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**‘THE FARMERS’ PART’: AN
ETHNOGRAPHIC EXPLORATION OF
NEW ENVIRONMENTAL SCENERIES**

Dissertation submitted in 2015 for the MRes Anthropology

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MRes in Anthropology Dissertation

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New Environmental Sceneries**

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Abstract

Based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in 2015 in a rainforest valley of Peruvian Amazonia, this dissertation looks at the dynamics between the implementation of environmental programmes and local farmers' visions of the world. Such dynamics are read through the lens of a metaphor: the development of environmental programmes is seen as the setting up of a play, with the construction of a specific scene and specific roles. I describe how environmental organisations followed contemporary processes of neoliberalisation of nature to re-construct and re-territorialise the valley as a new environmental scene for wealth to grow from. I discovered that this scene was based on a specific acting contract stipulating that farmers were to perform conservation for environmental organisations to support development. I had to long observe farmers' rehearsal of these new roles to realise that, behind the scenes, the performance was transforming their own cosmologies. I believed at first that farmers were reconstructing their world and identities according to old scenarios involving the poor 'South', in need for education, and the rich 'North', teaching culture. Yet, I realised that in fact farmers were re-enacting themselves in terms of a place they were actively producing and of the new social cohesion and tranquillity stemming from it.

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I am finally grateful to Alexander Goddard for his unconditional support.

Author's note

The primary sources of my work are notes collected from interviews, personal conversations and participant observation, undertaken during fieldwork in a rainforest valley of San Martin, region in Peruvian Amazonia, between May and July 2015.

I deliberately call the area under study 'the valley' and choose not to name towns and villages in order to fully preserve the anonymity of both the organisations and the people I am mentioning in this dissertation. This choice does not impact the content of my argumentation. First, all distinctive geographical and historical characteristics of interest for my analysis can be described at the level of the San Martin region and are not particular of the valley under study. Moreover, I do not aim to focus this work on the distinctions between farmers' behaviours in different villages but try to rather concentrate on the differences between various roles in environmental conservation.

I also purposely do not name the environmental company I was working for and which was implementing the environmental programmes in the area under study to respect the anonymity of their business. I do not name the cooperative or foundation the company created in the region to support its programmes. I choose to call them 'the environmental company' (or 'the international company' or simply 'the company'), 'the cooperative' and 'the foundation'. I also name them indistinctly 'environmental organisations'. I similarly call the different projects initiated by these environmental organisations 'environmental programmes' or 'environmental projects'. This choice also allows me to illustrate farmers' understandings and perceptions both of the organisations managing environmental

programmes and of different programmes developed in the area. Indeed, farmers did not know, for the vast majority of them, the specific differences between the environmental programmes conducted in the valley and between the different entities managing them.

Furthermore, I call ‘environmental practitioners’ the Peruvian men and women who were working for these programmes through the cooperative or the foundation. Similarly, I choose to speak of informants as ‘farmers’ or ‘villagers’ to respect their own identity delimitations. Lastly, all names of all informants have been changed to respect the anonymity of my participants.

I also decide to report informants’ direct quotes and place the original words in Spanish in footnotes. I name the authors of these quotes when the words had been enunciated specifically and only by them. Conversely, I do not specify any author when the similar words had been said several times by different people.

Introduction

Literature Review:

A study of locality in the context of neoliberalised participatory conservation

This dissertation is an ethnographic study and analysis of the impact of neoliberalised environmental conservation on local socio-political relations as observed through projects, spaces and people in the villages of a rainforest valley in Peruvian Amazonia. It mainly draws on ethnographies developed by Fairhead and Leach (1998), Mauzé (1998), Sivaramakrishnan (1998), West (2006), which originally depict the invasion of non-Western forests by Western official discourses around the environment. More especially, these studies interestingly describe how such discourses promote, essentially through neoliberal approaches of nature, the environment as a space for economic development and conservation strategies to indigenous forest dwellers, and how the latter's discourses and behaviours are impacted, as a result, by the introduction of new perspectives on nature. Beyond these ethnographies, the phenomenon of global neoliberalisation has been hardly studied in context, especially in situations of environmental conservation. It seems that popular conceptions of international preservation of nature still consider conservation as a 'bulwark' against the advance of free-market capitalism (Igoe and Brockington 2007: 433). We have to admit that when biodiversity conservation was first established as an environmental strategy at the outset of the 1990s, it aimed indeed to tackle the protection of natural habitats and sustainable use of natural resources through protected areas and against capitalist markets (Smith 2010: 1). These 'landscapes of biodiverse purity' (Büscher et al. 2012: 21), constructed as spaces of high biodiversity value, were, at the

time, mainly established and managed by governments receiving funding from the United Nations, Global Environmental Fund, World Bank and other international institutions (*ibid.*). Yet, conservationists quickly realised that this model could not counter the increasing pressures on natural ecosystems because of their minimal infrastructure and personnel (Kaimowitz 2002). More especially, when highly biodiverse areas became threatened by expanding deforestation in the 1990s, conservationists decided to shift towards the sustainable use of these areas for profitable purposes (Smith 2010: 1). This enabled environmental organisations to spread their conservation programmes more effectively through ecotourism, marketing of wood and non-timber products (*ibid.*). Yet, for these activities to be implemented, local communities needed to be incorporated into strategies for conservation. Most conservation initiatives however ignored the needs of these communities, undermining their rights and livelihoods by denying them access to resources and subjecting them to enforcement measures (Van Vliet 2010). As a result, few of these efforts were found profitable and conflicts between local populations and conservation managers were common (Smith 2010).

At the beginning of our century, biodiversity conservation was reframed to answer increasing efforts for combating climate change (*ibid.*). When it became evident that global forests were an important counterbalance to the world's CO₂ emissions, governments and international organisations decided to compensate marketable activities' emissions with ecosystem services (*ibid.*). These services included both direct payments for protecting forests and indirect payments for halting deforestation and promoting reforestation, mainly via REDD+ programmes (Fogel, 2002). Conservation-business partnerships then became increasingly common. Through the corporate sponsorship of protected areas, controlled by private for-profit companies, conservation was, as a result, progressively 'neoliberalised' (Igoe and Brockington 2007: 433). The reader should note here that, in this study, I choose

to follow Igoe and Brockington (*ibid.*: 436) and speak of ‘neoliberalisation’ rather than ‘neoliberalism’ in order to see the evolution of environmental conservation towards neoliberal concerns ‘less as a thing than as a bundle of processes’ occurring in recent years at a face pace. Indeed, if nature has long been approached as what Dasgupta (2007) calls ‘natural capital’ – resource-base for wealth to grow through the dynamics of extracting from, polluting and conserving nature – many authors argue that these dynamics have progressively become more intense and more urgent (see Arsel and Büscher (2012: 53)). Neoliberalisation, revolving around ‘the restructuring of the world to facilitate the spread of free-markets’ (Igoe and Brockington 2007: 433), increasingly seek better methods to offset extraction and pollution and better ways for conservation, while increasing opportunities for the accumulation of capital and profits (*ibid.*). In this view, nature has to submit to capital and its subsequent expansion and revaluations in order to be better conserved (Bücher et al. 2012: 4). Neoclassical economic theories typically present the absence of markets in environmental ‘goods’ and ‘harms’ as the very source of the world’s environmental problems (O’Neill 2001: 1865). In this view, nature has to be sold for it to be ‘saved’ (McAfee 1999).

At first, such neoliberalised schemes for conservation were not expected to have any substantial development benefit for the local communities living in and from the forests (Smith 2010). Now however, linking biodiversity conservation and development seems to become increasingly primordial in environmental discourses to respect the economic needs of these communities and avoid past mistakes in the implementation of conservation projects (*ibid.*).

Amazonia has been particularly targeted by these recent efforts of combining conservation with development, especially because Amazonian countries remain extremely interested in

economically developing their rural and forested areas – where poverty is seen as pervasive and living conditions as precarious (see United Nations Development Programme 2010) – through projects entailing positive societal effects (Pokorny et al. 2012: 1). Thereby, during my fieldwork in Peruvian Amazonia, environmental organisations approached conservation as being better achieved through the sustainable and social development of economic markets in biodiverse areas. These markets were seen to enable the flow of income to reach ‘poor people’ living in biologically diverse places (see West 2006: xii). In turn, these people were to conserve the biological diversity on which the markets, they relied on themselves, were based. Consequently, environmental programmes created what West (*ibid.*) calls ‘conservation-as-development projects’. According to her (*ibid.*), these projects mainly assume that environmental conservation can engender economic development for rural peoples and that what the latter need and want in terms of development is to be met by biodiversity on their lands.

Furthermore, for these projects to be successful both in terms of conservation and development, the environmental organisations under study were to develop ‘participatory’ methods. These methods followed a more general trend in conservation and development strategies that, from the late 1970s onwards, accused traditional ‘top-down’ Western models of undertaking development and conservation projects at high cultural and environmental costs (Christens and Speer 2006). The ostensible aim of participatory approaches has been to conversely make ‘people’ central to development by encouraging their involvement in the plans of action affecting them and over which they previously had limited control or influence (Cooke and Kothari 2001: 5). Thus, in Guijt and Shah’s words (1998: 1): ‘the broad aim of participatory development is to increase the involvement of socially and economically marginalized peoples in decision-making over their own lives’.

In popular imagination, participation then evokes images of people coming together to deliberate (Cornwall 2004: 77). On a more metaphorical level, I follow Cornwall (*ibid.*) who interestingly argues that participatory initiatives can be thought of as creating spaces for discussion and involvement where there was previously none, or as allowing people to occupy spaces formerly denied to them. During my fieldwork, forest dwellers were indeed ‘invited’ into new spaces by governmental institutions, supranational agencies and non-governmental organisations (see Cornwall 2002: 24). In this study, viewing participatory ‘conservation-as-development’ as a spatial practice will help draw attention to the local dynamisms of power, as well as their productive possibilities and negative effects through people’s representations and hidden strategies.

To link power and participatory spaces, I draw more precisely on Foucault (1986: 252) who suggests that ‘space is fundamental in any exercise of power’ as power, he argues, permeates and lives through spaces, producing particular institutional forms, patterns and practices within them. We have to note here that, according to Foucault (*ibid.*: 221), power is more a question of ‘government’ than of direct confrontation: to govern is to structure the possible field of action of others or ‘conduct of conducts’ (Foucault, 1982: 221). Thereby, the art and activity of what he (1991: 87) calls ‘governmentality’ consists of creating governable subjects in specific spaces. I argue that the act of making available spaces, such as environmental spaces, need to be seen similarly as an act of power (see Cornwall 2004: 80) and decide to follow here the insightful work of Agrawal (2005). Originally applying such Foucauldian approach to ‘environmental criticism’ (Darier 1999: 4) and drawing on Luke (1999), Agrawal (2005) designed the concept of ‘environmentality’. Drawing on a study of the Indian region of Kumaon, Agrawal (*ibid.*) argues that any subject, even rebellious populations, can be transformed into

‘environmental subject’, whose whole agency revolves around a novel ‘conceptual category’ (*ibid.*:164), the environment, requiring regulation and protection. Agrawal (*ibid.*: 17) interestingly demonstrates that, through this process, people are ‘environmentalised’ by the external coercive forces conducting environmental projects in the space they live in (*ibid.*: 17).

Yet, beyond both Foucault and Agrawal, I argue with Bebbington (2000) that looking at these interventions in the context of places that people can dynamically produce and reproduce allows us to see people not simply as detached recipients of external assistance, but as active and knowing agents in their own environment. To fully embrace power inequalities and political agendas in space (see Hickey and Mohan 2004: 15), I choose to define the ‘environment’ as a complex ‘place’ of negotiated, intersubjective identities. Here, I draw on authors who focused on theories of ‘being-in-the-world’ and who have interestingly re-delimited definitions of landscape, space and place (see Bender 1993; Harvey 1996; Hirsch and O’Hanlon 1995; Gow 1995; Tilley 1994). Among them, Casey (1993) offered a particularly convincing explanation of place. According to him (*ibid.*: 25, 29), place occurs between embodied experiences and spaces – which work only as pre-existing canvases (Casey 1996). A place is the locus of an embodied being at its inner boundary while a surrounding landscape or space goes beyond that place as its outer boundary (*ibid.*). Between these two boundaries, ‘implacement occurs’ (*ibid.*: 29). In this perspective, place becomes a fundamental aspect of existence: all beings and things are in place, at all times, and ‘nothing we do is unplaced’ (Casey 1998: ix).

Following this definition of ‘place’ from Casey, further works from the same author (1993, 1998, 2001) and other studies from Bender (1998), Harvey (1996), Malpas (1998), Marshall (1992), Thrift (1999), I will more precisely draw from the concept of ‘dwelling’

to understand the ‘environment’. This concept, first coined by Heidegger, originally asked a mental shift from traditional Cartesian ‘building perspectives’ — in which human ideas were merely projected onto an outside blank space — to a ‘dwelling perspective’ — through which acts of life are seen as embodied experiences of ‘being-in-the-world’ (Jones and Cloke 2002: 80). Ingold (1993; 1995) famously connected Heidegger’s perspective to anthropological approaches of the environment. Drawing on Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology (1962), Ingold claims that contextualized, embodied practices create place and time that are reciprocally ‘homeland(s) to our thoughts’ (1995: 76, citing Merleau-Ponty 1962: 24). Place and people are intrinsically linked in constantly evolving relationships between them. Thus approached as ‘the manner by which we are on the earth’ (Vycinas 1969: 15), the notion of dwelling echoes Appadurai’s (1996) concept of ‘production of locality’. Appadurai (*ibid.*: 178) interestingly sees locality through its ‘complex phenomenological quality, constituted by a series of links between the sense of social immediacy, the technologies of interactivity, and the relativity of contexts’. This definition further describes dwelling, or the production of locality, as an active sense of immediate and constant belonging and identity, complexly interconnected with other places (see Massey and Jess 1995).

Overcoming the epistemological weaknesses that have beset research on neoliberal conservation projects, I argue and demonstrate in the following analysis that such perspectives on the local environment offer a better way to deal with the ‘richness’ of place and all its political potentialities.

Dissertation outline

This dissertation is divided into three chapters, themselves broken down into two sections and four sub-sections. The chapters follow this introduction and precede a conclusion. The introduction is divided into three sections. A literature review summarises and criticises key literature written around the main themes studied in this dissertation. This outline is followed by a third section focusing on my experience of conducting fieldwork in the villages. Then starts the analysis of my ethnographic data. The first chapter focuses on the scene environmental organisations set up to develop conservation and development projects in the valley. The second chapter describes the original contract, and further dynamics stemming from it, between farmers, who were to perform specific roles in conservation, and the environmental organisations, teaching them sustainable development. The last chapter questions the impact farmers' roles had on their own subjectivities and looks at the local strategies farmers used to re-enact themselves in the production of place. Lastly, the conclusion summarises the development of my argument and briefly suggests new potential frameworks of study for further research on the topic.

Fieldwork in the valley: some reflexive issues

This study is based on two months of fieldwork in villages of a rainforest valley, constructed along one of the main rivers of San Martin, region of the Peruvian upper-Amazon, from 10th May to 10th July 2015.

During fieldwork, I was employed by an international environmental company to assess the socio-economic impact of agroforestry/reforestation programmes. This environmental company mainly helps other companies incorporate climate issues at the heart of their business processes, notably through the conservation of ecosystems and techniques of reforestation. To make sure such commitments were respected and actually implemented in the area under study, the environmental company created a local foundation, I call the foundation, based in the main town of the valley. The foundation received and distributed the company's funds while monitoring their projects with local associations and groups participating to the company's environmental activities. Since 2011, the environmental company, along with the foundation and a local cocoa cooperative the company supported since 2000s, has conducted different forest preservation and reforestation programmes, including a REDD+ conservation project in a reserve upstream of the river. Today, all three organisations are working with different farmers' associations in various villages to promote agroforestry and agro-ecological techniques based on cocoa productions. I was asked by the company to study the farmers' understandings and perceptions of these conservation techniques in order to eventually help improve the organisations' programmes. I had to conduct around 50 interviews with both participants of their programmes and non-participants living in the valley and was to subsequently produce several documents, graphs and written reports to communicate my observations.

At the beginning, I was helped by both the company's foundation and the cocoa cooperative to approach farmers. I had to go back occasionally to the main town to work with the foundation and cooperative, using this time to access electricity/internet in order to write my notes and to observe and speak with farmers coming to meetings or requesting information at the foundation. However, I was mainly living first for three weeks in one village situated in the rainforest valley thirty minutes by boat from the main town, and later for four weeks in another village located further in the forest and upstream, six hours by boat from the main town. For a week, I visited two villages only twenty minutes by motorbike from the main town.

I drew on the interviews I conducted for the environmental company to get more in-depth conversations with farmers. I used these conversations along with everyday exchanges and participant observation to construct this study.

Yet, I quickly realised that applying participant observation with farmers would be rather difficult. Farmers were waking up at five in the morning at the latest, worked in the field until midday, had a rest, worked again until six in the evening, rested and went to bed by seven or eight. When they rested, they most often ate silently while watching television alone or with their family. At the beginning, farmers were telling me that I could not come 'just like this', asking for interviews or hang out with them. According to them, I had to plan long in advance because farmers were busy.

I understood that there was another reality behind this claim. At the outset of my fieldwork, I had to formally interview people on a regular basis for the environmental company. I realised that interviewing informants on this systematic and formal basis was confining me to 'the "observer" end of the participant-observer spectrum' (Jackson 1983: 41). As a consequence, people seemed quite distrustful, only seeing me as working for an

international company and as a detached stranger. But the following words, from Vidich (1955: 354), quickly resonated with me:

‘The role of the participant observer and the images which respondents hold of him are central to the definition of his social position; together these two factors shape the circumstances under which he works and the type of data he will be able to collect’.

In order to develop relationships with informants, I realised that I had to work with them in their fields, help women preparing food, play with children and participate to everything I could reasonably do. I was aware that I had to be accepted in the villages in order to leave my status of ‘gringa’ — Latin American term for ‘foreigners’ — working for a foreign for-profit company. If the social position of the researcher determines what he/she ‘is likely to see’ (Vidich 1955: 354), I endeavoured to change the position farmers were inclined to automatically ascribe to me. I had to see more.

Yet, during my first days, I realised how hard it would be. At first, in the streets, people were constantly shouting ‘gringa!’, laughing. In my initial conversations with villagers, I was indifferently called the ‘gringa’ and was often laughed at for my hesitant Spanish.

When I was speaking with farmers for the first times, their children were inventing games to discreetly reach and touch my skin and my blond arm hair, whispering about how white I looked. I understood however that I should not take it personally. Peruvian people were always highlighting differences, between themselves too. Passionate about adjectives, they were calling each other ‘fat’, ‘skinny’, ‘brown’, ‘black’,¹ and even ‘gringo(a)’. Anyone wearing a veil on his/her head to protect him/herself from the sun could be shout at:

¹ ‘gordito(a)’; ‘flaco(a)’; ‘moreno(a)’; ‘negro(a)’

‘Muslim! Muslim!’². I understood that I had to find a way to construct rapport with my informants in order to turn this marking of differences into a benevolent joke.

Moreover, during my first week of work, I had to face another difficulty. As I was to rely on the foundation and cocoa cooperative to approach farmers and interview them at the beginning of my investigation, I spent my first days in the villages with Hector, member of two farmers’ association and working closely with the foundation, who introduced me to farmers. Hector ended up accompanying me to ask them questions. Quickly, instead of explaining them questions some couldn’t understand, he started to answer in their behalf, farmers shyly nodding to his responses. I realised further that without rapport, even the best-prepared questions were falling flat, resulting in elicited, brief and uninformative answers (see Leech 2002). In my words and in my gestures, I had to convince people that I was listening, understanding, interested in what they were talking about and that they should continue talking with me (*ibid.*). Then, I decided to embed the questions I had to ask for the company in more casual conversations and in more approachable terms. I also told Hector after a few days that I could handle the next interviews alone.

Constructing truthful relationships with informants was nevertheless made difficult by another constraint: my fieldwork had to be multi-sited, i.e. embedded in several sites of study, in the main town with environmental organisations, in villages, on boats, through documents or emails from environmental and governmental organisations. Shifting between these different scenes, I had to comply every time with various demands of justification, affinities and alienations. I had to re-position myself constantly and was plunged into a recurrent reflexion on the situations I was embedded in (see Haraway 1991; Marcus 1995). More, my fieldwork became ‘multipositioned’ (Mosse 2005: 11). On the one hand, environmental practitioners were asking my work to focus on their projects in

² ‘musulmán!’

order to provide ‘a kind of translation or legibility-making service for them’ (West 2006: xviii). On the other hand, I felt that I had to follow the anthropological tradition of questioning conservation as a way of producing knowledge (*ibid.*). The swinging back and forth between being an employee for an international company and independent researcher became an integral part of my experience (see Garsten 1994: 35). I had to avoid being irrelevant or disruptive, seen by the environmental company as a mere ‘academic outsider’ (Mosse 2005: 13). Conversely, I had to be considered by farmers as neutral, interested in listening to them without judging them or reporting them to the company. In sum, I had two diametrically opposed sets of informants (see West 2006: 23). As West (*ibid.*) claims, anthropologists are often political and social defenders of the people they work with. As a result, conducting a research project in which my informants, friends and confidants were both farmers and people working for environmental organisations was a difficult challenge.

I had to become what Marcus (1995) calls a ‘professional persona’, choosing to place myself with or against different subjects, in different locales. This experience gave me the opportunity to see fieldwork as a ‘situated intervention’: I had to reflexively think of the context and its actors, of my personal position as employee, researcher and friend (Gupta and Ferguson 1997: 38). This experience showed me how important was the anthropologists’ approach of their own ‘point of view’, of their personal and research predilections, judgments, aesthetics, ethics, as the product of different social emplacements (see Hastrup 2004). I realised that I was a positioned subject whose interwoven thoughts, feelings were revealing the realities of my fieldwork, especially of its power relations (see Rosaldo 1989). To discover more about the places I was studying, I had to follow Bourdieu’s (2003: 282) ‘participant objectivation’, i.e. the objectivation of ‘the analysing subject’ or researcher. ‘Participant objectivation’ consists in exploring the ‘social

conditions of possibility – and therefore the effects and limits – of the researcher's experience' and objectivise the 'subjective relation to the object' of study (*ibid.*).

If my first conversations were possibly constrained by me being a 'gringa' working for a rich French company, a work of objectivation conducted by myself to understand better my positions, perspectives and purposes in this work along with explanations of those to my informants, allowed me to be more accepted and participate in farmers' daily lives, as a researcher and sometimes as a friend. Following this process and keeping all these anthropological reflections in mind, I was eventually able to better understand my informants' worlds and construct the analysis I present in the following chapters.

Chapter I:

Setting up the Scene

In this chapter, I describe the scene environmental organisations set up in the valley and the different processes by which they constructed it. In a first section, I focus on the historical (re)development of the ‘environment’ in the region to better understand the dynamics by which farmers approached their environment as a space for wealth to grow from. In a second section, I look at how farmers’ new ‘environment’ is practically supported by its re-organisation in space and how this configuration follows particular processes of territorialisation which are increasingly developed by conservation programmes in Amazonia and other biodiverse areas of the world.

A new commodified space: the ‘environment’

‘Each mode of production has its own particular space, the shift from one mode to another must entail the production of a new space’ (Lefebvre 1991: 46).

I follow Lefebvre’s statement to set up the scene of my work and explain how a space I call the ‘environment’, and based on new cocoa production and tree plantations, was gradually formed in the villages of the valley. The shift from corn and coca productions to cocoa production coupled with reforestation programmes has created a particular space that mainly focuses on economic development. In this section, I first introduce the historical construction of the scene before analysing its key characteristics in the eyes of farmers in present days.

From coca to cocoa: historical setting

Peruvian forests cover 60% of the national territory. At an international level, Peru is the ninth country with the largest forest area, and fourth concerning tropical forest area (Equipo ProAmbiente/GTZ 2014: 5). The department of San Martin, also called region of San Martin and where this study is set, is covered by 2,3 millions hectares of tropical forest. More precisely, my fieldwork took place in a province situated in the south of the department of San Martin, which comprised, at a time of my study, a national park and four Conservation Concessions.

I was told that the province remained an untouched jungle until the 1940s, when its main town started to be constructed by Andean and other Peruvian migrants. The region of San Martin however became quickly deforested: 11,000 hectares were deforested each year

between 1989 and 2002, subsequently leading the region to loose 117,723 hectares between 2005 and 2010 (Equipo ProAmbiente/GTZ 2014: 4). San Martin was one of the Peruvian areas hit the most by deforestation since, at the beginning of the 21st century, it had lost 40% of its forest (*ibid.*). This deforestation is often said to be the consequence of the regional demographic growth — mainly caused by important migrations from Andean highlands — which has been double the national demographic growth during the past 67 years (*ibid.*). Yet, the main, uncontested, cause of the deforestation in San Martin was coca plantations. The region indeed became a red zone of coca production in the 1960s. Coca had been a regional staple for centuries: people were traditionally using the leaves medicinally, every day as a stimulant or in social, ritual events. Nevertheless, the 1970s global increase in cocaine use made the region the most important coca-growing zone in the world (Kawell 1995: 402). According to U.S. State Department (1991), 200,000 acres of coca were cultivated in the other main valley of the department in 1990, representing 40% of the world coca crop. If the principal town of this other valley was first the main centre of the business, the main town in the valley under study became one of the most important drug platforms of the 1990s (Kawell 1995: 403). There, coca gradually replaced fields of rice and corn (*ibid.*). At the time, tens of thousands of coca farmers owned small plots of only a few acres or less (*ibid.*). They were selling their harvests to wholesale buyers who in turn processed the leaves in cocaine paste, before sending it to other labs in Colombia or Peru to further develop it (*ibid.*). Violence, guerrilla insurgencies, ruthless transnational drug mafias, corruption and persistent poverty were an integral part of the region's daily life (*ibid.*).

Described by my informants as a time of 'fear', 'death', 'war' and 'violence',³ this era of coca production and trafficking was indeed felt as socio-economically and spatially

³ 'temor'; 'muerte'; 'guerra'; 'violencia'

destructive. During one of our long conversations in his farm, my friend Antonio explained: people were burning their fields to grow coca better, expanding always more into the rain forest, fighting against it and against each other to get more land and to produce more for a mafia which was constantly threatening them. Echoing others, he described how armed groups were waiting for people in their fields to physically attack them and rob their productions or were knocking at people's doors to ask for money and personal belongings. Farmers were depicting a valley where space, outside the familial house or field, was entirely shrunk. While she was taking care of the house in the morning, Maria, married to a cocoa farmer, and I were always speaking of how she had to live locked in her small parents' house with all her family. She was telling me that she and her family couldn't live outside and see the forest. Her father had to visit his field as regularly as needed to produce enough coca leaves to satisfy the local mafia. They were always scared that he would not come back. Living in an oppressive environment of fear, people were, as a result, completely robbed from their surrounding space and the economic strength that could stem from it. People were physically unable to grow anything else: Raul, working for the foundation, recounted that bananas and plantains, the local staple produce, had to be imported from other parts of Peru.

U.S. drug control programmes saw this situation as an aberration and quickly considered Peruvian farmers' coca production as one of the main sources of the world demand for cocaine, especially designed for U.S. use (Kawell 1995: 405). Under growing pressure from the United States, the Peruvian government began a series of U.S. funded coca eradication in the region in 1979 (*ibid.*). By 1990s, coca was officially 'eradicated', leaving the region in high poverty and environmental depletion. Yet, the 'Miracle San Martin' has been presented since 2007 by the Peruvian government, through the National Commission for Development and Life without Drugs (DEVIDA), as the path to follow to achieve drug

supply reduction (Cabieses 2010: 1). This model is now praised by drug eradication plans across the world for having successfully eradicated coca crops, having secured governability and security in the zones concerned, and having coordinated with international institutions both public and private sustainable economic activities (*ibid.*) Indeed, illegal coca zones were reduced from 30, 000 hectares planted towards 1990 to 321 hectares at the beginning of the 2000s (*ibid.*: 3). If coca-drug trafficking economy represented 46% of the gross value of San Martin's production in 1992, it was only 0.5% in 2008 (*ibid.*). Furthermore, DEVIDA with the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) initiated plans for development projects that could provide farmers with alternatives to coca. The Fair Trade and Organic cocoa cooperative, which I call in this study the cooperative, was then created in 1997, as part of a UN program to substitute coca plantations with cocoa and other alternative crops in the San Martin region. Other organisations such as governmental institutions — from the Ministry of Environment or from regional authorities such as Autoridad Regional Ambiental (the Regional Environmental Authority) — regional non-governmental organisations (NGOs) or international organisations like the German governmental agency for international cooperation in sustainable development (GTZ), the environmental company I was working for and other companies from the United States, quickly followed and started to work locally on environmental themes in order to reforest the area.

Consequently, after Peruvian and U.S. planes 'dried'⁴ coca, as farmers were always recounting, leaving the area completely socio-economically and environmentally depleted, these organisations produced new, 'invited' spaces, 'into which people (as users, as citizens, as beneficiaries) [were] invited to participate' by various kinds of authorities (Cornwall 2002: 24). The programmes developed by these governmental and international

⁴ 'secaron coca'

authorities in the valley around new cocoa production encouraged farmers to re-construct a space for them to ecologically and economically recover.

The new capitalist scenario: trees in the background and the ‘economist’ in the centre

Shift from coca or corn productions to cocoa productions along with the creation of the cooperative then constructed a new and safe space (see Lefebvre 1991) where people were finally able to ‘participate’, move and exchange. In farmers’ discourses, cocoa and timber markets were often opposed to past corn and coca productions. Corn was described as not providing enough to cover basic necessities⁵ and coca cultures as generating an ‘easy money leaving easily’⁶. Eduardo, who was working for a U.S. organisation on developing environmental education in the region, once brilliantly summarised that for both corn and coca productions, ‘there was no economy’⁷.

On the opposite, new markets of cocoa and timber production were ‘safe money’⁸ enabling social and economic development. I first understood how people were feeling about this evolution when Aquiles, farmer since always, invited me in his house. He showed me a space with no door, a long corridor of dust floor, where rooms could hardly squeeze all the members of an extended family. He and his wife Iveth, who was also helping in the field, explained that before they were ‘*really* poor’⁹ [my emphasis], unable to eat at times. Now, they were telling me: ‘look! Our house is big! There are shops in the village, beautiful houses, a school!’¹⁰. Echoing other farmers, Aquiles concluded: ‘now, we have all the

⁵ ‘maíz no sale para cubrir necesidades’

⁶ ‘plata fácil que se va fácil’

⁷ ‘no había economía’

⁸ ‘seguro plata’

⁹ ‘muy pobres’

¹⁰ ‘mira ! hay bodegas, casas bonitas, una escuela’

things'¹¹. The difference made between times of corn and coca productions and today's cocoa plantations was mainly made in terms of economic changes: present times were better because they could allow market dynamics to grow and eventually provide more money.

During my conversations with most farmers, I quickly became aware that attitudes and relationships that were typical of the market were in fact transferred to other relationships between humans and between humans and non-humans (see O'Neill 2001). People were, it seemed, obsessed by the environment as 'natural capital' and by potential economic development. Participants of the environmental organisations' reforestation programmes were always speaking of planting 'wood' instead of 'trees'¹² and I was told by environmental practitioners, as by farmers themselves, that villagers were considering trees as 'symbols of money'¹³. Thus, nature actually became itself a commodity, exchangeable in markets (see Kricheff 2012: 23). Forests were spaces filled with 'wood', and trees did not seem to exist outside their potential monetary value. One farmer confessed that he had planted 'wood' in his field only because he was hoping to sell his field with better value later. Cocoa and other trees gave 'more money', 'paid' and allowed them to 'live economically'.¹⁴ I was often told that there was 'nothing else that produced more'¹⁵ after coca. A friend living in the main town claimed one day that the rainforest was to give 'a lot of benefits for human consumption'¹⁶ and later told me that the goal of the different environmental programmes was 'to obtain economic benefits'¹⁷. One young farmer working to implement reforestation programmes for the foundation confirmed: farmers

¹¹ 'tenemos todas las cosas'

¹² 'madera'; 'árboles'

¹³ 'árboles son simbólicos de dinero'

¹⁴ 'más plata'; 'pagan'; 'vivir económicamente'

¹⁵ 'no hay una otra cosa que produce más'

¹⁶ 'muchos beneficios por consumo humano'

¹⁷ 'obtener beneficios económicos'

were always focusing on ‘business’ rather than ‘nature’¹⁸.

With new roads connecting it to Lima and to the world, the valley became a space of ‘competition’ and ‘competitiveness’¹⁹ embedded in global capitalist forces. Farmers were speaking of a new spirit, giving them the motivation ‘to do more’²⁰. For instance, many farmers were acting as they were prospecting international markets through my views of European consumer. They were curious about what could be sold in my country, how much I was buying chocolate, what foreign people were thinking of Peruvian products, if investing in wood was a good idea. Taking the environment as an excuse, farmers were expanding, into the forest and into new markets. Many were further constructing houses to welcome foreign environmental workers or buying new machine (releasing a thick black smoke when used) to cut herbs in order to plant more cocoa trees.

When I was asking them who they were selling their cocoa to, some of them were replying ‘to those who pay me more’²¹. Others were justifying their membership to local associations by the prices they offered. Cocoa was described as a ‘free market’²² where people were able to sell following capitalist logics. When asked what they would do if there was no cocoa plantations left, farmers were most often saying that they would come back to corn, plant ‘wood’ or any other product that could be sold, in their property or a new one. When we were speaking of the future, most of them were hoping for a better economic situation with more ‘incomes’²³.

Victor, working for the regional government within the Autoridad Regional Ambiental, was praising this new capitalist mentality. According to him, environmental organisations

¹⁸ ‘negocios antes de la naturaleza’

¹⁹ ‘competencia’; ‘competitividad’

²⁰ ‘competencia da ganas de hacer más’

²¹ ‘a los que me pagan mas’

²² ‘mercado libre’

²³ ‘ingresos’

were to focus on developing the economy without affecting the forest. Victor acknowledged that ‘the theme of reforestation [was] fructuous’,²⁴ and that organisations, such as the environmental company, did not only follow their ‘love for nature’²⁵ but were also searching profitability. He was regretting the lack of ‘economic people’²⁶ within his service and other organisations, who would be able to take the most out of local resources. He was deploring that farmers were too chauvinists, asking for a paternalist government (for which he was working) to guide them. He was looking at the cooperative as the opposite example and at its development as the path to follow. According to him, farmers had to follow ‘a new capitalist vision’²⁷ of farming and develop a stronger spirit of negotiation and entrepreneurship to be as successful as the cooperative. More specifically, he was saying how the director of the cooperative, who people called ‘the economist’²⁸, had understood that it was necessary to transform ‘farmers’ into ‘producers’ developing rentable productions. Now, the cooperative’s 2000 members were all considered small-scale producers of cocoa and sugar cane and had 5 hectares of land each, with an average 2.2 ha of cocoa fields.

I quickly realised that Victor’s admiration for the ‘economist’ and the cooperative was shared by most farmers. The ‘economist’, at the head of the cooperative since its very creation, was described as this charismatic figure chanting words in meetings that all spectators remembered later. He was this very ambitious character who one day told my friend Ben, student from the United States working for the cooperative, that he was not interested in what Ben was doing here but only in what he could financially bring in. In most of my conversations, people were saying that they had to follow the example of the

²⁴ ‘el tema de reforestación es fructuoso’

²⁵ ‘el amor de la naturaleza’

²⁶ ‘la gente económica’

²⁷ ‘una nueva visión capitalista’

²⁸ ‘el economista’

cooperative to become ‘more capitalists’²⁹. Given an environment that could be both licit and profitable, people seemed to have this urge to produce more and develop further economically. Nature was reduced to ‘natural resources’ or ‘natural capital’ (Dasgupta 2007) for people to flourish. Fidel, farmer living near the main town with his wife and son, once cleverly summarised: ‘now we project ourselves, we want to be big, we want to have more’³⁰.

²⁹ ‘más capitalistas’

³⁰ ‘ahora nos proyectamos, queremos ser grandes, queremos tener más’

A territorialised scenery

During my time in the different villages of the valley, I realised that the penetration of neoliberal perspectives into everyday relationships between people and the environment was further reinforced by a particular organisation of space, arranged by governmental institutions and international organisations. More especially, I discovered that the new scenery of environmental conservation was set up through strategies of environmental territorialisation aimed at supporting specific neoliberal perspectives on nature. After describing briefly the development of territorialisation processes in Amazonia and biodiverse places in general, I focus in this section on the example of the ‘Model Forest’³¹ project, which was developed in the area under study at the time, to understand how these territorialisation processes take shape in the context of my research.

The need for territorialisation in Amazonia

Popular imagination has always praised Amazonia for its astonishing and overwhelming nature (Raffles 2000). In recent decades however, as Amazonia was increasingly considered ‘to signify nature at its most primal’ (*ibid.*), the need for its preservation has intensified. Thereby, the Amazonian region is now the key symbol of threatened biodiversity and fragile ecosystems to be urgently conserved (*ibid.*). Consequently, conservation organisations are increasingly diving into the Amazonian space where states most often lack the resources and capacity to effectively protect a highly biodiverse nature (Igoe and Brockington 2007: 434). Now, most Amazonian states benefit from, but are dependent on, multilateral funding, technology and expertise in environmental

³¹ ‘Bosque modelo’

conservation. They become new types of ‘neoliberalised states’, constructed on what Igoe and Brockington (*ibid.*: 437) call ‘reregulation’. Reregulation is the strategic use of neoliberalised conservation ‘to transform previously untradable things [i.e. natural resources] into tradable commodities’ (*ibid.*). Territorialisation, essential to state-making, accompanies this reregulation. Territorialisation has allowed Amazonian states both to meet the terms of external funding by commoditising resources and to facilitate the capture of these resources from external institutions providing funding (Igoe and Brockington 2007: 437). Hence, territorialisation in biodiverse regions has to follow certain imperatives established by external actors and institutions, which are often based on the synergy between sustainability and investment-driven economic growth (Igoe and Brockington 2007: 437; Goldman 2001a, 2001b; Lemos and Agrawal 2006). The resulting captured resources can then be used to undertake more territorialisation (Igoe and Brockington 2007: 437). This process transforms valuable biodiverse areas into ‘transnationalised spaces of high biodiversity value’, which have been reregulated in order to give them a new economic value and make that value available to transnational elites’ interests (Igoe and Brockington 2007: 441; Ferguson 2006).

Territorialised space in the valley: the ‘Model Forest’

Victor, member of the Autoridad Regional Ambiental, branch of the regional Peruvian government, depicted a similar phenomenon happening in San Martin. He confessed that the government was indeed using ‘environment’ to re-regulate space and delimitate territories in order to control local resources. According to him, Peruvian policies saw decentralisation and spatial territorialisation, based on the reinforcement of local transnational projects, as a chance to attract foreign funding and markets. From

conservation areas being granted to local associations working with for-profit companies, to the numerous signs placed on roads, asking the population not to throw things in the forest or to love nature, I understood the extent to which the Peruvian government was trying to re-organise space in terms of environmental conservation and of the ‘environment’ in general.

Furthermore, during my fieldwork, a ‘Model Forest’³² was constructed in the area. Many actors, from the foundation, Autoridad Regional Ambiental, GTZ, or regional NGOs, were working together to build a stronger conserved space. Neoliberal territorialisation indeed coincides with the emergence of new networks, cutting across traditional divides between states, NGOs and for-profit companies, now united by neoliberal ideologies (Igoe and Brockington 2007: 432). German, Canadian, French and others, along with Peruvian organisations, both public and private, were to participate in promoting a model of sustainable and licit development of alternative productions, which could be subsequently sold on agricultural and carbon markets. This active network of environmental collaboration was to share data, infinite number of maps and Excel documents describing each plot, its ‘plot code’³³, its GPS position, its area, the type of property, how the property was used, which plants were grown, their number and other specific information for a better control of the area’s territory. Local participation of national and international environmental organisations in the Model Forest were to implement ‘innovative mechanisms of environmental and climatic funding’³⁴ (Equipo ProAmbiente/GTZ 2014: 5). The ‘Model Forest’ was also a project that could reinforce ‘access to market with products of quality’³⁵ in order to enhance the local ‘consumption of goods and services’³⁶

³² ‘Bosque modelo’

³³ ‘código parcela’

³⁴ ‘Implementar mecanismos innovadores de financiamiento ambiental y climático’

³⁵ ‘el acceso al mercado con productos de calidad’

³⁶ ‘garantizar el consumo de productos y/o servicios’

(*ibid.*). In a nutshell, organisations were spatially constructing a model which could ‘generate the conditions’ necessary to channel ‘public and private budgets’ (*ibid.*).³⁷

³⁷ ‘Generar condiciones para canalizar los presupuestos públicos o privados para conservar los ecosistemas y la diversidad biológica del ámbito de la BMRHA, orientado a la adaptación y mitigación del cambio climático’

Concluding note

In this chapter, I have demonstrated that the reconstruction of the valley in time and space has been based on a specific vision of the ‘environment’ as natural capital. Such vision of the ‘environment’ follows a process of neoliberalisation of conservation strategies that has increasingly and globally developed in recent years. Indeed, according to Sachs (1993), the post-World War II policy landscape saw ideas of progress in economic development becoming increasingly tied to the environment. Sachs (*ibid.*: 9) relates continued growth with the need for long-term availability of natural resources. In this way, nature becomes valuable only because it constitutes the raw material for growth while growth comes to be articulated as ‘development’ (see West 2006: 33). I realised not only that nature and growth in the villages were conceived in such ways but that the relationship between nature and growth was based on a specific agreement, or contract, between official authorities, international organisations and farmers. In all Conservation Concessions in the valley, national authorities, and more especially local resource users, were agreeing to protect their natural ecosystems in exchange for a steady stream of structured compensation from conservationists or other investors (see Rice 2003). In the second chapter, I focus on this contract and on its impact on farmers’ roles in conservation.

Chapter II:

The Conservationists' Rehearsal

In this second chapter, I study the roles farmers had to perform in the conservation arena.

In a first section, I describe the acting contract established between farmers and environmental organisations to later analyse the former's performance and environmentalisation. In the second section, I look at how the leitmotiv of environmental education affects farmers' roles and positions in the conservation realm, and their legitimation as conservationists.

The urgent need for eco-rational conservationists

Conservation-as-development projects were constructed on specific contracts. Farmers were to perform convincing conservation techniques and knowledge in the area for environmental organisations to provide financial funding and technical support. On one hand, environmental organisations had to get ‘good numbers’ for their clients, as Paul, member of the environmental company, once told me. These clients, which are mainly big companies working in mass consumption and retail, banking and finance, building construction or cosmetics for instance, aim to compensate their carbon emissions by funding socio-environmental projects. Following a complex financial and contractual system, the environmental company signs contracts of exclusive transfer of carbon rights with local farmers’ cooperatives to later resell them to their clients. Contracts are thereby signed indirectly between farmers, in charge of nature preservation in the valley, and big foreign companies, often conducting polluting projects in different countries and in search for ‘carbon purity’.

In addition, the founder of the environmental company, behind the commercialisation of the cooperative’s cocoa beans, also created a pioneer company in Fair Trade, known in Western countries for selling highly priced organic chocolate. To satisfy the growing demand for organic and Fair Trade large distribution, this other company had to make sure that its associated environmental organisations were showing beneficial socio-economic and ecological impacts on the local sources of their chocolate production. Conversely, villagers understood that they would have to take part in certain social roles, playing with environmental programmes in order to access food, medicine, education, technology, knowledge, what West (2006: xiii) calls ‘the things they see as development’, in exchange for their participation in conservation. Local projects were shaping ‘conservation-as-

development’, assuming that economic development for rural people could be produced by environmental conservation and that what people needed for this development was to be met by biodiversity on their lands (*ibid.*).

This contractual relationship was actually embedded in the specific form of agriculture that was to be used by farmers. I suggest that agroforestry indeed created a practical relationship between conservation — here tackled through reforestation — and cocoa production. Agroforestry aims to grow both trees and agricultural crops on the same piece of land in order to conserve, diversify and sustain vital economic and environmental resources, through the interactions among components (Schroth and Harvey 2007). More biologically productive, more profitable and more sustainable than forestry or agricultural monocultures (*ibid.*), agroforestry was seen by farmers as allowing better and quicker agricultural productions. Gregorio, from the foundation, once confirmed: ‘people take care of the environment because it is good for cocoa’³⁸. I argue that environmental organisations thus created a practical ‘taskscape’ (Ingold 1993) where new habitual agricultural knowledge was to effectively construct conservationist actors. Embedding the relationship between development (cocoa production) and conservation (reforestation) helped implement the vision of an environment in need for preservation and reinforce a sense of responsibility in farmers’ roles as conservationists. I focus in this section on this vision and this sense of responsibility or, more especially, on the impact such contractual change in farmers’ habitus had on their roles of environmental service providers in the global environmental crisis, and on their environmentalisation.

³⁸ ‘la gente cuida el medio ambiente porque es bien para el cacao’

Perform to stop a global crisis

Conservation-as-development setting had instilled a sense of conservation accountability within the farming community. All the farmers I spoke with told me that they *had* to conserve nature. They often shared that if they did not care, they would not have water for their cocoa trees, for the fishes they fish in the river or for air to breathe. When I asked what the ‘environment’ was for them, they were always anxiously answering: ‘the environment is taking care of/conserving the environment’³⁹. Others immediately responded: ‘the environment is reforestation’⁴⁰. The ‘environment’ was thus only conceived as an action or performance, as their act in the conservation arena. The ‘environment’ was seen through the lens of their responsibility to conserve the environment, through their roles of good conservationists and the contract that established them.

I could observe that this responsibility further developed through payments for economic services (PES) and Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation (REDD+) projects on which the environmental company was based. Following the logics of conservation-as-development, PES and REDD+ generally align biodiversity conservation with economic growth (by market expansion) and, in ‘developing’ countries, with poverty reduction and local empowerment (United Nations Environment Programme/International Union for Conservation of Nature 2007). PES and REDD+ aim to sustain ‘vital ecosystem services’ and allow those wanting and/or requiring these ‘services’ to pay inhabitants for activities that sustain them through conservation (*ibid.*: 9).

In this way, PES and REDD+ projects create, I surmise, a particular vision of the world. Since the ecological-economic study conducted by Costanza et al. (1997) estimating the annual global ‘value’ of ‘ecosystem services’ and ‘natural capital’ to be \$16-54 trillion, a

³⁹ ‘el medio ambiente es cuidar/conservar el medio ambiente’

⁴⁰ ‘el medio ambiente es la reforestación’

wide range of expanding products, potential investments and trade opportunities has been priced as new environmental conservation commodities (Sullivan 2012: 4). More specifically, the trade of derived carbon products, created through REDD+ and marketed as a conserving force in climate management (Lohman 2012), has enabled carbon production as one thing (industrial emissions) in one location to be ‘offsetted’ against its storage in another qualitatively different thing (tropical forests) in another location (Sullivan 2012: 5; see case studies in Böhm and Dabhi 2009). Earth today becomes this ‘carbon matrix’ (Sullivan 2012: 5) in which all activities can be reduced to the profitable exchange of the element carbon (Sullivan 2010). Offsetting environmental damage in one location through the investment of environmental conservation in another location support new understandings of the ‘global environment’ as an ‘abstract global ledger’ that can be reduced to exchangeable parts (Sullivan 2012: 3). One of the fundamental characteristics of trees in this view is transformed into its potential monetary value since absorbing atmospheric carbon becomes an asset to be sold on markets to those who emit carbon (*ibid.*: 23). For instance, between carbon emitted by a car in a Western city and carbon captured and stored by a tree in a tropical forest, a new relationship is created through commodification (*ibid.*). The universality between trees, forests and different aspects of nature becomes generally conceptualised in monetary terms: money links them, makes them similar and flows between them (*ibid.*).

In this process, inhabitants of ‘service-producing landscapes’ are reframed as service-maintainers for demanding consumers elsewhere in such ‘emerging global ledger of financialised environmental services’ (Sullivan 2012: 11). In the villages, people were taking this role very seriously: if they were not working for others to protect nature, the world could be depleted. Many were seeing the world as a potential desert, taking the example of Africa, first covered by a forest and later exhausted by careless humans. In our

conversations, Fidel was always scared that his children would live in an arid space, with heat and no food, having to eat dust as people were doing in Africa. Echoing others, Juan, married to an environmental practitioner, even confessed he had been told that if they didn't take care of the forest, there would be a global war for water, like what happened for the 'Arabs'. He further told me that if local people didn't protect the environment, they would have to go to planet Mars. Others, such as my friend Segundo, were more generally scared of the potential 'deforestation of the world', the 'breaking of the ozone layer',⁴¹ or other possible disasters. In general, it was thought that if nobody was taking care of the environment *here*, nobody else would. Consequently, farmers *had* to take care of the environment as the environment, described as the 'lungs of the earth'⁴², was 'the responsibility of here'⁴³ for the gas emissions 'there'⁴⁴ to be lessened and the disastrous scenarios they feared to be avoided. Some were telling me that they could 'reduce for them'⁴⁵, the people who didn't have forests anymore. Séptimo confirmed this view: 'if it is good locally, it will be good for other countries'⁴⁶. Others similarly claimed: 'if it is taken care of here, there it will be okay'⁴⁷ or 'to maintain the rainforest is to maintain other countries'⁴⁸.

Environmentalised farmers

Environmental programmes thereby created a physical locality of global responsibility: farmers were seemingly discovering a sense of 'globality' through the responsibility for

⁴¹ 'deforestación del mundo'; 'rompimiento de la capa de ozono'

⁴² 'pulmón del mundo'

⁴³ 'responsabilidad de acá'

⁴⁴ 'allá'

⁴⁵ 'reducir para ellos'

⁴⁶ 'si esta bonito localmente, va a ser bonito en otros países'

⁴⁷ 'si se cuida acá, allá esta bien'

⁴⁸ 'mantener la selva es mantener otros países'

caring a local environment and by this were constructing a relationship between ‘here’ and ‘there’. Farmers were then ‘environmentalised’ by external forces, completely legitimated and informed by a novel ‘conceptual category’, the ‘environment’ (Agrawal 2005:164).

I argue with Tsing (2005: 57) that the ‘self-conscious making of a spectacle’ is a necessary means to gather investment funds for environmental organisations. More precisely, to be implemented in different contexts, this ‘conservation spectacle’ (Sullivan 2012: 4) has to be constructed on discourses of environmental crisis, of nature treasures requiring conservation and of conservation performances in the field (Sullivan 2012: 4).

With their responsibility to conserve the forest and preserve our world, farmers had to become what Goldman (2001b) calls ‘eco-rational subjects’, where ‘eco’ stands both for economic and ecological: they were given the authority and incentive to protect natural resources as environmental stakeholders and in return, had to provide the capital to enter environmental oriented business ventures (see Igoe and Brockington 2007: 442). In addition, they progressively acquired the skills and values of responsibility that are necessary to care for nature, prescribed by the transnational institutions that rule these interpretations (*ibid.*). Meanwhile, this urgency of the global environmental crisis gave the environmental organisations and conservation practitioners ‘a sort of moral high ground’ (West 2006: 32) to stand on when making decisions about local peoples and the global environment. I argue in the next section that this series of practices and rhetoric created a new kind of transnational contact between all of these actors.

‘We have land but no culture’: environmental education

‘We conserve only what we love, we love only what we understand, we understand only what we are taught.’⁴⁹ (Ministerio del Ambiente 2015)

Farmers were often confessing that they only stopped planting coca because the U.S. planes decided to dry it. The initiative to start environmental programmes was similarly attributed to transnational organisations coming in the valley. Many times was I told that there were ‘people coming’⁵⁰ to teach them how to plant and grow cocoa, how to take care of the forest and local natural resources. Foreign environmental practitioners were said to invade the valley in groups from Western countries. Farmers were then often showing me old pictures, regretting that foreigners were ‘just coming and going’⁵¹. For instance, Aquiles was always speaking of the ‘people coming to change something’⁵², concluding: ‘I hope they will always come back’⁵³. In this section, I study how the relationships between these Western environmental organisations and farmers affected the latter’s roles as conservationists and their search for legitimation among other actors.

The school stage

I quickly realised that Western invaders were in fact seen teachers. In general, farmers seemed to praise those ‘Europeans’ or ‘Americans’⁵⁴ coming to teach them how to ‘work with intelligence’⁵⁵. In a long conversation, Bernardo further described how Europeans

⁴⁹ ‘Conservamos sólo aquello que amamos, Amamos sólo aquello que entendemos, Entendemos sólo lo que se nos enseñe’

⁵⁰ ‘hay personas que vienen’

⁵¹ ‘ellos vienen et se van’

⁵² ‘Gente que viene para cambiar algo’

⁵³ ‘espero que vuelvan’

⁵⁴ ‘Europeos’; ‘Americanos’

⁵⁵ ‘trabajar con inteligencia’

took environmental initiatives that created ‘a bit of consciousness’⁵⁶ in the villages. Aquiles was describing ‘foreigners’ as people who could ‘teach them how to be strong with positive ideas, how to stand up’⁵⁷. Farmers were constantly speaking of ‘learning’, ‘being educated’, ‘receiving knowledge’,⁵⁸ or were repeating ‘we have been told’, ‘the technicians said’, ‘they came to tell me’,⁵⁹ before sharing with me what they had to learn. In general, farmers and environmental practitioners were equally hoping that education would subsequently remedy to the local ‘lack of knowledge transfer’⁶⁰. Echoing others, Humberto described their local agriculture, prior to Western education, as empirical and without technological knowledge. Environmental education was meant to ‘change people’⁶¹, especially since farmers could not naturally take care of nature, as Robert, environmental practitioner, once told me. Similarly, when I apologised for taking so much of their time during interviews, Eulogio and his friends replied that they were happy to learn from my stories because they *had* to learn, they *had* to receive knowledge [my emphasis]. According to farmers, people would deforest again if they didn’t understand. Indeed, Doel, old farmer, claimed that without environmental education, people were ‘blind’⁶², staying in a ‘complete disaster’⁶³. Aquiles explained that most farmers didn’t read the Bible properly, thinking that God commanded that people had to take advantage of all natural resources before the world would end. In all these conversations, farmers were building an image of themselves as waiting for foreigners to ‘educate’ them to prevent them from ‘naturally’ destroying their environment, as they were always claiming.⁶⁴ They had to be corrected in order to avoid

⁵⁶ ‘un poco de consciencia’

⁵⁷ ‘ustedes nos enseñaban a ser fuertes con ideas positivas, a levantarnos’

⁵⁸ ‘aprender’; ‘educarse’; ‘recibir conocimiento’

⁵⁹ ‘me han dicho’; ‘los técnicos dijeron’; ‘vinieron para decirme’

⁶⁰ ‘falta la transferencia de conocimiento’

⁶¹ ‘cambiar la gente’

⁶² ‘estamos ciegos’

⁶³ ‘desastre completo’

⁶⁴ ‘no cuidan naturalmente’

‘contamination’⁶⁵, so often feared in our conversations. In all these exchanges, they were building their own roles of the ‘naturally’ undeveloped Peruvian farmers, discovering conservation knowledge through foreign private companies. Victor once claimed: ‘I applaud the invasion because it develops you!’⁶⁶.

In the same fashion, farmers were often compared to children by environmental practitioners.⁶⁷ More, a particular experience showed me that farmers seemed to position themselves as such in front of foreign authorities. When Paul, in charge of the implementation of the company’s projects in Peru, came to the foundation, all the local associations were presenting their respective work, how they were organised, what they achieved and what they were hoping to do in the next few months. There was a certain atmosphere of anxiety and excitement. Members of different associations wanted Paul to be ‘proud’. They were distributing many documents to him, showing him an excessive number of Excel tables and, it seems, repeating the environmental lessons they were taught. On that day, members of the foundation and farmers were giving an even stronger attention to procedures than usual. They produced a large amount of papers to be signed and re-signed, showing Paul the seriousness of the event. Paul was agreeing or disagreeing along the meeting, quickly glancing at the documents provided. Farmers were ready to take notes on these comments with notebooks many of them confessed they borrowed to their children. Throughout the meeting, farmers were sharing their expectations about ‘the process of learning’ or ‘educating more the fellows’.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ ‘contaminación’

⁶⁶ ‘aplaudo la invasión porque te desarrolla!’

⁶⁷ ‘son niños!’

⁶⁸ ‘proceso de aprendizaje’; ‘educar a los socios’

Bad actors and the problem of legitimacy

Nevertheless, environmental authorities were often complaining about their students.

Victor, working for the government, was always telling me that, for farmers, ‘things were going in one ear and out the other’⁶⁹. I indeed quickly realised that farmers were not often responding with notions the ‘environmental education’⁷⁰ would expect them to answer. In interviews, if I was to talk a bit more about environmental knowledge, people either started to repeat the same words without making any sentence or said that they didn’t know anything or tried to remember and confessed they had forgotten. Those who tried to answer were giving me confused answers, mixing notions and concepts. For instance, a lot of farmers were telling me that global warming was the difference of temperatures between summer and winter. Others were speaking of it as ‘the burning of everything’⁷¹. Many were looking at me afterwards, interrogative, to see if their answers were correct. If they couldn’t answer at all, they timidly apologised: ‘I don’t know anything’⁷².

Furthermore, the identity of their teachers or clients, grouped in the famous ‘they’ of all farmers’ explanations, was not understood either. During the meeting, most of the people involved in associations did not know what Paul’s role exactly was. Some people, yet working for the cooperative, were taking Paul for another member of the international company. And many could only describe company as a ‘company from Europe’⁷³.

In a similar way, farmers did not know where the cocoa was going after the main town in the valley. Some of them were guessing Lima; others were able to further mention the United States and Europe, listing some countries such as Holland, Switzerland, France, German and Spain. They all did not know much about these countries, except from television news that people were rarely watching. Some of them however told me that what

⁶⁹ ‘cosas van por una oreja y salen por la otra’

⁷⁰ ‘educación ambiental’

⁷¹ ‘la quema de todo’

⁷² ‘no sé nada’

⁷³ ‘empresa de Europa’

they knew was that these countries needed chocolate to keep warm due to their cold weather. Yet, most of them did not know where their production was going at all.

Nevertheless, they tried their best to play their cards right to receive socio-economic legitimation. They had to distinguish themselves from others as better students. Aquiles and environmental practitioners for instance were often telling me that they and I were forming a team that understood the changes needed and knew about the conservation of environment. Aquiles denounced neighbours that ‘were not conserving’, were ‘disinterested’ in ‘cleaning their fields’.⁷⁴ He recounted that some people could not bear the idea of waiting for cocoa trees to grow for three years, obsessed by yield and economic benefits. These persons were not listening to conservation lessons and were pointed at as bad conservationists.

These bad students were often described as migrants from the Andean Highlands, called ‘la sierra’, or mountains. These people didn’t know the forest and were only used to rocks and dust. Consequently, migrants from ‘la sierra’ were naturally unable to recognise the richness and preciousness of the forest. In almost all my conversations, these migrants were responsible for the destruction of the forest. Conversely, as Gregorio, working for the foundation, once explained to me in his ‘concept of the forest dweller’⁷⁵, original forest dwellers were naturally taking care of their environment. Many farmers were actually making a point of introducing themselves as ‘natural from here’⁷⁶, claiming ‘natural is what I am’⁷⁷, speaking proudly of their parents and, more rarely, their grandparents living in the rainforest, ‘la selva’. Unfortunately, as Gregorio recounted clearly, forest dwellers had been impacted by unacceptable behaviours of migrants from ‘la sierra’. According to

⁷⁴ ‘hay vecinos que no conservan’; ‘tienen desinterés;’ ‘limpiar sus campos’

⁷⁵ ‘concepto del selvático’

⁷⁶ ‘natural de acá’

⁷⁷ ‘natural es de mí’

him, environmental programmes were there to remedy to this problem and educate all people again. Interestingly however, farmers from ‘la sierra’ were claiming that people originally from the forest were lazy, taking their environment for granted and waiting for others to help them in the fields. They were not working to gain any status and were just pretending to respect a forest that they were in fact deforesting themselves.

If farmers from ‘la sierra’ and from ‘la selva’ were then fighting for their environmental legitimacy against each other, both were situating themselves as superior from another ‘type’ of forest dwellers, indigenous peoples. Indigenous peoples were invariably said to be ‘disorganised’, ‘without culture’, cut from the outside world, ‘without communication,’ ‘without confidence’.⁷⁸ Fidel told me that indigenous people could only be ‘organised’ and ‘live like civilised people’ if they were receiving education by teachers in Spanish.⁷⁹ They were looked at as completely uncultured, untouched by Western environmental and cultural education. Farmers on the contrary had the chance to receive Western knowledge to progressively (re)understand and (re)organise their environment and grow economically. Farmers had, as a consequence, to fight for legitimation to be recognised by their teachers as worth educating, and eventually receive better cultivation in their fields and culture in their homes.

⁷⁸ ‘desorganizados’ ; ‘sin cultura’ ; ‘sin comunicación’; ‘sin confianza’

⁷⁹ ‘organizados, hablan castellano porque hay profesores que van a educarlos para que viven como gente civilizada’

Concluding note

This shows further how the relationships farmers developed with nature and with others were in fact translated into discourses of modernity and enlightenment: being cultured is following good cultivation techniques in the fields, or being cultivated, organised and clean. To become cultured or cultivated, farmers had to welcome the invasion of environmental educators who they sought to study from and imitate, successfully or not. Good conservationists would be recognised by environmental organisations as legitimate and worthy receptors of their technical and financial help. Others, disorganised and deforesting, would be left in the background of the scene. In the last chapter, I question the real impact such search for legitimation and modernisation has on farmers' relationships to their own identity and how farmers define further, as a result, their positions in the valley and the world.

Chapter III:

Beyond Farmers' Roles

In this last chapter, I look at farmers' behaviours and discourses beyond their roles and behind the scenes. In a first section, I describe how their roles as conservationists affect how they see themselves in the world and, more especially, impact the differences made between themselves, Peru and the Western world in terms of modernisation and enlightenment. In a second section, I suggest that such dynamics are mainly articulated through wealth inequalities between poor farmers and rich environmental organisations. I finally argue that these relationships create a sort of discontentment from which stems a creative resistance for farmers to produce and recover their own locality.

‘Gringos’ and the promise of a first role

The process of environmental legitimation for farmers to be recognised as good conservationists seemed to influence the way they were constructing Peru and other countries. Farmers were trying to follow the path of Western peoples, from Europe or United States, all called ‘gringos’, or ‘foreigners’. The ‘gringo(a)’ was described as someone ‘different’⁸⁰, more specifically because of his/her ‘white skin’⁸¹, due to the lack of sun in his/her country. ‘Gringos’ were first and foremost seen as rich, being able to pay plane tickets to Peru or fair trade chocolate at home. In sum, ‘gringos’ were ‘not like them’⁸² and this difference, or hierarchy, was constantly made, in everyday comments or in longer conversations. I explain in this section how the relationship between Peru and ‘gringo’ countries was further constructed in the opposition between concepts of ‘organisation’ and ‘disorganisation’ and in terms of cultural modernisation and economic development.

Cultured ‘gringos’ and disorganised ‘Peruanos’

In general, ‘gringos’, and especially European peoples, were described as ‘better’⁸³ people. For instance, Eulogio, old farmer who had participated in the development of the cooperative, told me that European people were more creative and clever than Peruvian peoples. As others did, he introduced himself as well as his wife as honourable descents of Spanish people. His grandparents, of Spanish origins, had shown creativity to make better money and took the decision not to resign themselves to work from farming like others. He

⁸⁰ ‘diferente’

⁸¹ ‘piel blanca’

⁸² ‘no son como nosotros’

⁸³ ‘mejor’

was also showing me his and his wife's physical features and lighter skin to prove his point.

Similarly, most farmers were praising 'gringo' countries, such as France and Holland, for being 'clean', with 'no papers in the streets', 'well ordered' and 'developed'.⁸⁴ Europe was 'tranquil', 'with no problem'.⁸⁵ Living in such an 'advanced'⁸⁶ part of the world, people could take their time: farmers were often asking me at what time I could wake up to go to work and what time I was going to bed, and if it was true that we had weekends.

With a sigh, Aquiles once claimed: 'I wish we had a country like you'⁸⁷.

On the contrary, Peru was seen as backwards, as a bare land, waiting to be cultivated, organised and modernised by others. When I was working with Marcos in his field, he suddenly stopped harvesting and realised: 'we are poor but we have land'⁸⁸. Fidel explained that with their 'low culture'⁸⁹, farmers 'used to live in darkness'⁹⁰. Only culture, mainly viewed as cultivation of lands, was missing.⁹¹ People were then said to be lacking education, stopping school really early in order to work. Some people were also describing Peruvian people as corrupted by money since a very young age, depicting them as only caring about themselves and what they could earn, throwing trash everywhere without thinking of the consequences. In addition, during the long afternoons I was spending with them, the women of the villages were explaining how Peruvian women in general had this natural need of having children early, which women in Europe didn't have.⁹² To sum up,

⁸⁴ 'limpio', 'no papel en la calle', 'bien ordenado'; 'desarrollado'

⁸⁵ 'tranquila'; 'sin problemas'

⁸⁶ 'avanzada'

⁸⁷ 'si podemos tener un país como ellos'

⁸⁸ 'somos pobres pero tenemos tierra'

⁸⁹ 'cultura baja'

⁹⁰ 'vivían en oscuridad'

⁹¹ 'a veces digo que tenemos todo pero nos falta solo la cultura'

⁹² 'es natural: cuando toca toca'

Eduardo stated that Peruvian people didn't have the 'ample vision of the world'⁹³ Europe had and concluded, apprehensively laughing: 'we are delayed'⁹⁴.

Becoming modern

Drawing on their economic and environmental situations, farmers were then using specific terms used in old colonial dynamics to describe themselves and the relationships they had with foreign organisations. They were repeating how they had to 'clean' to avoid 'contamination' and become 'modern'.⁹⁵ If in interviews they were attempting to play their cards right by legitimating themselves as environmental subjects, they were often, in longer conversations, describing their own country with the very flaws they saw in indigenous peoples. They constructed, it seems, a sort of development timeline where indigenous peoples were living in forest but lacking everything else, where farmers lived in the forest but had a very low, disorganised but emerging, culture and where 'gringos' had built a strong culture but lost their nature. If development, by its essence, is always suggestive of change over time, I discovered that in the valley, it was articulated in notions of modernity as enlightenment through environmental education and cultivation (see Pred and Watts 1992). Moreover, development, as explained in previous chapters, was conceptualised mainly in its economic potentialities. Farmers were indeed describing Peruvian people as backwards because of their poverty. Poverty was said to blind them, asking them to think how they could eat the very same day. By this, they were only able to have a 'short vision'⁹⁶ of the future and of environmental conservation as a result. In Martinez-Allier's (2002: 5) words, the 'poor were too poor to be green'. As a consequence,

⁹³ 'visión amplia del mundo'

⁹⁴ 'somos retrasados'

⁹⁵ 'limpiar'; 'la contaminación'; 'modernos'

⁹⁶ 'visión corta plazada'

conservation-as-development projects had to get them out of poverty so that ‘they could then acquire the taste and means to improve the environment’ (*ibid.*).

Poverty and acting

Getting out of this poverty however was not an easy task. Host of most of viral and fungal diseases, cause of loss of soil fertility and of continued clearing of new lands, cocoa productions are often meant to be unsustainable (Rice and Greenberg 2000: 167). Moreover, the current conjuncture, characterised by high prices for global commodities and natural resources, along with reinforced competition for forestlands, has importantly increased the opportunity cost of both forest protection in general, and of REDD+ projects in particular (Seymour and Angelsen 2012). In addition, if expected net incomes and environmental enhancement from the agroforestry were considerably higher than from cocoa monocultures (see Ramirez et al. 2001: 141), most non-cocoa trees would be fully-grown in an average of twenty years. Adan, former member of the cooperative, told me that it was necessary for far-away countries to come and see the ‘reality of the producers’⁹⁷, desperately waiting to grow and live better. Fidel was often explaining: ‘we are good poor, we eat of everything’⁹⁸ contrary to foreigners who were ‘very particular with quality’⁹⁹. Similarly, other women, at the end of our meals, were claiming: ‘forgive my poverty!’¹⁰⁰. Waiting for their development, farmers were growing cocoa for foreigners, expecting growth through cultivation, and coping with the rest in the meantime. Here, it seems that ‘winners’ and ‘losers’ are actively, but implicitly, produced through the exchange process of trading and its significant redistributionary consequences (McAfee 2012). Indeed, as Igoe and Brockington (2007: 443) point out, local people do not benefit from potential investment and easily start losing their capital due to limited opportunities on the ‘bottom rungs of the investment ladder’, due to little experience of how to

⁹⁷ ‘a ver la realidad de los productores’

⁹⁸ ‘somos buenos pobres, consumemos de todo’

⁹⁹ ‘ellos son muy pedilones para calidad’

¹⁰⁰ ‘disculpe mi pobreza!’

effectively invest it and to emergencies in their lives (see Dove 1993; Li 2002). When profits are generated, many smallholders are rarely able to accumulate sufficient capital to secure further operations (Medina and Pokorny 2011). Moreover, direct sales in national and international markets remain difficult, making them dependent on the continued mediation of external actors (Hoch et al. 2012; Pokorny et al. 2012; Scherr et al. 2001). Similar distributional issues were raised in the valley. Farmers seemed to have the little role in their development and the sustainable use of their environmental resources, unable to control their clients or understand the market they were submitting to. I agree here with O'Neill (2001: 1868) who claims that 'the poorer you are the less your preferences count' and concludes (*ibid.*) that 'the poor sell cheap'. In this last section, I first study this little role of farmers in distribution and conservation and the discontentment stemming from it to later focus on the creative resistance progressively developing, it seems, from this dissatisfaction and which ultimately allows farmers to reproduce their own locality as a space of tranquillity.

The little role

Farmers' poverty was seen as a threat and environmental organisations' superiority was the source of strong discontentment. Farmers were interestingly thinking that 'gringos' were coming to steal their natural resources. Eduardo, echoing Victor, once told me that farmers were scared of foreigners taking their water and their air in boxes or buying conservation areas for their own purposes. Their lack of education was seen as potentially fatal to the only thing they had: nature. A growing number of people were then asking environmental organisations for a fairer distribution of resources. Moreover, speaking of the cooperative, Adan, was telling me that participant farmers were exploited, being 'skinny' in front of

‘big’ people taking the meagre resources they had.¹⁰¹ He claimed: ‘we become little in front of power’¹⁰².

As Hickey and Mohan (2004: 19) point out, what is considered ‘participatory’ is often a process whereby large numbers of people are represented by a relatively small group of participants. In the valley, participation was indeed organised by a few leaders rather than members per se since the latter had to work in the field and couldn’t afford boats to the main town. Most farmers were saying that they didn’t know much about the organisations and the meetings they couldn’t attend. In many of their stories, they felt that they did not control anything or that they were earning just enough to cover their basic necessities.

Most farmers were not able to pay health services for instance. Fidel took the example of his son, working for the cooperative in one of the collecting centres. His son was working alone, for long hours, without being paid much. He could not afford to get surgery for his painful hips and his mother, retired farmer, had to help him everyday to fulfil the requirements of his post correctly.

Fidel was also confessing that he had already lost many plantations because his land was not really made for cocoa culture. Nobody helped him: the cooperative just told him that it would be better to plant cocoa, without any further monitoring. Others were similarly complaining. These villages were too close to the river and their fields were often flooded. The cooperative and the environmental company apparently ignored their complaints. For people ‘dedicating’¹⁰³, as they always said, their lives to cocoa, the eventuality of losing their production was a disaster. When I was speaking of this unfortunate potentiality, Marcos, recently father, claimed: ‘I would cut my throat!’¹⁰⁴.

¹⁰¹ ‘somos flacos y ellos gorditos’; ‘vienen para llevar lo que tenemos’

¹⁰² ‘volvemos pequeños frente al poder’

¹⁰³ ‘dedicando’

¹⁰⁴ ‘cortaría mi cuello’

Beyond the scenes: farmers' strategies

Yet, I would like to finish on a more positive note. In this last section, I go beyond the images of the poor and the rich, the disorganised and the cultured and look at farmers' strategies to reconstruct their environment and identity from these oppositions. I argue that it would be misleading to see all environmental spaces as disempowering simply because they are fuelled by the development machine and by neoliberal conservation.

Indeed, to approach spaces as completely unequal and disempowering overlooks the ways in which wider understandings of political agency can be exercised (Hickey and Mohan 2004: 18). This perspective denies to the less powerful any agency when in fact, as Mosse (2003: 46) rightly argues: 'beneficiaries... constitute and manipulate project discourse in managing their own relationships with external patrons and donors'. I suggest that contrived spaces can still hold the potential for action by the so-called poor or marginalised. If Lefebvre and Foucault highlight the significance of relations of power in social spaces, Scott's (1986, 1990, 1998) work shows the dynamism and changing nature of these relations. His explicit concern with the spatiality of power and of resistance provides a useful analytic tool to understand how people can shape spaces differently. In this view, resistance and transformative potentialities are not situated in an artificially autonomous space (Mitchell 1990). Cornwall (2004: 82) argues that Scott's (1986) early work on everyday forms of resistance shows instances of subtle tactics subverting the strategies of the powerful behind discourses and practices. Following Cornwall (2004), I argue that 'weapons of the weak' (Scott 1986) have been shaped in the valley through pretending not to understand, staging discourses or even articulating positions openly. Beyond the gaze of the environmental company and other organisations, farmers voice their resistance in 'hidden transcripts' and backstage commentaries through which they define countervailing realities in their own terms (see Cornwall 2004; Scott 1990). I follow

here Cornwall (2002: 7) who argues that ‘less attention has been paid to what actually happens in practice’ to focus on place as lived experience. In the background of the environmental scene, I could observe that villagers were mostly indifferent to conservation. In most villages, rubbishes surrounded all the bins. I discovered that my friend Guido was one of the many farmers deforesting around the village. A few days earlier, he had pronounced his environmental speech perfectly. Environmental practitioners themselves, after having taught to other farmers their environmental lessons, were throwing papers in the river or in the forest. Some farmers even claimed: ‘I don’t care where the cocoa goes’¹⁰⁵.

So I state, with Mohan (2001: 164), that if inequalities of power in spaces exist, they create hybrid places that those viewed as powerless can actively contribute to produce.

Intersections of spaces allow new possibilities for challenging hegemonic power relations (Gaventa 2004: 39). In the valley, the opening of previously closed spaces (under corn and coca production) had actually contributed to new mobilizations and critical consciousness. Environmental programmes provided possibilities for transformational change.

Environment was used to construct a socio-political and ecological place, seen as a place of ‘tranquillity’¹⁰⁶. Before, people were speaking of ‘deformation’¹⁰⁷: non-existent space prevented farmers to create their place and their vision of the world. A young man once reported how his father and the ‘old men’ were already talking about changing things at this time but didn’t have any space to construct and exchange socio-political ideas. He concluded that nobody could do anything. Moreover, most of the farmers either came from other parts of Peru (mostly ‘la sierra’) or had to experience personally the eradication of coca plantations either because they were producing coca leaves directly or because they

¹⁰⁵ ‘no me importa saber donde va’

¹⁰⁶ ‘tranquilidad’

¹⁰⁷ ‘deformación’

were working for ‘the coca industry’¹⁰⁸ in other indirect ways. They all had to start everything again and produce locality in what Bender and Winer (2001) call ‘the part-familiar and completely unknown’.

Slowly growing, cocoa trees allowed farmers to benefit from a socio-economic rebirth and re-create a space of tranquillity, support and security. Farmers were often paralleling the strength of trees, the difficulties to grow them and take care of them through time to how powerful they were progressively feeling socially in a new environment of ‘union’ and ‘cohesion’¹⁰⁹. For instance, farmers were explaining how they quickly understood that good cocoa productions would start from exchanging techniques and ‘everything you knew about cocoa’¹¹⁰ through what they called ‘choba-choba’ or as Eduardo called it ‘strength-strength’¹¹¹. ‘Choba-choba’ consisted of helping, in turn, one another in their field. Cocoa production and reforestation programmes consequently opened potential space for social cohesion. Aquiles was claiming: ‘before community was a disaster! Now we have a structure with more social support’¹¹². Some people were also explaining how conserving the environment made them aware of the future, beyond the present and beyond themselves, for their children’s and other generations’ lives to be better ¹¹³. Environment helped them, it seems, to project themselves in terms of social responsibility for the local community and reinforced a sense of belonging to and sharing a certain space.

Indeed, in many conversations, cocoa trees were depicted as the emblem of ‘stability’¹¹⁴.

As opposed to coca plants, growing quickly and easily everywhere, impoverishing soil and giving ‘quick money’¹¹⁵, cocoa trees were environmentally and socially constructive. They

¹⁰⁸ ‘empresas de droga’

¹⁰⁹ ‘unión’, ‘cohesión’

¹¹⁰ ‘todo lo que sabías sobre cacao’

¹¹¹ ‘fuerza-fuerza’

¹¹² ‘antes, la comunidad fue un desastre ! ahora hay una estructura con más apoyo social’

¹¹³ ‘no tanto para el dinero pero para ellos’

¹¹⁴ ‘estabilidad’

¹¹⁵ ‘plata fácil que se va fácil’

became the spatiotemporal evidence of environmental and social tranquillity. Most farmers I knew were claiming that ‘now, everything here [was] tranquil’¹¹⁶ and this notion of ‘tranquillity’¹¹⁷ was very important in all my conversations. In long everyday conversations, people were telling me how they were sorry for me, living in polluted and dangerous cities, not knowing where my food was coming from. Here, Aquiles recognised that people could eat what they were producing: ‘from the field to the mouth!’¹¹⁸. Women were making jokes telling their children that I was here to take them back to Europe. All the family was bursting into laughter, claiming that it would be horrible there. Farmers were most often seeing the outside world as full of diseases, such as flu and fever, and of potential disasters such as volcano explosions, strong winds and tsunamis. Victor once confessed: ‘thank God, we are not like you; we can now choose to modernise without following the path of industrialisation and contamination’¹¹⁹.

¹¹⁶ ‘ahora, acá todo esta tranquilo’

¹¹⁷ ‘tranquilidad’

¹¹⁸ ‘del campo a la boca’

¹¹⁹ ‘no somos similares Gracias a Dios ; entonces podemos caminar un otro camino que el de la industrialización y contaminación’

Concluding note

Parroting discourses and acting as ventriloquists, farmers were actually playing their own roles in order to socio-economically benefit from a new opened environment. They were following their own strategies to recover space and used neoliberalised power relations to construct their own place of tranquillity and produce a locality of agricultural communities. They were thereby able to extend space and time beyond economic production towards social quality. The study of space as linchpin for creative resistance helped us discover the everyday strategies farmers put in place in the valley. I conclude here that space, as a result, can be seen as the birthplace of local methods to (re)construct social identities and should be better studied in the contexts of conservation programmes.

Conclusion

The penetration of neoliberal perspectives into everyday life, and above all into the reproduction of extra-human nature, seems to have become a key feature of the contemporary world (Moore 2010: 390). As a consequence, environmental conservation is now engaged in an intensified neoliberalisation of its practices and discourses. The whole reconceptualization of nature in tradable terms becomes the justification of ‘saving of nature to trade it’ as Sullivan (2012: 4) puts it. Indeed, for capitalism to ‘operationalise’, new spheres for investment, trade and speculation need to create what Robertson (2006: 368) calls ‘new natures’. These natures are ‘capitalised’, based on the rethinking and rewording of the ‘earth-in-crisis’ into the alignment with capital both conceptually, semiotically and materially.

The aim of this dissertation was to show a local ethnographic study of the impact of conservation-as-development projects and their implicit commodification of space on people’s production of locality, self and other. Most work focusing on neoliberal natures, ecologies, environment and conservation have concentrated on theoretical explanations of these recent processes and their places in conceptual history (see Castree 2008a, 2008b; Heynen and Robbins 2005). I draw on original ethnographies by Mauzé (1998), Fairhead and Leach (1998), Sivaramakrishnan (1998) and especially West (2006) that depict the invasion of non-Western forests by Western neoliberal discourses and practices. These studies however have been focusing on indigenous populations and on their struggle to preserve their own cosmologies against naturalist ones. Here, I try to expand a fight that concerns other ‘traditional peoples’ (Carneiro da Cunha and Almeida 2000). Indeed, other forest-dwellers have also a specific, creative sense of spatial belonging and place-making,

both produced by and constructed against Western approaches of the environment. They are, as indigenous people are, often taken in complex socio-political relationships with outsiders over their own space and looking for legitimation of their roles in nature conservation. This study attempted to further understand these relationships and to give these, often forgotten, people a primary role.

I first intended to set up the scene. U.S. and Peruvian interventions to eradicate cocoa plantations shaped the valley under study as an emptied space. Local farmers were left with an economically and ecologically empty environment. Then, national and transnational organisations decided to dive into this space and reconstructed it as a profitable space to grow cocoa, setting up a new production scenery. At the beginning of the 2000s however, biodiversity conservation became urgent in many deforested tropical forests. The most efficient solution to deforestation was to neoliberalise nature via complex systems of direct and indirect payments to preserve it.

The environmental company, implementing reforestation programmes in the valley, was to obey to this neoliberalisation of conservation practices. Their objective was to reverse environmental degradation and enhance the role of sustainable agriculture in the local economy. In Rival's (2013: 4) words, the repair of the social fabric was to be conjugated with 'Earth repair'. Moreover, through these conservation-as-development initiatives, environmental organisations introduced the idea of ecological responsibility in a new global environment. Along with governmental institutions, they reshaped space and imagination of space through territorialisation and discourses about the environmental world. I realised however that the commodified environment was becoming the space for reinforcing power relations between 'rich' and 'poor'. Indeed, Lefebvre (1991: 24) claims: 'Space is a social product... it is not simply "there", a neutral container waiting to be filled, but is a dynamic, humanly constructed means of control and hence of domination, of

power'. Here, I took environmental programmes as invading space and subjectivities. I showed how people use the neoliberalised 'environment' to think about themselves and how they think about it in terms of themselves. Informants were indeed speaking their relationships with external actors in terms of modernisation, revealing old power dynamics still at work between poor farmers and rich environmental organisations. Presenting themselves as poor, uncultured and generally backwards, informants were obeying to their roles of conservationists waiting for foreign environmental education. I first decided to follow Foucault (1986) and suggested that these discourses, ways of thinking, of doing as well as of speaking could shape the boundaries of agency and people's cosmologies. Yet, I ultimately chose to go beyond Foucault to see people's strategies behind the scene. I indeed discovered that farmers were in fact the directors of their own roles in the conservation arena and were actively and creatively building their own environmental scene. I then concluded that farmers were in fact able to participate in shaping their social limits and subsequently form a space as their own locality on which rested their very own identities.

I encourage further research to study in more depth during longer fieldworks these politics of space, especially through the formation and organisation of local associations. Focusing on other important actors, i.e. women and children, would also be an interesting viewpoint on power relations and their strategies in the context of neoliberalisation of nature and conservation-as-development projects.

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