signaling new connections that emerge once we approach the agents and phenomena across the Pacific without Eurocentric lenses. Finally, we acknowledge part of our limitations and contradictions in shaping this work.

DEBATING THE IDEA OF THE TRANSPACIFIC

Both the critical overview of the concept of the transpacific and questions regarding what we have decided to refer to as decolonizing practices in this book are relatively recent concerns in academia. Although this is as of today an underrepresented, understudied subject—we refrain from using terms such as “field” and “discipline,” as they are too rooted in an

institutionalized, North-centric understanding of knowledge production from academia—we want to honor and reference here a few commendable attempts of approaching the matter. They inform our current understanding of the issue and represent complementary partners in this ongoing conversation.

The works that constitute part of our forerunners are recent attempts to critically revisit and redefine the idea of the transpacific itself. These authors have struggled before us in freeing this term from previously held conceptions of connections across the Pacific. One of the first works to contest these ideas was Arif Dirlik's *What is a Rim?* It problematized the construction of the “Pacific Rim” as a term supposedly foretelling prosperity (1998). Dirlik's criticism of “Rim” focuses particularly on those narratives that have framed the Pacific as a space of exchange of commodities. It included condemnations of the neoliberal optimism at those times—the prospect of a bright future brought by the expansion of trade under global capitalism. The work of authors like Dirlik is important, for it signals one of the main axes of epistemic oppression that has dwarfed the potentialities of the Pacific in any direction other than economic exchange. The next step in that direction would be to not stop at criticizing the limitations of a Pacific solely defined by capitalist frames but also include the systemic erasure of the many different narratives and experiences that have happened, are occurring now, and could come up in the future between the different agents and territories encompassed by this ocean. To denounce how North-centric thought has inflicted epistemicide in the Pacific and demonstrate how it could be different with a critical reinterpretation of Pacific connections—that is, through an embrace of critical transpacific ideals.

This path was tentatively walked by Naoki Sakai and Hyon Joo Yoo, who in 2012 coedited *The Trans-Pacific Imagination: Rethinking Boundary, Culture and Society*. This work is an early attempt to reformulate the subject of area studies, free from the political inheritance of Western Cold War needs, and into the twenty-first century, writing particularly after the economic disaster of 2008 and the slow decline of US hegemony. Their plea is for the understanding of the Pacific as a “space of traffic and convergence rather than a barrier or separation” (Sakai and Yoo 2012, viii). Despite our shared goal of transcending the practical and epistemological barriers of area and disciplines (a question of continuous concern for Sakai as he showed in his recent co-edition of a special issue of *positions: asia critique* (Sakai and Walker 2019, 20), *The Trans-Pacific*

Imagination shows a quite North-centric grasp of agents in the transpacific, focusing almost exclusively on the contact between East Asia and the United States. Similarly, Janet Hoskins and Viet Thanh Nguyen collected a series of essays critically evaluating what they deemed as the “field” of transpacific studies that tackles “a centuries-old problem: the Pacific as an arena of economic development and imperial fantasy or the Pacific as a site of critical engagement with and evaluation of such development and fantasy” (2014, 3). In their book, they offer attempts to create a model to approach the Pacific as an opportunity not only for conscious-minded US scholars wishing to confront the country’s imperial past and present but also for Asian scholars to build their own theoretical and methodological approaches to the ocean and its connections to the different shores. Although the essays are rich and the discussion brought up by this volume relevant, the main representative for the whole of America is the United States, a circumstance that, to their credit, the editors acknowledge (Hoskins and Nguyen 2014, 33). It nevertheless reifies a North-centric, hegemonic understanding of transpacific connections that epistemologically belittles the potential of the concept.

It is at this point that we wish to recognize the seminal work of two scholars in a reconceptualization of the idea of the transpacific as a conceptspace beneficial for the reevaluation of our larger modes of knowledge production. Lisa Lowe and Lisa Yoneyama have worked either independently or together (as in their piece written with Yèn Lê Espiritu, “Transpacific Entanglements,” for the book *Flashpoints for American Studies*) seeking to decolonize the Pacific as a territory and a set of idea(l)s occupied both physically and intellectually by different hegemonic powers, usually the United States but not necessarily restricted to the West. They remind us of the ways hegemonies in the North have built their supremacy abroad but also nationally using the Pacific as a site for the nurturing and development of their sources of domination. Military expansionism, neoliberal trade routes, racial inequalities, migratory predations, and extractivist deals are pillars of the current order. They also take place in the Pacific, sometimes outside public attention. Understanding these processes and how they develop in transpacific connections can help us dismantle the power oppressions instituted not only in this territory and communities but also across the globe.

The emergence and rise in the last decade of bolder discussions on epistemic negligence for non-Eurocentric research, the noble shortcomings of postcolonial studies, and the crisis and revamping of so-called area studies

by mark of decolonial-like criticism pave the way for a more encompassing and plural understanding of transpacific connections. Andre Bachner and Pedro Erber's 2017 co-edition of "Between Asia and Latin America: New Transpacific Perspectives," the special issue of *Verge*, is an endeavor closer to this book. The transpacific is again framed as an opportunity to move beyond more rigid, traditional, and institutionally bound definitions of area, discipline, and subject matter to welcome new ways of conceiving and producing research. As they put it in their introductory piece, their aim is

to think about intercultural exchange and transregionalism beyond naturalized relationships by being open to patterns of analogy, contemporaneity, parallelism, uneven dialogues, and failed encounters. Uncovering, exploring, and analyzing such connections, which are not merely factual but also ontological, epistemological, and imaginary, is crucial to understanding the constitution of the contemporary world. (Bachner and Erber 2017, vii)

This is a good point in which to make our statements on what we consider to be our idea of the transpacific. We espouse an approach to regions as unstable, movable, relational ideas that must be used operationally, for they help us organize phenomena and experiences, but cannot be considered ontologically sound ideas. Regions, like areas or any other moniker used to categorize communities and their knowledges, should not be treated as permanent, readily identifiable, subjects. We think of them instead as dynamic concepts that hold fluctuating positions of power depending on their circumstances and their opposite partners. Our understanding of "agents" in a reformulated transpacific that goes beyond the paradigm of Cold War narratives needs to include other subjects beyond nation-states: peoples, organizations, communities, artists, transnational companies, and activists all have a role in shaping the multiple realities of the Pacific. As mentioned above, we reject treating this ocean as land in dispute, a realm to be conquered or passed along hegemonic powers, but that does not stop us from criticizing these powers and those who frame the Pacific in such terms.

This book is, however, not a manifesto for another single understanding of the transpacific. We do not want "transpacific" to become a buzzword, a term in vogue, or an empty signifier. We stress again that this volume does not abide by a single description of the transpacific. Doing so would limit the scope of our inquiry to a certain angle, similar to

designing a house with only one window. The authors bring their reflections, criticisms, doubts, and proposals and share them so as to bring more voices to this ongoing conversation. The premise of having their works together in this volume is to explore ways in which an open struggle for the decolonization of the transpacific can become performative while simultaneously tackling the specific research question of many different case studies. As Ignacio López-Calvo has anticipated in the foreword, the authors of this book offer bold attempts at bringing to the forefront the exchange of epistemological knowledges that can help us, in turn, to broaden these debates.

We should refrain then from aspiring to homogeneous Swiss-Army-knife principles that could explain transpacific phenomena. This process of redefinition goes together with our objective of cracking open the idea of the transpacific through a sense of active problematization. We hold a position of simultaneously approaching the Pacific as a space, a territory defined by its shores and everything in between, and as a joint, a notion defined by its capacity to bend articulate closeness despite its vast physical stretch. The sheer magnitude of the Pacific and its diversity and complexity are a constant reminder of the vanity of wishing to narrow it down. The ocean and its connections warn you that the only workable embrace is a plural one. Even adopting a naming convention for the term is problematic and invites debate. Should it be capitalized? Should it be hyphenated? In this regard, we opt for a lowercase version so as not to reify the concept. We also write the two parts of the words glued together to keep being consistent (as Pacific would need to be upper-cased). There are good arguments in favor of hyphenating the word, as presenting it so emphasizes the crosses and fluxes that determine these phenomena. We welcome any variation to the term and have respected the authors' wishes on the matter.

This book does not aspire to set a new standard definition of transpacific. The most important aspect we want readers to take away from the chapters hereby comprised is the exciting sense of opportunity present in decolonizing the idea of the transpacific. It opens up compelling venues for rethinking ideas such as area, region, nation-state, globalization, migration, extractive industries, cultural influence, identity, and race. It does so without shoehorning a specific definition for any of them. Instead, the transpacific can jolt open the conceptual cages of these concepts by revealing how dependent they are not only from a Eurocentric hegemonic worldview but also from a Eurocentric critical apparatus to this same

hegemony. The lessons brought forward by the transpacific can—and perhaps should—lead us then to rethink, for example, the transatlantic. Freeing ourselves from the imposition of committing to a standardized definition reminds us therefore of the fact that the Pacific means many things for the plurality communities that relate to it. It should be no different, therefore, if the transpacific adopts and embraces its intrinsically polysemic nature.

QUESTIONING WHAT IT MEANS TO DO DECOLONIAL WORK

Instead of thinking of this volume as a how-to on decolonizing the transpacific, we wish readers to look at it as a vindication of the many ways in which this struggle can be addressed. Our goal is to normalize the importance of this task so that, in the future, we integrate the tools and the spirit embedded in each of the contributions present here. Eventually, we want to go out and produce committed transpacific and decolonial work that does not need to be confined to a book tailored for this specific purpose. As Boaventura de Sousa Santos says when discussing the concept of epistemologies of the South, the objective is not the replacement of hegemony; “we do not need alternatives; we need rather an alternative thinking of alternatives” (2018, 6).

We approach decolonization as the development of emancipating dynamics of knowledge production and reproduction from North-centric epistemological cages. Postcolonial national independence presented the necessity to rethink territories in their whole political and cultural complexity, as well as to promote supra-national projects respectful of plurality. UN geoschemes, far from aiding in the construction of a plural and diverse vision, perpetuate a waterproof partition of territories, homogenizing differences and establishing categories. Those categories are the result of our modern/colonial North-centric world-system, which Immanuel Wallerstein (2004) defines as a space-time zone that crosses multiple political and cultural units, representing an integrated zone of activity and institutions that obey certain systemic rules. Moreover, as Aníbal Quijano (2014) suggests, within the modern world-system hegemony leads to a common character trait in the coloniality of cognitive perspectives: ethnocentrism. With this in mind, decolonizing our research experience means, therefore, questioning the very epistemology of ethnocentrism, the myths of “Western” rise, the evolutionist vision of social systems, and the liberal conception of capitalism. Decolonizing the transpacific, hence, includes an

exercise to vivify and dignify experiences arisen from disqualified peoples, social actors, artists, communities, and epistemes.

We detach ourselves from discourses that promote the narrative of a Pacific century. We refuse to relocate the center: we advocate for ending the idea of centrality. We try here to propose a pluri-centered scenario in which diversity is enhanced by de-hierarchizing peoples, ideas, and the exchange of resources throughout the Pacific. Identifying these differences in a non-centered world is important. We don't believe that decentering automatically brings about horizontality. Decentering efforts need to be paralleled with an open exercise of analyzing the differences in degree and category between movements and connections to properly identify embedded oppressions that can survive a non-Eurocentric world. The transpacific is not per se a decolonized idea. It requires plenty of conscious and constant work to make it so. As it stands, it nevertheless signifies an excellent opportunity to reformulate not only the experiences in the Pacific but also practices and knowledges—on migration, comparative literature, and sustainability, just to mention a few that are present in this book—that exist in other parts of the world.

The recent history of decolonization struggles has been riddled with troubles that have risen from linguistic complexities. There has been a need to retake, reformulate, and redefine historical processes like “colonization” and “colonialism” from a narrow Eurocentric matrix. This essential uncorking of ideas has engendered a new-found need to name circumstances and models brought to light by reappropriation. Concepts from marginalized epistemologies or neologisms created to fit these new necessities have flooded the field. We are not utterly against new designations, but we are very cautious of wild coinages. An excess of labels might lead to more opacity, to a forest too thick to explore. It also risks shifting the attention from the objective of bringing about social justice through epistemic justice toward focusing merely on banal, frivolous academic banter. An undue love for new or updated terminologies can also lead to division and factionalism, as it is already happening within so-called “decolonial” families. Academic and other intellectual institutions need to be a tool for the production and dissemination of our work, but we must be aware of its limitations and inherent perils, especially researchers from the Global North.

We have a clear idea in mind: to call a work “decolonial” does not automatically turn it into decolonial research. Decolonizing transpacific studies means for us to deeply examine our own role both as academics and as

social actors, to acknowledge our place of enunciation, and to promote the suppression of scholar subject/studied object that has traditionally shaped hierarchical ontologies within academia. Decoloniality is and shall continue to be more than mere reflection. The proposal of a real decolonial praxis arises from the need to politically and socially activate tangible changes in the lives of involved actors. As other researchers and activists have already stated, one of the first steps in practicing decoloniality is promoting non-abysal research. Santos defines abyssal lines as follows:

Radical lines that divide social reality into two different universes: ‘this side of the line’ and ‘the other side of the line’ ... The fundamental characteristic of abyssal thinking is the impossibility of co-presence on both sides of the line. The universe ‘on this side of the line’ only prevails to the extent that it exhausts the field of relevant reality: beyond the line there is only non-existence, invisibility, and non-dialectical absence.¹ (2007, 71)

It is hence necessary to epistemologically situate and position a decolonial analysis. We acknowledge the privileges of our places of enunciation, which vary across the authors of this volume but which include categories such as class, gender, racialization, and our shared access to higher education. Academia bestowed upon us this tribune from which we can reach out to the world, but we are extremely wary of its connotations. We do not speak for those oppressed by coloniality. We are not—for we should not become—spokespersons for these struggles. These chapters expect to narrate—for, as Edward Said (1984) pointed out, we have the privilege to do so. However, we seek here to establish an open, constant, contrastive, and rigorous conversation while rejecting to be *the* voice of an alleged, vain, and arrogant objectivity (Ramos Tolosa and Checa Hidalgo 2019, 29). Our part within these efforts is to provide tools for the identification, analysis, and proposal of operational ways to confront either situations of conflict or promising connections that emerge by adopting the transpacific as framework.

The modern/capitalist/colonialist world-system we live in creates an abyssal division that does not just separate the North from the South. It

¹ “Linhas radicais que dividem a realidade social em dois universos distintos: o ‘deste lado da linha’ e o ‘do outro lado da linha’. [...] A característica fundamental do pensamento abissal é a impossibilidade da co-presença dos dois lados da linha. O universo ‘deste lado da linha’ só prevalece na medida em que esgota o campo da realidade relevante: para além da linha há apenas inexistência, invisibilidade e ausência não-dialética.” Own translation.

hegemonically produces Souths *within* the Norths and Norths *within* the Souths. The tentacles of coloniality tie together fields of being, power, and knowledge. The perverse flexibility of levels of oppression and the fluidity of abyssal lines traverse transpacific connections. As explored by Antonio Ortega Santos in Chap. 4 and Helios Escalante Moreno in Chap. 5, for instance, China's extractive policies in Latin America go in line with previous and ongoing strategies for resource mining promoted by Western nations and corporations. China acts in this regard as a power of the Global North. National governments in Latin America from the different ideological sides of the aisle also allow and continue a polemic extractive agenda, many times against the will of the communities that they are theoretically representing. How does coloniality apply here? Where do we draw the abyssal line? Nation-state governments from the different shores of the Pacific share an itinerary of so-called progress whose rules were determined by the North-centric world-system. Affected communities across the transpacific also shared the effects of these policies, as Raúl Holz and Paulina Pavez show in Chap. 6. Another example: as much as the Chinese government and their business conglomerates exploit natural resources in parts of the Global South, Chinese epistemologies, however, have been framed by both Western nations and Latin-American communities as peripheral, secondary, nothing resembling universality. In this sense, they are considered below the abyssal line. The effects of this hierarchization have been historically also present within so-called East Asia and between what are now great powers such as Japan and China, as explored by Ashley Liu in Chap. 7 of the present volume.

The South-South dialogue that we present here gives then the necessary prominence back to the exchanges, influences, and mutual enrichments generated between Pacific coasts. Migrant knowledges, mobile and fluid, arise *within* the South and need to be understood as part of a different way of apprehending migration, as seen in Chap. 3, free from the narrow—albeit fully valid in itself—view of migration in the North. They move *with* and *within* the experiences we collect in these chapters—and in many others.

We aspire to the decolonization of not only our research, understood as logics of acquiring, sharing, and reevaluating knowledge, but also our practices as individuals and members of a community beyond intellectual enquires. The act of decolonization includes inextricably a commitment to action that goes side by side with our thoughts. The exercise of translating intellectual work into concrete action is a plea that appeals to all of us, but

there is not a universal bridge to connect the two realms. We must learn from each other and exchange strategies while working on our ways to make the two interventions dialogue. We should not be dismayed by the sheer magnitude of this task. Feeling that something is not enough must drive our quest to hone our ways. It is, simultaneously, a reminder that switches and levers can be found outside our familiar zone and our common epistemologies, so we need to bring more actors and experiences into the debate to complete our processes.

METHODOLOGIES OF ACTION IN INVESTIGATION

The voices in this collective volume show the wealth of potential strategies for the endeavor of decolonizing our ways of knowing and doing. We shy away from the cursed wish of shaping a functional and cohesive textbook on how to understand transpacific connections or how to decolonize our approaches to the task. There is no single recipe to the matter, and enforcing a model to our ways of working and understanding these processes carries the risk of falling back into the same traps from which we want to escape. This commitment means that the “studies” in our title will always remain plural. The authors in the present book share nevertheless a sense of fighting against a North-centric conceptual and methodological scaffold that has conditioned our way of understanding the manners, agents, and experiences constituting transpacific (non)encounters, as Andrea Mendoza sharply points out in Chap. 2. They include voices from East Asia and Latin America, while reframing and repurposing those associated with what we critically have considered the North/the West.

As we have been discussing throughout this chapter, the transpacific can become a productive framework that, used to decolonize our ways of doing and thinking, allows the production of critical research and strategic action. We believe that the transpacific provides the opportunity to engage with work that serves the interests of particular communities affected by colonial modernity, not only in the Pacific but across the Global South. It shines a light on different ways of oppression but also on potential strategies of resistance and empathy through identifying shared struggles. In this sense, working through a paradigm of the decolonial(izing) transpacific not only exposes situations of conflict but can also inform our methods to combat it.

In this book, we acknowledge two types of identifying and working with transpacific connections in ways that serve the purpose of

decolonizing our research and guide effective action. The first kind is those links that have been buried, discarded, ignored, or overlooked by conventional North-centric research. These are silenced narratives that have been at best treated as footnotes to history because they do not have Western powers as their main protagonists. They may be describing processes that had been previously described as exclusive of routes, spaces, and conditions that prioritized North-North streams or North-South floods. They expose how contacts across the Pacific were not restricted, for instance, to those established between the United States and East or Southeast Asia or limited to trade and the exchange of labor and goods as per capitalist design. These works show how contact manifests itself in a plurality of forms, and the exchange of knowledge and experiences is not something new to look forward to but has already existed before and is essential to the shaping of the different communities across the ocean. Rosanne Sia and Matías Chiappe Ippolito explore these kinds of connections in Chap. 9 and Chap. 12 respectively. Their pieces uncover the role of these relationships in the formation of the cultural and intellectual identity of Latin America.

The second type of work is those connections that are yet to be discovered and highlighted. The sharedness or discrepancy between communities, local experiences, methods, and ways of knowing is worked through novel comparative discoveries constructed with a horizontal approach to the task. These are narratives and experiences that have been cast to the margins, below the abyssal line, for they might disclose the faulty strings stitching together the current world-system based on material oppressions that are sustained through epistemic domination. Gina León Cabrera, in Chap. 10, discusses the ways in which the memory of Colombia's participation in the Korean War (the only Latin-American country to do so) is represented and shows how these processes of narrative formation get institutionalized in museums across the Pacific.

These two types of connections reveal a different side of the struggle: the resistance against oblivion and the fight for the construction of different stories, revelations, and modes of being and doing. We have not differentiated between the two in this book. They coexist as part of a shared conversation. We attempt to challenge both the univocal character of statist discourses and the hierarchical organization of dominant struggles, as Maria Paula Meneses suggests:

The idea of a non-plural History is an attempt to broaden modern social sciences beyond their limits, with the aim to (re)construct the knowledge cartography and the experiences of humanity. This call to plurality comes from acknowledging the extreme diversity of those very experiences, which richness, in terms of change possibilities, cannot be reduced to just one disciplinary horizon, to just one form to conceive the alternative.² (2011, 33)

Dialogue, within the chapters of this book, is established as in a constant state of evolution and proposes ways to escape the totalizing universe in which we live. The glocality of the experiences narrated in this book shapes it a pluriverse (Grosfoguel 2008) of practices and realities, and experiments and contingencies, launching chains of solidarity toward other geographical places, oppressed by the yoke of our world-system. “These are small voices which are drowned in the noise of statist commands. [...] They have many stories to tell” (Guha 2009, 307).

CONTRADICTIONS, ABSENCES, AND PROMISES FOR THE FUTURE

The year 2020 has forced us to rethink the idea of pluricentrality and its practical consequences. The global pandemic we are experiencing pushes us into reconsidering most of our activities: our personal, work- and family-related, social ones, but also, on a massive scale, the economic and productive mechanisms of our world-system. It has been long proved by now how the ban or reduction of trade and extractive industries caused by the pandemic had a positive impact on oceans. These short-term benefits cannot overshadow the fact that the subsistence of millions of people may be critically affected by the precariousness of our current model. Pollution, overfishing, the loss/conversion of habitats, the introduction of invasive species, and the effect of climate change on oceans are the direct results of a world-system that is indifferent to the needs of the environment.

The personal losses caused by the pandemic have been devastating. Many of us have also been experiencing distance, loneliness, isolation,

²“La idea de una historia no plural es un intento de ampliar las ciencias sociales modernas más allá de sus límites, con el objetivo de (re)construir la cartografía de los saberes y las experiencias de la Humanidad. Este llamamiento a la pluralidad procede de un reconocimiento de la extrema diversidad de experiencias, cuya riqueza, en términos de posibilidades de cambio, no puede reducirse a un único horizonte disciplinario, a una única forma de concebir la alternativa.” Own translation.

precariousness, uncertainty, and distress. The pre-COVID world had made us used to contact immediacy, to feel close despite the physical separation, to a tangible—and, maybe, unsustainable—globality. It is in this situation that this collective book project was born. Although “This Coronavirus shit is real”—to quote the title of Chap. 11 by Núria Canalda Moreno and Andrés Vargas Herreño—and despite all the difficulties and urgencies exacerbated by the global pandemic, the project of this book and the promise of exploring the concept of the transpacific brought together scholars from different disciplines, geographies, research experiences, and epistemes, to foster a plural vision of a space—physical and ontological—traditionally inserted as peripheral in North-centric studies.

We assume and accept the limitations of this endeavor, embracing them with humbleness and an eagerness to keep toiling in similar directions. We also assume a certain level of contradictions. This volume gathers researchers from different parts of the world, but the language used to articulate their works is English. Why, if the idea is to connect Latin America with East Asia, do we use a language that is not the most spoken in either of these two so-called regions? The key is to focus on the idea of connection and understanding. English is still the lingua franca in academia and international relations. Our aspiration is that readers from any part of the Pacific can have easier access to this work, and the chances are higher if it is in English. Cho Young-han has discussed the headaches and conflicts that this reliance on English carries for him when reflecting upon academic exchange in East Asia (2012, 662). We acknowledge that languages carry ideological and hegemonic connotations. This contradiction is especially intense when we are at the same time amid a struggle for the decolonization of our ways of producing and reproducing knowledge. In the end, however, we side with a pragmatic, strategic approach to this matter that is ready to assume to sacrifice a bit of coherence if it leads in the direction of large-scale structures of oppression. Let’s pick the battles one by one.

We shy away from framing our collective book as a complete, representative show of all the different ways in which we can do work on transpacific matters with a decolonizing aim. The authors provide here a diverse sample that can appeal to many different researchers, activists, and other enthusiastic readers from diverse backgrounds and interests. There are, however, some voices and experiences that would enrich our conversation. As a sample of cases and experiences that could have shared the space in this book, we miss having works on, to, and from many other communities of Abya Yala (especially in the *Cono Sur*), Taiwan, the Pacific Islands,

and the Philippines. On the latter, Paula C. Park's "Transpacific Intercoloniality: Rethinking the Globality of Philippine Literature in Spanish" is an excellent piece because of its theoretical insightfulness and inspiring analytical awareness. We would like our omissions to become an encouragement for the development of further works based on (or in opposition to) some of the points that we raise in this book.

We are forever grateful for the way the authors have turned *East Asia, Latin America, and the Decolonization of Transpacific Studies* into an exciting opportunity to foster conversations with researchers committed to better understanding connections and divergences within agents that are in and across the Pacific. One of our goals has been to include the space, circumstances, and agents intersected by the concept of the transpacific in a broader debate happening across the globe on decolonization and other forms of fighting for epistemic and social justice. Any faults in conveying this message can only be attributed to our limitations as editors. We hope readers find the questions and points raised by the work compiled here as engaging as we do.

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