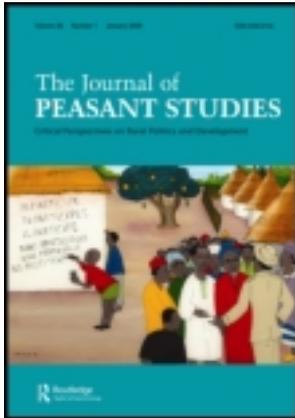


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Green pretexts: Ecotourism, neoliberal conservation and land grabbing in Tayrona National Natural Park, Colombia

Diana Ojeda

While conflict-related dynamics are recognized as causes of land grabbing in Colombia, violent processes of exclusion and expropriation behind ‘greener’ projects are often seen as disconnected from them. The case of ecotourism in Tayrona National Natural Park makes it possible to explore the geographies of violence that sustain tourism in the area and their role in shaping everyday resource politics. This paper shows how green pretexts of paradisiacal spots in need of protection have contributed to privatization and dispossession. Furthermore, it details how land-grabbing dynamics have been enabled by processes of sociospatial demarcation that produce not-green-enough subjects as bodies-out-of-place.

Keywords: neoliberal conservation; land grabbing; ecotourism; militarization; Colombia

Introduction

According to the results from the recently published report from the Colombian Commission for the Assessment of Public Policy on Forced Displacement (CSPPDF 2010), between 1998 and 2008, about four million people (10 percent of the total population) were forcibly displaced from 5.3 million hectares of land in different regions of Colombia. This humanitarian crisis and substantial counter-agrarian reform, which has neither stopped nor been reversed despite recent state projects for victims’ reparation, is rooted in the complex dynamics of the country’s history of unequal access to land and its long-lasting armed conflict. During the last decade, entangled processes of territorial control expansion by paramilitary and neo-paramilitary groups, illegal crop production, large agribusinesses promotion and

This paper is based on findings from my doctoral dissertation research (Graduate School of Geography, Clark University) entitled ‘Producing Paradise: The Violent Geographies of Tourism in Colombia’. This work has been funded by the Inter-American Foundation’s Grassroots Development Fellowship, the Society of Woman Geographers’ Pruitt National Dissertation Fellowship and Clark University’s Pruser-Holzauer Dissertation Enhancement Award. I would like to thank research participants who generously shared their stories with me in the midst of their busy daily schedules, and Alejandro Suárez, Julián Montalvo and Óscar Campo for their knowledge and support. Thanks also to two anonymous reviewers, to the editors of the special issue – Melissa Leach, Ian Scoones and James Fairhead – and to Dianne Rocheleau, Roberta Hawkins, Rosbelinda Cárdenas, Carlos Del Cairo, Julio Arias, Diana Bocarejo, Jill Williams and Dan Brockington for their insightful comments on a previous draft.

high-end corruption have resulted in entrenched uneven geographies of resource access and control in different regions of the country (e.g. Ballvé 2011, Grajales 2011). While these violent dynamics of dispossession and removal have been accounted for as causes of land grabbing, ‘greener’ projects such as plantations of palm oil for biodiesel production, environmental conservation strategies and ecotourism development have not usually been understood by analysts, the media or scholars as part of these dynamics. This is particularly true for the case of tourism-based conservation, which is even portrayed as an environment- and community-friendly alternative to productive activities such as large-scale agriculture and cattle-ranching.

In this paper, I explore how ecotourism complements this land-grabbing logic despite green imperatives of environmental conservation and tourism ‘done right’. I trace the unfortunate articulations of ecotourism, neoliberal conservation and land grabbing in one of the most important protected areas in Colombia, Tayrona National Park. I use the case of Tayrona to delve into the discourses and practices of ecotourism development and the subsequent transformation of resource politics in the area. I thus examine the production of nature for tourist consumption and its effects on the livelihood strategies of local community members, including peasants, fishermen, transporters, food vendors and tour guides. These effects have often included the criminalization, exclusion and forced eviction of community members who have lived and worked in the protected area for decades. In particular, I seek to better understand how the shifting resource politics in the area are coupled with particular formations of difference. In order to do so, I contrast two cases in which local community members’ production as environmental subjects results in their configuration as either eco-guardians or eco-threats. I identify how markers of their embodied greenness respond to (i) their *colono* or ‘settler’ status – a category based on class, race/ethnicity, gender and regional origin – and (ii) their insertion as tourist service providers into two specific forms of neoliberal conservation: a private concession of strategic areas of the park and a state-led project of conservation as development in the park’s buffer zone.

I understand neoliberalism as a global project that seeks to expand the conditions for capital accumulation. Having in mind its many historically and geographically specific forms, I refer to neoliberalism as an always already political and never complete project based on a set of ideologies, discourses and practices of deregulation, decentralization and privatization.¹ Moreover, the neoliberal project is intrinsically an environmental one (McCarthy and Prudham 2004) and has an outstanding capacity for significantly transforming environmental governance (Heynen *et al.* 2007). By ‘neoliberal conservation’ I thus refer to the particular forms the neoliberal project has taken and how it has become articulated with particular forms of environmentalism, especially with discourses and practices of biodiversity conservation (Sullivan 2006, Igoe *et al.* 2010). The old relationship

¹It is important to note that neoliberalism’s deregulatory rhetoric does not correspond to the ways in which neoliberal practices have resulted in the concentration of capital. This is evidenced in the important role that oligopolies and monopolies have increasingly played in the current neoliberal order. In the same way, neoliberalism has not translated into less state intervention. On the contrary, one can speak of a capitalist state (Jessop 2002) at the service of private capital accumulation. As Peck and Tickell (2002, 400) rightly point out, ‘[neoliberalism] exists in a self-contradictory way as a form of “metaregulation,” a rule system that paradoxically defines itself as a form of antiregulation’.

between capitalism and conservation has recently taken new forms under the neoliberal project (Brockington and Duffy 2010), including the current greening of capitalism and its corporate responsibility version in which capital is supposed to be the most effective ally in saving the world from the environmental destruction it has done so much to produce.² Moreover, this paper examines how neoliberal conservation for the case of Tayrona has been coupled with multiple forms of violence resulting in uneven geographies of security, mobility and resource access. The problematic relations between tourism, conservation, (para)militarization, privatization and the politics of difference are detailed below.

First, I provide a brief history of tourism and war in Tayrona, highlighting the touristification process that has taken place during the last decade as tourism became a fundamental site of the production of natures, spaces and subjects. I note the strategies of securitization and tourism promotion behind Tayrona's production as 'paradise regained'. Second, I examine the privatization of strategic areas of the park that has resulted from the concession of tourist services to the travel company Aviator and the implications of ecotourism, as a particular form of neoliberal conservation, for the livelihoods of those who live and work at the park. Lastly, I analyze how the shifting resource politics in the area are profoundly entangled with the politics of difference, local community members socially marked as guardians or invaders of Tayrona's protected area.

As mentioned earlier, my research focuses on *colonos*: local community members who work mostly as tourist service providers and who, for the particular case of Tayrona, are not identified as indigenous or Afro-descendants. While my analysis would have benefited from examining how indigenous peoples in the area are produced as environmental subjects, I chose to focus on how seemingly non-ethnic communities are socially marked in relation to the natures they inhabit and produce. This is perhaps more relevant within the Colombian state multicultural regime as it makes legible and privileges particular forms of racial and ethnic differences at the expense of others such as class.³ Within this regime of difference, indigenous peoples from the Tayrona area have successfully been deemed as 'ecological natives' (Ulloa 2005) unlike *colonos*.

The arguments presented in this paper are based on ethnographic and historical research I carried out in Bogotá and the area of Tayrona National Natural Park between June 2009 and April 2011. I carried out content and discourse analysis of official documents, press material and media products regarding tourism-based development initiatives from the last two decades. I also conducted 26 semi-structured interviews with government and NGO officials in Bogotá and Santa Marta whose work and experience relates to tourism promotion and development at the national, regional and local levels. Moreover, as my main interest was to get a better sense of how allegedly ecotourist projects are understood, experienced and negotiated by precisely those who have been most affected by them, I rely heavily on

²For literature on the relation between capitalism and conservation, including recent discussions on neoliberal conservation see, for example, Katz (1998), Neumann (1998), Conservation and Society (2007), Brockington *et al.* (2008), Duffy (2008), Antipode (2010) and Current Conservation (2010).

³For critical analyses of multiculturalism in Colombia, see for example Agudelo (2005), Restrepo (2007, 2008, Bocarejo (2011), Chaves (2012) and Del Cairo (2011). See Restrepo (2004) for a critique of how, under the multicultural regime, ethnicization processes have become fundamental for negotiations about access to rights.

information I gathered through participant observation, open-ended interviews, informal conversations and the collection of life histories of more than 35 members from the local communities that inhabit the Tayrona area. For confidentiality purposes, I use pseudonyms and omit some identifying characteristics of key participants. All interviews and conversations took place in Spanish; direct quotes are my translation.

Tayrona: ‘paradise regained’⁴

Located in the Caribbean coast of Colombia, Tayrona National Natural Park is nowadays one of the most important protected areas in the country, comprising 15,000 hectares, of which 3,000 are in marine areas. Last year it received around 250,000 visitors. Only 35 km away from the city of Santa Marta and under its district’s jurisdiction, the park was legally established in 1964. In 1982, UNESCO declared the combined area of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta National Natural Park and Tayrona National Natural Park a Biosphere Reserve. This combined area of about 400,000 hectares includes traditional indigenous territories of the Arhuaco, Kankuamo, Kogui and Wiwa peoples. It is home to about 30,000 of their members, as well as to numerous peasant communities that arrived numerous beginning in the mid-twentieth century and have continued to settle in Tayrona and the Sierra. These settlers, *colonos*, have fled violent events in other regions of the country and have sought job opportunities in the area, mostly associated with illicit crops. In its borders, from sea level to 5,775 m of altitude, the combined area of Tayrona and the Sierra includes glaciers, *páramos*, humid tropical forests, dry tropical forests, thorn forests, beaches, coral reefs, mangroves and coastal pools, among other endangered ecosystems.

Despite the fact that Tayrona’s ecologies, species and landscapes are generally seen as constitutive of its ‘natural tourist vocation’, there is nothing ‘natural’ or immediate about turning ‘one person’s provision ground into another’s playground’ (Sheller 2003, 13). In particular, the recent increase of international and domestic visitors to the park from about 90,000 in 2004 to 250,000 visitors in 2010 is the result of the intensive process of touristification that has taken place under the national policy of Democratic Security implemented in 2002 by former president Álvaro Uribe. A state project of *securitization* that stands in accordance to the War on Drugs and the War on Terror, Democratic Security has been framed as the answer to the urgent necessity to ‘restore order and the dominion of law’ in all corners of the national territory.⁵ Officially defined by former President Álvaro Uribe as ‘the concrete possibility for all citizens to enjoy their fundamental rights. . . [a] possibility [that] only becomes true when the state’s prompt and effective coercion is guaranteed’ (2002, cited in Barco 2002), Democratic Security has indeed relied on coercion, among other securitization mechanisms. As a result, what privileged Colombians usually from urban areas celebrate as their possibility to finally return to their vacation homes is what human rights advocates and state victims have denoted

⁴USA Today’s (2006, online) article referring to the Colombian Caribbean and how tourism has increased in response to the perception of the country’s improved security.

⁵I use the concept of ‘securitization’ to refer to a political and cultural project of hyper-vigilance and exclusion of particular spaces and forms of citizenship, usually based on militarization and the mobilization of fear (Sparke 2006, Hyndman 2007, Katz 2007).

as a project based on state terror and the elimination of political dissidence: a dirty war.⁶

The double strategy of tourism promotion and militarization of tourist spots and travel routes connecting main urban centers with tourist attractions has resulted in the production of the country, and in particular of the Colombian Caribbean and Tayrona National Park, as tourist destinations. In fact, Tayrona's historical geographies of violence seem to contradict its effective conjuration as a paradisiacal spot. A strategic area, the park connects the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, where mostly illegal crops (marihuana, coca and poppies) are harvested, to maritime access points through which products are transported and then distributed to Central America and Mexico, to then be sent to their final destinations in the US and Europe. Partly because of these activities, the last four decades in the Tayrona area have been marked by the strong presence of both official and irregular (i.e. guerrilla and paramilitary) armed forces. In the 1970s – with the marihuana bonanza – and the 1980s – with the coca bonanza – in the Sierra Nevada and different areas of the park, paramilitary forces were formed in order to take part in the business and to provide private security services to drug lords and landowners.

Paramilitary groups organized by Hernán Giraldo, also known as 'El Patrón' (The Boss), constituted an anti-guerrilla private armed force, mostly against the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) that had presence in the area around the mid-1980s. The following decade was marked by the consolidation of Giraldo's armed, economic and political power, his private militias often operating with state sanction. In 1995, Giraldo had expanded his territorial influence and control to include significant areas of the two departments of the Caribbean coast.⁷ Paramilitary actions were funded mainly through *boleteo* ('protection' fees), extortion, 'taxation' on land and cattle, theft, drug traffic and contraband. Throughout the 1990s, as a means of securing a tight control of population and resources, the area that comprises Tayrona Natural Park and the northeastern slope of the Sierra Nevada was characterized by massacres, selective assassinations, forced displacement and forced disappearances carried out by paramilitary squads (personal interviews with local community members; *Verdad Abierta* 2009, 2010a).

In 2002, the Castaño brothers and 'Jorge 40', leaders of the largest paramilitary group in Colombia called the Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (AUC), declared war on Giraldo. Giraldo's army, now under the name of Frente Resistencia Tayrona, refused to surrender and to hand out territories and combatants until February 2003 when, after a bloody war, the two groups signed a truce and 'Jorge 40' took charge of the Tayrona area. The two paramilitary structures of the Colombian Caribbean region – the AUC and the Frente Resistencia Tayrona – were then unified under AUC's Bloque

⁶For example, official statistics from the Fiscalía General de la Nación (General Prosecution Office) count 50,000 persons forcibly disappeared during the last 20 years, with clear increases in the last eight years: 'During Uribe's first year [2002] four persons disappeared per day. But between 2002 and 2006 the number was seven persons per day, and between 2007 and 2008 this number grew to eleven. Eleven every single day' (Caballero 2010, online, my translation). The continuation of the Democratic Security doctrine has been central to President Juan Manuel Santos's administration and strategies of securitization linked to tourism promotion have been an important part of his government. It is also worth noting that Santos was Uribe's Minister of Defense.

⁷It has been estimated that by 2001, 40 percent of all coca exports with a value of nearly 1.2 billion dollars went through Giraldo's territories (*Verdad Abierta* 2010b).

Norte. Bloque Norte's dominion continued undefeated, constituting an army of nearly 1,200 men and women. The group nominally ceased activities in 2006, when it participated in the highly questioned process of paramilitary demobilization carried out under Uribe's government between 2003 and 2006. Hernán Giraldo was among the demobilized and was detained in 2006; he was extradited to the US two years later and faces a 38-year sentence (*Verdad Abierta* 2009).

When I asked local community members if things are better at the park, now that it is a major tourist attraction, they often referred to how violence was still part of their everyday lives. As one tour guide put it:

It's a *calma chicha* (a superficial calm that hides the storm beneath), as it has been for a while. . . . You come from Bogotá and think 'nothing happens here'. But it's not easy. . . . paramilitary bands are organizing again. . . . You see? Tourism is the façade, you don't see what's behind. (personal interview, May 2010)

In fact, one of the reasons why the peace process between the government and paramilitary groups has been deemed as a failure, is the fact that criminal organizations were not dismantled and neo-paramilitary groups or 'emerging criminal bands' (BACRIM) have continued operating, often with state sanction, and have even increased their violent activities and expanded their area of influence in different regions of the country (Human Rights Watch 2010).

In the Tayrona area, the dubious demobilization process has meant the violent redefinition of territorial control, illegal crop production areas and traffic routes. With more than 11,000 combatants nationally and strong presence in 24 of the 32 departments of the country (Corporación Nuevo Arco Iris 2009), the actions of various neo-paramilitary groups in the Caribbean Region and in Tayrona in particular challenge images of paradisiacal spots commonly associated to the area. Moreover, they reveal the seemingly impossible relations between war and tourism when, in fact, the spatialities of leisure in Tayrona have been forged through violence.

Paramilitary violence has played a crucial role in the state project of securitization undertaken by the national policy of Democratic Security, even if not openly recognized by official sources. As FARC 'subversives' started to be understood as 'terrorists' at the beginning of the 2000s and were deemed as the country's only obstacle to attaining peace, paramilitary groups became natural allies of state attempts of pacifying the country.⁸ This was and is particularly true in the Tayrona area, where paramilitary control has guaranteed tourists' mobility and relative safety. The presence of guerrilla groups was a problem for tourism development. Thefts, extortion and kidnappings prevented opening the park to a significant number of visitors coming from cities, such as Bogotá and Medellín, and foreigners. Paramilitary groups, by gaining control of Tayrona and the Sierra, fought guerrilla forces out of the area and 'cleaned it up' for tourist activities. The tight alliances between paramilitary groups and regional power structures often implied local government entities' compliance with violent paramilitary actions either by overlooking or enticing them.

The 'retaking of the country', as former President Alvaro Uribe has often referred to the effects of this double strategy of militarization and tourism promotion, has been

⁸This contradicts recent national statistics, which signal that while the state was responsible for 17 percent of human rights violations at the beginning of Uribe's first term in 2002, four years later, it was responsible for 56 percent of the violations, compared to 29 percent by paramilitary groups and 10 percent by the FARC guerrilla in the same year (Leech 2008).

based on the ‘re-conquest’ of the national territory, a patriotic endeavor performed by both soldiers and families on vacation. Concomitant to this material ‘retaking’ from guerrilla forces, the imagined geographies circulated by promotional videos, brochures, journalists and presidential speeches alike have resulted in the production of the park as ‘paradise regained’ despite the ongoing war in the area.⁹ Notions of security, war and peace have become profoundly entangled with tourism promotion, which has played a key role in the production of a new order where impunity and the criminalization of dissidence are the rule (Ramírez 2010). Simultaneously, narratives of ‘out of this world’ places and ‘paradises awaiting discovery’ have effectively created the illusion that, when you come visit the country, ‘the only risk is wanting to stay’, as the promotional campaign ‘Colombia is Passion’ asserts.

The uneven geographies of security that emerged during the last decade need to be understood in relation to violence’s central role in enabling and sustaining tourism. For the case of Tayrona, glossy tourist brochures have contributed to making state and paramilitary violence invisible, hiding both the violence that tourism produces and the complex dimensions of the internal armed conflict. Ecotourism thus became a powerful mechanism in reimagining the park, the region and the country. The shared itineraries and landscapes of war and tourism in Tayrona National Park have been enabled and sustained by the problematic articulations of tourism, conservation and violence this paper examines. In what follows, I specify some everyday aspects of this violence in terms of land-grabbing dynamics in Tayrona and its effects over local resource politics.

Whose paradise?

Tayrona National Natural Park is a protected area rife with land tenure conflicts, including the fact that 90 percent of the public national park is *de facto* in private hands. As reported by one of the major newspapers in the country, ‘Tayrona belongs to very few Colombians’ (Coronel 2009, online, my translation, Burgos 2002). Private plots within the park have been expanding, notwithstanding its legal public character. Just between 2002 and 2003, the number of private properties within its boundaries increased from 108 to 160 (Coronel 2009, online). The majority of the area belongs to property owners, occupants and *colonos*. Properties range from

⁹For example, in 2007, *The New York Times* declared in a rather triumphant tone that Tayrona National Park was ‘recovered’ for tourism. The article in *The New York Times* reads,

For years the park and its environs were a battleground between guerrilla and paramilitary groups. . . Now, however, Tayrona has been transformed. In late 2003, the Colombian president, Alvaro Uribe, cracked down on crime. With the Sierra Nevada now largely safe, the government has set about promoting Tayrona as a tourist paradise (Hammer 2007).

These overstatements of a pacified zone had to be rectified by the newspaper weeks later, and only a few months after the article’s publication the war between different neo-paramilitary bands exploded. The correction published on December 9, 2007 reads, ‘An article on Nov. 11 about Tayrona National Park in Colombia misstated the extent to which kidnappings have been reduced since the Colombian president, Alvaro Uribe, initiated his new security policy in late 2003 . . . The number of kidnappings was not brought down from 3,000 in 2003 to 100 a year’ (Hammer 2007, 1). It is also worth noting that this reduction obeys to different forms of warfare now instituted, forms that usually go under the radar (see Dickinson 2011 and Tate 2007).

farms of different sizes, some of them without land title, to recreational homes of powerful members of local elites. The latter are landowners and high-end government officials, some of whom, judging by recent convictions and sentences for *parapolítica*, have connections with drug traffic and irregular armed forces.¹⁰ Members from local elites have either acquired the properties, despite the park's public status under which it is illegal to sell or buy any piece of land within its limits, or have royal decrees dating back to the Spanish colonial period – titles given by the Crown to conquistadors in return for their endeavors.

In addition to the problematic ways in which local elites and paramilitary forces participate in the definition of Tayrona's public/private character, tourism-based strategies of neoliberal conservation have had significant effects on local communities. One of its most problematic aspects is their capacity of producing bodies out of place. Environmental protection discourses and practices have translated into land-grabbing mechanisms under which the protection of nature – allegedly made possible by its commodification for tourist consumption – justifies and even legitimates the dispossession of local community members such as fishermen, transporters and peasants. The resulting restructuring of resource access, use and control has been justified by 'green' purposes of biodiversity conservation. As defined by government officials and NGO professionals I interviewed, conservation comprised those actions necessary to protect Tayrona's natures from imminent destruction. Narratives of species and ecosystems in peril often were expressed under the idea that the world's natural heritage, including that of all Colombian citizens, was put at risk by the presence and destructive actions of 'invaders' and 'illegal occupants'. Conservation was always invoked as an ulterior purpose, a mission, and tourism development was conceived as one of the main conservation strategies within Tayrona National Natural Park. Nevertheless, the conservation imperative of 'taking the necessary measures for the protection of wildlife' was coupled with problematic means of capital accumulation that were seen as green, unlike local community members – those who were often invoked as the main beneficiaries of tourism-based conservation.

In 2005, tourist services within strategic areas of the park were given in concession by the state for a period of 10 years to Unión Temporal Tayrona, an alliance among Santa Marta's Chamber of Commerce, the private national travel company Aviatur and the travel agency Alnuva, with Aviatur being its major stockholder. The provision of tourist services in certain areas of Tayrona was put up for concession under the premise that tourism would bring jobs to the local community and financial resources for biodiversity conservation, while relieving the National Park's Administrative Unit (Unidad Administrativa Especial de Parques Naturales – UAESPNN) of the technical and economic burdens of tourism's administration. While the alliance holds a relatively small fraction of Tayrona National Natural Park, it has control over the two important tourist zones of Cañaveral and Arrecifes, as well as over the two park entrances and registration booths.

The concession exemplifies well the connections between tourism and localized land-grabbing dynamics carried out by state and corporate power in the name of development and conservation. While, *de jure*, the state only entrusted the provision of tourist services to the company, strategic areas of the park have been *de facto*

¹⁰*Parapolítica* refers to the strong links between government instances – including several politicians, Congress, and local, departmental and national elections – and the formation, funding and operation of paramilitary groups.

privatized with significant effects on local community members' livelihood strategies, who often signaled the concession as a major change in their capacity of making a living.¹¹ The concession's establishment has increased the pressure on resources and territories where tourism is the main means of subsistence, resulting in the criminalization, relocation and expulsion of workers and park residents. It has also significantly transformed the relations among local community members, their interactions with local conservation officials from UAESPNN, and the terms under which they access and use different spaces of the park.

Even if officially Aviator won the public contest, most community members and some former UAESPNN officials argue that the details through which the concession was determined and the competition itself were never open to the public. 'We even asked for information at [UAESPNN], but it was all secret. We didn't have time to organize. . . We've been doing this ecotourism thing for years, we know the business. But the concession was *amañada* (fixed) from the beginning', one of the tour guides said to me, aptly summarizing the feeling of many other community members who expressed that none of the changes were discussed or arranged with them (personal interview, June 2010). Vendors, transporters and tour guides who work in different areas of the park say they were left out, ignored when invited to preliminary meetings or even threatened if they continued to oppose the concession. Many of them identify the changes since the establishment of the concession in terms of Aviator taking advantage of them and their work, and in terms of UAESPNN displacing them and violating their right to work in order to protect Aviator's interests (personal interviews). In addition to this, the declarations from 'El Canoso', an important paramilitary leader now imprisoned in the US, suggest that an alliance among paramilitary warlords, local political leaders, Uribe's sons and Aviator was behind the establishment of the concession (El Espectador 2011, Semana 2011, Verdad Abierta 2011a, 2011b). They also reveal the political and economic interests behind Tayrona's privatization.

Before the concession, tourist services were provided mostly by local associations: vendors, tour guides, transporters and *arrieros* (mule drivers) organized in workers' cooperatives that negotiated directly with the UAESPNN local officials at the time. 'Only [two of such associations] are alive, just some remains of them. Everyone else got displaced. . . The concession has been a serious mistake', said a former UAESPNN official I interviewed (personal interview, February 2010). By putting pressure on local associations to sign a contract with the company, the concession's establishment changed the rules of the game. Some tour guides and all *arrieros* signed a contract with Aviator in order to be able to continue working at the park. They said they have had to increase their fares and pay the company a significant part of it. 'Before, one charged 40,000 pesos (US\$20) for the day. Now, one has to charge 80,000 pesos (US\$40). So less people buy your services. And Aviator takes half. And you have to work to their rules and their clock, not yours', explained one of the tour guides who decided to stop working with Aviator six months after signing with the company (personal interview, March 2010).

¹¹I refer to the privatization of areas of the park as the process through which an exclusionary set of relations that inform ownership – and thus control, access and use of resources – has been established. According to Bakker (2005, 544), privatization processes 'entail a change of ownership, or a handover of management, from the public to the private sector'.

Fishermen, food vendors and transporters in Gairaca and Playa del Muerto, among other beaches at the park, say they are experiencing more pressure to leave after the concession was established. They think other potential or actual tourists spots they depend from would be put out to tender in a matter of years. Many of them, including people who have lived and worked at the park for several decades, have been threatened by eviction both by UAESPNN officials, private parties and armed actors. In March 2010, I arrived in Gairaca a few days after a fishing community was evicted, their homes for around 50 years destroyed. According to the fishermen in the area, UAESPNN officials entered escorted by policemen and demolition trucks: they destroyed seven houses from fishermen who have lived in the park for decades, but none of the luxurious private houses were touched. While some of the evicted fishermen decided to move to other beaches in the park, at least temporarily, most of them are now in the nearest city, Santa Marta, looking for a way of making a living. ‘We don’t know what will be of us’, said another one of the fishermen. ‘They will come after us, kick us out, even the ones at other beaches. I have no doubt this will all be turned into ecotourist concessions. . . this is a tourist mine’ (personal interview, March 2010).

Eco-guardians/Eco-threats

For the case of Tayrona, natures in peril are co-constitutive of subjects that fall into two exclusionary categories: *eco-guardians* or *eco-threats*.¹² This classification works within hierarchical systems of differentiation and domination based on class, race, ethnicity, gender and regional origin, revealing the intricate workings of resource politics and the politics of difference.¹³ Authors such as Diana Bocarejo and Roosbelinda Cárdenas have noted the spatial dimension of multicultural regimes of differentiation in Colombia. In her work, Bocarejo (2009) notes how *typologies* of difference in the country, which took a new form under the Constitution of 1991, have produced particular subjects upon which particular *topologies* are assigned.¹⁴ In this order, indigenous peoples are generally assumed to belong to *resguardos* (reservations), peasants to agricultural fields, and Afro-Colombians to river basins in the Pacific region. Moreover, as Cárdenas (2011) points out, the particular configuration of cultural and natural politics under what she refers to as *green multiculturalism* in Colombia has resulted in perverse logics under which ‘the conditions of [multicultural subjects’] cultural recognition get intricately tied to their promise to display appropriately “green” behavior’ (Cárdenas 2011, 29).

Social demarcation in the Tayrona area relies on identifiable markers that work as a powerful measure of embodied greenness. While indigenous communities are seen as an ethnically differentiated group with its own culture and territory, the

¹²In his work on the cultural politics of blackness in Colombia’s Pacific region, Peter Wade (1995) makes a similar argument regarding the perceptions of blacks as invaders vs. Embera and Guambiano indigenous peoples as traditional guardians of the land.

¹³On the articulations of resource politics and the politics of difference, see, for example, Wade (2002), Moore *et al.* (2003), Escobar (2006, 2008) and Kosek (2006). Specifically in relation to conservation, see for example Neumann (1998), Lohmann (2000) and West (2006).

¹⁴For an analysis of the isomorphism of space, place and culture, see Gupta and Ferguson (1992). Trouillot’s (2001) concept of *the savage slot* provides insightful ways of understanding how ethnicity gets fixed to a particular territory. On the role of the Constitution of 1991 on the production of nature and on particular state formations, see Asher and Ojeda (2009).

apparent absence of ethnic markers makes it difficult for peasants, fishermen, vendors and tour guides to meet green multicultural requirements of an inherent disposition for conservation.¹⁵ In that way, they have become *bodies out of place* who constantly transgress the logic of bounded difference in the country.¹⁶ Produced as *mestizo* populations, a category understood as racially and ethnically unmarked, fishermen and transporters in Gairaca and Playa del Muerto are seen as lacking a specific culture and, thus, ancestral roots to land. More specifically, local community members are mostly identified with *colonos*. *Colonos* have traditionally embodied *mestizo* ideals of industriousness and progress. Also with strong links to class-based connotations of laboring bodies and of masculine values of manual labor and bravery, *colonos* have historically been associated with the culture side of the culture/nature dualism (Plumwood 1993).¹⁷

Regional hierarchies in Colombia have long historical geographies of racialization and ethnicization that have been carefully studied by different authors.¹⁸ These sedimented representations have resulted in the association of peasants and fishermen in the Colombian Caribbean, unlike indigenous peoples and peasants in

¹⁵The idea of indigenous communities from the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta as exemplary protectors of nature – as mobilized by state entities, development practitioners, conservationists, activists and the indigenous communities themselves – has become a strong narrative present in development plans, academic work and documentaries alike. Nevertheless, the recognition of their greenness is contingent upon the presence of legible ethnic and cultural markers. For example, in one interview I conducted with a UAESPNN official at the regional office, I asked whether indigenous people were allowed to live within park limits. To this, he said, ‘yes, this is their ancestral land’. Briefly after, he added: ‘...but some of them are not really *Indios* (sic) anymore and they take advantage of their supposedly indigenous status to invade and destroy different areas of the park’ (personal interview, June 2010, emphasis added). Markers of this lost indigeness included the ‘contamination of their culture’ from having lived in the city and being ‘too accustomed’ to money. According to these accounts, indigenous communities’ lost ethnicity could be read in their appearance – hair, dress, shoes, bag, etc. – and corresponds with their lost greenness. This seems to corroborate Bocarejo’s (2009) findings of how multiculturalism in Colombia dictates that indigenous peoples have to live what is considered an indigenous life within indigenous territories in order to be considered legitimately indigenous, and thus subjects of indigenous rights. These forms of symbolic violence have recently been made evident as the construction of a highly exclusive seven star hotel in Tayrona has been just announced. The hotel quickly implied the erasure of indigenous peoples and their rights to sacred lands within the park as the Ministry of Interior publicly denied their existence in order for the project to be carried out without their prior informed consent (Osorio 2011).

¹⁶Following McDowell’s (1999) theorizations of how particular bodies are assigned to particular spaces – in her case, gendered and sexualized bodies, I use her notion of ‘bodies out of place’ to the study of the embodied politics of mobility in the park (Cresswell 1999), in particular in relation to the impossibility some communities face of *staying put*.

¹⁷The way in which *colonos* have been historically associated with the *mestizo* ideal in Colombia has of course translated into historically entrenched privileges. While I present the complex contextual factors that, for the case of Tayrona, put them at disadvantage in terms of mobilizing their embodied greenness and their right to territory *vis-à-vis* particular indigenous peoples, I do not seek to dismiss the jarring effects of racialization and ethnicization processes in the region. Far from a zero sum game, the struggles for resource access, use and control need to be carefully studied on the ground. For a contrasting case, refer to Mollet’s (2006) work on the Lasa Pulan area in Honduras.

¹⁸On the regionalization of difference during the nineteenth century in Colombia, see Appelbaum (1999) and Arias (2005). For examples and a detailed analysis of dynamics of internal colonization and their civilization/savagery logic during the first half of the twentieth century, see Roldán (1998) and Steiner (2000).

the Andean region of the country, with extractive activities that have been framed as detrimental to environmental conservation. The differentiation between *tierra fría* (highlands) and *tierra caliente* (lowlands) – the latter represented by the Caribbean region – has been one of the most important factors behind these hierarchies as they correlate with the binary pair civilization/savagery (Wade 1993, Palacio 2006). The colonization of the lowlands, up until the mid-twentieth century, was a synonym for civilization. In that way, *colonos* were seen as the labor force behind *abrir monte* (opening wild lands) and pushing the agricultural frontier, key elements for the nation's progress.

The national colonization project of 'filling up' the nation and conquering marginal territories was saturated with moral connotations that glorified the brave men who took on the endeavor of domesticating nature, conquering it with diligence, discipline and strength (Bolívar 2006, 254, LeGrand 1986). This characterization began to change as the moral worth of peasants was put into question and the image of the poor *colono*, squatter and *guerrillero* (guerrilla combatant) became more popular in the Cold War setting.¹⁹ Later in the 1970s and 1980s, with the marijuana and coca bonanzas in different regions of the country including Tayrona and the Sierra, peasants and fishermen became associated with drug trafficking, their image transformed from the forefront of progress and nation making, to that of invaders and environmental predators.²⁰

Indeed, the narratives implied in the production of vendors, peasants, fishermen, tour guides, transporters and other local community members in the Tayrona area as 'not green-enough others' stand in close relation to their dubious moral worth. In my conversations with officials from UAESPNN and from other government instances, as well as with NGO professionals in the region, fishermen were thought of as not being conscious about the coral reef and were usually signaled as responsible for fish shortages. Their improper environmental behavior was further explained because '[they are] paramilitaries' and *narcos*' allies, not real fishermen', as one former UAESPNN official put it (personal interview, September 2009). Peasants, on the other hand, were thought of as coca growers and *raspachines* (coca pickers), depleting the forest in order to establish illicit and other crops.²¹ Within this hierarchical system of difference and territoriality, local community members who live and work at the park have not been able to access the status of eco-guardians. Instead, they are produced by official conservation discourses as environmental

¹⁹For a historical account of how peasants and *colonos* began to be identified by metaphors of illegality such as coca growers, *raspachines* (coca pickers) and *guerrilleros* at the margins of the state in Colombia, see Vásquez (2006). See also Ramírez (2001) on *campesinos cocaleros* (coca-growing peasants) in the Colombian Amazon.

²⁰For a specific analysis of the construction of peasants as invaders of natural reserves in Colombia, see Ruiz (2003). For a detailed ethnography of the production of *colonos* within a state logic that does not recognize peasants as citizens, and insists on criminalizing them by deeming them as drug traffickers and guerrilla combatants, see Espinosa (2010).

²¹I thank one of the anonymous reviewers for pointing out that despite coca presence within Tayrona, it is not an important land use given the size of the park (Alvarez 2002). S/he also noted how recent evidence suggests that coca is not associated with a higher probability of deforestation in the region (Dávalos *et al.* 2011). Agricultural land use within Tayrona consists mostly of subsistence crops such as plantain, yucca and tropical fruits. Local community members often complained about UAESPNN 'giving them trouble' for engaging in any agricultural activity even when, according to them, the trees they planted fed the monkeys and birds that brought conservationists and tourists to the park (personal interviews).

predators, and thus as bodies out of place, deeply rooted in the ever-changing interpretations of the culture/nature dualism.

On the contrary, a group of local community members, peasants, in Tayrona's buffer zone have been produced as eco-guardians through their participation in the project *Posadas Turísticas* (Tourist Lodges) – a development project that uses ecotourism as a means for illicit crop eradication, environmental conservation, community building and peacemaking. In 2007, the government purchased collective lands located in Tayrona's buffer zone corresponding to 100 ha of dry tropical forest, in addition to some space for housing and agriculture. A total of 20 tourist lodges were built and allocated to 20 families that were chosen according to their 'disposition to tend to tourists and learn the business' (personal interviews). In exchange, project participants had the commitment to maintain the land 'clean' (coca-free) and to devote it to conservation and sustainable economic activities such as organic small-scale farming (coffee, cacao and tropical fruits), beekeeping and ecotourism.

Peasants participating in the project arrived in the area at various historical moments and under different conditions, mostly escaping from violence and looking for job opportunities. Most of them identify themselves as *colonos* and they used to be *jornaleros* (temporary agricultural workers without a contract) who came to the area motivated by the jobs offered in coca crops, mainly for men: planting, weeding and harvesting. Some of them started to work as *raspachines*, transporting coca leaves, watching the crops or making coca paste (primary input for cocaine production) in the labs. By complying with the demands of the project of becoming tourist hosts, they have been produced as 'green peasants' – a rare category within state multiculturalism in Colombia and its logics of bounded difference, particularly for the Caribbean Coast.

For project participants, their legitimate role in the area's conservation practices has been possible through their moral and cultural transformation from *cocaleros* (coca growers and pickers) to *hoteleros* (tourist hosts), through their commitment to living the 'legal life', keeping their lands coca-free and selling a tourist experience based on a new relation to nature. Like in the case of Tayrona's fishermen, peasants, transporters and vendors, *posaderos* (project participants) who live and work in the park's buffer zone are considered *colonos*. But, unlike them, their status as proper environmental subjects within a hierarchical system of difference mobilizes their *colono* status as a marker of their capacity to become neoliberal entrepreneurial subjects. According to the logics of neoliberal conservation imperatives, values and goals of self-management, individual progress, economic rationality and efficiency – those ideally embodied by *posaderos* – are deemed fundamental for the proper use and transformation of the environment, and thus for the production of morally worthy and properly green subjects.

Posaderos are framed as green peasants in their formation as entrepreneurial subjects within the logics of tourism-based practices of nature commodification. This is reflected in how their new life as tourist hosts implied a different environmental subjectivity: their past as coca growers was an unacceptable form of relating to the environment (and of being an entrepreneur), so the project's goal was turning them into proper conservationists that, *through* and *for* the market, could learn a presumably different and better way of being in nature. The mechanisms through which *posaderos* were transformed from eco-threats to eco-guardians were stated in terms of regaining their moral worth. In an interview with one of them, he explained these connections between an ecological and moral conversion: 'We used to destroy

the forest with coca plantations, now we are conserving it. . . we have organic crops such as coffee, we do ecotourism, . . . By changing our lives, we added our two cents to change our country and the environment' (personal interview, February 2010).²²

On the contrary, claims to the right to subsistence and the right to work – such as those made by local community members in Tayrona – combined with the reluctance to work within the corporatized regime imposed by the concession are framed in opposition to an 'eco-rational' way of being in and relating to nature, that is both about ecology and economics (Goldman 2001). This, in turn, produces them as bodies out of place that, for conservation's sake, need to be taken off protected areas. They stood in the way of corporate-sponsored development initiatives that required them to become employees. Their entrepreneurial skills and autonomous work as service providers challenged conservation mandates and left them *out of place* within Tayrona's boundaries. At the same time, even if *posaderos* were idolized by government instances in comparison to Tayrona's fishermen and tourist service providers, their relationship with nature was prescribed under the mandates of development, conservation and security. Their ability to be considered *in place* at the outskirts of the park depended upon their performance of an embodied green, entrepreneurial and 'reinserted to society' identity. Dynamics of social demarcation have thus played an important role in the criminalization, relocation and eviction of people who live and work in the park.

Conclusions

Tourism promotion in Tayrona National Park and its buffer zone has had significant implications on the livelihood strategies of peasants, fishermen and tourist service providers who live and work at the park. Tayrona's touristification has meant the restructuring of local resource access, use and control as tourism-based neoliberal conservation initiatives have been implemented. Ecotourist projects have been increasingly promoted, established and justified under development and conservation discourses that see the attraction of 'responsible' capital investment and 'conscious' tourists as the solution to environmental depletion. Despite pervasive narratives of natural and cultural diversity in need of protection, local community members who inhabit the protected area have been produced as invaders and illegal occupants. In fact, ecotourism has played an important role in their criminalization, exclusion and even eviction. Green pretexts of paradisiacal spots in need to be protected have enabled coercive practices of conservation, facilitated capital accumulation, caused deteriorating working conditions and legitimized dispossession in the park.

²²In her work, Vásquez (2006) examines the transition from *colonos* to environmentalists that local communities experienced in the case of La Macarena, in the Eastern Lowlands region of the country. She explains this process in terms of global discourses of sustainability, coupled with local political opportunities that conservation measures offered for those who managed to mobilize themselves as guardians of local natural resources. Like in the case of Tayrona's tourist lodges, community members were seen as lacking traditional practices, an ancestral territory and a group collective identity. Similarly, the *colonos* studied by Vásquez had to resort to state-led development interventions in order to justify their permanence and status as properly green subjects. As it is also noted by Bolívar (2006), throughout Colombia's history, *colonos* have had to negotiate their moral worth in terms of enacting more 'natural' relations with territory. This negotiation has often included performing a role as protectors of biologic diversity and cultural difference.

The shifting resource politics in Tayrona stand in close relation with processes of differentiation. Local community members have been deemed as either eco-guardians or eco-threats in response to particular versions of their embodied greenness. I have identified the processes of sociospatial demarcation behind their production as environmental subjects, contrasting the case of tourist service providers in Tayrona with that of peasants in the park's buffer zone. The production of Tayrona's beaches, and of its buffer zone, as ecotourist spaces full of natures in need of protection has been articulated with different forms of subject making: On one hand, in the case of Tayrona's beaches, local community members are deemed as eco-threats, despite the ways in which their everyday lives and experience permanently contest the boundaries between livelihoods/conservation, work/home and culture/nature that tourism depends on and constantly reinforces. On the other, the *Posadas* project in the park's buffer zone demands the production of local community members as eco-guardians through their incorporation to neoliberal conservation and development logics that depend on problematic narratives of nature as an ideal, fixed, external entity that can only be protected through its commodification for tourist consumption.

In both cases, tourism and its capacity to produce natures, spaces and subjects have had problematic effects on local community members' everyday lives. Ecotourism's broken promises of conservation, development and peacemaking have been insufficient to generate viable livelihood strategies and more inclusive politics that could lead to the region's transformation. It is in that sense that tourism-based conservation in the Tayrona area has made of ecotourism a powerful strategy of accumulation by dispossession, complementing other mechanisms of land grabbing in the country. Its effects on the everyday lives of those who call 'paradise' home point to the problematic ways in which environmental agendas have been recently mobilized for resource appropriation. By examining the specific articulations of ecotourism, neoliberal conservation and land grabbing for the case of Tayrona, I have shown the ways in which 'green' imperatives have translated into particular productions of natures in peril and not-green-enough subjects. These formations exemplify well the discourses and practices of ecotourism and their workings within multi-scaled green grabbing dynamics. The connections between neoliberal conservation and violence are perhaps more striking as the production of Tayrona as 'paradise regained' has implied rampant forms of exclusion that, in the name of nature, have been maintained and reinforced through a double strategy of touristification and militarization.

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