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### Territories of Difference Book Review

In *Territories of Difference*, Arturo Escobar explores many themes that showcase the relationship that communities have with difference, a concept that describes the relationship between territory and identity. He looks primarily at the communities in the Columbian Pacific and analyzes the politics of difference in six different territories: place, capital, nature, development, identity, and networks. In these territories, there is an interesting recurring idea of the separation between the Western Euro-centric understanding of the world, and the distinct traditional, cultural understanding of the world that each community possesses. Below I will discuss the three chapters that I felt most strongly with, but all six chapters focus on very important themes surrounding understanding and respecting other traditions.

In chapter one, Escobar focuses on the differences in place. He makes the connection that the loss of territory becomes the loss of traditional values and identity by analyzing the destructive effect that colonialism had on the communities in the Columbian Pacific. Colonizing countries would commandeer the local political, economic, and social systems in the name of “saving” a community that was less developed, but this led to the loss of the identity of that community. Everything they had was tossed to the side and replaced with the euro-centric idea of “West is Best,” when it is not always. There is so much more that we can learn from these

“underdeveloped” countries than we think. One example that comes to mind for me is Wangari Maathai and The Green Belt Movement. The Kenyan Government was pushing the idea to industrialize and modernize the country and its agricultural sector, which led to the mass destruction of the forests in the country. Maathai decided that the national identity was more important than the urbanization of the country, and began a grassroots organization that held the value of subsistence living – which was the tradition of the country. Maathai felt the loss of traditional values and identity in her country, the same that Escobar talks about in this chapter.

In chapter two, Escobar describes how capitalism is often the system that will threaten the local communities the most. It is a “crisis-dependent system” (Escobar, 93) that sacrifices the local processes in favor of a global machine. Capitalism is a system that works (kind of) for some, but favors globalization and autonomy over preservation of local traditions. The penetration of capitalism makes it so the local businesses cannot thrive as they were, as populations begin to favor the larger businesses with more product readily available. In California, we are seeing this happen even now. In the midst of a pandemic, local businesses are struggling because companies like Amazon and large grocery store chains are able to transition easily. Most of these local businesses could be deemed as essential, allowing them to stay open, but they simply cannot compete with the bigger, more global corporations. Communities then take a hit because the workers that typically keep them running are now struggling for work, or even struggling to keep a job that is above minimum wage. Many small businesses can’t compete with the wages that larger corporations can offer to employees. Capitalism pushes local nature and the local economy to the side in favor of the global, but then a complicated relationship

reveals itself in Escobar's research: the natural environment and workers need to be preserved in any capitalist economy because it is reliant on them.

In chapter five, Escobar discusses the origin of identity within communities and how it is mobilized through social movements. I found this to be particularly interesting because it asked the question of what pushes people to become activists? I believe that finding an identity in their cultural history is key. Once people find this identity, they are motivated to make the social changes necessary to remedy the issue they found. Again, we can turn to Wangari Maathai as an example. She became an activist advocating for the saving of the forests in her home that held so many memories and cultural history. Escobar finds these same ideas, but in the black communities in the Columbian Pacific. The idea of place, capitalism and identity all being interconnected was so interesting to me because you can find commonalities all around the world between three things that don't immediately have something in common, which is something that Escobar emphasizes throughout his analysis of territories of difference.