

A Political Ecology of Northwest Amazonia:
Indigenous 'Management of the World' and the
Politics of Territorial Ordering in Colombia



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Declaration

I declare that this is my own work and has not been submitted in any previous application for a degree. The results presented here are from analyses that were carried out by myself, other contributions have been acknowledged.

Abstract of Thesis

This thesis provides a description of political conflicts derived from differences in perspectives of environmental management and governance for Northwest Amazonia (NWA). The methodology used is that of deconstruction of discourses, which are taken as constituents of reality.

There is a description of political conflicts involving indigenous organisations, religious institutions, conservation organisations, NGOs, the Colombian Government and a guerrilla group. It is suggested that conflict analysis promotes mutations in indigenous understanding of the world, all of which is reflected in the transformation of their environmental management practises.

A chapter is devoted to analysing the impact of State security policy in the development of indigenous' territorial rights. It is noticed that the Colombian and USA government discourses of security coincide in some relevant aspects. It is concluded that the derived policies increase environmental risks and hinder indigenous peoples' rights.

Survey forms are treated as an additional source of discourse and are used to illustrate different perspectives with respect to governance and territorial ordering in Amazonia. It is argued that inhabitants of the industrialised countries with access to Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in many senses share the responsibility for the actual state of affairs in NWA, as well as other parts of the developing world where there is precarious access to ICT. However, as access to ICT is highly restricted in the majority of the developing world, how might we attempt a 'social contract' at the global scale? By asking such questions of the reader, the author calls into question the validity of the concept of 'civil society'.

Central to the thesis is the idea that we are passing through a moment of conceptual 'dissolution': dissolution of the divide 'Indigenous Knowledge' / 'Western Sciences', of the distinction between 'Social Resistance' and 'Social Adaptation', and of the differentiation between 'Corporate Management' and 'State Security policy'. The thesis describes how this dissolution is occurring at the same time as cultural identity is mutating. The thesis goes beyond discourses surrounding the governance of NWA, by offering a contemporary critique of the concept of 'globalisation', and an attempt to locate it in the a 21st century cultural context.

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Abbreviations

- ACAIFI:** *Asociación de Capitanes Indígenas del Pirá-Paraná* (Association of Traditional Authorities from the Pirá-Paraná Resguardo Indigenous Reserve).
- ACIMA:** *Asociación de Capitanes Indígenas del Mirití – Amazonas* (Association of Traditional Authorities from the Mirití Resguardo Indigenous Reserve – Amazon).
- ACITAM:** *Asociación de Capitanes Indígenas del Trapecio Amazónico* (Association of Traditional Authorities from the Colombian Amazon).
- ACIYA:** *Asociación de Capitanes Indígenas del Yaigojé y el Río Apaporis* (Association of Traditional Authorities from the Yaigojé Resguardo Indigenous Reserve and the Apaporis River).
- AUC:** Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (United self-defence of Colombia) the association of Colombian para-militars.
- CANOA:** *Coordinación y Alianza para el Norte y el Oeste Amazónico* (Alliance and Coordination for Northwest Amazonia). CANOA associates NGO networks from Brazil, Colombia, Venezuela and the Andean Countries.
- CAP:** Corporación Autónoma del Putumayo (Putumayo Autonomous Corporation).
- CEPAL:** *Comisión Económica para América Latina* (Economics Commission for Latin America).
- CIC:** *Conservación Internacional – Colombia* (Conservation International – Colombia).
- COAMA:** *Consolidación de la Amazonía*, (Consolidation for Amazonia) the largest NGOs' Network operating in the Colombian Amazon.
- COICA:** *Coordinadora de Organizaciones Indígenas de la Cuenca Amazónica* (Coordination for Indigenous Organisations from the Amazon Basin).
- CRIVA:** *Consejo Regional Indígena del Vaupés* (Indigenous Regional Council from Vaupés – Colombia).
- DANIDA:** Danish Agency for Developmental Assistance
- ELN:** *Ejército de Liberación Nacional* (National Liberation Army).
- EU:** European Union
- FAO:** Food & Agriculture Organisation
- FAP:** *Foro Ambiental Permanente* (Permanent Environmental Management Forum).
- FARC:** *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia).
- GATT:** The General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
- GNP:** Gross National Product

IBRD: International Bank for Reconstruction and Development

ILO: International Labour Organisation

IMF: International Monetary Found

INCORA: Instituto Colombiano de la Reforma Agraria (Colombian Institute for the Agrarian Reforms).

IUCN: International Union for the Conservation of Nature

NGOs: Non Governmental Organisations

NWA: Northwest Amazon

OEA: *Organización de Estados Americanos* (OAS – Organisation of American States).

PAR: Participatory Action Research

UN: United Nations

UAESPNN: *Unidad Administrativa Especial del Sistema de Paques Nacionales Naturales* (Special Administrative Unit for the System of National Natural Parks).

WTO: World Trade Organisation

WWF: World Wide Fund for Nature