

THE LIMINALITY OF COSMOPOLITANISM FROM THE GLOBAL SOUTH

TRANSNATIONAL ACTIVISTS IN COSTA RICA BETWEEN COLONIAL LEGACIES AND DECOLONIAL ATTITUDES

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<p>The Master's thesis examines whether and how decolonial cosmopolitanism is empirically traceable in the attitudes and practices of Costa Rican activists working in transnational advocacy organizations. Decolonial cosmopolitanism is defined as a form of cosmopolitanism from below that aims to propose ways of imagining – and putting into practice – a truly globe-encompassing civic community not based on relations of domination but on horizontal dialogue. This concept has been developed by and shares its basic presumptions with the theory on coloniality that the modernity/coloniality/decoloniality research group is putting forward. It is analyzed whether and how the workings of coloniality as underlying ontological assumption of decolonial cosmopolitanism and broadly subsumable under the three logics of race, capitalism, and knowledge, are traceable in intermediate postcolonial transnational advocacy in Costa Rica.</p> <p>The method of analysis chosen to approach these questions is content analysis, which is used for the analysis of qualitative semi-structured in-depth interviews with Costa Rican activists working in advocacy organizations with transnational ties. Costa Rica was chosen as it – while unquestionably a Latin American postcolonial country and thus within the geo-political context in which the concept was developed – introduces a complex setting of socio-cultural and political factors that put the explanatory potential of the concept to the test.</p> <p>The research group applies the term 'coloniality' to describe how the social, political, economic, and epistemic relations developed during the colonization of the Americas order global relations and sustain Western domination still today through what is called the logic of coloniality. It also takes these processes as point of departure for imagining how counter-hegemonic contestations can be achieved through the linking of local struggles to a global community that is based on pluriversality. The issues that have been chosen as most relevant expressions of the logic of coloniality in the context of Costa Rican transnational advocacy and that are thus empirically scrutinized are national identity as 'white' exceptional nation with gender equality (racism), the neoliberalization of advocacy in the Global South (capitalism), and finally Eurocentrism, but also transnational civil society networks as first step in decolonizing civic activism (epistemic domination).</p> <p>The findings of this thesis show that the various ways in which activists adopt practices and outlooks stemming from the center in order to empower themselves and their constituencies, but also how their particular geo-political position affects their work, cannot be reduced to one single logic of coloniality. Nonetheless, the aspects of race, gender, capitalism and epistemic hegemony do undeniably affect activist cosmopolitan attitudes and transnational practices.</p> <p>While the premisses on which the concept of decolonial cosmopolitanism is based suffer from some analytical drawbacks, its importance is seen in its ability to take as point of departure the concrete spaces in which situated social relations develop. It thus allows for perceiving the increasing interconnectedness between different levels of social and political organizing as contributing to cosmopolitan visions combining local situatedness with global community as normative horizon that have not only influenced academic debate, but also political projects.</p>		
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1 Introduction

The world we live in has been irredeemably transformed by globalization, defined as the “transformation in the spatial organization of social relations regarding their extensity, intensity, velocity and impact” (Held, McGrew *et al.* 1999:16). There exist various perspectives on the origins of the transformations of the “global age” (Beck 2005), as well as on their scope and their consequences for the life worlds of people and for the current political order, from celebratory to skeptical to downright hostile. Critical approaches from the Left have mainly underlined the capitalist logic of current global transformations, claiming that they lead to the commodification of social relations and to the hegemony of neoliberal ideas and practices in all areas of human life (Gill 1995). Some base such an account on the underlying global inequality that is seen as the basis for capitalist hegemony (Prebisch 1971; Wallerstein 1979).

In recent decades, not the least due to the transnational turn in the social sciences, the concept of global civil society has emerged as a new possible way of democratizing these global dynamics (Scholte 2002; Keane 2003). The main political actors in this global public sphere are broadly defined as transnational social movements and NGOs, undergirded by civic networks and cosmopolitan citizens (Mercer, Page *et al.* 2009)¹. Increased mobilities around the planet, leading to the rise of cultural and ethnic diversity nearly everywhere (Scholte 2005:252), new communication and information technologies connecting people around the world in real time (Castells 1996), the decreased costs of air travel, but also the emergence of new global risks (Beck 1997) are all seen as having contributed to the transformation of individual perspectives on the world towards more cosmopolitan orientations.

Some strands of political science debate in particular argue that cosmopolitanism as a way of relating to the world can provide the basis for new global democratic projects (Archibugi and Held 1995; Held 1998; Beck and Sznaider 2006). This conviction is based on the view that an ethical stance towards perceiving all humans as being of equal worth and as part of the same community is a crucial condition of possibility for political projects aiming for the mutual thriving of all humanity through political

¹ The term ‘transnational’ and the term ‘global’ in relation to civil society need closer scrutiny, as while both refer to social relations and processes that transcend the borders of the traditional unit of analysis, the nation-state, ‘global’ is commonly used to delineate the simultaneous development of world consciousness or “one-worldness”, while the term ‘transnational’ does not necessarily entail notions of such a linear development of consciousness (Bauböck and Faist 2010:15). In this thesis, I will mostly use the term ‘transnational’, while the term ‘global’ will be used mainly in connections to particular concepts and debates that presuppose or aim at the development of such world consciousness.

organization transcending the nation-state (Nussbaum 1996:4). While in its classical formulation, cosmopolitanism mainly depicts a moral-philosophical concern of perceiving the whole of humanity as one's moral community, a trajectory reaching from Ancient Greece and the Stoics to Kant, it has in recent decades been re-appropriated and connected to the debate on global democracy and global civil society (Held 2000; Archibugi and Held 1995). Moreover, it also has been re-defined as an individual disposition traceable in empirically informed analyses of individual outlooks under the conditions of globalization (Hiebert 2002; Ollivier and Fridman 2002; Skrbis, Kendall *et al.* 2004; Calcutt, Woodward *et al.* 2009). Cosmopolitanism is also a key concept in research examining the outlooks of those that sustain transnational civic interaction through their everyday work (cf. Tarrow 2005; Nowicka and Kaweh 2009). However, the subjects of research in both fields are still very much either located in the West or highly mobile due to their elevated positions within global civil society. Cosmopolitanism generally has been applied to depict the ethical and political stance of the postmodern citizen of the world, characterized by the dialectic between the locally rooted particular and the world-encompassing universal (Mendieta 2009:242).

The empirical approach of studying cosmopolitanism has reported on cosmopolitan attitudes being based mainly on the specific cultural repertoire of the individual, which in turn is shaped by different structural conditions (Calcutt, Woodward *et al.* 2009:173; Nowicka and Rovisco 2009). Increasingly, scholars from and expressing solidarity for the Global South² depart from a similar position, analyze the structural conditions of cosmopolitanism and argue that cosmopolitanism historically has been “a project of empires, long-distance trade, and of cities” (Calhoun 2003:89), an ideology for those who could afford it. According to them, it is necessary to reflect on the material conditions that make cosmopolitan global citizens more likely to stem from some parts of the world than from others and to develop a counter-discourse of cosmopolitanism that departs from the marginalized and excluded of the globalized world and provides the “cultural and political form of counter-hegemonic globalization” (Santos 2007:23;

² Throughout this thesis, I will use the term ‘Global South’ when referring to those societies that geopolitically are grouped as those in the periphery or semi-periphery of the modern world-system, to use Wallerstein’s terminology (cf. Wallerstein 1979). While the concept of ‘South’ has been applied in international relations since the 1970s to denote the collectivity of ‘developing countries’ which, while being heterogeneous, were facing similar challenges and sharing similar vulnerabilities, the term ‘Global South’ gained prominence after the UNDP (2004) published a report named ‘Forging the Global South’ that called for increased South-South cooperation in order to further development (Dirlik 2007:1-2; UNDP 2004:i). The notion of transnational solidarity between those countries detrimentally affected by the advent of neoliberalism has been picked up by recent social and political movements aspiring to create a ‘counter-hegemonic globalization’ that, while sharing some of the characteristics of liberatory ‘Third-Worldism’, aims to propose localized solutions within a global frame (Cairo Carou and Bringel 2010:43; Santos 2007).

Mignolo 2000b; Mignolo 2010a; Mendieta 2009).

These scholars claim that the dominant understanding of globalization and global civil society is based on an abstract inclusiveness that obscures how colonial structures have persisted within a neoliberal framework of domination (Krishnaswamy and Hawley 2008:11-13). Within postcolonial countries, perpetuated transnational political, economic, cultural and epistemic hegemonies, but also the internal exclusions that have solidified due to the history of colonial organization, have created postcolonial identities that more often than not sustain the very global structures that legitimize and perpetuate their domination (Walsh 2008a:507). This ongoing global ‘coloniality’³ then is seen to result in the “imperial capture” (Ayers 2009:17) of civil society actors from the Global South that seem autonomous but are steered in their thinking and acting by Western epistemologies and interventions. Any kind of global civic community or any cosmopolitan outlooks based on these conditions then are seen as mere smoke screens obscuring the ongoing domination by the West over the rest.

Nevertheless, postcolonial theory, too, sees transnational social movements and non-governmental organizations as the actors with the potential to form a global cosmopolitan community, but one of another kind: Instead of balancing out and democratizing current global relations, as global civil society is often pictured in more conventional accounts (Beck 2005:244-248), the global community imagined by those taking the positionality of the postcolony is believed to offer alternative visions of global order, forming a counter-hegemonic ‘movement of movements’ able to create “worlds and knowledges otherwise” (Escobar 2004; Mercer, Page *et al.* 2009:142; Patomäki and Teivainen 2004; Krishnaswamy and Hawley 2008). In general, these scholars perceive current transnational activism from the Global South as being either constituted by NGOs that are captured by the imperial designs of Western actors or by a multitude of diverse, not necessarily institutionalized actors that are bound together by new communication technologies and aim to challenge the current world order (Bennett 2005:212; Reitan 2007; Smith 2008:16).

Such a distinction, however, is less based on empirical evidence, as members of the World Social Forum, which proponents of the radical view on transnational civil society

³ While the concept of ‘coloniality’ will be discussed later, a short clarification of the term is in order already now: Coloniality is a concept used to describe the “transhistoric expansion of colonial domination and the perpetuation of its effects in contemporary times” (Moraña, Dussel *et al.* 2008:2). It departs particularly from the insight that modernity is based on the colonization and subjugation of the Americas in the 1500s and the power relations that were developed at this point in time that have persisted even after the end of political domination through formal decolonization.

commonly cite as the epitome of a counter-hegemonic movement of movements, are many times organized as NGOs receiving funding from Western donors (Gautney 2010:88-95). More accurately, it is geared towards a particular perception of the identity of the actors involved: either these actors are co-opted and epistemically colonized or they have been able to de-link epistemologically and now challenge Western hegemony and display cosmopolitanism from below (Mignolo 2000b; Santos 2007).

In this thesis, I argue that when aiming to assess the feasibility of a truly globe-encompassing and equitable civic community, cosmopolitan approaches might profit from integrating empirical and theoretical insights from the postcolonial world that examine how living in a globalized world that nevertheless does not provide equal opportunities for becoming cosmopolitan impacts on cosmopolitan identity formation. By making visible the cosmopolitan experience of transnational activism from the Global South, the mainstream understanding of cosmopolitan civic activism is troubled and new avenues for imagining and actively contributing to constructing global civil society might be opened. Such an endeavor becomes even more crucial when taking into account that increasingly, theory production from the Global South is closely intertwined with political movements aiming to challenge what they perceive as neoliberal hegemony, be it through the World Social Forum process or through more local political movements. Scrutinizing the claims and premisses of these theories might not only provide insights into the underlying rationality of these subaltern⁴ movements for a better world, but might also help overcome the epistemic boundaries of Eurocentric theory production by making visible theory production from the Global South.

Concepts in the social science, however, are only as good as their ability to reduce, while still adequately reflecting, the complexities of the social world. I chose to scrutinize one particular approach to studying 'subaltern' cosmopolitanism that has been developed by the modernity/coloniality/decoloniality (from here on forwards: MCD) research collective in order to evaluate its ability to draw valid inferences from empirical material. This collective is developing one of the most debated current academic approaches in Latin America that directly scrutinizes the relation between

⁴ The term 'subaltern' has first been used by Gramsci in his 'Prison Notebooks' to refer to the unorganized Italian peasantry (cf. Gramsci 1971). It has come to prominence especially through its usage by Guha and the South Asian Subaltern Studies Collective for those members of the Indian peasantry and the 'untouchables' that were not acknowledged as being political subjects in their own right, excluded even from counter-hegemonic political struggles. Nowadays, the term is used quite broadly to denote groups or individuals that are marginalized, excluded and not being able to represent themselves due to them not being recognized as actors in their own right (Venn 2006:27; Krishnaswamy 2008:6; Spivak 1988).

postcoloniality, identity and global community formation (Pachón 2007:15; Quintero 2009). It consists of a group of mainly Latin American scholars from various disciplines that aim to theorize modernity from the relative exteriority of Latin America. These scholars challenge not only conventional views on the big themes of today's world, such as modernity, capitalism and globalization, but also aim to offer a constructive view on how to build global community from below (Escobar 2004:31-33). The MCD approach is an example of postcolonial scholarship that possesses a double intention: On the one hand, their aim is to relocate the epistemic basis for academic endeavors from the Global North to the Global South in general and Latin America in particular in order to reveal the limits and silences of Northern theory with regard to the lived realities of the postcolonial world. On the other hand, they further a political program that calls for intercultural dialogue, especially within the Global South, as basis for constructing alternatives to the current world order. Thus, their work provides a fruitful basis for scrutinizing alternative conceptualizations of the role of individual attitudes for constructing a global civil society that is relevant not only for academic knowledge production but also for political activism.

The concept that I will examine in detail is Mignolo's (2000b; 2010a) concept of decolonial cosmopolitanism⁵. The notion of decolonial cosmopolitanism is based on the claim that cosmopolitanism as 'openness to the world' crucially also implies an 'openness to the Other' that is motivated by the historical consciousness of how 'Other' voices and peoples have continuously been subalternized, as well as by the political aim to challenge this subalternization. In Mignolo's words, decolonial cosmopolitanism thus "demands yielding generously (...) toward diversity as a universal and cosmopolitan project in which everyone participates instead of 'being participated'" (Mignolo 2000b:744).

While elaborated in theory, utilized by various political projects in Latin America and also already entering more mainstream debates on cosmopolitanism (e.g. Mendieta 2009), this concept has not yet been applied in empirical research. It also has to be seen in the context of the theoretical and political claims of the approach as a whole: MCD research departs from the presumption that the pervasive power patterns that were created during colonialism still define labor, intersubjective and social relations as well as forms of knowledge production worldwide, securing Western hegemony in all areas

⁵ While Mignolo used 'critical cosmopolitanism' (Mignolo 2000b) in his earlier writings, he recently has begun to frame his approach to the cosmopolitan debate as 'decolonial cosmopolitanism' (Mignolo 2010a; 2010b). I will follow his more recent usage that underlines the research group's claim that specific forms of cosmopolitan attitudes have decolonial potential and apply the term 'decolonial cosmopolitanism' throughout this thesis.

of human life. Nevertheless, it also asserts that simultaneously, spaces for alternative thinking emerge from the places where indigenous and Eurocentric paradigms meet to create a particular consciousness stemming from the relative exteriority of the world system. Part and parcel of MCD's theoretical work is its political aspiration to support decolonial projects worldwide that are

“intercultural, inter-epistemic, inter-political, inter-aesthetical and inter-spiritual but always from perspectives of the Global South (...)” (Transnational Decolonial Institute 2011).

Put shortly, the MCD group holds that the postcolonial condition matters for the formation of political identities, as these are created from within the tensions of the modern/colonial world, and that these tensions play out on both national and transnational terrains to limit or broaden the basis for counter-hegemonic struggles. Decolonial cosmopolitanism is seen as an orientation fostering coalitions of those that aim to create a ‘world where many worlds fit’, as the Zapatista slogan proclaims (Waterman 2004:24; Walsh 2002). It is thus a scientific approach that aims at providing the basis for a political program. This merging of political program and analytical-theoretical frame has led to its advocates exclusively scrutinizing explicitly decolonial movements, testing their hypotheses and theoretical assumptions in these spaces (Walsh 2002; Arias 2008). What is largely missing from the debate (one exception being Escobar 2008) are empirical accounts of the attitudes and practices of those postcolonial civil society actors that pursue their goals in a less radical manner, as these actually represent the great majority of transnational activism from the Global South and might just already have started ‘thinking otherwise’ without necessarily yet acting on it.

My research connects to this gap in the theoretical and analytical development of the concept of decolonial cosmopolitanism and traces activist attitudes and the impact of their postcolonial context within the more conventional activism of advocacy organizations from the Global South that are positioned at an intermediate level between the transnational activist elite working for high profile NGOs and the grassroots subaltern movements that MCD scholarship usually examines. By focusing on these people, I aim to scrutinize whether and how the concept of decolonial cosmopolitanism can contribute to a better understanding of the relation between cosmopolitanism, postcoloniality, transnational activism and global civil society.

The intent to scrutinize whether decolonial cosmopolitanism is an appropriate concept to make sense of the cosmopolitan stance and the shape of transnational activism that stems from the postcolonial world but is not outwardly decolonial also led to the choice of the particular place to draw my sample from. The MCD group presumes particular

conditions of possibility for the emergence of decolonial cosmopolitan attitudes, which are seen to be closely connected to the socio-cultural and material conditions of Latin America (and implicitly the rest of the Global South), but have not scrutinized their assumptions in those Latin American places that do not conform to their image of Latin America that mainly derives from the Andean region.

Thus, I will examine the validity of their assumptions through an empirical study of the practices and attitudes of activists from Costa Rica. Costa Rica is a Central American country located between Panama and Nicaragua that has commonly been perceived as an ‘outlier’ case that does not conform to the trajectory of Latin American historical development. It has been described as a “social democracy in the global periphery” (Sandbrook, Edelman *et al.* 2006) due to its high levels of economic growth, its political stability and particularly due to its social public policies. Nonetheless, these features have begun to crumble in recent decades due to the changing world economy and the neoliberalization pressures exerted on the country. Nowadays, Costa Rican civil society is caught between explicitly decolonial activism as can be observed for example in parts of the Southern cone of Latin America and the submission to neoliberal policies and orientations. There have been large popular movements challenging the privatization of public services and neoliberalism, but those have remained punctual and unsustainable, not able to create a broad front able to offer alternatives (Frajman 2000; Huhn 2009b). The particular situation of contemporary Costa Rica has motivated me to apply the concept of liminality as one of the orienting notions of this thesis. While the concept of liminality originally stems from anthropology and denotes an in-between or transitional stage in a subject’s life⁶, postcolonial theory has characterized the postcolonial condition as one of continuous liminality, leading to hybridity and ambivalences marking the identity formation of postcolonial subjects (cf. Bhabha 1994:4-12). Liminality as basic condition of living in the borderlands provokes ambiguity, but can also spark dissidence and counter-hegemonies. In the context of Costa Rica, it also points to the feeling of many Costa Ricans as being caught “betwixt and between” (Turner 1974:232), because Costa Rica is being perceived as a ‘advanced’ country and yet is increasingly more like the rest of Central America. The MCD perspective in

⁶ The first to frame the concept of ‘liminality’ was the anthropologist van Gennep, who applied it to delineate the intermediate state in rites of passage that propelled the subject from one social status to the other, with the liminal stage being characterized by uncertainty, the dissolution of structures and danger. Turner (1967; 1974) characterized the liminal space as a space of transition, a notion that has been picked up by migration research to denote the basic conditions of migration (Cwerner 2001:27-28). In general, it has become a term applied to characterize the fragmentation and ambiguities of the modern world (Pieterse 2001:240).

general and their concept of decolonial cosmopolitanism in particular must be able to depict and explain these tensions if the concept of decolonial cosmopolitanism is seen to be a valid base for cosmopolitan theorization from the Global South, as well as a political claim for Southern solidarity. The potential for decolonial cosmopolitan outlooks in the Global South should exist also where these are not readily self-evident and where radical decolonial politics are not (yet?) played out. But decolonial cosmopolitanism might also prove to be a political concept that is unsuitable for academic research.

In order to approach these questions I ask: *To what extent are the presumptions of the concept of decolonial cosmopolitanism empirically traceable in the attitudes of Costa Rican activists involved in transnational advocacy? What do these findings imply for the potential of this concept to offer a framework for building an equitable global community?*

If members of Costa Rican transnational advocacy share patterns of relating to the world which reflect the underlying logics of the modern/colonial world that MCD research sees as central for steering the thought and actions of people, the concept of decolonial cosmopolitanism might reveal new possibilities of research and political engagement. I will scrutinize the concept through a qualitative study of the outlooks of members of Costa Rican transnational advocacy organizations.

In order to structure my analysis, I have chosen to focus on the three main dimensions in which the ‘logic of coloniality’⁷ is assumed to shape the identities and actions of people, which are the dimensions of race, capitalism, and knowledge (Mignolo 2010b:332). MCD research applies the concept of logic to describe how these dimensions shape people’s relation to the world, which I will scrutinize with regard to those issues that in my reading are their most relevant expressions in Costa Rican transnational advocacy. These issues are firstly, Costa Rican national identity as ‘white’ exceptional nation (logic of race), secondly, the neoliberalization of advocacy in the Global South (logic of capitalism), and finally the implications of transnational activism being based on networked forms of communication (logic of knowledge). My data consists of qualitative semi-structured in-depth interviews conducted during a fieldtrip to Costa Rica in September/October 2010 with nine activists working in advocacy

⁷ While the term coloniality, or coloniality of power in Quijano’s (2000) rendering of it, is applied to depict these scholars’ ontological understanding of the concept as such, the ‘logic of coloniality’ is a term that focuses attention on the way coloniality *works* to sustain and strengthen the global relations of power that characterize the modern/colonial world, as well as on the distinct ways in which the logic of coloniality provides the point of departure for alternative projects that challenge this very logic (Migolo 2010b:317-338).

organizations with transnational ties.

I will start by introducing my theoretical framework and show what the MCD perspective might be able contribute to the debate on cosmopolitan identities in transnational activism from the Global South. Then I will delineate the methodological and ethical choices made when deciding on my research design and present the data on which I base my analysis. In the fifth chapter, I will operationalize the three logics of coloniality (race, capitalism, and knowledge) and develop an argument on how these might be reflected in the issues of national identity, the neoliberalization of activism and networking logics. Concurrently, I will examine whether and how these logics are traceable in the narratives of Costa Rica activists. Subsequently, I will use the sixth chapter to discuss whether and how the logic of coloniality is expressed in my respondents' attitudes and whether and how there are instances of decolonial cosmopolitanism emerging. I will also debate if the concept of decolonial cosmopolitanism provides an appropriate framework for adding a postcolonial perspective to the debate on cosmopolitanism and global civil society. In a final step, I will contextualize my findings with regard to their contributions for academic debate; discuss the limitations of my results and comment on possibilities for future research.

2 Theoretical Framework

The postcolonial approach of MCD research to theorizing cosmopolitan identities in the Global South most centrally departs from the claim that one has to be aware of how the *colonial difference* plays out within the socio-historical and spatial setting that serves as the locus of enunciation⁸, arguing thus for situated knowledge production. How such a stance impacts on the way global relations but also the potential for cosmopolitanism from below are perceived will be a central part of this chapter. But before delving further into the particularities of the perspective of the MCD collective, I need to clarify how their approach fits – or might be opposed to – the more common understanding of cosmopolitanism in the contemporary world.

⁸ The concept of 'colonial difference' was originally formulated by Chatterjee (1993) in the 'rule of colonial difference'. He stressed that colonial domination was legitimized by positing an absolute difference between colonizer and colonized, based on the inferiority of the latter. In MCD research, the term 'colonial difference' depicts how the imaginary of the modern West arose as juxtaposed to places and peoples who were 'outside' humanity. The "horizon of modernity, and with it, legitimate intellectual work, policy and common sense" (Maldonado-Torres 2004:48) has been consequently defined as purely European. The devaluation of practices and perspectives of political actors from the Global South, together with the co-optation of their knowledges, is in this interpretation a corollary of the colonial difference (Mignolo 2000a).

In the following, I will thus first give a brief overview over the way cosmopolitan identity formation has been conceptualized in social science debate and comment on the development of the concept of cosmopolitanism from Kant to the “actually existing cosmopolitanism” (Calhoun 2002) of today’s globalized world. While there has been a veritable upsurge of work attempting to characterize current cosmopolitanism as, among others, ‘patriotic’, ‘reflexive’, ‘rooted’, ‘elite’, ‘multicultural’, ‘post-modern’, ‘subaltern’, ‘banal’ or ‘consumerist’ (cf. Vertovec and Cohen 2002:21; Mendieta 2009:241), some common ground can be identified: In all approaches, cosmopolitanism denotes a way of relating to the world that thrives of the dialectic interplay between particularity and universality, locality and worldliness (Mendieta 2009:242). As the one term that is thought to incorporate the ambiguities and tensions that globalization provokes, cosmopolitanism has become one of the most prominent concepts to grasp the dynamics of identity formation in the contemporary world. This is due to, not the least, its enmeshing of empirical analysis and normative claims, making the term prone for appropriation by scholars of all political convictions. In recent years, cosmopolitanism has also been increasingly used to ground notions of global civil society through a focus on individual outlooks, muddying the conceptual waters even further (cf. Vertovec and Cohen 2002; Skrbis, Kendall *et al.* 2004; Nowicka 2006).

Secondly, I will delineate how the concept of cosmopolitanism has been used to describe the practices and outlooks of transnational activists. I will also argue that research on cosmopolitan activist identities has commonly tended to gloss over the particular position of civil society activists from the Global South.

Increasingly, scholars have become aware of the chasm dividing the theoretical claims of cosmopolitanism and the empirical analysis of the dynamics of emerging global civil society that is dominated by NGOs and activists from the Global North, in which an elite cosmopolitan identity seems to be formed (Calhoun 2002:92; Munck 2004:17). I argue that these ambiguities should be regarded in the context of the material and discursive conditions in which the debate on global civil society is located: The modern/colonial world that is still crucially shaped by the histories of colonization and domination of the West over the rest (cf. Baillie Smith and Jenkins 2011a:175).

Therefore, I will subsequently introduce one strand of academic debate that tries to explicitly take into account, even depart from, these conditions as shaping the possibilities of thinking and acting in today’s world: the MCD research program and, for my purposes, especially Mignolo’s concept of decolonial cosmopolitanism. These theorizations, however, are rarely applied to study how the ‘ambiguities of the

modern/colonial world' are expressed in the outlooks and practices of people and how these ambiguities then lay the basis for decolonial cosmopolitan orientations. Therefore, I will utilize the subsequent chapters of this thesis to examine if the MCD framework is appropriate for studying the cosmopolitan attitudes and transnational practices of Costa Rican transnational advocacy activists.

2.1 Cosmopolitan Identity and Global Civil Society

The question whether the centrality of individual identity for social life is a modern invention or a human universal is still not resolved in academic debate, contributing to the largely interchangeable use of terms like 'identity', 'personhood', 'subjectivity', or 'individual' and leading to a lack of clarity regarding the application of the terminology of identity formation. I adopt a constructivist stance towards identity, assuming that while people vary in their sense of self and their relation to their social and natural environment, these differences will be to some extent the product of a particular history and the discourses and practices surrounding them, which in turn are the results of a particular power setting. I see identities nevertheless not as externally imposed, as people interpret their context in different ways and thus produce individual notions of themselves and their environment. Such a view of identity runs contrary to essentialism, which holds that identity is based on an unchanging core of characteristics that can serve to clearly delineate e.g. ethnic or national identities. For my purposes, I define identity as *a form of understanding oneself and one's social world drawn from but not imposed by the discourses and practices at hand based on a particular historical background*. Such a view is also prevalent in much of poststructuralist theory, whose understanding of identity can be summarized as the position that

“socially and historically positioned persons construct their subjectivities in practice” (Holland *et al.* 1998:32 in Escobar 2008).

Generally, one of the dynamics thought to have fundamentally transformed human life around the globe are the processes of globalization and the way these have led to a transformation of societal organization, weakening national boundaries and providing new avenues for political and social action across and beyond the limits of the nation-state (cf. Beck 2005; Scholte 2005). These developments are generally seen as not only impacting on political and economic organization but also on identity formation, as it is argued that the nation-state as the central institution for creating feelings of belonging and community has lost some of its centrality, leading to two main responses with regard to identity formation: On the one hand, identity is increasingly thought to be

better understood in terms of hybridization and fluidity than in terms of stable and exclusive identities (Scholte 2005:252). On the other hand, new ethnic and religious counter-movements are thought to aim to strengthen exclusive identities, leading to the upsurge of conflicts and violence (Rosenau 2002:70-71; Beck 2002:38-39).

One concept that has gained currency in the context of the first response to globalization is that of cosmopolitanism, but applied in a renewed form: In its earlier usage, from the Stoics to Kant, cosmopolitanism mainly described a normative-philosophical commitment to the primacy of world citizenship over all other national, religious, cultural, and ethnic affiliations (Beck and Sznaider 2006:6; Mendieta 2009:244-247). In its 'new' form, it is now applied in academic debate to denote both the methodological commitment to abandon the 'container-model' of the nation-state as well as the analytical goal to develop new approaches to research and theorizing that take into account the possibility for multiple forms of belonging. Furthermore, the notion of 'new' cosmopolitanism also includes the call for empirically studying how people increasingly engage with "the otherness of the other' and the oneness of the world" (Nowicka and Rovisco 2009:2).

While numerous academic disciplines have included some notion of cosmopolitanism into their debates, political scientists in particular have focused on the rise of new transnational regimes, understanding cosmopolitanism as a political project that fosters new forms of supranational governance contributing to the creation of a global civil society that addresses global challenges (Boon and Delanty 2007:24; Vertovec and Cohen 2002:11-12; cf. also Held 2000; Archibugi and Held 1995). Global civil society is imagined as a fluid space constituted by international non-governmental organizations, new social movements and transnational advocacy networks (Vertovec and Cohen 2002:16-20). Its definition is based on the notion of civil society⁹, which is thought to have transcended national borders, making global civil society

“the sphere of ideas, values, institutions, organisations, networks, and individuals located between the family, the state and the market and operating beyond the confines of national politics and economics” (Anheier, Glasius *et al.* 2001:17).

Even though such a sphere is said to have existed since a long time, as for example exemplified by the campaign for abolishing slavery in the 19th century (Keck and

⁹Civil society is commonly used to denote a sphere that is neither the state nor the household or private sphere. There is considerable debate regarding the location of economic relations, with some theorists including the economy in civil society and some categorically refuting such a stance. What has to be noted, however, is that such an analytical separation of human life and collective relations into different spheres is a constructed perspective that, as some would argue, has been utilized to gloss over power relations and influences in the respectively other 'autonomous' spheres, an argument that e.g. feminists have taken up in their argumentation that the private is public because the personal is also political (meaning shaped by power).

Sikkink 1998), only in the 1990s the empirical realities of such organizing became an issue for academic scrutiny. One insight of research scrutinizing the mechanisms of transnational civic organizing and the possibilities for global civil society has been the recognition of the necessarily multi-level character of such dynamics: Locally or nationally organized civil society that possesses transnational linkages, for example through networks, alliances or partnerships, constitutes a fundamental part of 'global' civil society (Batliwala 2002). This is also underlined by Sassen (2008), who posits the term 'multiscalarity of globalization' as descriptive frame for the border-crossing linkages between local, national, transnational and global levels.

Such linkages, however, are not always entered into voluntarily. The globalized world, apart from offering facilitated communication and movement such as travel and tourism that can contribute to a feeling of global community, is also replete with stories of involuntary immigration and diaspora, leading to another kind of community that is global in its extensiveness but not in consciousness. Turks in Germany (Adelson 1994), the Afro-Costarrican minority in Costa Rica (Sharman 2001), Palestinians everywhere (King-Irani 2006) and other immigrant or ethnic minorities are believed to exist at the interstices of legal, political and discursive orders that more often than not foster a state of temporal or permanent liminality characterized by exclusions, marginality and invisibility (cf. Balduk 2008:23-29), comprising the hidden side of global civil society.

Common to the approaches to global civil society is furthermore the positing of cosmopolitan identity as part of the solution to democratize global dynamics and achieve a somehow more equal, just and better world. It is seen as an integral part of any kind of political project aiming at fostering a global community that does not strive to privilege one particular group or ideology but aims to create linkages between different places to foster democratic and equitable relations between peoples. While the term 'cosmopolitan' has been applied to international organizations, legal regimes, political initiatives, groups and individuals, it is always used to describe a particular state of consciousness to see all human life on the planet as part of one moral community, leading to notions such as respect for diversity, tolerance, human rights and intercultural dialogue (Vertovec and Cohen 2002:8-14; Mendieta 2009:242).

Notwithstanding the contributions of the debate on cosmopolitan democracy and global civil society, discussion in this field has been theoretical-philosophical rather than empirical (cf. Archibugi and Held 1995; Held 1998; Held 2002; Beck and Sznaider 2006). It has been criticized for being highly normative, making it hard to pinpoint which of its conclusions are derived from empirical findings and which from normative

aspirations (Munck 2002; Baillie Smith and Jenkins 2011a:164) and also for putting forward an abstract inclusiveness that does in fact favor the interests of particular social groups that possess the material resources and socio-cultural dispositions necessary to adapt and practice this form of cosmopolitanism (Santos 2007:23; Calhoun 2002).

In the social sciences more broadly and particularly in sociology, some scholars have embarked on empirically examining how cosmopolitan identities are situated in everyday life through a conscious openness to the world and to cultural differences (Skrbis, Kendall *et al.* 2004:117; cf. Vertovec and Cohen 2002). There is an abundance of empirical studies on the cosmopolitan attitudes of people who encounter difference in the form of cultural diversity at the local level due to increased immigration (Hiebert 2002; Ollivier and Fridman 2002; Skrbis, Kendall *et al.* 2004; Calcutt, Woodward *et al.* 2009) or on those who are ‘globally mobile professionals’ encountering different cultures in the course of their professional life (Thompson and Tambyah 1999; Nowicka 2006). Cosmopolitan in this reading becomes a

“set of increasingly available cultural outlooks that individuals selectively deploy to deal with new social conditions” (Skrbis and Woodward 2007:745).

The main normative stance of this new cosmopolitan debate focusing on cosmopolitanism as individual outlook on the world is to

“fashion tools for understanding and acting upon problems of a global scale, to diminish suffering regardless of color, class, religion, sex and tribe” (Hollinger 2002:230).

Critical voices within the cosmopolitan debate see these assumptions more ambivalently and argue that by assuming that cosmopolitan outlooks are increasingly available for everyone, regardless of social status, education, or nationality, it becomes easier to associate cosmopolitan disposition with a stance towards openness and progressiveness and cast all those who do not or cannot join the cosmopolitan ranks as parochial at best and fundamentalist at worst. Cosmopolitan in this usage thus becomes a “conspicuous openness to diversity” (Ollivier and Fridman 2002:2; cf. Buchanan and Pahuja 2002; Yegenoglu 2005) that does not always reflect on the manifold ways in which

“the cosmopolitan appreciation of global diversity is based on privileges of wealth and perhaps especially citizenship in certain states” (Calhoun 2002:108).

Moreover, most of these studies still focus on the Western world. In the instances where cosmopolitan attitudes have also been traced in the Global South (cf. Werbner 2006; Notar 2008), these studies are mainly ethnographic accounts of how certain groups or individuals express outlooks of valuing diversity and respecting difference in interaction with the ethnically ‘Other’ and seldom link their findings to the general debate on the

feasibility of global civil society. Cosmopolitan identities in the Global South seem to be analyzed mainly out of ethnographic curiosity and are perceived as contributions to the discipline of anthropology. This tendency can be seen as a perpetuation of some academic disciplines, such as anthropology, producing knowledge about the exotic ‘Other’, while others, such as political science or sociology, produce universally valid knowledge on topics of general concern (Castro-Gómez 2005:1-20; Restrepo 2007).

To conclude, the contemporary debate on cosmopolitanism as political project linked to global civil society and as individual outlook has produced a wealth of knowledge on the cosmopolitan condition of the modern citizen and certainly has contributed to the empirical analysis of what being cosmopolitan might mean in practice and what it might mean for the feasibility of global civil society. Nevertheless, the debate cannot shed light on the particular postcolonial conditions under which cosmopolitan identities are formed in the Global South as it generally perpetuates the Eurocentric assumption that universally valid knowledge can be produced by examining social relations in the Western world.

Another field that has focused on identity formation, in the particular context of border-crossing social relations and political and social activism, and that might thus provide insights into the cosmopolitan outlook of transnational activists from the Global South, is the field of transnational studies and social movement research. In the following, I will therefore shortly present their main findings as relevant for my research interest.

2.2 Cosmopolitan Identities within Transnational Activism

A term that is often used to describe border-crossing activities and outlooks is ‘transnationalism’. In academic debate but also common usage, transnational practices are defined as those sustained practices that transcend national boundaries while remaining grounded in particular national or local contexts. In contrast to the notion of cosmopolitan attitudes and global civil society, the use of the term ‘transnational’ explicitly acknowledges that the ties created and sustained through interaction and communication, while border-crossing, most of the times fall short of being all-encompassingly global in scope. This limited scope also allows for a more pronounced focus on the hierarchies and limitations inherent to border-crossing social relations.

The point of emergence of transnational studies as academic discipline that studies the transnational ties of civil society and civic associations is commonly set to the publication of Glick Schiller and her colleagues’ pivotal book on immigrant transnationalism (Basch, Schiller *et al.* 1994). The discipline’s main focus has been

immigrants, the diaspora and their transnational ties and practices, but its scope has recently been broadened to include a concern with political and institutional spaces becoming transnational (cf. Pries 2008; Albert 2009).

While undoubtedly a promising perspective, much of the current knowledge on the mindset and practices of people that pursue political or social goals transnationally has been produced in the field of social movement research that has followed the social movements it has begun to study in the 1950s from the domestic to the transnational terrain. It consequently increasingly also examines transnational activism. Keck and Sikkink (1998) were one of the first to conceptualize border-crossing civic activism and campaigning through the study of activist networks and information sharing based on international conferences and electronic communication technologies. They diagnosed an increased accessibility to transnational civic spaces also for the Global South, but did not exclusively focus on the conditions of possibility of its transnational activism.

While Keck and Sikkink primarily study the processes and dynamics of transnational activism, Tarrow (2005) not only analyzes the latter's mechanisms but also underlines the importance of analyzing the motivations of individuals for sustaining transnational activism. He put forward the concept of 'rooted cosmopolitanism'¹⁰ as central foundation of transnational activist identities. In his reading, transnational activists are rooted cosmopolitans because they remain linked to a specific place while they

“mobilize domestic and international resources and opportunities to advance claims on behalf of external actors, against external opponents, or in favor of goals they hold in common with transnational allies (...) able to combine the resources and opportunities of their own societies into transnational networks (...).” (Tarrow 2005:43)

Labeling transnational activism 'rooted cosmopolitanism' also underlines the claim that while the number of activists that operate on a transnational level is growing, many of them remain closely tied to their location of origin, combining experiences and resources from their own societies with transnational opportunity structures to further specific aims. He also emphasizes that by far not all transnational activism is benign in nature and that in fact much cross-border activism is sustained by “birds of passage” (Tarrow 2005:53), activists – he interestingly focuses on immigrant activism – who use these new opportunities for seeding fundamental nationalism in their home countries

¹⁰ The term 'rooted cosmopolitanism' has first been put forward by Cohen who called for a “dialectical concept of rooted cosmopolitanism, which accepts a multiplicity of roots and branches, and that rests on the legitimacy of plural loyalties” (Cohen 1992:480). Appiah applied the notion of rootedness as a response to the often-voiced slander that cosmopolitans are rootless and without loyalties to anybody or anything, presenting his father, who has been securely settled in his local context, as 'rooted cosmopolitan' and 'cosmopolitan patriot' (Appiah 1996:22).

while making use of the resources in their country of settlement.

Moreover, he, as many other scholars in social movement research, argues that transnational class-based activism has increasingly been replaced by transnational identity-, and rights-based activism. This activism is characterized as either pursuing the interests of all humankind or the planet in its entirety, or, in a countermove, pursuing the interests of one group or nation to the detriment of others (Tarrow 2005:51-56; Adick 2008:140). Their concern with identity, combined with a rhetoric emphasizing civil, political or social rights, connects to notions of cosmopolitanism as understood in contemporary academic debate. This rights-based activism, interwoven with notions of global dialogue and international solidarity, became an often remarked upon part of the international UN summits and similar events in the decade of the 1990s, fostering notions of cosmopolitanism and global civil society (Lenz 2008:106-109; Baillie Smith and Jenkins 2011a:162; cf. Keck and Sikkink 1998).

But according to some recent arguments, what can be observed currently in transnational civil society, affecting especially the Global South, is the “de-cosmopolitanization of spaces for global dialogue and civic action” (Baillie Smith and Jenkins 2011a:161). A poignant argument in this regard was made by Baillie Smith and Jenkins (2011a), who examined the practices and narratives of grassroots health promoters in rural Peru and concluded that what can be observed are processes of professionalization within global civil society that in practice exclude activists from the Global South from participating in it. Drawing on the definitions of cosmopolitanism developed in studies concerned with the highly skilled elite (Nowicka 2006), but also in those examining working-class cosmopolitanism (Lamont and Aksartova 2002), they argue that there are two versions of cosmopolitan practice and identity within contemporary global civil society: On the one hand, they see a cosmopolitan space of NGOs and professionalized development workers that celebrate an intellectual and aesthetic openness to different cultural experiences and the switching between different cultural codes, creating a narrow space nearly impenetrable for local activists (Baillie Smith and Jenkins 2011a:170-171, cf. van der Veer 2000:165). On the other hand, they describe the local activists they studied as rooted cosmopolitans whose interaction with difference is shaped by transnational political structures but grounded in local struggles and life worlds (Baillie Smith and Jenkins 2011a:167). For them, this form of cosmopolitanism is a socio-cultural practice that is expressed through the “interest in and openness to difference” (Baillie Smith and Jenkins 2011a:166), encountered through “purposeful interaction” (cf. Kaldor 2003:46) within the context of

transnational activism, but nevertheless also embedded in their everyday lives.

According to these scholars, activists from the Global South increasingly are excluded from global civil society, as they cannot fulfill the demands for professionalization and efficiency set as requirements for participation in it. Consequently, the caveats of critical scholars of the cosmopolitan debate are repeated: celebrating cosmopolitan orientations without paying attention to the various ways material and structural conditions might inhibit certain groups from 'becoming cosmopolitan' might convert the notion of cosmopolitanism into a means of sustaining relations of domination of a more privileged group over others in the margins (Ollivier and Fridman 2002). They furthermore note, referring to Jenkins (2009), that the health activists'

“openness to difference at transnational levels is rooted in their particular experiences of racialized and gendered inequalities” (Baillie Smith and Jenkins 2011a:167).

MCD scholars would depart from this claim and argue that Baillie Smith and Jenkins (2011a) observation that transnational grassroots activism has not become part of the sphere of 'cosmopolitan' global civil society has to be understood in the context of the very gendered, racialized, and professionalized environment from which activists' cosmopolitanism is inevitably expressed and which is shaped by the logic of coloniality. Such a claim resonates with postcolonial scholars' general call to situate cosmopolitanism and to scrutinize whom and how contemporary notions of cosmopolitanism exclude, marginalize and silence. Some scholars, for example Santos (2007:23), also strive to re-appropriate the concept for theorizing emancipative political projects from the margins of the globalized world asking

“who needs cosmopolitanism? The answer is simple: whoever is a victim of intolerance and discrimination needs tolerance; whoever is denied basic human dignity needs a community of human beings; whoever is a non-citizen needs world citizenship in any given community or nation. In sum, those socially excluded, victims of the hegemonic conception of cosmopolitanism, need a different type of cosmopolitanism. Subaltern cosmopolitanism is therefore an oppositional variety.”

According to such a view, the notion of cosmopolitanism can also provide a point of reference for counter-hegemonic political projects that challenge the asymmetrical power relations of today's formally decolonized, but still (post)colonial world (Quijano 2000:22). In this vein, MCD research argues that before emancipative political projects can be constructed, the racialized and gendered contexts shaped by coloniality in which activists operate have to be made visible and deconstructed. Such a distinct starting point also leads to a different understanding of the context of transnational activism in the Global South as well as of the cosmopolitanism possible within it, a view that I will delineate in the following.

2.3 Decolonial Cosmopolitanism in the Modern/Colonial World

While having been perceived by mainstream academia as a marginal concern mainly for academics from the Global South when it emerged on the academic stage in the 1970s, postcolonial theory has become a noticeable presence in critical scholarship in recent decades. Departing from the seminal works of scholars such as Said (1978), Spivak (1988) and Bhabha (1994), scholars of different backgrounds, disciplines, and political convictions have highlighted the importance of making visible the impact of the European colonization of the world on social relations in order to gain insights into both past and present social, cultural, economic and political phenomena.

While there are numerous approaches in the postcolonial field that examine the postcolonial condition and its effect on people's life-worlds and orientations, I have decided to focus on a theoretical approach that takes up postcolonial concerns and aims to offer both an argument of how the contemporary world is constituted as well as a vision of how a more equitable and just world could be achieved through fostering what they call 'decolonial cosmopolitanism'. This approach thinks the postcolonial from Latin America and aims to combine an analysis of how the material and structural conditions in the postcolonial world shape epistemic orientations with a notion of cosmopolitanism that is seen to provide the basis for political projects striving for global change. Their two-fold stance on analytically grasping attitude formation in the postcolony and offering a political program for transnational coalition building, as well as their explicit focus on Latin America, makes it a fruitful approach for my purposes.

This perspective, called the modernity/coloniality/decoloniality (MCD) project, has resonated particularly well within Latin American academic circles and radical political movements in the Andean region (Quintero 2009; Ceci Misoczky 2011). It has been developed by a group of scholars from different academic backgrounds who began to work on theorizing modernity from a Latin American postcolonial perspective at the end of the 1990s¹¹. The history of this collective has already been written elsewhere (Restrepo and Rojas 2010:30-37), which is why in the following, I will only comment on the group's genealogy to the extent that is necessary for a proper contextualization of

¹¹ More prominent members of the MCD group include for example the Argentinian/Mexican philosopher Enrique Dussel, the Argentinian/US semiotician and cultural theorist Walter D. Mignolo, and the Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano. Other members, located in a variety of places from Colombia, Venezuela, Bolivia to the US and Europe, include for example Edgardo Lander, Arturo Escobar, Santiago Castro-Gómez, Eduardo Restrepo, Catherine Walsh, Freya Schiwy, Ramón Grosfoguel, Nelson Maldonado-Torres and María Lugones (Escobar 2010:57).

their work¹².

Broadly put, the overall aim of these scholars is to develop a different, non-universalizing kind of research – a “*paradigma otro*” (Escobar 2004:31) – stemming from the borderlands of the world-system. They strive to show how colonialism was constitutive of the making of modernity and the capitalist world system, sparking global logics that, while taking on different shapes and leading to different outcomes in different localities, still converge in sustaining the global hegemony of the former colonizers over the formerly colonized. They also underline the importance of constructing theoretical approaches that depart from the perspective of the marginalized, showing how the underlying logics of epistemic, social, political and economic coloniality can be traced in the very distinct situations of the modern ‘wretched of the earth’ (Fanon 1967). Nonetheless, they do not perceive global hegemony to be all-encompassing and aim to reveal the instances where the modern/colonial system has created spaces for new thinking and acting when dominant epistemologies met indigenous knowledges and cosmologies (Escobar 2004; Mignolo 2010c:15-20).

Their approach consequently reflects some of postcolonial theory’s concern with hybridity, *mestizaje* and creolization (Venn 2006:18-19; Bhabha 1994; Anzaldúa 1999), but denotes a more radical stance towards transcending the mere celebration of postcolonial liminal, hybrid and ambiguous consciousness and towards formulating a political program based on the experiences and aspirations of the peoples displaying such consciousness. While postcolonial theory examines how the appearance of the ‘North in the South’ and ‘the South in the North’ through diaphora and immigration has led to the conflicted and multiple affiliations of the postcolonial subject, creating new creative potentials and ways for re-defining subjectivity at the interstices of fixed identities (Pieterse 2001:240-241), MCD research is more closely interested in how these experiences of liminality can be used to create political agency based on the concrete experiences of postcolonial subjects, a stance that some parts of postcolonial scholarship refuse for being overly “antagonistic” (Lazarus 2005:423).

In general, MCD research has its roots in the work postcolonial scholars have produced and are producing, but also criticizes the canon of postcolonial studies for perceiving modernity as being somehow salvageable, while they themselves see modernity as

¹² Theoretically, the group itself acknowledges several roots for their arguments, which are, among others, dependency theory (e.g. Prebisch 1971; Frank 1969) that linked Latin American ‘underdevelopment’ to Western ‘development’, Wallerstein’s (1979) world-systems theory that theoretically explored the interdependencies between the first and the third world, as well as liberation theology and Latin American philosophy (e.g. Dussel 1976). They also acknowledge the anticolonial writers Fanon (1967; 1986) and Césaire (1972) as important bases for their work.

being inextricably intertwined with coloniality and thus as something that has to be overcome. MCD research consequently also refuses to use the term ‘postcolonial’ because it sees the modern global order as still very much colonial. This also is the main motivation behind employing the term modern/colonial to describe the contemporary world (Quijano and Ennis 2000; Escobar 2004). By emphasizing the joint constitution of the world as both modern and colonial, they claim that while colonialism as the overt political and economic domination of one country over the other has ended in almost all places, the patterns that emerged in the course of colonial expansion are in operation still today. For MCD scholars, these patterns have their origin in a particular time and place in world history, namely the conquest of the Americas by European colonizers.

MCD scholars not only see the starting point of ‘postcolonial dependencies’ in the conquest of the Americas, they also argue that the foundations for the notion of ‘race’ and for the organization of economic relations in a capitalist world market were laid at this point in world history. They argue that these emerged, on the one hand, because the Spanish colonizers encountered new peoples that did not fit into Christian cosmology and, on the other hand, because the natives of the new territories could not satisfy the Spanish demand for labor, thus contributing to the development of the trade in African captives as world-spanning economic endeavor that contributed to the onset of capitalism. According to MCD research, the conquest of the Americas thus is implicated in the creation of two intertwined axes of power – race and world capitalism – that have become constitutive of modernity (Quijano and Ennis 2000:533; Mazzotti 2008: 96-101).

It is important to note that this perspective is an approach that takes the stand of Latin America and the Global South and aims to theorize the current world-system from the ‘darker side of modernity’, which most centrally means giving voice to those perspectives on the world that have been silenced and excluded (Mignolo 2000:722; Suárez-Krabbe 2009:2). Thus, one of its central tenets is based on the claim that European cosmologies, epistemologies and practices of knowledge production have come to be taken as universally valid and ‘objective’, while others have been cast as parochial and ‘cultural’ simply due to their differences to hegemonic discourse (Smith 2005; Castro-Gómez 2005; Quijano 2000; Mignolo 2008). Their primary concern with how epistemic relations sustain the colonial difference has led to an emphasis on how coloniality

“is maintained alive in books, in the criteria for academic performance, in cultural patterns, in common sense, in the self-images of peoples, in aspirations of the self, and so many other aspects of our modern experience” (Maldonado-Torres 2010:97).

What they see at work in these processes is ‘Eurocentrism’, understood as epistemology that has successfully managed to obscure its particular locus of enunciation and to claim universal validity, supported by the practices of academic knowledge production and emission, the policies of publishing houses and the common understanding of what ‘valid’ knowledge means (Quijano 2000; Mignolo 2000).

While these scholars do not argue that coloniality takes the same shape everywhere, they hold that the ‘logic of coloniality’ (Mignolo 2010b) orders social relations worldwide not necessarily in similar ways, but always in ways that ensure the perpetuation of the colonial difference that keeps one part of the world elevated in comparison to the other. The life of a poor peasant in Guatemala is thus not the same as the one of an Algerian immigrant woman in France or of a Chicano in Los Angeles, but for MCD research, people inhabiting these positionalities are thought to more likely feel the logic of coloniality more acutely than those who are privileged by it and thus remain oblivious to its workings (Quijano 2000).

This emphasis on one all-encompassing logic of coloniality that, even if composed by an entangled web of various other dimensions and hierarchical orderings, impacts on all localities of the planet not similarly, but in an equal measure, has led to the MCD project being criticized for putting forward a “logocentrism of power” (Cheah 2006:10) that fails to account for the productive side of power and sees it mainly as repressive. The workings of power, in MCD understanding, can be traced, deciphered and ultimately opposed by counter-logics developed by those who have experienced how coloniality subjugates them and their outlooks and consequently are more likely to desire to de-link from it.

Decolonial cosmopolitanism departs from these very assumptions: because coloniality is anchored in subjectivities and outlooks on the world, people can de-link from the structures of coloniality through the transformation of their consciousness and through becoming aware of the workings of these processes. The concept of decolonial cosmopolitanism is thus closely connected to the political project of decolonization, with decolonization not denoting the end of formal colonialism – something that has been achieved in most of Latin America in the 18th and 19th century and in Africa and Asia in the 20th century – but denoting the challenging of racial, sexual, gender and other hierarchies that were constituted through colonialism and have persisted after the end of former colonization (Maldonado-Torres 2010:115). Decolonial cosmopolitan consequently delineates an individual and collective disposition from which decolonial political projects can emerge, with decolonial cosmopolitanism acting as

“a connector between different experiences of exploitation (...) that connects pluriversality (different colonial histories entangled with imperial modernity) into a uni-versal project of delinking from modern rationality and building other possible worlds” (Mignolo 2010b:352).

The main difference MCD scholars see between their approach of building coalitions between different peoples and previous political projects uniting people across borders is that while the latter have aimed to unite people under one universal ideology, decolonial projects are based on the notion of pluriversality (Quijano 2000 in Mignolo 2010b:307). Pluriversality, a play of words referring to plurality as well as universalism, is applied to emphasize that these political projects do not strive to establish one universal ideology, but aim for the universal acceptance of different ways of being, not by positing a “blueprint of a future and ideal society projected from a single point of view” (Mignolo 2000:744), but by being reflexive about one’s own, and more importantly, the ‘Other’s’ standpoint (Mendieta 2009:252). Such a stance is thought to be different to both relativism and multiculturalism, as the plurality of distinct groups that follow singular paths emerging from local histories is seen to be connected through their shared desire to depart from coloniality in all its forms, building coalitions to overcome economic, political, cultural, and epistemic hegemonies, while respecting the particularities of the ‘Other’ (Gržinić 2008; Maldonado-Torres 2010:115).

At first glance, however, pluriversality seems to be just another term for what cosmopolitan debate has coined openness to the world and others have named cultural pluralism. They all aim to overcome national thinking and communitarian orientations and to move away from essentialist conceptions of identity (Mignolo 2000b), culminating in a plea for a world consciousness that is open for difference and the experiences of the ‘Other’. The main difference might lie in how decolonial cosmopolitanism is mainly applied to emphasize the emancipatory potential of orientations and attitudes stemming from the Global South, which are reflexive about their situatedness in specific places but do not perpetuate ethnic or national fundamentalism (Maldonado-Torres 2010:116). What is being at stake is consequently

“a form of cosmopolitanism that reflects about its locatedness (...) a type of epistemic and moral stance toward the world that is cognizant of both its privileges and thus limits, and which reflects about these from the standpoint of the other, to whom it reaches to learn from and with.” (Mendieta 2009:243)

Decolonial cosmopolitanism could thus be defined as *individual or collective attitude of being open to the ‘Other’ and striving for mutual understanding through intercultural and interepistemic dialogue that is reflexive about one’s own epistemic and socio-cultural standpoint and aims to overcome postcolonial dependencies.*

These broad theorizations and proclamations nevertheless leave some important questions unanswered: What would such an attitude entail in practice? Which identities, knowledges, and orientations are decolonial, which are not? Is decolonial cosmopolitanism a privilege of the subaltern? Can only explicitly counter-hegemonic movements such as the Zapatistas in Mexico or the World Social Forum display decolonial cosmopolitanism? Can everybody become a decolonial cosmopolitan?

As decoloniality is as much a practical as a theoretical project, it seems crucial to sharpen the contours of the concept and to ascertain its validity through empirically tracing its underlying assumptions about the socio-cultural postcolonial situation that is seen to represent the condition of possibility of this ethical and political stance. I have decided to focus on transnational advocacy as likely context in which such an ethical and moral stance might be inherent, but not radicalized, and on Costa Rica as space that, while being postcolonial and Latin American, offers a decidedly different environment to trace the logic of coloniality in than the context where the framework has been developed. The validity of its assumptions clearly impacts on the explanatory strength of decolonial cosmopolitanism as a concept.

Because of the central position of the notion of logic in the MCD approach, I have decided to also use the concept of ‘logic’ when referring to the ‘spheres of human experience’ “*knowledge and racism and capital*” (Mignolo 2010b:332) that are thought to be shaped by logic of coloniality and through which the latter is seen to be expressed. The concept of logic usually is utilized when scientific research aims to reveal how something is working, how certain underlying dynamics ‘make it tick’¹³. I argue that the usage of the concept of logics stresses the way MCD research believes the practices and belief-systems of those living in the modern/colonial world to be steered by logics of coloniality that are enacted and internalized continuously. In this sense, when coloniality of power is seen as a constantly re-enacted and thus perpetuated social practice, the logics of this practice comprise

“the rules or grammar of the practice, as well as the conditions which make the practice both possible and vulnerable.” (Glynos and Howarth 2007:136)

In general, the perspective of MCD research involved a dialectic positing of the logic of

¹³ This understanding of the concept of ‘logic’ is based on the poststructuralist approach to discourse analysis as put forward by Laclau and Mouffe (2001) and further developed by the ‘Essex School of Ideology and Discourse Analysis’. Even though the introduction of the poststructuralist concept of logics to the theoretical system of MCD research would certainly necessitate a deeper discussion about the implications of this move for the theoretical approach as a whole, in this thesis I merely aim to use the concept of logic as an analytical tool that helps me focus my analytical strategy. A more detailed discussion of the concept of logics can be found in ‘Logics of Critical Explanation in Social and Political Theory’ by Glynos and Howarth (2007:131-164).

coloniality as sustaining as well as sparking resistance to global relations of power.

This dialectic of compliance and challenge that the logic of coloniality provokes can be depicted in Schiwy's (2010:127) summary of how the three core concepts of race, capitalism, and knowledge have been understood in MCD research: The logic of race is seen as the central principle naturalizing colonial relations of domination, but also as the notion that been used to create alliances between racialized peoples to challenge the domination of the white man¹⁴. The logic of capitalism, on the other hand, is used to emphasize that capitalism is central for the reproduction of the current global order. At the same time, it has been challenged by projects fostering alternative economic relations. The logic of knowledge is believed to work mainly through the shaping of Eurocentric epistemic relations to ensure that inter-subjective and epistemic relations conform to and sustain the hegemonic relations of power, but also is seen as operating in the development of new forms of thinking that challenge Eurocentrism.

What has to be made abundantly clear is that while I chose to analytically distinguish these three logics in order to better be able to empirically scrutinize their appearance in the narratives of my respondents, MCD research generally speaks of one 'logic of coloniality' but is adamant in proclaiming that this logic works in very distinct ways and through the entanglement of various hierarchies and processes 'on the ground', of which racism, capitalism and epistemic control are seen as most central dimensions.

In the following, I will examine whether the concept of decolonial cosmopolitanism and its ontological assumptions are fruitful for examining the attitudes of world-openness and 'Other'-openness displayed by Costa Rican activists that work for advocacy organizations with transnational ties. Instead of focusing on one particular movement (for example the women's movement) or one particular ethnic group (for example Afro-Costarricans), my respondents are part of different movements, networks, and organizations and vary with regard to their organizations' position towards radical politics. While some are part of the minority groups of the country, the majority is not. An analysis whether and how the logic of coloniality is reflected in the lived experience of the very people who are the presumed agents of decolonial projects, but are not part of explicitly counter-hegemonic social movements, will contribute to an evaluation of the applicability of decolonial cosmopolitanism as analytical concept. It will thus contribute to the theoretical development of the concept in an empirically grounded context.

¹⁴ In recent years, feminists have also urged to perceive the logic of race as logic that racializes and at the same time sexualizes certain bodies, thus introducing the concept of intersectionality to MCD research (Lugones 2010; Schiwy 2010).

A necessary first step is to clarify how the three ‘logics’ of coloniality, which I have identified as MCD research’s central assumptions about the socio-cultural and material context from which decolonial cosmopolitanism is thought to emerge, are defined in MCD research and how I would expect them to be displayed in the attitudes and practices of Costa Ricans working in advocacy organizations. I will necessarily focus on some instances that I see as most fruitful for examining whether the logics of coloniality can be traced and whether there are attitudes displayed that point to decolonial cosmopolitan dispositions and exclude others that might have served equally well. The literature I draw from can be classified as written from a postcolonial perspective, but I also include work from social movement research, transnational studies and post-development scholarship, as far as it can help to clarify the factors impacting on the attitude formation of members of transnational civil society from the Global South. I also use studies on Costa Rican national identity and society to shed light on the historical development in Costa Rica of the issues under scrutiny.

But before delving further into my analysis, I will give the reader some more insights into my research design and the theoretical, methodological and ethical choices made in the process of this research.

3 Research Design

In this research, I am taking a constructivist view that sees reality as both socially and discursively constructed and riveted by power. I study attitudes as part of the identity formation and thus the contextualized self-understandings and the meaning-making of people, and – studying a contemporary real-life phenomenon instead of taking a more historical or diachronic approach – I chose semi-structured in-depth interviews as avenue of gathering data. This method serves me as a way to access the stories through which people describe their world and which reveal their attitudes towards certain issues or situations. I am not being concerned so much with the question if respondents deliver a true picture of a somehow external reality, but more with the way people construct plausible accounts of the world they live in and what these stories tell me about their attitudes towards certain topics and what I can interpretively infer from them (Silvermann 2000:823).

The method I chose for inferring meaning from text is content analysis. Content analysis has no single methodology, as the strategy applied is driven by the research question, but at its basis, this method is about reducing large quantities of data into

smaller, more meaningful units, from which analysis can depart through the process of coding. When used to analyze interview data, it allows for scrutinizing both the manifest content, meaning the transcribed interview as text, and the latent content, including body language, tone of voice, as well as laughter, sighs or silences (Elo and Kyngäs 2008:109; Morse 1994:179-180).

This chapter will explicate the reasons for and the consequences of taking this methodological standpoint, as well as delineate how and why certain choices were made with regard to my research design, and also reflect on the problems that emerged during this process, the steps I took to solve them, and the impact these had on my data and consequently also on my findings.

3.1 Research Strategy

As I am studying the attitudes of activists working in transnational advocacy organizations, I started by identifying these organizations first. I chose to focus on Costa Rican transnational advocacy because I assume the potential for decolonial cosmopolitan attitudes to be rather high in identity-based advocacy from the Global South that already has established inter-cultural, border-crossing linkages. Moreover, the members of this group are at the interstices between grassroots activism and the elite circles of global civil society and thus might represent the tensions stemming from this liminal position particular well. These characteristics make me posit this group as particularly fruitful for scrutinizing MCD research's presumptions with regard to their validity.

I looked for civil society organizations that are connected to the transnational level in at least two ways: Firstly, they needed to possess visible transnational linkages that strongly suggested these organizations to be part of some kind of transnational network, be it institutionalized or informal. These 'visible signs' of being transnationally networked ranged from more obvious hints like listing institutionalized transnational networks, for example Civicus, as partners on their website or having built alliances for projects that were implemented in more than one country, to being a central coordinating point for a transnational network. Less obvious marks were the emission of a news bulletin with information about a specific cause whose content transcended the borders of Costa Rica, or a research-oriented focus on topics like Central American development or migration. Secondly, and arguably closely intertwined with the first requirement, the organizations needed some kind of 'normative' link to the transnational that made it highly likely that their employees would display some kind of

attitudes transcending their national context. These criteria led me to consider particularly those organizations that were oriented towards advocacy and human rights, for example being part of the women's movement, the indigenous movement, or the peace movement. Because of doing research in a place that is physically at a large distance from my place of residence, I depended on the Internet for gathering information on organizations and choosing potential respondents, meaning that I could only choose from within those organizations that possessed the resources, knowledge and personnel necessary to create and maintain a website that was informative enough for me to draw conclusions regarding their eligibility for my study. Organizations that did not have the resources to do so or that communicated in other ways than maintaining a public website were thus excluded from my study from the very beginning (primary selection bias).

I chose to include organizations with a varied thematic focus in my analysis, as to uncover more general patterns of attitude formation independent from a particular thematic focus of advocacy, which means that I did not study one transnational network or one transnational movement specifically. Instead, I start at the national level and ask what it means to be transnationally networked in practice and if there is a special kind of subjectivity linked to working in a transnationally networked place that could be characterized as decolonial cosmopolitanism. I applied the variation-finding strategy (Tilly 1984 in Brumley 2010:395), which meant that I contacted organizations that fulfilled the above mentioned criteria of transnationality, trying to achieve a varied sample of organizations with different thematic foci and different sizes and resources. This also means that I did not contact some organizations if they worked on topics that were similar to those I already included in the sample.

As I did not possess the resources necessary to do extensive fieldwork, I already contacted the organizations via e-mail from Finland, presenting my study and asking for possible interviews. Most of my interviews were nevertheless agreed on while I was in Costa Rica, as calling and passing by the office were more effective tools for finding respondents. This strategy also created some limitations that I wish to address: Most organizations did not include a list of their employees on the website, which means that someone inside the organization decided whom I would meet. Employees that are outwardly critical of the organization's work or approach therefore might not have been selected (secondary selection bias). I suspect that especially in the more professionalized organizations, the employees I came in contact with were known to endorse the organization's aims and strategies. Therefore, critical voices might have

been excluded from the very beginning.

Some respondents were referred to me by other interviewees, and in some cases, I could not find a website for the organization, which means that regarding those persons, I had to forego my original selection strategy and trust my previous respondent's opinion that these persons would be able to contribute something to my research. I argue that the inclusion of these organizations might potentially alleviate the primary selection bias of only taking into consideration those organizations that possessed the resources necessary to create a public website and keep it updated. In one case, I had to exclude the already finished interview from my sample, as the organization my respondent worked for turned out to be a business organization focused on consultancy. As my research examines the attitudes of people working in transnational advocacy in the sphere of civil society, which I understand in a narrow sense as excluding economic actors, I excluded this interview data from my analysis.

In the end, the final sample for this study consists of nine in-depth semi-structured interviews with Costa Rican activists working in Costa Rican advocacy organizations possessing observable transnational ties, from eight of which I additionally received a filled out questionnaire with their background information (in one case, the time was too short to fill out this document and I decided to focus on the interview instead). I conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews, which were held in Spanish and between 35 minutes to two hours in length. The interviews took place at a location of the respondent's choice, mostly in the offices of the organization, but also in one case in a restaurant, in one during a conference and in one case at the respondent's home in an indigenous community. The interviews were recorded by a digital recording device and then transcribed by me in Spanish, the original language of the interview. I also conducted the analysis in Spanish, only translating those quotations that I include in my thesis as direct quotations into English. In translating these quotations from their original language into another, subjectivity entered their representation unquestionably, as not all expression could be translated literally and some interpretive freedom was necessary to convey the meaning of these passages.

For the actual interview process, I prepared an interview guide that was structured according to three very broad themes, for each of which I prepared open questions: I first asked about the organization itself, its historical development and institutional structures, how its projects and goals have changed during the years, and also about its funding and donors. One focus of this part were also the transnational ties of the organization and how these are perceived by the participants. Even though I did not

explicitly ask after the organization's ties to networks, the great majority of my respondents nevertheless brought the topic up and also tended to evaluate the impact and difficulties of networked practices in great detail, an occurrence that makes the advantages of semi-structured interviews as method of analysis obvious, because it gives the respondents room for explicating their experiences, thus making it possible to reveal crucial patterns that might otherwise have been left unidentified.

The second theme of the interview focused on the respondent as person, and I specifically asked about their personal opinions on how the world has changed in the last decades and how this has impacted on Costa Rican society. I also asked various question about cultural diversity in Costa Rica and the region and their opinion about Costa Rican society. In the last part of the interview, I asked questions relating to the participant's own involvement in civic and political organizations, and about their ideas about how a 'better' society would look like and how it might be achieved. Both the themes selected and the questions linked to them derived from my research interest in scrutinizing the assumptions of MCD research through empirically examining if the logic of coloniality, which these scholars perceive as fundamentally structuring the attitudes of people and the potential for decolonial cosmopolitanism, can be traced in the narratives of activists engaged in transnational advocacy. While I tried to cover all of the themes in all interviews, I sometimes could not discuss all equally due to time constraints in some of the interviews, but tried to receive at least some information on each of them.

3.2 Content Analysis as Qualitative Tool for Interview Analysis

Content analysis as method of inquiry is applied to extract meaning from text in a systematic, logical and consistent manner. For Weber (1990:9), content analysis is "a research method that uses a set of procedures to make valid inferences from text". Content analysis makes possible the identification of key themes, patterns, or ideas in a text and also can contribute to identifying what is unique or controversial to the text at hand. With regard to interview analysis, it allows for the theoretically guided, systematic analysis of recorded communication (Mayring 2000:106; Elo and Kyngäs 2008:109; cf. Mayring 1994:200-207).

While the systematic analysis of text can be traced back to the methods of the Church Inquisition of the 17th century (Krippendorff 2004:3) and was, with the rise of modern universities, increasingly applied for the analysis of (mass) media, the term 'content analysis' as scientific method entered the social sciences first in US American

communication studies and political science from the 1930s onwards (Krippendorff 2004:6-8). It was methodologically refined for scientific inquiry by Lasswell and his colleagues at the University of Chicago, among others, in the 1940s (Stone 1966:24-30)¹⁵.

The larger debate in the social sciences between positivist and hermeneutic epistemologies can also be traced the debates regarding content analysis, which has been received more as a quantitative than as a qualitative tool for a long time, as the main concern of many researchers applying content analysis has been the quantification of text through frequency counts of certain words and expressions.

Increasingly, qualitative content analysis has come to the fore, and there exist various versions of explicitly qualitative content analysis¹⁶, which, according to Krippendorff (2004:17) share certain basic characteristics, even though they vary in their theoretical roots and analytical perspectives. These characteristics include the sample size – most require a close reading of a small amount of text –, the emphasis on interpretation and re-articulation of text and the explicit acknowledgement of the influence of the researcher's own socially and culturally conditioned understandings on the interpretation of textual matter. While still being a decisively empirically grounded method geared towards inferring meaning from text, the idea of text being a mere container for content that can be interpretively inferred without any loss or misinterpretation in meaning has been largely abandoned, leading to a more self-reflexive and critical relation between the researcher and the text he or she is aiming to infer meaning from (Krippendorff 2004:xvii-xx).

By taking this road into interpretive political science, I explicitly acknowledge the responsibility of the researcher for the conclusions drawn from the data. Qualitative content analysis of this kind is heavily based on interpretation and demands reflexivity of his or her own subject position from the researcher, both in terms of one's position of power and in terms of one's position with regard to the topic studied and the intentions invested into the research and its results. The importance of recognizing the subjectivity inherent in such an analysis has to be emphasized even more when applying content analysis to infer meaning from text based on interview data: interviews are an

¹⁵ For a detailed history of the development of content analysis as scientific method of the social sciences, please confer to Krippendorff (2004:3-17).

¹⁶ Even though even the most quantitative version of content analysis, dealing with computer-aided statistical analysis of large samples, is actually based on a qualitative reading of text that is converted to numerical measurements, more positivist approaches to content analysis do not necessarily acknowledge this basic fact. Content analysis in all its variety is at its basis a qualitative method that relies on quantification – coding and counting – to draw conclusions (cf. Kracauer 1952).

intersubjective activity that involves interaction between persons that possess different positions and expectations, making the result of the interview process – the transcribed interview in my case – as much a product of the social dynamic that was at play during the interview as an accurate reflection of the questions asked and the answers given (Fontana and Frey 2000:647). Interviews in this sense are negotiated text that is created through the joint creation of meaning and the grounding of responses through a shared context, and thus as a socially situated activity (Fontana and Frey 2000:663-664). Such a perspective takes into account the context of the interview situation and also acknowledges that the knowledge gained in the interview depends to a large extent also on rapport established between the interviewer and the respondent. What comes into play in interview situations are power positions, status concerns, and the personal character of the people involved, or, as Fontana and Frey (2000:666) argue with regard to the underlying concerns of using interviews as method:

“We need to proceed by looking at the substantive concerns of the members of society while simultaneously examining the constructive activities used to produce order in everyday life, and, all along, remaining reflexive about how interviews are accomplished”.

This concern holds especially true when studying, as a Western female researcher, people and processes in the Global South, as the power differentials, existent in qualitative interviewing in any case, become heightened through the long trajectory of researchers using the Global South to extract knowledge for academic production in the centers (Smith 2005:88-96). Reflecting on how my research perpetuates this trajectory at least to some extent, together with the ethical stance to contextualize and situate my findings and pay attention to the complex identities and experiences of those that have been silenced and making their voice heard, can only aim to balance out the inherent inequalities of such research. These issues will be taken up in the subsequent part of this chapter when reflecting on the ethics of my research.

There are various traditions of qualitative inquiry making use of interviewing, from ethnographic approaches to survey research, all of them linked to distinct epistemological standpoints. As my research interest is largely related to understanding the attitudes of my respondents regarding certain topics, I chose to conduct in-depth semi-structured interviews. While the exact number of participants necessary for qualitative research depends very much on convention and on the research questions asked, Morse (1994 in Ryan and Bernard 2000:780) recommends interviewing at least six respondents when trying to understand a particular shared experience or trying to find themes and patterns. By choosing semi-structured interviews, I also aimed to reveal

patterns, as this form of interview is typically chosen to find out the respondents' own experiences and view on the themes brought up during the interview, while at the same time ensuring a certain level of comparability between the different interviews through the inclusion of the same themes and questions with broadly the same content.

Using qualitative content analysis as a method to infer meaning from interview material implies the "empirical, methodological controlled analysis of texts within their context of communication" (Mayring 2000:106), which is why my analysis is motivated by the "assumption that language use can only be understood in context. That is, one needs to evaluate the data in relation to the contexts in which it was both created and later used" (Yates 1998:234-235).

One of my crucial concerns is to take into consideration the context in which my respondents live, as people use "culturally available resources in order to structure their stories"(Silvermann 2000:823). In order to be better able to assess the social environment of my respondents, I also handed out a questionnaire to my respondents that collected their personal background information, from their place and year of birth to their education level and the number of times they lived abroad for a period longer than three months. The data from these questionnaires, while not explicitly referred to in my analysis, helped to gain a richer picture of the life and social environment in which my respondents live, which contributed to the contextualization of my findings

Like any scientific tool, the method of content analysis has to be reliable, meaning most importantly that the techniques applied should be reproducible, or yielding the same results when other researchers scrutinize the same data at a different point in time. As a qualitative tool, there are considerable difficulties of ensuring reliability in qualitative content analysis, especially when the text is coded by only one researcher. Therefore, the research process and the steps taken should be disclosed as openly as possible in order to ensure that other researchers can scrutinize the findings and the process that has led to them. In the following, I will thus give an account of the process of data analysis that I have undertaken.

Validity as the other crucial measuring tool of the social sciences, on the other hand, refers to the extent to which one is actually measuring the concepts one thinks one is, particularly with regard to how well the categorization scheme fits the data and reflects the patterns apparent in the text. I repeatedly compared my data to my analytical concepts in order to ensure compatibility, and also discussed my research and analysis strategy repeatedly with others well acquainted with my data and theoretical frame. Nevertheless, the ultimate assessment of both validity and reliability lies not with me but with the research community at large and those that choose to scrutinize my work.

3.3 Coding Process

Put most broadly, I analyzed the transcribed interviews by coding them according to the aspects I identified as decisive for examining the assumptions of MCD research on the conditions of possibility for decolonial cosmopolitan attitude formation in the Costa Rican context, which I did according to the guiding rules of content analysis. I applied inductive qualitative content analysis in order to ensure that I tested the assumptions of the theory under scrutiny, as well as ascertained the inclusion of possibly relevant material transcending the MCD framework.

While deductive content analysis is recommended for theory testing and is mostly applied when already existing categories are retested on new data or in a new context (Elo and Kyngäs 2008:109-112), inductive content analysis stays closer to the material and develops its categories from the latter. It makes use of the theoretical framework and the research question to establish the aspects of the material that are to be taken into account in the analysis. Following the definition of the aspects to be analyzed, the material is worked through and the respective categories are tentatively and gradually deduced from the text, constantly revising them through referring to the material in its entirety, the theoretical background and the research intent (Mayring 2000:109). As neither the concept of decolonial cosmopolitanism nor its underlying assumptions have been applied in a systematic and consistent manner to empirically derived material, I argue that inductive content analysis is the appropriate choice as it limits the aspects analyzed in the material on those that are relevant for answering the research question while not restricting the categorization of these aspects overly much.

The first step in inductive content analysis is categorization, also called indexing: First, I broke the text down to smaller units based on the key aspects I identified as central to my research design and interest, which are the logics of race, capitalism and knowledge. I understand category in this context as "a group of words with similar meaning or connotations" (Weber 1990:37). Put practically, I thus read each transcribed interview closely at least two times, marking instances in the text that related to the aspects I previously identified as central and developing categories for them. I also took notes commenting on the particular issues of each interview for itself, identifying topics of concern that were not covered in my original assessment of the central aspects that was primarily based on a literature review. I then read those sections of each interview that I marked with a similar category jointly, so that I could check if my categories were comparable across the different interviews. The categories I developed, as well as the notes taken with regard to particularities of the material, were then compared to the

theoretical framework and to the research intent in order to ensure reliability and validity. This was also the first point where I took note if some categories did not conform to the expectations derived from the MCD framework.

As a second step, I then focused on one of the categories at a time and developed codes for the text belonging to this category, thus identifying the main issues and patterns. It is important to note that in the coding process, I was not that much concerned with the structure of the text or the linguistic particularities used, but rather approached the text as a “window into experience” (Ryan and Bernard 2000:790), consequently coding on the basis of content more than rhetoric or expression. Nevertheless, I have identified and also analyzed linguistic particularities that convey for example hesitancy or particular metaphors that imply certain attitudes when fruitful for my analysis, which I have marked in my analysis at the appropriate points. The method of qualitative content analysis allows for the inclusion of aspects of the material that are not manifest content of the text, such as amusement, hesitancy or anger communicated by body language or speech inflection (Mayring 2000:106; Elo and Kyngäs 2008:109).

In order to easier identify the patterns within these categories, I made use of ATLAS.ti, a tool for qualitative data analysis and data management. Using ATLAS.ti at this stage meant transferring the coding that had been undertaken until this point manually into the program, a process that was time-consuming but also refreshed the memory of the interviews as a whole. The reasons for not employing the program from the very beginning were mainly personal, as I preferred to read the transcribed interviews as printed versions and work on the categories and codes while keeping in mind each interview as a whole, something that was easier for me when working with paper versions of the text instead of an electronic version.

After having transferred the categories with their related codes to ATLAS.ti, I reworked the coding already applied to some extent as the comparing of different text units is easier in an electronic program due to its fast pace of identifying the text units marked with the same code, which revealed some instances of imprecise coding.

Then, I compared the codes within one category in order to perceive the patterns and tendencies within this category, marking those text units that exemplified the patterns well enough to be used as direct quotations to better illustrate my analysis and also taking note of the tensions and irregularities that transcended the explanatory potential of MCD research. In a final step, I compared the patterns that I developed across the categories, noting convergences and tensions, consequently tracing the entanglement of the patterns that I was examining through the text and the different categories and

taking note when the empirical material did not conform to the theoretical assumptions. In practice, I frequently jumped between the different steps, re-evaluating codes and drawing new connections, which was made easier in the last stages of my analysis by using an electronic program in which changes were applied faster and easier.

3.4 Research Ethics

The central issues of research ethics are generally subsumed under the concepts of informed consent and disclosure of risk, right to privacy and protection from harm. I considered all of these requirements before collecting my data and used them as guidance regarding the collection, storage, and interpretation of my data. Some recent developments in research ethics, especially the advent of 'interpretive and critical paradigms' including, but not limited to, Marxism, feminism, postcolonialism and constructivism, call into question the assumptions underpinning the more traditional view on research ethics (Denzin and Lincoln 2000:19-24; Smith:88).

Nevertheless, these are still the yardsticks on which one's research process is measured. Furthermore, I argue that these criteria are the minimum requirements of ethical research, which nevertheless should be supplemented by a self-reflexive and self-critical stance towards one's own behavior as researcher, as well as by the acknowledgement that all findings in social science research are subjective to some extent and that the research process is always woven through with unequal power dynamics (Gallaher 2009:133). In the following, I will first show how I conducted my research with regard to the criteria of informed consent and disclosure of risk, right to privacy and protection from harm, in order to then respond to the issues brought up by critical ethics.

I informed my respondents of the aims and context of my research several times: First when I sent them an e-mail asking if they would be willing to participate in my study, and then again when we met to conduct the interview and I presented myself and the research aims before the interview started. At this occasion I handed them a written introduction to my study in which I described the direction and scope of my research, listed the University of Helsinki as my home institution and gave my contact details for further questions. After they had read this introduction and acknowledged its content, I handed them two informed consent forms, which both the respondent and I signed. While I kept one of these forms, the respondent kept the other. I made sure that my respondents understood that they could withdraw their consent afterwards as well as end the interview at any time, withdrawing their consent at this point. I also narrated briefly the intent of my research and described how I would store the interview as data file and

later on as transcribed interview and also assured them of their privacy, stating that I would use an alias when referring to them directly in my thesis. I also made clear that my thesis will be published online, additionally to one paper copy being stored at the social sciences library in Helsinki, and that I might use the findings of my study, as well as direct citations, for academic purposes in other occasions, for example in conference presentations. Additionally, I later on also decided to create an alias for the name of the organization they were working for, as in many of the smaller organizations, my respondents would be easily identifiable through the name of their organization alone. Another reason for this decision was my assessment of risk, because the civil society sector in Costa Rica is highly competitive and disclosing information about the practices and challenges of specific organizations might impact on their relations to other organizations. Furthermore, I want to ensure the protection of the reputation of my respondents, as in transnational advocacy, one's integrity is one's main currency in entering alliances and attracting donations. This is also the reason why I refrained from giving a more specific profile of my respondents when describing my data, as linking the organizations' thematic focus with my respondents' professional position, age, gender and other markers would in some cases have led to an easy identification of the person I interviewed.

While I was open with regard to the general topic of my research, which I described as transnational activism and the outlook on global issues of people working for civil society organizations, I did neither mention cosmopolitanism nor decoloniality as core concepts. This decision was made on the one hand because of the abstractness of these concepts, but on the other hand also because I wanted to avoid that my respondents shaped their answers towards more acceptable responses. I might not have evaded that risk as it is one that impacts on interview situations in any case, but in my opinion, it would have been even more aggravated when explicitly stating that I was analyzing a specific set of attitudes. While my research thus had a moderate covert element, I argue that without this strategy, my data most certainly would have been skewed.

Adopting a postcolonial perspective also means acknowledging that the positivist claim of being able to uncover the objective truth through scientific research has historically been used as a tool to perpetuate unequal power relations and to exclude 'the natives' from participation in academic debate, belittling their learning practices and knowledges (Bishop 2005:110; Smith 2005). Similarly, the image of the impartial observer has been utilized to ensure a strict separation between the researcher and the 'object' of research. These divisions have been challenged by critical race and feminist approaches, among

others, in the course of the last century. Nowadays the claim that the results of scientific research are always partial and situated because knowledge is always produced from a particular place and a particular time has been gaining ground in the social sciences (Gallaher 2009:133). I adhere to this approach and argue that my position as female graduate student from a 'developed' country from the Global North studying people in the Global South certainly impacted on the data I was able to get and on the conclusions I draw from it.

I would like to explicate this position by reflecting on some issues that I was directly confronted with during the research process that can help illustrate the unequal power relations inherent to research and especially reveal that this power differential not necessarily flows from the researcher to the 'object' of research: As many of my interviewees were involved in academic research themselves and most of the organizations I approached produce research on different topics, the respondents saw me as a fellow scientist at the best of times, but also sometimes as an inexperienced student whom they tried to guide, very politely I must add, into specific thematic areas. On the other hand, some of my interviewees saw me as possibly providing a link to research institutions in Finland that could bring new funding to their organization through establishing contacts for consultations and studies. While this topic was only twice explicitly broached, I noted such an undercurrent various times. While I decided to respond in a way that did not lead to further commitments, the fact that I was perceived as a representative of the University of Helsinki in general and CEREN in particular made me acutely aware of the power issues inherent in any interview situation. Some of the answers I received, in particular regarding the importance of the transnational level for the work and activism of my respondents, were probably also linked to my presentation of the research topic that explicitly mentioned the transnational level. Being associated with a country that is perceived as potential donor might have made my respondents underline the importance of transnational activities even more as to underline their eligibility as donor recipients. While in my opinion, the extent of this suspicion to have invalidated my findings is exceedingly small, especially because I presented myself very consciously as being a graduate student with no links to any donor organization in Finland. I can nevertheless not rule it out completely.

4 Description of Material

In Costa Rican organized civil society, there exists a multitude of different organizations, associations and foundations that are part of transnational networks and receive funding from international donors. Still, no information about the exact number of active civil society organizations exists, as the legal basis is not the same for all and many are not even registered officially. Nevertheless, my informants assess that there are around four thousand registered NGOs and countless small civil society organizations and neighborhood associations, but that giving an exact number is difficult as some only are active for some years and then disappear again and some may be active for many years but might never see the need to formalize their status.

The respondents in this study work in organizations with the thematic focus democracy, peace and citizenship (n=4), as well as human rights (n=4), which includes women's rights (n=1), indigenous rights (n=2) and children's rights (n=1). Another thematic focus consisted in the capacity building of organized civil society, defined as social movements, networks and NGOs (n=1).

The size of the organizations that became part of this study is very different, from a one-person organization to large institutions with specialized departments and different focus areas. My respondents were mostly part of the higher or middle management, in some cases being the directors or part of the Executive Board.

Three of the respondents work in large foundations that were already founded with a regional scope and possess close links to state and development actors, with two respondents being part of the same organization, but working in different positions with different levels of responsibility. These organizations are oriented thematically towards peace and the strengthening of Central American democracy and are generally recognized as prestigious non-governmental organizations in the region, but also in international development circles. Another organization receives its funding almost exclusively from Spanish cooperation funds.

One organization is a foundation that provides services to Central American civil society organizations, social movements, networks and NGOs with regard to capacity building and access to new information technologies. Two organizations are movement organizations, one focusing on children's rights and the other on women's rights. These organizations started as grass-roots organizations but now have a more diversified project base. The two indigenous organizations are intermediary organizations that pursue the interests of indigenous communities transnationally, one as part of an institutionalized transnational network, the other as a largely informal endeavor based in

an indigenous community in the Southern Zone of Costa Rica. The latter is also the only organization that is part of this study that was not located in San José, the capital of Costa Rica.

My respondents were between 28 and 57 years old, with an average of 39 years. All of them graduated from university, two with a bachelor's degree and seven with a Master's degree, all in the field of the social sciences and humanities. The level of education of these activists reflects on the one hand the facilitated access to education in Costa Rica, but also the level of education that seems to be required in order to engage in transnational advocacy successfully.

Three of my respondents were male and six were female. Both activists that were part of the indigenous movement were male. In the case of one respondent (Teresa), I did not have the opportunity to gather all background information, which is why I have estimated her age in the following table.

Table 1: Basic Data of the Research Participants

Name	Age	Organization
Paola	48	Peace and Development, PeaceDev
Jorge	28	Peace and Democracy, PeaceDem
Silvia	57	Peace and Democracy, PeaceDem
Teresa	35 (estimated)	Peace and Institutional Development, InstDev
Sara	30	Children's Alliance, AllChild
Ana	31	Feminist Action, FemAct
Vanessa	36	Access for Civil Society, ProCiv
Rodrigo	47	Indigenous Development Center, IndDev
Carlos	35	Indigenous Alliance, IndAll

All of my respondents reported to be very committed to their work, but the reasoning behind this commitment varied, with two positions being discernible: On the one hand, some¹⁷ saw their work as clearest expression of their ethical and moral convictions and as the best way to fulfill their activist ideals and at the same time earn the pecuniary resources necessary to upkeep their and their families' livelihood. Others¹⁸ liked their work because of the possibility to combine research activities with contact to

¹⁷ In particular Ana (FemAct), Vanessa (ProCiv), Rodrigo (IndDev), Carlos (IndAll) and Silvia (PeaceDem).

¹⁸ Paola (PeaceDev), Jorge (PeaceDem), Teresa (InstDev).

stakeholders and communities, thus being able to directly implement one's research results. Due to the financial situation of Costa Rican advocacy organizations (an issue that will be commented on in detail later), some of my respondents¹⁹ also told me that they often have worked for months without pay when no project funding was received. Vanessa characterized these moments even as "occasions when one sees who is truly committed to the organization because these people stay and fight".

All in all, their belief in contributing to the betterment of society through their work and the reasons they provided for having decided to being employed in the civil society sector makes me characterize all my respondents as activists, who most of the times receive financial remuneration for their work. This characterization is necessarily broad and does not shed light on the very individual situations of each activist, but for my purposes, it is sufficient to note that while most²⁰ receive a salary for the work they do, most also tend to see themselves first and foremost as activists, and only secondly as employees. In order to illustrate this point, I would like to quote Ana at length, as she frames her position as activist/employee very clearly:

"Well, I don't know if we or our grandchildren will see a better world, I think everything is going in the opposite direction. But I believe that it is our political stance to contribute to this, to contribute to the debate, to the political positioning, to the demand for human rights, because otherwise it would be like saying: Well, whatever happens happens and everybody copes as well as he or she can, you know, and this is definitely not our stance. I don't know if we can reach our goals, I don't know if I should see them as goals or as utopia, you know. But in the work I daily do, from my personal, professional and ethical convictions, from my condition as woman and from my condition as mother as well, I try to bet everything on that world that is at least a little bit more just. (...) I like the work I do and the work that *Feminist Action* realizes, in my opinion it is very valiant work. In my opinion, it furthermore seems that this is a very privileged opportunity, to have the possibility, in between all of this, with organizations closing down left and right, projects ending and organizations having to close their doors forever and everything, to have the possibility to work for something which one really likes, and in which one firmly believes. And moreover that this work allows one to generate an income that can secure one's own survival and in my case also that of my daughter. I think this should be a human right, but it is becoming more and more a privilege. And I guess in this very moment I enjoy this privilege."

¹⁹ Sara (AllChild), Ana (FemAct), Carlos (IndAll), Rodrigo (IndDev).

²⁰ With the exception of Rodrigo (IndDev), on whose arrangement I will comment in more detail later on.

5 Interview Analysis: Decolonial Cosmopolitan Attitudes within Costa Rican Transnational Civic Activism

This part of my research serves two purposes: First, I will delineate MCD research's presumptions about the current postcolonial situation that is seen as inevitably shaping the point of departure for decolonial cosmopolitan social change. A central requirement of decolonial cosmopolitanism is the display of reflexivity about one's own standpoint, one's own locus of enunciation, which MCD research sees inevitably configured by the logic of coloniality. Examining whether and in what way this logic is traceable in the concrete practices and outlooks of my respondents influences the validity of decolonial cosmopolitanism as scientific concept. The increasing interest in cosmopolitanism from below in academic but also political circles makes it pertinent that the concepts brought forward can uphold their explanatory potential also under empirical scrutiny.

Consequently, I will examine if these presumptions can be traced empirically by applying them to the Costa Rican context. For this reason, I will develop hypotheses on how they could be expected to configure the attitudes of Costa Ricans involved in transnational advocacy with regard to their cosmopolitan dispositions, decolonial or otherwise. This strategy of determining and operationalizing the variables that comprise the concept of decolonial cosmopolitanism and narrow it down to their probable expression in Costa Rican transnational activism then lays the basis for the analysis of my data through the method of qualitative content analysis. I chose to cluster my analysis thematically, which means that after introducing and operationalizing the underlying presumptions of decolonial cosmopolitanism, which I have framed as the three logics of coloniality, I will directly proceed to giving the results of my analysis with regard to this specific topic.

The respective results of my analysis will then be summarized, compared and discussed in the next chapter, in which I will also debate the potential of the concept of decolonial cosmopolitanism for grasping the cosmopolitan attitude formation of people in the Global South who organize to affect social and political change. This discussion will then in the concluding chapter of my thesis lay the basis for an overall assessment of the MCD approach, as well as of their concept of decolonial cosmopolitanism, as an appropriate way to capture 'cosmopolitanism from below', or the decolonial potential of transnational civil society organizing for global social change.

The focal point of MCD research studying transnational activism has been the analysis of indigenous movements, for example in Bolivia and Ecuador, but also the Zapatista

and the alter-globalization movement, all of which are seen as offering another way of thinking and being that is alternative to the current world order (Walsh 2008a; Walsh 2008b; Arias 2008). My impression is that the attention paid to these movements stems from the political program of MCD research. The decolonial project seems to contribute to steering researchers towards studying movements that already show clear signs of decolonial struggles as a political move to support the political plight of decolonial actors, without necessarily scrutinizing the assumptions that underlie their claims.

Nevertheless, if lived coloniality is seen as the central concern for empirical research on coloniality, the frame must be broadened to study also those that are not clearly engaged in decolonial struggles (yet). Such an approach can also reveal instances of ambiguity with regard to how well the framework of MCD research can depict and explain the empirical realities of civil society activism in the Global South. The question whether the concept of decolonial cosmopolitanism is able to serve as an analytical tool for examining postcolonial civic activism, with implications for the construction of global civil society from below, is best answered through testing its claims on activism that is not explicitly decolonial but fulfills the condition of possibility for becoming decolonial. In this thesis, I have consequently decided to focus on the attitudes of members of Costa Rican transnational advocacy organizations.

I organize my analysis around the logics that I, following MCD research's understanding of the logic of coloniality, have identified as MCD's central assumptions about how the identities of those living under conditions of coloniality are ordered, which are *racism, capitalism, and knowledge* (Mignolo 2010b:332). As the scope of this thesis is necessarily limited, I have chosen to concentrate on three topics that have very likely impacted on civil society actors involved in transnational advocacy in the context of Costa Rica. Thus, I assume that my respondents all have had to position themselves with regard to them. With these choices, I deliberately have narrowed the focus of my research, and consciously excluded from analysis other valid instances in which decolonial cosmopolitanism might possibly have been expressed by my respondents. This decision was not taken lightly, but was deemed necessary in order to be able to analyze these themes in more depth and reach meaningful conclusions that are supported by a thorough analysis. Furthermore, one has to acknowledge the importance of discourses for the worldviews and actions of people. While I am certainly not aiming for a full-fledged discourse analysis, the constructivist perspective from which this thesis departs allows for the recognition of the structuring role of discourses in social relations.

The three logics that delimit the premisses of decolonial cosmopolitanism are the *logic of race*, the *logic of capitalism*, and the *logic of knowledge*. As MCD research tends to investigate broad patterns at a rather high level of abstraction, they are best scrutinized by empirically analyzing their emergence in the attitudes and practices of a specific group, which in this thesis are Costa Rican activists involved in transnational advocacy. In Costa Rica, the *logic of race* could be seen as operative in the way both national minorities and immigrants are perceived. Costa Rica's national identity quite strongly leans on being a 'white' exceptional nation, a self-image that has been challenged by the increasing ethnic and cultural diversity of the country. According to MCD research, the attitudes of activists toward Costa Rican national identity as well as toward their partners in regional alliances should be either ordered by the logic of race or de-linked from it, expressed through their awareness of the discrimination legitimized by national identity and their desire to challenge it.

The *logic of capitalism*, which MCD research associates with the centrality of the world market for the ordering of social relations worldwide through the international division of labor, could be traced in the way "transnational development networks" (Mercer 2002) shape the form and orientations of postcolonial advocacy organizations. International donors have increasingly turned towards the fostering of civil society as agent of social change in the global periphery, resulting in the professionalization and – some argue – neoliberalization of organized civil society in the Global South. Activists would be expected to comply with the logic, or, in the dialectical move of decoloniality, be aware of and challenge it.

The *logic of knowledge* in MCD research points to the fundamental role of Eurocentrism in legitimizing and sustaining the hegemony of the Global North. If this logic were empirically traceable, activists would be expected to either comply with it or express attitudes of desiring to express their own cosmologies and epistemologies, aiming to build coalitions to foster dialogue based on pluriversality. Knowledge in MCD research is seen as the most crucial tool in initiating decolonial movements and as its most basic condition of possibility, as

“[e]pistemic decolonization is necessary to make possible and move toward a truly intercultural communication” (Quijano 2000:44 in Mignolo 2010b:353).

Therefore, as organizations increasingly forge alliances and solidarities that cross national borders, entering into transnational advocacy networks in which they share information and knowledge, instances of decolonial cosmopolitan orientations might be visible. Nevertheless, an important part of advocacy organizations' work is geared

towards producing knowledge for an audience of Western donors (Alvarez 2009:177-180), which might complicate the picture.

In the following, I will focus on each of these logics separately and delineate first how MCD research frames them and then illustrate my understanding of how they might be expressed in the attitudes of Costa Rican activists. Subsequently, I will then analyze my empirical data through the method of qualitative content analysis in order to scrutinize whether and how these logics are expressed in the narratives of Costa Rican activists involved in transnational advocacy, and also whether and how decolonial cosmopolitan attitudes are traceable.

5.1 The Logic of Race

5.1.1 The Exceptional ‘White’ Nation: Costa Rica and its National Identity

According to MCD research, the idea of race has entered social practice and discourse as a marker for otherness due to the colonization of the Americas and the encounter with the indigenous peoples of the conquered territories. They argue that when the colonizers arrived in the Americas in the late fifteenth century, they did not only extend an economic and political system from Europe to the new colonies, but a whole web of entangled power structures that were to establish new entangled global hierarchies that are in operation still today (Castro-Gómez 2008:280-281; Mignolo 2010c). Who arrived in the ‘new world’, according to MCD scholars, and whose world-view was to be decisive for the ordering of the world was a “European/capitalist/military/Christian/patriarchal/white/heterosexual/male” (Grosfoguel 2011:11). While the forms of domination are thought to be context-specific and shaped by the local environment of the respective place and time, the underlying dynamics are believed to be connected to this fundamental power structure. Moreover, decolonial scholars claim that the idea of race, in particular, has become the organizing principle that structures multiple global and local hierarchies through establishing a division between European and non-European peoples that supersedes and orders all other hierarchies (Quijano 2000; Grosfoguel 2011).

The centrality of race for the structuring of global hierarchies has first been made visible, according to this view, in the theological debates of Valladolid between de Sepúlveda and de Las Casas in 1550 and 1551 regarding the humanity – and the property rights – of the indigenous peoples of the Americas. The debates concluded in the proclamation that these peoples, while most likely possessing a soul and thus validly considered humans, still did not fit the standards of humanity set by Christianity. They

were thus considered inferior and consequently could legitimately be exploited and evangelized, if necessary by force (Mignolo 2000b:727-729). With the globalization of the trade in African captives for the plantations of the Americas, 'blackness' is thought to have entered this racial hierarchy as marker for those that were considered 'inhuman' and 'soulless' and thus could be enslaved and sold as economic commodity. While for MCD research, the concept of race has changed over the centuries from the focus on the purity of blood to Darwinist racism to the "multicultural acknowledgement of different ethnicities" (Schiwy 2010:128; cf. Mignolo 2000a:27-30), it is still considered to be the underlying principle of all forms of domination.

"Race has proven to be the most effective and long-lasting instrument of universal social domination, since the much older principle – gender or intersexual domination – was encroached upon by the inferior / superior racial classifications. So the conquered and dominated peoples were situated in a natural position of inferiority and, as a result, their phenotypic traits as well as their cultural features were considered inferior. In this way, race became the fundamental criterion for the distribution of the world population into ranks, places, and roles in the new society's structure of power."(Quijano and Ennis 2000:535)

While the concept of race has been on the forefront of MCD research, feminists challenge Quijano's analysis that race has supplanted gender as main ordering concept of social relations. Instead, they argue that both race and gender interact, creating gender-specific forms of racial oppression (Schiwy 2010:129). As I chose to focus on Costa Rican national identity in the context of ethnic diversity as expression of the notion of race, I will not scrutinize the intersections of race and gender in the narratives of my respondents in detail but mainly concentrate on the attitudes of my respondents with regard to the assumed functioning of the logic of race in the Costa Rican context. Nonetheless, I will point to the instances when gender and race intersect.

I chose national identity as main issue under scrutiny because in my opinion, it is the most salient issue where the logic of race in Costa Rica could be traceable, mainly because national identity is still strongly tied to several founding myths of the nation, based on the racial construction of a 'white' Costa Rica: In its own self-image, Costa Rica is seen as being based on peace, purity, 'whiteness' and social democracy, as a nation that is socially and politically exceptional, especially in comparison to other Central American countries. National identity is closely tied to the construction of a Costa Rican people that is composed of direct descendants of the Spanish colonizers, creating a "Tiquicia pura" as 'white' as the Spanish themselves (Sojo 2010:22). At this point, I would like to point out my understanding of the concept of national identity: I see national identity as a constructed social reality that indicates a certain social and

symbolic order and many times is historicized in the sense that it draws from a specific narrative of historical events to explain how the nation came about, obscuring its processuality and constructedness (cf. Bhabha 1990; Anderson 1991; Hall and Du Gay 1996).

One of the founding myths that has contributed to Costa Rican ‘whiteness’ has been the supposedly small indigenous population already in colonial times, which is said to have resulted in a non-mixture between the Spanish and the ‘Indian’ (Sojo 2010:22). This social construction of ‘whiteness’ is based on a particular reading of colonial history, when colonial Costa Rica was a province of the colony of Guatemala, with little infrastructure, poor communication to the colonial centre in Guatemala and no valuable goods to extract. According to the Costa Rican founding myth, the only Spanish settlers attracted to Costa Rica were peasants, as the very remoteness of the province, the difficult environmental conditions and the lacking infrastructure made Costa Rica not an easy place to settle in. Additionally, the maintenance of large estates was said to have been impossible as nature was hostile and there were not enough indigenous people to work the land, as only few had survived the massive exploitation and diseases in the early stages of colonization. Due to the settlers’ scarce financial resources – or so the story goes–, they could not afford to buy many slaves from Africa, either, which is why they had to turn to subsistence agriculture. Consequently, Costa Rica is said to have developed into a proto-democratic peasant society, especially in the central valley where most settlers lived (Palmer and Molina 2004a:9-12).

The social relations developed in the central valley still are central for national identity, even though the history of Costa Rica is just as equally characterized by the imperialist control of the United Fruit Company in the Atlantic region with its banana plantations and West Indian workers, by cattle raising in the Pacific region, as well as by indigenous peoples who were pushed back to the *cordilleras* of the South and resisted any attempt at domination (Molina and Palmer 2007:34-35,77-84). In fact,

“[a]t the time of independence in 1821, not even one-tenth of the population was of direct Spanish descent, while over half were mestizos, blacks, and mulattoes.” (Palmer and Molina 2004b:229)

Nonetheless, Costa Rican colonial history, if it is brought up at all, is represented as the history of the central valley with its small farmers of assumed direct Spanish descent, primitive accumulation and rural democracy (Monge Alfaro 1982 [1941]; Palmer and Molina 2004a:11). Other groups and histories have effectively been silenced.

While some efforts have been made to reconstitute these groups as part of the national image and thus also of national community, not much progress has been made. This is

mainly because the image of Costa Rica being an exceptional nation, the second pillar of Costa Rican national identity, is still closely tied to the discourse on an ethnically homogenous population (Molina 2005:20; cf. Harpelle 2001). Being exceptional has become a part of national identity as well as of political rhetoric (Molina 2005).

The myth of the exceptional 'white' peasant society falls together with the creation of the liberal nation-state from the 19th century onwards (Molina and Palmer 2007:72-3). Some of the pivotal moments in history that are seen as having cemented Costa Rica's peaceful exceptionality are for example the civil war of 1948, which resulted in the abolition of the Costa Rican army in the same year, as well as the proclamation of neutrality by President Monge in the midst of the regional conflicts of the 1970s and 1980s, followed by the Arias Peace Plan for Central America that led to President Arias' decoration with the Nobel Peace Prize in 1987 (Huhn 2009a). National identity has continued to be a strong reference point, as can be seen in statements such as the following, given by Laura Chinchilla, then vice president (and since 2010 president) of Costa Rica, and published by *La Nación*, the country's most popular newspaper:

"Costa Rica was known in the world as a nation of peace and tolerance. Over the course of our history, we learned to solve our differences and conflicts through dialogue and with respect for the others." (*La Nación*, March 30, 2008 in Huhn 2009a:6)

All in all, national identity carries more than just a notion of skin color, but is closely connected to the supposed characteristics of a 'Costa Rica' that is peaceful and democratic, a "lovely tropical arcade, white, rural, egalitarian, and with issues of gender clearly defined" (Molina 2005:111), the prosperous "Switzerland of Central America"²¹ (Molina and Palmer 2007:116). In Costa Rican national identity, race and gender intersect in the characterization of the nation's exceptionality.

This image of a white, peaceful and egalitarian Costa Rica has served to cast certain groups as the 'Other' and exclude them from the national community and its resources. Historically, these groups were the Afro-Costarricans and the indigenous peoples (Palmer and Molina 2004a:320), but in recent years, immigrants from Nicaragua have

²¹It is worth pointing out that the notion of Costa Rica being the 'Switzerland of Central America' has its origin in a mocking pamphlet written by Mario Sancho during the height of the depression of the 1930s, amidst palpable tension between Communists and Liberals in 1935. Sancho pointed out the many ways Costa Rica was not a Switzerland, ruled by elites who did not care for the plight of the poor. While the metaphor is still very popular in today's discourse, its actual origins as a polemical slur against Costa Rican national identity has been lost and it is now understood positively (Palmer and Molina 2004a:99; Molina and Palmer 2007:116). This metaphor and its turn into the positive also reveals the pride that Costa Ricans feel for the achievements of their public institutions of social welfare and education, based on a social democratic ideology, that have in fact managed to reach most of the population and lessen the levels of social inequality, at least in the 'golden years of the middle class' from the 1950s to 1970s (Sandbrook, Edelman *et al.* 2006; Molina and Palmer 2007:119-145).

been targeted as the new 'Other' (Sandoval García 2004).

As the construction of Costa Rican 'whiteness' includes assumed characteristics like peacefulness and social democracy as much as phenotypical traits, the position of the Afro-Costarricans in the national imaginary is shaped by ambiguity. As a democratic nation, Costa Rica cannot afford to acknowledge the exclusion of a national minority merely due to its skin color, which is why

“white Costa Rican society has constructed an image of blackness that cannot be categorized as outsiderhood, and whose democratic ideology of total social incorporation precludes its association with marginality” (Sharman 2001:60).

Being 'white' and civilized nowadays necessarily also means tolerating blackness. Nevertheless, tensions abound, and public discourse still paints blacks as lazy, dirty, infantile and dangerous (Sandoval García 2004). For many Costa Ricans, the Atlantic coast, where most Afro-Costarricans live, is still a place of danger, crime and violence that should be avoided at all costs (Sharman 2001:50). The strategy of avoidance is made possible by the geographical concentration of Afro-Costarricans to the region of Limón on the Atlantic coast, resulting from the latter's history of segregation: While African captives were brought to Costa Rica to work as slaves during colonial times, their traces have merged with the majority population due to processes of *mestizaje*, or racial mixture (Molina and Palmer 2007:37). Nevertheless, with the boom of the banana industry at the beginning of the 20th century, West Indian immigrant workers were brought in as cheap labor, increasing the black population on the Atlantic coast and leading to a fear of the 'blackening' of the central valley by 'white' Costa Ricans, who aimed to prevent Afro-Costarricans from leaving the province of Limón²². Consequently, when much of the banana industry moved to the Pacific coast in the late 1930s, public pressure resulted in the United Fruit Company signing an agreement that “no coloured labour shall be employed in banana farming in the Pacific coast” (Sharman 2001:49). In public opinion, this agreement was largely understood as confining all Afro-Costarricans to the province of Limón. Only after the civil war of 1948, intents were made to incorporate Costa Rica's black population and citizenship was finally extended to all Afro-Caribbeans, also because the ideology of social democracy that gained dominance during that period pushed for the incorporation of the black population into the state. Generally, the existence of an Afro-Costarrican minority

²² While in the colonial era, the population of African captives and their descendants numbered approximately 9.000, in the 1892 census this number of visible African descendants had decreased to 634. After the arrival of West Indian workers, the number of African descendants in Puerto Limón, the main city of the Atlantic coast, alone, numbered 21.259 persons already in 1927, representing 74% of the whole population of the city. At that time, 94,1% of all Afro-Caribbeans in Costa Rica lived on the Atlantic coast in the province of Limón (Harpelle 2001; Sharman 2001:49).

has not obstructed the maintenance of a ‘white’ national identity, mainly because ‘white’ national identity centers on the social relations of the central valley where blackness is largely invisible. Racism against Afro-Costarricans today thus operates mainly through the invisibilization of the Afro-Costarricans and through their – in many ways still very real – segregation to the Atlantic coast

The situation for the indigenous peoples of Costa Rica²³ is rather similar: Officially included through the ratification of international declarations, the issuing of presidential decrees, as well as through existing legal provisions, everyday practices of exclusion and marginalization persist, especially in those regions where many indigenous peoples live. Even though in 1992, the Costa Rican government ratified the ILO Convention 169, the most important legal document securing the rights of indigenous peoples, a comprehensive implementation of the provisions stated in this declaration is still missing, leaving as basis for indigenous rights the Indigenous Law of 1977 with its assimilative and exclusive stance (Schulting 1997). The government also repeatedly has argued that because of the small number of indigenous peoples, it would not be efficient to develop special programs for indigenous social, economic and political inclusion, preferring to include the indigenous in general programs fighting poverty that, as they do not take the structural reasons for the poverty of indigenous peoples into account, tend to fail (Rauch 2008:4). This governmental stance reflects how racism against the indigenous peoples mainly functions: They are made invisible in public discourse as a separate group with their own identity and specific claims, as according to national myth, there were no indigenous survivors of the colonial era. Consequently, indigenous peoples are hardly able to enter the public domain. Their subaltern status has become apparent in the current debate surrounding the revision of the Indigenous Law, originally ratified in 1977. While most of the indigenous peoples, and recently also some municipalities and opposition parties, support the debate on and ratification of a new law, political actors have been delaying the ratification of the *Nueva Ley Indígena*²⁴, which would guarantee the indigenous territories²⁵ a higher level of

²³ The indigenous population of Costa Rica is rather heterogeneous, representing approximately 2% of the whole population (Rauch 2008:1), and consist of eight peoples: The Bribri, Cabécar, Huetar, Maleku, Ngöbe (Guaymi), Brunka (Boruca), Chorotega, and the Teribe. These peoples have been territorially concentrated on both sides of the *Cordillera de Talamanca*, with some communities also in the Northern region (Rauch 2008:2).

²⁴ The official name is ‘Legislative Project for the Autonomous Development of the Indigenous Peoples in Costa Rica’ (*Proyecto de Ley para el Desarrollo Autónomo de los Pueblos Indígenas en Costa Rica*).

²⁵ In Costa Rica, there are 24 indigenous protected territories, most of them established in the 1960s and 1970s. These territories are located in the less accessible areas of the country and are lacking basic infrastructure, especially in the areas of health and education (Rauch 2008:2-3). Even after these territories were established, state authorities did not implement the regulations protecting territorial

autonomy, for now already 18 years, while the public remains relatively uninterested in the struggle of the indigenous peoples.

The figure of the Nicaraguan immigrant, on the other hand, has increasingly taken center-stage in openly racist discourse in Costa Rica. Since the annexation of the previously Nicaraguan peninsula of Nicoya in 1824, located in the North-West of Costa Rica, Costa Rica has had regular waves of settlement from Nicaragua. The first influx occurred not because of immigration but because after the annexation of Nicoya, the national border moved over the Nicaraguans living in these regions. Subsequent immigration mainly consisted of labor migration to the coffee and the banana plantations. Nevertheless, earlier migration flows only marginally impacted on national identity and did not gain any major prominence in public discourse (Molina 2005). During the civil war in Nicaragua from 1974 to 1990, Costa Ricans welcomed Nicaraguan refugees – also because of the economic aid received from the US in return for visible signs of Contra support (Edelman 1999:77-78) – even though the numbers of Nicaraguan refugees from the war were already rather high and foreshadowed the high numbers of documented and undocumented Nicaraguans living in Costa Rica today²⁶. Nowadays, Nicaraguan immigrants that have come to Costa Rica in search for better economic perspectives are painted as a threat to national prosperity and national identity. In public discourse, Nicaraguans are represented as direct threats to the remnants of the welfare state and the symbol for the decline of Costa Rican exceptionality. They also serve as the direct representation of what Costa Ricans do not want to be: poor and mestizo. They are being referred to as ‘contaminants’ and ‘pests’ and associated with disease, immigration and criminality (Palmer and Molina 2004b; Sandoval García 2004:28). Much of the immense hostility against Nicaraguans and the open racism directed towards them might also be explained by their area of settlement: As most Nicaraguans have settled in the central valley, Costa Rica’s ‘heart of whiteness’ and the “epicenter of the public sphere” (Molina 2003:3), they cannot be segregated or invisibilized like the Afro-Costarricans and to some extent also the indigenous peoples. I expect my respondents to be aware of the situation of these three minorities in Costa Rica as international donors increasingly have funded projects that define the latter as

integrity, leading to the exploitation and expropriation of indigenous lands (Mora 2004; Rauch 2008:2; Miller 2006:368).

²⁶ While for example in 1927, 20.000 Nicaraguans were reported living in and around Puerto Limón, the total number of Nicaraguan refugees between 1983 and 1989 is officially roughly estimated at 30.000, while unofficial estimates range from 100.000 to 250.000 people (Basok 2005:284-285). By the time of the last census in 2000, there were 226.000 officially documented Nicaraguans living in Costa Rica, which represents 6% of the population (Vargas 2005).

their target groups, with mainly the Nicaraguan issue being high on the agenda due to its relation to the topic of immigration that has gained center stage in development cooperation during the last decade. Consequently, my respondents most probably have had to confront the issue of Nicaraguan immigration to Costa Rica and reflect on Costa Rican national identity and racism. Two of my respondents are indigenous people who are active in the movement for indigenous rights, so they most likely will have had to position themselves with regard to Costa Rican national identity.

According to the framework of MCD research, decolonial attitudes would be expressed in the context of the logic of race firstly, through the awareness of the ambiguities inherent in Costa Rican national identity and the racism that is legitimized through it, which would be, secondly, contrasted to the need to challenge the exclusion of minorities that Costa Rican national identity legitimizes. This would be the case for those of my respondents that are part of majority society especially, who would be expected to challenge racism directly through speaking to instead of speaking for the excluded parts of the population, politically striving to change those social relations that continue to racialize minorities.

In the case of those of my respondents that are part of the indigenous minority, the MCD framework would expect decolonial attitudes to be expressed through their awareness that the asymmetrical power relations oppressing them but benefitting those part of majority society are legitimized by a particular form of national identity that excludes them (cf. Walsh 2008a:509). They would also be expected to directly challenge these exclusions and aim to enter into coalitions with others that are equally suppressed, nationally and transnationally, in order to ‘decolonize’ the current social order.

5.1.2 Activists’ Attitudes towards National Identity

While Costa Rican national identity and racism were not topics that I directly inquired about during the interviews, all my respondents brought these issues up in one way or the other during the interviews. The instances when these topics were brought up were similar in each interview, mainly either when characterizing Costa Rican society or when reporting on the obstacles posed to Costa Rican transnational activism in the region. The discourse on Costa Rican exceptionality and peacefulness in particular orders the way Costa Rica is thought of, with the image of Costa Rica being the Switzerland of Central America as the central reference point used to frame Costa Rican

identity. Five of my respondents²⁷ directly referred to this metaphor when characterizing Costa Rican society, portraying it as problematic discourse, while one other²⁸ did not directly refer to this image, but also commented on the implications of Costa Rican national identity for regional activism.

The reasons that are given for perceiving national identity as problematic are diverse, but two general tendencies can be depicted within those activists part of majority society²⁹: One group of my respondents³⁰ factors out the first pillar, Costa Rican ‘whiteness’, and exclusively draws on the second pillar of national identity, Costa Rica’s peaceful exceptionality and social democracy. They argue that while this depiction of national identity might have been a valid description in the past, it has been eroded in recent decades by increasing violence and social fragmentation, as well as by the rolling back of social democracy and the welfare state. Costa Rica’s exceptionality is also seen as having averse effects for Costa Rica’s regional standing, not as a fault of its own, but because of the jealous resentment of the other countries in the region. Costa Rica is thus depicted as misunderstood, but still exceptional. Regarding the first point, Jorge comment that:

“(…) it fell on me to live in a Costa Rica that wakes up from this dream of being the Central American Switzerland and suddenly at the end of the nineties looks at itself and says: We are neither that much like Switzerland anymore, not are we like Central America, so what do we do, how do we do it (…).”

This tendency to mourn the end of Costa Rica’s exceptional social democracy – the end of the nineties was the moment when the neoliberalization of public services became an issue – while at the same time emphasizing that Costa Rica is still very much *not* like its neighboring countries is consolidated in the narratives of the other respondents of this group. The central factor that guarantees Costa Rica’s distinction from its neighboring countries is seen to be equality, understood on the one hand as the comparatively smaller gap between rich and poor in Costa Rica and on the other hand as gender equality. For example, Jorge, when talking about the closeness he feels to other Central American countries and his many travels in the region, sees a marked difference between Costa Rica and the other countries in the region with regard to the pronounced inequalities between different social groups, stating that “this part is very shocking, we are not used to see such here as starkly”. Central America is felt to be close emotionally, but not socio-politically, culturally or economically. The way this position of belonging

²⁷ Jorge (PeaceDem), Silvia (PeaceDem), Paola (PeaceDev), Ana (FemAct) and Sara (ChildAll).

²⁸ Vanessa (ProCiv).

²⁹ In this categorization, I follow my respondents’ self-ascribed identities.

³⁰ Jorge (PeaceDem), Silvia (PeaceDem), Paola (PeaceDev), Teresa (InstDev).

to while at the same time still being superior to the rest of Central America can also be traced in Silvia's explanation of what it means to be Costa Rican for her:

“I for example see myself as very Tica³¹. Very, very Tica. Ehm...with a pronounced...with a feeling of much solidarity and connection to the Central American brothers and sisters, whatever, I do not feel any kind of xenophobia nor...whatever, for me, Central America is like my neighbor, it is like...much closer. I don't see much difference, we have so many things in common, even though there are many differences in perception, in idiosyncrasies as well, and this is in things as important as...which seem like...for example the gender relations in the Central American countries are very different, very pronounced. For example how a gay couple [*pareja de esposos*] is treated in Guatemala, and how in Costa Rica. There are enormous differences in gender relations between those countries. But apart from this, we have a common history and a common origin. And many of the differences are created and stimulated and fostered by political interests, social interests, economic interests.”

Note how she emphatically identifies herself as Costa Rican, while in the same breath proclaiming solidarity to her ‘brothers and sisters’ in Central America and refusing any kind of xenophobic attitudes on her part, then framing Central America as ‘neighbor’ with whom many things are shared, while immediately afterwards emphasizing the differences, exemplified by the ‘more progressive’ gender relations in Costa Rica. Interestingly, she uses as example the different attitudes in Costa Rica and Guatemala towards homosexuality, using the term *esposos* (husbands), even though just a few minutes before, she lamented the dissolution of the social institution of marriage due to the increasing legal acceptance of gay civil unions. The second part of her statement points to an emphasis on the rhetoric that Costa Rican exceptionalism is not based on essentialized differences anymore – as race could be assumed to be – but on a more ‘civilized’ and progressive set of values, making it comparatively more Western.

The problem that presents itself in this version of Costa Rican exceptionalism is the way the domestic, but also international media, report on racism and xenophobia expressed by Costa Ricans towards minorities. Paola, who also tries to position Costa Rica closer to the Global North than to the Global South in her narrative, consequently tries to downplay Costa Rican racism by arguing that because of the resentment felt against Costa Rica in the region, the difficult situation of Nicaraguan immigrants in Costa Rica has been exaggerated: “From a 100 maybe 6 [treat Nicaraguans badly] but those 6 have more impact than the other 94”. She expands on this thought further by drawing a direct link between Costa Rica's position in the region and the situation of Nicaraguans in

³¹ Tico, or Tica in the feminine form, is the colloquial form of ‘Costa Rican’ and a term that Costa Ricans often use to refer to themselves and their nationality. It supposedly derives from the diminutive form ‘-tico’ that Costa Ricans use instead of the more common ‘-ito’ (e.g. ‘chiquitico’ instead of ‘chiquito’ for a boy or the adjective ‘small’).

Costa Rica, stating that

“I am also surprised how they emphasize furthermore how the Ticos³² treat the Nicaraguans. In my place, first of all, because it’s not all the Ticos, is it? But for example on the level of Central America, nobody thinks that they, without us actually being in their countries, do not love the Ticos either and that they have not loved us since before the immigration from Nicaragua but that they never have loved us. (...) How can it be that there is no one who says: ‘Well, yes, in Costa Rica this situation is because of the effects of migration, but why does nobody like the Ticos, even though they have not come to take our jobs?’ Why does nobody say that, or whatever?”

In this statement, she perpetuates the claim that Nicaraguans have mainly come to Costa Rica to take jobs from Costa Ricans and argues that “this situation” (the discrimination of Nicaraguans in Costa Rica) merely stems from the pressures of increased immigration. Furthermore, Costa Ricans should be viewed more positively, even loved, as they are not directly competing for the jobs of other Central Americans. Thus, other Central Americans are more xenophobic than Costa Ricans as they express negative sentiments towards Costa Ricans without any valid reason, while the latter only react to the very real threat of Nicaraguans taking away their livelihoods. For Paola, Costa Rican exceptionalism is a fact, but has been used as a means to express the resentments felt against Costa Ricans in the region, which for her, are mostly based on their neighbors being jealous of the achievements of Costa Rica. In her words:

“But for example there is a thing that I always ponder and which is that on the level of Central America, the Ticos are not loved very much. And this stems from, let’s say, whatever, when somebody said that Costa Rica is the Switzerland of Central America and this, well, fell like a stone in the other countries because somebody had the misfortune of saying it. But let’s say, whatever, there are things that added to this thing of not loving the Ticos, which have to do with the education system that is better, the health system that is better, that there is no army, a series of things that are basically good but that are looked at badly from outside.”

What is noticeable is that she seems hesitant to voice these thoughts, and that she also tries to discursively split the image of being the Switzerland of Central America from its discursive basis, which are those characteristics that she mentions in the second part of her statement. While she draws on the second pillar of national identity, Costa Rica’s peaceful exceptionalism, she also does not acknowledge the first pillar, the construction of Costa Rican ‘whiteness’, accusing the other countries in Central America, instead, of discriminating Costa Ricans out of petty jealousy. While she is the only one that argues that the discrimination of minorities in Costa Rica is a discourse that has been constructed mainly from the outside and that, implicitly, the treatment of the Nicaraguans in Costa Rica is excusable, there seems to be a link between the discourse

³² Ticos is the plural form of Tico, the self-referential colloquial form of Costa Rican (see footnote 31).

on Costa Rican exceptionalism as based on progressive values and a pronounced silence with regard to the topic of racism and 'whiteness' in this group's attitudes towards national identity. Furthermore, no reference is made to the relation between Costa Rican national identity and European or US-American identity, and neither to the position of Costa Rican identity with regard to a more global context, implying a very regional stance with regard to collective identity formation.

Nonetheless, many of these activists implement projects that are aimed directly at eradicating the inequalities stemming from the exclusion and discrimination of minorities. They thus have to negotiate between their view on Costa Rican national identity as non-discriminatory and the projects they are implementing, which are to a large extent aiming to counteract inequalities stemming from protracted discrimination. Jorge, for example, illustrates the work of his organization by referring to two projects he is directly involved in and that define as their target group indigenous peoples in the one, and Afro-Costarricans in the other project. He nevertheless does not explain why these groups in particular are targeted. Instead, he chooses to refer to the problems these groups face in Costa Rican society as "problems of political character" that his organization is aiming to overcome by offering capacitation workshops. The broader implications of these problems and the dynamics they probably reflect are not part of his narrative, and neither are terms like 'discrimination' or 'racism'. This does not imply that he might not be aware of these issues, but rather that he might be uncomfortable with bringing them up, as they are juxtaposed to the Costa Rican national identity he believes in.

In a similar vein, Teresa, who is working in a project that focuses on the border regions between Nicaragua and Costa Rica and the people living there, frames the population of this region as living in extreme poverty and without access to any kind of resources and as a case for humanitarian aid³³. Nevertheless, she does not think that the Costa Rican State can alleviate the situation of these people by allowing them access to Costa Rican services, but instead states that the actors of international cooperation are the appropriate actors to mitigate the desperate situation of these people on the ground, for example through events like the Festival of Health (*Feria de Salud*) that her organization in cooperation with other development actors organizes once or twice a

³³ These people are Nicaraguan by citizenship but live on a part of Nicaraguan territory that is surrounded by Costa Rican territory as this part of Nicaragua is on the Costa Rican side of the San Juan river that is taken as a natural frontier between Costa Rica and Nicaragua. They cannot easily access employment or services like education or health care on the Nicaraguan side of the river, but are also not allowed to make use of the services offered on 'their' side of the river and established by the Costa Rican state.

year to bring doctors and nurses to these communities.

In general, this group expresses attitudes of bringing help and knowledge to the people of Central America, of helping them develop, or in the words of Jorge:

“(…) and this is why I like working here because ninety and more per cent of the projects that we do are in Central America. And it is with organizations, with people, in the communities and I like that very much, the possibility of working there, the possibility of supporting and the…giving some kind of…in some way the knowledge and what else one can bring to support these countries, it is something that I like very much. And yes, I see them as my brothers and everything, but with a certain… with this closer connection.”

In this quotation, one can trace the same positioning as in Silvia’s narrative above, as Jorge is alternating between proclaiming close vicinity and likeness, while also maintaining the superior position of Costa Rica with regard to the knowledge and support it can bring to the ‘Others’. He does not perceive a relation on equal terms but claims that one side – Costa Ricans – being those who give and the other side being those who receive.

The other group of activists that are part of majority society³⁴ acknowledges the link between Costa Rican national identity and racism and some also challenge the founding myths on which national identity is based. Ana for example characterizes Costa Rican culture as

“making us want to believe, don’t they, that we are different from the rest, different from the people of the other Central American countries, and that these differences are signalized from the physical, that we are not as indigenous, we are not as black, we are not that…you know. Which starts from that point but goes till the political culture, social culture, et cetera of every one of these countries.”

According to her, national culture establishes a direct link between this myth and the social indicators of Costa Rica and the other Central American countries, respectively, “sustaining the myth that for some unexplainable reason the whitest ones [*los más blanquitos*] are those that can read and write better”. She claims that this link is a complete lie because what is behind these differences are actually international actors that, during the Cold War, inverted huge amounts of economic aid in the Costa Rican education and health system in order to show that democracy and development go together, creating a “spectacle” of Costa Rican prosperity. In her narrative, Western actors have fostered Costa Rican ‘whiteness’ in order to pursue their own geo-political aims, pitting Central American countries against each other. What she sees operating in the discourse on Costa Rican exceptionalism is definitely racism. She is also very clear on the implications this has for minorities within the country, because

³⁴ Ana (FemAct), Sara (AllChild) and Vanessa (ProCiv).

“[a]s society we result in reproducing all these myths, xenophobia, discrimination, racism, towards people..towards people from the same country who relocate, isn't it, the rural-urban migration, the people who come from the Caribbean to San José. It is a country where the valid culture is the one in San José. (...) And this is the one that is then exported not only to the rest of the country, but it is also the image that is sold abroad. Therefore I believe that Costa Rica is a country...it is a very particular country. Because my parents for example grew up with the glory of the myth of a democratic country, the country of peace, the country where there is no violence, where everybody is equal, where there is a middle class, which decides the future of the country, or whatever, my parents still grew up in the glory of this myth. It is my generation and those that are yet to come that have to confront this ‘country of peace’ everyday (...) where a dog ate a person in clear sight of the police, of the firefighters, the community, media filming it, 45 minutes and nobody did anything³⁵. (...) Or the things that have been done with the migration law, the increasing of costs, everything. It is a migration law that talks of rights everywhere but in the small print it says that you have to pay to access your rights.”

In this quotation, Ana on the one hand remarks on the centrality of the central valley with San José as capital for ‘valid’ national identity and enumerates the idiosyncrasies that are believed to be part of Costa Rican identity which once were fervently believed in, while on the other hand referring to two instances that according to her, show how racism operates to support violence and exclusion through social, but also legal means. In her narrative, it has become impossible to continue believing in the myth of the peaceful and exceptional nation because of the blatant disregard of human rights and the discrimination that abounds in the country.

Following this quotation, she also comments on the difficulties of challenging the myth of the democratic and peaceful nation abroad, because international institutions tend to dismiss denunciations filed against Costa Rica. Additionally, Costa Rica’s national identity creates obstacles when trying to establish regional alliances, as “a priori they look at us with a horrid level of mistrust”. Sara also comments on the discrimination faced by Costa Rica’s minorities, be it the indigenous, Afro-Costarricans, Nicaraguans, but also the various other immigrant groups that can be found in Costa Rica, and

³⁵ Ana refers here to the death of Natividad Canda Mairena, a Nicaraguan immigrant who was mauled to death by two dogs in Cartago, Costa Rica, on November 10, 2005. Allegedly, the dogs were guarding a private property that the victim illegally entered, only to be attacked by the dogs, which could not be discouraged from attacking the victim, even though numerous attempts were made. While a Costa Rican court acquitted those accused of not having done enough to separate the dogs from the victim, the accusation stands that those present did not help Canda simply because of him being Nicaraguan. The Nicaraguan State included Canda’s case in a case against the Costa Rican State before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, accusing it of violating the human rights of Nicaraguan immigrants. In a report on the case, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights cites Nicaragua’s position that the mauling of Canda “lasted approximately two hours and was witnessed by the owner of the workshop and the two dogs, Mr. Fernando Zúñiga Mora; the security guard, Luis Hernández; the head of the security company, Hugo Ceciliano Rodríguez; armed policemen, firefighters, and curious onlookers” (Inter-American Commission on Human Rights 2007:§51).

comments that “the Costa Rican society does not make the most of its ethnic diversity”. But she is more hopeful than Ana, believing Costa Rica to be a ‘society apt to learn’ [*sociedad aprendedora*] that has to work on its ‘human rights culture’ but might be able to change, also because approximately 47% of the population are children and teenagers and newer generations might be more open to perceive cultural diversity as valuable.

While ultimately, the level of repudiation of Costa Rican national identity and Costa Rican society varies in this group, they all insist on Costa Rican exceptionalism being a constructed myth that does more harm than good and that is used to exclude minorities from the nation’s resources. While Ana challenges national identity most directly, the others also express succinctly that Costa Rica is not superior to other Central American countries and that this belief has made their activism more difficult than necessary.

Two of my respondents are indigenous and thus belong to one of the national minorities that I have characterized as being racialized and invisibilized in the discourse on national identity: Carlos, who is a Maleku, and Rodrigo, who is a Brunca. In their narratives, they do not refer to Costa Rican national identity, preferring to talk about racism instead. For them, the discourse on national identity seems to be irrelevant, as they do not see themselves as part of the nation it refers to. While my other respondents see themselves unquestionably as Ticos, even if they might be critical of some of their nation’s characteristics, Carlos and Rodrigo both self-identify first and foremost as indigenous and member of their communities. Carlos states that he feels “a bit Tico, but not much” and Rodrigo voices a similar sentiment. He adds that even though he, as every other indigenous person in Costa Rica, has been formed by the Costa Rican education system that “has been a tool of oppression to make the indigenous little by little lose their identity”, he even would like to see the Costa Rican passport changed so that indigenous peoples can also officially belong to their indigenous nation instead of having to belong to the Costa Rican nation. Both their organizations are in favor of the New Indigenous Law that would bring more autonomy to the indigenous territories, but while Carlos still is very involved in the fight to have the Law approved, Rodrigo reports to have been active in the movement in favor of the Law, but to have been disappointed in the political response as well as to have not been able to aggregate the financial resources necessary to repeatedly travel to the central valley, where the issue is to be decided. Thus, he finally gave up on national politics and now focuses on the issues of his region instead.

The different location of both activists not only impacts on their involvement in the fight for the approval of the New Indigenous Law, but also on their experience with

racism and their attitudes towards Costa Rican society: Carlos, who lives and works in San José, reports to not having experienced open racism, instead commenting on the refusal of Costa Ricans to cede their privileges in order to allow the indigenous peoples access to their rights, or in his words:

“There exists [a tendency] in Costa Rica, that, when the topic of indigenous rights is breached, everybody says ‘yes’, but when you ask them more directly, they say ‘no’, but really, I have not had problems, very serious problems, in my opinion it is okay. There are other societies that are more violent, thus it maybe is more pleasant to live here.”

Rodrigo, on the other hand, who lives in the Southern Zone of Costa Rica in the district of Buenos Aires, says that he lives in “the most racist district that exists in the country”. The reason for this racism, he argues, is that 30% of the population of the district are indigenous peoples, who are blamed for the poverty of its population because, as the reasoning goes, “there is poverty because there are indigenous people”. According to him, this racism results in everyday discrimination³⁶, but also physical aggression against indigenous people because they are believed to be passive and lazy, and also in “semi-slavery” for those who work on the big farms of the region. He also reports on a curious turn in racist discourse, as natural resources are mostly found on indigenous territories, and eco-tourism is becoming a new source of income in this impoverished district:

“Buenos Aires depends on a transnational pineapple company, nearly, let’s say, 90% depend on the Del Monte company, (...) And what happens when this company leaves? 3.000 jobs are lost, they don’t know where to go or from what to live. While the indigenous populations, we don’t depend on that, here we don’t depend on a transnational pineapple company, we don’t depend on anybody, we depend only on ourselves and the resources we have. And this is a bit what keeps racism going. Today, they are generating racism because of opportunities, thus they are accusing the indigenous that, well, that we have better opportunities, and they don’t. It is inconceivable. First there is racism because we were poor, and today there is racism because we have better opportunities of development.”

While the invisibilization of the indigenous peoples might be how racism operates in the central valley, Rodrigo’s experiences clearly demonstrate that in those regions where the indigenous people cannot easily be ignored simply due to their numbers, open racism still runs rampant. Due to their shared experiences of racism, he also reports of feeling a bond of solidarity towards Nicaraguan immigrants to Costa Rica, as

“the Nicaraguans are discriminated, we as well, thus there are no big differences, rather there is a certain grade of understanding as we face the same problems”.

³⁶ “(...) for example in a queue for medical attention in the hospital, they first attend to the non-indigenous and leave the indigenous for last. If you go to a supermarket, and they see a ‘very passive Indian’, the same, they take him from the queue and he pays when the queue is dissolved.”

But independent from the level of discrimination that is felt by my respondents, they both put their community first, both in terms of identification as well as in terms of political strategy. Rodrigo is active in one of Costa Rica's mainstream political parties, as well as in the educative council of the district, but while he states that even though he has entered as an individual, the issues that he fights for in these arenas are the issues of the indigenous peoples. He is also part of a joint initiative between various Costa Rican indigenous peoples to re-constitute the practices of indigenous conflict resolution within the indigenous territories, but does not distinguish between his political engagement in the political arenas of the Costa Rican state and his activism within the indigenous communities.

What is of secondary importance for the activism of both indigenous respondents are other issues of social oppression, most importantly the issue of gender equality. Carlos for example reports on the values of his work that

“we believe the work is the defense of indigenous autonomy. Autonomy, cultural diversity, gender also a bit, let's say, the promotion of the rights of women.”

In this statement, he clearly cedes first priority to the fight for indigenous autonomy, then mentioning cultural diversity, and only as an afterthought, he mentions gender. In his particular phrasing of the topic, as well in his fast equalization of gender with women's rights, he seems to react to the predominant discourse in mainstream civil society, as well as in development discourse. He might also directly react to my position as Western 'emancipated' woman who expects to hear gender equality as one of the central values of any civic organization in order for it to be legitimate. Rodrigo does not bring up gender at all.

This stance does not imply that patriarchy and the oppression of women is supported by these activists, but rather points to the fact that in the face of discrimination, solidarity is felt first and foremost for the whole community, with other issues not being at the forefront, but being dealt with inside the community in their own terms. Nevertheless, such attitudes are easily taken up by the racist discourse on Costa Rican exceptionalism that holds that one of the dividing lines between the Costa Rican nation and the 'Others' is Costa Rica's progressive stance towards gender relations. While this issue has not emerged directly in my interviews, except maybe in the statement of Carlos cited above, the Costa Rican State and its various institutions tend to define indigenous women as a particularly vulnerable group, which needs to be educated and made aware of their rights through numerous projects of capacitation (Instituto Nacional de las Mujeres 2009; Zamora 2011). Therefore, granting more autonomy to the indigenous territories

would mean less access to this vulnerable group, which might be one of the implicit reasons why the Law has not been ratified yet.

All things considered, one has to state that around half of my respondents do not comment on the claim that Costa Rican national identity fosters racism and also tend to perpetuate the discourse on Costa Rican exceptionalism. Instead of 'whiteness', they use 'progressiveness' and apply it as a marker to differentiate between those that are more progressed (Costa Ricans) and those that have to be helped and educated in order to become like the Ticos. Their role as activists actually strengthens this tendency, because the groups that are often targeted as vulnerable are minority groups, which are mainly helped through capacitation and education projects.

Such attitudes would not be coined decolonial by MCD scholars, as they promote a pedagogy of talking to marginalized groups, not of meeting them on equal terms. But there exist ambiguities and tensions that cannot be grasped by the concept of the logic of race within the narratives of my respondents, who are torn between affirming Costa Rican exceptionalism and a broader identification with Central America as a whole. Moreover, the paternalizing stance traceable when Costa Rican national identity is talked about is less apparent when the same respondents talk about their work as activists and their concrete projects with minority groups within and without Costa Rica, and also when they talk about their alliances with actors from other Central American countries.

Those that are more critical with regard to the racist bases of national identity and comment on ambiguities being inherent to national identity also criticize the exclusion of minority groups from many of the resources and the services that the state provides, but do not necessarily aim to challenge them directly through political action. Even in my small sample, the range starts from Sara, who sets her hopes in education and in younger generations learning to value diversity and Ana, who is very conscious of the racist basis of Costa Rican society and challenges it directly in speech, if not necessarily in action. Moreover, these activists do not perpetuate the strategy of using gender as a means to paint minority groups as inferior, even though all self-identify as feminist and one also works for a feminist organization with projects directly aiming to mitigate violence against women in the Nicaraguan immigrant group.

In general, MCD research's conceptualization of decolonial cosmopolitanism as being reflexive about one's own and the 'Other's' locus of enunciation, aiming to challenge asymmetrical power relations, can contribute to making sense of the role that Costa Rican national identity still plays in shaping the attitudes of Costa Ricans that are part

of majority society. Nonetheless, not all of my respondents' attitudes towards minority groups and other nationalities are exclusively shaped by the notion of race, as the role of activists in implementing projects that are targeted at the marginalized also contributes to their perception of some groups being more vulnerable and also to their stance of aiming to empower them, which is not necessarily inherently racist. There is a broad spectrum of possible factors, structural as well as personal, that shape my respondents' attitudes towards the 'Other', with the notion of national identity being an important, but not the only factor.

Being part of a racialized minority changes the locus of enunciation and Carlos and Rodrigo as indigenous activists do not refer to Costa Rican national identity, as they know that they are not assumed to be part of it, instead talking about Costa Rican society from a position of relative exteriority. However, their attitudes also show that minority groups are not a homogenous group in which all experience the same and express the same sentiments, as both take very different stances towards Costa Rican society, while still expressing a feeling of solidarity towards their community but also towards other groups that are discriminated. They clearly feel discriminated by Costa Rican society, but to a different extent, respectively. Both strive to eradicate the asymmetric power relations in society in order to improve the situation of the indigenous peoples of Costa Rica, which could be described as decolonial cosmopolitan orientation in MCD research. Nevertheless, their varied strategies towards this aim, both within and without civil society and the political institutions of the Costa Rican state show that the picture is more complex than graspable with the notion of 'de-linking': On the one hand, they do not feel as belonging to the Costa Rican nation, even striving to de-link from it symbolically and practically, exemplified for example in Rodrigo's proposal for an indigenous passport and their involvement in the fight for territorial autonomy for indigenous territories. But nonetheless, Rodrigo is active in changing the situation of indigenous communities for the better both through alliances with others who are in a position of marginalization and through his political activism in one of Costa Rica's 'mainstream' political parties and in the educative council of the district. Carlos, who works in an organization with the main aim to build transnational coalitions between indigenous communities, propagates a strategy of building a 'strategic front' of indigenous actors when aiming to negotiate in international political arenas like the UN, but also cooperates with actors like the World Bank and Costa Rican institutions if concrete improvements of the indigenous situation are at stake. Decolonial cosmopolitanism might be a concept that, by prioritizing the solidarity of the racialized,

remains blind to other forms of political activism that, while arguably not challenging overall power patterns, do contribute to pushing for social change, albeit in small ways. At least in my data, gender seems to be juxtaposed to race in majority discourse as it is used as a means to mark those that are racialized as less progressive and thus inferior, a juxtaposition that is not reflected in the narratives of indigenous nor in the narratives of those part of majority society self-identifying as feminist. Nonetheless, I cannot draw a final conclusion with regard to the intersection of race and gender, as I would need additional data from for example indigenous women activists or other minority groups in order to gather more insights.

5.2 The Logic of Capitalism

5.2.1 Advocacy in the Development Machine: Promoting a Neoliberal Ethos?

The conceptualization of global capitalism that is prevalent in MCD research is largely based on Quijano's Latin American twist on Wallerstein's analysis of capitalism as a world-system (Quijano and Wallerstein 1992; Quijano 2003). Wallerstein's theory, while according to Quijano still anchored in a Eurocentric understanding of world history, nonetheless is seen as offering three analytical premisses that have become crucial for MCD research's understanding of capitalism as global logic of power: Firstly, the basic unit of analysis for Wallerstein is not the nation-state, but the modern world-system as an integrated unit. Secondly, the perspective of analysis is the *longue durée*, or the long-term historical perspective that allows for an examination of overall dynamics. Thirdly, the object of analysis is characterized as global capitalism operating on a world scale (Wallerstein 1991:267; Restrepo and Rojas 2010:70).

However, Wallerstein sees coloniality as merely one possible avenue of epistemic relations that legitimize the inequalities between center and periphery in modern times, while for MCD research, coloniality is co-emergent and constitutive of modernity. This is the point when the capitalist world-system of Wallerstein is transformed into the "modern/colonial capitalist/patriarchal world system" (Grosfoguel 2011:5) of the MCD perspective. While the difference thus is one of emphasis at first glance, it fundamentally transforms Wallerstein's world-system theory, because the focus of analysis and enunciation is transferred from the center to the periphery, where race is thought to interact with class as ordering principle of social relations, creating racialized (and feminists would add gendered) class structures (Restrepo and Rojas 2010:79).

Consequently, MCD scholars tell the story of capitalism not as an intra-European story starting with the proto-capitalism of Italian city-states and the Industrial revolution,

culminating in neoliberal globalization as a phenomenon with European roots, but as a story told from the perspective of the colonized: Capitalism is seen as specific type of economic structure that had its beginnings in the conquest of the Americas, which changed the existing circuits of production, distribution, trade, and consumption through a massive appropriation of land and the exploitation of indigenous and African slave labor, which provided the raw materials to spark the Industrial revolution in England. The notion of race (as elaborated in the previous chapter) and the allocation of certain roles in the capitalist economy to certain racialized groups thus changed the constellation of economic, social, institutional and epistemic structures (Mignolo 2010b:335-338). Just like the postcolonial endeavors to ‘provincialize Europe’³⁷ (Chakrabarty 2000), MCD research argues that Eurocentric universalism has successfully obscured the ‘structural heterogeneity’ between the Europeans and the non-Europeans on which capitalism is based, seeing the notion of the international division of labor as not necessarily based on geographical regions, but on racialized groups, with immigrants in the industrialized cities of the Global North taking a similar positionality within patterns of production, distribution and consumption as indigenous peoples in the Andes or Central America. Thus, they challenge the notion of capitalism being an intra-European phenomenon that then has been extended to the world only during the 19th century and taken on a new, neoliberal form with the globalization of the 21st century (Castro-Gómez 2010:287) by inverting the gaze and claiming its internal workings to be fundamentally based on the colonization of the Americas.

Nevertheless, MCD research has reacted to the observation that global capitalism has moved beyond international Fordism and into the neoliberal knowledge economy³⁸ and argues that this development has had implications for the way capitalism operates to maintain the global system of domination. They argue that in North/South relations, an emphasis on the efficient fostering of human capital increasingly supersedes the focus on industrialization levels as best measure of development: As information and

³⁷ This approach in postcolonial studies aims to show how the universal norms that are perceived as valid for all humanity are but a reflection of a specific history, that of Europe, which gained universal status through a process of colonization and hegemony.

³⁸ A great deal of academic work has dealt with the emergence of neoliberalism as the global ideology and rule of the self-regulating market, which I will not recount in detail here (cf. Harvey 2005; Chomsky 1999; Gill 1995). It suffices to state that I understand neoliberalism as an politico-economic theory and ideology that claims that “human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade” (Harvey 2005:2). The role of the state is limited to ensuring an institutional framework appropriate to such practices. In my assessment of capitalism as logic within the MCD approach, I do not focus on the role or the changes of the state, but instead on the form neoliberalism has taken within North/South relations, especially through development cooperation, to foster notions of developmentalism and consumerism as best ways to progress (Power 2005).

knowledge processing capabilities are nowadays perceived as motor of economic success, the capabilities that convert a social actor into an ‘economically productive subject’ have taken central stage in development discourse (Ceci Misoczky 2011). Castro-Gómez (2010:291-292) sees this new logic of capitalism operative in the following way:

“The agents are now the social actors themselves, by way of their appropriation of the cognitive resources that would allow the promotion of an economy centered in information and knowledge. To be sustainable, economic growth should be capable of generating ‘human capital’, which means improving knowledge, expertise and the ability to manage social actors in order to use them more efficiently.”

It is argued that this discourse on development through the promotion of ‘human capital’ is transmitted to the Global South as a way to structure the economic, but also the social and intersubjective relations in order to ensure compliance with the continued dominance of a small number of actors located in the Global North (Ceci Misoczky 2011:348-353). One of the many ways this is done is through the ‘development machine’³⁹ and the system of international development aid that keeps it running. In particular post-development debate⁴⁰ argues that civil society organizations are increasingly financed by international aid as they are thought to act as transmission belts to move the transformation of postcolonial societies in the ‘right’ direction (Ayers 2009:10). As the promotion of ‘human capital’ is directly linked to a democratic and capitalist environment, and postcolonial states are often perceived as being incapable of implementing the transformations necessary to establish political, economic and social institutions that support democratization, civil society is seen as being the appropriate actor to transmit these discourses. In this context, Northern donor agencies are thought to finance reports produced by local advocacy organizations to learn about the ‘progress’ of these societies, while also transmitting neoliberal values and orientations through financing projects based on these values.

³⁹Crush (1995:6), borrowing the term from Ferguson (1990), defines the ‘development machine’ as “global in its reach, encompassing departments and bureaucracies in colonial and post-colonial states throughout the world, Western aid agencies, multilateral organizations, the sprawling global network of NGOs, experts and private consultants, private sector organizations such as banks and companies that marshall the rhetoric of development, and the plethora of development studies programmes in institutes of learning worldwide”. For him, this entity is neither static nor centralized, but fragmented and diffuse, changing shape and constantly being challenged.

⁴⁰ Although MCD and post-development are by no means a unified approach, post-development can be seen as complementing the MCD perspective, as both approaches share common underlying assumptions, even though they are of different scope. While MCD tackles broader issues, post-development focuses on development as discursively created ideology (Said 1978; Crush 1995; Porter 2003:134) and argues that, through the “systematic creation of objects, concepts, and strategies” (Escobar 1995:40), capitalism, development, and modernity are bound together to define the Global South as ‘underdeveloped’ and to legitimize interventions that reproduce the very global inequalities on which the Northern standard of living is based.

Two interrelated arguments are made regarding the influence of this particular transnational connection on postcolonial advocacy: Firstly, it is argued that the landscape of organized civil society in the Global South has changed in the last decades. Nowadays, an increasing number of advocacy organizations compete for decreasing resources. Some argue in this context that NGOs have been co-opted by states and international donors alike, as their resource dependency leads to a heightened awareness that donor agendas have to be followed at all costs in order to guarantee funding (Brumley 2010:390). The ‘NGOization’ of activism from the Global South is seen as having led to civil society organizations adopting a Western set of values and framing problems in these terms, being mere “vehicles for neoliberal governmentality” (Townsend, Porter *et al.* 2002; for a similar argument see also Dolhinow 2005:559; Mitlin, Hickey *et al.* 2007:1703). Secondly, it is argued that donors increasingly tie their funding to the fulfillment of high standards of accountability, reporting, and efficiency, which has resulted in the growing professionalization of postcolonial advocacy (Townsend, Porter *et al.* 2002:832; Dolhinow 2005:559).

All in all, it is argued that ‘neoliberal professionalization’ has changed the character of activism in the Global South towards a management-oriented style of ‘doing development’ (Townsend, Porter *et al.* 2002; Kamat 2004; Jenkins, K. 2009:879).

Neoliberal professionalization in this context is defined as the

“increasing formalization of third sector interventions in the North and South, accompanied by an emphasis on accountability, efficiency and bureaucracy (...) and the co-option of previously radical or alternative concepts and ideologies.” (Baillie Smith and Jenkins 2011a:170)

The focus on expert knowledge that is readily transferable is seen to lead *de facto* to the valorization of Western technical and managerial knowledge “permeated deeply by the ethos of the capitalist market” (Chandhoke 2002:50). In this understanding, self-help projects that promote good governance through ‘active citizenship’ and ‘individual empowerment’ in fact implicitly strengthen neoliberal discourse through anchoring empowerment in practices that pursue the eradication of poverty through “self-serving and instrumental action” instead of through collective solidarity (Chandhoke 2002:50). Neoliberal discourse is also seen to be reflected in the way that the NGOs that implement these projects have to compete against each other in order to acquire these projects (Dolhinow 2005).

When assuming the logic of capitalism to work in these ways and through these issues, it might be more clearly traceable in the Costa Rican NGO sector than in other countries of the Global South because Costa Rica’s official level of development now positions

the country as one of the more ‘developed’ postcolonial countries, effectively leading to a decrease in development aid and to an increase in competition for project funding (Korzeniewicz and Smith 2003:20). The decrease in international aid hit especially hard in Costa Rica as during the decades of civil war in Central America, Western governments and especially USAID channeled unprecedented amounts of aid into the country, seeing it – one of the three democratic countries in Latin America in the 1970s (Colburn 2007:6) – as a bastion against the socialist tide that was seen to sweep the region (Clark 1997:81). In the decade after the signing of the regional Peace Accords in Esquipulas, particularly European governments strove to strengthen Central American civil societies through supporting the latter’s institutionalization (Korzeniewicz and Smith 2003:19-20). But nowadays, the changing international environment has created new priorities for development aid, leaving Costa Rica at the margins of the development machine’s resource flows. The organizations that remain are desperate to secure funding for their organization, and might consequently adopt the trends of development discourse more readily than others. Additionally, the accessibility of public as well as private institutes of higher education in Costa Rica’s makes it more likely that activists have a higher level of education, are fluent in English, and possess the technical knowledge necessary to network electronically to ensure their presence in transnational development networks. Infrastructure conditions as broadband Internet access and affordable rates might also contribute to this tendency (Siles 2008), as might the prominence of liberal discourse in Costa Rican politics and the public sphere.

The growing professionalization of activism is not only seen as having changed the discourses that influence which goals of civil society activism are seen as legitimate, but also, as some researchers argue, the kind of cosmopolitanism prevalent in transnational civil society: Baillie Smith and Jenkins (2011a), for example, argue, basing their findings on an analysis of Jenkin’s (2009) field research on grassroots health activists in Peru, that attitudes of cosmopolitanism and professionalization within transnational civic activism intersect and reinforce each other. What they see reflected in transnational civil society discourse are notions of individual capacity, professionalism and readily transferable expert knowledge superseding earlier visions of transnational solidarity and global dialogue. When they refer to cosmopolitanism in their article, they refer to the notion of the specific cosmopolitanism of the globally mobile professional who is a

“globally literate and savvy technocrat, apparently able to move seamlessly between different cultural and social spaces” (Baillie Smith and Jenkins 2011a:170).

The activists that are described in these terms are activists with a high level of education, being able to grasp and apply the current buzzwords of ‘donor speak’ (Townsend, Porter *et al.* 2002) and working in “highly professionalized, thematically specialized and transnationalized” organizations (Alvarez 1998 in Baillie Smith and Jenkins 2011a). Baillie Smith and Jenkins (2011a) argue that because grassroots activists do not possess the material resources necessary for becoming part of these cosmopolitan circles, actually existing global civil society is highly exclusive and privileges elite activism. Issues of exploitation, social inequalities and domination are seen to be less focused on than individual empowerment and good governance, an orientation that does not challenge the hegemony of neoliberal politics in the Global South (Baillie Smith and Jenkins 2011a; cf. Townsend, Porter *et al.* 2002; Kamat 2004; Jenkins 2005; Kothari 2005; Laurie, Andolina *et al.* 2005).

Nevertheless, these scholars also strongly emphasize that even though the widespread dependence of postcolonial advocacy organizations on resources from Western donors has had a notable impact on the orientations and actions of postcolonial activism, activists nevertheless do not inevitably succumb to the discourse on neoliberal efficiency. Especially when competition for international resources is fierce, like in the context of Costa Rica, the organizations that persist might have had to be well-versed in ‘donor-speak’, if only for their organizational survival, but might also have retained or even gained new critical perspectives on the workings of the ‘development machine’. As long as structural analyses of power and inequalities are still very much a part of their explanatory frame and transnational solidarity is what is striven for, spaces for emphasizing solidarity in global civil society that goes beyond individual empowerment for the capitalist market are still believed to exist, even through these might not be easily visible in the projects implemented or the narratives officially endorsed (cf. Alvarez 2009).

Decolonial attitudes would consequently entail being reflexive about the limits resource dependency sets, maybe even striving to find alternative sources for organizational survival, while adopting strategic solutions within the ‘wriggle space’ of transnational development networks that nevertheless still include subalternized voices in the knowledge emitted. In a similar vein Dolhinow (2005:560), drawing on her experiences with employees of postcolonial NGOs who “spoke of empowerment and politicization while they planned projects that helped to enhance neoliberal forms of governance” argues: “these pitfalls are avoidable, but only when NGOs and communities are aware of them and seek to avoid them”. Decolonial attitudes would thus also be expressed

through the awareness that international aid is deeply permeated by certain discourses on and about development and capitalism developed in the Western world and by international institutions, which might not be fitting solutions for the activists' local context.

5.2.2 Activists' Attitudes towards the Development Machine

In considering my respondents' attitudes towards the development machine, one common thread can be observed that binds together the very varied stances of the activists with regard to the pressures and opportunities of development aid: All respondents assess their situation with regard to their position within the international development industry very similarly as precarious and unsustainable. Many have experienced the decrease in project funding since the NGO boom of the post-Esquipulas era first-hand as they are working for organizations that in many cases were founded directly after the civil wars⁴¹. They either personally remember or have heard the stories of how funding was accessed rather easily and now work under the constant pressure of needing to access the little funding that is still available to Costa Rican organizations. Within the narratives of my respondents, there are many stories of how certain donors have supported the work of my respondents for many years but who in the last couple of years have stopped supporting Costa Rican organizations completely and now concentrate their funding for Central America in Guatemala⁴². Rodrigo sums up the rationale behind these changes rather succinctly by explaining that

“(...) according to the national statistics that are published internationally, Costa Rica does not have poor people anymore, therefore it is supposedly already developed, which means that the [Western donor organization] reasoned that if there are no poor people anymore in Costa Rica they should go where the poverty is. Now they are in Guatemala.”

Regarding the activists' attitudes towards international aid, two broad responses can be depicted: Either they reject development aid as an appropriate source of funding or they strive to become more professional in order to access the little funding that is left, while simultaneously displaying different levels of internalization of neoliberal values.

One respondent that chose a very particular strategy for coping with his belief in autonomy and the pressures of organizational sustainability is Rodrigo, a former teacher

⁴¹ In particular Paola (PeaceDev), Jorge (PeaceDem), Silvia (PeaceDem), Ana (FemAct).

⁴² I heard these stories, with the particular mention of Guatemala as new focus of international aid in the region, from Paola (PeaceDev), Jorge (PeaceDem), Silvia (PeaceDem), Ana (FemAct), Vanessa (ProCiv), and Rodrigo (IndDev).

and Boruca⁴³, who now runs and directs his own organization from the indigenous territory of his people in Southern Costa Rica. He strictly separates his organization's activities for the indigenous movement from the way they generate funding, which is mainly through consultancy work for international organizations or for universities conducting research within indigenous territories. Their main work, the elaboration of project proposals for indigenous communities and the securing of funding for these projects through their many (mainly informal) contacts to international donor organizations, as well as the emission of news and information on and from the indigenous communities of Costa Rica, is something they do for free and with the resources they receive from their consultancy work. Rodrigo is very adamant that these two activities are separated and that one is merely the means for ensuring the other:

“Look, at the moment we [receive financial resources] only through the selling of services, we don't receive any other kind of funding. And this is good because project funding only complicates things. (...) Consequently, this ensures us economic resources for continuing rotating, continuing our work, but basically for all that is communication or that is the elaboration of projects for indigenous communities we do not receive an kind of financing.”

His main incentive for the work he is doing is, on the one hand, the motivation to allow indigenous communities to organize themselves from the grassroots and develop and implement those projects that they deem necessary. On the other hand, he wants to provide a voice to the indigenous peoples of Costa Rica to emit their own news and knowledge without having somebody else in between who then could claim to speak for them. This is why the organization centers on its website as well as on the publication of an electronic newsletter that is sent to people around the world and informs about the activities and opinions of the indigenous peoples of Costa Rica.

For Rodrigo, knowledge is politics, and the main aim of his activism is to secure that indigenous communities receive the knowledge necessary to organize themselves in order to be able to develop their own communities the way they want as well as to emit their voice the way they want. The development machine is a means to be used for this end, but only if those groups that make use of the opportunities it gives have the autonomy to decide how they want to develop and when. Based on this reasoning, Rodrigo sees no tension between refusing to finance his organization through international aid while at the same time having as one of the central tasks of the

⁴³ The Boruca are one of the eight indigenous peoples living in the territory of Costa Rica. In the 1960s and 1970s, the Costa Rican state established 24 indigenous territories, the territory of the Boruca being one of them, which are located in the less accessible areas of the country and not sufficiently protected against expropriation. For example in the Boruca community, only 54% of the land is in indigenous hands (Rojas 2006; Rauch 2008:2-3).

organization creating connections between international as well as national donors and indigenous grassroots groups that want a specific community project to be financed.

The other group of my respondents consists of those that struggle with the place-based reasoning of Western donors, but try to access the little funding that is left by striving to be more professional, hoping that their expertise on the region will guarantee the survival of their organization⁴⁴. In particular Paola, Jorge and Silvia, who work for the big regionally focused peace institutes, are critical of the way international donors decide who is eligible for international aid. Paola, for example, questions the reasons behind the withdrawal from Costa Rica and expresses resentment because

“those countries that try to do things well get their aid cut, instead of getting aid to maintain their achievements and tackle other things. (...) They get a fine when they should get a price”.

While being aware of the limits of Western development aid, they do not question the politics of the development machine or challenge the values it fosters. Consequently, they aim to improve their professional standards and personal capacities in order to win in the competition for funding, internalizing the demands for transparency, efficiency, and observable results. This is the point where one can depict how the neoliberal emphasis on personal capacities and social capital has entered into the reasoning of activists, illustrated by Silvia who argues:

“I’d say that when one works for such an organization, one always carries one’s own social capital that one already brings from somewhere else or one’s previous professional career, and thus one of the strengths of an organization is to convert these personal social capitals into social capital of the organization. We have noticed that the organization as such, through the contributions of its team and the contributions of its allies who also must add value to the organization, has become a factor in the competition for success.”

Note how she emphasizes the importance of social capital that can be used as a commodity in the ‘competition for success’, and how she includes the allies of the organization, i.e. the organizations that entered into transnational or national alliances or cooperations, in this logic. They, too, have to add value to the organization for the alliance to be worth while, instead of merely possessing shared goals or common strategies.

Nevertheless, nearly all my respondents have started to realize that due to the changes in international donor policies, Costa Rican organizations might not be able to work

⁴⁴ Paola (PeaceDev), Jorge (PeaceDem), Silvia (PeaceDem) and Vanessa (ProCiv) most clearly express these attitudes, while Carlos (IndAll) and Sara (AllChild) comment on the increasing threshold for accessing funding, but do not explain their reaction to these increased demands, instead of being pessimistic about the future. Teresa (InstDev) does not take a clear position with regard to the implications of funding.

sustainably if they are exclusively depending on development aid, which is why all but two of my respondents⁴⁵ report that their organization is aiming to find other avenues for funding. The solution that they favor is the selling of services and consultancy work, a strategy that Silvia explains as follows:

Well, the organization, as it has accumulated important expertise throughout its trajectory, it now able to offer this knowledge via different types of activities, be it research, or well, we can be contracted to do research about one of the topics in which we have knowledge in, or we can do capacitations or implement specific projects or we can consult local governments, we could also perfectly well consult national governments (...).”

Knowledge and information enters here as expertise and as commodity to be sold. While my respondents insisted on the fact that this orientation by no means implies selling one’s services to the highest bidder without any concern for the ethics of one’s organization or the values one represents, the strategic positioning of the organization nevertheless seems to change. What becomes crucial is the successful finalization of projects, transparency in managing funds and the presentation of an external image that, while based on the pursuit of normative goals, still allows diverse state and non-state actors to consider the organization as an appropriate partner for cooperation. Jorge explains the success of his organization in acquiring projects through the combination of these two factors:

“(...) our team is very focused not only on their technical knowledge for the short-term topics of work that we have to do, but also on the whole part of management, it has to be good management, management of quality. Thus [what matters is] not only the topic of transparency but the topic of being professionals, the topic of being leaders in what we do, that we are innovators as well. (...) And another important topic is that we have tried and still try to position [our organization] as a center for peace. And therefore we have a strong reputation on the Central American level within distinct sectors that are normally clashing, for example entrepreneurs with trade unions, as a civil society organization of a distinct character (...). They see the organization as an organization of peace, that’s how we like to call it (...).”

Many of the smaller, rights-based organizations, which continuously struggle for their organizational survival, similarly have started to look for alternative sources of funding to become more independent from development aid. They, too, now search for different avenues for accessing enough resources to keep the organization afloat. Even though those of my respondents who work for these organizations⁴⁶ are mostly skeptical of the selling of their services, they present the decision as basically one between having to

⁴⁵ One of them is Teresa, who is working for a foundation that is financed by Spanish development funds and has not experienced any major difficulty in financial sustainability. The other one is Carlos, who works for an organization that is completely financed by project funding and that – even though it has major difficulties in financing its daily operations – has not started to look for other solutions.

⁴⁶ Ana (FemAct) and Vanessa (ProCiv) comment on this issue.

juggle numerous short-term projects and small research tasks, always with the underlying threat of having to close the organization completely, or accepting a longer-term alliance with a company or consultancy work that gives financial security and at the same time allows for the continuation of their advocacy efforts.

Vanessa, who is the director of an organization that supports the work of social movements and networks in Central America, illustrates how her organization received a long-term corporate social responsibility project from a Costa Rican company in the following way:

“That with the company came about through an association called ‘Entrepreneurial Association for Development’ which contacted us. They contacted us because what they do is connecting companies that want to do a project [with civil society organizations], thus they were looking for a counterpart that should be an NGO, you know, basically, but which has the capacities and the necessary skills to implement this project. And in the case of Costa Rica, *Access for Civil Society* was the one who fit the profile of, let’s say, successful executor [*ejecutora*].”

According to her, her organization would have had to close down if it would not have been for its alternative sources of funding. In general, the income from the selling of their services has grown in importance, if not for the pursuit of the normative goals of the organization, then definitely for securing its financial stability. Nevertheless, there is a tension between financial security and normative goals, which is visible as an undercurrent when Vanessa describes company-financed projects as “very lovely initiatives”, immediately adding a caveat by saying:

“you know, which...well, at least [the companies] are seeing their engagement in the long run, not as an one-time thing.”

Something that should be kept in mind is that all the organizations that are part of my study have been successful in establishing themselves transnationally, which implies that they have managed to attract enough funding – from international donors and/or through the selling of their services – to become transnationally connected.

Noteworthy in this context is that the projects these organizations have implemented or are currently implementing are all either research-oriented or based on very similar presumptions that could be broadly coined as strategies of ‘individual empowerment through the transfer of knowledge and particular skill-sets’. Be it the capacitation of workers with regard to labor regulations, the capacitation of migrant women with regard to legislation concerned with combating violence against women, or the implementation of a “pilot plan to create a network of boys and girls empowered in human rights who serve as a social tool for generating (...) responsible citizens” (Sara, AllChild), the general assumptions with regard to how to achieve fairer and more equal societies are

eerily similar: The problem identified as underlying reason for a particular situation of inequality or injustice is a lack of knowledge, which means that this lack can be cured – and the situation improved for the group under scrutiny – by workshops, speeches, leaflets and capacitation projects. In this sense, the discourse of empowerment through the fostering of individual capacities seems to predominate in the projects currently being financed, accompanied by an increasing pressure for professionalization and a style of management that, with its emphasis on a culture of internal plans of action, reports and transparency, closely mirrors business management styles.

But how are these trends reflected in the attitudes of my respondents towards neoliberal efficiency and knowledge production within the development machine?

Generally, my respondents perceive their current situation as rather bleak, with a hostile global environment that makes their fight for a better world seem nearly pointless, with more and more obstacles put in their way. They also see how

“more and more activists are trying to place themselves in work spaces with some stability, which social organizations definitely cannot provide.” (Ana, FemAct)

My respondents, who all aim to continue working in advocacy at least for the next couple of years, all aim to be more professional and innovative to meet the pressures of the development machine, albeit in different ways: Some⁴⁷ seem to have internalized the requirements of the development machine and aim to be ever more professional and efficient, adapting the empowerment discourse also for their own internal work ethic and displaying some of the traits that Baillie Smith and Jenkins (2011a) comment on in their article on the de-cosmopolitanization of activism. Jorge even comments on how he began studying for another degree, this time in business administration, because he perceives it

“as a working tool that has helped me much in what I have been doing in the organization, trying to project the work towards another sphere, or [approaching it] with other mechanisms or tools that are often used in the private company, which could also help the organization very much.”

Others⁴⁸ do not express this kind of internalization of the efficiency discourse, but vary in their attitude towards the latter, from being pessimistic with regard to the future of their organization to trying to adapt their projects and rhetoric to these new standards of ‘donor speak’, hoping for their success. Nevertheless, none openly commented on the values inherent to the projects they were implementing. Even though this could point to them not being aware of the values that are attached to development projects, simply

⁴⁷ In particular Paola (PeaceDev), Jorge (PeaceDem), and Silvia (PeaceDem).

⁴⁸ Ana (FemAct), Vanessa (ProCiv), Rodrigo (IndDev), Carlos (IndAll), Sara (AllChild).

being relieved that there are still projects they find financing for, it might just as well have been a corollary of me being a researcher from a Western country. Due to the temporal limitations of my fieldwork trip, I possibly might not have been able to create a relationship in which they would have been willing to openly comment on their own work and organizational practices.

With regard to grasp how well activists' attitudes with regard to the development machine can be framed through positing the logic of capitalism, it has to be stated that when scrutinizing the narratives of my respondents, the picture that is painted is replete with ambiguity and tensions that do not derive from neoliberal discourse alone. Thus, perceiving the link of advocacy organizations to the development industry through such a frame cannot completely grasp how resource dependency and the empowerment discourse are representing both the repressive, but also the productive aspects of power. One example of this is given by Vanessa, who states that even though her organization was

“at the point of closing several times in the last years, something always came about. And this, for me, means that the organization is still necessary (...) because if it would not be, we would have ceased to exist already a long time ago.”

While Vanessa most likely refers to the social movements and organizations that her organization supports and for whom her organization is still necessary, those that have continued to finance the organization are international donors and, more recently, a Costa Rican company. Her organization has been able to secure funding most likely because it organizes capacitation workshops in new communication technologies and assesses the organizational sustainability and internal practices of other civil society organizations, which fits with the discourse on human capital that MCD research would see as operative form of the logic of capitalism. While not immediately linked to the perpetuation of economic relations that support the domination of the West over the rest, even at times supporting social movements that directly challenge these very relations, Vanessa's organization nevertheless would be deemed to contribute to the transmission and incorporation of neoliberal values in civil society, which in the long-term is seen to stabilize the global system of coloniality through establishing its hegemony in value orientation and epistemologies. The question remains if this is all that her organization's work does: By transmitting knowledge to social movements on how to effectively manage their internal organization, as well as by transmitting capabilities of how to use electronic communication technologies for their work, they also strengthen social and political actors' voices which allows them to better pursue their goals nationally and transnationally.

While referring to the logic of capitalism thus cannot ultimately grasp some of the ways in which neoliberalism and empowerment configure the practices and outlooks of my respondents, it nevertheless allows for critically scrutinizing the link between resource dependency and activism. Furthermore, a tendency with regard to my respondents' attitudes towards the development machine can be traced rather clearly: There seems to be a correlation between the kind of organization my respondents work for and the kind of attitudes displayed: Those that work for the big research-oriented peace institutes generally seem to display an affinity to the discourse on human capital, not only with regard to the way they talk about the projects they are currently implementing, but also with regard to how they refer to their own work ethic and their interpretation of the social and political context in which they act. But this might have less to do with the power of the development machine in transmitting a logic of capitalism and more with the close relation of the peace institutes to state and international development actors, which makes it more likely that those working in these organizations also possess normative orientations more closely mirroring the ideologies of these actors. As I approached the organizations and not the activists personally when asking for possible participants in my research, my eventual respondents might be also known internally to espouse the values of the organizations.

Those working for smaller, rights-based organizations seem to feel the pressures of resource dependency rather strongly and seem to be mainly concerned with securing their organization's survival, which does not leave them much time for reflecting on the rationale behind the projects implemented or on the knowledge they produce and emit through research, workshops and capacitation projects. While some lament the lack of opportunity to reflect and discuss their strategies, their dependence on external resources does not allow for the complete de-linking that MCD research proposes. Particularly Rodrigo pursues a strategy that would come closest to what MCD research frames as de-linking, as his main strategic goal with regard to the financial politics of his organization is autonomy, but his de-linking is a transference to more autonomy in choosing in which way to depend on the capitalist market rather than a refusal to participate in it. Moreover, he is the only one explicitly commenting on his activism being based on the motivation of providing a way to transmit the previously silenced voices of Costa Rican indigenous communities to the world, which he does through the publication of an electronic newsletter that collects stories and information emerging from the indigenous communities themselves. Nonetheless, it cannot be assumed that only because no other respondent commented on this, they are not concerned with this

issue, even though their silence on this matter does imply that it is not a primary concern of their work.

All in all, one of the basic conditions of possibility for decolonial cosmopolitanism, which is the desire to de-link from capitalist modernity, seems not to be a feasible option for transnational advocacy and would probably also encounter serious obstacles in implementation even in popular organizing not based on institutionally organized activism. Nonetheless, thinking transnational advocacy through the logic of capitalism makes it possible to perceive the importance of scrutinizing the material context of postcolonial advocacy and the influence of donor politics not only on the projects implemented, but also on the strategic orientation of advocacy organizations and their relative adjustment to the pressures of professionalization.

5.3 The Logic of Knowledge

5.3.1 The Transnationalization of Advocacy: Networked Pluriversality?

When MCD research refers to the coloniality of knowledge, it puts forward an argument that sees European hegemony over economic, political, social and cultural relations anchored crucially in epistemic relations based on European forms of knowledge production and exchange being recognized as legitimate and valid. The production of knowledge and meaning through the Eurocentric prism is given a central role in legitimizing European colonial domination and establishing the universal validity of knowledge based on European experiences, also through the spread of the modern university to (post)colonial societies (Castro-Gómez 2008:280; Lander and Castro-Gómez 2000; Quijano and Ennis 2000). MCD research has approached the logic of knowledge through the concept of the (European) geopolitics of knowledge that have silenced and invisibilized certain knowledges, while European cosmology has become universal and able to obscure its specific locus of enunciation, which is the position of the white bourgeois man (Schiwy 2010:127, Maldonado-Torres 2004:52; cf. Grosfoguel 2008; Mignolo 2008). On the other hand, MCD research also focuses on other cosmologies and epistemologies and the way these have interacted with ‘hegemonic Eurocentrism’, leading to ‘border thinking’ challenging and at the same time partly reproducing the dominant epistemology, which is also cast as logic of knowledge (cf. Walsh 2002; Mignolo 2000b).

In this part of the analysis, I aim to study the way the logic of knowledge is assumed to impact on transnational civic activism in the Global South. As this is a topic that has been less researched in MCD research and more in other academic debates, which are,

however, very close to the MCD project, I will mainly draw from these sources in order to show how transnational activists' outlooks that could be framed through the concept of decolonial cosmopolitanism have been conceptualized and studied. What I will concentrate on is the research done within the scholar-activist circles of the alter-globalization movement on how the cultural logics of networking foster decolonial attitudes. Similar to the alter-globalization movement, advocacy is mainly based on communication and the exchange of knowledge, which is why I argue that the transnationalization of advocacy, which operates mainly through the creation of transnational networks, might be correlated to the formation of attitudes stemming from networking logics. In the following, I will thus draw from literature on this topic, as well as from social movement research, to show in which ways the organization of transnational activism in networked form might steer activists towards pluriversality and thus towards decolonial attitudes. I presume that the repressive side of the logic of knowledge, thought to operate through Eurocentrism as dominant way of structuring epistemic relations, most likely might be reflected in the discourse on human capital as empowerment. As I have commented extensively on this issue in the previous part of this analysis, I will refrain from developing the argument again in this context. Instead, I will concentrate on how MCD research imagines the possibilities of de-linking from Eurocentrism, a move that is thought to enable pluriversal orientations and practices and is central for the concept of decolonial cosmopolitanism.

As I am now entering territory that I have not commented on in detail in the theoretical part of my research yet, let me first make visible how the transnationalization of activism and networked practices are thought to contribute to decolonial activist attitudes and the construction of an equitable global community: Generally, emergent global civil society is seen as resting on the communicative practices of "dialogue, debate, confrontation or negotiation" (Anheier, Glasius *et al.* 2001:4), a view shared by Kaldor (2003:160 in Baillie Smith and Jenkins 2011a:165), who holds that global civil society most fundamentally constitutes a "conversation in which we talk about our moral concerns, our passions, as well as thinking through the best way to solve problems". The social morphology of the network has taken central stage as the structure that fosters this global conversation in which supposedly,

"places receive their meaning and function from their nodal point in the specific networks to which they belong" (Castells 2004:36).

Civil society transcending national borders is seen to be grounded in "reflexive, horizontal, and flexible transnational networks" (Lenz 2008,104), especially in

organized advocacy. Advocacy organizations are seen as one of the central actors building and sustaining networks also because their activities are crucially based on communication and the emission of knowledge. Strategies of awareness-raising through public campaigning, lobbying, protesting and boycotting, but also of research, documentation and reporting – all of which are inherently communicative actions – belong to the basic toolkit of any advocacy organization (Roche 1999).

Civil society networks are generally seen as voluntary fluid structures with a certain degree of institutionalization that facilitate collaborative action without limiting the autonomy of its members (Church, Bitel *et al.* 2002:12). Transnational networks, in this context, are thought to be facilitated by increased communication possibilities through new technologies like the Internet, which have enabled more durable and faster contacts between people and organizations. Increased literacy and easier access to these technologies are also seen as playing a key role in contributing to the heightened grade of transnationally networked advocacy organizations (Baillie Smith and Jenkins 2011a:164). Virtual communication nevertheless is still undergirded by increased mobility through, for example through cheap air travel (cf. Keck and Sikkink 1998).

Social movement literature mainly cites four conditions of possibility that have contributed to the growing transnationalization and networking of activism, which are firstly, the growing democratization worldwide that gives activists the legitimacy to pursue their goals freely and openly and secondly, the increasing global integration and the rise of global problems that have to be countered transnationally. In this sense, both the legitimacy of and the need for civil society participation in shaping national and global policies on issues like the environment, human rights, women's rights and development fall together to accelerate the transnationalization of activism. Thirdly, the convergence – but also the diffusing – of values is seen to create the fuel for mobilization, as human rights are lobbied for and economic neoliberalization is opposed. Finally, an increased number of transnational institutions are seen to provide institutionalized spaces for global dialogue, to which organized civil society responded – particularly during the UN 'Conference Decade' of the 1990s – by building transnational networks and alliances, facilitated by new communication technologies (Kriesberg 1997:4-14; Batliwala 2002:394-5). Put shortly, organized civil society is believed to have entered transnational networks because the conditions for this move have been right and because their normative goals nowadays necessitate action on the transnational level, which promises more success when pursued through alliances and cooperation instead of alone.

This rather hopeful picture of the impact of the transnationalization of civic activism for progressive social change nevertheless has been complicated by research on regional networks in Latin America, as well as by post-development debate, which hold that it is a mistake to downplay the interests of those that foster the formation of transnational actors. National governments and multilateral agencies generally have their own strategic interests in mind when they support the building of transnational advocacy networks. Motivations may vary, but usually range from an interest in using the knowledge of civic actors to manage the coordination between governmental and social actors located in many countries within a specific issue area to the intent to co-opt potentially anti-systemic movements through providing incentives for transnational network formation. Networks are seen as more moderate because the emphasis on information exchange within transnational networks, together with their relatively limited capacity for coordinated action, makes them less likely to engage in contentious politics (cf. Khagram, Riker *et al.* 2002; Korzeniewicz and Smith 2003:23-26).

Notwithstanding these caveats, the organization of transnational activism as networks has also been perceived as mainly characterized by a voluntary “non-hierarchical and relatively loose coupling of constituent elements” (von Bernstorff 2002:511; DeMars 2005:50-54). This tendency is perpetuated by studies specifically scrutinizing decolonial transnational activism within the alter-globalization movement, especially the World Social Forum process⁴⁹. Scholars have increasingly become interested in the structures that sustain this new transnational movement, also taking an interest in its organization of communication and activity in network form, which they see as one of its hallmarks (Juris 2004; Waterman 2004:56; Smith 2008). Within this particular academic debate, networks are perceived functionally as a means of connecting actors and providing

“not only the space between different groups which permit them to maintain their particular identities, but also the bridge by which the global and place are linked.” (Smith 2008:16)

⁴⁹ Generally, most know the World Social Forum as the annual conference of ‘global civil society’. But, transcending these singular events, the WSF is the central and most visible attempt to formulate a counter-hegemonic discourse and provide a global space for those social movements that together build the alter-globalization movement aiming for a more just and equitable world. It has been most prominently identified with the anti-globalization protest movements of the Global North comprising students, the middle-class and professional activists that rallied against neoliberal capitalism represented by the World Economic Forum and the United States in Seattle 1999, Prague 2000, Evian 2003 and various other events (Waterman 2004:57). Less commented on, but equally crucial, are the actors from the Global South, who were formed through protests against the Washington Consensus and the structural adjustment programs of the World Bank, as well as through the Zapatista struggle in Mexico (Langman 2005:51). These actors are mainly organized in NGO networks and in sometimes connected, sometimes opposed social movements pursuing identity claims, but also in trade unions and more recently, leftist governments from Latin America (Vanden 2007).

Again, new communications technologies are seen as a tool for creating community (Waterman 2004:62) but these technologies are mainly understood instrumentally (Clemens and Minkoff 2003:156; della Porta 2005:76). This approach also most clearly sees transnationally networked practices connected to the formation of pluriversal attitudes: One of the scholar-activists of the alter-globalization movement, who studies the role of the network in the movement, Juris⁵⁰, claims that networks have emerged as a cultural ideal in itself (Juris 2005:257). Basing his conclusions on extensive fieldwork and his own involvement in the movement, he argues that the activists of the alter-globalization movement believe that they are inaugurating a ‘new way of doing politics’ based on the cultural logic of networking. According to him, these cultural logics of networking are being expressed, for instance, when activists cite ‘cultural flexibility’, ‘language proficiency’ and ‘autonomy’ as key ideals for their work. These logics are also at play when activists stress the importance of building horizontal ties between diverse actors and allowing for the free and open circulation of information, aim to work by collaborating through de-centralized democratic structures and see the best way to achieve their aims in self-directed networking (Juris 2004:352-353; Juris 2005:256). While some of these characterizations might be particular to the alter-globalization movement, it can be argued that the cultural logics of networking might generally be observable in advocacy networks, in which activists also tend to think of themselves

“as belonging to a global movement, discursively linking their local protests and activities to diverse struggles elsewhere”(Juris 2004:345).

Within decolonial scholarship, the concept of pluriversality, or the striving for global community united in its acceptance of a plurality of epistemologies and cosmologies, has been applied to frame attitudes and processes very similar to those that Juris describes. In this sense, the cultural logics of networking might foster pluriversal attitudes such as the one of an attendant of the European Social Forum who insists that

“it is important and necessary to defend and enhance the multiple beliefs and ideological, political, cultural and religious positions that are part of the movement” (Piazza and Barbagallo 2003:22 in della Porta 2005:80).

Extending the analysis of the cultural logics of networking within the alter-globalization movement to advocacy activism presupposes that the actual networked practices of activists will be reflected in and to a certain extent also foster attitudes that directly derive from these practices. The political philosopher Tully (2008:175), who has worked on the impact of networks on subjectivities, argues in this context that

⁵⁰ As he characterizes himself (Juris 2005:225): “I am both an activist and ethnographer who has participated actively within the world and regional social forum process, as well as activist networks in the United States and Catalonia (...)”.

“every form of social ordering also has distinctive relations of power by which the conduct (roles) of those subject to it is ordered (governed) [which is why] (...) networkers tend to acquire a corresponding network form of subjectivity through submission to their forms of organization, types of communicative activities and routines.”

Similarly, Snow and Benford (1992:136) have argued that networks can be seen

“as actively engaged in the production and maintenance of meaning for constituents, antagonists, and bystanders or observers”.

With regard to the tracing of the cultural logics of networking within transnational advocacy, Lenz (2008) takes up the basic premisses of pluriversality when describing the contemporary transnationally networked women’s movement as distinguished to earlier forms of organizing in the following way:

“[The transnational women’s movement] created discourses of equality and peace while respecting and integrating cultural difference, and thus contributed to a new universalism based on diversity”(Lenz 2008:105).

Therefore, transnational advocacy in networked form might well lead to an internalization of the cultural logics of networking as expressed in attitudes valuing pluriversality.

Both Eurocentric geopolitics and decolonial pluriversality might be observable in transnational activism in Costa Rica also because of the history of its civil society organizations: In Central America in general, organized civil society mainly emerged after the ‘lost decade’ of the 1980s, during which the debt crisis, neoliberal restructuring programs but also Central America’s role as a battlefield for the Cold War fueled civil wars and social uprisings, many times followed by counter-insurgencies steered by the United States of America.

One consequence of the turmoil of this decade was the enormous mobilization of civil society, especially after the Peace Accords of Esquipulas in which a regional peace agreement was brokered. New spaces were opened up for civil actors, also because the Accords included a call to strengthen and democratize civil society in order to secure regional peace and reconciliation. Not the least, an enormous amount of funding was set aside for civil society organizations actively pursuing regional programs to further these aims, particularly from European social democratic governments that saw inequality, poverty, a lacking human rights culture and the patriarchal and authoritarian organization of society as main causes for the upheavals (Edelman 2003:2). These efforts were accompanied by a rhetoric of empowering previously marginalized groups to participate on an equal basis in political institutions and thus contribute to the fostering of peace and democracy. Many NGOs that were founded during that time

included practices of regional cooperation from the beginning, especially in Costa Rica. As the one country that did not experience civil wars or authoritarian regimes during the times of turmoil, Costa Rica was taken to be exceptionally democratic and stable, which is why many international donors saw it as the starting point for strengthening peace in Central America. Three of the organizations that are included in my study⁵¹ were founded during that period and with these calculations as a backdrop. Due to the strong rhetoric of dialogue and understanding prevalent during that time, which also found entrance to the mission statements of these organizations, I expect the respondents of these organizations to emphasize dialogue and the promotion of regional understanding as main motivations driving their activities. Nevertheless, Costa Rican activism is not always well received in the region. Due to the rhetoric of Costa Rican peacefulness at the end of the civil wars, as well as due to Costa Rican national identity of being somewhat exceptional and ‘better developed’ than the rest of Central America, there are some moments of mistrust and resentment between Costa Rican and other Central American actors. Edelman (2003), in his study of the rise and fall of the regional peasant network ASOCODE, apart from offering an insightful account of transnational organizing in Central America, illustrates how Costa Rican stereotypes have impacted on the running of a Central American alliance of peasant organizations.

The way my respondents respond to these resentments, as well as their assessment of other countries and their activists, might help to scrutinize whether and how the logic of knowledge can be traced in their narratives. On the one hand, my respondents could display attitudes influenced by the discourse on Costa Rican superiority and a paternalistic orientation of teaching others how to be democratic, transmitting discourses of the development machine under the guise of South-South dialogue.

On the other hand, what could also be displayed is an awareness of the legacies of Central American history and activists not belittling other Central American organizations that are part of their networks, striving for mutual understanding based on respect instead. Such attitudes would come close to what MCD coins ‘pluriversality’.

One issue that is thought to support transnational, maybe even pluriversal practices and attitudes, is electronic communication technology. Networks have achieved their centrality both in practice and theory mainly because of the opportunities that the Internet offers to communicate cheaply and nearly instantaneously over long distances, giving rise to denser and more sustainable civil society networks. But making use of the Internet presupposes the availability of the material resources necessary for connecting

⁵¹ PeaceDev, PeaceDem, and InstDev.

to it. Costa Rica as location for transnational activism has been shaped by the rise of electronic communication technologies, because when the Internet was becoming available for private use, Costa Rica was one of the first countries in the region to offer reasonably priced connections through the public institute of electricity and telecommunications (Siles 2008). Costa Rican organizations thus had a head start regarding the use of the Internet, which might have influenced their appreciation and use of electronic communication technologies. For example, two of the organizations that are part of my study⁵² link their overall goals to the dynamics of the Internet: While one⁵³ aims to use electronic communication to facilitate and democratize the flow of information between indigenous communities and the rest of the world, the other was founded to provide access to electronic communication technologies for social movements and organizations.

In the Costa Rican context and in connection to the dynamics created by the increasing competition for less resources, decolonial attitudes would generally be expressed through respecting difference and striving to make it possible for many points of view to be voiced within transnational networks. It would also mean recognizing the inherent hierarchies in any kind of network, as well as the material conditions underlying connectivity, and responding to them in a way that tries to negotiate power differentials to allow for equal access as far as that is possible. Even when transnational networks are steered by state and donors' interests and limited in their scope of action, spaces for alternative thinking based on pluriversality might be traceable.

5.3.2 Activists' Attitudes towards Transnational Activism

Transnational networks have entered my respondents' daily work practices as well as their perception of how to pursue their organizations' goals most effectively. Nevertheless, the terminology of the network is not commonly accepted or applied, for instance two of my respondents⁵⁴ negated to be connected to any kind of civil society network, only to continue with describing their practices in terms that clearly point to the existence and central importance of such linkages. Thus, I would like to make clear that when I am talking of transnational civil society networks in the following analysis, I am talking about any kind of transnational social structure or practice that links more

⁵² IndDev and ProCiv.

⁵³ IndDev.

⁵⁴ Rodrigo (IndDev) and Ana (FemAct). While Rodrigo talks about "a little telephone call or a little letter" to his acquaintances in development organizations when referring to his extensive informal networks, Ana talks about "articulations" that are sometimes continuous and sometimes punctual instead.

than two actors (activists or organizations) from at least two countries with the purpose of entering into communication, exchanging information and collaborating. These networks are entered on one's own accord and endure over a period of time.

Even though not all agree on naming these transnational practices networks, as Ana and Rodrigo exemplify, they are generally an important part of the work of my respondents: Particularly central are institutionalized networks that connect actors from different Central American countries through electronic communication technologies as well as through conferences and meetings that require physical presence. These networks are used to exchange information, agree on collaborations and joint activities and to see

“globally where civil society stands and what is happening with social movements and what is changing with regard to new international politics in a certain field.”⁵⁵

But apart from this kind of transnational network, there exists an enormous variety of networked structures that all serve different purposes, illustrated by Sara, who sums up her links to networks in the following way:

“There are different networks to which I am connected. There are for example inter-institutional networks consisting of other non-governmental organizations that work on the national level and which operate through meetings, joint activities, and also electronically. Much of the communication is already regional, there are other networks that have a more informative character, which are a bit more about human rights in general and about the human rights situation in general, [as well as] other networks with other children's and youth organizations that are more oriented towards regional activities and which pass from the national to the regional level and where we mainly deal with regional questions. Another regional part are the sections for the defense and promotion of rights at the regional level that are operated through presence sessions and also through electronic means. In that case we also make much use of virtual meetings via Skype, which is one of the most accessible mediums.”

What is noteworthy in her statement is that the most important level around which her network connections revolve is the regional level. While she mentions national networks, her activism seems to be steered by regional structures and regional questions, which is particularly interesting because the general aim of her organization is to promote and defend children's rights, mainly through providing legal and psychological guidance for children who have been victims of violence and who seek to pursue the perpetrators through legal means before national courts. The goal of her organization could consequently be pursued through an exclusively national focus and without entering into transnational networks or alliances. Nevertheless, the organization is unquestioningly transnational. Moreover, transnational connections do not flow unidirectionally from the transnational to the national level: Sara is currently organizing a Central American meeting of children's organizations, and she is also in charge of

⁵⁵Vanessa (ProCiv).

publishing an international electronic newsletter dealing with the developments in the sector of children's rights three times per week. She explains the transnational links of her work through the goal of not only prosecuting, but also preventing violence against children, which is best achieved through strategies of awareness raising and capacity building. These activities then are coordinated with other organizations in Central America, as the issues are the same and best practices and experiences can be shared.

But what undeniably also plays a part in seeking to enter transnational networks is the financial question, which also enters Sara's reasoning when she comments a bit later in the interview that "if you look for any kind of funding for Costa Rica on the international level, they do not finance you". Applying for project funding for a transnational project that is then implemented in more than one country simultaneously by their respective national organizations, which have entered into a transnational alliance, promises higher chances of success. Vanessa further illustrates this link between transnational networks and the development machine when she states:

"Effectively, the participation in networks also has had the resource question as motivation, nobody can deny that. In the South, they participate much in international networks in order to enter into alliances in order to access resources. And in order to be much more visible for the donors, this definitely. No one can lie about that."

In this sense, while transnational networks are certainly voluntarily entered into, there are always multiple underlying reasons, some of them probably linked to the organization's financial sustainability. Jorge sees this development as a clear trend visible in transnational activism from the Global South and comments that

"Another characteristic is that nowadays, it is not only one organization competing for project funding for itself, now the majority of cooperations requires you to have allies. Thus, they require you to have for example four allies, local allies, or in the case of funding from the European Union for example they nearly always...it is an unwritten rule, but if the funding in question concerns a lot of money, you have to be with a European [organization]."

Nevertheless, the existence of pragmatic reasons for becoming part of transnational networks does by no means discount the very real consequences of being transnationally networked for activists' attitudes and practices. While the cultural logics of networking that Juris (2004; 2005) diagnoses have to be put into the context of the everyday realities of transnational activism within organized civil society that is dependent on external resources, they are nevertheless reflected to a certain extent.

While my respondents certainly do not feel that they are autonomous in their decision to

become part of networks⁵⁶, they do feel a link to those that are part of the same networks and their local struggles and are to a certain extent autonomous in deciding which networks to participate in, which leads in many cases to personalized network connections. Four of my respondents⁵⁷ directly commented on the fact that many transnational networks are based on personal friendships and contacts, which tend to be hard to follow up once the person that either created these contacts or brought them to the organization leaves to work somewhere else. Instead of institutionalized networks that are sustained through electronic communication and shared goals (be they of financial or political character), many networks seem to be based on the flesh-and-blood experiences and affinities of individual activists.

Apart from the personal factor, which might also lead to the privileging of certain people or organizations for personal reasons and affect the organization's strategic positioning detrimentally, feelings of community and shared struggle are also created through the increased mobility of my respondents that results from network participation: Networks almost always include regular meetings and conferences, alliances usually mean traveling to one's counterpart's locality to discuss strategies and campaigns, and many activists⁵⁸ travel abroad to give workshops or to capacitate others in certain methodologies and topics. These physical movements from place to place create community that seems longer lasting and more decisive for my respondents' imaginaries than the organizational strategies and politics of transnational activism. Even in cases when my respondents did not comment directly on the importance of personal friendships to keep transnational networks alive, many referred to close partner organizations as for example 'our friends in Nicaragua' or referred to other organizations by the name of an employee of this organization. Those that have to travel a lot for their work report on the experiences made by traveling in a similar way as Carlos, who recounts his experiences of transnational community in the following way:

"When I travel to Guatemala, I've got friends where I sleep and I stay with them, and we also go out at night. If I travel to Ecuador as well. If I have a meeting in Canada, where I have been various times to attend meetings, we meet at night, go out together, and if somebody is short of money, we lend him a bit of money."

⁵⁶ The exception to this feeling is Rodrigo (IndDev), whose organization maintains mostly informal links to 'friends' who work for international development agencies, private and state actors, who are the main contact persons for Rodrigo's work of bringing community projects together with possible donors. These networks are informal, but strong, and give Rodrigo the feeling of being autonomous in deciding with whom to maintain communication.

⁵⁷ Vanessa (ProCiv), Paola (PeaceDev), Jorge (PeaceDem), Ana (FemAct).

⁵⁸ The respondents that reported to have to travel abroad regularly for their work are Paola (PeaceDev), Jorge (PeaceDem), Silvia (PeaceDem), Ana (FemAct), Vanessa (ProCiv) and Carlos (IndAll). Teresa (InstDev) and Sara (AllChild) travel regularly, but mainly within Costa Rica, while Rodrigo (IndDev) sometimes travels within his district, but much less within the country or abroad.

In this statement, Carlos mentions different instances of community creation, from staying at another activist's home to going out and even lending each other money, which actually points to a level of trust that cannot be achieved by mere acquaintance or strategic alliance. While some might discount such narratives as superficial accounts from the private life, they actually seem to constitute the backbone of transnational activism and feelings of community and also the glue that holds transnational civil society networks together, at least in my data sample.

According to Vanessa, the strong link between personal ties and organizational networks also stems from the different organization of network participation in the Global South. She argues that in the Global North, networks are seen as an opportunity to gain additional knowledge and employees are paid specifically to participate in those networks that are relevant for the organization's issue area. In the Global South, on the other hand, networks are entered into because somebody in the organization functions as a driving force, as network participation is not a specific part of anyone's job description. In her opinion, this leads to a situation in which networks that are not based on personal friendships are often neglected, because "nobody knows anymore who is in charge of keeping connected to the network, and who goes and who participates" (Vanessa, ProCiv). For her, networking is "an additional thing to everything else that I have to do" that has, however, become crucial for keeping connected to the pulse of global developments, but that poses many difficulties due to the limited personal and financial resources in the Global South. Nevertheless, transnational networks are seen as extremely important, also because only through them, activists working under repressive regimes have the possibility to transmit information and raise awareness of their local situation. For Vanessa, this side of transnational networks has been tragically confirmed after the coup d'état in Honduras in 2009 when activists from Honduras first sought support and then refuge in Costa Rica.

According to the literature, the institution that acts as crucial foundation enabling the translation into practice of the values of horizontal organizing and free flow of information is the Internet. While in the literature, electronic communication technologies are mainly understood instrumentally and as a means of accelerating communication and connections between actors, the activists that are part of my study⁵⁹ see its contribution to transnational activism much more ambivalently, both with regard

⁵⁹ The only ones that did not comment on the Internet or its ambivalent position in transnational activism are Teresa (InstDev) and Carlos (IndAll). Carlos nonetheless mentions that he would like to live in his community, but is forced to stay in San José because he could not continue his work as activist from the Maleku territory due to not availing of Internet access there.

to its horizontality and with regard to the possibilities of free information exchange. According to them, transnational networks based on electronic communication technologies are exclusionary, an assessment based to a large extent on the fact that they still know of many organizations that are not connected to the Internet and thus not able to even participate in transnational networks. While Sara comments that in her field, more than twenty per cent of the organizations fighting for children's rights do not have continuous access to the Internet, Rodrigo confirms that he sees the same situation with regard to indigenous organizations, "which have not understood the importance of communicating [electronically]". Rodrigo directly works towards democratizing electronic communication technologies not only in the sense of securing access, but even more importantly in the sense of appropriating these technologies properly. Many of my respondents commented in a similar manner on access being one issue and actually knowing how to use the computer and the Internet as a tool for activism being another. Juxtaposed to this awareness of the problems of appropriating the use of the Internet is a general appreciation for the chances it opens up. According to Rodrigo, for example, the Internet is the single most important tool for his activism because

"[without the Internet], we would be, like, isolated from the world. Yes, because for us, the daily contact to people is vitally important, well, the receiving of information, the distributing of information. And all of this revolves around the Internet. For us, it is vital, it is exceptionally important, transcendental, well, because it allows us, I repeat, to have communication with the world."

His strong emphasis on the importance of electronic communication technologies also might stem from the fact that he lives and works in an indigenous territory in the Southern Zone of Costa Rica and has no other means of keeping in contact with his allies and keeping track of the developments of the world than the Internet. He, just like Vanessa, clearly sees the possibilities of the Internet for activism, but also strives to make electronic communication more horizontal and democratic, because with regard to the Internet, just as in other areas, "the one who has the information has the power". Both are clear in their assessment that there are always power relations that will limit the free flow of information, but that the Internet has ample opportunities to democratize information flows, if only one is aware of the limitations and dangers and actively works to counteract them.

Nevertheless, electronic communication technologies have to be undergirded by face-to-face communication. Ana, for instance, comments on the use of the Internet for her activism in the following way:

“For us, in order to maintain communication and such, without question the Internet and calls via Skype and such resolve much coordination issues and the things work faster. But I also think that there comes a moment when one has to share a space or a conference, or a meeting that has a presence-based character. I believe that being able to have meetings with a certain regularity of every six months, once a year, I don’t know, in order to be able to put into common what it is what we are doing, how we are doing it, how we are perceiving it, you know...actualize contextual things, exchange, political proposals and such...I think that is fundamental. I believe that afterwards, tools like Internet, phone calls and such are there much more to follow up on these things. (...) I do not yet see it as the very base of articulation between organizations.”

While she acknowledges the Internet’s usefulness for keeping in contact and coordinating joint activities, she does not believe that community can be created only through electronic communication. She makes her opinion even clearer when she comments a bit later that

“[p]eople do not learn to love each other via the Internet. The Internet is a tool for communication with the people you love, but you fell in love with them before”.

While she is certainly the most outspoken with regard to how she assesses the usefulness of the Internet for her activism, most others⁶⁰ echo her sentiments at least with regard to the importance of meeting the people you are networked with face to face with a certain regularity in order to be able to feel a common bond to them. While most of the work in advocacy nowadays consists of desk work and most of the communication is done via e-mail, many activists see their real work beginning only when they meet and talk to people in person, travel to where one’s allies live, hold workshops and share the same space. The free flow of information, in the sense of debating visions and ideas and agreeing of commonalities, happens mainly when activists come together and share the same space. Vanessa, for example, comments that her organization only shares its knowledge with other organizations when they are sure that they can trust them, as a basic precaution regarding organizational survival. In the highly competitive environment of transnational advocacy, knowledge is a commodity that is not shared lightly and necessitates trust, which mainly is created by meeting physically in shared spaces, which implies traveling, which again is limited by available funds and the projects that are implemented.

Transnational activism consequently mainly means regional activism for my respondents. In this sense, the politics of the development machine and the way it steers activists towards regional projects also leads to a very strong regional emotional attachment. While places like Guatemala, Nicaragua, Honduras and even Ecuador are

⁶⁰ Vanessa (ProCiv), Carlos (IndAll), Sara (AllChild), Silvia (PeaceDem) and Paola (PeaceDev).

part of my respondents' immediate context and they tend to talk about them in ways that reveal familiarity and closeness, Europe, but also Africa and Asia, are seen as foreign places that do not enter into one's life world. Nevertheless, regional identities are complicated by the way Costa Rican national identity is perceived by many Central Americans, or as Paola says, "on the Central American level, Costa Ricans are not loved very much". Some of my respondents, such as Ana⁶¹, acknowledge this continuing resentment as a valid reaction to the way Costa Rica has been represented – and represents itself – as the Switzerland of Central America that knows better than its neighbors how to develop, and simply try to "calm the waters a bit" before working together. Others in turn resent the stereotypes that they are met with and ridicule the ways they are being cast as the stereotypical Costa Rican whenever they meet with new organizations from other Central American countries⁶². But however these resentments are dealt with, my respondents all display a close affinity to Central America.

When analyzing the appearance of pluriversal orientations in my respondents' narratives more closely, many of my respondents⁶³, especially those that are active in the rights-based movements, are very adamant about respect for diversity being the driving force for any kind of social change. Rodrigo refers to the concept of *Buen Vivir*⁶⁴ and demands the "increased participation of the people in the construction of their own development", which will lead to "constructing societies from below". Sara imagines the only viable form of social organization that can offer justice and equality to all to be a world in which the inequalities between North and South, but also within countries, are leveled out and "where the minorities are represented". According to Vanessa, the main aim of civic and political activism should be

"motivating people that they fall in love with difference and that they fall in love with the new learning that these differences offer".

Carlos similarly insists on the recognition of difference and expresses the values behind the concept of pluriversality when he comments that

⁶¹ Ana (FemAct), Sara (AllChild) and Vanessa (ProCiv).

⁶² Particularly Paola (PeaceDev). More on this issue can be found in the first part of this analysis that analyzes Costa Rican national identity.

⁶³ Rodrigo (IndDev), Carlos (IndAll), Vanessa (ProCiv), Sara (AllChild), and Ana (FemAct).

⁶⁴ *Buen Vivir* is a concept that stems from the indigenous Ecuadorean Kichwas, who call it *sumac kawsay*, but a similar concept has also been expressed by the Aymara Indians, who call it *suma qamaña* (Bizerra 2009). It denotes a way of living based on harmony and equilibrium between men and women, different communities and between human beings and the natural environment. It also implies living in a community in which a minimum degree of equality is striven for. In 2008, *Buen Vivir* has become the orienting concept of the new Ecuadorian Constitution that was agreed on in a popular referendum (Walsh 2010), and it also is one of the basic principles referred to in the World Social Forum and by the Zapatistas as a way to create 'a world where many world fit'.

“I think we have to begin by recognizing difference. Recognizing that...first of all, that there are different people because you live in Finland and Germany and I in Costa Rica, you speak Finnish and German and I speak Maleku and Spanish, but we have to know that you are as important as I and that I am important as well and that you have problems and I as well, and you have solutions for the problems of the world and I as well, but these are different solutions. Thus, recognizing difference, the cultural diversity in which we live, is the first step because this way, you are going to construct societies that are not equal, but another society instead, with the same rights to all the people.”

These activists state that a better world has to be based on respect for diversity and on a form of dialogue that does not see one way of being or knowing as superior, instead aiming to include and respect all kinds of differences into a community that is not equal, but offers the same rights to everybody and thus is equitable. Basic human rights should be fulfilled and economic inequalities should be eradicated, but these changes have to be always based on a respect for difference and a desire to maintain these differences.

What can be traced in the narratives of those that work for the peace institutes is an intermeshed narrative of respect for difference and a pedagogy of teaching. Jorge, for example, sees social networks as the major tool for creating feelings of community and solidarity that transcend national identities and can contribute to a major awareness of the ‘Other’. Through networked links to various peoples, humanity will become more conscious of the effect their actions have on others and will learn to live peacefully together. But according to him, the ability to enter into networked forms of community crucially hinges on education as precondition for creating this more conscious and peaceful world. Consequently, he holds that:

“(...) when we receive a better education, when every time a bigger proportion of the population has better education, we might be able to create these communities that might be virtual communities. I believe that will be an option through which we can be constructing a more peaceful world, a world that is a bit more just, a world that is more conscious of what it is doing.”

His colleague Silvia also takes education as the precondition for creating a better world, and as a precondition for reaching a higher state of consciousness. Spirituality, in her understanding, necessarily goes together with education. According to her, education and spirituality will be the foundations for humanity to find more

“solidaritarian and more just forms so that all human beings might reach to enjoy a much more harmonious existence.”

Paola also stresses the importance of education, which she sees as the only way to overcome cultural differences. In her reasoning, when people become more educated, they will be able to recognize what they want, and consequently, the value systems that exist in the world will become more similar, which is a precondition for creating a

global community:

“First of all, what is difficult to create are homogenous value systems. Because there exist, let’s say, many cultural elements that impede that this works. What is unthinkable for us is the most common thing in countries in Africa or Asia or the Middle East, thus this is a difficulty. Because, let’s say, one of the things that has to be changed in this sense are cultural perspectives and this is what is most difficult to change. One of the things that should be done, and I don’t say in order to make the world juster, but to ensure that the people have more opportunities, is that they should have the capacity to grow by educating themselves, to be able to choose, well, select what they like, this would help.”

Noticeable in her narrative is how she posits “homogeneous value systems” as main foundation for global change for the better and cites Africa, Asia, and the Middle East as places with “cultural perspectives” that should be changed, mainly through education that opens up opportunities for individual empowerment. The foundational incentive to contribute to peace in Central America and the regional scope of the peace institutes seems to contribute to the respondents working for those organizations underlining the importance of education for creating a better world. While they generally recognize that the economic and social inequalities that exist in the world fundamentally impede global equality, and they also underline the importance of community building for a more peaceful and more just world and affirm the necessity of dialogue, they believe that first, people need education in order to then be able to communicate with others. While they do not specify which kind of education they refer to, the setting any kind of epistemic precondition for intercultural dialogue would, within the framework of MCD research, be seen as negating the fundamental values on which pluriversality is built and as a means to denigrate and dominate subaltern knowledges and cosmologies.

The indigenous participants express attitudes that MCD research would certainly frame as decolonial cosmopolitanism, as they aim for the recognition of plural forms of knowledge and communicating and for valuing these diversities without aiming to make them comply with any kind of hegemonic forms of knowledge. While they are closest to the notion of ‘pluriversality’ in their formulation of the issue, other respondents also take up certain building blocks of this orientation, as for example Vanessa who sees a precondition for a better world in ‘falling in love with differences’. But also most of those working in the peace institutes emphasized the importance of respecting difference, adding education as prerequisite.

The clearest distinction between decolonial cosmopolitanism and other forms of difference-affirming accounts of social change can thus maybe only be anchored in the subject position of the speaker itself, with those who have been excluded and their knowledge invisibilized being more adamant about pluriversality. This might also

simply be based on the fact that both my indigenous respondents believe in possessing a different epistemology and cosmology to majority society, which they see as central part of their subjectivity. Such a stance on pluriversality as epistemic privilege of the indigenous, however, would simultaneously invisibilize people like Vanessa, who espouse similar orientations but would not be able to be counted as decolonial cosmopolitan on account of her subject position.

Moreover, if decolonial cosmopolitanism is taken as an ethical stance that is accompanied by the political stance of coalition building, the practices that accompany such orientations should also be scrutinized. My respondents' practices and outlooks do conform to what Tarrow (2005) has called 'rooted cosmopolitanism' and instead of displaying one unilinear organizational form from below, their transnationally networked practices display a dynamic that is as much informed by external factors, for example with regard to the requirements of international donors, as by ethical or political motivations. The internal organization of advocacy organizations moreover impacts on the shape and direction of network connections, which tend to favor personal contacts, maybe even with nepotistic leanings. Networks are thus more than just an instrumental means to connecting actors, and simply assuming a direct link between the existence of transnational civil society networks and a cosmopolitanism from below might neglect the crucial impact of other factors related to resource dependency, the material context of activism and personal preferences.

6 Discussion

In my analysis, I have aimed to examine whether the concept of decolonial cosmopolitanism can contribute to the conceptualization of cosmopolitanism from below as ethical and political orientation of those historically excluded from participating on equal terms on the global level (Escobar 2004). As the concept departs from a particular ontology that revolves around the logic of coloniality as central dynamic of the social world, I have asked whether and how the logic of coloniality as put forward by the MCD research group, assumed to be operative in racism, neoliberal capitalism and control of knowledge, is traceable in the practices and orientations of Costa Rican transnational advocacy activists. As ethical as well as political stance of being reflexive about one's own standpoint while challenging the asymmetrical power relations that have shaped the latter by entering into coalitions with others with whom experiences of oppression are shared, decolonial cosmopolitanism is seen to connect

different localities and different peoples who share not an abstract universal but, instead, an awareness of the workings of the logic of coloniality and the desire to de-link from it (Mignolo 2010a:125).

I have examined whether there are signs that point to the ontological claim of the existence of a ‘system of domination based on the logic of coloniality’ being more than a mere theoretical assumption and visible in the concrete experiences, practices and attitudes of those supposed to live under conditions of coloniality. By including in my sample a broad range of activists engaged in distinct kinds of transnational advocacy, I aimed to examine whether there are connecting patterns that point to the logic of coloniality shaping the attitudes and practices of activists in Costa Rica in possibly different, but still traceable ways.

With regard to the validity of presupposing the logic of race as being operative in Costa Rica through its ‘white’ national identity, there seems to be a correlation between a strong identification with national discourse and its articulation as a means to set Costa Rica apart from the rest of the region with regard to its progressiveness, measured in gender equality and other markers. In the narratives of those of my respondents that work in the peace institutes, race and gender serve as a means of identifying those in need to be empowered and educated. In their narratives they distinguish, however, between those that are at the receiving end of their projects, who are cast in a more passive way, and their regional allies, who are perceived as actors who may at times feel resentment towards Costa Rica’s level of development, but are not generally perceived as inferior. Those working for the rights-based organizations identify to a lesser extent with national identity and take a more critical stance with regard to the issue of race and discrimination and also do not use gender as a means to distinguish between those being ‘more progressive’ and those needing to be educated. The indigenous respondents in particular only feel a weak sense of belonging to the Costa Rican nation and prioritize their own communities, even though show signs of national and transnational solidarity towards other minority groups and their struggles.

In general, all my respondents aim to challenge asymmetrical power relations, but display a broad range of interpretations with regard to the origins of these asymmetries and the strategies applied to change them, with racialization being more prevalent in the explanatory frames of those who self-identify as part of a racialized or gendered minority. Putting forward the claim that one logic of race serves to distinguish people as inferior or superior does seem pre-empt the recognition of a more complex social fabric in which, for example, Nicaraguans might be perceived differently when at the

receiving end of one's capacitation projects than when being perceived as the 'friends in Nicaragua' with whom these very projects are implemented. Nonetheless, the important role that Costa Rican national identity still seems to play emphasizes the need to take seriously the way ethnic and cultural differences impact not only on the attitudes of those that are privileged by such discourses or the attitudes of those that are cast as the 'Other', but also on how they impact on the possibilities of and limits to intercultural transnational activism and coalition building. When MCD research's understanding of race as expression of the logic of coloniality is juxtaposed to the empirical analysis of national identity, it seems that while national identity plays an important part in shaping activist attitudes, its articulation and contestation is ultimately more fraught with tensions than the logic of coloniality can explain.

Something similar can be stated with regard to the logic of capitalism: While there are some important facets of my respondents' attitudes and practices that seem to be decisively shaped by the neoliberal discourse on human capital and the ordering of economic relations in a world market, neoliberal capitalism, far from only being repressive and limiting, does provide opportunities for activism that transcend a unilinear understanding of power merely flowing from the center to the margins. One basic point of convergence for the experiences of my respondents that could arguably be perceived as a ramification of the capitalist logic is the prevalent organizational form that transnational advocacy activism takes in Costa Rica, which is the project-based organization that is dependent on external resources, which are either acquired through development aid or through the selling of expertise and services. The material context of my respondents' activism leads to their susceptibility for development discourse and to their adaption to the changing trends of international donor politics, as the strategies of my respondents are also shaped by the aims of financial sustainability and organizational survival. Setting the desire to de-link from capitalist modernity as requirement for decolonial cosmopolitanism, however, does not take into account that such a stance might not be feasible for most activism in the Global South, certainly not for advocacy, but most probably also not for popular organizing.

While the feasibility of perceiving de-linking in a material sense can thus certainly be questioned, MCD research also emphasizes de-linking as epistemological process in which one becomes aware of the logic of coloniality and begins to question and overcome the latter. In this vein, Dolhinow (2005:560) appeals to postcolonial NGOs to distinguish between normative notions of empowerment and their practical fostering of neoliberal governance. Even though the great share of projects implemented by my

respondents concerns the capacity building of for example immigrant women or other activists, none displayed an awareness of possibly transmitting neoliberal values through their projects. I would argue that an analytical stance that presumes capacitation projects to be mere vehicles for transmitting neoliberal values and aims to explain the implementation of such projects by postcolonial activists as a case of being compliant to the logic of coloniality cannot explain how and why this assumed logic establishes and sustains itself. It cannot be negated that there is a tendency in the forms of postcolonial advocacy of my respondents to turn away from more direct forms of activism – organizing rallies, mobilizing and tackling injustices through contentious politics – and towards the educative side of advocacy. The existence of opportunities and resources for particular kinds of projects, which allow activists to pursue their goals through specific means, does not foreclose the existence and availability of other channels for intervention and activism but instead might make it more likely that these are not taken up. Rodrigo, for example, reports on having been involved in organizing the indigenous protest against the delaying of the ratification of the New Indigenous Law, but having had to cease his involvement because of a lack of financial resources. Thus, he re-focused on those tasks that were more likely to yield concrete results for his organization, but more importantly, for the indigenous communities. Ana's organization, which was vital in founding the first trade union for women in the country, now focuses on research and capacitation, but still continues to be active in more direct forms of political intervention, at least if time and resources allow.

These forms of negotiated activism are not inherently less valuable than more contentious politics, as they do contribute to social change. My question here is not to settle whether or not such projects are transmitting neoliberal values, but to evaluate whether the logic of coloniality can make sense of these developments. With regard to this question I would argue that by perceiving power as operating through a logic of coloniality that inevitably excludes and invisibilizes certain groups of people, the various ways in which these very people adopt practices and outlooks stemming from the center in order to empower themselves and tackle their marginalization are not discussed. Power is productive, and while discourses on individual empowerment and education for democratic participation are, ultimately, discourses with an Eurocentric core that might not be able to offer fitting solutions to the local context of my respondents, they nevertheless might be adapted to the local context and contribute to social change. In this vein, Rodrigo's understanding of indigenous autonomy as indigenous communities being able to participate in the global market on their own

terms, could, while probably not leading to epistemic and material de-linking from capitalism, be seen as a more feasible strategy. Such a stance could arguably be better explained by a different theory of power than MCD research can offer⁶⁵.

MCD research perceives pluriversality, or the ethical and political stance to respect and value different knowledges and worldviews, as juxtaposed to the repressive side of the logic of knowledge expressed through Eurocentrism, a belief in modern systems of education and, with regard to development, pressures for professionalization (Ceci Misoczky 2011). When following MCD research, the latter characteristics of the logic of knowledge would need to be overcome in order for pluriversality and thus decolonial cosmopolitanism to flourish.

The results of my analysis point to the importance of not only looking at the epistemic level, but also taking into account the concrete practices of transnational coalition building that result from but also lead to attitudes of world-openness. My respondents all displayed attitudes of world-consciousness and emphasized the importance of respecting diversity and intercultural dialogue as the only viable road towards a better world, which many in the cosmopolitan debate would invariably coin cosmopolitan dispositions. Nevertheless, such attitudes can be accompanied by different political stances and one tenet of MCD research is to show how such connotations have accompanied imperial global projects (Mignolo 2010:113-124; Castro-Gómez 2010:23-41). Attitudes of world-openness and respect for difference alone, in their understanding, do not automatically lead to decolonial cosmopolitanism, but might just as well be the expression of an universalizing version of cosmopolitanism that will inevitably deny, invisibilize and possibly subjugate other world views and orientations. Decolonial cosmopolitanism is distinguishable from other forms of difference-affirming cosmopolitanisms, according to MCD research, by the subject position of the speaker: Those in a subaltern position, those having been at the receiving end of such 'global designs' (Mignolo 2000a), enjoy the epistemic privilege of pluriversality, as they are thought to be more reflexive with regard to how positing one way of being in and seeing the world as the 'right' one does inevitably marginalize others in very concrete ways, from school curricula to notions of wealth and success.

⁶⁵ The refusal of MCD research to take into account theory production from the Global North has led to its silence on the theories of power that Foucault, Derrida and other post-structuralists, but also feminists and queer theorists, have developed. Adapting a theory on power inspired by these theorizations might be more fruitful for making sense of how the remnants of colonial domination have successfully been able to adapt to the changing social context.

But when taking a closer look at the results of my analysis, what becomes clear is that subalternity is neither reducible to indigeneity nor to postcoloniality: My indigenous respondents undoubtedly displayed attitudes more closely conforming to the notion of pluriversality, but this could just as well stem from the fact that the concept of pluriversality has been developed based on indigenous conceptions of Buen Vivir (to which Rodrigo explicitly refers to), which has been used as a tool in the identity politics of Latin American indigenous communities on global, but more importantly also on national levels in confronting the state and (re-)claiming social and cultural, but also economic and political rights. Taking on MCD's understanding of pluriversality, apart from idealizing the 'Other's' concrete experiences, would to a certain extent invalidate the dispositions of people like Vanessa, who display similar orientations but do not make use of an 'indigenous' or 'subaltern' epistemology to shore up their claims. Moreover, when examining how the empowerment through education discourse enmeshes with a discourse on respecting difference in the narratives of my respondents working in the peace institutes, the implicit tendency of MCD research to posit binaries becomes a limitation for grasping these orientations. Simply identifying such outlooks with imperial designs of the Global North transmitted through development discourse does not sufficiently account for the various ways normative orientations and activist practices set in a transnationalizing and regionalizing context interact to sustain, but also to refigure universalist understandings in a myriad of ways. The concrete experiences of those activists, based on an intermeshed process of pressures for transnationalization transmitted through the development machine, notions of empowerment and coalition building, experiences of traveling, as well as the impact of new communication technologies, lead to different attitudes with regard to regional intercultural dialogue and to global dialogue, in which a more universalizing stance prevails.

Reducing the heterogeneity of my respondents' narratives, which do not conform to an easy distinction between excluded and excluders, to one logic of coloniality does not seem to be sufficiently cognizant of the variety of ways subject positions and activist practices are not pre-given but are in fact contingent and constituted through practices and social relations. When applying the framework of MCD research to the social realities of postcolonial civic activism, it becomes clear that while the aspects focused on in MCD research (racism, capitalism, epistemic domination) certainly play an important part in configuring the social world, claiming that their workings can be revealed and challenged through decolonial cosmopolitan practices does to a certain extent negate the production of these very aspects through continuous social practice

that is informed not only by these logics, but also by various other discourses, power constellation and social relations, which, when taken together, make the social terrain more complex and ambiguous than MCD research acknowledges. Through examining the attitudes of activists that do not display an activist identity that presumes the necessity of antagonistic struggle between dominator and dominated (or, alternatively, former colonizers and formerly colonized) in a place where social antagonisms are not made as explicit as to show clear social boundaries between social groupings, the assumptions of the MCD framework can thus ultimately not be validated.

What emerges, instead, is a more liminal picture⁶⁶ of these activists' narratives merging hegemonic discourses with practices and outlooks that are potentially counter-hegemonic but cannot possibly be categorized as either, representing that which is "neither this nor that and yet is both" (Turner 1967:99). The territorial, symbolic and structural in-betweenness of Costa Rica impacts on activist attitudes and while the tensions and ambiguities that show where hegemonic discourse is not able to stabilize its internal contradictions point to the potential for decolonial attitudes, MCD research's assumptions fall short of grasping them. Analytically presuming that a simple inversion of power relations would empower the previously marginalized ultimately fails to make sense of the varying complicities and contestations in activists' lives (cf. Gustafsson 2009:112).

Decolonial cosmopolitanism and the concept of pluriversality has the potential to make sense of the latter without falling into the dangers of the first, contributing to the formation of a more equitable global community, but only when the framework of MCD research overcomes its binary perception of social relations. In its current state of conceptualization, decolonial cosmopolitanism as emancipative outlook and political practice which sets as horizon of possibility a pluriversal world "in which many worlds fit" (Olsesen 2004:262) should be scrutinized as concept that aims to construct a claim towards counter-hegemonic struggle both in academia and political practice. Looking at the findings of my analysis through the analytical trope of the 'liminal' thus also points to the way MCD research tries to invest the position of being marginalized in the global

⁶⁶ When applied in this context, the concept of liminality does not only point to the 'in-betweenness' of activists attitudes in Costa Rica that do not conform to the positing of binaries, being more fragmented and complex, but also to the Latin origin of the term, *limes* or *limen*, which means boundary or threshold (Glare 1982:1031 in Balduk 2008:vi). The concept of decolonial cosmopolitanism, by departing from the assumption that the workings of power can be reduced to subjects profiting or suffering from Eurocentric global relations of dominations, constructs clear boundaries between those colonized – and thus able to decolonize – and those obstructing such emancipative movements for their own gains. The constitutive drive for reflexive dialogue inherent to decolonial cosmopolitanism thus seems to be based on presumptions identifying whom to enter in dialogue with, possibly contributing to the hardening of social frontiers within postcolonial societies.

order with normative values of empowerment by employing this marginalization as a political tool for struggles of recognition within power structures (Conroy and Ruyter 2009:3-5; cf. Sharman 2001; Rumelili 2003; Adelson 1994). In this sense the concept of hegemony, as understood in post-structuralist theory, might be useful in making sense of how the everyday interactions and communications of my respondents articulate hegemonic power, but also leave spaces for contestation through ambiguities and tensions that might be exploited for creating counter-hegemonic alliances, for example through claims for pluriversality as basis for emancipative struggles (Gramsci 1971:238; Buttigieg 1995:7; Laclau and Mouffe 2001).

All in all, decolonial cosmopolitanism is a crucial concept for making sense of postcolonial social relations particularly in Latin America today, but only when understood as a concept that aims to explain social reality with the intent to use political, socio-economic and symbolic categories to empower and mobilize a certain part of population, rather than as an analytical concept aiming to deconstruct and make sense of the varied ramifications of the colonial times on contemporary social relations. It points to the tensions of the postcolonial condition but cannot adequately explain their workings and origins as it departs from a limited conception of power that privileges the epistemic, neglecting everyday practices and materiality. It thus exemplifies how notions of cosmopolitanism from below intermesh political goals and claims of academic authority to foster and support subaltern political projects aiming at empowerment through constructing transnational linkages with global connotations. Nonetheless, the political potential of the concept of decolonial cosmopolitanism for fostering pluriversal, counter-hegemonic projects rooted in the local but conscious of the necessity to enter the global is undeniably – also mirrored in the enthusiasm with which the concept has been received not only in Latin American academic circles, but also in radical political projects aiming for social change.

7 Conclusion

The biggest analytical challenge for the concept of decolonial cosmopolitanism consists in its inherent contradiction: While it is presumed that the actions and attitudes of people in the Latin American postcolony are inevitably governed by the categories and logics of coloniality that prevent the emancipation of the subaltern, these very categories and logics at the same time constitute the point of departure for emancipative social change. The only way to solve this seeming contradiction is to fall back to understanding subaltern emancipation first and foremost as ‘de-linking’, or the overcoming of these oppressive logics through an epistemic shift away from ‘hegemonic’ epistemology and toward the strengthening of indigenous epistemologies and cosmologies. One danger of such a conceptualization of social transformation is its opening up of a division between ‘authentic subaltern’ and everything ‘white’, ‘colonial’ and ‘European’, resulting in an inversion of positionalities that is not able to account for the tensions and ambiguities inherent in all social constructions of identity and political agency. MCD research in general has a tendency to fall back to positing binary distinctions instead of tackling the more complex realities of the social world.

Transnational advocacy from the Global South is most assuredly not automatically decolonial. Nevertheless, it is also neither automatically hopelessly co-opted by Western actors nor irredeemably Eurocentric. The picture that is presented, instead of one coherent logic of coloniality being operative in shaping transnational postcolonial advocacy through racism, capitalism and the silencing of other epistemologies, is better characterized as a liminal terrain in which hegemony is stabilized but also contested through the everyday practices and orientations within transnational advocacy. Particularly those whose activism is channeled through the more privileged organizations pursuing regional understanding and peace implement projects and display orientations that show a more universalizing stance, as they perceive no inherent ambiguity in respecting difference while at the same time educating and capacitating those that are posited as different. Nonetheless, their narratives reveal tensions with regard to this general tendency, just as those working in the rights-based organizations are more critical of global and national power relations, but do not display a desire to de-link from the very system that keeps their organization’s alive, even though taking an ethical stance oriented towards pluriversality. Those activists that self-identify as indigenous see pluriversality as the only means to create a global community that does not perpetuate the colonial difference and also express a desire to de-link through fighting for more autonomy for indigenous territories and also, in the case of Rodrigo,

through refusing to be a part of the development machine. Nonetheless, Rodrigo, who most proudly claims indigenous territories to be autonomous from all and everybody, aims to become more connected to the world market through using the Internet to sell tourist packages and indigenous art. Such strategies are undoubtedly more feasible than a complete de-linking, just as education and capacitation projects might contribute to the empowerment of their target groups and not only be complicit in sustaining their global domination. MCD research, however, draws up clear boundaries in positing some actors as decolonial and some as complicit in contributing to the perpetuation of global relations of domination.

Nonetheless, Decolonial cosmopolitanism has the potential to be more than a fighting creed of the subaltern leading to the "the exclusion of the excluders by the excluded" (Castells 2010:9), but only if MCD research acknowledges that the boundaries between excluder and excluded are not clear-cut and that the more complex realities of the social world necessitate a more complex theory of power and hegemony.

What has to be kept in mind when assessing my results is that these findings are based on a small sample of Costa Rican activists. Thus, I can only assume the general tendencies that my research unearthed to mirror the general tendencies of transnational advocacy in Costa Rica, Central America, or the Global South. Furthermore, the biases that were part of my research strategy might have led me to very specific activists who also might have been hesitant to openly criticize the work of their own organization in front of a Western researcher and who might also have overplayed some facets of their activism that they thought to be more in line with my research interests. Due to the short period of time that I spent in the field, I could not implement more long-term strategies of building trust and had to rely on the dynamics of the first meeting to be sufficient for a quick rapport between my respondents and me. In some cases, this rapport did not emerge⁶⁷. As the language of the interviews is not my native language, even though I am fluent in it, I might also have misinterpreted some utterances, as well mistranslated some of the quotations used to illustrate my findings. Possibly more invalidating is the possibility of arbitrariness when having chosen the issues under scrutiny in my empirical analysis that I saw as expressions of the analytical framework of MCD research. Even though I conducted extensive literature research in order to make sure

⁶⁷ I interviewed Teresa, for example, during the break of a conference which both of us were attending, me having been invited by an acquaintance of mine who also presented her to me as possible participant in my research. Due to the circumstances of our meeting and the context of the interview, the insights I could gain from her narrative are comparatively smaller than from the other interviews. Nevertheless, her narrative confirmed the tendencies already visible in the rest of my data.

that I understood and represented the MCD framework as intended by its members and also profited from personal communication with some of its advocates who affirmed my initial impression of its analytical and political stance, errors and misrepresentations might have occurred.

Notwithstanding the limitations of my research, my study contributes to academic debate in at least four ways: Firstly, through my analysis, the concept of decolonial cosmopolitanism, which has largely been developed in theoretical work, has been scrutinized with regard to its validity as an analytical tool for empirical research, if only at a small scope. This is an important contribution to MCD research, which is based mainly on theoretical work or historical analyses, without many examples of researchers doing empirical work using qualitative data that has been analyzed according to scientific standards in order to undergird their arguments. While, arguably, the validity of 'scientific standards' is not recognized by the great majority of decolonial scholars, empirical research based on more conventional methods of analysis nevertheless ensures that the theoretical claims made by scholars are tested with regard to their ability to reflect social reality. This ensures connectivity to 'mainstream' research, postcolonial and otherwise, but also contributes to the improvement of theoretical work as analytical premisses are examined and, if necessary, refined. Academic scholarship has to distinguish between normative political concepts and analytically sound scientific concepts that can validly be used in scientific research for producing knowledge on social phenomena.

I also argue, secondly and in the context of research on social movements, that some of the problems and inherent contradictions that plague radical decolonial movements, for example the strengthening of the boundary between different social groups instead of its blurring through dialogue as can be observed in contemporary Bolivia (Gustafsson 2009:111-112), might be reflected and more easily made sense of in the processes of conventional postcolonial advocacy and through the examination of the premisses for intercultural dialogue that decolonial scholars and activists set. Simultaneously, some of the practical and epistemological difficulties of transnational activism that I have examined might be mirrored in transnational advocacy in general, as processes of professionalization and pressures for transnationalization have impacted on civil society organizing not only in Central America but planet-wide.

Thirdly, the debate on global civil society can profit not only from the insights into the practices of transnational activism that I have traced, for example with regard to the role of networks in transnational activism and the respective attitudes of activists, but also

from the examination of an alternative conception of global civil society departing from the positionality of subaltern Latin America. The transnationalization of activism, instead of pointing to an emerging global civil society, might to some extent also be furthered by the demands of the development machine and as such, the existence of globally connected civic actors does not automatically represent a counterweight to economic and state actors, but might even more likely support the global hegemonies of today's world. On the other hand, radical conceptions of globalizing local struggles through transnational networking and dialogue are gaining ground, from Chiapas to Porto Alegre, and offer new ways of understanding global solidarity. These conceptualizations, while undoubtedly normative and not without political connotations, nevertheless point to the need of taking the continuing inequalities of the world, as well as the growing possibilities for transnational connectivity, more seriously as factors shaping social relations and political movements worldwide. They also point to the necessity of examining the normative and political connotations of 'Eurocentric' visions of global governance and global civil society.

Fourthly, my findings show that cosmopolitan debate has to be more concerned with the locus of enunciation of people and seriously take into consideration the growing inequalities of the globalized world as fundamental dynamic for identity formation. As most of cosmopolitan debate has been conducted from within and about people on the privileged side of the 'colonial difference', claiming their findings to be universally valid, other forms of cosmopolitan attitudes have been invisibilized. By raising the questions I have in this analysis, these dynamics become clearer, and a possible road for refining cosmopolitan debate by scrutinizing the shape cosmopolitanism as attitude and political project takes in the Global South, as well as by re-examining cosmopolitanism's inherent universalizing tendencies, has been paved.

These implications provide sufficient grounds for validating and transcending my findings through new research that takes up my basic questions to gain new insights. The impact of decolonial scholarship in academic and political circles makes the task of scrutinizing its underlying presumptions and claims an important endeavor. While the decolonial project would profit from the theoretical refinement of its central tenets, mainstream debate would gain insights into the specific conditions and points of departure for actors from the Global South aiming to construct global community through theoretical work, but also through concrete political projects. The commonalities and tensions between 'Northern' theories of cosmopolitanism and 'Southern' decolonial and subaltern conceptions of cosmopolitanism, as well as

between decolonial and mainstream conceptions of global civil society, could be analyzed more thoroughly to provide a more stable basis for future empirical research. Methodologically, more extensive empirical analyses that include other groups of activists, or a narrowing down to only one social movement or group to examine in more depth how everyday practices and discursive orientations interact to stabilize or contradict each other would be fruitful.

Decolonial cosmopolitanism as a form of cosmopolitanism from below aims to propose ways of imagining – and putting into practice – a truly globe-encompassing global community not based on relations of domination but on horizontal dialogue on equal terms. While the premisses on which the concept is based suffer from some analytical drawbacks, its importance lies in its ability to take as point of departure the concrete spaces in which situated social relations develop. It allows for perceiving the increasing interconnectedness between different levels of social and political organizing as background for the fostering of visions on how to combine local situatedness with global community as normative horizon.

Envisioning an equitable global community in which relations of domination based on coloniality have been eradicated – as activists, decolonial academics and increasingly also Latin American voters do – might be an utopia and the ways which are proposed for achieving this ‘world where many worlds fit’ might also lack analytical refinement and at times a blindness to the ambiguities inherent to concrete social realities. Nonetheless, these approaches point to the political potential of such visions in today’s interconnected world. Decolonial cosmopolitanism demands reflexivity about one’s own, but also the ‘Other’s’ standpoint, and its proponents should take this to heart and practice constant critique and self-reflection as these are quintessential for the further development of the concept, but also for the political projects leaning on it.

8 References

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