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- Major Research Paper -

Negotiating the ‘tropical Eden’
– Exploring the political dimensions of forest carbon sequestration projects in the Colombian Pacific region

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Abstract

Afro-Colombian forests are earmarked for the implementation of Payments for Environmental Services (PES) schemes, particularly in the context of climate change mitigation efforts such as Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD). In international as well as national policy, REDD is being promoted as a promising mechanism to deliver in support of local socioeconomic development and foster forest conservation. Yet, critics question the implications of market-based conservation strategies, and their potential effects on communities that depend on natural resources. Situated within a political ecology theoretical framework, this paper explores the potential impacts a market-based conservation approach might have on the struggle for Afro-Colombian rights and recognition. It does so by drawing on the historical-cultural context of a long-standing territorial struggle, changes in governance practices, and related shifts in resource access and control.

Keywords: Colombia, Afro-Colombian communities, environmental politics, ethnicity, market-based conservation, PES, REDD+

This paper is dedicated to my mother, who gave me wings and roots.

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Introduction

Colombia is gearing up to claim its share in the global forest carbon business but there is still a clear gap of knowledge how this will affect the Afro-Colombian communities that call the forests home. In the case of the communities who inhabit the biodiversity-rich and densely forested lowlands of the Pacific coast (see Annex 1), an analysis of planned or existing forest carbon projects must take into consideration their broader struggle for recognition of civil as well as cultural and territorial rights. This paper will focus on the rural Afro-Colombian communities that hold collective land titles in the Pacific coastal region of Colombia, as it is their forests that are the focus of carbon sequestration projects.

A small number of communities currently hold such collective titles to land situated along the coast. These territorial gains are the result of a cultural politics spearheaded by some parts of the Afro-Colombian movement that stressed the political-cultural aspects of territory. For these communities, constitutional support has been in place since the early 1990s to allow for self-government, but despite these successes, the situation of the communities continues to be precarious (CODHES, 2011). While the constitution asserts the right to development and protection against discrimination and creates mechanisms for Afro-Colombian participation in all levels and kinds of development projects, the implementation of relevant legislation is slow at best (Rapoport Center for Human Rights and Justice, 2007). At the same time, Afro-Colombian land is sought-after to make space for bio-fuel plantations, mining operations or coca crops, and local communities continue to suffer the impact of the armed conflict that embroils the region (Offen, 2003). It is in this complex context that forest carbon projects need to be considered.

In the past decade, Payments for Environmental Services (PES) have become an important tool for conservation, especially with the rise of climate change mitigation mechanisms that harness payments for ‘Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation’ (REDD). The Colombian government is keenly aware of the potential that indigenous and Afro-Colombian managed territories hold in this regard and there are a number of public-private funded community-level projects already underway.

Most scholars agree that forest carbon projects will have profound social and political effects, although what form these will take is still unclear as there are few empirical studies to date. In Colombia as elsewhere, many PES and REDD projects will operate at the community level, due to the prevalence of communal property rights, but this raises a number of concerns. Some argue that REDD could significantly strengthen support for community-based natural resource management and livelihoods (Agrawal & Angelsen, 2009), while others warn that it could lead to a re-centralization of decision making and rights over forests, and a loss of community control over natural resources (Phelps & Webb, 2010). In response to these concerns there has been a focus on addressing questions of REDD design in order to avoid negative social impacts and maximize the benefit for local communities (Angelsen, 2009; Angelsen & Research, 2008).

Generally, the focus of much of the REDD literature has been on how external factors affect the possible implementation of REDD programs and how REDD can be adapted to local circumstances. However, what appears to be missing is an examination of the possible impacts of REDD on the local political context and broader struggles around control of natural resources. One key feature of a market-based conservation

discourse is the way it privileges the market as an institution for delivering public goods, and tends to obscure the political dimensions of ‘conservation’ efforts (Castree, 2008).

Thus, the objective this paper is to explore the impact of market-style conservation on the renegotiation of environment-human relations. More specifically, it aims to examine how REDD might interact with the various socio-political struggles that are affecting rural Afro-Colombian communities. Therefore, the main research question that this paper addresses is:

- What are the political dimensions of forest carbon sequestration projects in relation to the broader context of Afro-Colombian socio-political struggles?

The specific questions to be considered include:

- How does a PES modality affect the way that Afro-Colombian community is positioned in relation to their resources?
- What scenarios are likely to unfold and what are their possible outcomes?

To address the above research questions, this analysis is situated within a broad political ecology framework. This analytical approach combines an examination of deforestation narratives that establish both a problem definition and possible solutions as well as an analysis of the role the notions of ethnicity plays in structuring local human-environment relationships.

To begin, Part 1 sets out the theoretical framework for the paper. Here, I give a brief overview of the key tenets of political ecology and the conservation and control thesis (Robbins, 2010), a stream of analysis that focuses on how conservation efforts tend to disempower local users and producers in the name of preserving the environment. Furthermore, I briefly present the Foucauldian concept of discourse and Said’s notion of representation that will later form part of the discussion around the production of

knowledge around deforestation and the constructed notion of black ethnicity. In Part 2, I will provide relevant background information on the Pacific coastal region of Colombia, focusing on the role of multicultural policies in the constitutional reform in 1991, the notion of black ethnicity and the pressures on land in the Pacific coastal region of Colombia. Part 3 will examine the research questions by drawing on the analytical tools developed in the theoretical framework.

Methodology

The modalities and impacts of market-based conservation approaches are highly place specific (Roth & Dressler, 2012) and the racialized context of the Pacific region in Colombia poses a number of particular challenges. To consider the political impacts of REDD+ this paper therefore follows a case study approach, drawing on secondary sources.

For information on the political processes relating to Afro-Colombians, a number of authors have produced rich ethnographic studies that provide historical context (Asher, 2009; Escobar, 2008; Asher, 2000) and critically examine the changes that have occurred since the constitutional reform in 1991 (Ng'weno, 2007; Hooker, 2005; Paschel, 2010; Wade, 2012). Additionally, grey literature, such as project reports (Carbon Central Network, nd; Anthroctect, nd), donor publications (Kernan, Monje C., & von Hildebrand M., 2006), as well as material published by various Afro-Colombian groups, such as statements and reports (Foro Interétnico Solidaridad Choco (FISCH), 2011; Comision de Estudio, 2012; Conferencia Nacional de Organizaciones Afrocolombianas (CNOA), 2008), and information produced by the Government of Colombia (Ortega-P., 2010; Government of Colombia, 2011) are important sources to assess the local dimensions of carbon forestry efforts. In terms of the mechanism of forest carbon sequestration, there is a large body of literature that covers the technical aspects of REDD and its implementation (Angelsen, 2009; Corbera & Brown, 2010; Hufty & Haakenstad, 2011). This literature often includes prescriptions regarding aspects such as land tenure, financing mechanisms or emissions monitoring (Van Dam, 2011; Springate-Baginski & Wollenberg; Reed, 2011; Griffiths & Martone, 2009; Bond, 2008). At the same time there is also a slowly growing number of empirical studies that consider the socio-

economic impact of early forest carbon projects (Pereira, 2010; Pagiola, Arcenas, & Platais, 2005) which offer valuable insights into the potential benefits and emerging shortcomings of these projects.

An inherent feature of the case study approach is the specificity of the context that is being examined and the limits to what extent the resulting insights can be applied to other settings and contribute to theory-building. In the case of the Afro-Colombian communities on the Pacific Coast, the main challenges lie in the demographic, topographic and historical idiosyncrasies that limit the representativeness of the study, even when applied to other Afro-descendant communities across South and Central America.

Nonetheless, the most important limitations for the present study lie in the still pending official approval of the mechanism and in the fact that in Colombia national REDD+ frameworks and relevant legislation are still being developed. Consequently, the present analysis can only offer an exploration of possible scenarios, based on the political context in Colombia, experiences from early carbon forestry projects and literature on PES in general. As both REDD negotiations as well as the implementation of forest carbon sequestration projects advance, further studies will contribute to our understanding of the complex political interactions that these projects generate.

Part 1 - Theoretical framework and methodology

1.1 Political ecology

As an analytical approach, political ecology helps to examine the causes and consequences of social and ecological change. In this section, I set out the key conceptual tools comprising the theoretical framework that inform my analysis.

To begin with, I will give a brief overview of the field of political ecology, including its origins and sources of influence. Since the main feature of the field of political ecology is its analytical and theoretical breadth, it proves necessary to locate my particular approach within this broad literature. Above all, the notion of the ‘social construction of nature’ is helpful to explain the ways in which natural resource management and resource use represent struggles over material conditions and struggles over meaning (Robbins, 2010). According to Robbins (2010), the *conservation and control* stream of analysis focuses on how conservation efforts tend to disempower local users and producers in the name of preserving the environment. For my analysis, two additional theoretical tools, Foucault’s notion of discourse (Foucault, 1977) and Said’s concept of representation (Said, 1978), help to highlight how not only the knowledge around deforestation but also some of the qualities associated with black ‘ethnicity’ have been discursively produced.

The foundations of political ecology can be found in the sub-disciplines of cultural geography and anthropology, including cultural ecology (Robbins, 2010; Bryant, 1998). The varied conceptual and research approaches now considered to form part of political ecology scholarship emerged mainly as a response to the apolitical ecologies that dominated early explanations of human-environment relations. Fuelled by Malthusian admonitions of ecoscarcity and impending limits to growth, the dominant 1970s narrative

focused on a perceived approaching ‘ecological crisis’. Studies that aimed to show how this type of analysis tended to ignore broader political and economic forces to explain environmental degradation form part of the foundations of political ecology literature (Robbins, 2010; Bryant, 1998).

However, given the empirical and theoretical heterogeneity of political ecology, it defies any effort to represent it as a single theory or body of theory (Robbins, 2010). Indeed, “it seems easier to say what [political ecology] is, than what it is not” (Blaikie, 2008 quoted in Robbins, 2010, p. 84). Instead, Robbins describes political ecology as an intellectual practice that applies concepts from a variety of different schools of thought to examine socio-environmental outcomes and thus presents it rather as a community of practice, whose diverse constituency is concerned with making sense of human-environment relations (Robbins, 2010). Indeed, this constituency is as broad as the conceptual approaches it draws on. Tracing the theoretical development of political ecology since the early 1970s reveals the multitude of different worldviews and resulting methodological approaches that have been taken by researchers engaging in political ecology research (Robbins, 2010; Bryant, 1998).

The broad range of influences also provides the practice of political ecology with a large number of theoretical, methodological and even technological resources and tools. But importantly, it does so while guided by overarching common assumptions and modes of explanation that stress that environmental change and ecological conditions are the product of political processes (Robbins, 2010).

Another common thread is a normative concern for environmental justice and political ecologists often focus on how the tensions between development and conservation that pervade local to global scales affect resource use and privilege certain

actors over others. In this way, political ecology has contributed to a large literature of social-ecological systems thinking that offers robust critiques of dominant development and natural resource management paradigms (Brosius, Tsing, & Zerner, 2005; Peet, Robbins, & Watts, 2010; Berkes, 2004). For the purposes of this study, political ecology is thus conceived as a flexible analytical framework that will guide the discussion and generate questions that will shed light on a complex set of actors and circumstances.

According to Stott and Sullivan the objective of political ecology revolves around “illustrating the political dimensions of environmental narratives and in deconstructing particular narratives to suggest that accepted ideas of degradation and deterioration may not be simple linear trends that tend to predominate” (Stott and Sullivan, 2000 quoted in Robbins, 2010, p. 16). While not uncontroversial (Robbins, 2010), a constructivist approach succeeds at directing our attention to the social origins of environmental processes and objects and asserts that many environmental processes or concepts are not natural or inevitable. Since many political ecologists share in the notion that these same processes and concepts are doing harm or helping to secure the power of an elites at the expense of less powerful groups, the ‘hatchet’ of deconstruction is meant to expose these unjust processes and allow for a questioning of established practices (Robbins, 2010). Moreover, if the “history of these phenomena can be traced, and their intention discovered, though analysis“ (Hacking quoted in Robbins, 2010, p. 124), there is also opportunity for change. The ‘seed’ of political ecology research encompasses the motivation to inspire change by adjusting concepts and processes to minimize harm (Robbins, 2010).

There are differing levels of commitment to the constructivist approach. In the words of Robbins (2010), ‘soft’ constructivism assumes that “the objective world is real

and independent of our categorization but filtered through subjective conceptual systems and scientific methods that are socially conditioned” (p. 128). In this way, the ‘soft’ constructivist view allows for the biophysical realm to play a role in the production of reality and creates a role for science in attempting to make sense of that reality. Although the ‘soft’ constructivist perspective validates the use of science, it acknowledges that science is itself socially constructed. That is, science can be seen as produced and advanced through negotiations between particular socio-political actors and in fact many political ecologists recognize that science is only one of multiple forms of knowledge-generation (Robbins, 2010). Consequently, given that multiple epistemologies and thus multiple conceptions of nature exist simultaneously, political ecology can be summed up to be concerned with how certain socio-political actors assert particular conceptions over others, thereby shaping human-environment interactions and affecting change on the ground (Escobar, 1996; Escobar, 1998).

1.1.1 The conservation and control thesis

Within the broad field of political ecology literature, it is possible to make out a number of different streams of analysis that aim to explain human-environment interactions and environmental change. In particular, processes of environmental degradation and conservation efforts have long been a focus of political ecology scholarship.

Historically, the state has not only played a prominent role in natural resource management but it also still tends to hold ownership of large tracts of land such as forests. In many regions of the global South, colonization and its aftermath have shaped power relations that encouraged nation-states to seize lands for ‘productive’ land use such as export agriculture. This often disrupted traditional systems of land use, and thus

established a legacy by which local communities have lost and continue to lose control over the access and use of the lands on which they reside and depend (Robbins, 2010). Today, commercial interests such as inter- or multinational corporations, large landowners, and local elites may also own and/or control the management of large tracts of land. Contemporary practices of land management that are driven by the imperative of the market economy to expand and generate capital at the expense of local livelihoods and ecosystems have resulted in widespread environmental and social degradation across the globe. However, this environmental and social degradation is often framed in terms of problems generated by the supposedly inadequate land management practices of those politically and economically marginalized populations whose customary land use and livelihood practices have been replaced by more ‘advanced’ practices.

In response to increasing environmental degradation, conservation efforts, especially those driven by international actors in the 1980s and 1990s, were striving to close off endangered areas and rid them of their inhabitants. In effect, it has been argued that this approach continued the earlier imperialist process of displacing people from their homelands and restricting their access and use of subsistence resources. Today, conservation approaches attempt to work with local communities by combining socio-economic development activities and conservation, albeit with varying results (Blaikie, 2006).

Research on how environmental conservation efforts that aim to protect ‘nature’ but often result in political and economic exclusion and ultimately environmental degradation, can be said to broadly follow the conservation and control thesis (Robbins, 2010). In general terms, approaches that fall in this category describe how

control of resources and landscapes has been wrested from local producers or producer

groups (by class, gender, or ethnicity) through the implementation of efforts to preserve 'sustainability', 'community', or 'nature'. In the process, officials and global interests seeking to preserve the environment have disabled local systems of livelihood, production, and socio-political organization (Robbins, 2010, p. 178).

According to Robbins (2010), this thesis rests on a number of theoretical foundations. To begin with, that the discourse and practice of conservation is established through social institutions and technologies, such as the creation of protected areas and land management regulations. While these technologies and institutions enforce certain behaviors, more importantly they also serve to foster the adoption of specific conservation practices and values that reflect what goals and behaviors are considered socially desirable and what ecological outcomes are appropriate (Robbins, 2010). For example, the implementation of a PES scheme can be seen as a social institution as its modality directly affects existing resource management strategies in favor of project objectives that aim to provide certain ecosystem services. These external requirements might weaken and displace traditional restraints on for example land clearing but they will also foster certain behaviors and strive for certain ecological outcomes through positive incentives and self-enforcing mechanisms (Robbins, 2010). Secondly, studies that apply the *conservation and control thesis* usually involve a questioning of the object or quality that supposedly demands protection. This can involve a critical deconstruction of notions such as 'wild Africa' or 'pristine rainforests', as these concepts and images are often employed to legitimize the enclosure of territories and the exclusion of local communities from these lands (Robbins, 2010). Lastly, this stream of analysis rests on the assumption that the spatial bounding of conservation units into discrete, mappable units is problematic, a view that has recently found support in geographic and ecological research. The fundamental problem is that "the imposition of a political geography over

an ecological geography” (Botkin, 1990, cited in Robbins, 2010, p. 181) is not tenable and does not reflect the movements of animals, people or even plants. Political ecologists often study the geographical patterns of exclusion and access that are generated by these policies and what environmental changes result from these policies.

Within political ecology, discourse analysis is often used to examine the social construction of struggles over natural resource management (Bryant, 1998; Escobar, 1998). This type of analysis serves to challenge dominant paradigms and commonly held assumptions by questioning the validity of the knowledge used in their creation (Robbins, 2010) and deconstruct ideas such as ‘environmental degradation’ and even ‘nature’ itself (Escobar, 1998). Discursive approaches help to make explicit the social construction of human-environment interactions by revealing the power of discourse to generate meanings or representations and thus frame ideas and knowledge. The key question then is no longer *Who* has control of nature?, but rather *Who* has control of *what* nature? (Escobar, 1998). Robbins (2010) asserts the importance of discourse analysis for understanding natural resource management via a political ecology lens:

“If accounts about people like herders or farmers or things like cattle or trees are conditioned and stabilized by social structures of power, the problem is not only understanding how social and environmental conditions change over time, or how they become undesirable, or how they can be changed. The problem is also understanding how scientific accounts, government documents, and local stories about those same social and environmental conditions are formed and made powerful by state institutions, media companies, experts, and families (p. 70)”.

In the context of the current case study, this understanding of discursive formation will be helpful when examining the phenomenon of deforestation and environmental degradation in the Pacific coastal region of Colombia.

According to political ecologists, the failures of dominant conservation approaches are to be found in the inadequate notions of human-environment interactions that guide

their implementation: one that either conceives of humans as external to the natural realm, or that values the well-being of the natural or biophysical realm over that of the human realm. As an example, Escobar's (1998) early study on the use of the term 'biodiversity' in the context the Pacific coastal region of Colombia serves to illustrate the above issues. During his research on the intersection of biodiversity discourse and the political struggles of black communities to gain control of territory in the Pacific rainforest region of Colombia, Escobar (1998) found that four distinct socio-political groups defined and used the concept of biodiversity differently. He concluded, "from a discursive perspective, then, biodiversity does not exist in an absolute sense. Rather, it anchors a discourse that articulates a new relation between nature and society in global contexts of science, cultures, and economics" (p. 5). For the local actors in Escobar's study, the acceptance of an overarching apolitical, modernist framing of biodiversity within the global conservation and development realm in the 1980s contrasted with local perceptions of nature and threatened local autonomy, knowledge, identity and economy.

In Colombia, historically, nature is not only politicized but also racialized as a result of discourses that revolve around citizenship and resource management. Control over land and resources is connected to a variety of social, political and economic processes and international and national policies. These policies have emerged over time in response to the perspectives and goals of a variety of local and non-local socio-political actors. How their policies define the region and become implemented at the local scale has important implications for environmental and social justice. Overall, approaching the present case study from the perspective of the conservation and control thesis, allows to explore the discursive and therefore inherently political modality of

‘avoided deforestation’ in the way that it produces and frames local realities, making intervention both justifiable and possible.

1.2 Power/knowledge, discourse and representation

In addition to insights stemming from political ecology, the present discussion also draws on two other theoretical concepts. Firstly, the notion of discursive power put forward by Michel Foucault. Secondly, and building on this view of (Foucauldian) power, Edward Said’s concept of representation as an expression of discursive power.

Foucault’s radical rethinking of power has proven a useful tool to comprehend the productive aspects of power. According to his analysis, power cannot only be understood as ‘power over’ or only considered in material terms. In contrast to the notion of the state and its institutions wielding power over its subjects, such as in the sense of sovereign power, Foucault demonstrates that in fact power is not a fixed entity, structure or institution but instead relational, resulting from social processes and realized through the social body. In this way, it operates at all levels of society and is omnipresent (Abrahamsen, 2003; Foucault, 1977).

One of most important outcomes of his analysis is the knowledge/power nexus. This linkage speaks of processes of power that create truth, morality and meaning through discourse. By making something a subject of legitimate scientific and scholarly investigation, that object is constructed according to the way it is perceived and understood. In effect, the object of knowledge can only exist through a method of producing it. These methods of knowledge production refer to systems of thought that are made up of attitudes, ideas, beliefs and practices and through a study of how social processes of discursive formation legitimize knowledge and thus create power, Foucault demonstrated that truth is always an effect of discourse and equally contingent on power

relations (Abrahamsen, 2003). Nonetheless, discursive power is exercised rather than possessed and is expressed by determining who can speak, what can be spoken of and how one may speak and it thus creates meaning and truth as well as silences. In this way, discourses, or modes of thinking, construct social realities. Additionally, it is the productive aspect of power that constitutes people's ways of thinking of the world, themselves and other around them through discursive formation rather than simply constraining it. More or less coherent ways of representation of a given realm of activity and experience therefore render visible or conceal those power relations (Wade, 2012).

Building on Foucault's understanding of power, in his seminal book *Orientalism*, Edward Said (1978) dissected the discursive formation of the Orient, showing how the East had been constructed as Other in the Western mind by a tradition of representation and how this had affected the production of knowledge about the East. The positioning of a superior Occident and an inferior Orient was used to legitimize colonial rule and normalize Western colonialism's civilizing mission as bringing the Orient into modernity. In this way, power and knowledge were intimately related. Said argues that Orientalism can be understood "as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (Said, 1978, p. 3) and he showed through example that knowledge production is never apolitical or neutral but rather located within power relations. Applying this mode of deconstruction to the Colombian context will permit to explore how a variety of knowledges about black people and their relationship to land, natural resources and identity are produced and codified through a variety of means (Wade, 2012). Thus, weaving together notions of power and social construction with a political ecology perspective allows interrogating the socio-political processes at play in environmental knowledge formation, validation and assertion.

1.3 Market-based conservation and payment for ecosystem services (PES)

As the focus of this paper is on the political dimensions of market-based conservation, it is necessary to situate PES-related research within political ecology literature. For a decade, PES has been widely promoted as a new mechanism for enabling conservation of a multitude of ecosystem services, often at community level (Corbera, Brown, & Adger, 2007). These ecosystem services are, in the broadest terms, the benefits that humans derive from nature, such as clean water, air quality or carbon storage. The growing interest in PES reflects the rapidly increasing importance of the concept of environmental or ecosystem services following the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment. PES schemes aim to address supposed market failures whereby the individuals or groups who provide those services do not obtain economic benefits generated by an ecosystem and who consequently lack incentives to conserve those resources. They attempt to diversify the income opportunities of rural populations whose livelihoods depend directly or indirectly on ecosystem goods and services (Corbera, Brown, & Adger, 2007).

The implementation of PES mechanisms is subject to voluntary and conditional contracts between a buyer and a seller in which a well-defined environmental service is purchased. Two key concepts in PES arrangements are *additionality* and *conditionality*. Additionality signifies that payments made must secure an environmental service that would not have been produced anyway in the absence of those payments. Conditionality means payment for the service is conditional on some defined performance criteria that must be met by the providers or sellers. PES mechanisms with these characteristics are also sometimes termed performance payments or direct payments for conservation (Corbera & Brown, 2010).

Currently, PES are an important feature of debates around the increasing

marketization of conservation and environmental management. A growing body of recent scholarship is engaged with the political economy and practice of neoliberal nature (Castree, 2008b; Castree, 2008; McAfee, 1999; Igoe & Brockington, 2007). This literature is analytically concerned with the linkages between neoliberalism, on the one hand, and environmental governance, environmental change, and environmental politics, on the other. The plural nature of this literature is both a strength and, according to Castree, its weakness (2008). It is an asset in that it speaks to criticisms within political ecology about abstracting nature from social, geographical, and historical contexts (McAfee, 1999) but while this often empirical work exposes the hybrid and uneven nature of market-based conservation, it often fails to deliver a clear and comprehensive analysis of this trend in ways that can effectively challenge neoliberal policies (Castree 2008). As such, this gap in the literature is noteworthy, as many scholars are highly critical of the project of market-based conservation but collectively lag behind in providing alternatives (Castree, 2008b).

Market-based approaches to conservation are diversely manifested, but usually involve a change to the conservation landscape where the state is joined by the private sector and non-governmental organizations, resulting in complex and often fragmented natural resource governance. Accompanying these changes, on a national level, natural resource management regulations are often adapted to facilitate market-based approaches as a means of achieving conservation goals (Igoe & Brockington, 2007; Roth & Dressler, 2012). By opening new spaces for capital expansion through processes such as privatization and commodification, these interventions profoundly reshape nature–society relations (Castree, 2008).

Regarding the political dimensions of PES, these become apparent in a number of

ways. On the one hand, the implementation of PES usually requires a simplification of social and ecological complexity that focuses on the marketable aspects of the ecosystem in question, involving the translation of complex processes into identifiable and measurable services, and the monetary valuation of those services (Milne & Adams, 2012). Furthermore, critics also point to the way how PES tend to mask social relations that underlie processes of production (Kosoy, Corbera, & Brown, 2009), and warn of the potential negative effects of marketization for equitable and ethical environmental management that tend to benefit elite interests (Igoe & Brockington, 2007).

Lastly, it is important to consider that local manifestations of PES are highly varied depending on ecological and social, economic and political conditions. A number of studies show that in practice many PES schemes actually become hybrids of market-like mechanisms, state regulation and subsidies (Roth & Dressler, 2012). Therefore, it is not necessarily the aspect of environmental markets and their effects that is the most relevant for understanding the implications of PES for communities and conservation. Instead, the significance of PES lies in the political and social effects of its design and implementation that relate to their interaction with the broader political context, and not in its functioning as a market per se (Milne & Adams, 2012).

1.3.1 Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+)

The Earth's forests store up to 50% (Hufty & Haakenstad, 2011) of terrestrial organic carbon and are invaluable sources of biodiversity, but current patterns of exploitation focus on destructive uses of forests. As much as 13 million hectares are lost annually to deforestation, 97% of which occurs in tropical countries (Hufty & Haakenstad, 2011). It is estimated that deforestation and forest degradation, through agricultural expansion,

conversion to pastureland, infrastructure development and destructive logging account for nearly 20% of global greenhouse gas emissions. This is more than the entire global transportation sector and second only to the energy sector (UN-REDD, nd). Moreover, deforestation inflicts high biodiversity losses and triggers the loss of key ecosystem services (Hufty & Haakenstad, 2011). As a result, there is widespread agreement on the need to halt deforestation.

In the context of United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change negotiations, “avoided deforestation” had originally not been included in the Kyoto Protocol. Controversial forest and other land issues were left out for a variety of reasons including the apparent complexity of managing deforestation and forest degradation, fear of a possible flood of credits into the carbon markets and possible negative biodiversity impacts. Instead, the Kyoto Protocol’s Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) saw the development of forest-related carbon sink projects and the implementation of carbon-forestry PES. For example, by harnessing the carbon market CDM projects offer to compensate developed countries’ excess carbon emissions with tree plantations in developing countries. These projects have been criticized for promoting large monoculture tree plantations and actually promote deforestation, as well as involving problems of additionality, leakage and permanence. Other approaches to tackle deforestation have involved PES schemes (Tacconi, Mahanty, & Suich, 2010), but critical accounts have highlighted their tendency to focus excessively on one resource (e.g. water) or reproducing and even strengthening power asymmetries and social inequalities (Kosoy, Corbera, & Brown, 2009).

Revisiting the proposal of avoided deforestation, at the 11th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in 2005, a

group of developing countries proposed a mechanism called ‘Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation’ (REDD). Portrayed as a ‘win-win’ for developing and developed countries alike, the mechanism has not only gained widespread momentum but also generated an abundant literature, including academic papers, reports and advocacy papers, despite the fact that it remains experimental and under negotiation (Hufty & Haakenstad, 2011).

The basic idea of REDD is to generate a significant level of compensation or economic incentive to outweigh the income generated through deforestation. REDD is presented as a cost effective mitigation option for climate change and a potential development opportunity since it would provide additional financial resources for national governments and local communities to invest in health, education and sustainable development. Thus, by preventing deforestation, global carbon emissions could be reduced significantly and at a lower cost, while simultaneously accomplishing development objectives. Moreover, a ‘+’ has recently been added, which includes conservation, in protected areas or indigenous reserves for example, sustainable management of forests, such as forest certification, and enhancement of forest carbon stocks through reforestation and regeneration (UN-REDD, nd).

REDD+ is envisioned as an international financial transfer mechanism that directs payments to forest owners and users. As such, it is a quintessential PES mechanism and it is seen as an efficient means to deliver localized incentives and benefits (Angelsen, 2009). This compensation mechanism has yielded optimism among economists and others: “Market mechanisms that rely on PES [are] the most promising tools to create the necessary financial transfers to motivate conservation and restoration of forests in developing countries” (Streck & Scholz, 2006, cited in (Pereira, 2010, p. 175). Broad

international support has created the potential for a rapid increase in the number and geographical coverage of environmental service agreements under REDD+, alongside other forestry sector reforms (Mahanty, 2011, p. 2). Currently, the debate continues on the most appropriate international and national architecture for REDD+ schemes, and how global mechanisms will mesh with national and local initiatives with private sector and NGO support (Angelsen & Research, 2008; Angelsen, 2009).

At the forefront of supporting REDD+ are several UN organizations, including the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), which, as of 2008, have collectively combined their efforts into a program known as UN-REDD. The World Bank is the other major actor in REDD+ and The Bank's Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF) is spearheading its REDD+ programs (Thompson, Baruah, & Carr, 2011).

Despite the strong push in favor of REDD+, a number of issues have been raised. Among the main concerns with REDD+ are *leakage*, *additionality*, and *permanence*. *Leakage* refers to a situation in which deforestation avoided in one area results in deforestation in another, whether within or between countries, which would severely undermine the effectiveness of REDD+ projects. *Additionality* is the necessary condition that an achieved reduction in deforestation should be greater than what would have occurred otherwise. Lastly, *permanence* makes references to the maintenance of forests and their carbon sequestration capacities over time (Hufty & Haakenstad, 2011).

Furthermore, stemming from PES experiences are concerns related to equity and whether REDD+ will instigate elite capture of benefits to the detriment of those with less power and resources, as has been the case with other conservation schemes (Cotula,

2009). Linked to inequity, opportunity and transactions costs have also been discussed and some question the possibility that local small-scale forest users can participate as equals in selling carbon (Hufty & Haakenstad, 2011).

Indigenous groups have raised yet another set of concerns that sees REDD+ potentially jeopardizing their rights to their territories, sovereignty, and self-determination (Reed, 2011). These concerns have been echoed by various academics and rights-based organizations worldwide (CENSAT Agua Viva / Friends of the Earth-Colombia, 2011), which critically assess the proliferation of REDD+ projects. They argue that these tend to ignore the rights, tenure, and engagement of indigenous communities and may even encourage displacement, conflict, corruption, impoverishment, and cultural degradation (Reed, 2011). Since a considerable portion of indigenous peoples' customary lands still lack demarcation and titling, indigenous groups warn that the profit motivations stemming from market-based conservation efforts will stall ongoing or future titling processes. What is more, indigenous groups fear that tree plantations and monocultures might replace forests, increasing carbon stocks at the expense of their ecosystem's integrity, biodiversity, and socio-cultural value as definitions of what may constitute a 'forest' or even 'degradation' remain imprecise (Reed, 2011).

Early experiences bear out these concerns and fears, as instances of displacement and coercion of native communities have already been documented in Uganda (Reed, 2011). In Indonesia, current state policy supports the expropriation of community forests, displace indigenous communities and impose involuntary resource use restrictions on local populations as part of their REDD+ program (Redd-Monitor.org, 2012). As REDD+ negotiations have been advancing, it has brought with it a proliferation of carbon brokers, some legitimate, others not, looking to capitalize on the vast amounts of new money that

will be made available by illegally buying up land and carbon rights. Reed describes how in Ecuador impostor NGOs or companies have deceived indigenous communities by offering vast sums of money in exchange for carbon and land rights (Reed, 2011). In Colombia, government sources report that foreign NGOs, companies and other organizations have illegitimately obtained the rights to some 38 million hectares, including indigenous and Afro-Colombian territories, which is equivalent to 33.3% of the national territory (RCN La Radio, 2011). As they often lack sufficient information about REDD+, rural and ethnic communities are highly vulnerable to unfavorable agreements with dubious organizations thus further jeopardizing rights to their territories (Reed, 2011).

So far, carbon-forestry projects still represent a very modest share of carbon trade under the CDM and land-use and forestry projects are gaining slow ground in voluntary markets (Corbera & Brown, 2010). Nonetheless, the study of carbon forestry is and will continue to be important in the light of the current entrenching of a political economy of forest carbon in climate-mitigation policy. The current efforts towards accounting, valuing, and trading forest carbon through the World Bank and the UN frameworks for REDD+ will complement ongoing and newly designed projects under the CDM and voluntary markets (Corbera and Broderick, 2009). At the most recent round of negotiations in Durban, REDD+ received a major push. Countries left all the options open to ways to finance REDD+, including carbon markets, resolving years of debate on financing options and paving the way for further negotiations. Even more so, key players have indicated their plans to raise emission reduction targets, which would increase demand for international credits. Current work on REDD+ is mainly focused on defining ways to measure progress on emission reductions and to determine financing mechanisms

and most analysts expect that negotiations will make significant headway at the next UN climate talk in Qatar (Silva-Chavez, 2012).

Part 2 – Case study: Afro-Colombian cultural politics and territory

As a country, Colombia has the second largest Afro-descendant population in Latin America, at about 10% of the general population (DANE (Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística), 2007). These communities are descendants of enslaved Africans who arrived in Colombia starting from the 16th century. They mainly worked in mines, cattle ranches and on plantations along the Pacific coast, where many subsequently settled (Ng'weno, 2007). Due to changes to land tenure arrangements in the 1950s, many Afro-Colombians were forced out to urban centers. Today, only about 20% of Afro-Colombians still live in the Pacific region, yet there they make up the vast majority at about 95% (DANE (Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística), 2007) of the population. The majority of rural communities depend on subsistence resources including agricultural products as well as hunting and fishing. See annex 1 for a map of Colombia's Pacific Coastal Region.

2.1 Invisible Afro-Colombians

When the Spanish and Portuguese arrived in the New World, Africans were already a well-known category of person since there had been a long culture of contact between Africa and Europe prior to settlement in the Americas, most recently in terms of the slave trade. In contrast, the indigenous communities inspired a great deal of ambivalence regarding their status within society and there was fierce discussion on how to view them, as brute natives or noble savages (Ng'weno, 2007). This was expressed, for instance, in the fact that while slavery was hardly questioned for Africans, for indigenous people it was outlawed as early as the 1890s when indigenous communities were granted legal recognition of their lands and limited rights to self-government. To this day, indigenous

groups suffer discrimination and exploitation but they are nevertheless, officially at least, set apart to be studied and protected¹ (Wade, 2012).

In contrast, no space other than slavery was reserved for Africans and African-descended people within the colonial order and there was a concerted effort to erase African cultures and languages (Whitten, 2007). Ng'weno argues that this effort to eliminate black culture, constructed as backward, was motivated by ideas of progress and to suppress challenges to (post)colonial authority: "As such, the production of a cultureless blackness (or the lack of a black culture apart from the national culture) was itself a state project" (Ng'weno, 2007, p. 433). Thus, with reference to the colonial order, Wade states that "blacks and Indians have both been characterized as Others, located in the liminal spaces of the nation, but they have fitted in different ways into what I call the structures of alterity" (cited in (Hooker, 2005, p. 301).

Yet, to fully understand the dynamics and the impact of the shift in later ethno-racial politics, one must first situate it in the broader historical context of ethnicity and race in Colombia and Latin America in general. Across the continent, state ideology has been based on the national narrative of *Mestizaje*. *Mestizaje* refers to the dual process of physical race mixture and cultural hybridity and was conceived of as a strategy of racial improvement, where Latin American populations would slowly evolve from conditions of 'primitiveness' thought to be embodied by brown-skinned indigenous, to more 'civilized' beings, imagined as white-skinned Europeans. The objective was that through this process the country would improve, ultimately moving toward whiteness (Whitten, 2007). *Mestizaje* was also central to the widely promoted 'racial democracy thesis'.

¹ While official state multiculturalism did not exist before the passage of the 1991 Constitution, the Colombian state had historically treated indigenous populations distinctly in legislation. Since the 1890s, a number of laws set out the autonomy of indigenous populations and outlined semiautonomous indigenous territories. This treatment was clearly rooted in colonial law, which defined indigenous peoples as savages who were uncivilized and thus incapable of citizenship or government. (Paschel, 2010)

While this thesis allowed for class-based inequality, it asserted that ethno-racial cleavages did not exist in Latin American countries and thus ruled out racism and racially based inequalities (Paschel, 2010).

Mestizaje in Colombia was mainly about the mixing of Spanish and indigenous ‘blood’ and culture and largely ignored the sizable black population. In the post independence context, state and popular discourses of Mestizaje in Colombia excluded² Afro-Colombians both ideologically and materially, in this way linking class inequality and racial stratification. The lack of legal provisions prior to 1991 and the silencing of racial divisions in national society supported the notion that racial discrimination did not exist in Colombia, making effective race-based mobilization difficult (Paschel, 2010). Consequently, with blackness absent from official state discourse, ethno-racial hierarchies were allowed to persist in Colombian society, albeit in forms linked to and expressed in terms of regionalism (i.e the Pacific region was understood as *the* black region) and class (Wade, 2012). Thus, “the prevalence of Mestizaje, on the one hand, and regionalism, on the other, make race, class, and region nearly inseparable in Colombia” (Paschel, 2010, p. 737).

2.1.1 Multiculturalism, the 1991 constitutional reform and Law 70

However, as early as the 1970s, spurred by international advocacy and against a background of proposals for land reform, the reform of church-state relations and the emergence of left-wing guerillas, indigenous movements were growing fast across the continent. Their discourse of group identity, autonomy, and ancestral claims began to

² The national census dropped references to race after 1918 and it was not taken up again until 2005. This can be explained by the fact that the post independence government recognized the impossibility of ‘objective’ racial classification and not wished to emphasize ethnic or racial differences, in accordance with Mestizaje (Paschel, 2010).

shake the very foundations of state-promulgated notions of homogenous national identity and harmony (Wade, 1995). The most evident indication of this shift was the slow recognition by many states of their multiethnic national character and the eventual passage of legislation for indigenous and black populations.

This also occurred in Colombia during the early 1990s when the state was undergoing a crisis of legitimacy after having been unable to either avert nor put an end to decades of armed conflict and violence. The constitutional reform of 1991 mainly aimed to increase popular participation and to reduce conflict by advocating the reorganization of national territory, but it also officially acknowledged the ethnic diversity of Colombia for the first time and recognized the existence of Afro-descendants and their cultural and territorial rights in the form of Law 70, also called *Law of the Black communities* (Escobar, 2008). Since 1991, this law has been a powerful hub around which Afro-Colombian struggles and resistance have organized and projected their work (Asher, 2009).

Nevertheless, Van Cott assesses the rise of multicultural policies in Colombia critically and suggests that these constitutional provisions, rather than being instituted as a result of mobilization by black populations, were simply extended to black populations, and that these provisions “often mimic in weaker form rights granted to indigenous populations” (2006 cited in (Paschel, 2010, p. 734)). Hooker (2005) points out that while black populations have won substantial rights, including official recognition, cultural patrimony, and land rights, these rights pale in comparison to those extended to indigenous populations. Indigenous peoples, who make up 3.4% of the national population, have been granted collective rights to about 29.8% of Colombia’s territory,

while Afro-Colombians, who make up at least 10.6%³ of the national population, received only 4.1% of the country's land (DANE (Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística), 2007). Clearly, indigenous groups have been more successful in obtaining collective titles. This phenomenon and its consequences have been addressed by a number of authors (Hooker, 2005; Ng'weno, 2007).

2.1.2 The emergence of black ethnicity

In the early 1990s, three factors converged to give rise to Afro-Colombian 'ethnicity'. Changes in global policy norms, a political opening in the form of a Constitutional reform, and the strategic use of discursive tactics by black activists coincided and led to the emergence of ethno-racial legislation in Colombia.

In many countries in Latin America, the process of translating international multicultural policies into domestic policies took place through constitutional reforms that were largely based on provisions set out in the International Labor Organization (ILO) Convention 169 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples (Van Cott, 2002 cited in (Paschel, 2010)). In fact, Colombia ratified the ILO convention the same year as the new Constitution was passed and the language of recognition, autonomy, and previous consultation is very much reflected in the 1991 Constitution (Paschel, 2010). An important international player, the World Bank, was central to the rise of multicultural politics across Latin America. The Bank's policy on indigenous peoples, in effect since the early 1990s, played a key part in raising the international profile of Afro-Latinos. In

³ (DANE 2007). These figures are highly contested. Paschel sums it up concisely: "It should be noted that the 10.6% figure is in dispute both by the government and social movement actors. Starting with the National Census of 1993, official government estimates of the Afro-Colombian population have ranged from 1.5% to 26%. The 10.6% figure is based on the 2005 census, which used a broad definition of Afro-Colombian [...]; however, there were many methodological issues related to self vs. interviewer classification and the sampling method used, considering that only a sample of the Colombian population was asked about its ethno-racial identity. Afro-Colombian organizations tend to defend the 26% figure, which comes from an official government planning document [...] which estimates the Afro-Colombian population at 10.5 million people." (2010, p735)

Colombia, the World Bank was also instrumental in financing and supporting the collective titling process, albeit limited to the Pacific Basin, for Afro-Colombian communities after 1993 (Greene, 2007; Offen, 2003).

In Colombia, post independence ethno-racial resistance had largely been non-existent due to a number of factors but mainly because racial inequality did not exist 'officially'. Nevertheless, beginning in the 1970s alongside much stronger indigenous mobilization, several organizations dedicated explicitly to the plight of black Colombian communities emerged (Paschel, 2010). One of the most prominent black organizations of the time, *Cimarron*⁴, was influenced by both Colombian and international black leaders but was largely urban-based. Intellectually, it was highly influenced by the civil rights movement in the United States as well as the antiapartheid struggles in South Africa and its platform was based on demands for racial equality (Wade, 1995; Paschel, 2010).

However, this was contrasted by a large number of rural associations struggling to end land dispossession by powerful national and international corporations, which had been gaining ground as neoliberal policies were taking hold of Colombia. Without rights to the land they had occupied since colonial times, rural black communities had no basis on which to challenge these corporations (Escobar, 2008). Thus, for these often regionally based associations, the Constitutional reform process became an opportunity to address the issues of land, development, and environmental sustainability. In the run-up to the Constitutional reform, a broad spectrum of different organizations was advocating for black rights, but as will be set out below, it would be rural black movements who would become the prototype for granting rights to black populations in Colombia (Paschel, 2010).

⁴ Cimarron means maroon in Spanish. A maroon is a runaway slave.

When the Law of the Black Communities, Law 70, was adopted in 1993, its eight chapters and sixty-eight articles focused on three main issues (1) ethnic and cultural rights (2) collective land ownership (3) and socioeconomic development. In its own words, the law

*recognizes the right of the Black Communities that **have been living on barren lands** in rural areas along the rivers of the **Pacific Basin**, in accordance with their **traditional production practices**, to their collective property as specified and instructed in the articles that follow. Similarly, the purpose of the Law is to establish mechanisms for protecting the **cultural identity** and rights of the Black Communities of Colombia as an ethnic group and to foster their economic and social development, in order to guarantee that these communities have real equal opportunities before the rest of the Colombian society. (Chapter I, Objective and Definitions, Article 1. (Government of Colombia, 1993)*

Without a doubt, by legally inscribing blacks as a separate social category for the first time, the passage of Law 70 represented a serious rupture in the dominant narrative about Colombia as a Mestizo, culturally homogenous nation. Nonetheless, it also served to cement a particular Afro-Colombian identity (Paschel, 2010).

The elaboration of Law 70 was supported by a particular way of understanding what it meant to be different. In fact, I argue that it was clearly based on the binary of Mestizo and indigenous, that was central to Mestizaje ideology. As can be seen in Article 1, the representation of black communities mirrors in many ways the image of the constituent elements of what is considered to be indigenous characteristics: the established community, communally held land, rootedness and production practices dating from the immemorial (Ng'weno, 2007).

Within the article, three defining concepts are touched on: Firstly, the concept of migrant or even invader, secondly, that of region or location, and lastly that of occupation. The concept of invader is expressed in the phrasing of '*have been living on barren lands*'. In the context of Colombia, 'barren' land (tierras baldías) refers to land

owned by the state and the term implies a lack of any other recognized previous ownership. Thus, instead of assuming that black communities have long-term claims to these lands, they are understood to be occupants of public lands. Unlike indigenous peoples, who have always had original land rights the black territorial claim is consequently rendered vulnerable. Moreover, it appears to imply that since they *now* occupy these lands, they in fact have lived and have been rooted somewhere else and have merely arrived here. This introduces a temporality to their claims and while the article employs the indigenous concept of territorial claims, it still manages to maintain an ambivalent stance towards Afro-Colombians (Ng'weno, 2007)

Furthermore, as set out in the article, the spatial existence of traditional black communities is confined to the rural riparian zones of the Pacific Basin or also to other rural riparian state lands that they have been occupying using traditional practices of production. However, the problem is that while the majority of the people in the Pacific Basin are Afro-descendants, the majority of black Colombians live outside this region. Therefore, proving ethnic status to warrant successful territorial claims outside of the Pacific basin is near impossible, according to the criteria set out here (Ng'weno, 2007).

In terms of traditional production practices⁵, the law ignores the differences of region, local histories, class, and occupation that exist within Colombia and focuses only on a small subset of agricultural activities or at best artisanal mining. Resource use and cultural practices vary widely even in the Pacific region. Most importantly, it leaves out the great majority of Afro-Colombians in regional and urban centers who have little

⁵ Article 7 in chapter 1 states: "Traditional practices of production: Are the technical, agricultural, mining, forestal extractions, grazing, hunting, fishing, and general harvesting activities of natural resources, customarily used by the Black Communities to guarantee the conservation of their lives and their self-sustaining development. (Government of Colombia, 1993)

connection to agrarian or rural livelihoods. It thus equates ethnicity with production practices (Asher, 2009).

Law 70 clearly specifies a temporality and spatiality to black communities in relation to the land and their production practices. In fact, cultural identity is located as secondary and derivative of elements relating to geography and economics. How has this come about?

As established above, the understanding of ethnicity in Colombia is based on mainly colonial racial categories. In this context, relations to land are essential as they define the position of the individual in the colonial order. In the mestizaje narrative, the Mestizo identity (whitened, urban, modern) is deterritorialized and the only connection to land is as means of production but not on the basis of any cultural or spiritual claim (Ng'weno, 2007). Yet, black Colombians did not easily fit into this binary as their forced labor in the colonies located them vis-à-vis the colonial state based on means of production and thus within the context of modernity. But, they were neither owners of land, as this was reserved for elite Mestizos, or people with a spiritual connection to land, as this was the prerogative of the indigenous communities. Wade points to this distinction between labor and ethnicity as decisive criteria when he refers to the leading academic heading the Constitutional negotiations who “declared that los Negros were not an ethnic group but were peasants and proletarians” (Wade, 1995, p. 347). Therefore, the challenge that lawmakers and Afro-Colombian activists had to face in the run-up to the passing of the Constitution was to renegotiate the location of black Colombians within national society. But it was not simply the existence of any cultural distinctiveness that mattered, but rather the possession of particular kind of culture or ethnicity, a kind that could be understood by those in charge of granting that status. Put another way, in the eyes of the

law, it was a perceived indigenous-like relation to land that legitimated both claims to ethnic identity and to culture, and thus to a different legal treatment (Hooker, 2005).

2.2 Conservation and development in the Pacific coastal region of Colombia

Without a doubt, the most powerful provision of Law 70 is with regard to land rights. It designates collective titles as inalienable, protected from seizure, and exempt from statutes of limitations. In theory, these provisions protect collective lands from the economic, governmental, and armed actors seeking to exploit Afro-Colombian lands by legally prohibiting individuals or community members from selling or otherwise ceding all or part of their land. However, the continued armed conflict, drug-trafficking, institutionalized discrimination, and large agro-business development projects like contract logging and palm oil cultivation have contributed to the frustration of these ambitious provisions (Rapoport Center for Human Rights and Justice, 2007).

2.2.1 Territorial rights, development and marginalization

Law 70 guarantees the territorial rights of black communities in the Colombian Pacific region and additional decrees require the collaboration of governmental institutions and agencies in the demarcation and titling of black territories to locally-elected community councils. Created by law, these councils are ethno-territorial and political entities that serve to solicit and administer the new territories and are responsible for the conservation and protection of the collective property and environment, the protection of cultural rights, and the collective titling process. Since the passing of Law 70 and up until 2007, 159 titles comprising more than 5.000 hectares, equivalent to roughly 5% of the national

territory, have been awarded to Afro-Colombian communities (Vicepresidencia de la Republica de Colombia, nd).

While there have been successes in the collective titling of Afro-Colombian lands, efforts to this end have not been matched by the institutional or political will to implement other rights, including the right to development and protections against discrimination (Rapoport Center for Human Rights and Justice, 2007). Chapter VII of Law 70 sets out the development rights guaranteed to Afro-Colombian communities. These rights, however, have not been brought into force through relevant legislation in any meaningful sense. One fundamental reason seems to be lack of government commitment to providing the fiscal support necessary to make development possible. The central government does not allocate funds to the community councils since they do not have the same autonomous status as for example their indigenous counterparts. Instead, Afro-Colombian communities are considered to be a part of the municipality in which they are located and therefore depend on municipal authorities. However, many of these municipal governments suffer from a lack of administrative capacity as well as corruption and inefficiency. What is more, most municipal functionaries often have a very limited understanding of Law 70 and racially and ethnically discriminatory attitudes are common (Rapoport Center for Human Rights and Justice, 2007; Semana, 2007).

Since black rural communities, like Colombia's rural poor more generally and in spite of laws that promise such resources, lack access to credit and direct subsidies, the absence of these resources severely limits the possibilities for Afro-Colombians to take full advantage of collective title they have been granted (Conferencia Nacional de Organizaciones Afrocolombianas (CNOA), 2008). The extent of this exclusion goes well beyond the foreclosure of possibilities for the realization of the provisions set out in Law

70. Instead, it forms the basis of a pattern of structural racial discrimination caused in part by government inaction. Many rural Afro-Colombians continue to live in conditions of poverty and exclusion that are tantamount to a violation of their basic civil, political, social, economic, and cultural rights guaranteed by Law 70, the Colombian Constitution and international law⁶ (Rapoport Center for Human Rights and Justice, 2007).

While the lack of ethnicity/race data prior to 1991⁷ makes it difficult to approximate any measure of ethno-racial inequality in Colombia, since then such disparity has been widely recognized and documented. This inequity manifests in many forms, including labor market discrimination, lack of access to basic social services such as education and health, infant and maternal mortality, and political representation (Hooker, 2005). For example, indicators of health and wellbeing in the Chocó, the most populated Pacific department, are among the worst in the country. Male infant mortality rates are roughly double the national average at 86 per 1000 births (DANE (Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística), 2007). The rate of illiteracy among Afro-Colombians is 32% compared to 15% among other ethnic groups. Only 38% of Afro-Colombian teenagers attend high school, compared to 66% of non-black Colombian teenagers. In 2005, some 76% of the inhabitants of the Chocó had ‘basic unmet needs’, the highest percentage of any department in the country and roughly four times the national average (DANE (Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística), 2007). Despite legal advances, a common refrain from Afro-Colombians

⁶ For example, following the process of verification of rights launched after the declaration of the ‘unconstitutional state of affairs’ caused by the precarious situation of IDPs, the Constitutional Court in decision 004 of January 26, 2009 has affirmed the rights of displaced Afro-Colombians. In decision 004 the Court declared that Afro-Colombians have been disproportionately affected by the armed conflict. In decision 004, it ruled that “the fundamental rights of [afro-Colombian individuals and communities] are being massively and continuously ignored.” The Court ordered the government to implement specific plans to protect these groups. (The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), 2009)

⁷ See footnote 2 and 3.

living on the Pacific Coast is: "We are abandoned by the State. We are forgotten, invisible" (CRLN, 2007).

The ongoing conflict in Colombia plays a major role in this situation and decades of armed conflict have disproportionately affected Afro-Colombians in terms of violence and forced displacement. While the Pacific region had been a largely forgotten corner and thus little affected by the violent conflict that was ravaging the rest of the country, in the past decade the violence arrived along with the growing economic interests in the region. Today, paramilitary groups and the military vie for control over territory to expand or maintain strategic presence, secure routes of access, and establish zones of political influence (CODHES, 2011). For rural communities, among the most pressing issues is the encroachment of mining or agribusiness companies on collective or privately owned land, lack of land restitution for internally displaced and large-scale neoliberal development interventions, such as dams and road building projects (Escobar, 2008; CODHES, 2011).

When communities are forced into displacement, they suffer violations of their most basic human rights, both during and after displacement and they effectively find themselves stripped of their rights under Law 70. Dislodged from their land, they are forced out to urban or semi-urban areas, where they are forced to insert themselves into an already tight labor market in an environment marked by racial discrimination and stigmatization of the internally displaced. Furthermore, the semi-urban settlements where many settle rarely receive basic services such as potable water, much less support for personal or communal development. Access to the ethno-education mandated by Law 70 is rarely present, and even regular public schooling is in short supply. The result is a deepening of conditions of marginalization and poverty (Rapoport Center for Human

Rights and Justice, 2007). More recently, the national government's 'democratic security' strategy has been attempting to reclaim the region through a combination of force and 'hearts-and-minds' efforts (Government of Colombia, 2007). But the attempt to strengthen the presence of the state and improve social and economic conditions has had little success and the regions remains affected by structural poverty and marginalization.

As economic interests in the region are linked to the conflict, communal landholding is an obstacle to the further expansion of the agrofuel plantations, mining activities and logging. It has been reported that while the Colombian army (backed by US-funded Plan Colombia) takes action against the leftist guerrilla, the right-wing paramilitary groups face few obstacles in their reign over territory. They often collude with powerful economic interests in the region and provide armed protection and combat capabilities to the highest bidder (CODHES, 2011). Some scholars consider forced displacement not only as a consequence of the conflict but even as a conflict strategy. Oslender (2007) sees the displacement in the Pacific coastal region of Colombia as a deliberate strategy to clear the land for further expansion of agro-fuel plantations and this is illustrated clearly by the statement a local leader gave during a visit to the region "Displacement is not a product of the armed conflict. It is a deliberate strategy to get people off of the land. As Law 70 titles are given, the paramilitary starts arriving" (Rapoport Center for Human Rights and Justice, 2007, p. 23). In fact, in the current context of impunity and state inaction, the fear of reprisals for claiming or successfully receiving land may make the execution of Law 70 seem more dangerous than the non-practice of the rights it guarantees. According to some scholars, this also explains the number of claims without adequate titling and the suspicious slowing down of titling processes in recent years (Vélez, 2008).

2.3 Conservation and development

Colombia's coastal region is rich in resources and economic activity has long revolved around the extraction of raw materials such timber, platinum, gold and fish. Since colonial rule, the global hunger for rubber and minerals has caused boom and bust cycles that shaped the social, economic, ecological, and cultural makeup of the region (Escobar, 2008). But despite its resources, the region had remained marginal to national interest and only in the early 1980s did the national government formulate a strategy to incorporate the Pacific into national and transnational spheres. It was mainly the region's abundant and unique biodiversity that attracted international attention and funding, as Northern concerns regarding the linkages between environment and development were mounting (Escobar, 2008). International donors in Colombia have provided - and continue to do so - a large portion of the resources directed toward conservation of the Pacific region. For example, the Pacific coastal region is part of a conservation project overseen by The Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (The Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF), 2005, p. 19).

As conservation efforts colluded with neoliberal economic strategies of the 1990s, biodiversity conservation efforts were linked to economic development policies. Conservation projects such as GEF-funded *Proyecto Biopacífico*⁸ (Oslender, 2007) and various national economic development strategies aimed to open up the region to integrate it into the national economy, facilitate the 'sustainable' use of natural resources, and aid the establishment of transpacific trading routes with Asia (Escobar, 2008). But by providing capital, improved access routes, and inventories of flora and fauna, these

⁸ Proyecto Biopacífico was a five-year initiative (1993-1998) funded by the United National Development Program and the Global Environment Facility. Its mandate was to formulate a biodiversity conservation policy for the region (Asher, 2009).

conservation activities also facilitated the arrival of large agricultural companies that brought biofuels, bananas and other mono-culture cash crops (Asher, 2009; Oslender, 2007). Today, regional integration projects include infrastructure projects such as roads, hydroelectric and energy plants, and telecommunications networks. Among others, this infrastructure is designed to boost forestry, fishing, agriculture, and mining. Environmentalists, indigenous rights groups and Afro-Colombian leaders are concerned about the impacts of such a large project on traditional social and economic structures and on the environment, expressing concern that the large-scale development will severely damage the region's biological diversity (The Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF), 2005).

As elsewhere, deforestation⁹ is among the main problems in the region and analyses and interpretations of the causes of deforestation tend to cite the obvious direct causes, such as logging, agriculture, cattle ranching and, in the particular case of Colombia, drug-trafficking and the cultivation of illicit crops (Government of Colombia, 2008) (Ortega-P., 2010) (Government of Colombia, 2011). However, underlying causes of deforestation in Colombia include the impacts of macroeconomic policies, both national and international, the gradual dismantling of the national environmental system over the course of the last decade¹⁰, and the design and implementation of detrimental legislation that promotes the exploitation of forests (WWF USA; Corporación Ecovera). According to a review of relevant forest legislation and data, WWF USA concludes in a report that

⁹ According to the definition used by the Colombian Ministry of Environment, "deforestation is defined as the change in land cover status from forest to non-forest (i.e., when harvest or the gradual degrading of forest land reduces tree cover per hectare below your country's definition of forest. Forest degradation is the reduction of tree cover and forest biomass per hectare, via selective harvest, fuel woodcutting or other practices, but where the land still meets your country's definition of forest land. (MAVDT, 2008, p1)

¹⁰ Law 99 of the 1991 constitution also put in places a number of reforms that substantially affected Colombia's National Environment System (SINA). While some authors consider that the system's design is fundamentally well-defined and sound, other point out that in reality it is characterized by significant asymmetries in the distribution of financial and technical capacity, which has contributed to the weakening of the SINA over recent years (A., Hoffmann, Morgenstern, & Topping, 2005).

Colombia does currently not possess national-level data or studies that clearly and consistently quantify or characterize the agents and causes of deforestation (WWF USA; Corporación Ecovera). Similarly, the government's failure to take decisive action in relation to the titling of Afro-descendants' territories and the impact that this has had on deforestation or degradation is generally overlooked (CENSAT Agua Viva / Friends of the Earth-Colombia, 2011).

2.3.1 Forest carbon sequestration projects in Colombia

Colombia has long been keen to harness its natural resources potential and engage in forest carbon sequestration projects as a climate change mitigation measure (Ortega-P., 2010; Government of Colombia, 2011) and has actively been pursuing inclusion in relevant mechanisms. This commitment has been affirmed in the *National Development Plans* and other relevant documents. For example in the Second Communication before the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the intention to build up the generation and recognition of environmental services provided by forests in the removal of carbon dioxide is discussed and actions proposed (Government of Colombia, 2009, p. 43). This has also been supported by a number of relevant strategy documents, among others the CONPES 3242 “*Estrategia Nacional para la Venta de Servicios Ambientales de Mitigación de Cambio Climático*”, la *Estrategia Nacional para la Reducción de las Emisiones debidas a la Deforestación y la Degradación Forestal en los Países en Desarrollo*; y la *Función de la Conservación, la Gestión Sostenible de los Bosques y el Aumento de las Reservas Forestales de Carbono en los Países en Desarrollo – ENREDD+* (Government of Colombia, 2011). To finance these efforts, Colombia has ratified a number of multilateral strategic alliances with the *World Bank*

Prototype Carbon Fund, the *CAF Latin American Program for Carbon and Alternative Energy* and various governments (Government of Colombia, 2009).

Most recently, Colombia has successfully applied to receive funds from The Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF) for the development of a national REDD strategy, (Forest Carbon Partnership, nd). To elaborate the proposal *Mesa REDD*, a national round table, funded by the World Bank and composed of USAID, a number of international environmental NGOs such as WWF Conservation International, The Nature Conservancy, and national organizations such as the *Colombian Council for Sustainable Economic Development* was to “promote the development of strategies, policies, plans and REDD+ projects in Colombia” (Ortega-P., 2010). While this national roundtable is generously referenced in official documents, there is no detailed information about its creation or composition. Indeed, its website has been unavailable since the end of 2011.

While the review of the initial application to the FCPF had received a positive evaluation in regards to the consultation process held with indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities, the general process of designing national policies and positions has been heavily critiqued by some civil society organization in Colombia (CENSAT Agua Viva / Friends of the Earth-Colombia, 2011). They claim that this process has left out Colombian civil society organizations, with no or little participation by those who hold the rights to the territories in question or other relevant social and community actors such as the social movements and organizations or NGOs, with the exception of a few large international conservation NGOs (Tropenbos, 2010). Since the REDD-readiness proposal has recently been accepted by the FCPF, the Colombian government will now enter a new phase of consultation with rural community organizations as well as indigenous as Afro-Colombian leaders. These consultations will be specifically geared

towards social and environmental impact management and land issues ((RRI), Rights and Resources Initiative; (BIC), Bank Information Center; (ILSA), Instituto para una Sociedad y un Derecho Alternativo, 2012; Rapoport Center for Human Rights and Justice, 2007).

In order to support this process of creating a national REDD+ strategy, Afro-Colombian groups have formed the *Common Agenda forum* to participate in the consultation process (Foro Interétnico Solidaridad Choco (FISCH), 2011). There is a wide range of positions among Afro-Colombian groups with reference to REDD+, as some communities are actively developing carbon forestry projects while others view it more critically (Proceso de Comunidades Negras (PCN); Processo de Agenda Comun para la Gobernabilidad en territorios ancestrales de comunidades negras del Pacifico Colombiano; Foro Interetnico Colombiano, 2011; Anthroct, nd) but they are unified in demanding that while a national REDD+ strategy is under negotiation action be taken against organizations that illegally promise stakes in voluntary carbon markets and so wrest land claims from rural communities (Foro Interetnico de Solidaridad Choco (FISCH), nd). They also link the REDD+ process to the broader context of conservation efforts, in requesting to limit the actions of illegal mining activities that are taking place with concession obtained from the national government ¹¹ that are in direct violation of the rights of local communities and contradict national conservation policies .

As a national REDD+ strategy is being elaborated, there are already a number of CDM pilot projects underway that experiment with carbon forestry, such as the *San Nicolás Agroforestry* project, which is funded by the World Bank and the Forest Carbon

• ¹¹ Among the companies that are actively mining in the Pacific region of Colombia are Anglo Gold Ashanti, Glencord, Cosigo Risort, Anglo Gold American, Muriel Mining Company, Frontino Gold, among others. (Government of Colombia. (2011)

Partnership Found (Carbon Finance Unit - The World Bank, nd). This project has been described as “testing a new financing system, which combines sustainable forest management with the possibilities offered to the forest sector by the Clean Development Mechanism of the Kyoto Protocol (CDM) and with the participation of the international investors” (CENSAT Agua Viva / Friends of the Earth-Colombia, 2011). Similarly, USAID has been funding pilot projects in the Pacific region through its regional program that work with indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities (USAID, 2011).

Apart from the above projects, another interesting case is *The Chocó-Darién Conservation Corridor project* by AnthroTECT, a private environmental services company that “supports community landholders in the design and implementation of payment for ecosystem services (PES) programs that engage emerging international markets for carbon and biodiversity credits.” (AnthroTECT, nd). They argue that the financial resources that the project could generate could be used to strengthen communal territorial governance capacity as well as improved forest management activities (AnthroTECT, nd).

Part 3 – Discussion

The above discussion aimed to demonstrate that environmental politics in Colombia are tightly bound up with questions of identity and power. In this section, I consider how a forest carbon management discourse accommodates a particular construction of Afro-Colombian identity and what political implications this might have.

It is argued that the implementation of forest carbon sequestration projects could not only protect the tropical rainforest of Colombia's Pacific coast but generate a host of additional benefits, among them increased revenues for the struggling municipalities and Afro-Colombian community councils through sustainable forest management and forest conservation, including sustainable traditional land-use values. I want to focus on this assumption - the idea that traditional land uses and production practices are consistent or in accordance with forest carbon management objectives- and suggest that by drawing on a limited representation of Afro-Colombian identity this discourse also affects Black politics. I suggest that it reproduces a Black identity as an abstract universal and thus negates the diversity that characterizes the lived experience of the majority of Afro-Colombians.

Rural Afro-Colombian communities are slotted into the forest carbon discourse through a frame of 'traditional' modes of production, importantly a notion supported by relevant national legislation. But I question to what extent such a narrow framing forecloses other possibilities for Afro-Colombian agency and politics in the context of environment politics and conservation. If that is the case, what might this foreclosure mean for Afro-Colombian scholars and activists who actively struggle for rights and recognition and work to redefine the meaning of 'blackness', and for those who

strategically invoke the category of ‘tradition’ to further whatever longer term political ambitions they might aspire to. The politics of multiculturalism have opened a discursive space to renegotiate Afro-Colombian identity and legitimize their claims to land, development and self-determination, but I argue that a market-based conservation approach contributes to creating a situation that ultimately denies a number of rights to these groups.

To conclude this section, I will briefly consider a number of possible scenarios. Previous experience with PES has shown that in some cases, local communities can obtain some benefits and it remains to be seen if organizations like Anthroctect are able to work with communities to maximize these benefits. However, as Reed (2011) points out, an unintended side effect of REDD+ is that it focuses on communities that report increased rates of deforestation, more often than not on the basis of weaker organizational structures, instead of well-organized communities who are able and willing to protect their resources. This carries with it an increased risks of unfavorable outcomes as these weaker communities might not be able to develop a strong negotiation platform on which to lobby for their resources. In the worst-case scenario, the situation on Colombia could unfold as in Indonesia where elite capture has caused the displacement of local populations.

3.1 The limitations to Black political struggles

In the run-up to the constitutional reform of 1991 and in response to mounting concerns around biodiversity conservation, black organizations developed a discourse of ‘territory plus culture’. They argued that territory could not be seen merely as a natural landscape but that it included the people that lived in this landscape. As a means to gain political

recognition and claiming cultural distinctiveness, they started a process of ‘ethnicization’ (Asher, 2000) to demonstrate that Black traditional knowledge and practices were equal to conservation (Ng'weno, 2007; Escobar, 2008). They constructed the coastal rainforest region as comprising interlocking ecological and cultural units associated in a dynamic process. By linking their political struggle with an emerging conservation agenda¹², black activists fostered an Afro-Colombian identity that was at once race-based and part of a larger eco-cultural system and established a simultaneously distinct and integrated cultural identity that met the exigencies of lawmakers in granting them ethnic status (Checker, 2008).

This discursive feat is nothing new. Since the 1980s, indigenous peoples have become key symbols and sometimes key participants in the development of a transnational environmental ideology and discourse that has promoted an image of the ‘ecologically noble savage’. These Western environmental ideologies have located authenticity and purity in imaginaries of indigenous peoples and have presented them as living in harmony with nature, outside of modernity, and in a manner resistant to global capitalism. Both environmentalists as well as indigenous or ethnic minority peoples themselves have employed these narratives (Muehlmann, 2009).

The fundamental problem associated with the ‘ethnicity discourse’ is that it circumscribes who can qualify and thus excludes those that do not fulfill the criteria that it sets out. For example, in the case of urban-based Afro-Colombian communities, they fall outside the categories set out in Law 70. In recognition of this, broadening the scope of the law and renegotiating what constitutes Blackness in Colombia is one of the key

¹² The Chocó Biopacific Project, for example, catered to multilateral bank support for sustainable development, while projects such as Plan Pacífico and the Initiative to Integrate South America’s Regional Infrastructure (IRSA) were designed to connect South American markets and link Colombia to Pacific Rim economies.

political struggles at this moment. It is in this context that REDD+ and market-based conservation play an important role in shaping public discourse and posing challenges to Black political struggles.

The collective titles that have been awarded to rural communities represent major gains and strategic documents acknowledge the central role of land as a source of income and identify the consolidation and extension of territory as a main priority. Of course, for market-based conservation schemes such as REDD+, having title to collective territories is a key condition to establish projects (Comision de Estudio, 2012). Afro-Colombian organizations clearly recognize the value of their natural resources and propose ways to economically exploit them. For example, in the *National Development Plan for Afro-Colombian communities 2010-2014*, PES schemes are an integral part of regional development to generate income for local communities. Such a strategy would include education, governance and trade relations (Comision de Estudio, 2012). Apart from securing livelihoods and generating much needed resources for cash strapped community councils, this would also generate resources that could be used to buy more land and so speed up the titling of Afro-Colombian territories, such as land along the Caribbean coast and on the island of Santa Catalina, where many Afro-Colombians live. It appears as if market-based conservation could indeed be a win-win instrument to support these efforts but closer inspection reveals some pitfalls.

Despite the fact that Law 70 guarantees the right to an autonomous perspective of the future, particularly an autonomous vision of development, the design of PES might restrict potential development alternatives. PES schemes are usually designed with a singular conservation outcome and thus run the risk of rendering local communities

caretakers of their resources. In the case of indigenous or 'ethnic' communities, this reinforces existing stereotypes about their inherent quality of being guardians of nature.

Yet, it is not only the discursive production of ethnic identities that has attracted criticism but many scholars have also argued that the turn towards community-based land rights fits within broader efforts of resource governance that regularizes land tenure and promotes the commodification of resources. They contend that among the stated rationale for this transformation is compensatory justice but further probing brings a plain economic logic to the fore. The compensatory justice argument is summed up with the phrase 'development with identity', which embraces a chain of assertions: modern nation states recognize cultural difference; indigenous and ethnic minority peoples need special regimes of rights that help them to negotiate the challenges of modernity; without such provisions, these peoples would lose their culture (Hale, 2011). Since a fundamental aspect of their 'culture' is a close relationship with nature, they would also turn to unsustainably exploit their natural resources.

Despite the apparent benefits for local communities, Hale argues that this logic is instead motivated by an implicit economic rationale. Even if large tracts of territory are excluded from the land market, regularization of land tenure pays off. As the rest of the land becomes fair game for commoditization and since the existence of collectively owned property poses no direct challenge to the principle of private property or to the reign of market forces, it achieves the key goal of replacing chaos and contention with an intelligible, predictable and market- friendly grid of property rights. Therefore, these two principles together, special rights based on ethnicity and reinforcement of a market for land and resources, converge to cement existing political power relations: states devolve

authority to marginal spaces, recognize the inhabitants' rights and let them govern themselves, which has the effect of constraining their political participation beyond the local level, especially in relation to broader structures of political-economic inequity (Hale, 2011).

This 'politics of recognition' poses the danger of obscuring underlying material inequalities, which are rooted in and connected to past and current distributions of wealth and power (Lynch, 2012). For the state, the emphasis on cultural difference as opposed to racial discrimination is a way to detract from addressing the social and economic aspects of racial injustice, and instead to focus on cultural diversity¹³. The privileging of cultural recognition in black politics and the limitation of ethnically justified claims to territory in the wake of a multicultural model poses significant problems since collective rights based on cultural difference do not address race-based structural inequalities at a national level (Hooker, 2005) but subordinate these to the functioning of markets (Hale 2005).

It also extends a particularly neoliberal approach to governance, one that compels property owners to simultaneously make use of land and resources in economically productive ways and maintain a broader social order equated with the security of property rights. Both tendencies reinscribe race and property as constitutive elements of liberal forms of citizenship (Ng'weno, 2007). Along the way, Afro-descendants are produced as populations as objects of government and in whose name the state asserts its sovereign authority to govern. State control over territory thus becomes less important than the ability to preserve a spatial order necessary to economic growth, security, and the task of governing itself (Bryan, 2012).

¹³ In spite of the laws in place against racial discrimination and of the legal recognition of the rights of the Afro-descendant communities that live on the Pacific coast, see Annex 1, Chapter VI, there is little enforcement of these laws and situations that are symptomatic of ongoing structural discrimination persist in Colombia. (Rodríguez, G. C., 2009)

Indeed, the experience of Black communities in Colombia has shown that the enforcement of collective territorial and cultural rights is weak and that economic, political or national interests often outweigh collective demands. In fact, it could be argued that the region's policy agenda opposes ethnic rights and environmental sustainability with its focus on economic modernization, counter insurgency, and the war on drugs. One of the main stumbling blocks is that collective property rights are at odds with policies to attract foreign investment, a prerequisite of which is to protect private property and guarantee access to strategic resources. The important role of Colombia's forests is made clear in documents such as the *National Strategy for Environmental Services*, which poignantly neglects any mention of indigenous or Afro-Colombian communities (Government of Colombia, 2008), despite the fact that about 50% of Colombia's forests are owned by indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities (Ortega-P., 2010).

Hale argues that the exclusionary effects of decentralization could thus be seen as the ultimate achievement of the union of neoliberal development and multicultural policies: a restructuring of the political arena that drives a wedge between claiming cultural rights and claiming control over the resources necessary for those rights to be realized (Hale, 2011). By leveraging multicultural policies and pushing for conservation efforts that pay mere lip service to Afro-Colombian rights instead of affirming political organizing and promote social justice, for instance, market based conservation efforts effectively constrain for local communities the possibility of gaining control over the resources at stake.

3.2 The discourse of avoided deforestation

One of the main concerns of political ecology lies with examining the politics of knowledge in conservation practice. In the case of environmental degradation, the way an environmental problem is defined forms the basis for all interventions, whether environmental or social. In the context of conservation and development, scholars have observed how the discursive processes of problem definition and policy formulation can systematically favor Western knowledge over local perspectives and how the complexities of nature are simplified so that they can be ‘seen’ by capital, or made ‘legible’ for environmental markets (Robbins, 2010).

With reference to REDD+, many scholars have argued that the discourse around deforestation depoliticizes the causes and actors that contribute to environmental degradation (Milne & Adams, 2012). While project proposals as well as national strategy documents are clear in identifying large-scale development projects such as mining operations, plantations, logging and illegal coca plantations as the main causes of deforestation, potential solutions are proposed at the community-level (Anthrotext, nd). While communities are marginally contributing to deforestation through shifting agriculture activities and illegal logging activities, they are by no means the main culprits. In fact, as expressed in the official Colombia REDD+ guide the main causes for deforestation are the expansion of the agricultural frontier, colonization, infrastructure development, illicit crops, and large-scale industrial logging all of which require intervention far beyond the project level (Ortega-P., 2010).

In REDD+ documents, the notion of a generic ‘Afro-Colombian community’ disguises the diversity of livelihoods and social inequalities within each community and

along the coast. Many ‘communities’ are in fact newly created and have arisen from the need to represent a community and form a community council to claim titles to territory. These new ‘communities’ are often still weak in their internal governance structures and inequalities among these ‘communities’ are caused by a multitude of factors among others the parallel practice of informally holding private land alongside the collective titles (Vélez, 2008).

Constructing the solution to deforestation as community-based conservation efforts makes it possible to advocate market-based conservation as a potential option. But as shown above, this represents a disempowering closure or even negation of other conservation options that would target the various actors involved in deforestation. In this way it also illustrates how the marketization of conservation actions can depoliticize powerful interventions and obscures more structural struggles over land and resources within and outside the community. In this way PES models allow circumventing the micro-politics as well as macro-politics of resource exploitation. The implication then is that community-level PES provides a convenient way to ‘outsource’ the politics of conservation, by reducing the complexities and struggles of natural resource management to an apolitical contract for services (Milne & Adams, 2012).

By constructing their forests as a resource that needs protecting for the sake of humanity, market-based conservation displaces the responsibility of environmental management onto local communities while restricting alternative efforts. In this way, REDD+ could in effect contribute to the historical marginalization of Afro-Colombian communities. As a representative of a local organization recently stated at a meeting about forest carbon projects:

They have sold us the idea that the Chocó is part of the world's lungs and they might be right. However, we cannot allow that this privilege condemns us to a state of underdevelopment and exclusion. We flatly reject the idea of existing like in a museum, being the nation's repository and the world and safeguarding riches that will benefit others in the future, while today our people suffer from neglect on the hands of the state.
(Foro Interétnico Solidaridad Choco (FISCH), 2011)

3.3 Scenarios

As evidence by the above discussion, many scholars and activists are critical of REDD+ and point to the risk that even in cases where local forest managers, including community forest management authorities, might benefit from global carbon markets, such managers are embedded within a global division of labor characterized by vast asymmetries in political economic power, thus placing local forest managers at a distinct disadvantage vis-à-vis other more powerful actors in the carbon market. Nevertheless, there is a desperate need for development funding in the region and there are great hopes that REDD+ can deliver such benefit. One of the tasks of critical scholarship should be to accompany these projects and study their impact. These results could offer important insights to modify the blueprint approach of PES schemes that are applied in multiple contexts without being able to take into account cultural specificity.

In this last part, I want to briefly consider three possible scenarios that might unfold as REDD+ is implemented in Colombia.

To begin, the best-case scenario involves an organization that is attune to the community's needs and able to serve as an interlocutor to help negotiate appropriate rights. For example, *The Chocó-Darién Conservation Corridor* project, designed by *AnthroTECT* aims to leverage climate finance to protect ecosystems on the Pacific Coast by strengthening the territorial identity and governance capacity of Council of Afro-Colombian Communities of the Tolo River Basin (COCOMASUR). It is among the first

in the world to use to new methodologies under the *Verified Carbon Standard (VCS)* and *Climate, Community, and Biodiversity (CCB) Standards*. Under the guidance of *Anthrotect* and the *Colombian Fund for Environmental Action*, COCOMASUR carries out activities that address some of the drivers of deforestation and ecosystem degradation in the region, and they state that communities will receive 50% of net profits from the project (Anthrotect, nd).

Among its project objectives are:

(a) building governance capacity, by raising awareness of collective identity and rights, demarcating title boundaries, resolving land disputes, instilling best practices for administration and accountability, and constructing collective visions and strategic plans for land use; (b) reducing carbon emissions, through community surveillance to conserve existing forest, restoring degraded lands, and improving forest management by extending harvest rotations and minimizing logging impacts; and, (c) investing in green commodity production, by improving technologies and agricultural practices, applying proven new models for sustainable ranching and artisanal gold mining and securing enduring markets for other community products. (Anthrotect, nd, p. 67).

The project has a proposed 30-year lifespan and aims to demonstrate how forest-dependent communities can generate income from markets for ecosystem services.

The project is located in the Chocó region, where banana plantations and cattle ranches have brought enormous ecological cost and devastating socio-economic impact. Planned infrastructure development such as roads and ports will involve accelerated deforestation. These large-scale developments do not take into account COCOMASUR's vision for its own development, and most likely would neither engage with the territory as an equal partner in the co-creation of the project nor in the sharing of its proceeds (Anthrotect, nd).

As pointed out in the project proposal,

“the most likely scenario in the absence of the project would be that the same pattern of deforestation and degradation will continue unchecked. This means a continuation of forest degradation driven by agricultural expansion, and in particular cattle ranching. The compound damage to the ecosystem from the conversion of forest to pasture would, in turn, affect habitat and land use patterns as farmland becomes more vulnerable to more frequent and intense flooding. Erosion and silt accumulation in rivers from forest destruction would put further pressure on livelihoods. Without the project’s system of monitoring and territorial protection, it is unlikely that current community governance would be capable of preventing the incursion of illegal settlers and loggers in the territory” (Anthroctect, nd, p. 55).

While the socio-economic impacts from this project will enable landholders to generate a revenue stream linked to the carbon value of conservation and reforestation activities, it also serves to call attention to the profound marginalization of these communities and their neglect by the state. For example, among its objectives are socio-economic and cultural development, improved access to basic health and education services and improved agricultural yields and food security. These are clearly services that the state has responsibility to provide, but in the context of regional development plans that push for militarization and territorial control, social spending and socio-economic development efforts take a strategic backseat. Indeed, while the state fails to provide for the basic needs of the local population, it is replaced by quasi-state institutions such as *The Fund for Environmental Action*. While this fund is a not-for-profit organization, it has been created as a result of a bilateral agreement signed in 1993 between the governments of Colombia and the United States and finances projects of environmental conservation and child welfare, implemented by non-governmental and community-based organizations.

A second scenario includes projects that approach REDD+ mainly as a profit maximization strategy. Since a pre-condition of REDD+ schemes are formal titles, Afro-Colombian collective territories, are an attractive resource. Many of these communities

would thus seem to have the necessary clarified tenure rights, built-in resource management, and benefit distribution mechanisms that are needed for the objectives of REDD+. But, herein lies the conundrum. Such communities are caught in a difficult situation: having effectively organized themselves, some have been able to limit deforestation within their territories. Such a condition, however, makes them the least likely candidates for REDD+ type initiatives and funding, given the additionality requirement common to any payments for environmental services schemes, along with the difficulty to prove how extra funding could result in a net and abrupt reduction of carbon emissions. It is generally understood that if REDD+ investors want to achieve higher impact, they should target those forests that are under the most threat. In practice, however, this carries the risk that the main winners of such project schemes could turn out to be the very ones that have been driving deforestation to begin with. These include cattle ranchers, oil palm plantation owners, and large-scale developers.

More importantly, most local communities are far from effectively entering into REDD+ negotiations. Many of them have yet to create viable political mechanisms for self-representation and thus still lack the institutional capacity to effectively carry out these types of projects on their lands (Vélez, 2008; Reed, 2011). Despite having formally recognized and collective titles to their territories, many individual community members still hold private parcels and maintain allegiances to extended family groups and local or national associations, rather than to 'community' identities. As a result, their territories are yet to be fully consolidated, leaving them vulnerable to powerful outside influences. How a national REDD+ strategy deals with these two different and difficult sets of

organizational capacity levels will be important to see and largely determine the outcome for individual communities (Reed, 2011)

Lastly, the worst-case scenario would result in eventual displacement of local communities and in effect mean the violation of human rights. As the experiences in Uganda, Indonesia and Ecuador show, without adequate involvement of forest communities and respect for peoples' rights, REDD policies and global carbon and other commodity markets threaten to generate land grabs, displacement, conflict, corruption, impoverishment and cultural degradation (Griffiths & Martone, 2009).

Conclusion

This paper has explored the potential political implications of forest carbon sequestration projects in the context of a broader Black struggle for rights and recognition. The discussion was situated within a political ecology framework and drew on Foucault's understanding of power and discourse as well as Said's notion of representation.

Notwithstanding the critical stance of many scholars and activists, it is clear that the situation of many remote communities in the Pacific region of Colombia is dire. Structural poverty, violence and environmental degradation are grave concerns and most social indicators lay bare the suffering caused by lack of healthcare, education and livelihood options. For lack of other options, REDD+ projects could offer a way to provide some income, social development and protect the forest. But the key issue is if the tradeoffs are worth it. As Escobar wrote in 1996 when referring to biodiversity and genetic resources, local communities become economic agents "to the extent that they accept viewing and treating territory and themselves as reservoirs of capital. Communities in various parts of the world are then enticed by biodiversity projects to become 'stewards of the social and natural capitals' whose sustainable management is, henceforth, both their responsibility and the business of the world economy" (Escobar, 1996, p335). This time round they are asked to join in the effort to mitigate global climate change but it is not yet clear what price they might have to pay for participating in this struggle. Given the pressure on their land, structural poverty and violent conflict, the communities sit between a rock and a hard place and while REDD+ mechanisms deserve attention for their potential to fund forest conservation and provide livelihoods, they must be viewed not as stand alone mechanisms, but in the context of a highly racialized and

politically charged environmental politics where the broader political struggle for the rights of urban as well as rural black communities will be affected by strategies such as REDD+.

All signs indicate that REDD+ will receive official approval in climate change negotiations to come. Therefore, one immediate challenge lies in constructing an adequate national framework for REDD+ and for Afro-Colombian groups to effectively organize and advocate for projects that are adapted to the specific social and geographic characteristics of their territory. Case studies such as this one need to be reviewed through a critical yet reflective improvement lens, to ask what policies and institutions are most appropriate to sustain communities, landscapes and livelihoods in particular locations. In this vein, this case study aimed to provide a narrative of political struggles and linked it to market-based conservation.

As REDD+ is being negotiated, it is still too early to judge if the win-win logic of an ecologically modern forest carbon management regime will result in another form of primitive accumulation and maintain the marginalization of Afro-Colombian communities. It remains to be seen how the discursive power of ‘conservation’ and ‘identity’ will unfold in the REDD+ context. It is not possible to offer concrete answers to these questions at this moment because forest carbon management in Colombia is still very much a political rhetoric more so than it is a set of specific material practices. Nevertheless, I consider that the evidence and argumentation I present here, speculative though it is, offers at least some early indication that the interaction of market-based conservation and the struggle for Afro-Colombian rights and recognition will have very real implications for social justice, local power relations and property rights. Perhaps

most significantly, the present case serves to remind us that environmental conflicts are never just about “the environment.” Sometimes, they also become the terrain on which other ideological conflicts play out. In the case of Afro-Colombian political rights, debates about the conservation of the forest are at the same time battlegrounds for struggles over how identity is constructed and what political struggles are being fought.

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ANNEX 1 - Map

Figure 1 - Map of Colombia's Pacific Coastal Region



Source: (Oslender, 2007)