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Complexities and surprises in local resistance to neoliberal conservation: Multiple environmentalities, technologies of the self and the poststructural geography of local engagement with REDD+

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ABSTRACT

Actual local engagement with neoliberal conservation is remarkably complex and dynamic. This article advances a poststructural geographical understanding of this complexity by focusing on the spatiotemporally articulated rationalities and strategies of local communities in their encounter with Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation 'Plus' (REDD+), a form of neoliberal conservation. We integrate literature on 'technologies of resistance' and 'multiple environmentalities', retracing the progressive development of the subject of power in Michel Foucault's work in order to conceptualise local engagement with neoliberal conservation in terms of community 'technologies of the self'. Developed in Foucault's later works, the notion of technologies of the self places the strategies of the governed at the centre of analysis, while attending to their diverse and creative comportments. We develop this empirically through a detailed ethnographic investigation of community engagement with REDD+ in Nigeria. We show how the project proponents' efforts to produce Ekuri forest community as a 'model REDD + community' clash with this community's technologies of the self which have evolved dynamically through historically-sedimented values, practices, relations and struggles. Ekuri's technologies are at once, traditional and modern in their ethos; local and global in their spatial articulations. They manifest in Ekuri's contestation of the failing promises of REDD+, the moral burden of its assumptions about local deforestation and its restriction on community development. Yet, this community would surprisingly align with REDD+ and the global carbon forestry regime to challenge the state's appropriation of community forest land for infrastructural development. We highlight four key moments of community technologies through their corresponding provisional subjectivities: *the subject of hope, the moral subject, the unruly subject* and *the mobilising subject*. We reflect on the wider implications of our poststructural geographical analysis for understanding local engagement with neoliberal conservation.

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1. Introduction

Why do local communities support neoliberal conservation projects even when they appear to threaten community control over resources?[4] Why do they resist particular projects and not others? How do we explain changes in local engagement with neoliberal conservation in particular places and over time? These questions of local engagement with neoliberal conservation have surprisingly received relatively less attention among critical geographers and political ecologists compared to their extremely productive analyses of the logics, variegated manifestations and impacts of the neoliberalisation of the environment broadly.[5] Rocheleau (2007 p222) once observed that "governmentality and environmentality from below" including "technologies of resistance" have been "under-theorized and overlooked" in analyses of neoliberal environments. A decade on, Fletcher (2017 p314) would note that subjectivity is still "only superficially explored", joining a wider call by Holmes and Cavanagh (2016) for investigations into the complexi ties of local engagement with neoliberal conservation. As Benjaminsen, Buhaug, McConnell, Sharp, and Steinberg (2017) observed in this journal, only recently has a growing body of literature emerged emphasising resistance to, and broader local engagement with, neoliberal conservation (see Benjaminsen, 2014; Cavanagh & Benjaminsen, 2014; Fletcher, Dressler, Anderson, & Büscher, 2018; McAfee & Shapiro, 2010; West, 2006), as part of growing studies of resistance to conservation more generally (Holmes, 2007; Matose, 2014). What is still poorly understood and less theorised, however, is the co-existence of multiple, even seemingly contradictory forms of local engagement with neoliberal conservation in particular places and the dynamism of this engagement over time. Yet it is such complexity and dynamism that more closely reflect the everyday politics of local communities who live with actual neoliberal projects.

In response to this gap, we advance a poststructural geographical understanding in order to contribute both theoretically and empirically to a deeper understanding of local engagement with neoliberal conservation. We argue that retracing the progressive development of the subject in Foucault's thoughts and particularly his notion of "technologies of the self" can fruitfully illuminate the complexities and surprises in local

[4] Neoliberal conservation is marked by diverse efforts to prioritise market principles (e.g. commodification, financialisation, privatisation, de/re-regulation, market competition, use of incentives etc) in conservation and environmental governance (Bigger et al., 2018; Buscher, 2013; Corson, MacDonald, & Neimark, 2013; Igoe & Brockington, 2007). This is part of a wider global attempt to extend market principles as a mean to regulate every facet of social life and rejuvenate capitalist growth at least since the 1970s (Harvey, 2005).

[5] The local goes beyond a fixed essentialised spatiality. As we later show in this article, modes of local engagement often link across scales and networks.

engagement with neoliberal conservation. This entails directing attention to the rationalities and strategies of the governed, and the spatiotemporal complexity of their comportment in the face of governmental power. We, therefore, build on a growing body of governmentality studies focusing substantively on resistance and subjectivities in neoliberal conservation (e.g. Astuti & McGregor, 2017; Benjaminsen, 2014; Cortes-Vazquez & Ruiz-Ballesteros, 2018), extending an older intellectual agenda around technologies of resistance (Rocheleau, 2007; Scott, 1990). Specifically, we bring into a productive dialogue the literature on multiple environmentalities and work on the technologies of resistance and counter-conducts. Situating both within the development of the subject in Foucault's oeuvre, we respond to the former's need for a proper engagement with subjectivities and the latter's need for a more nuanced conception of local comportment partly in response to the subtleties of multiple environmentalities.

At stake here is the core environmentality question about how and why communities and people groups come to internalise particular environmental values and embrace particular environmental regimes REDD+ in our case (Agrawal, 2005). Beyond the common focus on a linear transformation of subjectivities into some settled form, we emphasise the spatiotemporal dynamics of subject positions, what one might call the vicissitudes of environmentality. We return to Foucault's later ascription of an ontological and analytical prominence to technologies of the governed, in seeking a deeper appreciation of the inventive, strategic and spatiotemporally nuanced agency of the governed. Applying this conceptual lens to local engagement with neoliberal conservation foregrounds questions of local agency but also opens up critical insights into communities' aspirations and the emancipatory underpinnings and potentials of local mobilisation. Channelling such underpinnings into broader political processes is critical for building a formidable emancipatory politics as Kashwan (2017) argues, particularly at a time of increasing securitisation of conservation, violence against environmental activists and wider authoritarianism (LeBillon & Duffy, 2018; Scoones et al., 2018).

We draw on an empirical investigation of local engagement with a REDD+ project in Nigeria's Cross River, part of the guinea forest global biodiversity hotspot and a critical area of national significance often described as "Nigeria's last rainforest". In this project, like many other neoliberal conservation projects, proponents employ a mix of rationalities and tools to enlist local support.[6] We focus on efforts to engage Ekuri forest community, a United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Equator awardee community of about 10,000 farmers and forest gatherers who claim around 33,000ha of forest. Ekuri community is part of the central Cross River REDD+ cluster of 12 communities. A prime logic of subject-

[6] There are debates around whether schemes like REDD+ are neoliberal since some of their market-based elements have failed to materialise, thus relying on non-market elements (see Fletcher & Büscher, 2017; Van Hecken et al., 2018). We argue that the neoliberal nature of REDD+ needs to be understood in terms of the provenance of the scheme (Liverman, 2009; McAfee, 2015), the wider philosophy of which it is part (Fletcher & Büscher, 2017) and its processual nature as market in the making (Asiyanbi, 2017).

making in REDD+ is the production of model communities (cf Skutsch & Turnhout, 2018). We investigate proponents' efforts to enrol Ekuri community as the model community and how this clashes with the community's technologies of the self. We followed Nigeria's REDD+ programme between 2012 and 2017, conducting intensive fieldwork between 2013 and 2014. We combined extended ethnography in communities with in-depth interviews with community leaders and members, the specially-constituted REDD+ Unit, state forestry bureaucrats and conservation NGOs. We attended several REDD+ activities and events. We also analysed textual materials including community documents (including position papers, petitions and protest documents), official forestry documents including annual reports and REDD+ policy documents such as the project idea notes (PIN), the Readiness Programme Proposal (RPP) approved by the World Bank, the National Programme Document (NPD) approved by the UNREDD in 2011. Our analysis evolved iteratively in dialogue with communities and in engagement with scholarly literature.

The rest of this paper is organised as follows: first we critically appraise the progressive development of the subject in Foucault's work to outline our refined understanding of the technologies of the self. We next discuss efforts to enrol Ekuri community as the model REDD+ community and how these efforts are confronted with the historical basis of this community's technologies of the self, captured in long-standing historical values, practices, relations and struggles. We analyse key moments of Ekuri's technologies under four headings: the subjects of hope, the moral subject, the unruly subject, and the mobilising subject. We then draw some conclusions.

2. Subjectivities, counter-conducts and technologies of the self: from subjection to subjectivation

Although Foucault's early works focused on unveiling the powers of institutions often thought to be politically marginal, he was also interested in the ways these institutional powers were productive of particular human subjects – the process of subjection. Yet, while always figuring beneath his preoccupation with the power techniques for rendering unruly human subjects pliable, conceptual work on the strategies of the subject did not find a prominent space in Foucault's work until much later (Davidson, 2011; Leask, 2012). It is with his elaboration of the notion of governmentality in the late 1970s that one begins to observe a sustained theoretical emphasis on the strategies of the subject in Foucault's thoughts.

In the 1977-78 College de France lectures published in English in 2009 as Security, Territory and Population, Foucault locates the origins of governmentality in the Christian pastorate tradition, which functions through “a highly specific form of power with the object of conducting men” (Death, 2010; Foucault, 2009, p. 259). He observed that this form of power attracts its own corresponding kind of response, which he called “counter-conducts”. Counter-conducts are subtle and sly attempts to subvert and “escape direction by others” (Foucault, 2009, p. 259). Since they entail turning to other ways of being governed but not

an absolute eschewal of government, counter-conducts are co-extensive with government, always maintaining relations of reversal never "in a position of exteriority in relation to power" (Foucault, 2009, p. 259). He thus distinguished counter-conducts from resistance to other forms of power, say sovereign power or economic exploitation (cf. Davidson, 2011). Yet, notably, Foucault would later consider these other forms of power – i.e. sovereign power and economic exploitation – as specific kinds of governmentality in their own rights (Foucault, 2010). This creates a difficulty around the specificity and utility of the concept of counter-conducts. Is the concept to be understood in relation to the more historical governmentality or could it be extended to understand responses to various kinds of governmentality, including, say sovereign governmentality?[7] This difficulty is further amplified by the fact that Foucault never referred to counter-conducts again in the subsequent 1978-79 lectures (published as The Birth of Biopolitics), where he expounded a general understanding of governmentality in a historically-detached sense as:

series of governmental rationalities [which] overlap, lean on each other, challenge each other, and struggle with each other: art of government according to truth, art of government according to the rationality of the sovereign state, and art of government according to the rationality of economic agents, and more generally, according to the rationality of the governed themselves (Foucault, 2010 p313 see also p92, p186; cf. Fletcher, 2010).

It is this pluralist understanding of multiple governmentality that appears to be the most relevant for understanding contemporary environmental governance which has been shown to work through a simultaneous deployment of a variety of rationalities and tools (Fletcher, 2010; see also Bluwstein, 2017; Leibenath, 2017; Youdelis, 2013; see Fletcher, 2017 for an overview of recent studies applying multiple environmentality). Astuti and McGregor (2015), and McGregor et al. (2015) showed in their work on Indonesia how central multiple environmentalities are to REDD+. Under this condition, it seems apt to anticipate an equally diverse range of comportments and strategies among the target of governmental intervention than the more reactionary concept of counter-conducts allows. As such, counter-conducts become only a part of a more elaborate and varied suite for engaging with multiple governmentalities. This suite, we argue, is better understood through Foucault's notion of "technologies of the self" which focuses on practices of subjectivation i.e. practice of the subjects on the self and others. Indeed, the notion of counter-conducts then appears as a bridge concept, what Michel Senellart in his commentaries on Foucault's lectures, describes as "an essential stage in Foucault's thought, between the analysis of techniques of subjection and that, developed from 1980, of practices of subjectivation" (Foucault, 2009, p. 259 footnote; cf. Leask, 2012). We now turn to technologies of the self.

[7] The concept of counter-conduct appears to have flourished recently in global environmental politics (e.g. Death, 2010, 2016; Odysseos, Death, & Malmvig, 2016) in part because of the curious refusal of much global governmentality studies to elaborate a pluralist understanding of governmentality.

By the early 1980s Foucault had explicitly placed the strategies of the subject at the heart of his intellectual agenda. In an important 1982 essay titled The Question of the Subject, Foucault elaborates a "new economy of power relations" which takes "the forms of resistances against different forms of power as a starting point … and consists of analysing power relations through the antagonism of strategies" (1982 p780). Two things become immediately evident in this new economy of power: the pre-eminence of the strategies of the governed as a substantive focus of analysis and attentiveness to the "field of possibilities in which several ways of behaving, several reactions and diverse comportments may be realized" (Foucault, 1982, p. 790). Foucault (1997) describes this analytical turn in terms of technologies of the self, placing it together with technologies of production, technologies of sign systems and technologies of power as the four major overlapping types of technologies that are relevant to how human beings understand themselves. This elaboration of technologies of the self expanded on what he had, in earlier lectures, described as the art of government "according to the rationality of the governed themselves" (Foucault, 2010, p. 313).

Technologies of the self "permit individuals to effect by their own means, or with the help of others a certain number of operation on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality" (Foucault, 1982, p. 225). Foucault developed this concept within the historical context of the Greco-Roman Philosophy and the Christian monastic principles that bordered around the question of truth, sexuality and the self. As Leask (2012 p57) observes, what is at stake here is the centrality of a "general, active subjectivization (subjectivation) as a counter to passive subjection (assujetissement)" and how subjects pursue diverse new relations "strategic decisions and localized opposition". As such, like technologies of power, technologies of the self entail a multiplicity of practices and diverse targets – bodies, souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being.

In deploying the concept of technologies of the self, we refine its strongly individualising historical origins in order to demonstrate its "consequences far beyond the specific domain of the history of sexuality" (Davidson, 2011, p. 25). This is necessary to grapple with the collective dimensions of communities' everyday environmental practices and mobilisations (cf. Singh, 2017). If governmentality ultimately seeks to work in populations, then collective strategies among the governed should be readily imaginable. Compared to technologies of resistance (Rocheleau, 2007; Scott, 1990), technologies of the self more accurately reflects the fact that local responses have the "potential to reinforce and bolster, as well as and at the same time as, undermining and challenging" governmental regimes (Death, 2010, p. 236 emphasis in original; see also G.; Benjaminsen, 2014; Cortes-Vazquez & Ruiz-Ballesteros, 2018).

In short, to analyse community technologies of the self (also "community technologies") is to focus on the dynamic and historically-constituted political strategies and rationalities of

local communities. It is to ask what tools, aims, actors, events and rationalities are tentatively aligned into communal strategies of the self? A focus on community technologies allows for the appreciation of the range of local values, capacities, practices, and overall local agency that shape regimes of government (Barnett, Clarke, Cloke, & Malpass, 2008; Cortes-Vazquez & Ruiz-Ballesteros, 2018; Faye, 2016; Singh, 2013). This focus foregrounds the complexity and dynamism that more closely reflect the everyday reality of local communities (Hall et al., 2015). Such a focus would also unveil local aspirations, granting insights into how and why contemporary conservation regimes repeatedly find a foothold in communities, despite the emptiness of their promises (Kansanga & Luginaah, 2019; Massarella, Sallu, Ensor, & Marchant, 2018), their failure to deliver change (Lund, Sungusia, Mabele, & Scheba, 2017; West, 2006), and the various forms of violence by which they often get enacted on the ground (Howson, 2018; Mabele, 2017; Margulies & Karanth, 2018; Marijnen & Verweijen, 2016; Massé, 2018; Milne & Mahanty, 2018). In the following section, we turn to the governmental process of model making as an entry point to understanding Ekuri's community technologies.

3. Making a model REDD+ community

As earlier noted, a prime logic of subject making in Nigeria's REDD+ and in REDD+ projects generally is the production of model communities through an objectifying practice that reflects proponents' ideal assumptions and optimistic aspirations about communities (cf. Skutsch & Turnhout, 2018). Model communities help to, among other things, rationalise governmental intervention in REDD+ by tokenising the possibility of success as strongly as possible (cf. Li, 2007). Like Pal Nyiri's (2012 p.533) "enclaves of improvement" which are underpinned by modernity's "promise of progress", REDD+ models are underpinned by the promise of incentives, better livelihoods and more effective conservation regimes (cf. Dressler, 2017; Massarella et al., 2018). In Nigeria's REDD+, the deployment of the model logic was already underway when, in 2009, proponents marked out three community clusters in the north, centre and south of Cross River State, the REDD+ pilot state and one of Nigeria's 37 states.

What is striking across REDD+ programme documents, expert field visits, workshops, and other demonstration activities is the way Ekuri, a key community in the central cluster, is held up as an ideal exemplar for community engagement with REDD+. The 2010 Preliminary Assessment Report (PAR), a 167-page baseline and proposal document, portrayed Ekuri's forest and local governance in terms of all that is desirable in a REDD+ pilot community (Oyebo, Bisong, & Morakinyo, 2010). Ekuri's community-based organisation, Ekuri Initiative, was held up as an important indication that communities can be beneficially engaged in the REDD+ process:

> The Ekuri Initiative has made several notable achievements. These include mobilization of community resources and liaison with the local government to construct a 40km road and bridges to the communities; a DFID funded inventory of two 50ha forest plots where timber

> is harvested sustainably; and development [sic] a land use plan that zoned the Ekuri forests into various land uses. (Oyebo et al., 2010 p.61).

The programme proposal submitted to the World Bank claims that "Ekuri community has led the state with their conservation" (R-PP, 2013 p.23). Such a community, proponents assume, is a natural model for the REDD+ project; it is a beacon of possibility for the scheme in Nigeria where proponents claimed "deforestation is one of the highest in the world" at the rate of 3.7% even though the global deforestation rate stands at 8.4% based on recent figures from Global Deforestation Watch (Oyebo et al., 2010, p. 1; see also; National Programme Document, 2011; R-PP, 2013). To be sure, a few other communities such as Iko-Esai community as well as the Mbe Mountain communities and Community-Based Organisations (CBO) also got a mention but none was nearly as prominently featured as was Ekuri (e.g. Oyebo et al., 2010, p60, p66, p67, p84). Perhaps more striking in relation to other forest communities and CBOs is the contrast regularly drawn between Ekuri and other forest communities who are, for instance, described as:

> … unaware of any alternatives to unsustainable exploitation and are often divided amongst themselves as to how to best exploit the forests for their development. In a typical village; individuals supported by logging interests are often pitted against hunters and NTFP collectors. Chiefs are often compromised by loggers and are unable to protect the forests for the good of the majority in the village who may depend on NTFPs and bushmeat and other forest products to supplement farming income. Divided communities are often far more vulnerable to predatory logging interests and so within a few generations, their forests is cleared while the villages remain poor (Oyebo et al., 2010 p.28).

It is against this stereotypical image of other forest communities that Ekuri becomes essentialised as an isolated, embodiment of conservation virtue. This strategic valorisation of Ekuri seems, at first, innocuous, even empowering. But as we soon show, it not only obscures the community's vital histories and values, it also seeks to responsibilise Ekuri into a proper REDD+ subject – a process which the community will come to challenge. Moreover, the choice of Ekuri as a model, is neither inevitable nor natural. In fact, the additionality criterion requires REDD+ sites to be forest areas that would otherwise have witnessed significant deforestation in the absence of the scheme. Yet, REDD+ in Ekuri is justified precisely by claims that the community already "led the state with their conservation" (R-PP, 2013 p.23). As such, while Ekuri is made to appear as a self-evident model, what is remarkable about the model logic is the amount of expert labour devoted to demonstrating what ought to be self-evident. Such expert representations are as constitutive as they are representative of the reality they seek to make evident (Turnhout, 2018).

Interestingly, this model image of Ekuri was not lost on its resource managers. For instance, one of the leaders proudly declared: "one cannot just do without Ekuri when you are talking about REDD+ or forest management because they (the funders and international REDD+ partners) would ask you, we know that the key community that does forestry in that region is Ekuri, why are they not in the picture?". This is an important, if tentative moment of self

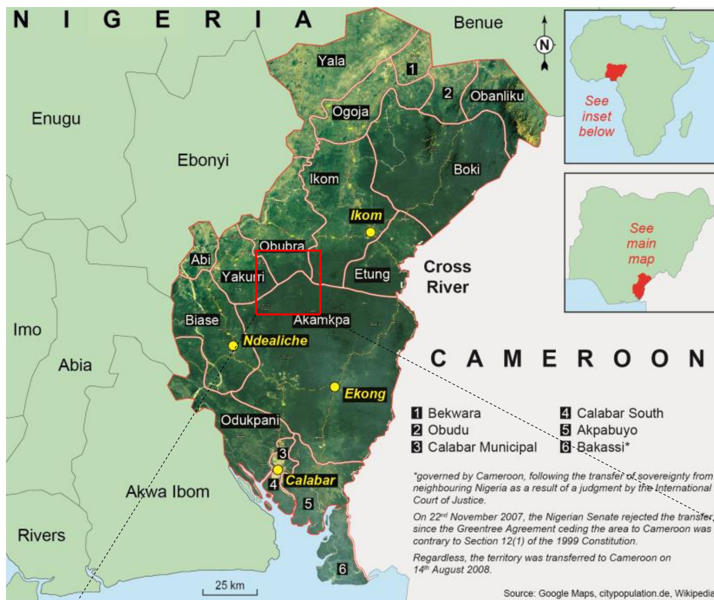
recognition. What is important to note here is that the model discourse gains some efficacy not by absolutely obscuring community history and values per se, but rather by strategically and selectively articulating with them. The next section thus presents a different profile of Ekuri, which does not sit neatly with proponents' purified and instrumental portrayal of the community (cf. Skutsch & Turnhout, 2018). This alternative profile, which builds on the community’s own account of itself, is also critical for understanding the historical basis of Ekuri's technologies of the self.

4. Beyond the model imaginary: relations, struggles and the historical basis of community technologies

The Ekuri people trace their history to Onughi Hill, a large composite settlement (of tens of different ethnic groups) around the major curvature of the River Cross (the River after which Cross River State was named) in the central region of Cross River State. Moving from Onughi Hill, Ekuri people set up five villages (Etara, Okokori, Edondon, Old Ekuri and New Ekuri – all identifiable in Fig. 1) in succession as groups broke out in search of more space for livelihood and cultural practices (Onor, 1994). But what is today known as Ekuri community (the focus of this article) comprises only the Old and the New Ekuri villages the two which have retained the strongest ties. The community's forests surround the centrally located villages from where tracks connect to: neighbouring communities, a forest reserve and the Oban section of the Cross River National Park. A 40 km major earth track connects the community to Ochon, the nearest market town.

Ekuri community has historically managed its forests primarily through indigenous institutions, some of which continue to function till present day. Studies record that these institutions and those of neighbouring communities are “well-defined institutions stipulating norms that guide resource use and management … together with a system of enforceable sanctions” (Bisong & Andrew-Essien, 2010 p262). Land is believed to be overseen by deities who must be consulted before it is put to certain uses. While land is owned by the whole community and held in trust by the Chiefs, individuals and families retain bundles of overlapping usufruct rights to land and resources. The general assembly of all community adults retains sovereign authority. Major land decisions are taken in the general assembly through a simple majority. Ekpe (the leopard society), a traditional quasi-cultic group is still looked upon to enforce laws and punish offenders. The community's sacred forest is kept as such. The youth group, organised into age-grades, is often the community's first line of defence against threats. A well-established women's group facilitates women's socialising and representation at all meetings. Community members claim farmlands for personal or family use by working the land. It is common to use Ota, a system of rotational group labour, to prepare land for farming, which is mainly subsistence. Farm surplus and non-timber forest produce are sold to pre-certified middlemen who sell in towns and cities. Prior to the paving of the community access road, farm produce was manually transported. These largely traditional practices which have been relatively

environmentally benign are also dynamic, though community elders hold they are “practices we have continued for generations” (Int. 32; Int. 6).



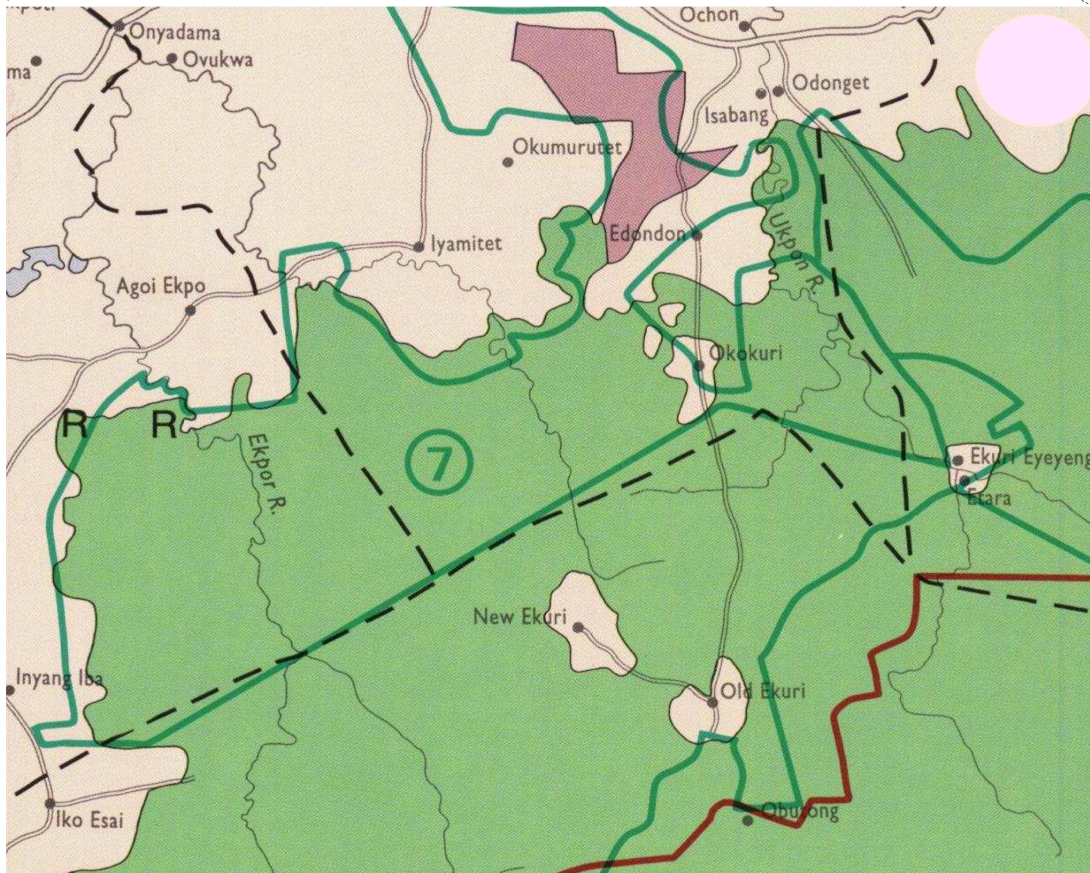


Fig. 1. Map showing the location of Ekuri and neighbouring communities in Cross River, Nigeria. Sources: Asiyanbi, Arhin, & Isyaku, 2017; Cross River State Forestry Commission, Calabar.

Relations around forest conservation and the timber economy are central to Ekuri's recent conservation and development history. The earliest major commercial timber exploitation proposal received by Ekuri came in 1982 when an industrial logging company approached the community for a logging concession in exchange for an access road. Burdened by the arduous trek through the 40 km earth track connecting the community to the outside world, the proposal appeared compelling to Ekuri community. While the community took the offer, the then village head of New Ekuri objected, convincing the entire community not to give out its forests but instead facilitate the road construction through communal efforts. The community often refers to this event as a decisive moment in the community's conservation history, one which not only reinforced the community's resource claims and commitment to conservation but also galvanised collective action towards autonomous development. For instance, the community noted in a position paper dated 10th March 2011 that “In 1982, Ekuri community, without external influence conceived of the idea of community forestry” (EkuriCommunity, 2011 p.1).

It was in the early 1990s during a period of booming timber economy, which coincided with the constitution of the Cross River National Park (CRNP), that Ekuri established its community-based organisation, Ekuri Initiative (henceforth, EI). The founding of EI was motivated not by a singular commitment to conservation in contradistinction to the socio-economic development. Rather Ekuri was also responding to socio-economic aspirations and collective desire to enhance livelihood opportunities and foster local development, as a community leader explained:

> Then (prior to 1992) … we were trapped in the forest, there were no economic activities. You do your farm and nobody would buy your surplus, no exploitation (of forest) because there was no access road. But by the 1990s, technology such as the chainsaw was introduced, people were thinking of bigger opportunities. This was going to put pressure on the forest. So we decided on a system of managing the forest through the Ekuri Initiative (Int. 6, also Int. 29).

The creation of EI was not a purely traditional or community affair; it involved a range of external support. For instance, EI earlier on benefited from the deep relationship with a community forest officer for the buffer zone of the then newly constituted National Park. But EI also developed partnerships with other government agencies, international donor agencies, and local NGOs. For instance, a Department for International Development (DFID then Overseas Development Administration) forestry project in 1994 provided initial technical and material support for the Ekuri Initiative, while a Ford Foundation grant in 1998 facilitated a perimeter survey and a preliminary land use plan. This trend partly reflects the ways that local communities like Ekuri, while claiming a traditional ethos, even indigeneity

(as will be shown below), might also exhibit “a commitment to reforming, adapting, and managing modernization”, forging local and transnational links (Bebbington, 1996, p. 87; see also; Li, 2004; Mosse, 2005).

Meanwhile, Ekuri would face another timber concession crisis. An industrial timber company working with the state Forestry Commission would lure an Ekuri Chief into a large logging concession in Ekuri forests. As the company was beginning actual extraction in 1994, the deal came to public knowledge. Tension around this concession “almost tore the community apart; it became a big struggle”, community leaders recount. Six members of the community each opted to serve a 2-year jail term for allegedly obstructing state-sanctioned extraction of the community's forest. They chose the prison sentence rather than allow the logging to proceed. Subsequently, the concession was revoked by the state government. Ultimately, the community exercised the sovereign powers of its general assembly to depose the erring chief.

It is these communal efforts and struggles around conservation and community development which earned Ekuri international recognition. For instance, Ekuri Initiative was awarded the prestigious UNDP Equator Prize in 2004, as an exemplar of “locally sustainable development solutions for people, nature, and resilient communities” (UNDP, 2012, p. 1). Indeed, a DFID-sponsored forestry intervention which began in 1999 sought precisely to replicate the “Ekuri experience” in other forest communities in the buffer zone of the National Park, as a resource manager in Ekuri observes (Int. 27). Ekuri was invited to make contributions to the DFID-sponsored project. This intervention, and Ekuri's role in it, however, became the crux of another struggle with project proponents and state forestry officials. The latter would abruptly curtail Ekuri's contributions because the community was advocating its own kind of organisational autonomy for the Forest Management Committees (FMCs) which were being set up in communities across the state.

What is thus clear is that Ekuri's history is more complex than the image of the model community projected by REDD+ proponents. It is marked by indigenous and modern practices, collective mobilisations and struggles, and a range of cooperative and adversarial interactions. Ekuri's partly internally-motivated conservation practice does not preclude the use of the forest for collective socio-economic development. More importantly, Ekuri's history points to an underlying ethos defined by the tendency to challenge congealing forms of domination in order to maintain a somewhat collective, relational autonomy. This historically constituted rationality along with the practices and values associated with it would be central to Ekuri's engagement with REDD+. The next section, thus, turns to key moments of Ekuri's community technologies. Each of these moments reflects: a tentative subject positions taken by Ekuri community, the corresponding regime of practice and the specific environmentality through which REDD+ was constituted in Cross River. They tentative subject positions are: *the subject of hope; the moral subject; the unruly subject; the mobilising subject*.

5. The subject of hope: desiring 'a better life' and economies of expectation

REDD+ depends on the use of incentives to drive forest conservation, reflecting a specifically neoliberal environmentality (McGregor et al., 2015). This promise of incentives has been an important aspect of efforts to secure much-needed community support for projects. As such, early carbon forestry missions to communities in Nigeria's programme sought their initial buy-in through promises of financial payment that targeted communities' own aspirations and desire for what they consider 'a better life'. As well as helping to establish project legitimacy (Buscher, 2013; Mosse, 2005), these promises had the effect of constituting REDD+ as a prime object of desire, in response to which communities would begin positioning themselves as subjects of hope, thereby contributing to nurturing what has been described as an economy of expectation.

The pursuit of a better life is evident throughout Ekuri's history, if it gets perversely instrumentalised in REDD+. Whether in the break out of groups to build new villages, or the community's desire for a road or its desire for a formalised community organisation and resource management regime, the desire for a better life is a deep-seated aspect of Ekuri's communal life (cf. Bebbington, 1996; Mosse, 2005). It is the enrolment of this desire in REDD+ which is perverse, since it is based on bogus promises. For instance, a community leader in Ekuri described early REDD+ promises made to the community back in 2009: "they advised that we should keep doing what we have been doing, that we were going to be paid and our people will be rich … When the people heard it, they were excited and were celebrating … Families started thinking of how they were going to be millionaires" (Int. 6). Another community member expressed the aspiration of many: "if carbon credit comes with financial benefits, it means it will improve our welfare, we will have money to build houses, send our children to school and get healthcare" (Int. 32). It was in expectation of such promises that community leaders publicly pledged support to REDD+ as observed in various community meetings. Communities, thus, looked forward in expectation. In neighbouring Iko-Esai community, members voluntarily took on more restrictive forest use regimes hoping this would increase their carbon benefits.

Scholars have analysed the economy of expectation in REDD+, showing how this economy is constitutive of the trajectory of project implementation, and how the scheme's failure to meet local expectations presents a significant challenge not only for REDD+ but also for the future of conservation broadly (Fletcher, Dressler, Büscher, & Anderson, 2016, 2018). There are already reports of unmet REDD+ promises crowding out existing conservation values among local communities (Isyaku, 2017). Across many REDD+ sites communities have wait(ed) in vain for promised benefits (Fletcher et al., 2016; Massarella et al., 2018). In this case, waiting constitutes an experience of the violence of power, as Pierre Bourdieu (2000) argues. In waiting for REDD+ benefits, communities are made to invest precious time in compli cated REDD+ activities and procedures, part of what Milne and Mahanty (2018) describe as the bureaucractic violence of REDD+. Yet, as Bourdieu (2000 p231) observed, "a

person can be durably ‘held’ (so that he can be made to wait, hope) only to the extent that he is invested in the game so that the complicity of his disposition can in a sense be counted on”. In other words, waiting though reflects the violence of power exercised by REDD+, is still very much an aspect of communities' self positioning.

By 2014, Ekuri's certitude over REDD+ promises would begin to unravel. One jaded community leader summarised the situation as follows: “This is six years since the logging moratorium was placed in Cross River [in preparation for REDD+]. And unfortunately, expectations from communities have been dashed … because the promise they gave us suggested that REDD+ money would come soon” (Int. 27; also Int. 42). Under these conditions, divergent views would begin to emerge within the model community, reflecting the heterogeneous subjectivities, for instance, between the youth and the elders, and between community members and their leaders. As Li (2007) notes, while the workings of government inadvertently produce groups who identify common interests around which they can mobilise, these groups also have their own internal politics and differentiation along class, gender, ethnicity and age (see also Hall et al., 2015). While community leaders and most resource managers in Ekuri strongly backed a carbon forestry regime, the community youths were sceptical. As one of the youth leaders noted:

> the Chiefs are interested in REDD+; they are supporting it very seriously. They look forward to the money from REDD+ because they said they wanted to rest from farm work … Some of us are sceptical and our boys, especially those in town, do not support REDD+. They told us that REDD+ is a kind of colonialism …. Even if the idea was real, I don't think some of us will benefit from the thing (Int. 47, also Int. 41).

Closely linked to this trajectory of fractured community engagement are community practices that seek to re-appropriate REDD+ discourses in order to challenge the moral burden of deforestation.

6. The moral subject: repossessions from below and discourses of entitlement

In addition to a specifically neoliberal form of environmentality, REDD+ also employs a disciplinary environmentality which seeks to normalise particular moral values by which populations are expected to self-govern in fear of deviance (cf. Fletcher, 2017; McGregor et al., 2015). Through the mobilisation of technical expertise in proposals and reports, and through workshops, field demonstrations and community engagement activities, REDD+ aims to instil values which are thought appropriate for a proper REDD+ subject (cf. Leach & Scoones, 2013). The subject of REDD+ disciplinary environmentality is expected to engage with the calculative logics and legibility imperatives of carbon forestry, and act accordingly to shoulder the moral burden of forest protection. This moral burden thrust upon communities like Ekuri is linked to the problematic assumption in REDD+ that community livelihood activities are ‘drivers of deforestation’, a direct legacy of colonial and postcolonial vilification of local livelihood practices (Kashwan, 2017).

Li (2007 p26) points to the possibility of the claims and tools of government being "repossessed as demands from below, backed by a sense of entitlement". This is reflected in the ways that Ekuri community critically reframed REDD+'s moral demands, challenging its assumptions and re-embedding them within a longer history of community values and practices (cf. McAfee & Shapiro, 2010; Shapiro-Garza, 2013). Here, the Ekuri people not only emphasised their deep-seated ethical care for nature, they also infused their sense of morality and fairness into the world's relationship with them and their forests. Emphasising their historical and continued commitment to keeping the forests, this community espoused a sense of unconditional entitlement. They maintain that the world owes them, since their forests will continue to curb climate change even in the absence of REDD+. For instance, a member of the community queried "…. but we are keeping the forest and the forest continues to absorb carbon. We are sure the world is using it. So what is our own benefit as we keep the forest?" (Int. 32). This simply-stated critique reflects the perversity of placing the moral burden for addressing the world's carbon emission on the shoulders of poor communities like Ekuri.

Thus, starting partly with the knowledge passed on by REDD+ proponents, Ekuri's discourses put a moral demand on a world which has come to recognise the global importance of its forest. They maintain that any REDD+ negotiation must begin with an agreement that rewards communities for historical conservation efforts. Another Ekuri Chief expressed this demand and related concerns that the demand is not presently heeded: "It is crucial that our efforts be appreciated for the carbon that is already there" (Int. 27). This community thus emphasised its claim to being the historical custodian of the forest, one whose commitment to forest conservation predates (and will potentially outlive) REDD+ projects.

This discourse of entitlement is also linked to the ways that Ekuri questions the commensurability of reward under carbon forestry. REDD+ proponents had sought to enrol communities as co-producer of carbon through various field demonstration of forest measuration and carbon estimation one of which was carried out on sample plots in Ekuri forest. Communities wielded these calculations from the official carbon stock assessment exercises to estimate their potential monetary gains from REDD+. A community resource manager observed:

> as the official carbon measurement found, 500 metric tons of carbon per hectare accumulated in Ekuri forests over 2000 years. The additional carbon sequestered in our forest each year will be very insignificant. Our initial calculations show that benefits to us will be insignificant given the price of carbon today. Then add the fact that the money will be shared with everyone … with all the tiers of government and the communities and the consultants. So that is our greatest fear (Int. 27).

Ekuri's fears are well founded. Generally, a great deal of REDD+ funds have gone to consultants, international NGOs and development institutions, leaving local communities and governments to bear much of the cost of the scheme (Lund et al., 2016; CIFOR, 2016).

Where payments have managed to trickle down, they have been concentrated in the hands of a few, usually the elites, formal land title holders and other powerful actors who also dominate procedural mechanisms of programme design and multi-stakeholder deliberative spaces (Bastakoti & Davidsen, 2015; Chomba, Kariuki, Lund, & Sinclair, 2016). Moreover, preliminary benefit sharing documents in Nigeria's REDD+ put communities in a weak position (Asiyanbi, 2016).

Here, then, are some of the ways that Ekuri community appropriates carbon forestry's own logic of pilot carbon measurement to critically scrutinise promises of benefits made by REDD+ proponents. This shows how the reification of indigenous knowledge as the pure antithesis of scientific knowledge may not particularly reflect everyday realities of local communities (Turnhout, 2018). Yet, Ekuri employs this hybrid ethos in furthering its own notion of morality which, in this case, is in tension with the moral burden of REDD+. But this community's sense of morality and justice is deeply entrenched, allowing it to seek justice whether in instances of attempted elite capture of community resources (as discussed earlier) or in cases of state exclusion from forest use as the next section shows.

7. The unruly subject: resisting forest protection

Efforts to secure forests for REDD+ under failing incentives regimes and the linking of REDD+ to organised forest crime have meant the growing application of moratoria, stiffer law enforcements, intense surveillance and use of military techniques (Asiyanbi, 2016; Cavanagh, Vedeld, & Trædal, 2015; cf. LeBillon and Duffy, 2018; Mabele, 2017). This reflects a sovereign environmentality with the application of threat, law and punishment (cf. Fletcher, 2017). In preparation for REDD+, the Cross River State government in 2008 declared a logging ban. The ban was enforced by a militarised Anti-deforestation Taskforce which employed violent surveillance and policing techniques and hurled many local community members to forestry mobile courts where they were heavily fined or incarcerated (see Asiyanbi, 2016; Isyaku, 2017).

Ekuri initially embraced the logging ban with the expectation that it would remove much of the logging pressure from intruders, commercial timber dealers, and the state Forestry Commission which, under pressure to meet revenue targets, often canvassed for logging concessions in community forests. Its own historical pro-conservation values and the promised REDD+ benefits may also have galvanised Ekuri's early support for forest protection. Besides, the strategic valorisation of Ekuri by REDD+ proponents which is partly linked to the community's conservation values meant that it was spared from the worst brutalities of the Anti-deforestation Taskforce (See Asiyanbi, 2016). Thus, with respect to forest protection, Ekuri community's early responses reflected attitudes expected of a model REDD+ community whose tentative interests aligned with the governmental aim of forest protection.

However, from early 2014, things began to take a different turn as forest protection came to stand in the way of community development. Cross River State had secured a loan for rural access improvement across some of its rural hinterlands. Ekuri's 40 km access road was among those to be paved and tarred. The road project involved the felling of hundreds of trees. The community would request permission from the Forestry Commission and the Anti-deforestation Taskforce to salvage felled logs for use towards community development rather than allow the logs to rot away. The two villages of Ekuri had reached an agreement to use the proceeds from the salvage operations to facilitate the extension of the road construction into New Ekuri (7 km from Old Ekuri), since the government sponsored construction had stopped at Old Ekuri. But, to the community's surprise, the salvage request was declined by the Forestry Commission. The Chair of the Commission who doubled as the REDD+ coordinator for the state explained that Ekuri was an important REDD+ community, a model that must not be seen to be extracting and transporting timber under any conditions. This, he claimed, would send a negative signal to other communities, thereby undermining the logging ban. This exemplifies how REDD+ proponents sought to responsibilise Ekuri, reinforcing the moral demand on the community to act in ways befitting of a model REDD+ community.

This situation angered Ekuri community. The community would issue a biting protest letter, signed by about 500 community members and despatched to the Chair of the Forestry Commission. The letter dated 28th March 2014 reads:

> Is it that REDD+ is against salvage for the economic and sustainable development of forest dependent communities? Please what are your plausible reasons for not approving our application so that we and the world will know? … We demand without any reservation your approval of the salvage application to enable generation of needed funds to improve the access to New Ekuri from Old Ekuri …. For you to deny us our social, economic and resource rights is a non-recognition of our ownership rights of this forest, passion, efforts and commitment over the years in the conservation of our community forest which is globally recognised as the largest, best-managed communally-controlled forest in West Africa. Furthermore, your action is a clear violation of our rights as enshrined in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of the Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).

This letter confounded REDD+ implementers and state forestry officers. For instance, the Chair of the Forestry Commission was said to have read it "more than 10 times! He couldn't put it down" (Int. 27). Through this letter, the community challenged the carbon forestry regime on many fronts. Quite notable is Ekuri's deployment of an identity politics (cf. Li, 2004). Project documents devoted significant space to demonstrating that "there are no indigenous groups in Cross River", because of the stiffer safeguard measures this entails (Oyebo et al., 2010, p. 65). Thus Ekuri's assertion of indigeneity constitutes a mode of resistance, a way of refusing to be what they were being made to be (Foucault, 1982). The efficacy of this protest in general reflect for better or worse in the greater attention Ekuri now receives from REDD+ proponents. Still, that the community did not go ahead to

continue salvage process without state approval also reflects the limit of resistance in this particular instance. Communities like Ekuri also temper their strategies with the notion that one community leader wearily declared: “you can never win against the government” (Int. 27, also Int. 35). In this specific instance, it would seem that Ekuri, like Foucault, is suggesting that resistance is about limiting domination and not necessarily ending it (see also Death, 2010, 2016; Scott, 1990).[8] The next section presents a more intense community mobilisation against another threat to community wellbeing.

8. The mobilising subject: uneasy alignments and challenging state power

In May 2015, the newly-elected governor of Cross River, Governor Ben Ayade immediately made public a proposal to construct a superhighway 260 km long with 10 km-wide buffer on either side. The superhighway cuts through the length of Cross River forests, what is supposedly Nigeria's ‘last rainforest’, an internationally important biodiversity area made up of several community forests including Ekuri's. Governor Ayade made this proposal not oblivous of REDD+ activities in the state, but with a keen awareness of the frustration of his predecessor who was reported in a national newspaper as lamenting “that REDD+ did not yield a return on investment” (Ekott, 2016, p. 2). By October 2015, work on the superhighway had commenced. By February 2016, bulldozers clearing the forests were approaching Ekuri. Meanwhile, an equally unprecedented resistance in the history of Cross River State was swelling against the project. Protests, petitions, appeals and media campaigns brought together actors from the local level to the international level, including forest communities, conservation NGOs, international researchers, and development agencies.[9] Later in 2016, significant local and international pressure forced the federal government to prevail upon the Cross River State government to re-route the superhighway away from much of the forest areas and suspend the project until a satisfactory impact assessment had been conducted.

Unlike the others, this key moment of community technologies transcends the calculations of REDD+ proponents. Yet, it shaped Ekuri's subjectivity and comportment towards REDD+, thus reflecting another sense in which community technologies of the self can exceed the scope of government calculation (cf. Li, 2007). REDD+ proponents had to oppose the proposed construction as an existential threat to the scheme. Yet, more remarkable is the mobilisation across forest communities in Cross River, including Ekuri's own mobilisation to protect its forests from a direct and immediate threat. In this mobilisation, forest communities and REDD+ proponents find each other labouring on the same side, against a common threat posed by the state.

[8] To be sure, many other communities in Cross River have mounted outright everyday resistance (cf Holmes, 2007) defying the forest exploitation ban altogether (Asiyanbi, 2016).

[9] The campaign was supported or covered by international organisations and platforms including Heinrich Boll Stiftung, Rainforest Rescue, Mongabay, REDD-Monitor, World Rainforest Movement.

One of Ekuri's appeals to Governor Ayade and the Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari was a 5-page protest letter dated 16th January 2016. The letter was copied to 29 international organisations, including the World Bank, UNDP, UNEP, UNHCR and the Zoological Society of London. Sections of the letter note:

The Notice of Revocation has alarmed us greatly … and even the vulnerable and defenceless rivers and streams and living plant and creature in our forest are complaining bitterly …. [Revocation] will lead to loss of our culture against UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage …. [It] will leave us landless against our fundamental Human Rights as enshrined in the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and the International Labour Organisation number 169 …. We have for centuries conserved and managed our Ekuri community forests for its rich biodiversity and ecosystem services not only for our sustainable development but for the entire world …. Ekuri community forest stores several million tons of carbon contributing substantially to climate change mitigation at the local, national and global level …. This revocation is against the focus and programmes of the UNFCCC … and even the UNREDD+ programme for which Cross River is a pilot state. We consider the revocation a pogrom against us as published and a land grab in the guise of the superhighway …. Our ancestral deities in the forest are crying against this injustice of the highest magnitude in our history and their cries will never stop". (Ekuri, 2016)

Ekuri's struggle against the superhighway reflects its entrenched practice of mobilising against domination. It draws on the community's historical repertoires and new technological affordances. It used modern technology, creating a dedicated "Save Ekuri Forests" website for the campaign, using online campaign platforms (including avizz and rainforest rescue), and maps, videos, and narratives to mobilise international support.[10] Yet, Ekuri also invoked ancestors, traditional cosmologies and community heritage. The community combined a particularising ethos of indigeneity, culture and place with the universalising discourses of human rights, transnational camaraderie and ecosystemic connections. Its alliances were both local and transnational. It is, indeed, the community's strategic blending of discourses, tools, scales and networks that is most remarkable here, reflecting the spatial complexity of local mobilisations which is continually emphasised by critical geographers and political ecologists (Escobar, 2001). Indeed, Rocheleau (2015 p695) observed that resistance, though "rooted in place(s)", is often "rhizomatic in character, reaching across archipelagos of forest and farming communities and distant allies".

Clearly, Ekuri now mobilises the carbon forestry imperative and REDD+ in its rationalisation of forest protection. Yet, the community maintains this strategic alignment with REDD+ insofar as it bolsters its historically-articulated liberation rationality which underpins its current struggle as much as the previous ones, including earlier struggles against REDD+ itself. Gardner (2016) shows in the study of the Loliondo Maasai in Tanzania how Maasai

[10] The campaign website is accessible at https://www.saveekuriforest.com/ protest-letters.html.

communities forged an alliance with market-oriented ecotourism investors in order to challenge state oppression and assert land claims. Astuti and McGregor (2017 p445) traced a similar logic where the Indigenous People's Alliance of the Archipelago in Bahanei, Indonesia are aligning with "interests normally associated with green grabs to claim land back from state". It appears that communities learn to prioritise threats to their autonomy and wellbeing, and then draw on a bricolage of resources, institutions and alliances – including unlikely bedfellows – in order to challenge congealing oppression (Rocheleau, 2015; cf. Cleaver, 2012). Here, then, is one sense in which neoliberal conservation goals might coincide with what communities tentatively consider to be in their own interest (Holmes & Cavanagh, 2016).

9. Conclusion

Rocheleau (2007 p226) warns that "analysis of neoliberalism and environment is not complete without an equally thorough treatment of people's own experiences, analysis and values, as well as their actions and initiatives". We have responded theoretically by advancing a poststructural geographical analysis based on Foucault's technologies of the self. We have shown through the case of REDD+ project in Nigeria's Cross River what is at stake empirically. Our analysis offers at least three important insights into local engagement with neoliberal conservation.

First, the complexities of community engagement with neoliberal conservation cannot be fully explained by any single factor – whether internal factors such as the community's changing understanding of its own interests and strategies (Kashwan, 2017; Rocheleau, 2015) or internal differentiation along class, age, gender, religion, livelihood strategies (Hall et al., 2015; Li, 2007) or external factors such as the variegation of neoliberal projects themselves (Van Hecken et al., 2017) or the multiple constitutive governmentalities employed by proponents (Fletcher, 2017; McGregor et al., 2015). Rather this complexity should be understood as relationally forged between (tentatively) internal and external factors interacting in a historically and geographically contingent manner with other factors which – at least, in their origins – transcend the field of governmental calculation altogether. As such, to appreciate the ramifications of local engagement with neoliberal conservation is to understand them in terms of technologies of the self, allowing for the tracing of the multiplicity of aims, practices, rationalities and comportments that get aligned in the technologies of the governed.

Second is the properly strategic nature of the complexities of lo cal agency in neoliberal conservation. While we agree with Bluwstein (2017 p110) about the need to go beyond simple a priori conclusions about neoliberal conservation as something to be "supported or rejected", we however differ on their assertion that "those who have to live with it often do not have this choice". Rather, we argue that non-binary complexities are not merely (at least, not always) foisted on docile communities; they are rather actively co-constituted – no doubt, asymmetrically – by communities as part of their technologies for living politically

with powerful neoliberal conservation interests and structures (cf. Astuti & McGregor, 2017; Gardner, 2016; McAfee & Shapiro, 2010). And these local complexities are not arbitrary. Indeed, the strategic nature of community technologies is underpinned by enduring rationalities and repertoires for regularly struggling against congealing forms of domination whenever and wherever they emerge – whether from the state, market-based conservation interests or even local community elites. And the extent to which these struggles can and do actually deliver emancipatory outcomes (cf. Bryant, 2002) must be ascertained in the specific context of each mobilisation, as our study shows.

Third, analyses of local engagement with neoliberal conservation are critical not just for what they reveal about neoliberalism, but also because of the insights they grant into community aspirations, values and interests (Gardner, 2016; Shapiro-Garza, 2013). Such revelations are important in cultivating truly liberatory politics which Fletcher (2017 p314) rightly notes requires that we "identify and nurture forms of environmental management" out there that already seek to subvert and transcend neoliberal capitalism. Given, as we have shown, that communities do already have critical repertoires for engaging politically with conservation regimes with some success, emancipatory politics entails, as Kashwan (2017) notes, that we channel these local mobilisations into broader political processes with the aim of changing the broad structuctures that determine how rules (such as conservation laws) get formulated. Community values and their visions of a good life are, thus, basis for constructing more socially equitable and ecologically sustainable futures. Critical analyses of community strategies and a poststructural approach in particular can significantly contribute to these emancipatory projects.

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