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**Entanglements, Nature, and Inequalities in the Darien:
Analyzing Interoceanity in Panama and Colombia**

Abstract

This essay explores the spatial turn in global history by analyzing portals of globalization, literature on the territorialism of capitalism, megaprojects as mechanisms of displacement, interoceanity, and postcolonial approaches to environmental history. The historical case of the Panama Canal and the contemporary proposals for a dry canal in Colombia are employed. The essay evidences its position with secondary sources, newspaper articles, NGO reports, and media sources. The results reveal that megaprojects for interoceanity include complex entanglements of actors and ideas about nature and local populations. The imperial role of the U.S. is key to understanding the emergence and construction of the Panama Canal. Even so, studies of the contemporary enlargement of the Canal include the interplay of other factors, such as patriotism and conservation policies used by the Panamanian government and enterprises to support interoceanity. The Colombian case reveals contradictions between the policies that grant territorial rights to local communities identifying them as forest stewards and those that seek capital support from China to construct a dry canal. Within neoliberal globalization, there is a trivialization of environmental ends and policies that has been articulated to coordinate with the construction of megaprojects.

Keywords: Interoceanity, Entanglements, Panama Canal, megacities, environment, nature

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1. Introduction

The Caribbean is a region of entanglements. These entanglements have been advanced by, among others things, the construction of megaprojects to facilitate looting and global trade. The Darien region, currently comprising territories in Panama and Colombia at the Darien Gulf, was historically designed as a hinge of globalization to expedite the flow of goods, persons, and ideas. The region's colonizers constructed ports for transporting looted minerals and they viewed Central America as a land of cannibals (Arens 54).

The tropical region of the Darien was identified as "unhealthy" in the 19th century (Tomes 129; Wong 229). Developed countries considered this an obstacle to regional modernization and civilization (Blaut) and justification of their intervention. In the early 1900s, the Panama Canal was built once disputes among European powers and the U.S. were settled. The Canal's builders believed they were superior and advanced humans, and they aimed to modernize territories and populations engaging in disputes over the territories with the local people, whom they treated as inferior. When the Canal was complete, many US workers remained in segregated neighborhoods at the Canal Zone and racially discriminated against the Panamanians (Donoghue).

Panama recently carried out construction projects to enlarge its Canal, proposals have emerged to build a dry canal in Colombia, and Nicaragua has begun construction on an interoceanic canal. However, international infrastructural projects have negatively influenced local populations; specifically, megaprojects imposed on local communities have downsized local knowledge and destroyed ecosystems. Megaprojects relevant to the Darien region are linked to the transformation of territories by the ongoing influences of colonialism, imperialism, and capitalism (Amin). Some approaches to the discipline of global history have incorporated the idea of a "spatial turn" to study emerging issues using concepts such as "portals of globalization" (Middell and Naumann 162). Although this approach is useful, it lacks attention to the reproduction of global inequalities, including the inequalities that result from the entanglements of class, race, and nature (Braig, Costa, and Göbel 13) related to territorial transformations.

This essay's primary concern is in the discourses and images of nature and local populations that have been created to facilitate territorial transformations that ease the construction of megaprojects. To accomplish this, the case of the Panama Canal, its recent enlargement projects, and the proposals for a dry canal in Colombia are examined. Instead of reiterating a historical study of the region, this essay analyzes the evolution of the entangled types of territorial transformations, ideas about nature, and global inequalities from a sociological post-colonial perspective. The methodology comprises a critical appraisal of secondary sources, such as relevant research on the region and the Panama Canal and content analysis of data gathered from newspaper articles, governmental reports, and NGO documents. This essay analyzes so-called

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"portals of globalization" (Middell and Naumann 162) by discussing studies on "megaprojects" (Gellert and Lynch 15-16), approaches to "transitism" (Castillero Calvo 35-36) and "interoceanity" (Allard 145), and postcolonial perspectives on environmental history (Alimonda 21). The entanglements and the effects of megaprojects are discussed regarding their relevance to culture, nature, and global inequalities.

The thesis under investigation is that global and/or national elites have produced and reproduced entangled discourses and assumptions about territories, populations, landscapes, and nature (e.g. by identifying them as primitive or underdeveloped) with the intent to facilitate construction and protection of megaprojects. Megaprojects directly influence local indigenous peoples, peasants, and their ecosystems. Projects, such as interoceanic canals, have historically reproduced inequalities, such as those that blend class, race, and the environment. However, over time, the discourses and mechanisms employed to dominate nature and populations, which are products of complexities among multiple actors from diverse regions, have evolved. These mechanisms include colonial racial categorizing, 19th century negative and romanticized views of nature and local people, racial/ethnic segregation of workers at the Canal Zone, recent conservation policies linked to megaprojects in Panama, and contradictions between policies that define collective territories and ethnic identities on the one hand and megaprojects' goals (as in Colombia) on the other.

2. Global History and the Spatial Turn

Global history is an empirical discipline that gained relevance in the last two decades of the 20th century to promote intellectual cooperation among history and other social sciences (Kocka). According to Conrad, Eckert, and Freitag, global history gathers an array of types of academic studies. Initially, studies on the history of the world economy's movement away from the world-system perspective (Wallerstein) dominated the field together with studies on the processes of divergence. Other studies analyzed civilizations and multiple modernities (Eisenstadt) in contrast to Huntington's concept of the clash of civilizations. The multiple modernities perspective was criticized because it neglected interdependencies between or among metropolises and/or colonies that sustain power asymmetries (Randeria). Some scholars responded with the concept of "entangled modernities" (Conrad and Randeria 9; Randeria 377) to investigate the complex processes and relationships of metropolises and colonies.

Global history is not world history with a global dimension; it emphasizes "interactions, exchanges and interrelations across boundaries between national states, regions, continents and cultures"

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(Kocka 4) because the history of globalization is not merely the history of convergence; it is the history of "interdependencies," including the:

> mutual perceptions, interactions and exchanges between different parts of the world [...referred to] economic integration, empires and nations, and their relation to one another, cultural change between convergence and differentiation, interrelated perceptions of time and space, transport and communication, pattern of migration. (Kocka 3)

Global history assumes that the history of globalization began sometime in the early 16th century when Europe was colonizing and dominating a variety of world regions.

Since its inception, global history has involved the participation of scholars from non-European regions who were studying "asymmetric relations between the colonizers from the West and the colonized in the non-Western world" (Kocka 3). Examples are Said's work on orientalism and Mignolo's work on *La Idea de America Latina* that investigated the effects of European domination and colonization, the configuration of images of Others, and the idea of other continents as complete regions.

Osterhammel and Petersson contended that globalization has a longer history than its contemporary process that involves international trade networks since medieval times. These scholars proposed an organized history of globalization comprising four distinct periods. First, between the 15th and mid-18th centuries, the European powers built empires characterized by transcontinental exchange, including slave trade. That was followed by the process of European industrialization, accompanied by increasing development of trade networks, communication, and migratory movement of people. Between about 1880 and 1945, there was a period of international rivalries and wars, deep trade, and capital flows. From 1945 until the end of the Cold War, increasing international leadership by the US, in competition and conflict with the Soviet Union, dominated the global stage.

Recent studies on global history have considered issues of territory and territoriality, following the so-called spatial turn (Middell and Naumann). The nexus between global history and the spatial turn is clarified in this explanation:

> Globalization can be interpreted as a dialectical process of de- and re-territorialization. The challenges to existing borders that limit economic, socio-cultural, and political activities, and the establishment of new borders as the result of such activities, bring about certain consolidated structures of spatiality, while at the same time societies develop regulatory regimes to use these structures for purposes of dominance and integration. (Middell and Naumann 149)

Studies of territory have focused on the "historicity of regimes of territorialization and their permanent renegotiation over time" (Middell and Naumann 149). They propose and discuss three key concepts: regimes of territoriality and regimes of Territorialization (163), portals of globalization (162), and critical junctures of globalization (166). These studies argue that two dimensions of

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historical spatialities have not been sufficiently studied: the simultaneity of spatial references of social action with their consolidation and the nexus of global crises with changing patterns of territorialization (Middell and Naumann 162).

2.1. Regimes of Territoriality

Regimes of territoriality concern the current international regime of nation-states as the outcome of historical processes, analyzed through the concepts of regimes of territoriality and regimes of territorialization; specifically, "globalization can be interpreted as a dialectical process of de- and re-territorialization" (Middell and Naumann 149). In the process of globalization, a political sovereign's defense has been in constant dialectic tension with a plurality of spatial references, including flows and interactions (Middell and Naumann 162). Large-scale political transformations have manifested as the emergence, enforcement, and collapse of types of territoriality.

Middell and Naumann criticized previous approaches to territoriality, such as Maier's. Maier understood the territory of the nation-state as a bounded political space and established a periodization of territorial regimes, based on nation-states, from the time of the 1648 Westpahlia agreement. That approach contradicted the observed reality of "overlapping border zones, unclear property claims, freer cities, and weakly administered colonial spaces" (Middell and Naumann 164). Several nation-states were not effective in defending their colonized territories.

Several phases of the construction of "modern territoriality" and "regimes of territorialization" have existed (Middell and Naumann 164). These phases are "the world before and after the established European nation-states of the late nineteenth century" (Middell and Naumann 164). Since then and until the 1960s, a succeeding epoch was in place that was subsequently replaced with a new phase of globalization. In the post-1960s phase, nation-states' territoriality did not decline; rather, the hierarchical superiority of the nation-state was contested by a proliferation of transnational actors, such as NGOs and transnational social movements.

Long-term analyses of regimes of territorialization demonstrate a tension between goals. On the one hand, there is the goal of sustaining the centrality of nation-states; on the other hand, there is a desire to create and control global flows of goods, people, power, and entanglements. Several European nation-states successfully organized their power to sustain their sovereignty, maximize benefits from entanglements, and link those successes to imperial expansion (Middell and Naumann 165–166). Thus, "the expansion of the principle of sovereign nationalization collided [...] with the attempt of the colonial powers to hold on to their supplementary imperial spaces" (Middell and Naumann 166). These conditions existed at the beginning of the 20th century.

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2.2. Portals of Globalization

The concept of portals of globalization relates to processes of de- and re-territorialization during struggles over the imposition of new spatial patterns. The portals are places and subjects, such as ports, cities, international trade, handling exotica (such as places, museums, restaurants), and migration. According to Middell and Naumann, portals of globalization are:

> those places that have been centres of world trade or global communication, have served as entrance points for cultural transfer, and where institutions and practices for dealing with global connectedness have been developed. Such places have always been known as sites of transcultural encounter and mutual influence. (162)

Portals of globalization also include economic and military expansion and cultural inventions, such as the social construction of "Ours" and the "Other," which challenge national affiliations. National boundaries and stable territorial order are challenged, but the "elites try to channel and therefore control the effects of global connectivity" (162) by, for example, creating political structures and social control. At portals of globalization, spatial order is constructed that aims to connect pre-determined territorialities. Entanglements are tangible here through flows of goods, people, and ideas. Multiple actors strive to control the portals, motivated by economic, political, and/or social interests. Whereas regimes of territoriality refer to the general political structuration of a territory, such as a nation-state, portals of globalization refer to specific places that serve global interconnectedness. The actors that aim to control nation-states compete for control of the global flows.

2.3. Global Crises and Junctures of Globalization

Crises and conflicts that give impetus to new regimes of territorialization are global crises and junctures of globalization. Violent confrontations are related when they aim to control the pace and/or direction of new types of territorial organizations and markets. A global crisis or transition occurred between 1720 and 1820 that included, among others events and processes, the independence achieved by colonies in the Americas and some changes to European nation-state territoriality, which influenced land property patterns because feudal rights were abolished.

The re-territorialization processes are not limited to the formation of nation-states. For example, rebellion in Saint-Domingue pressured the French colonial power to end slavery and Haiti was established as a new nation-state. Colonies in Latin America achieved independence and Simón Bolivar sought to unify the Americas. Between 1840 and 1880, "many parts of the world reacted simultaneously [...] by competing over the most efficient forms of political, economic and cultural order" (Middell and Naumann 168). There is a permanent dialectic of de-territorialization and re-territorialization related to critical junctures of globalization, meaning, "periods or arenas in which

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new spatial relationships are established as a reaction to the effects of globalization" (Middell and Naumann 169). Conflicts on a global scale are about power relations in which, "conflicts are [...] arenas where the form in which societies participate in world affairs is decided, arenas in which the most effective form to secure strong societal integration domestically and efficient entanglement internationally is fought about" (Middell and Naumann 169).

Regimes of territoriality, portals of globalization, and global crises and junctures of globalization are analytically useful for explaining changing struggles over global territories. Globalization "as a dialectical process of de- and re-territorialization" (Middell and Naumann 149) suggests that the historical construction of global inequalities can be analyzed through the configuration and imposition of territorial rationalities. However, the concepts should be critically approached and applied because they emphasize European or elitist processes or processes in ex-colonized regions. Middell and Naumann did not deeply delve into geopolitical processes that produce global inequalities. For example, they mention Latin American independence and the Haitian rebellion as processes immersed in critical junctures of globalization and as processes that transformed regimes of territoriality. However, they ultimately reproduced a type of sanctioned history that reinforces the hegemony of nation-state territoriality, in which actors, such as Simón Bolívar, overshadow all other actors in political transformations. Other populations, such as the Colombian indigenous and Afro-descent populations, are invisible from this perspectives despite the necessity of understanding how these minority populations achieved independence and thereafter were reproduced as unequal. Middell and Naumann criticize the global history focus on nation-states, but their concerns did not fully overcome the nationalistic methodologies. The expansion of nation-states' global political order has imposed nation-state territoriality. That includes control over nature and local populations achieved through political and military means, power asymmetries between or among countries, and conflicts between or among governments and local populations.

3. Megaprojects, Interoceanity, and Postcolonial Approaches

Capitalist globalization has a particular territorialism, which is, "the propensity to extend the area controlled by a single political centre," [which is] "by nature territorially disembodied" [and which] "has guided the spatial relationship between its economic reproduction and its area of political control" (Amin 235). Metropolises, core cities, and nation-states are influenced "far beyond their frontiers" (Amin 235) by different sources of power. In the era of mercantilism, it was financial power. Later, governments and enterprises used political and economic power to facilitate accumulation and industrialization. Colonialism, led by European powers, spread with and

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articulated the expansion of the colonizers' capitalist development (Amin 237), which demanded the control of large extra-national territories (Amin 240) to execute financial ventures, such as mines and plantations.

Colonialism, financialization, capitalism, and territorial expansion have been related to the so-called megaprojects, which Gellert and Lynch define as:

> [P]rojects which transform landscapes rapidly, intentionally, and profoundly in very visible ways and require coordinated applications of capital and state power. They use heavy equipment and sophisticated technologies, usually imported from the global North and require coordinated flows of international finance capital. (15–16).

Gellert and Lynch identified four types of megaprojects: "(1) Infrastructure; (2) Extraction; (3) Production; and (4) Consumption" (16). These types of ventures have influenced places, regions that are marginal peripheries, and regions of refuge or frontier territories (Meza) to facilitate looting and capital accumulation.

Megaprojects relate to the reproduction of inequalities in knowledge production because they "serve the material interests of powerful actors in the process: notably capital accumulation, especially for financial institutions and construction firms, and modernization and territorialization ambitions for states" (Gellert and Lynch 20). Governments expect that local communities will sacrifice for the common good, which megaprojects purportedly are, and megaprojects exclude communities from the decision-making that produces rapid landscape changes (Gellert and Lynch 20). Furthermore, megaprojects involve "blatant and subtle forms of racial and other discrimination" toward indigenous peoples and peasants' livelihoods, values, and landscapes (Gellert and Lynch 20). Enterprises and outsiders impose their sense of urban and racial superiority. Thus, megaprojects produce primary socio-natural displacement of humans, geological formations, hydrological patterns, natural habitats, plants, fauna, and livelihoods (Gellert and Lynch 17) and secondary displacement arising from the production of contexts of inadequate water and sewer systems, increased crime and housing costs, and the displacement of "communities, biota and geophysical features" (Gellert and Lynch 19). Megaprojects imply an influx of outside workers and the entrenchment of structural inequalities of race, gender, class, and ethnicity that are manifested in unequal labor conditions and health problems (Donoghue; Gellert and Lynch 18). For example, the construction of the Panama Canal produced dispersed puddles that were habitats for mosquitos and yellow fever (Gellert and Lynch 18–19).

An example of a megaproject is the Panama Canal. Canals are aspects of "transitism" (Castillero Calvo) and interoceanity (Allard; Porras). Transitism is the function or role assigned to a nation-state, such as Panama, in the globalization process as a place where connection or transit of ships occurs to transport goods, commodities, and people based on its geographic convenience for

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transit. Departing from dependency theory (Cardoso and Faletto), Castillero Calvo claimed that Panama was not devoted to or specialized in the extraction of raw materials. Instead:

> [I]ts productive activity was electively outset specialized in the sector of services, to promote overseas communications through its territory [...]. The mechanism of our external dependency worked [...] through the imposition of a bond of internal domination in terms of a specific local power structure, and its status of extremely open economy. (Castillero Calvo 35–36)

The notion of transitism contrasts with the cultural perspective of interoceanity. The *Dependentistas* (Latin American dependency theorists) stressed the economic aspects of the Canal and ignored the role of culture. Porras coined the concept of "culture of interoceanity" to indicate a system of narratives that gives meaning to Panama's situation as a place of interoceanic transit (qtd. in Allard 147–148). Thus, the Panamanian identity was relatively less physiocratic and relatively more grounded in transnational connections.

Following the culturalist approach, Allard coined the term "subaltern interoceanity" (146). From her perspective, Castillero Calvo viewed Panama as situated in the modern world-system since the 16th century when the "landscapes and narratives that characterized the economic activity of transit" emerged (Allard 146). Thus, "modernity and coloniality gave form to the idea of interoceanity" (Allard 145–146). However, dependency theory (Castillero Calvo), socioeconomics, environmental approaches (Castro), and cultural approaches (Porras) all pointed to the origin of the interoceanity and transitism in Europe (Allard 148). Conversely, Allard argued that these views and processes emerged in entanglements.

Moreover, Allard is critical of Mignolo's views on interoceanity. Mignolo stated that, during the first half of the 19th century, the United States and European powers assaulted societies in the Southern Hemisphere and Central America. The emergence of the idea of *latinidad*, or the difference between North America and Central/South America, can be traced to this period. The choice of where to build the infrastructure that would link the Atlantic to the Pacific was framed in discussions and disputes among the powers hoping to control the Canal. The U.S. was victorious during the California Gold Rush, and it has intensified its presence in Panama since the 1850s. Thus:

> the situation of Panama was a concentrated version of the tension between two opposite forces that received the name of 'Anglo-Saxon race' and 'Latin race' [...]. This epoch was crucial, because the continental disputes of 1850 were the exact moment when Bolivar's dream of the 'Confederation of Hispano-American nations' was transformed into Latin America in the sense of a zone dominated by the 'Latin race'. (Mignolo 102)

Allard criticized such a stark division between the imperial and the dominated countries by noting the role of entanglements in the relationships. Arguing that separation of the idea of interoceanity

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from its correlative imagery stemming from 16th century European cartography is impossible (Allard 150–151), Allard pointed out that we cannot understand the configuration of the Americas without accounting for the entangled stories of conquest and colony. The arrival of Vasco Nuñez de Balboa to the *Mar del Sur* in 1513 marked the origin of the modern/colonial world-system (Allard 149). The Spanish crown defined the function of the Panamanian isthmus as a place of transit or, at least, had interoceanic goals as it sought to strengthen its European hegemony (Allard 149). The epistemic as well as geopolitical distinctions made through interoceanity, seen through the lens of the *herida colonial* (colonial wound), were derived from maps. However, they also emerged from the stories and images of the explorers. During the 19th century, the explorers provided ideas, symbols, and inventions of their understandings of the Other. Interoceanity is an idea that includes, "the articulation among economy, gender and race, or among cultural/ethnic identities, and gender identities, as well as the relation among the nation-state, racism, imperialism and practices of patriarchal ideologies" (Allard 149).

Yet, the debate on interoceanity lacks a discussion on the role of nature. A postcolonial view of environmental history (Alimonda) noted the role of territory to integrate humans with nature. Generally, colonial processes have produced negative effects on nature; in Latin America, nature was:

> biophysical reality [...] and as territorial configuration [the socio-cultural dynamics that articulates those ecosystems and landscapes] appears in the hegemonic global thought, and for regional elites, as a subaltern space that can be exploited, razed, reconfigured, responding to the necessities of the prevailing accumulation regimes. (Alimonda 22).

Orthodox Marxism and liberal approaches defended the idea of progress based on the scientific and technological mastery of nature and did not consider the hidden costs (Alimonda 33).

In Latin America, many regions have been "subalternized" (Alimonda 34) by the dominant rationale of nation-state territoriality. Others are not within the control of political centers because of geomorphological and/or climatic factors and elites' lack of requisite interest or resources to integrate areas such as the "Amazonas comprising various countries, the Pampa, Patagonia and Chaco in Argentina, Araucanía in Chile, Yucatan in Mexico, Petén in Guatemala, Darien in Panama and Colombia, and lowlands in Colombia" (Alimonda 34). The ignored areas are refuges for communities, although they are influenced by political conflicts. The political centers created the idea of marginal places to control those that lack political autonomy. The analysis of the situation of those areas is that they are a type of "internal colonialism" (Alimonda 35) because they and their inhabitants are controlled through violence and public policies, as was the case in the 1950s and 1970s when Latin American governments favored human settlement in forests to spread the agricultural frontier. Since the 1980s, policies have defined national parks and collective territories

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in line with the goals of environmental conservation. These policies are related to "neoliberal environmentality" (Fletcher), which emerged from Foucault's concept of biopower (41), because governments exert systematic biopower through "biopolitical conservation policies" (Fletcher 175). Biopower policies determine the ways that local communities can legitimately make demands, obtain benefits, and negotiate or contest policies. Biopower policies exist where governments and corporate interests meet to build megaprojects.

4. Megaprojects and Interoceanity in the Darien Region

The Darien region is an example of territorial transformation that facilitates globalization. The Darien was transformed into a portal of globalization and chosen for the construction of the Panama Canal. The Darien historically included a portion of Panama and a portion of Colombia. This region has been overtaken by global, national, and local elites for purposes of global connectivity or transit (Allard). Previously, the Darien integrated the greater region of Panama state when it was part of the "United States of Colombia." At present, it comprises the Darien Panameño and Darién Chocoano in Colombia.

During the colonial period, the Spanish conquerors sought control of this area to transport gold extracted from Perú and Colombia. They faced several difficulties including indigenous resistance. The conquerors struggled to control production inequalities, such as racial subordination of the indigenous population and the use of African slaves in mining. Spain created a system of harbors by linking Portobelo to Cartagena and other ports in the Caribbean region to transport extracted minerals (Uribe de Hincapie).

The notion of connecting the oceans through the Panamanian isthmus emerged after the colonial period. The French conducted studies to determine how to build an interoceanic canal through Panama, relying on experience gained in the construction of the Suez Canal. However, lack of funding delayed the project, and the goal was not materialized until the intervention of the U.S. in its capacity as an emerging global power. Then, in 1903, Colombia was re-territorialized when Panama seceded. The secession occurred during the *Guerra de los Mil Días*, a bloody and harsh civil war between the key "political subcultures" (Pécaut 32) – the liberal and conservative political parties. The war, with impetus from U.S. political intervention, ultimately led to Panama's secession. Outside pressures, caused by the global powers' search for expanding capitalist opportunities, took advantage of the political situation to encourage the creation of the new nation-state of Panama.

The forces in the background of the Canal's construction were U.S. imperial expansion and the

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taking of Panama. This event was described in the U.S. as an "act of sordid conquest" and as a "vulgar and mercenary venture" (Hanson 1). As President Theodore Roosevelt stated:

> [T]he Panama Canal would not have started if I had not taken hold of it [...;] the beginning of work on the canal would be fifty years in the future. Fortunately [the opportunity] came at a period when I could act unhampered. Accordingly I took the Isthmus, started the canal and then left Congress not to debate the canal, but to debate me. (Hanson 1)

From Middell and Naumann's perspective, the U.S. aimed to consolidate its domestic sovereignty by colonizing the territories of its continental indigenous populations (American Indians) and their ecosystems during the California Gold Rush. Those accumulation processes favored the imperial expansion of the country beyond its borders; and this expansion, in terms of Amin, demonstrated the internal and external territorial expansionism of U.S. capitalism.

5. The Panama Canal

Global and national elites created an image of Panamanian territories and a set of discourses to facilitate the control of nature and populations and to facilitate the construction and maintenance of the Canal. These discourses evolved in conjunction with the political and economic processes related to the Canal, and they included entanglements of ideas and economic competition that linked the Darien to imperial powers such as the U.S.

Ideas about nature and culture in the Darien originated in the colonial period when explorers and conquerors constructed and spread the idea that the Caribbean indigenous people of Central America were cannibals (Arens). Some evidence supports the theory that the idea of cannibalism was invented by conquerors to label indigenous people who resisted colonization (Arens 49). After the independence period and by the 19th century, North American travellers to Central America constructed positive and negative narratives about those tropical peoples and areas. The positive ones alluded to "sensual and exotic beauty" (Frenkel, "Jungle Stories" 325) in contrast to:

> [A] negative narrative about Panama's tropics became increasingly common as travelers more thoroughly explored and worked in the region. Panama's tropics were often presented as a region of danger and discomfort, of snakes, malarial mosquitoes, and rank, dank vegetation. (Frenkel, "Jungle Stories" 324)

Narratives also identified a perception that transforming the landscapes to be more suitable for habitation was necessary. According to Tomes, "Walls of jungle had to be struck down, and treacherous swamps, in which man had never before ventured, had to be made firm as a foundation of rock." (qtd. in Frenkel, "Jungle Stories" 324)

At that time, the representations of the tropics and environmental determinism were related

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(Frenkel, "Geography, Empire"). The characteristics of the tropics were perceived as obstacles to modernization and civilization (Blaut 71). Tropics were associated with unhealthy conditions and diseases. The moist and warm climate and the frequent rainfall were associated with life-threatening diseases, such as yellow fever (Tomes). This notion that the region was unhealthy and dangerous spread, particularly throughout the Canal Zone, at the beginning of the 20ᵗʰ century, during construction of the Canal. The workers faced diverse health problems:

> Due to poor sanitation and deficient medical knowledge, outsiders [workers] came to Panama and its "Fever Coast" only to die from diseases thought to be caused by "miasmal mists" from the local swamps. These diseases were primarily yellow fever and malaria. (Wong 229)

However, these problems are an example of power and knowledge asymmetries. Gellert and Lynch pointed out that the proliferation of diseases did not originate in the local swamps, but were spread because of conditions related to Canal construction. By 1903, when the high death toll began including workers and executives, the scientists discovered that the origin of malaria and yellow fever was mosquitoes. A mosquito eradication program, an important scientific advance beyond the scope of the Canal, stemmed the death rate and facilitated the Canal's completion (Wong 229).

By 1912, the construction and operation of the Canal had produced a major territorial transformation. The territory was divided between the Canal Zone and the rest of the territory of Panama. Settlements and neighborhoods were built for the American workers, which created a racial, cultural, and socioeconomic segregation. American workers in the Canal Zone, so-called "Zonians," viewed the Panamanians as the Other and, "American perceptions of Panama and its inhabitants […] reveal the racism and environmental determinism of the Americans in Panama" (Frenkel, "Geography Representations" 85).

The Canal builders believed that they were superior humans and discriminated against the local people (Donoghue). The inferior Others included the West Indian Panama Canal labor force, Spanish-language workers, and the natural environment outside of the Canal Zone (Frenkel, "Geography Representations"). Portions of the Canal Zone were racially segregated because American suburbs were built in an "Americanized" style geographically separated from Colon and Panama City by forests, railroads, hills, and roads (Frenkel, "Geography Representations" 85). Similar to colonial cities, company towns, and military bases where the characteristics of place reflect the beliefs and power of the designers, the Canal Zone was "an expression of the imperialistic ideas of a cadre of American Canal administrators and planners" (Frenkel, "Geography Representations" 86). According to Frenkel, the Canal Zone was built in a colonial fashion (86). The Americanization of the Canal Zone demonstrates the imposition of the U.S. government through this megaproject (in association with the local elites), in which the

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Panamanian people were given "little input" (Frenkel, "Geography Representations" 86). Thus, the U.S. workers laboring in the canal "stigmatized Panamanians as racial inferiors" (Donoghue abstract).

A key issue regarding nature in the Canal concerns the use and management of the water. According to Carse, "a staggering 52 million gallons are released into the Atlantic and Pacific oceans with each of the 35–45 ships that transit the canal daily" (1). During the 20th century, several infrastructural projects were built in the Canal Zone, including hydrographic stations, dams, and locks to control the water and the watershed around the Canal. Between the 1950s and the 1970s, the government aimed to integrate the rainforest into the nation-state by prompting peasant colonization (Carse 15). The vision was that watershed forests would function for cultivation, but that changed after 1977 when the Canal Treaties were signed and the Canal was transferred to Panamanian control. Peasants had previously benefited from the expansion of the agricultural frontier. However, after 1977, peasants became a problem because the new goal was to maintain the forests around the canal to protect the water supplies and agriculture and livestock production were counterproductive to that end (Carse 15).

More recently, regulations have emerged that manage the water flow by restricting agriculture in areas near the Canal and forests. The government sought to manage the current and potential water shortage in the area by managing land use and the environment through the articulation of "techno-politics" and "environmental policy" (Carse 1). Thus, "the forests (the peasants) lived and worked in were not exclusively theirs, but part of a hydrological support system for shipping" (Carse 15). The forests now function to store water. The new regulations imposed upon the farmers a new role as conservators of the forests, which sometimes conflicts with their agricultural practices (Carse).

By 1984, the government created Chagres National Park, which enclosed almost 30% of the basin areas of the upper watershed lands. Today, the Park covers almost 130,000 ha. The related policies included reforestation regulations and identification of secondary forests in which peasants could exploit trees, regulated by Forest Law 13 of 1987. However, enforcement of the environmental law included the participation of the military during Manuel Noriega´s rule (Carse 16). Peasants were jailed and their tools were confiscated to end forest exploitation. It is estimated that, before the 1980s, the forest area was reduced by about 50% because of farmers' exploitation activities, ranchers, and state policies, but, after the policies in the 1990s, forest cover increased. (Carse).

The *Autoridad del Canal de Panamá* (Panama Canal Authority) has been administering the Canal since 1997, and it has controlled the conservation and management of the hydrological resources. The watershed has been managed through policies that encouraged a "water culture" among the people by emphasizing local participation and environmental education (Carse 16). However,

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despite this participatory approach, inequalities persist. Many people were displaced to urban labor markets, and the model of dispossession (initiated in the 1980s) has not changed although it wears different vestments.

New outside actors are interested in the regional watershed and forest cover, such as NGOs, governmental agencies, natural scientists, and social scientists. They are part of the neoliberal environmentality described by Fletcher. The agricultural frontier has been converted into a natural infrastructure and social services, such as electricity and potable water, arrived slowly to the region (Carse). A key point regarding inequalities is that the pursuit of environmental ends by these outside actors ignores the fact that the landscape includes people. The reversion of land and forests from agricultural to transit uses implies that the construction of megaprojects has, among other things, limited neighbors' access to resources and social services (Carse).

Recently, Panama began a project to enlarge its Canal, led by the international consortium Sacyr, and chiefly funded by Spanish capital. At the local level, the project is controlled by Panamanian administrators and workers through the *Autoridad del Canal de Panamá*. Discourses that justify the megaproject relate to discourses about Panama's interests and responses to increasing global demands for transportation services and to maintaining the value and future competitiveness of the route. A worker explained:

> The canal expansion aims to increase the capacity of the canal in response to the present and future demands of the global maritime industry, to maximize our biggest asset that is our geographical location. Similarly, we seek to maintain the sustainability of the canal operations. (Reyes)

Another worker stated:

> As the sluice cannot grow, and now has nearly 100 years, the answer is to build a new sluice, one more entry in the Pacific and one more entry into the Atlantic. But much larger than at present, in order to meet those ships of the future. Most customers today are looking for larger ships, enabling them to optimize their operations, leverage resources with economies of scale. We will grow with the customer, and to stay in business. (Robleto)

The enlargement project comprises five megaprojects: (1) dredging to deepen the entries at the Pacific and Atlantic; (2) widening and deepening the navigational canals in Gatun Lake; (3) constructing access to the new Pacific sluices; (4) dredging and deepening the Canal; and (5) performing the main work of constructing the new sluices (Reyes).

The project managers expect that these megaprojects will increase Canal capacity threefold and have a similar effect on the country's profits. The project is tied to parallel industrial projects in other countries. The shipping industry is building Post-Panamax vessels (that are longer, wider, and deeper than the largest (Panamax) ships that can pass through the existing locks) to accommodate 12,600 containers compared to Panamax capacity at 4500 containers. The U.S.

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east coast harbors are being adapted to receive those ships (Reyes) and Canal authorities anticipate that the Canal will be working at the higher capacity by 2025.

A sense of nationalism and patriotism exists among the leaders of the Canal authority as they work to demonstrate their abilities to complete the megaproject. They have stated that they expect foreigners who visit the projects to exclaim that, "the people in Panama are doing well, they have overcome" (Robleto). A representative of Grupo Unidos por el Canal S.A., a contractor that supervises compliance with environmental and labor standards, stated that:

> In all areas of the project we share with all field workers. They are people who work with body, soul and heart. They feel very enlarged for sharing, for working on the project for the *patria* [homeland]. (Bernard)

A manager of the project stated that:

> Currently there are working on the project more than 39 nationalities. Something similar happened in 1904 and 1914 when the world came together to build a canal for the Republic of Panama. The difference is that now Panamanians lead it. (Reyes)

Those who manage the project have further noted the role of sustainability as a key goal in the enlargement projects, "Before starting the work, environmental impact studies were made; inventories and wildlife rescue, forest inventories, and compliance in air and water monitoring" (Reyes). A representative of Grupo Unidos por el Canal S.A. stated:

> What we do is inspecting the environmental impacts, the compliance of environmental plans and procedures. We verified that the project areas are clean, tidy, workers have environmental responsibilities within the project. [...] Once we have observations, we followed them until are met. (Bernard)

These statements suggest that environmental sustainability is a goal that has been trivialized in the protocols of the construction companies to meet a bureaucratic requirement. However, megaprojects are built despite the results of studies that point out their negative environmental implications. For example, the area of construction of the new sluice is a vast hole, a giant excavation, filled with mud, heavy machinery, workers and, on either side, forests and other natural features. The constructors have altered the regional ecosystems by digging this vast hole, producing primary and secondary displacement. A major effect of the construction is the salinization of Lake Gatun (Vargas).

Simultaneously, the establishment of conservation area boundaries has become instrumental for the functioning of the megaprojects. Environmental policies, emerging in entanglements among countries and actors, such as NGOs, governments, experts, and communities, have been integrated into neoliberal environmentality (Fletcher). Despite the primary and secondary displacement effects produced by the enlargement projects, the projects are defended by a

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patriotic discourse. Thus, the justification for the Canal enlargement has emerged in entanglements arising from the belief that the project is justified by the purported necessity to accommodate bigger ships for the bigger ports (in the U.S.) that will receive those ships. Domination of nature emerges from entangled ideas on, and policies related to, global transportation, trade, progress, and environmentalism.

6. Dry Canal Proposals in Colombia

The Panama secession in 1903 was a traumatic event that produced a variety of Colombian governmental proposals for canals to compete with the Panama Canal. These plans included an Inter-Oceanic Dry Canal to join the Atlantic to the Pacific across the Darien region. That proposal has been in the agendas of several Colombian administrations, including Belisario Betancourt's (1982-1986), which considered building the Atrato-Truandó canal through the Department of Chocó under Law 53 of 1984. President Virgilio Barco (1986-1990) proposed the so-called Interoceanic Land Bridge. President Ernesto Samper (1994-1998) created the Interagency Advisory Committee for the Study of Construction Project of the Interoceanic Canal and the Bio-Park of Darién. Currently, President Santos has a new proposal under Law 70 of 1993 regarding the collective territories of Afro-descent communities in Chocó.

In Colombia, there are complex relationships among the lack of state control over the entire national territory, the expansion of the *latifundio* (large properties), private interests, and the spread of forced displacement due to armed conflict. Frontier territories, such as the Darien, have suffered from those processes and their complex relationships. In the last decades of the 20th century, struggles over territories at the Darien demonstrated that several actors are interested in controlling that area. Previously, the region served as a refuge for peasants escaping the bi-partisan violence of the *La Violencia* period between 1948 and 1965 (Uribe). The 57th Front of the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) guerrillas (composed of about 250 combatants, mostly in Chocó) has controlled the area on behalf of their drug trafficking. The paramilitary groups that emerged in 1989 spread into this region in the 1990s, allied with the army, to attack the guerrillas. Since 1997, more than 10,000 peasants have been displaced (Defensoría del Pueblo).

However, the regional government of Antioquia has simultaneously aimed to transform the Urabá region (which is part of the Darien) into the best corner of America, by integrating infrastructural megaprojects (namely, the dry canal and the Transversal de las Americas road) with agribusiness (mainly banana and palm oil cultivators). A variety of regional elites has benefited from the displacement of the local peasants. Agro-entrepreneurs, paramilitaries, and their allied elites aimed

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to control the lands in which the megaprojects are planned by supporting paramilitary control of the territory. These activities have generated resistance from the indigenous, Afro-descent, and mestizo communities.

One recent dry canal proposal includes studies by Chinese companies that would support and finance a project. China proposed a 220 km railway to open the so-called *Tapón del Darién* (Darién Gap) through an area rich in biodiversity. In early 2011, the Colombian government discussed the project with the Chinese entrepreneurs, who further proposed a new city near Cartagena in an effort to compete with Panama, which was working on its Canal enlargement. China's goal was to boost its trade within Asia and it further negotiated to build railroads 791 miles long and an expanded port at Buenaventura. The estimated cost of the project was 7.6 million USD, financed by the Development Bank of China and managed by the China Railway Group (Portafolio.co).

From President Santos' perspective, the financial and fiscal goals of the project were his priorities:

> The studies that they (the Chinese)'ve made on the costs of transporting per tonne, the cost of investment, it all works out. [...] But again it depends on how it's going to be financed. My ideal – and here the sky is the limit – is to attract foreign investment via concessions. I've told the Chinese, "If it's so profitable and so important, okay, come here via this mechanism of concessions." Because [of] that, from my fiscal point of view, makes my life much easier. (Rathbone and Mapstone)

There have been continual discussions about the economic, environmental, and social effects of the China railway project (e.g. Defensoria del Pueblo). The project has been developed toward protections from financial and technical risks, and governmental officials have further noted the negative effects that the project could have on the ecosystems of the region, which has one of the highest levels of biodiversity on the planet (Defensoria del Pueblo). From the perspectives of governmental officials and the involved enterprises, the Darien Gap is a natural obstacle (Molano and Ramírez).

That the Embera and Katío indigenous communities, which have territorial rights, exist in this area, is a further entanglement. However, the Darien mostly is inhabited by Afro-descendants and mestizo peasants who were granted territorial rights through Law 70 of 1993 that focused on conservation by securing those collective lands. It is clear that the indigenous populations would be negatively influenced by the completion of a dry canal because it would result in primary displacement through the destruction of ecosystems and dispossession of communities (Defensoria del Pueblo).

Dispossession was used to introduce single-crop agriculture and livestock production into the Darien in Riosucio (Defensoria del Pueblo). Capitalism is continuing its advancement in the region at the cost of forced displacement. The Afro-descent, mestizo, and indigenous communities have

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been de-territorialized, and livestock production and monoculture have changed the structures of land property and land use. Even so, local communities have demanded rights, based on state-sanctioned territorial rights and, thus, the identification of Afro-descent and indigenous peoples as stewards of the forests has become the center of resistance to these megaprojects.

The regional landscapes of the Darien include waterscapes, such as wetlands and rivers. The expansion of agribusinesses and livestock production is a process that facilitates the construction of megaprojects because cattle ranchers and landowners grab the lands at the same time that those lands increase in value to the planned megaprojects. The plantations and livestock estates advanced through the destruction of the forests, drained the water from the wetlands, diverted the rivers, and, thus, have prepared the land for future megaprojects' construction.

Contrary to the Panamanian case, the Colombian dry canal would not produce a new sense of national identity in Colombia. Instead, it would complement the existing national identity that was strengthened in the 20th century by the coffee economy. The dry canal may be an additional way to modernize, although that modernization would be at the cost of primary and secondary displacement. Territories that are imagined by the global and/or national elites as at the edge of civilization or empty, would be used by governments to generate revenue by integrating international financial institutions (such as the Development Bank of China) with actors from diverse multi-polar centers (such as the China Railway Group).

China's interests in building megaprojects in the Darien have spread to encompass other regions in Central America. For example, at the end of 2014, the Nicaraguan government began construction on an interoceanic canal. It is working with HKND (Hong Kong Nicaragua Canal Development) Group, a private infrastructural development firm based in Hong Kong, to construct and operate the canal (initially for 50 years) in competition with the Panama Canal. The megaproject comprises a canal of 278 km with a network of roads and an aquatic path. Nicaragua's government expects that the megaproject would create more than 50,000 jobs. Even so, the project has met resistance from the population because it is expected to displace almost 29,000 persons and negatively influence the regional ecosystems, such as Lake Nicaragua and the precious mangroves. President Daniel Ortega was accused of selling the country to China and Chinese technicians have been violently attacked in the local counties (Semana.com).

7. Conclusions

This essay argues that additional study and analysis are necessary to understand the inequalities related to the so-called spatial turn in global history. It discusses megaprojects and interoceanic canals generally and employs the Panama Canal as an example of portals of globalization. The

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discussion clarifies how multiple types of inequalities emerge and the ways that some of them are constructed in entanglements (Braig, Costa, and Göbel). Interoceanity has been a product of entangled social processes, such as colonialism, capitalism, and imperialism, since the 16th century. Today, inequalities emerge from the domination that enterprises and governments have over nature and populations through the construction of megaprojects. Those inequalities have been facilitated by the construction of ideas about nature and local populations, a construction that has occurred in entanglements.

Accounting for portals of globalization in the analysis of megaprojects is a useful way to analytically understand the inequalities that emanate from the structuration of territorial forms, such as the nation-state, that generate power asymmetries. Moreover, it assists in the analysis of nation-states' struggles to dominate among world powers, struggles that aim to control global flows of goods, people, and ideas, such as those related to interoceanic canals. Despite the potential, there are inherent challenges in the application of this concept regarding the multiple elements that Middell and Naumann define as portals. Although they indiscriminately referred to places (such as ports and canals) and processes (such as trade), the nature and extents of power asymmetries of and the environmental effects on these places/processes likely vary. Furthermore, the extent of the agency of local populations and their capacities to resist must be considered when studying portals of globalization.

The recent process of the enlargement of the Panama Canal (and the Nicaraguan canal) demonstrates the need to emphasize entanglements in our efforts to understand the process and its consequences beyond internal racial or ethnic divisions (Mignolo). Historical processes influencing Panama have featured entangled processes that manifested the notions of transitism and the broader idea of interoceanity. Today, we can identify complex entanglements in discourses that aim to justify the construction of megaprojects. These discourses include elements (and goals) of nationalism, patriotism, development, progress, and global engagement. The discourses assist the maintenance of the supremacy of nation-state territoriality over alternative territorialities, such as those of peasants who oppose megaprojects (as in Colombia and Nicaragua) (Semana.com). The colonization of nature is reproduced, together with ideas about cultural difference to inferiorize local communities and control the resources within their territories.

Entanglements have been used to justify the construction of interoceanic canals since the beginning of the 20th century. In the early 1900s, U.S. imperial expansion was crucial to Panamanian secession and the construction of the Panama Canal. Eighty years later, the Canal was transferred to Panamanian control. In recent decades, the construction enterprises have created a discourse to justify Canal enlargement and to secure the water supply for the Canal by merging discourses on nationalism and patriotism with environmental ends (conservation). Recent environmental regulations have emerged that consider conservation goals in conjunction with the

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Canal. Two entangled trends, interoceanity and neoliberal environmentality, have been articulated to transform landscapes for the enlargement of the Canal.

In terms of the spatial turn in global history, the Panama Canal has strengthened the territoriality of the nation-state through a sort of *patriotismo anti-yanqui (*anti-American patriotism*)*. It is an ironic outcome because the anti-American discourse co-exists with the Canal authority's claims that enlarging the Canal meets global demands for the interoceanity of the vessels of the future, which are built to fit U.S. ports. Thus, the Canal simultaneously bases its expansion on and rejects the U.S.

This essay's analysis of the Colombian case reveals other contradictions, embedded in recent governmental policies. On one hand, the government gave territorial rights to Afro-descendants and indigenous communities. On the other hand, it is actively searching out financial support from China to construct a dry canal at the Colombian Darien. The recent expansion of livestock production and monoculture favors the future construction of megaprojects in the disputed and prized lands.

Following Guha and Martínez Allier, varieties of environmentalism are found in these processes. One type is neoliberal environmentality (Fletcher), which is promoted by governments and enterprises; another type is the "environmentalism of the poor," in which minority populations may use their official territorial rights to resist megaprojects, supported by NGOs and global campaigns. In addition, entanglements among perspectives on nature are present within oppositions to megaprojects.

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