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Villains, Victims, and Conservationists? Representational Frameworks and Sustainable Development on the Transamazon Highway

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Abstract Literature on conservation and land reform politics concentrates on how local actors are characterized dualistically as either environmental villains or heroes. Here I present three different frames as exemplary of the multiple narratives at stake as actors create environmental subjectivities in relation to political opportunity, based primarily on ethnographic field research in a case study of Projects for Sustainable Development (PDSs) located in the Transamazon highway region of the Brazilian Amazon. I argue that local identities are mediated by their shifting relationships with other interested actors. Through a historical analysis of different frames of identity and land use, I examine how and why representation struggles occurred and shifted, based upon the ways in which powerful actors took advantage of political opportunities. This led to indeterminate outcomes in different local struggles across the region. In the process, local voices were often undermined in favor of interests of more powerful outsiders. The political process through which such struggles occur yield geographically and socially uneven effects contingent upon key events and contestation from disparate groups.

Keywords Conservation · Development · Amazon · Land reform · Social movements · Socio-environmentalism · Project for Sustainable Development · Brazil

Introduction

This article builds on recent literature at the nexus of conservation and identity issues by examining how people are represented in land-use and conservation politics. As social movement scholars have noted, an articulation of identity may gain more resonance when it fits within a "master frame," whether a familiar set of discourses, symbols, or a pre-established pattern (Snow and Benford 1992; Hall 1996; Li 2000). Framing identity and establishing frames for social movement activism can play powerful roles in the production of environmental subjects (Hall 1996). I here examine the process of constructing identities in relationship to the environment from the perspective of political ecology and focus on how environmental subjectivities are formed in relation to a specific group of people and site of conflict (Agrawal 2005a, b).

Constellations of social and political interaction entail multi-level interactions that are not only rooted in historical, ideational, and social factors, but also in material factors. Recent literature has focused on how certain local actors are categorized alternatively as ecological heroes or as environmental villains (Brosius 1997; Neumann 1997; Goldman 2003, 2007; Forsyth and Walker 2008; Moore 2009). This dualist simplification, however, overlooks several important dimensions of the complexity of identity formation processes, as well as concurrent effects on local conservation practice. While the dualism of the environmental villains and heroes framework may often be deployed, local people are sometimes caught between competing strategic articulations about their identities as actors with different interests aim to benefit over land-use decisions (Brosius 1997; Neumann 1997; Moore 2009; see also White 1991; Dove 1993; Lohmann 1993; Conklin and Graham 1995). The effects of framing such struggles can be powerful, creating friction between conservation and development practice at local levels, while also giving rise to differing approaches to conservation policy and practice (Peluso 1993; Tsing 2005; see also Carrier and West 2009).

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I here address how subjectivities are formed in relation to conservationist identities, and show some of the ways in which the competing interests of state officials, local and international non-governmental actors, and local peoples yield different constructions of grassroots actors' identities.

In Amazonian contexts, land use plans with the goal of sustainable development often entail land conflicts, infrastructure development, and environmental conservation efforts (Hecht and Cockburn 1989; Schmink and Wood 1992; Bunker 1985). These projects have garnered international prominence because of the importance of the region on a global level (Keck and Sikkink 1998). Establishing a dominant frame for a local population delineates the terms of debate giving priority to different social, environmental, security, land tenure, infrastructural, or economic concerns. Different actors may have varying stakes in prioritizing each of these areas. It also delineates who the 'gatekeepers' are in conservation, marginalizing some actors while privileging others (Hecht and Cockburn 1989; Schmink and Wood 1992; Brosius 1997; Neumann 1997; Moore 2009). Participation in the process of conservationist identity construction will orient policies and practices in profound ways at local levels, and will consolidate further in people's constructions of self, community, and other alliances (Alvarez *et al*. 1992; Pulido 1998).

Following various calls for more nuanced understandings of identities in relation to conservation politics (Dove 1993; Conklin and Graham 1995; Brosius 1997; Agrawal 2005a, b; West 2006; Moore 2009), I present a historically contextualized analysis of how local identities are mediated by shifting relationships with other powerful actors. I propose that the complex histories and goals of local people's conservation struggles are often expressed in far more complex ways than binaries of environmental villain or hero, and further, that the process of constructing identities to describe grassroots actors in conservation is consistently mediated by the interests of more powerful and better-organized actors. As representational frames are constructed and changed in response to critical events and political opportunities, the subjectivities that result are often geographically uneven and indeterminate. Moreover, as such discourses shift, local actors are sometimes saddled with ecological responsibilities they neither support nor understand.

Based primarily on interviews with activists and residents in a Project for Sustainable Development (PDS)[1] in the Transamazon highway region of the Brazilian Amazon, I found that the actors involved in the struggle to support the PDS residents established different frameworks according to their disparate and competing interests, none of which predominated the others. By historically situating the various discourses of several different groups of actors in relation to the PDS, I link political ecology to rhetorical strategies and show how and why certain vested interests come to adopt certain frameworks and some of the results as they changed in relation to a key moment, noting the relative benefits for different actors involved in the land use struggle. Disappointingly for the PDS residents, despite an assassination in their midst, they experienced few benefits, and those who gained most were in fact quite distanced from the PDS communities.

By offering a case-study examination of how non-traditional peoples also embrace environmental values, albeit without as consistent an identity framework as conservationists, I counter views that insist traditional peoples and indigenous groups are almost inherently good ecological stewards. In this case, the migrant farmers living in the PDS are neither heroes nor villains, but they are a far cry from categorization as maladapted forest destroyers who pose a threat to conservation (Nugent 1993; Nygren 2000; Campos 2008). In fact, the multiplicity of narratives of people's identities shows the complex ways in which power is asserted in the face of struggles over territory. It suggests that the difficulties of breaking persistently intransigent dichotomies of environmental hero and villain, in addition to environment versus development issues more broadly, are contingent upon power relations and strategic interactions of a wide array of political actors. These include local government, private business people, and an array of local and international nongovernmental activists who are not necessarily allied with each other. This broader conceptualization proposes that the actors influencing representations of conservationists are not necessarily part of the environmental movement, as it has been conceived by community based conservation scholars and practitioners.

Shifting away from simplistic notions of identity and towards a more complex understanding of who local actors are and how they interface with other vested actors in a given conservation case allows for a more accurate account of how different plans are formed and how legitimacy is accorded to certain actors. Conservation policies are largely shaped by perceptions of local actors' identities and hence have significant implications for local land uses. And people's conservation practices and social ties are strongly marked by the ways in which conservation policies are shaped and implemented. As Carrier and West (2009) note, conservation policies affecting people's relations with their surroundings can give rise to new identities or can highlight previously insignificant identities, as much as establishing frameworks for identities can influence the terms of such policies.

This paper investigates the competing narratives of identity among a rather disparate group of actors, including local NGOs, governmental and business people, and international environmental organizations involved in the

[1] The Portuguese acronym is PDS which stands for Projeto de Desenvolvimento Sustentável.

creation of the PDSs through a frame analysis and historical examination of rhetorical shifts before and after a key historical moment: the high-profile assassination of an American-born 73 year old nun, Sister Dorothy Stang. These actors respectively adopted frames of the PDSs and its residents as similar to the better-known extractivist reserve (RESEX) model, as unproductive and as victims of violent conflict, such that their struggle capitalized upon conservation gains in other parts of the region. I then examine the ways in which these frameworks were modified and responded to at the grassroots level and over time. A more nuanced understanding of the identity framing process provides useful insight into interventions by the state and by international conservation organizations, and of regional sustainable development processes.

The often-dichotomized issues environmental conservation and sustainable development are likewise in tension for the residents of the PDS area itself, who are relatively powerless in the process of conservationist identity constructions where their more complex socio-environmental outlooks tend to be omitted or ignored in lieu of traditionally competing narratives of environmental preservation versus economic development interests. In the case described here, the competition between different discourses led to the ironic outcome that the local populations most closely affected by the assassination were burdened with ecological and land-use responsibilities that they did not fully support nor understand, whereas other actors saw notable benefits because they capitalized effectively on political opportunities at a crucial historical juncture.

As has been noted, establishing a resonant framework for identity and representation of a struggle can be important because it sets the terms of debate, helps an issue to gain prominence, and allows some actors to function as "gatekeepers" as they influence a struggle. However, at times establishment of frames by outsiders may involve an imposed cultural essentialism upon a group, or may function to tie a group to ecological responsibilities that they are not wholly capable of fulfilling or to which they may not fully subscribe. These are important considerations in the case of the PDSs land conflicts.

The Projects for Sustainable Development that are the focus of this investigation are also an important case study for conservation politics on another level. The PDSs are land reform settlements that have a strong environmental set of principles and rules underlying their governance. They are an innovation for Brazilian land reform, which is increasingly embracing environmental concerns in policy and in practice. The PDSs can be compared to the advent of extractivist reserves (RESEXs) in the late 1980s: the PDSs pushed the traditionally "red" interests of the land reform movement to embrace more "green" concerns, while RESEXs meant that environmentalists' traditionally "green" concerns would begin to take account of inequality and humans as allies in conservation efforts more systemically. The internationally-recognized efforts of rubber tapper Chico Mendes were successful in championing of the idea that traditional populations could be viable partners in tropical rainforest conservation and led to shifts in debates about the appropriate role for humans in conservation-oriented land use (Redford and Sanderson 2000; Schwartzmann *et al.* 2000; Terbourgh 2000). As with the RESEXs, the PDSs offered a new territorial-organizing model that had previously barely been considered as a feasible alternative. With their advent, the land-reform movement explicitly embraced environmental issues within the predominant framework of adjusting social inequities. The model is significant, as scholars have pointed to the land reform process in Brazil as one that is pervasively fraught with incentives for deforestation rather than conservation (Araujo *et al.* 2010).

Also like the RESEXs, the catalyst for development of the PDSs was an internationally recognized martyr, Sister Dorothy Stang, who was killed near the town of Anapu, located on the Transamazon highway in the Brazilian state of Pará. Sister Dorothy, as she was known, a 73-year old American-born nun, had worked in the region for more than two decades, and was assassinated in 2005 by hired gunmen for her activism in defense of two PDSs. The region is politically and economically dominated by loggers and cattle ranchers, many of whom are suspected of having been involved in ordering her assassination. Their impunity, the lack of infrastructure, and illegal land claiming are so pervasive that this region in the state of Pará is commonly referred to as a frontier akin to the American "Wild West" of the nineteenth century.

In the next section I present a brief description of the mixed social science methodology used in the course of field research, followed by a general discussion of different approaches to sustainable development in Brazi, with attention to the social, ecological, and economic background of the Transamazon highway region. Next, I provide analysis based on interviews of how different actors understood and constructed PDS residents as "conservationists" and discuss the reasons for the disjuncture among state officials representations of the struggle, NGO portrayals of the Anapu situation, and local residents' lack of cohesive identity as conservationists. I conclude with a discussion of the ways in which failures to coherently articulate identities and the power imbalances among multiple competing actors relate to the political ecology of land struggles.

Methodology

This research is based upon triangulating among multiple, sometimes overlapping, qualitative data-gathering procedures. These mixed social science methods served to

generate "richly detailed, thick, and holistic elaborations and understandings" (Snow and Trom 2002: 150). Data were gathered through structured and semi-structured interviews, participant-observation, and participatory engagement. The constructivist framework for understanding the data informed research insofar as it provided a pluralistic basis through which to understand the "circular dynamic tension between subject and object" (Crabtree and Miller 1999: 10; see also Searle 1995).

Over a period of approximately 18 months I conducted field research based at NGOs that were central hubs for social movement organizing in the region.[2] By starting the field research with participant-observation at the offices of these NGOs and then "snowballing" outward to interview the contacts of those organizations, I was able to gain an understanding of the interconnections and fault lines among actors involved in the land reform process, as well as allowing informants to tell their stories, working in collaboration with the researcher (Baxter and Jack 2008). Moreover, this approach meant I was able to gain respect and credibility with these civil society groups, which was essential to access and interact with the local residents most closely affected by the sustainable development plans. As one activist described, "the sides [social movement activists and private business/rancher elites, the latter of whom are often in positions of political control] are like oil and water—we never mix." Hence, some degree of autonomy was lost through these research affiliations. This challenge was not surprising; as has been noted, "the difficulty of achieving sufficiently broad representation to make participation meaningful should not be underestimated" (Schaft and Greenwood 2003). However, during the course of the research, it was on occasion possible to interview people in oppositional social positions; those interactions proved enormously insightful in offering different perspectives and contrasts of views that inform the research. Moreover, becoming associated with the side of the social movement activists contributed to establishing a greater empathy for these groups and their work, which was an explicit aim of the research methods.

In the course of this research, 20 qualitative surveys were conducted with residents of PDS Virola-Jatobá. The surveys were conducted with a representative sample of the approximately 75 households in the community, and in almost all cases, involved responses from heads of households, who were usually men between 25–60 years of age. Following several surveys, three informal focus groups were conducted, each with between three and five participants. Between the survey respondents and the focus groups, a balance was achieved between male and female participants, and old and newer residents of the PDS. Two of the focus groups were with neighbors (and often, extended family members) of the household member who had responded to the survey. Another focus group was women-only, and involved members of a handicraft workshop that was newly established in the PDS. The structure of these focus group sessions was focused on the same themes as the questionnaires, although the responses often were more unstructured. In addition, the research included participant-observation at approximately ten community meetings in the PDS communities. Typically, notes would be taken during interviews with the PDS residents, rather than audio recordings. These notes were then coded for content, specifically noting motivations for conservation, views on NGO activism in relation to the community, statements indicating environmental values, and definitions of the PDS area itself, among other themes. Coding these field notes helped to ascertain the relevance of particular data and to link specific observations to more general analytic issues (Emerson *et al*. 1995). Informant's identities are kept anonymous.

For perspectives informing the regional social and political context of conservation, more than 100 interviews with residents in the region, NGO activists, and governmental officials were conducted. These interviews ranged from 20-minute to two-hour conversations, and often involved follow-up contacts. Interviewees included women and men in nearly equal numbers, and an age range of approximately 18 to 70. Other articulations of representation for the PDSs were collected through local media sources and archival research. In addition, case studies on two other newly created conservation areas in the region were also conducted as a part of a broader comparative research project. While this article focuses specifically on the construction of conservationist identities in the PDS communities, the comparative case study approach did serve to inform this analysis.

Sustainable Development in Brazil

The negative attitude generally held against mainstream "environmentalists" is an important dimension of the situation in the Transamazon highway region. While Brazilian conservation policies incorporate a variety of options about the extent to which humans may use the forest resources, there is often tension between hard-line "environmentalist" organizations and *socioambientalista* (socioenvironmental) groups on the ground (Redford and Padoch 1999; Terbourgh 2000). Socioenvironmentalists in

[2] These were the offices of the Commissão Pastoral da Terra (CPT) in Altamira and in Anapu, and the Fundacão Viver, Produzir, e Preservar (FVPP), based in Altamira. The CPT is a national organization with local branches that is affiliated with the Catholic Church, and the FVPP is a social movement organization comprised of over 113 local organizations in the Transamazon region.

the Transamazon highway region are perceived as more reasonable than environmentalists, because they emphasize valuing human concerns rather than "caring more for trees than people." However, because local socio-environmentalists often need the resources and expertise of conservation-oriented environmentalists, many of whom bring in foreign money and leverage substantial sway in the media, uneasy tensions persist between these two groups. However, together they have largely established a basis for Amazonian development policies that emphasize human use of conservation areas (Guerra 2004). Also, since Brazil's 1999 initiation of the PDS as a model for environmentally focused land reform, the government has been proactive in adopting the PDS designation as a common set of guidelines for Amazonian land use.[3]

The Brazilian PDS case offers insight into the context of broader theoretical arguments about how sustainable development focuses on less developed nations instead of on de-growth, and on the Global South as the source of both the "problem" and the "solution." The colonial critique of the sustainable development concept echoes arguments that conservationist practices are framed by imposing foreign notions of the "Other." As Ignacy Sachs has noted for Amazonia:

> The non-development of Amazonia is totally unacceptable both to the people who live in the region and to Brazilians in general. The gratuitous advice handed out to the people on the spot may well be seen as a kind of ecological colonialism as long as the industrialized countries of the North refuse to change their ways of life and patterns of consumption. (1995: 103)

Another significant criticism is that on the whole, sustainable development is a set of norms that promotes neo-liberal development and ignores the long-standing power imbalances that have perpetuated social inequality (Adams 2001; Bernstein 2002).

This issue gives rise to questions about Brazil's current role in relation to sustainable development. It is sensitive to international environmental pressures, but at the same time is ideologically committed to continuing its economic growth trajectory through what are often large-scale infrastructure and energy projects with a neo-liberal emphasis. Social unrest in the face of this economic orientation maintains pressure on the federal government to undo historical social inequities through agrarian reform and other social policies. The issues at stake in this exploration of identities and the relationship of civil society to social movements and NGOs involve reconstituting notions of democracy, citizenship, and development.

[3] This rise has been particularly prominent from 2006 through to the present; only the Anapu PDSs were created between 1999 and 2004.

Some authors have suggested that outside actors (notably environmental NGOs) tend to impose alien conservationist frameworks on forest peoples, to the detriment of both (West 2006; Moore 2009). For others, it is more a question of subverting identities into collective imaginaries held by others than a direct imposition of clashing values (Snow and Benford 1988; Lohmann 1993). William Fisher has argued that ironically, the environmental movement has positioned Amazonians into a marginalized position because "the political effectiveness of environmental appeals depends precisely on the fact that they derive their meaning from pervasively held ideas about indigenous peoples contained in development ideology" (1996: 197–198; see also Hecht and Cockburn 1989). Others, however, argue that the expansion of local people's struggles into environmentalist frameworks in conjunction with international supporters serves to provide beneficial political resources and to meet mutual needs (Keck 1995). Moreover, amplifying the framework through which a movement conveys its identity transforms the ways in which people think about an issue, tending to extend the issue to communities that would not otherwise become engaged (Taylor 2000).

Failures in resource management have been attributed to inadequate governance and institutional structures as well as a lack of appropriate techniques for effective management of natural resources (Acheson 2006). In recent years, adopting new partners in conservation and resource management has become a popular strategy to address these concerns. Studies of these initiatives have concluded that while the state is important in environmental management, community members themselves are crucial to successful outcomes (Russell and Harschberger 2002). Yet there is also substantial debate about how to identify legitimate partners in conservation, and how such partners come to adopt environmentally friendly behaviors (Gibson *et al.* 2000; Soulsby and Johns 2003; Agrawal 2005a, b; Brosius *et al.* 2005).

The history of the PDSs offers insight into these debates. During the government-sponsored Amazonian colonization plans of the 1970s, which sought to "open up" and "develop" the region, many would-be farmers came to the Transamazon highway region seeking land and new opportunities. These settlers, who had been lured by promises of free land, agricultural assistance, schools, and other services, were frequently left in isolated circumstances without support (Moran 1981; Bunker 1985; Schmink and Wood 1992; Moran and Ostrom 2005; Toni 2006). Violent rural conflict was perceived as inevitable, and little was done to rectify the rampant impunity for crimes (Hall 1989). When they first arrived, the Transamazon smallholders were generally either vilified as environmentally destructive, unable to productively use the land or manage its natural resources, or characterized as

victims of wrong-headed development schemes (Hecht and Cockburn 1989; Schmink and Wood 1992; Nygren 2000; Hurtienne 2005; Campos and Nepstad 2006). Some conservationists argued that traditional populations do not necessarily exhibit environmentally responsible behaviors, and also that those who demonstrate environmentally sound practices today may not do so in the future, given the way markets are structured (da Cunha and de Almeida 2000). While rubber tappers and native tribes were framed as "good," peasant farmers were framed as foreigners in Amazonia, practicing irresponsible slash-and-burn agriculture and at the front lines of deforestation (Nygren 2000; Campos 2008).

Even after the government-sponsored colonization effort ended, people continue coming to Amazonia seeking land and opportunity. During the past few years, *colonos* are increasingly gaining recognition as legitimate partners in conservation (Campos and Nepstad 2006; Campos 2008). The reformulation of the *colonos*' role in conservation efforts may indicate that relative newcomers can be regarded as viable partners in conservation, even without specific ecological understandings of particular localities.

The PDSs are a good example of identity formulation for two reasons: first, they represent a shift on the part of INCRA, Brazil's land reform agency, towards a new approach to agrarian reform emphasizing environmental issues in their guidelines for land reform settlements. Policy options such as the PDS, which promote a different approach to economic development, at least in part address the criticism that sustainable development fudges the contradictions of the deleterious social effects of capital accumulation (Middleton and O'Keefe 2001). The PDSs in Anapu today, the second to be created in Brazil, represent some of the most significant steps taken by the government in attempting to harmonize land reform with environmental conservation. Second, the PDSs attracted international attention as they were the sites of more than five years of conflicts over land that most notably involved the death of Sister Dorothy Stang in 2005. The PDSs represent a proactive step by the government to give value to the role of *colono* farmers as potential partners in conservation, and as such they present a means for understanding how the stakeholders were able to construct and establish legitimacy as environmental stewards. The PDSs point to the possibilities for socio-environmentalism to take root in land-use policies and practices by offering a new strategy for simultaneously reducing poverty and achieving greater parity of land rights through conserving natural resources. In so doing, they counter criticism that environmentally protected areas have negative impacts on local people because they exacerbate poverty. As environmentalism, and specifically, sustainable development, is used as an framework for activism, scholars have noted the possibility for environmental governance to be more effective if international networks mobilize in speedy, legitimate, and diverse partnerships (Ivanova 2003; Büscher and Dressler 2007).

Constructing Conservationists

At the same time as Sister Dorothy's activism and subsequent assassination, smallholders organized most notably under the umbrella group "Movement for the Development of the Transamazon and Xingu" (MDTX) campaigned for the creation of a mosaic of conservation areas in the adjoining Terra do Meio region (Campos and Nepstad 2006). A very different identity framework for the PDS residents was constructed by the economic and political elites in the region, who sought to portray the PDS residents as perpetrators of violence and as undesirable members of society. The human rights community and international activists, who were particularly prominent in the area after Sister Dorothy Stang's death, were also influential in the PDSs. I first focus primarily on the ways in which these groups portrayed PDS residents' identities in order to convey the plurality of narratives about conservation identities that were in tension and shifted as the PDS areas became a hot-button issue. I subsequently offer analysis of what these different representational constructions meant in terms of PDS residents' own narratives and lived experiences and discuss how they changed after Sister Dorothy Stang's assassination.

Akin to Traditional Peoples: Local Activists' Frame

In 1997, Sister Dorothy Stang began investigating land titling on the lots in two areas, one on each side of the Transamazon highway. Under her leadership, the Catholic Church affiliate group, the Pastoral Land Commission, initially proposed the establishment of the PDSs in Anapu as a response to the problems of rapid deforestation and to the population influxes bringing considerable numbers of poor people into the region. Sister Dorothy Stang's socio-environmental perspective is illustrated by her frequent claim that "The end of the forest is the end of our lives." She saw "helping the people fight against the logging firms and ruthless ranchers" as part of her religious calling. In the liberation theology tradition to which she subscribed, this meant helping empower the voiceless and most marginalized in society, in this case the poorest newcomers to the Transamazon highway region, and defending unprotected forest lands.

Together, leaders at the Rural Workers' Union, the women's movement, the state offices of Fetagri (a federal group offering agricultural assistance), and the national-level Council of Rubber Tappers proposed a platform for land reform with an environmental emphasis for Anapu,

initially in the form of a massive extractive reserve (RESEX) Bacajá. Today, the area has two PDSs (Fig. 1).

As Sister Dorothy Stang's records reveal and most activists recalled, much of the impetus for creating the PDS settlements stemmed from opposition to an environmentally-destructive and mismanaged government-sponsored project which offered grants to large land-owners: "…this project, SUDAM, was burning out our land in Anapu and we were going to INCRA [the national land reform and colonization agency charged with oversight] day and night, because we were seeing our county being destroyed overnight" (Murphy 2007: 116). Although Sister Dorothy and her allies had little knowledge of the one PDS already created in a far western region of Amazonia, they did see the RESEXs run by Brazil's environmental agency as a model for land reform emphasizing environmental concerns. In seeking land rights for the PDS settlers, they initially noted how the migrants' struggles for land were inadequately described within existing legal categories, and consciously sought to re-frame their struggle to be akin to that of the more sympathetically-viewed traditional populations—the rubber-tappers, fishermen, and Brazil-nut collectors who had lived in the region for generations as extractivists. A Rural Workers' Union leader in Anapu summed up the history of the Transamazon colonists: "We're changing the story of the Amazon, so that the people here are equally concerned with life in the Amazon. Today they are no longer the villains of the story, and we're trying to publish to the world who's who…" The activists argued that supporting intensive small-scale farmers and helping them find markets for their goods could be achieved once adequate land guarantees were put into place.

In defending the environmental practices of the migrant farmers (generally residents in the area between three and 15 years), local activists argued that the differences in their agricultural practices and those of the *ribeirinhos*, indigenous populations, and traditional extractivist populations were insignificant. All have some responsibility for small-scale deforestation and some biodiversity loss. Collectively, however, these groups represent substantially different economic bases than the cattle ranching, industrial, and logging sectors. Additionally, many migrant farmers integrate some traditional knowledge about soil protection and integration of agro-forestry systems into their farming practices (Hurtienne 2005). The activists claimed that the local economy could

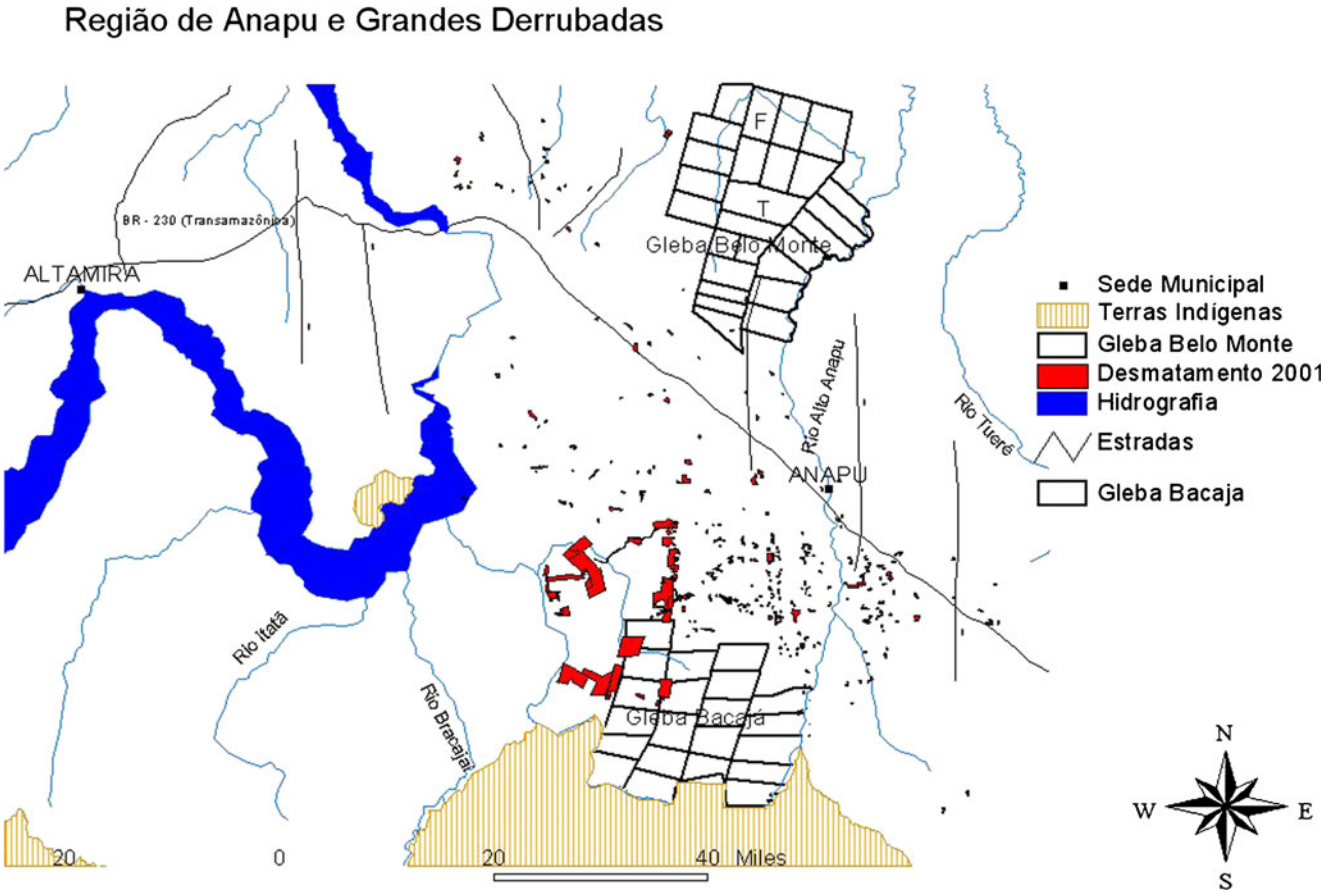

Fig. 1 The PDS lands were envisioned by local activists as offering a buffer from the rapid deforestation occurring elsewhere in the region, while simultaneously were a means of addressing social inequity through agrarian reform (CPT, 2001 and Ministério do Desenvolvimento Agrário, 2005)

effectively function in a close version of the same forest-based subsistence livelihoods that the traditional populations had practiced for three (or more) generations. It was hoped that settling the *colonos* on the PDS lands would yield similar results for conservation as that of extractivist reserves and provide them with viably sustainable livelihoods on productive small-scale farms. However, after a series of visits in 2004 from all of the relevant agencies, anthropologists, and others necessary to approve the areas, it was found that an Extractivist Reserve was not, in fact, an appropriate land use for this particular population.

The near-failure of the attempt to frame the PDS migrants as akin to the traditional populations living in RESEXs because of their extractivist practices ultimately became transformed into a notable opportunity for activists. While the RESEX Bacajá proposal fell through, Sister Dorothy and her allies reframed the proposed PDSs as an alternative for land reform that would allow small-scale farmers to live and work on lands that otherwise would be claimed by illegal ranchers and loggers. The PDS model was not substantially different from a RESEX, except that the PDS areas would first fall under the administration of the land reform agency, and then under the oversight of IBAMA, the environmental agency, which would also have an active role in guiding the land uses. Even though the government had precedents for creating conservation areas that necessitated land reform measures, never before had environmentally protected areas been so tied within the institutions and policies of land reform. It represented a unique step for socio-environmentalism, since a different model was required for accommodating the need for land reform that engaged the newest "people of the forest" to utilize it in more environmentally sound ways. Effectively, these groups achieved political success, having adequately framed the PDS settlers as environmentally minded stewards akin to traditional populations, hence worthy of benefiting from land reform gains.

The "Unproductive Sector": The Local Government and Business Interests' Frame

Although local NGO allies of the PDS residents saw some successes in constructing a more convincing framework for the PDS residents as environmentally and socially positive actors, the framework was strongly contested by those in political and economic control in the region. The local media outlets were controlled by large-scale landowners and sawmill owners and many of these same individuals were governmental officials in Anapu. These groups sought to characterize the PDSs in ways that made the residents appear socially detrimental actors. It should be noted that while these difficulties persist in the PDSs, they are also characteristic of the broader challenges faced by the land reform movement in Brazil, which generally faces the opprobrium of mainstream media outlets. In the PDSs, as with most land reform settlements, residents were regularly forced to confront portrayal as "invaders" of land.

Despite mandates for the official creation of the PDSs, institutional visitors frequently encountered INCRA officials who viewed the PDS settlers as unwanted rabble-rousers and were reticent, if not altogether hostile, to working in the PDSs. When they did visit the areas, officials stayed with the ranchers engaged in environmentally and socially suspect activities on their lands or land claimants who were entrenched with logging and ranching activities. Activists working for the PDSs noted that INCRA officials refused to enter certain areas of the PDS on the pretext that they were "invaded" areas, thus entrenching existing inequitable structures of land. Agribusiness interests in the region refer to themselves as the "productive sector." This is a contrast to what they actively point to as little in the way of production from the PDS farmers. In media outlets and public forums, public officials frequently contended that the PDS residents were "lazy," "worthless," and "dependent on social hand outs." The attention to environmental conservation, an important identity framework for the other groups, was highlighted as a negative trait by most of the region's powerful elites, implying involvement with foreign organizations and valuing conservation over development interests.

Of additional note is that the violence associated with land reform, which was framed by local governmental actors not as victimization but instead as aggression. The land lots in the PDS continue to be negotiated over in the justice system one-by-one, and conflicts with illegal land-claimers continue to involve violent confrontations to the time of writing. In many cases, local officials, police, the judicial system, and the media portray the PDS residents as aggressors in these conflicts. Accusations by local media suggested that the PDS residents were arming themselves with heavier ammunition and weapons, and that the agriculturalists were plotting conspiratorially to oust certain land-claimers or their hired gunmen from the areas. Charges were pressed in Anapu that Sister Dorothy Stang was forming an "armed militia" within the PDS. A few weeks before her murder, because of her defense of the settlements, the city council of Anapu officially declared Sister Dorothy Stang *persona non-grata*. Influential businessmen and officials in local government sought to portray the PDS residents as enemies of economic development and as posing threats to security in the region.

Sister Dorothy Stang's death on February 5, 2005 focused international attention on the PDSs. The Brazilian government immediately sent 2,000 troops into Anapu to keep the peace, signifying a shift in attitude to the PDS residents, who were no longer viewed as having high

potential for violent unrest. Rather, the federal government would confront the former mafia-like control of the powerful social classes, and sympathies turned more distinctly in favor of efforts to redress the problems of the PDS and more broadly of impunity in the state of Pará. Immediate arrests of hired gunmen, coupled with openings of new INCRA offices, a Federal Prosecutor's office, and a Federal Police office following Sister Dorothy's death were notable indicators of this framing shift.

"Victims" and Making the Most of Martyrdom: International Activists' Frame

Following Sister Dorothy Stang's death, international environmental and human rights activists came to Anapu, showing a concern with Amazonian issues perhaps only matched by the response to Chico Mendes' assassination in early 1989. Some of the environmental and human rights organizations that had minimal contact with the cause of the PDS residents prior to Dorothy Stang's death focused for a short time on Anapu. The assassination created a moment of public outcry and attention, and led to political opportunities in other parts of the region. Earlier identity frameworks that had portrayed the PDS residents as relative newcomers to the lands and as some of the main culprits for Amazonian forest loss were quickly discarded.

On the whole, the many portrayals offered by these international groups fit into two main frameworks. The first framed Dorothy Stang's cause in light of long-standing agrarian conflicts and a corrupted justice system. The second framework conflated the PDS residents and their struggle with land struggles occurring nearby in the region so that political responses were effectively geared towards other areas and did not include an emphasis directly on the PDSs.

At the time of Sister Dorothy Stang's death, it was not uncommon to hear criticism of the environmental impacts of land settlements from the strong environmentalist groups in Amazonia (Leonardos *et al*. 2000; Graziano 2003). Following her death, however, PDS residents were no longer spoken of as responsible for the chaotic growth in Anapu and unsustainable farming. Nor were they perceived, at a broader level, as the chainsaw-carrying newcomers responsible for Amazonian deforestation.

International environmental organizations highlighted in the media the idea that Sister Dorothy worked deep in the Amazon jungle, rather than describing the PDSs in relation to the Transamazon highway, and spoke about her work with "forest peoples." Rhetorical sleights-of-hand described Sister Dorothy as having "fought in favor of recognizing the land rights of *traditional populations*" for 35 years (WWF-Brasil 2006), conflating the *colonos* of the PDSs, who were much more recent migrants to the region, with traditional populations of riverine peasants and rubber tappers (*seringueiros*) who already had strong credibility with environmentalists. By affiliating the cause of the traditional populations of the Terra do Meio ribeirinhos with the colonos of the PDSs whom Sister Dorothy had defended, however, such organizations were able to consolidate political will and sympathy in favor of the ribeirinhos in the region adjacent to the PDSs, where land conflicts and conservation proposals were also at a ripe political juncture. While this did offer a more positive spin on the lifestyles of the colonos by associating them with traditional populations, it did not serve to further the idea that the PDS residents, with their own unique identities and history, were good stewards and legitimate conservation partners.

Rather than compounding political capital and solidarity for the PDS colonos' struggle, this framework turned towards recognition of the riverine peasants population directly. The plight of the Terra do Meio riverine peasants was more easily actionable than that of the PDS smallholders. In the Terra do Meio, a consortium of local and international socio-environmental organizations had advocated for the creation of federal conservation areas in the region for several years, and had a specific proposal awaiting approval by the federal government. Ultimately, the association of the PDS residents with to the riverine peasants of the Terra do Meio involved a conflation of struggles that led to a geographically uneven political response. The Terra do Meio communities ultimately did see direct political gains from this framing: the government signed on to the creation of the areas the week after Sister Dorothy's assassination, and the designated land was heralded as the world's second-largest contiguous biodiversity corridor (Campos and Nepstad 2006). For the PDS residents, however, there were almost no long-lasting shifts to the status quo, as many of the most contested plots of land languished in judicial procedures, and infrastructure improvements and social benefits were lacking.

It is also of note that a competing framework about human rights and security often ran parallel to the environmentalist framework for describing the PDSs. Before Dorothy Stang's death, some civil society organizations that became involved with the PDSs chose to emphasize the importance of human rights and assert greater rule-of-law in the area. In response to the Anapu city council resolution declaring her *persona non-grata,* the Brazilian Lawyer's Organization awarded Sister Dorothy a human rights prize. The gesture was to no avail in protecting her life, but it did contribute towards bringing a new set of allies to her cause.

Internationally, too, this justice-centered framework was resonant. An award-winning documentary, "They Killed Sister Dorothy," by North American filmmakers was released in 2008. The film primarily focuses on Sister

Dorothy's life as emblematic of the flawed Brazilian justice system and the mafia-like politics in the region. Scenes of the PDSs, interviews with PDS residents, and the ongoing problems of social inequality, all so fundamental to Sister Dorothy's work, are minimal in the film, while her family members' narratives and their pursuits against impunity for her murder predominate. The framework of victimization and human rights characterized the involvement of the human rights community in response to the PDS case. While it is not surprising that this interest group would effectuate a framework so aligned with their interests, what is of note are the ways in which the involvement of these partners has added new facets to how the PDS struggle is conceived of by all parties, effectively changing the tenor of the struggle for PDS residents themselves, shifting focus away from the direct struggle for land and environmental conservation towards conceptualizations of the PDSs as emblematic cases of impunity and land conflicts in the region as a whole.

Local Implications of Competing Frameworks

There is a clear disjuncture between outside actors' frameworks for the PDS and its residents and the residents' own articulations of identity and their struggle for land. Several residents' responses to interviews and surveys confidently mistook the PDS acronym as a "project for supported development." This confusion is indicative of the attitude shared by many residents that living in the PDS meant (or should entail) assistance from NGOs and from governmental agencies. Additionally, these responses point to the lack of familiarity with the term sustainability. Environmental restrictions on how land was used, gaining access to services, and becoming part of a larger mission for regional sustainable development were significant underpinnings of the PDS, but did not significantly characterize peoples' descriptions of what a PDS was and why they chose to live there.

Environmental conservation rarely figured directly in residents' explanations of their land use practices. However, there were multiple implicit ways in which values of environmentalism were expressed and adopted. Residents emphasized the importance of managing the PDS forest areas collectively, and were mindful of the rules stipulating that at least 80% of one's lands must be preserved as intact forest. Some PDS residents are vigilant about not practicing slash-and-burn agriculture, speak passionately about their love of the forest, and will even go so far as to "call attention" to neighbors who break environmental rules in the community. Others, however, are prone to occasionally "listening to the little devil in people's ears" and selling off valuable trees for extra income. Indeed, the process of establishing "good" conservation practice is neither uniform nor progressive over time. The PDS residents persisted in their roles as small-scale farmers, living in a community full of multiple contradictions and pressures in regard to conservation practice. Most people's concerns for their community were focused on other issues, such as legally establishing land rights and providing a safe place for their children to grow up. Most people chose to live in the PDS because it offered farmland with the added advantage of technical assistance from agronomy specialists.

At the time of their creation, the PDSs offered the possibility of becoming a regionally, if not nationally recognized model for how settling Amazonian migrants might be achieved in an environmentally and socially responsible manner. They captured the favorable social and political climate of socio-environmentalism in Amazonia, and specifically were well situated politically for improvements in response to Sister Dorothy Stang's assassination. Nevertheless the PDS residents largely failed to embrace and adopt a cohesive framework for representing their community.

Since the majority of land conflicts had been resolved in the PDSs at the time of Dorothy Stang's death, resolving the few remaining was not a central focus for international activists in response the tragedy. The reformulation of an identity framework of PDS residents as environmentalists and victims did help substantially in dispelling the negative light in which they had been cast by governmental officials and the powerful elites of the region. However, the new framework was not altogether matched with their own articulations. Inconsistent practices in terms of adherence to environmental laws and some disparities in understandings of the meanings and rules of the PDS itself led to subjectivities involving strife and community rift, more than one involving an adoption of or resistance to a master frame.

The incompatibility of the competing identity frameworks deeply affected PDS residents, who complained of being "forgotten" and "abandoned" and lacked direct benefits in the months following Sister Dorothy Stang's death at the same time some important international environmental organizations, including Greenpeace and the WWF, were instrumental in garnering attention for the PDSs in Anapu. Their involvement helped Sister Dorothy's story reach the international media, and they capitalized on the publicity to catalyze the government into creating new environmentally protected areas in neighboring parts of the state. One long-standing ally of the PDS residents in Anapu commented on the role of the big environmental organizations:

> …the Greenpeace banner appeared higher than everyone else's that day, it was kind of unfortunate. It is a beautiful message—"Peace in the Forest" - but it was so strange to us. Here we never saw them, and then all of a sudden, when Dorothy died, there they were, all over the newspapers…acting as if they'd been here all along.

Meanwhile, although the Anapu PDSs were supposed to be national models for how a PDS ought to be run, most community members felt that there were few benefits or changes at local levels. Regionally, gains included a federal attorney general's office, the creation of the Terra do Meio conservation areas, and a strengthening of the environmental agency staff, but locally, almost nothing was initiated that made the difference tangible on the ground. Problems with illegal logging encroachments continued, and many of the most contested land parcels remained ridden by conflict.

Conclusion

The representational struggles behind framing, as have been described above, involve positioning narratives of identity and struggle that are dynamic depending on time, events, and the framings of other powerful actors. For PDS residents, such constructions were shaped significantly in the aftermath of Sister Dorothy Stang's death, as they were represented as "victims" of Amazonian environmental conflicts. They were simultaneously, however, left out of the discussion on human rights and judicial reform, as they were overshadowed by the *cause celèbre* of combating impunity for Sister Dorothy Stang's murderers. At the same time, they were strategically re-framed by other NGOs working in the region so as to benefit other efforts at land reform and environmental conservation. The PDS case is one in which the asymmetrical power relations involved in identity construction ultimately prevented the residents from making more substantial policy gains in their own region, despite an outpouring of media attention, governmental engagement, and NGO support. The PDS resident's weakness in being unable to autonomously deploy the symbols and discourses of conservation, and their lack of a broad base of local and international collaboration prior to Sister Dorothy Stang's assassination effectively undermined the strategic position that they occupied following her death.

Differences of interpretation as to who the PDS residents are and how their roles as conservationists are framed suggest that the typically perceived binary categorizations of villain vs. hero and environment vs. development are inadequate. As this article has described, the PDS residents were subject to a multiplicity of competing identity frameworks that were simultaneously deployed in the face of a range of political contestation and conflict. Local activists portrayed the PDS residents as akin to traditional extractivist populations to garner support for their cause, while the government sought to portray them in a more adversarial role and as unproductive. The human rights and international NGO communities that became engaged in their struggle later sought to portray them as victims and to capitalize on the political opportunity created by Sister Dorothy Stang's assassination to make gains in other areas. These observations support arguments that representational struggles over identities and environmental contributions are powerful tools of persuasion (Brosius 1997; Carrier and West 2009; Moore 2009).

As identities of the residents filtered between local and international realms, as well as between interest groups, certain narratives and policy outcomes became privileged, and their own constructions of identity, articulations of value, and histories were almost completely disregarded. Because of inconsistencies present in their narratives of identity and representation, the PDS residents as well as their land uses reflect an uneven, dynamic, and often contradictory understanding of socio-environmentalism. The lack of a cohesive narrative articulated by the PDS residents themselves is something that continues to affect their relationship to land use. It often yields conflicting and unconsolidated expressions of conservation and community identity.

These conclusions support prior work noting an important shortcoming of community-based conservation initiatives is that rural people's own histories and identities are not adequately incorporated into conservation agendas generally set by international networks of environmental conservation experts and practitioners (West 2006; Moore 2009). As a result, overly-simplified categories and misrepresentations of local people's identities occur in ways that allow outsiders' interests to triumph over local rural stakeholders' agendas, to the detriment of the development of conservation strategies attuned to the complex realities of local people's lives. Discourses are shaped by different actors' interests, and these are linked to the ways in which material conflicts take shape.

This article has both identified and characterized the process of creating environmental subjectivities that occurred as several of the common identity frameworks were deployed in the case of the Transamazon highway PDSs to reveal the relative powerlessness of local peoples in the process of constructing and consolidating identities. This is particularly relevant in relation to transnational conservation groups who may purport to speak on behalf of local actors. Identity constructions imposed by others tend towards omitting or ignoring more complex socio-environmental outlooks held by local residents in lieu of traditional tropes that may hold more resonance with outside audiences.

This research also sheds light on the concept of sustainable development as it is realized in local Brazilian contexts. The findings presented here at first blush may seem to echo Lohmann's sympathetic critique that environmental interventions done in the name of sustainable development are a form of "green orientalism," compelling

people into acting out assigned roles rather than delimiting their relationships with their environment autonomously (1993). However, it should be noted that the critique of imposed "othering" is not essentially an environmentalist agenda; actors beyond the environmental realm, from both the human rights community as well as local governments, are also seeking to benefit from the attempt to achieve sustainable development. In fact, conservationist identity constructions appear to be more determined by the strategic interventions of a broader range of actors. These sometimes include strategic alliances of unlikely partners and often involve competition between groups that are purportedly acting in solidarity with one another.

As the Brazilian state strives to assert governance in this and other frontier regions, this case study offers some insights into implications for sustainable development on a broader level. The research shows how shifts of emphasis are linked to contestation between social actors and illuminates how and why material conflicts arose as powerful actors took advantage of political opportunities. The persistence of a lack of resolution to land parcel conflicts, basic social services, and also environmental considerations in the otherwise *cause celèbre* PDSs suggest some of the ways in which environmental subjectivities at local levels compound and mutually constitute the dynamics of social contestation and representational struggles. Such ironic and often disappointing outcomes for the local residents are indicative of the frictions that are manifest as frames shift and sustainable development is negotiated in both landscapes and lives.

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