EL FUTURO DE LA ALIMENTACIÓN Y RETOS DE LA AGRICULTURA PARA EL SIGLO XXI:

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# ELIKADURAREN ETORKIZUNA ETA NEKAZARITZAREN ERRONKAK XXI. MENDERAKO:

Mundua nork, nola eta zer-nolako inplikazio sozial, ekonomiko eta ekologikorekin elikatuko duen izango da eztabaidagaia

Questioning the 'vacant, fallow and virgin' landscape: Considerations for a political-economic approach to landscapes in Myanmar

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Paper # 77

Apirila – Abril – April
24, 25, 26
2017
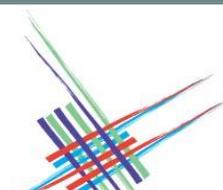
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Abstract

In the past years, the need for a 'landscape-approach' has been stressed and is increasingly emerging in global conservation and climate change mitigation frameworks. Recognizing the pitfalls of the dominant mainstream approach to landscape that through its managerial and technocratic approach de-politicizes core questions about who gets access to what, how and why, some authors have proposed the concept of territory and making indigenous practices in relation to specific territories legible as a means to re-politicise debates around climate change related interventions in the landscape. We argue that while these alternative concepts may be useful political articulations, they are by necessity limited to their particular meanings in particular historical, political contexts. They are *made* useful by political actors. In order to inform social justice strategizing, we propose an alternative approach to reading the landscape that is grounded in political economy, recognizes relations of power and authority and the related struggles over resource access and meanings. This intervention is not conclusive but offers an opening for future discussions - and given our research agenda of supporting actions for social justice, it attempts to contribute to the counter-coalition against mainstream 'landscape' discourse.

Introduction

"Integrative landscape approaches" lie in the horizon as part of the next step of global climate change mitigation policies by the UNFCCC within the ongoing and controversial REDD+ initiatives. As part of wider projects for climate change mitigation and adaptation and "green development", the technical, managerial discourse is likely to promote similar practices to other global conservation policies that have recently been critiqued as 'neoliberal environmentalities' and 'market environmentalism', without much account for the highly political nature of resource access and distribution, or the question of unequal power relations in decision making processes. Further, they also risk following the same logic that rarely recognize existing conflicts, and their potential to exacerbate them.

Recent literature has highlighted that climate change adaptation and mitigation interventions and related discourses can have *stratifying* effects where vulnerable communities at risk of material injury due to climate change or related interventions are made further vulnerable due to lack of recognition or misrecognition as stereotype victims in climate change discourse (Marino & Ribot, 2012). While climate change interventions such as Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation (REDD+) schemes are often portrayed as "win-win", or even "win-win-win" (Igoe & Brockington 2007), scenarios, critical scholars have

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drawn attention to the potential "lose-lose scenarios" (Beymer-Farris and Bassett, 2012: 333) and the need for counter-narratives to market-oriented conservation approaches that frame forest-reliant communities as "destructive" and "illegal". Other critiques of REDD+ highlight the effects of reconfiguring livelihoods without sufficient attention to distributive and procedural justice (Corbera, 2012). More recently, attention has been directed toward the emerging discourse of "landscape" in REDD+, and the need for counter-discourses such as "territory" which could legitimize entitlements for forest peoples to govern their own lands, potentially around their 'indigenous practices' (McCall, 2016; Nielson, 2016).

These emerging discussions are extremely relevant in Myanmar, since the recent political and economic reforms and the election of a new government in 2015. There have been significant opening up toward foreign investment and a so-called 'green path to development', with a REDD+ Readiness Roadmap (2013) and the Myanmar Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan (2016-2030). The recent arrival of international conservation organizations funded by international financial institutions, and collaborating with government has been received with mixed attitudes by villagers and grassroots organizations. These top-down conservation initiatives, although often promising 'community-based resource management' are being proposed in regions that have a history of armed conflicts and only recently signed peace agreements, such as in the southern Tanintharyi Region, and where multiple conflicts over the new land titling procedures, resource extraction such as mining and palm oil plantation, and mega development projects are already creating tensions, often at the expense of vulnerable groups.

This paper engages with this discussion of "landscape" within REDD+, but more widely in the discourse of climate change mitigation policies and green development. It engages with the debate on whether "territory" may be a more useful analytical and political tool within or in opposition to REDD+ for claims to access and control over resources and land, and how the claims based on 'indigenous' identities and practices may be useful but with its own challenges. Finally, it proposes a more political "landscape approach" as an analytical tool for looking at the diverse conflicts that occur in physical and institutional spaces, based on insights from geography, political economy and critical agrarian studies. This paper may also serve as an initial starting point for discussions on counter-discourses to mainstream 'landscape' approaches.

Mainstream "Landscape" in Green Discourse

Within the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) negotiations, and particularly within the framework of Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+), "integrated landscape approaches" are emerging as the new discourse, where there is a 'rediscovery' of the interconnectedness, heterogeneity and complexity of landscapes, as well as a recognition of the limitations of sectoral approaches to land management such as forestry, agriculture and other land uses. It is understood that these cannot be seen in isolation but must be dealt with in integrated management, in order to meet a web of global challenges spanning climate change and socio-economic improvements across the rural global south (Nielson, 2016). In the "Ten principles for landscape approach", the solution that is given for the multiple-scale,

multifunctional, multi-actor landscape is a more 'holistic' multi-stakeholder approach (Sayer et al. 2013). This is being formed and pushed by discourse coalitions in global arenas such as the UNFCCC, and circulate among multilateral funding agencies, international research institutes, multinational companies and international environmental organizations (Corson & MacDonald 2012). These coalitions include organizations such as the Global Carbon Project (GCP), the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), the Overseas Development Institute (ODI), Green Climate Fund (GCF) UN-REDD, Globe International, World Bank's Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF), Center for International Forest Research (CIFOR) and World Agroforestry Center (IGRAF), who are "leading efforts to mainstream "landscape" in REDD+ and environmental management" (McCall, 2016; Nielson, 2016). Particularly in the stream of meetings under 'The Global Landscapes Forum' that are held in parallel to the formal COPs of the UNFCCC, multiple conceptualizations of 'landscape' are being discussed. These discussions also span diverse goals, from Credit Suisse's specifc concern with reducing the "cost of capital for sustainable landscapes" to ENGOs broad concern of acheiving the Sustainable Development Goals through Landscape-management. Thus, the forums provide an opportunity for these actors to, in their own words, "address the increasingly complex and widespread environmental, social and political challenges that transcend traditional management boundaries." The outcomes at such global gatherings then in turn provide direction for national programs across the world (Corson & MacDonald 2012).

Although the principles for "landscape approach" include the need for transparency and clarification of rights and responsibilities and a continual 'learning and adaptive management', it is still quite vague as a concept and largely ignores the highly political nature of issues such as land tenure and power dynamics and inequalities in decision-making procedures. Fundamentally, it does not address some of the existing critiques of REDD+, such as the lack of intimate knowledge of the political landscape of resource struggle, the potential of such conservation initiatives to trigger and/or exacerbate land disputes, the threats to livelihoods and exclusion of resource users (Eilenberg, 2015; Larson et al, 2013; Corbera, 2012). It also does not change the top-down conservationist paradigm that has been critiqued in the literature as market environmentalism (Bakker, 2005), green capitalism (Sullivan, 2009), "environmentality" (Agrawal, 2005; Fletcher, 2010), "ecological modernization" (Backstrand and Lovbrand, 2006) and "neoliberalizing nature" (Castree, 2010). The scientific, managerial "landscape approach" which has a holistic discourse also obfuscate potentially violent encounters in its implementation, securitization and the "green pretexts" according which other capitalist developments take place (Peluso, 1993; Massé and Lunstrum, 2016; Ojeda, 2012). Further, it risks rescaling (Cohen and Bakker, 2014) the problem of "green grabbing" (Fairhead et al, 2012). Fairhead and colleagues (2012, 238-239) define "green grabbing' as "the appropriation of land and resources for environmental ends", which involves "[t]he restructuring of rules and authority over access, use and management of resources, in relation to labour relations, and in human-ecological relationships, that may have profound alienating effects." However, they alert against seeing neoliberalization of nature as a singular hegemonic project, without differentiated, contingent settings. Attention to empirical particularities, the processes involved, and the complex relationships between 'green grabbing' and agrarian change are therefore necessary. This will be further discussed later in political conceptions of 'landscape approach'.

McCall (2016, 60) critiques REDD+ landscape discourse in the way it addresses weaknesses as problems of cooperation between relevant agencies, as opposed to the more fundamental problem of "issues of power and authority and sufficient control over the holistic landscapes and their components". Secondly, local/indigenous people are not recognized and valued as the appropriate holders and managers of the areas. Thirdly, he critiques the REDD+ landscape mapping as a "key legal step in land and resource allocation and alienation", in which conflicts are raised when landscapes need to be defined, identified, mapped and monitored. The solution McCall proposes to this is the affirmation of "territory", which incorporates "notions of belonging and ownership and responsibilities", "embodying the control of space" "responsibility, entitlements and government of forest space". Drawing on a range of international legal frameworks including the ILO Convention and UN declarations and the rallying of the indigenous peoples and NGOs to include social and environmental safeguards, McCall proposes 'customary and indigenous territorialization', where territory "signifies meanings of authority, whether political, legal, customary, cultural, or simple raw power" and is a "political administrative term", to which would guarantee greater security of tenure. Although the critique of managerial-style 'landscape' is extremely relevant and necessary, the proposed solutions also require some attention.

Two elements merit critique. Firstly, the definition of 'territory' as necessary for the credibility of REDD+, does not fundamentally question the existence of the REDD+ model and its underlying assumptions. It also does not consider what affirmations of territory might mean in practice, particularly in different political, local and historical contexts. Our second point concerns McCall's definition of territory based on 'indigenous' identities. Such identities are idealized as communities with "deep knowledge of the landscape and land features in many cases is the embodiment of indigenous people's identity; it is a knowledge that is also symbolic, metaphoric, and spiritual."Although such framings may be useful and necessary in situations of defense of lands from dispossession and exclusion, particularly by marginalized and vulnerable groups, such identities must be recognized within the political interface/relational nature and within the context of global/institutional encounters. Proposing solutions of both 'territory' and 'indigeneity' within REDD+ and conservation discourse may further add discursive material that is subject to co-optation by conservation agendas.

The following section, although sympathetic to the critique of managerial "landscape" approaches, outlines some of the discussions of why claims to "territory" may have its own challenges, and why claims to territory based on "indigenous" identity or practice more so, based on insights from critical agrarian studies and political economy. Finally, it proposes how "landscape" may be used as an analytical lens that reveals the relations that REDD+ landscape approaches may conceal. It adds to the discussion by Nielson that there does not yet seem to be a unified counter-coalition to the "integrated landscape"-discourse.

Territorializations as contested

Although McCall (2016) proposes "territory" as an alternative to "landscape", there are many interpretations of what "territory" and "territorialization" might mean, as discursive tools in particular national, historical and political contexts, and as analytical concept. While "territorialization" can be understood as a state-driven expansionist project, for example to secure territory in frontier areas, to extract rent from populations, or a capitalist project to assert control over resources; it can also be a process of claims-making for resistance against dispossession and exclusion. This section outlines some of the conceptualizations of "territory", and how it has been and might be used as a discursive tool for political mobilization in defense of land and resource access and for inclusion in particular contexts. "People and institutions actively employ and interpret concepts in their attempts to enact different political projects and interests." (Sikor and Lund, 2009: 7). Hence, it is important to understand that struggles over meaning of concepts are part of the localized political struggles.

According to Vandergeest and Peluso (1995) "territorialization is about excluding or including people within particular geographic boundaries, and about controlling what people do and their access to natural resources within those boundaries." (388) Although territorialization may have previously been understood as state claims, Peluso and Lund (2011, 673) mention that 'territorialization' may or may not be a state claim. "It is in some way a *bundle of rights* – as one says for other kinds of property – but it produces a "collectivity" in some sense". Likewise, Sikor and Lund (2009: 14-15) agree that "[i]t is not merely states in the form of unitary government structures that employ territorializing strategies (…) [P]olitico-legal institutions that compete for authority in this field operate to legitimize their undertakings partly through territorial strategies. In fact, territoriality is often a key element in the exercise of authority (Lund, 2006: 693–5)." Hence, as much as legitimacy, authority and rights are contested, so are the territories over which such authorities, legitimacies and rights operate. Corson (2011) argues for an interpretation of "state territorialization as a dynamic, negotiated, and historically-contingent process that transpires through negotiations and interactions among state and non-state actors" (704-705). Corson also refers to Vandergeest and Peluso's (1995) definition of 'internal territorialization' "as a contested process by which a state institution 'establishes control over natural resources and the people who use them' within national boundaries (705). Importantly, as we refer to 'territory' within a process of struggle, McCall's suggestion that 'territory' be incorporated in REDD+ implementations is contradictory in that it suggests another top-down solution and ignores the dynamic, negotiated and historically-contingent process that Corson refers to.

Assertion of "territory" in resistance movements may be understood as dynamic process of claims-making. "Territorial claims are about power, an assertion of identity, autonomy, and a measure of control over encompassed natural resources." (Offen, 2003: 43). This process has increasingly been occurring in Latin America, where there has been a "territorial turn" in Latin America, in response to agrarian extractivist projects in Guatemala (Alonso-Fradejas, 2015), among black and indigenous communities in Pacific Colombia (Offen, 2003) and more recently against green grabs in Chiapas, Mexico (Rocheleau, 2015). Such claims are embedded in national and local histories and political contexts, and are increasingly

networked assemblages, coalitions or solidarity networks, that work across scale vertically and horizontally, and across diverse interest groups.

Indigenous territory in response to green grabs?

Although it is not the focus of the article to analyze the multiple forms of alliances that form across peasant, indigenous, ethnicity, class, religious and gender lines – we will refer to McCall's (2016)'s suggestion that indigenous practices be considered in REDD+ planning and implementation. We highlight here how indigeneity can be understood as constructed within particular political, institutional and historical contexts, and as a process of articulation, as opposed to an essentialized, romanticized and static concept. This may also be a useful way of understanding indigeneity as a political tool. Li (2000) sees as necessary to "alert to the political risks and opportunities posed by particular framings", "while drawing attention to nuances in the deployment of these terms and the meanings they invoke in particular contexts." (150-151)

According to Hall et al. (2011), although the debate on who qualifies as "indigenous" in Southeast Asia is ongoing, *indigeneity* has been used as a banner for mobilizations against dispossession and in claiming rights to land and resources, particularly when mainstream discourses portray shifting cultivators as forest destroyers, or when exclusions are intensified through demarcation of political forests, state-licensed logging and agricultural expansion. However, Hall et al. alert that mobilizations based on ethnicity or belonging has an "exclusion's double edge", where "every counter to one discourse of exclusion necessarily proposes exclusion on other grounds" (171). Counter-exclusions based on historical identification to place are also struggles over who should be given priority, and who should decide. Therefore, claims to ethno-territorial rights necessarily beg the question "Land for which people?" (180). A further question that may be asked is *what* land for which people?

It is also necessary to understand the historical and political conjunctures in which particular articulations of 'indigenous' rise. According to Li (2010: 395), while colonialism had created particular *indigeneity* under paternalistic attempts to establish collective tenure systems in Asia to protect groups against risks of market exposure, there was also a rise of attention to Asia's "tribal" populations in the 1990s, with increased democracy and administrative decentralization, which allowed for political space for the emergence of 'ethnopolitics' (395). In addition, large-scale enclosures, expansion of global corporate capitalism and environmentalism were further contributing factors to the increased attention to indigeneity. However, recent attempts to prevent 'piecemeal dispossession' through collective land tenure regimes based on indigeneity may sometimes be imposed by local groups on other members. Li alerts to the same paternalistic attitudes of new international experts who are rediscovering the 'indigenous' in new conservation practices.

Brosius et al. (1998) raised questions that may still be relevant today in understanding the new climate-discourse/green economy supported forms of conservation and emerging "indigenous" discourse in REDD+ policies. They alert to the problems of conflating "natives" with natural, and territorial assertions that may potentially accentuate ethnic difference or marginalize other social groups.

They alert to the problematic consequences of "invention of community", in the context of incorporations of 'community' in top-down conservation projects and policies. Often, assumptions about these communities and their practices are seen as "essentialized, timeless and homogenous" (165). In particular, Brosius et al. direct analysis to how counter-mapping, or mapping against interests of governments, industry and local elites, now appropriated by NGOs or local communities, may fulfill strategic goals within specific legal, environmental and political-historical contexts (162). Sometimes, in attempting to assert local claims using the 'legal textualization' or terms of the state and elite groups, such as in the form of 'community-based natural resource management, movements are bound in relations to them. The relevant question is whether territories may be asserted independently of state or elite textualizations, or whether territories or collective claims could be possibly asserted in a way that would be inclusive of community diversity, ethnic plurality and multiplicity of customary regimes that regulate rights to resources and territories (166). These questions are relevant in the case of Myanmar, and in response to McCall's suggestions.

In an interesting example, Astuti and McGregor (2017) show how contemporary forest politics in Indonesia has been reshaped by constitutional recognition of indigenous land claims, the arrival of the REDD+ programme, and the One-map national land titling project; where local groups are leveraging these tools to advance their own claims against dispossession. They describe how a group is leveraging the green economies underpinning the new political conjuncture to claim land back from more extractive users (447), by appropriating the emerging discourse used by green investors. However, they alert to what they call a potential "Indigenous-style green grab", or "at least an ambitious attempt to align Indigenous land claims with broader green grabbing processes. Problems of intimate exclusions (Li) are not easily solved through top-down attempts, or even 'multi-ethnic' or pluri-ethnic/multi-ethnic incarnations of the same model may produce similar environmentalities and exclusions as illustrated by Cardenas (2012) in the case of Colombia, where ethnic terrritoriality took the indigenous model for land rights to apply for black Colombians, by emphasizing black communities' traditional cultural practices. The 'ethnicization' of blackness for a political purpose of defending land tenure, however, supported by the green global discourse of conservation, also had the effect of creating neoliberal and 'green multicultural subjects", where the state functions as arbiter of determining who measures up to satisfactory standards of cultural difference.

For Li (2000) "a group's self-identification as tribal or indigenous is not natural or inevitable, but neither is it simply invented, adopted, or imposed. It is, rather, a *positioning* which draws upon historically sedimented practices, landscapes, and repertoires of meaning, and emerges through particular patterns of engagement and struggle" (151). Li uses Stuart Hall's concept of 'articulation', where "a theory of articulation is both a way of understanding how ideological elements come, under certain conditions, to cohere together in a discourse, and "how an ideology discovers its subject" without reducing the subject to that ideology (1996: 141-42, cited in Li, 2000: 152). Hence, it is useful, particularly in research that seeks to contribute to social justice outcomes in collaborative scholar-activist research and discussions, how such concepts as 'territory' and 'indigenous' may be articulated as a particular positioning within struggles, and how these may be done *strategically*

so - and not as another technical and managerial fix that may be plugged into the green discourse.

Tanintharyi landscape and the need for alternative conceptual approach

In Myanmar, the UNDP is currently in the implementing stage of the Project "Strengthening Sustainability of Protected Area Management in Myanmar" (2015). This involves a collaboration with the Ministry of Environmental Conservation and Forestry (MoECAF), and the project itself is implemented by the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) and partly funded by GEF. The long-term vision aims to have a "robust, representative and effectively managed terrestrial protected area system", which is "effectively integrated into broader *landscape-level* land use planning". It aims to secure biodiversity areas to be included in the protected area system. Much of the efforts will be directed at capacity building to alleviate weak institutional capacity, coordinating among departments within MoECAF, research institutions and state and regional governments. Local communities, CBOs and private businesses are also considered in the list of stakeholders. The report cites one study that estimated value of Myanmar's forest ecosystem services at over $7billion USD (29) and thus, "Investment in forest conservation is therefore expected to deliver significant net returns, estimated at around 39 billion USD over the next twenty years, or net present value of $10 billion USD". (2015: 30). This project is closely coordinated with the UN-REDD Programme's development of the REDD+ in Myanmar, and the protected areas (PA) management is seen to integrate with the Myanmar REDD+ Roadmap (2013). The program is also strengthened within the recent publication of the Myanmar National Adaptation Programme of Action (NAPA) to Climate Change (2012). The conservation agenda is furthermore supported by the 30 year Forest Master Plan (2001) which aims to increase Permanent Forest Estates to 30% and PAs to 10% of the country's territory.

The Tanintharyi Region, together with Kachin state in the North, are seen as priority areas for protection, and undertaken as pilot projects of the program. And the Tenasserim-south Thailand semi-evergreen rain forest is among the ecoregions in the PA system that should ideally be connected with an already existing Protected Area in the Northern part of Tanintharyi as part of a broader vision of creating 'conservation corridors'. However, Tanintharyi is not simply a 'landscape' in the ecological, technical and managerial sense proposed by such conservation agendas as REDD+ and others. These frameworks are paving the road for the arrival of multiple actors, such as international environmental organizations, scientific experts on biodiversity, ecotourism companies and including government personnel in the responsible departments and ministries for forestry and conservation.

For decades under the military regime, vast sections of Tanintharyi were considered 'black areas' in practice turning them into 'free fire zones', which for the military justified regular human rights abuses of villagers (DDA et al. 2016). With the signing of ceasefire agreements, notably a preliminary bilateral one with the Karen National Union (KNU) in 2012, these 'black-areas' were quickly opened up to outsiders. Simultaneously, a slew of political-economic reforms were initiated as part of the 'transition' (though see Jones 2015) in 2011 and following up on a longer period of

"reorientation of Burma's political economy" putting it on a "selective capitalist trajectory" in the years following the crackdown on democracy protests in 1988 (Woods 2011, 750). As part of this reorientation, the government has been allowing and proactively promoting the exploitation and extraction of value from land and forest resources by elite, military and domestic and foreign companies, through the establishment of a new Foreign Investment Law (2012) to facilitate foreign investment, and new land laws, such as the Farmland Law (2012) and the Vacant, Fallow and Virgin Lands Management Law (2012) which have effectively created a land market through formalization of property titles. This has led to what some local groups characterize as "an epidemic of land grabbing" (TRIPNET n.d., 4; LIOH, 2015). However, the process of land formalization and registration has not gone uncontested, and while "stacked laws" and legal pluralisms may facilitate exclusions and land grabs, farmers have also navigated such contexts to seek redress through an evolving judiciary, legal strategies and alliances with media and civil society groups (Mark, 2016). The engagement of civil society in the drafting of the National Land Use Policy (NLUP) is also indicative of a growing arena of contestation over the institutions that govern access and control over land.

Companies and individuals closely connected to the former military regime have embarked on different interventions in the area, including an expansive Navy confiscation area eating up villagers' long-standing cashew orchards and community forests, numerous mining concessions contaminating traditional local water sources, the sprawling Dawei Special Economic Zone (DSEZ), a major highway slashing through kilometers of old-growth forest to connect Dawei, on the coast of the Andaman sea, to Bangkok, in Thailand, and expanding oil palm and rubber concessions (and the lucrative large-scale logging that precedes them). The Tanintharyi Region, which was set to be the "palm oil bowl" of Myanmar since the military regime plans that began in 1999 has 36% of the country's total concession area for oil palm development (Woods, 2015), where huge agribusiness concessions also overlap with high conservation value forests. Many of these concessions were granted to domestic 'crony' military-linked businessmen, and in many cases, they have not been fully developed for plantation, have benefitted from the conversion timber or land speculation. Rubber cultivation occur as smallholding rubber plots, with rubber has been a less valued commodity, but rubber concessions have also been used for land claiming strategies. One case in which the palm oil MSPP company, in Myeik district, the collective and collaborative research among a broad-based NGO network in Tanintharyi mapped the consequence of a concession granted by the Myanmar Investment Commission (MIC) of 38,000 acres - a joint venture between a Malaysia and Myanmar company and funded by international capital. In the complex post-conflict scenario of competing sovereignties between the state and non-state KNU, land titling and tenure is often insecure and contested. However, the CSO report entitled "Green Desert" referring to the palm oil company may also be thought of as emerging contestations over the meaning of 'green' and appropriations of the new green discourse.

Thus, the newer interventions driven by concern for conservation and climate change mitigation are intersecting with these older competing claims to the landscape and should not be seen in isolation of broader power struggles surrounding the landscape. The actual practices on the ground are often contradictory to the vision of climate change mitigation, when considered as a

whole. Logging for large biofuel concessions, for example, may undermine or compete with conservation agendas. The region as such is therefore characterized by multiple initiatives occurring either in more or less the same place (but different historical periods), at more or less the same time (but in different spaces), or both in the same place and at the same time. As pointed out by Hunsberger and colleagues (2017) research into similar dynamics elsewhere has tended to look at the two phenomena (large-scale land deals and climate change mitigation projects) separately and usually only in discrete cases. As a result, they argue that "research with a broader 'landscape' perspective is needed to better understand the complex social, ecological and institutional interactions taking place in sites of land-based climate change projects (such as biofuel production or forest conservation) and large-scale investments (plantations or mines)" (Hunsberger et al. 2017, 1). Nonetheless, they have only a very brief consideration of what this might mean, drawing largely on the same approach as that criticized by McCall – albeit with an increased emphasis on the need to combine ecological and political administrative units of analysis.

We would argue there is a need for more theoretical depth in order to adequately examine and understand the current struggles over the landscape. Drawing on landscape work by geographers, we identify broadly two competing visions for the landscape in Tanintharyi. One as attempted conversions from above being imposed by different constellations of the State, domestic and foreign crony-capitalists & International Environmental NGOs and on the other hand contestations from below being waged by different civil-society and grassroots organisations.

"There are a lot of folks in the industry who would rather deal with authoritarian regimes than with the chaos often associated with an emerging democracy"

- *Oil company securities analyst (quoted in ERI 1996, 10)*

"It's much harder to get conservation done in democracies than in communist countries or dictatorships; when a dictatorship decides to establish a reserve, that's that."

- *WCS director on cooperation with SPDC in the '90s (quoted in Noam 2007)*

The historical manner in which large-scale extractive as well as large-scale conservation efforts have unfolded in Myanmar has been through for the most part brutal imposition from above. As argued by a range of scholars and NGOs (e.g. Noam 2007, Woods 2011, ERI 1996; 2003) they have been closely tied into broader territorialization processes on the part of the state to gain control and/or use of frontier areas and their resources, particularly during the SLORC/SPDC regime years. For example, the Yadana oil and gas pipeline, which began construction in 1994, was at once a source of revenue for the Burmese state as well as an excuse for the military to increase its presence in the region of the pipeline, purportedly to protect the area where it was being constructed (though as documented extensively by human rights groups like KHRG and ERI, this involved massive human-rights abuses). Additionally the construction of the pipeline went hand in glove with another large-scale physical intervention in the landscape, namely a railway running from Yé-Dawei in order to transport military personnel to and from

the pipeline area. This similarly involved human-rights abuses, including forced labour (ERI 1996). In a pioneering case, the alliance between a burmese activist and a human rights lawyer in the US can at the time formed an international legal advocacy network through which a lawsuit was filed against Unocal (Union Oil Company California - today a subsidiary of Chevron), one of the developers of the pipeline, in US federal court in 1996. The final out of court settlement for the human rights abuses were paid as compensation to improve and protect the livelihoods of the people in the pipeline region, through which the knowledge and advocacy network established through the creation of Earthrights International has also strengthened networks in Burma, Thailand and internationally on the base of environmental 'earth' rights. They have also linked with the strong activist networks that were formed across the border in Thailand during the military regime. Years later, as part of the oil-companies' CSR-project, the companies behind the Yadana pipeline funded the creation of 420,000 acre protected area. While the PA for many years remained protected only on paper, "since the 2012 ceasefire, the government has been more aggressively promoting TNRP" leading to different forms of green-grabbing (TRIPNET n.d., 8). The Tanintharyi Nature Reserve Project has since acquired a new language of 'biodiversity conservation' strengthened by global discourses (Pollard et al, 2014). And can be understood within the wider conservation and 'green development' projects unfolding in Tanintharyi.

More recently, the Burmese government in coalition with Thai- and Japanese state-capital has initiated what is envisioned to be the biggest deep sea port in all of Southeast Asia in conjuncture with a sprawling Special Economic Zone and a highway that connects the deep sea port with Bangkok. However, the mega development project has not remained uncontested, and a grassroots network formed by local activists, religious leaders, community and youth groups initially formed around the urgent need to document and demand accountability for land confiscations, pollution, lack of transparency and information of the project for local populations; and advocate at local, national and transnational levels. Taking the issue to the Thai Human Rights Commission has to demand accountability of Thai investments abroad, is illustrative of a growing network and strategies for environmental and social justice. Although these complex and rooted networks (Rochealeau, 2015) create transnational alliances, the dynamic process through which they are interacting across space and time is interactive with the transformative process of landscape construction

In this manner, government forest preservation initiatives and international environmental NGO-driven marine, forest and wildlife conservation projects are accommodating large-scale land-takings that are consuming forests and forest communities. When even just this tentative list of interventions is taken together, it attests to how the landscape is being molded according to a specific world-view and a certain set of interest in society. As Harvey has put it, through these interventions, "production and consumption are increasingly imprisoned within fixed ways of doing things and increasingly committed to specific lines of production" (Harvey 2006, 220-21). In this light, the unfolding interventions in recent years, are the physical representation of the re-orientation of the broader Burmese political-economy. Thus, in recognition of how "the landscape's very materiality shapes individual and social behavior, practices, and processes" (Mitchell 2008, 43) these different interventions should also be seen as part of a project of foreclosing alternative visions and futures. As elaborated by Carton

(2017, 6) on the creation of landscape inertia, "by having invested in the construction of road infrastructure, oil and gas production and transportation facilities, fossil-fuel-driven power plants, etc., a capitalist society is economically committed to utilize these assets."

As is also apparent though, all of these attempts at "placing limits on people's ability to make their own histories and geographies" (Mitchell 2012, 166) are being met with opposition from the ground, as local groups are mobilising around varying rights-discourses, including human rights broadly as well as

emerging discourse of "indigenous" rights and practices, strengthened by the global discourse and indigenous rights frameworks. The form this opposition takes spans outright opposition in some cases as well as more tactical engagement in others.

Proposing a POLITICAL ECONOMY LANDSCAPE APPROACH [Note from authors: This section remains in more raw note-form]

In this section, we outline some useful conceptions of "landscape" that differ from the mainstream UNFCCC discursive models to hopefully propose foundations for a stronger counter-discourse or counter discourse coalition. It also hopes to contribute some tentative analytical signposts for emerging academic discussions on "landscapes".

Mitchell (2008), in his chapter "New Axioms for reading the landscape: paying attention to political economy and social justice", argues that it is necessary to see *how* and *why* landscapes exist and uncover that which is least evident. From a Marxist perspective, his argument is toward a focus on production; an analysis of capital within a broader theory of circulation. His axioms propose a theoretical and methodological basis, designed to form also a normative basis, by providing a historical and materialist methodological foundation for "what the landscape *is* an *does*, and for what a more just landscape might *be*." (Mitchell, 2008: 33). His six axioms for understanding landscape are outlined here.

1. "The landscape is produced; it is actively made". Consideration of the relations of production, which are "always historically and technologically conditioned, and always and everywhere struggled over." (34). It is necessary to analyze if the landscape (as a totality as items in it) is produced as a commodity. "What is possible and what is not… is a function of what is produced elsewhere to be sold for profit." It requires an analysis of the networks of production and the relations of production that sustains them. (34).

In this sense, Tanintharyi's value as a composite commodity, may be understood as the multiple networks of production in which the commodification of different elements of its landscape are produced. Using Castree's (2008) idea of 'commodification of nature', we can understand commodification as a process. The commodification of tin or tungsten from the mine is its 'itemization' from the rest of its environment due to its market value. The setting up of an institutional framework through policies and a bureaucratic enterprise that will govern conservation forests and seascapes is a process that lays the groundwork for the commodification of forests and carbon with exchange or conservation 'value' in

markets. The ongoing extraction of timber through logging and exporting through legal and illegal pathways is similarly the connection of this landscape to wider markets. These are all, however, determined by formal and informal - and increasingly institutionalized and technically managed - regulated extractions that determine who is allowed to extract and benefit from resources through access rights (Ribot & Peluso 2003); and who is not. Similarly, access to land as property, which is the new 'commodity' is also determined by relations of power and authority (Sikor and Lund, 2009). However, the access to these resources and increasingly, the right to determine the terms that determine access are struggled over in a dynamic process, that, in the context of Tanintharyi, has arguably increased since the liberalizations of the new reformist government since Thein Sein (2010) and now the new elected NLD government (2015).

2. "Any landscape is (or was) functional." In capitalist society, the first… function of landscape is either directly to realize value (make money), or to establish the conditions under which value can be realized." (35). "Landscape is a (highly complex) site of investment." (35) Here he draws on Harvey's (2007, 233-234), point that "built landscape" may be seen as "a geographically ordered, complex, composite commodity". "Landscape is produced through investment in it, investment that is coordinate through complex financial market arrangements and state intervention." (Mitchell, 2008: 35). The landscape is functional for its (potential) exchange value. Secondly, landscape is a "lived space and thus is crucial to the reproduction of labor power." Here, he considers values of food, shelter, clothing and necessary entertainment and schooling as values that contribute to labor power. (36) although labor power is differentiated for different classes of people and part of struggle over how labor power is to be reproduced (37). Hence a site of struggle.

3. "No landscape is local." And requires tracing networks of capital, commodities, and labor that extend and have extended across the globe. (38) "The border, and the way it is enforced, has a significant role to play in providing that labor

Particularly as people have been continually displaced during times of conflict, or have migrated for work, or are migrating from poorer regions within Myanmar to work in Tanintharyi's mines, construction work and palm oil plantations. Capital is also not local in the increasingly financialized context, where multiple actors - including multilateral funding agencies, international environmental organizations, foreign donors. Networks of contestation and advocacy and the solidarity and knowledge networks that are created are also not local, but expand across scales.

4. "History does matter". The landscape is shaped by the current state of technology and is vulnerable to losing out to innovation as more modern production facilities capture more of the socially available relative surplus. It is 'flow' (constant transformations) but also stasis, "a repository of a great deal of inertia", historically defined by phases of stability and change. "Sometimes it is the *erasure* of history that matters the most." (ref to Hayden's Power of Place 1996)

The particular history of armed conflict, the huge displacement of populations before the ceasefire agreements, the continued presence of internally displaced peoples and refugees cross the border in Thailand, and the massive out-flux of economic migrants across the border during the military regime has had impacts on the current social relations. The erasure of the history of violence, forced displacement not yet addressed has been invisibilized by the modernizing

industrializing project, as well as the 'fog of greening' (Rocheleau, 2015) that has arrived with new conservation initiatives, ecotourism and green development narratives. Technology as linked to power and capital determine the capacities of construction, the intensification of extraction - through machinery and mining technologies.

5- *"Landscape is power.*" And 'determines what can and cannot be done' (43). Refers to (W. Mitchell, 1994): "It has the power to naturalize and make seem inevitable what is really constructed and struggled over… Landscape is thus ideology made solid: a produced space that does *more* than represent. It guides." (44) a 'structured way of seeing.

Power may be understood in multiple senses. Although it is relevant to highlight the multiple contestations over power in institutional arenas, within the state (between ministries, departments and across local-regional-national levels), and between state and non-state entities. Struggles of power occur throughout the development of policies - such as the National Land Use Policy; the Environmental Law, the Mining Law; as well as throughout their implementation, with demands for EIAs/SIAs, FPIC and regards to international safeguards. They are contestations also over maps/mapping and the contestations over authority linked to the ability to map and be mapped. We also argued that power is not static and solid, but it is contested and shaped along multiple axes of conflict. Power struggles occur across groups and within

6. *"Landscape is the spatial form that social justice takes*." (45). And so the landscape reveals the degree of "spatial equality, environmental equity" and "affirmative possibilities for different, degrees of autonomy."

However, we understand 'social justice' as a dynamic process in which multiple actors struggle for representation and equitable distribution. They are also sought through particular institutional (formal and informal) arenas.It also lacks recognition of institutions (formal and informal) and the state - as key relevant aspects that govern the 'bundle or rights' over access and control of resources. Further, Mitchell's axioms also need: landscape's *discursive* field - and contestations over meaning - such a s the meaning of 'sustainable' and 'green' or even 'development'. *Landscaping* here involves both th*e material* and *representational p*ractices through which any given landscape is created and maintained. (Cardenas, 2012)

Conclusion

The objective of this paper is to offer analytical tools and alternative discursive material/counter-discourse to mainstream 'integrative landscape'. We have argued for the need to understand territory, indigeneity and landscaping as contextual/relational processes of positioning and articulation for advancing political interests. Insights from political economy and geography can provide analytical insights on how we may view the 'landscape' differently - as composite commodity, arena of struggle for power, representation and access to resources - in order to develop effective political strategies. The paper is in process and part of a broader research project that seeks to contribute to greater social justice.

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