

A POLITICAL ECOLOGY OF NEOLIBERAL MULTICULTURALISM

SOCIAL INCLUSION AND MARKET-BASED CONSERVATION IN INDIGENOUS COSTA RICA

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This dissertation analyzes how indigenous populations become included or excluded as a result of the implementation of different forms of market-based conservation practices in two adjacent indigenous territories – Talamanca-Bribri and Talamanca-Cabécar Indigenous Reserves (TBIR and TCIR, respectively) – in Southeastern Costa Rica. More specifically, this thesis explores three different natural resource management interventions oriented towards conserving forest cover and biodiversity in the buffer zones of the nearby La Amistad International Park (PILA) through: 1) the promotion of organic cacao production in agroforestry systems, 2) financialization of forest carbon through PES and 3) the design of new indigenous-minded forms of PES through REDD+. While attention is offered to the various economic, environmental and social promises of these examples of the green economy, this dissertation concentrates on exploring their impact with regards to historical indigenous demands for political autonomy, indigenous control over natural resource management and their right to self-determination. In this sense, this thesis will conceptualize the aforementioned interventions as ‘inclusive’ forms of neoliberal conservation oriented towards addressing the historical forms of social exclusion of the Bribri and Cabécar indigenous peoples from Costa Rican society. This thesis will show how the ‘green economy’ has been embraced by conservation state agencies and NGOs in Costa Rica from an ambivalent stance, coming not from a stable consensus over the need of configuring forest governance under market logics, but due to neoliberal pressures to make protected areas financially self-supporting and capable of contributing to the wider national economy vis-à-vis other productive and social land uses. It will explain how have the Bribri and the Cabécar managed to retain a strong territorial claim over their lands, leading state and NGO actors to introduce market-based conservation in the TBIR and TCIR as an effort towards modifying existing indigenous livelihoods, behavior and perspectives in favor of conservation, instead of forcefully imposing it. Afterwards, it will characterize the manner in which the proponents of the ‘green economy’ have attempted to gain legitimacy and promote “buy-in” for these interventions at a local level, while also highlighting how local participation is being shaped by discursive and material powers of the green economy. It will explain how these green economy interventions simultaneously appropriate indigenous demands for political autonomy and self-determination and transform local institutions handling natural resource governance; in order to explain, drawing on literature about the relationship between indigenous politics and state formation, how this appropriation and transformations lead to new forms of social exclusion.

Overall, this thesis makes use of the concept of neoliberal multiculturalism, understood as a political project engrained within neoliberal forms of governance that seeks to selectively recognize indigenous rights with the objective of rendering these compatible to the wider ideas, interests and logics of capital. Using this concept as a key part of the analytical framework, this thesis demonstrates that the market-based interventions in the TBIR and TCIR entail the disciplining of indigenous peoples and politics to livelihoods considered more compatible with the economic and political practices and

ideas of the 'green economy', while still recognizing and supporting the traditions, rights and ideas of the Bribri and Cabécar inhabitants that are compatible to neoliberal conservation. So, viewed in a historical perspective, the gap between recognition and implementation of indigenous rights in Costa Rica does not become shortened through neoliberal conservation and the conservation 'catch-22' remains present. While conservation state agencies and NGOs have begun to diversify environmental governance in order to accommodate some indigenous ideas and culture, the overriding neoliberal mindsets of individualistic rationality, marginal optimization and environmental efficiency remain the unyielding project planning imperatives. Consequently, this thesis argues that while there is some effort to achieve inclusivity through these interventions, social exclusions remain an integral feature of the relationship between modern conservation and indigenous peoples in Costa Rica.