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Fostering collective subjectivities: Technologies of the self and resistance in Colombian community forest initiatives

Darío Gerardo Zambrano-Cortés [a,b,*], Jelle Behagel [a], Georg Winkel [a]

[a] Forest and Nature Policy Group, Wageningen University and Research, the Netherlands, Droevendaalsesteeg 3, Building/room 101/B315, 6708PB WAGENINGEN, The Netherlands
[b] Centro Interdisciplinario de Estudios Sobre desarrollo – CIDER, Universidad de Los Andes, Bogotá, Colombia

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ABSTRACT

Subjectivity is at the core of contestations in environmental politics. This article explores the dynamics of such contestations by analyzing how collective subjectivities relate to the state in a forest conservation context, drawing on three cases of community forestry projects in Colombia. It applies Michel Foucault's concept of technologies of the self and uses insights from social movement literature to analyze the process of collective subjectivity construction. The results highlight how subjectivities are shaped by resistance to state and extractive activities (i.e. mining and cattle ranching) on the one hand and by communitarian desires for political recognition on the other. Care of the environment was in all cases connected to a (historically) grown and shared identity of a specific community, including afrodescendant-, Amazonian peasant-, or indigenous identities to form a collectivity subjectivity. Collective subjectivities allowed communities to adapt to, and at the same time also resist volatile state environmental policy projects. Technologies of the self are used to create collective subjectivity, ranging from the appropriation of forest monitoring techniques to the establishment of community enterprises. Such collective subjectivities routinize a particular way of relating to the state and external actors, often opposing state interventions but frequently also tinkering with and adopting state technologies. We conclude by emphasizing that collective subjectivities draw from a heterogeneous set of discourses, strategies and technologies and are thus grounded in a fragile tension between peoples' historical experiences of marginalization and perceived opportunities for self-determination in connection to the natural environment, while responding to changing state interventions.

1. Introduction

In the last two decades, state power in Colombia has become increasingly entangled with discourses and practices of environmental protection. The development of national strategies and policies for biodiversity conservation, the maintenance of ecosystem services, and the mitigation and adaptation to climate change are features of a new policy context where environmental measures work at the interface of state and society. At first sight, the role of environmental discourses in redetermining and reinforcing state power in Colombia appears odd, given decades of preeminence of national development models that are based on extractivism, agroindustry, gold mining, and hydrocarbons (Ariza et al., 2020; Hernández Vidal, 2022; McNeish and McNeish, 2018; Sankey, 2018; Svampa, 2019; Vélez-Torres, 2014). This holds even more

true as these development models have led to the militarization of territories, the expropriation of land, and even the abolition of constitutional decision-making rights on behalf of the nation's interests (Higginbottom, 2005; Kaufmann and Côte, 2021; McNeish, 2017; Oslender, 2008; Sankey, 2014; Thomson, 2011; Vélez Torres, 2014; Vélez-Torres, 2016). There are, however, analogies between the old extractivist- and the new environmental strategies of the state. National parks, ecotourism, and biofuels, among others, have been used by the state to exercise control over forested and natural landscapes. The implementation of such strategies has been criticized for promoting a model of neoliberalization of nature (Krause, 2020; Montenegro-Perini, 2017; Ojeda, 2012), causing dispossession (Devine and Ojeda, 2017), and even for reproducing violence (Bocarejo and Ojeda, 2016; Ojeda, 2013).

* Corresponding author at: Forest and Nature Policy Group, Wageningen University and Research, the Netherlands, Droevendaalsesteeg 3, Building/room 101/B315, 6708PB WAGENINGEN, The Netherlands.
E-mail addresses: dario.zambranocortes@wur.nl (D.G. Zambrano-Cortés), jelle.behagel@wur.nl (J. Behagel), georg.winkel@wur.nl (G. Winkel).

The rise of environmental politics in Colombia has not only allowed the state to reposition itself in the political arena. It has also provided an opportunity for social movements to gain recognition and power in matters of governance and decision-making. In the last decades, environmental protection has bolstered social movements' agendas and has helped communities to build new relations with their landscapes (Del Cairo and Montenegro-Perini, 2015). Moreover, the adoption of environmental discourses and practices by social movements have helped them to pursue their alternative development agendas connected to bottom-up decision-making, with an emphasis on welfare distribution and decentralized economies (Escobar, 1998). Accordingly, environmental politics in Colombia increasingly shapes political dynamics between state and local communities today.

A critical aspect of environmental politics is the making of environmental subjects (Bocarejo, 2014; Del Cairo et al., 2018; Revelo Rebolledo, 2019; Valencia Ramírez, 2019; Zárate Acosta, 2021). Critical studies have pointed out how forest and nature have been used historically by states to exercise and rebuild power (Agrawal, 2005; McElwee, 2016).More recent inquiry focuses on the making of environmental subjects (Fletcher and Cortes-Vazquez, 2020; Loftus, 2020; Valdivia, 2015). Studies in this field illustrate how subjects are fostered to support notions of state-led conservation (Raycraft, 2020) and extractivism (Frederiksen and Himley, 2020; L. J. Jakobsen, 2022; Van Teijlingen, 2016), and to nurture particular ways of responsibilities in water, forest use and climate change(González-Hidalgo and Zografos, 2017; Hommes et al., 2022, 2020; Mills-Novoa et al., 2020, Owusu-Daaku and Rosko, 2019). These studies find that environmental subjectivities may reproduce discourses of privilege and exclusion but can also support local collectivities and politics of identity (Hickcox, 2017; Nepomuceno et al., 2019; Robinson, 2021). This suggests that with an increasing environmentalization of power, new collective subjectivities are emerging that can reshape local politics (Anand and Mulyani, 2020; Asiyanbi et al., 2019; Bose et al., 2012; Cepek, 2011; Choi, 2020; Müller, 2020). Multiple collective subjectivities thus swarm the political landscape as environmental policies intersect with history, gender, class and ethnicity, redefining power and interactions of society with nature in the process (Landy et al., 2021; Lau and Scales, 2016; Nightingale, 2011).

In Colombia, insight in the making of environmental subjects is key to understandi environmental politics (Del Cairo and Montenegro-Perini, 2015; Guilland and Ojeda, 2012). Guilland and Ojeda (2012) for example illustrate how the formation of a green peasant subjectivity based on ecotourism supports anti-narcotics state policies in Colombia. Similarly, del Cairo and Montenegro-Perini (2015) demonstrate how subjectivities are made and remade in the Amazon to legitimize state institutions, and Garcés Rallo (2022) and Valencia Ramírez (2019) show how the identity of the rural settlers in the Northwest of the Amazon is being transformed by engaging with practices and discourses of biological conservation. Alternatively, environmental subjectivities are also found to support political resistance in Colombia. Ulloa (2013), for instance, details how indigenous movements and environmental movements come together in political movements around ethnicity and environment.

In this article, we analyze the relation between social movements and environmental conservation in Colombia by exploring how environmental subjectivities are formed. Although there is an increasing recognition of the role of collective identity fueling social movements in Latin America (Flórez, 2014; Rodas et al., 2016), the literature on indigenous, peasant, and afrodescendant movements in Latin America has mostly focused on characterizing their emergence, historicity, recursion, and motives (Alvarez, 2018; Escobar, 2018; Stahler-Sholk et al., 2008), and has only recently recognized environmental subjectivity as one of its building blocks. Moreover, while environmental politics is shown to be one of the constituting elements for local movements (Quimbayo Ruiz, 2018; Ulloa, 2015, 2013), there is so far a lack of studies that investigates how social movements utilize environmental politics to derive their power, especially in the theory and practice of the links between power and resistance within social movements. (cf. Munck, 2020).

In the following, we highlight how environmental politics mediate and co-constitute environmental subjects. We utilize Foucault's technologies of self, i.e. "…the ways a human being turn(s) itself into a subject" (Foucault, 1982, pp 778) to explain collective subjectivities as social structures that follow from – but also may counteract- state and corporate power, through what Foucault calls counter conducts (Bashovski, 2022; Cadman, 2010; Death, 2016; Odysseos et al., 2016). First, we theorize social movements as an assemblage of discursively constituted knowledge and practices to which environmental issues are increasingly central. Next, we introduce Foucault's notions of subjectivity and technologies of the self and add insights from literature on social movements theories to explore how subjectivities are formed, and how resistance comes about. We then introduce the research methods and three cases in Colombia, after which we report our research results. We subsequently discuss environmental collective subjectivities by highlighting how these are shaped by diverse practices, technologies, and identities. We conclude the article with a reflection on the importance of such subjectivities for environmental politics in Colombia and elsewhere.

2. Social movements in Colombia

A social movement is an organized effort by a large group of people to achieve a particular goal, typically a social or political one. Social movements in Latin-American have been the topic of extensive literature for decades. Social movements have formed in response to questions of justice and (rural) inequalities, and have often promoted visions on development alternative to those of the state to tackle those phenomena (Murphy, 2024). In Colombia, social movements have strong ties to historical identities, including being afrodescendant, indigenous, or peasant (campesinos), to claim recognition, rights and decision-making power.

The history of contemporary social movements in Colombia began in the late 1960s with the formation of peasant movements. Those early movements articulated several interests, including tackling economic inequality, achieving land reforms, and recognition of ethnic minorities. While in the beginning they were influenced by anti-imperialist ideologies and coincided with developmentalist reforms in the continent (Veltmeyer, 2020), they soon fragmented because of differences in goals and means. The 1970s and 1980s witnessed a rise in armed organizations and unionism which made the fragmentation within the early peasant movements visible. In Colombia, this heterogeneity within social movements intensified following a new Constitution that provided many groups with substantial rights in 1991. The recognition of collective land, and the rights of afrodescendant and indigenous peoples led to a myriad of organizations pursuing different goals and drawing from different resources to attain them (Ramírez and Cobos, 2018, Velasco, 2015). The special rights based on general categories of indigenous or afrodescendant identities emanate from state-sanctioned categories, hence ethnic identities are the main if not the only option those groups have to claim special rights and to enact ethnic-based politics.

After adoption of the new Constitution in 1991, Colombia's social movements were characterized by resistance to neoliberal reforms. In the 2000s, action against extractivism-based development was added (Celis, 2017, Smart, 2020). However, such resistance was not equally shared by all movements. Cepek (2018), for instance, shows the ambivalence of the Cofan people whether to support or oppose the oil industry in Ecuador. Equally, Sankey (2017) describes how palm oil generated a schism amongst some peasant organizations in Colombia while Serrano (2023) found the palm oil industry to be viewed as an opportunity for rural livelihoods by other peasant groups. Both Sankey (2023) and Melo (2015) show such differentiation within social movements is influenced by demographic factors such as class, ethnicity and gender.

Over time, social movements have increasingly embraced ideologies and practices of environmental protection to respond to extractivist policies (Acuña, 2015; Villamayor-Tomas et al., 2022; Villamayor-Tomas & García-López, 2021). Environmental protection has furthermore strengthened social cohesion (Gudynas, 1992; Ulloa, 2013) and political leverage of previously marginalized groups (Montenegro-Perini, 2022; Osejo & Ungar, 2017). The adoption of environmental narratives by social movements shows how they search for means to legitimize their cultures and political claims (Cárdenas, 2014). By adopting environmental discourses, practices and knowledges, social movements add to the repertoire of strategies they have at their disposal to exert political agency (De Luis, 2020). Apart from open resistance to state policies and mobilization of groups, strategies include professionalization (Laurie et al., 2005), bureaucratization (Staggenborg, 2013), judicialization (Sieder et al., 2022), and technification (Ulloa et al., 2021) of daily operations. While some researchers indicate that grassroot movements have been coopted in mainstream policies by adopting such strategies (Dupuits et al., 2020), others argue that this diversification of strategies results from years of experience on how to counter state and corporate power (Erazo, 2011). Vela-Almeida (2020) refers to these as "mirror strategies" that can actually be employed by both state and private sector as well as social movements: states (Buu-Sao, 2021) and (illegal) corporations (Ballvé, 2013) are seen to also copy social movements strategies, adopting discourses and practices on environmental protection and community participation, among others.

3. Subjectivity and identity

Subjectivity is central to some of the work of Michel Foucault, who is well known for his analysis of assemblages of power-knowledge (Dews, 1984). Foucault argues that power is exercised by a particular rationality – a governmentality – which aims to "conduct the conduct" of (individual) subjects (Dean, 2010; Lemke, 2002; Miller and Rose, 2008) in favor of dominant (state) interests. As Mills-Novoa et al (2020) explain, subject behavior becomes the object of governmental intervention when political imaginaries are confined, contained, and neutralized so that new subjectivities become instrumental and constitutive of a particular vision. The formation of subjects, then, is the utmost manifestation of power, expressed through the creation of specific ways of relating, feeling and acting (Kelly, 2013). As the subject entails the possibility of being a certain kind of person, subjectivity debates coincide with a perennial anthropological discussion: what social identity and how it is formed (Banks, 2003; Bentley, 1987; Cornell and Hartmann, 2006; Gomes, 2013; Hale, 2004; Trigger and Dalley, 2010).

The concept of social identity overlaps in many parts with conceptualizations of subjectivity. Both identity and subjectivity are socially constructed and reproduced categories where social identifications are negotiable, historical, situationally dependent, and restricted by power (Chandler and Reid, 2020; Guenther et al., 2006; Jenkins, 2008). In this paper, we differentiate subjectivity from identity by using the latter as an ideal point of reference for a group, whereas subjectivity denotes subject-making practices (Zima, 2015). For instance, Bolívar Ramírez et al. (2006) present several examples how identity is mobilized to position subjects politically. They show how the Andean identity of coffee producer was the point of reference to rebuild a region after a devastating earthquake in 1999; they also show a green peasant identity as the point of reference for peasant associations in the North of Amazonia to become de-stigmatized from the settler-insurgent qualification; another example shows the mestizos (*chilapos*) in the west of Colombia situating their identity and adopting conservation thinking of afrodescendant ethnicity once they were recognized in the Colombian constitution in 1991.

4. Collective subjectivity

To consider social identity as a topic in governmentality studies entails the study of discursively constituted knowledge and practices that externalize and internalize such subjectivity/identity. Moreover, it involves treating social identity as inscribed with power relations between actors and the need to understand identity as a way to exercise power (Anthias and Hoffmann, 2021; Toha and Pepinsky, 2022).

Foucault argues that the production of subjects is the outcome of a balance between two groups of technologies (understood as assemblages of knowledges, practices and discourses): technologies of subjection and technologies of subjectivation (Audureau, 2003; Foucault, 2019a; Leask, 2012). Technologies of subjection are technologies *of government* that comprehend discourses, modes of operation, institutions and practices that ensure a regularized, efficient and docile individual, and which are exercised over *other* individuals (Foucault, 2019b). In contrast, subjectivation technologies are technologies *of the self* that form a subject by oneself (Foucault, 2019c). Subjects are constituted in the tug-of-war between both the (social) mode of subjection and the (individual) mode of subjectivation (Audureau, 2003; Dews, 1984). Both modes are often present in one single technology, which explains how technologies of government can become technologies of self and vice versa.

The notion of subjectivation is closely linked to the concept of counter-conduct (Cremonesi et al., 2016). As power is omnipresent, resistance to power is also exercised in multiple ways (Foucault, 1982). Foucault calls such resistances counter-conducts, the practices and mentalities of resisting the attempts to be conducted by others (Death, 2010). This not only refers to riots, protesting, agitating, dissenting and occupying, but also to everyday practices of misbehaving, disagreeing, boycotting, transgressing and outmaneuvering impositions with the aim of diverting the totalizing effect of subjection projects (Demetriou, 2016; Savransky, 2014). Subjectivation thus relates to reflexivity, self-knowledge, and discourses as well as practices that orient to self-forming (Cadman, 2010). Recent studies of modern protest movements around the world argue that collective subjectivity has been rising as a new social and political transformation of the subject (Bashovski, 2022; Dunst and Edwards, 2011; Lauri, 2019).

5. Resistance and transformation

The Latin American social movement literature has already explored the formation of collective subjectivities and their political-discursive and transformative practices. In her edited volume, Alvarez (2018) provides several examples of the diverse and multiple ways in which social movements engage with local and global politics. Social movements use collective identities to create, reproduce and challenge social categories, such as citizenship, community, rights, and democracy. Escobar (2018) argues that collective identity based on categories of afro-american, indigenous, or peasant (campesino) identities has been a fundamental part of Latin American social movements and that these identities have provided the steam to attain alternative ways of living. Stahler-Sholk et al. (2008) give account of the multiple strategies and motives that Latin American social movements articulate to rework relations of power, and to redefine participation and citizenship amidst state developmentalist and democratic reforms. Retamozo (2011) moreover argues that collective subjectivity is the main ingredient for social transformation, which is attached to the ways political subjects are formed through experience, memory and representations. These studies argue that rather than being a byproduct of individual resistance to power, social movements follow a collective logic, utilizing multiple strategies to aggregate individuals around a particular subjectivity and pursue social transformation.

Given the above, technologies of the (collective) self can be considered to gravitate around an ideal identity, which allows subjects to relate to the external world in a unified manner as to either resist and transform state and corporate power, or to be transformed by it. Thus, the

construction of collective subjectivity emerges "…within a game of more or less valid, more or less respectable social combinations in which the oppositions old/young, active/passive, rich/poor, above/ beneath combine to form something more or less good…" (Foucault, 2017 p 67). This is to say that the ideal identity is never fully reached, but only aimed for in technologies of the self that employ ambiguity and opposition to shape subjects as distinct from the state, but always with the risk of becoming state subjects at the same time. In the words of Žižek (1988), the collective subject is constructed from the selective negation and acceptance of forms of imposed subjectivities. Resistance to and embracing of imposed identities results in an identity that is collectively pursued as a strategy of power.

In this paper, we consider how collective identities as strategies of collective subjectivation, borrowing from Foucault's technologies of the self, aiming to resist and transform subjection (Zima, 2015). At the same time, we highlight how they may also be captured by state subjection to a certain extent. Used by collective subjects such as political parties, trade unions and governments, and, in our case, rural collectivities of indigenous, afrodescendants and peasants, collective subjectivation entails the creation of shared experience, practices and relations with external entities, human and non-human, usually in reference to an ideal identity such as "the coffee producer" or "the green peasant". Accordingly, collective technologies of the self also include an ethical endeavor, a form of ideal relation with others and the self (Allen, 2013). Ethics provide a basis to attain truth and strive for freedom to "be" sovereign over oneself as a collectivity, and to be "self-possessed", free from subjugating power (Foucault, 2019a, 2017). The envisaged collective truth is related to ethical considerations and principles that have to be internalized and practiced to materialize (Burkitt, 2002).

6. Cases and methods

To understand the construction of environmental subjectivities, we analyze three cases related to the implementation of forest conservation and agroforestry projects in Colombia by local communities. The cases are illustrative for how they present distinct responses by local communities to the same environmental policy discourse. These responses emerge in specific socio-economic contexts but relate to larger political projects of the respective groups that are tied to the identities of indigenous peoples, afrodescendant, and peasant groups respectively.

The first case focuses on the Pilar Indigena, a program implementing 140 conservation measures proposed by 173 indigenous communities across the Colombian Amazon. Indigenous peoples are recognized in the Colombian Constitution as ethnic collectives with, inter alia, special rights of collective property, government autonomy, autochthone education systems, and the right of free-and prior consent (FPIC) for any state and non-state development within their council boundaries. Pilar Indigena is part of the state-led program called Amazon Vision, a jurisdictional REDD+ program. This is a program of result-based payments bilaterally funded by the governments of the United Kingdom, Norway, and Germany. The Amazon Vision program was negotiated to allow indigenous groups direct access to funds via an open application. The case study encompasses several initiatives and therefore a wide range of perspectives that indigenous peoples employ to foster indigenous identity within this program. Projects gravitate around building political capacity of groups, recovering traditions (cooking, handcrafts, familiar agriculture, language) or land planning (including zonification, restoration and definition of property limits).

The second case is a voluntary carbon credit project with an important role for afrodescendant groups. Afrodescendant groups have special constitutional rights similar to indigenous people in Colombia. The Choco-Darien Conservation Corridor private project began in 2010 with an agreement between the US-based carbon credit company Anthrotec and COCOMASUR, an association of nine afrodescendant councils located in the Caribbean coast region, comprising nearly 13 thousand hectares of forest. The project is seen as an exemplary project because is the first well-known community forestry and REDD+ voluntary project in the region receiving payments.

The third case is Finca Amazonica, a private agroforestry project led by the Vicarage of Florencia, a Catholic church branch extending into four municipalities (Albania, San José del Fragua, Belén de los Andaquíes and Morelia) in Caquetá, an administrative region in the Northwest of the Colombian Amazon. Since 2006, the Vicarage intertwines catholic doctrine with agroforestry systems to nurture an environmental subjectivity based on the life teachings of Jesus Christ and self-recognition as Amazonian peasants. Since the 1960s, the region of Caquetá has been the target of several policies for colonization during different waves of migration from the Andes. These migration policies coincided with national conflicts and increasing demands by drug markets generating a context of land insecurity and political violence. Multiple attempts of the state to intervene in order to tackle poverty, to resolve land insecurity and to improve security failed to reverse the main drivers of these challenges, and ended in eroding trust in state institutions.

Methodologically, this paper draws upon ethnographic research and semi-structured interviews with key officers, stakeholders and members of international organizations, NGOs, local authorities, and community members. Fieldwork and interviews were conducted between June 2018 and January 2023. The 28 interviews aimed to understand the articulations of peasant, afrodescendant and indigenous within environmental projects. Interviews were carried out partially face-to-face and partially online. Ethnographic field work consisted of participant observation in 17 public hearings and workshops (Table 1) held by civic organizations or state institutions. Such events took place in different settings and places. Where possible, participation was physical; in parts however – also owing to the Covid restrictions – events were followed virtually or accessed through broadcasting or public recordings by organizers. Altogether, 34 h of recordings were generated while attending such events.

7. Results

7.1 The Pilar Indigena (Amazon Vision)

The Pilar Indigena comprises several projects concerning forest conservation, sustainable agriculture and non-timber products formulated by Amazonian indigenous peoples under the jurisdictional REDD+ program called Amazon Vision. Amazonian indigenous identity is a central concern in the Pilar Indigena. Among indigenous actors it is common to find assertions that this identity is built upon the Origin Law. The Origin Law refers to the orally transmitted rules that direct land use and food production, culture, the transmission of knowledge, the organization of societies and families, and relations with non-indigenous actors. Many indigenous actors attribute the subjugation of indigenous communities to the perceived erosion of Origin law. An indigenous official reflects:

Table 1
List of Events.

Events	Date
UNREDD + National Strategy	May 9th 2017
Environmental Summit Colombia	July 19th 2018
Local Visions of Deforestation in the Amazon	December 5th 2019
Public Audiences for the Amazon Vision	October 15, 16, 18, 29 November 5, 6, 12, 13,18 2019
Plan of Open Government	December 12th, 2019.January 12th 2020
A week for The Colombian Amazon	February 18th to 22nd of 2020
Presentation of results Amazon Vision	September 4th, September 10th
Strategic Planning for the Administrative region of the Amazon	November 11th, 2020
Dialogues on Deforestation	September 1st 2022

You know… tools, gizmos, the cellphone, crops we didn't know, come from outside and our people started to forget our language, the ways to cultivate, of cooking, the medicines… (Interviewee 04, June 2018)

The idea of recovering indigenous identity and the Origin Law is shared across the indigenous projects of the Pilar Indigena. A core orientation of these projects is to counter identity loss through nurturing self-government and indigenous culture. The premise of the projects is that previous interventions were detrimental to Amazonian indigenous identities. An indigenous leader put it in the following manner:

NGOs, the state, and other cooperation agencies … bring more problems than solutions and their money remains with them or their collaborators …. This money is for their ideas and hampers our indigenous identity which goes beyond the ways of producing, governing and healing.
(Interviewee 06, June 2018)

This indigenous leader is strongly asserting that external interventions came with alien ideas that kept indigenous communities dependent on the state and external agencies. Thus, indigenous authorities looked within the projects of the Pilar Indigena for support for collective indigenous identity: everyday tools for traditional land management, cooking appliances, and support for building a shared sacred place. These materials are key to "…maintain our community cohesive, living and acting as our ancestors… centered in the benefits of the community instead of the individual profit…" reflects an indigenous leader (Interviewee 5, December 2019).

The Pilar Indigena resulted from negotiations among the state and specially the OPIAC (the Colombian Amazonian Indigenous Organization). By prioritizing autonomous management and collective identity, indigenous organizations aim to achieve their ambitious political program. An indigenous official explains the political objective in the following manner:

We aim for indigenous nations that coexist with the Colombian state, not that belong to them… ruled by their own government and finance, organized along their own cultures and system of education, a nation with its own collective identity.
(Interviewee 02, December 2019)

Thus, the quote exemplifies the resistance to state's alienation, and the autonomy pursued by indigenous peoples. However, the collective identity had to be negotiated. Funders asked for the protection of water, forests and sustainable land management practices, thus, indigenous identity was framed in those terms. Indigenous groups are constantly described in the official documents of the Amazon Vision, and self-referenced by indigenous groups, as "natural-carers" – with an "ancestral" lifestyle and "depositaries of ancestral knowledge" as. The Pilar Indigena had to align funders' imaginaries of the Amazon (as threatened forest) with those of 62 indigenous Amazonian cultures to form one single Amazonian (indigenous) identity (Andoke et al., 2023).

Accommodating funder's requests via reshaping identity was not a novel experience. Indigenous identity is the cornerstone of the political struggle of indigenous peoples in Colombia, so identities have had to abide to funders' terms to access funds already in the past (Zambrano-Cortes and Behagel, 2023). Hence, environmental "jargon" is routinely incorporated in the rhetoric of indigenous leaders, as the below example from an interview with a leader of the *Andoque* community shows:

[With the project] we looked to strengthen autonomy and self-government… because self-government is part of the conservation of our forest in the Amazon and environmental governance (…) The project provided the malocas to each of our settlements, a place to share… but also a place to value culture and self-government (…).We are our territory, we have a forest to conserve, we have an ancestral knowledge and we want that the other civilization, the other science of the whites is shared with us because we have ancestral knowledge

of inhabiting the forest and sustainable use of our natural resource. (Interviewee 20, July 2022)

The formation of indigenous identity in relation to state projects is a crucial element for both the long-term indigenous political agenda of self-determination and the environmental agenda of REDD+ supporting the Pilar Indigena. To build the Amazonian collective indigenous identity, a wide variety of projects ha been agreed upon that mix and merge support for "traditional" activities with technicisms, practices and knowledges of (state) conservation science. Activities specifically focus on traditional indigenous practices including the provision of infrastructure, the *maloca* [The ceremonial building], the *chagra* [the small agricultural form of production], the exchange of seeds, and in a broader sense the role of women in family care. Several projects intertwine local needs with environmental concepts and Western notions of community-based enterprises, ecotourism, or forest restoration. Furthermore, surveillance and capacity building activities are agreed upon to monitor the sustainable management of the collective land.

The Pilar Indigena narrative emphasizes the protection of indigenous knowledge and practices as linked to the protection of forest and connects those to indigenous identity. Testimonies from the projects argue that the aim is to "…go back to roots", to "de-westernize", and to "remember and rescue" the indigenous knowledge and practices lost due to cattle ranching to enable environmental conservation. A woman participating in a special project on the role of women describes this process of reintroducing indigenous practices and hence identity:

We found that many women did not know about the *chagra (domestic harvest plot)*, they never went to the *chagra* and did not know how to harvest, neither the ecological calendar nor do (they) know (how) to cultivate and process yuca…we also rescued seeds, we have lost many seeds of the chagra due to many factors… With the project I could learn all the autochthone knowledge, the gastronomy and the utensils for it. (Interviewee 24, July 2022)

The above exemplifies how environmental ideas support the reconstitution of indigenous identities and knowledge practices. Cepek (2011) already provided a similar example in Ecuador where conservation projects leverage Cofan peoples ambitions. The projects of Pilar Indigena provided the opportunity to "…recover an Indigeneity long time lost", as a Coreguaje leader explains, and modernize this traditional subject into a political subject that directly connects to national and international environmental policy agendas. In that way, through relating to environmental knowledge, practices and discourses, indigenous identity becomes a powerful concept resonating with Western actors and global political agendas.

7.2 The Biocorridor Choco-Darien

The REDD+ project "Biocorridor Choco-Darien" has since 2010 been used by nine afrodescendant councils under the major council called COCOMASUR to create an Afro-American identity related to care of the environment. Already before the introduction of REDD+, state recognition of their collective property in 2005 prompted the COCOMASUR community to make efforts to secure the long-term survival of the newly gained territory. An interviewee describes their political project around afrodescendancy:

Afrodescendancy was the necessary vehicle to gain rights, so since land was titled to us [2005], it became the axis of COCOMASUR to build upon the ancestral land. REDD+ arrived a couple of years later [2009] and we saw an opportunity to foster the ancestral ways of living tightly with the forest and its sustainable use…People were dispersed by that time because of the armed conflict…so why not return to the land and believe again in living as our ancestors, living autonomously…
(Interview 25, January 2023).

"Afrodescendancy" coincided among interviewees as the necessary element to gain land rights, and thus important to nurture further. At the same time, this collective identity was threatened by armed displacement, mining, and cattle ranching. A member of the forest monitoring team reflects that the arrival of REDD+ coincided with the needs of the community to ground collective identity and rights in material means (Interviewee 29). The practices of REDD+ then provided the means to recover such collective identity as another council member recalls:

> After obtaining the collective property, we started to think about ways to leave this to next generations… to conserve forest, water and nature is also to nourish our identity and traditions, the way our ancestors used to value and use the forest… so we saw in REDD+ a way to strengthen our collective project. (Interviewee 28, January 2023)

COCOMASUR hence conceives a long-term project of subject-making through the REDD+ project. This subjectivity of afrodescendant is tied to ancestral ruling and self-recognition, and the conservation of the standing forest. The standing forest is a model that "generates richness from the interaction of nature and people [and not from its exploitation]" (Interviewee 21). This identity aligns well with new environmental policy narratives, and counteracts identities tied to cattle ranching and extractive mining, which are associated with deforestation, contamination of water and a model of development detrimental to communitarian survival. An interviewee summarizes:

> After land titling we agreed upon all the councils that neither mining nor cattle was welcome here in our territory…industries brought violence, dismembered the community and damaged our legacy, material and spiritual, …we want the forest and the peace that our ancestors inherited.
> (Interviewee 27, January 2023)

This view that collective identity served to resist external actors, state or corporate, is strongly affirmed by other interviewees. The testimony also suggests that state recognition was not enough, but the overall legacy needed material support, "something to fight for" in the words of the Major Council Leader.

In the "Biocorridor Choco-Darien" project, collective subjectivity is supported by modern forest monitoring technologies. As part of the REDD+ project, GPS based mapping and monitoring provided the means to foster the new collective identity, and helped to build the afrodescendant identity:

> Our forest has been losing cover each day … our neighbors are cattle ranchers that were clearcutting our forest … with (forest)monitoring we were able to stop the invasion of cattle ranchers and expel small-scale miners external to our community … with monitoring and the technical capacities we were able to demonstrate to the community that defending the forest is also to defend our identity and our rights, and we earn more conserving than deforesting.
> (Afrodescendant interviewee 26, January 2023)

The testimony shows that forest monitoring became a self-affirmation tool. For the afrodescendant community, forest monitoring became essential to appropriate the land they claimed to be their own, and to defend it against external actors. Within the REDD+ project, patrolling is done on a weekly basis by the team in charge, in addition, there are community walks in which all members of the community participate. A member of the monitoring team explains:

> We have lost for many reasons the practices of our grandparents of walking two or three days all together through our territory. They walked to assign this land to one person or the other, or to ask why they did this or why they cut the other tree. It was a way to check our collective rules and agreements, and helped to control the autonomy of the territory so other people external from the community did not enter. With REDD+ we recovered this practice. We have a forest

> team in charge of that, they do it daily and check where we can use some of the forest. We have been supported technically and we have GPS and knowledge to make parcels. …. it is a beautiful exercise to recover bonds and to appropriate the territory, the forest and the water.
> (Interviewee 22, January 2023)

This testimony shows the manifold aims that the REDD+ technical protocols may fulfill.

"Monitoring is for defense and to demand", mentioned a major councilor. REDD+ not only works for law enforcement, but is also understood as a tool to nurture a sense of collectivity and to recover traditions tied to an afrodescendant identity in order to build a political subject. Geographic information systems thus legitimize local claims of land rights towards the Colombian government and nurture the self-recognition of the community as consisting of subjects bearing unique collective rights.

In addition to through monitoring practice, the REDD+ project materializes subject making via jobs and income. REDD+ projects pay forest patrols, councilors and administrative teams. This could not happen without translating REDD+ premises into the collective project. As an interviewee pointed out, it was critical for the afrodescendant communities that knowledge and skills remained with them to support their vision of safeguarding traditions and controlling their territory. The entwinement of technology and identity is illustrated by the motto of "making the technical communitarian and the collective technical", in the words of a representative of COCOMASUR, which denotes how technical forestry elements are linked to negotiating environmental subjectivity.

To conclude, REDD+ materializations such as monitoring, reporting and verification sustained the project of nurturing a collective afrodescendant subjectivity. Specifically, REDD+ forest monitoring was implemented in a manner to mimic traditions of land management relevant for the collective endeavor. Identity categories such as the technician, the afrodescendant, and the collective were re-negotiated through mobilizing technological and financial elements of a global environmental framework. The collective subjectivity is therefore key to both maintain land rights vis-à-vis the state and to uphold alternative ways of being, based on a constantly communicated close and traditional relationship to the (standing) forest that also follows modern norms of environmental protection.

7.3 The Finca Amazonica

Finca Amazónica is a major project to support peasant movements in the Caqueta region. Since 2006, the regional Vicarage of the Catholic Church intertwines catholic doctrine with agroforestry systems to nurture an environmental subjectivity based on the life teachings of Jesus Christ and on self-recognition as Amazonian peasant. The identity model moreover follows the apostolical exhortation of Pope Francis "to search and self-incarnate within the Amazon to provide to the church new faces (Christians) with Amazonian traits" (Francis, 2020, 47). This exhortation further explains that Amazonian biodiversity is essential to proclaim Christian values. One parishioner describes Amazonian identity during a ceremony of the Finca Amazónica as follows:

> … regardless of the place you come from … by cultivating and building the Caquetanian identity, the Amazonian peasant … it is something that is not forgotten … that characterizes us, identifies and support us along the way
> (Interviewee 15, September 2022).

In contrast with the cases of the Pilar Indigena and Choco-Darien Biocorridor that aim to recover and sustain a lost identity, the Finca Amazonica seeks to build a new Amazonian identity. This Amazonian peasant identity is built upon migrant narratives and Christian ceremonies. Special masses are built along Christian symbolisms that include

everyday objects of peasantry in the Amazon: fire, pilon, hoe, and hat, together with Amazonian flowers, plants and fruits. Peasant imaginaries relating to migration are reinvigorated to build rapport amongst parishioners. The ceremony presents the hard life faced by migrants from the Andean region moving to the Amazon during the mid-twentieth century and the struggles of the following generations. An interviewee recalls:

> I have been here 42 years … this was only jungle which we started to cut to claim land … the state provided some money and tools at the beginning but it was insufficient to settle a good land, we found that this was tougher (than in the Andean lifestyle), and with my wife and a child we constantly watched with despair the *jungle* and questioned whether we should return. (Interviewee 18, September 2022)

The new Testament's parable of the Sower and Christ's suffering is used to nurture the collective subjectivity. In anniversary masses, a small road with dirt, soil, and stones is built in the middle of the room to represent the different stages of the parable and also to illustrate the migrant's road lived by generations of settler families. Each stage is accompanied by exhortations to peasant struggles for land and justice; parts of the gospel connects to the Pope's 2015 encyclical on protecting earth (Laudato Si') and the UN's declaration of peasants' rights of 2018. In this manner, the mass not only fosters Christian values, but also supports social mobilization against extractivism and creates an Amazonian identity.

The Amazonian identity aims to counteract the feeling of uprootedness of the peasants. Uprootedness is voiced in diverse ways in social media of Finca Amazónica, and explained by a peasant not belonging to Finca Amazónica:

> You know…they (indigenous people) … you see them speak … and you can see this feeling of belonging of something that is inside them … of attachment to their land … we in our hamlet we don't see that, people do not care, and everyone is on their own.
> (Interviewee 14, September 2022)

The uprootedness felt by Amazonian peasants is both historical and contemporary. Historically, political violence that characterized Colombia during the twentieth century produced displacement and migration of Andean peasants towards the Northwest of the Amazon. Later, during the 1970s, agrarian policies incentivized colonization and settlements in the Amazon under the premises of modernity and progress, leaving poverty and hopelessness behind (Molano, 1989). The peasants arriving in the Amazon hold Andean premises of taming nature to survive, but became overwhelmed by the Amazonian ecology. The Andean productive model of the 1950s of cut and sow did often not succeed in the new environment, leaving first cattle ranching and later coca crops as the only productive model, to the detriment of the Amazonian forest (Torres, 2018).

The collective identity of the Amazonian peasant serves to resist economic models imposed in the region by state and non-state actors. These include the introduction of illegal crops (coca) in the 1990s and the upsurge of political violence, related to the intertwinement among state, *para*-state, communist guerrillas and narcotraffic which serve as backdrop to social conflict (Acero and Thomson, 2021; Rodríguez and Rodríguez, 2018). In the 2010s, resistance raised against Emerald Energy − the State-supported oil company − and by extension against the extractivist economic model.

In the last twenty years, rural movements have organized protest, raids, and mobilizations against state policies of coca eradication and oil extraction, which were in turn characterized by violence and killings, and often failed to settle social conflicts (Rojas-Bahamón et al., 2021). Altogether, this resulted in the state stigmatizing any grassroot-based organization, wilting trust, and atomizing families (Acero and Thomson, 2021; Ramírez and Ramírez, 2022). An interviewee summarizes his experience:

> Let me tell you, petroleum has been for years a threat to the Amazonian peasantry. It threatens the water and nature from which we peasants make our daily living. It threatens our community because it attempts to weaken our organizations and unity through death threats, bribes and violence. We have peacefully demonstrated, refused the entrance of oil companies and technicians and all Caqueta joined their voice to protect water and territory, the support of the Amazonian peasant.
> (Interview 16, September 2022)

The uprootedness and community atomization shared among many of the Caquetenean inhabitants is accompanied by a feeling of uncertainty because of armed conflict the unstable income and isolation of some peasants. "We have nothing here, except our families and land" reflects a peasant from Solano, a settlement located four hours by boat from the main city. Hence, the Finca Amazonica appeals to this sense of isolation to create a unity among settlements.

The Finca Amazonica project nurtures the Amazonian peasant identity to counter the sense of isolation and uprootness, for example through small-scale agroforestry projects. These projects aim to promote family-based agriculture by mixing rotary cattle ranching with agroforestry and the use of (non-wood) native forest products. It strives for a peasant identity that builds upon ideas of sustainable use of the land, of local products and community support. A volunteer of the archdioceses explains:

> The idea is that in a small place, the rural family unity, everything is produced, and no one depends on external products. We prove that the model imposed by cattle ranching – that is based on the premise that the Amazon is unproductive and that we have to bring everything from outside – is a lie … we prove that we can produce everything (naming vegetable and fruits) to sustain a family and a dignified life.
> (Interviewee 19, September 2022)

The small production model of Finca Amazonica resists the state-led models of monocultures (such as palm oil) that have been slowly introduced in the region during the last three decades. Corporate agroindustries are viewed as detrimental to the environment and the rural collectivity because it hampers the self-sufficiency and community cohesion, affirm the interviewees. The ecological principles of production of the Finca Amazonica are positioned against the state and corporate development models. Moreover, they are justified by the Pope's call to take care of the "common house" (Francis, 2015). Christian symbols such as the prayer of "Our Father" are transformed to incite social mobilization and political resistance. A transformed prayer "Ecological Our Father" interlocks parts of the original prayer with exhortations to care for the water, to decry the ecological damages of multinationals, and to call for *buen-vivir* and socio-ecological justice. A chant raised during a national strike, where the vicarage helped to organize peasant mobilizations to the capitals, says:

> Man: Water for life!
> Group: Not for death!
> Man: with Jesus we will open a gap!
> Group: Because water is a right!
> Man: We live, we feel!
> Group responds: Caqueta is here!
> All together: Hey foe, join to the crowd, water is a right, yes sir!
> (Footage Archive of peasant Mobilizations in 2021)

Raids and demonstrations are also an important element to build the sense of community among rural inhabitants and to externalize opposition. The prospective of oil expansion in the Amazon, incarnated in the Emerald Energy Company, is seen as threat not only for the environment, but also for peasants' collective identity. Thus, organized demonstrations are accompanied by Christian rites and sharing of food.

The Finca Amazonica further nourishes collective work by organizing peasant markets and an exchange of native seeds between neighboring villages. Locally produced vegetables and products such as cheese and panela (solidified sugar cane juice) are offered in the local peasant markets. A peasant interviewee refers to this local economy as follows:

> No, I don't sell too much, everything is produced on my farm and I offer panela when I need other products… I have everything and all I get is from the same people of the town. (Interviewee 13, September 2022)

The peasant markets are organized any other day in different municipalities and epitomize collectivity, generosity, and self-organization articulated in the allegory of the common house of the Pope's encyclical "*Laudato Si*'" (Francis, 2015a). The Amazonian peasant identity builds upon solidarity to restore social relations atomized by the armed conflict with the state and driven by large-scale business interests. Collective mobilization moreover protects the common house against oil companies and consumerism that threatens God's legacy on earth with pollution and contamination. Similar findings by Mills-Novoa et al. (2023) show how climate adaptation projects are reworked to counter the advance of the mining sector while van Teijlingen (2016) in Ecuador discuss the adoption of environmental subjectivities to counter territorializations of extractive industries. In the case of Finca Amazonica the common house, God's creation, is safeguarded once the family, as Christian sacrament, is protected through water, land rights and food sovereignty.

8 Discussion

This paper presented the formation of collective subjectivities of non-state actors within the context of environmental political agendas, focusing on the diversity of practices used and adapted to achieve such collective subjectivities in three cases. In all cases, collective subjectivities were built and nurtured in reference to an identity, either historical, imposed, or aspirational. Specifically, particular versions of indigenous, afro-descendant, and peasant identity were referenced to respond to state policies and the expansion of extractive practices.

A collective subjectivity was achieved by interweaving environmental elements with traditional, legal, and religious elements at discursive and material levels, to create an environmental subject that at times appears contradictory (Jakobsen, 2022). In the indigenous case, indigenous Amazonian authorities support Western imaginaries of both the Amazon and indigeneity (see also Zambrano-Cortes et al 2023), homogenizing the needs and cultural differences within Amazonian indigenous peoples and thus reinforcing existing North-South relations. At the same time, afrodescendant communities use these imaginaries to strengthen or bring back traditional knowledge and practices. And we find that Amazonian peasants interweave Catholic references to "our house" with their own social histories and political struggles.

The phenomenon where local communities strategically connect "fragments" of historically available national and local identities with globalized discourses and policies is visible in the rich set of subjectivation technologies that were used in the three cases to form new collective identities. These technologies draw on cultural, political, and spiritual practices, including the creation of new (community based) administrative responsibilities to conserve forests, the adoption of new technologies, and the mobilization of political action. For instance, the Finca Amazonica case is illustrative for the skillful cultural and religious rituals the peasant movement has created to align their way of life with a new collective environmental subjectivity. Furthermore, Finca Amazonica illustrates how localized markets and political marches can foster Amazonian peasant pride. In the Choco-Darien case, collective monitoring by rural communities are used to promote a new collective identity, while indigenous projects under the Pilar Indigena combined requests for rescuing traditional practices of cultivating, weaving and

social organization with demands for modern technologies. These techniques are in line with the observations of community forest initiatives in India by Singh (2013) and forestry projects around Mapuche territories in Chile by González-Hidalgo and Zografos (2017) that rituals, collective walks, ceremonies, routinized practices of care, and reterritorialization can be used to promote a sense of belonging and environmental attachment.

The cultivation of collective subjects often results in individuals becoming acquiescent to state or corporate interests through techniques of subjection. A prevalent method of implementing these techniques is through participation. As analyzed by Mills-Novoa et al. (2020) and Notoña (2022), participation technologies are designed to produce subjects who internalize the logics and practices of the state. Corporations are equally devoted in transforming subjectivities. For example, Frederiksen and Himley (2020) demonstrate that extractivist corporations deploy modes of subjection through selective participation and state-like roles of provider of public services. Similarly, van Teijlingen (2016) finds that in Ecuador, education plays a crucial role in reproducing modes of subjection and creating subjects aligned with the mining industry. The article further highlights that the transformation of subjects can also occur through the modification of environments, which offer facilities and benefits. These benefits, however, introduce dilemmas, as Jakobsen (2002) discusses in a case in Colombia, between resisting the allure of these benefits, or embracing them and becoming subjected individuals.

This article shows that subjectivation can be used by communities to counter the influence of state and corporate power. While environmental discourses and practices are important to enable collective identity, the subjectivation techniques equally carry elements of subjection to state monitoring and state bureaucracies in them. While the catholic mass of the Finca Amazonica enables the creation of a collective peasant identity, it also excludes alternative identities not rooted in formalized religion. Collective forest monitoring in the case of Biocorridor Choco-Darien moreover became a strategy to claim control over community territory but was also serves to monitor community behavior within the settlements, likely ostracizing dissent and benefiting the central council.

The disciplining and constraining consequences that come with subjectivation techniques that aim to counter state and corporate power partially can be traced to the historical intersections with identities and institutions from which collective subjectivities are drawn to maintain political relevance and legitimacy (Anthias and Hoffmann, 2021, Bose et al. 2012, Noroña 2022). Collective subjectivities have aligned with colonial powers and central state driven initiatives in the past, as highlighted by the works of Scott (1998) and Agrawal (2005), among others. Erazo (2010) shows the emergence of indigenous-based enterprises – which could be interpreted as indigenous emancipation in capitalist terms – whereas Buu Sao (2024) shows that communal enterprises were run by indigenous groups but led by extractivist corporations. In line with that, Nepomuceno et al. (2019) shows that community-based restoration can serve to legitimize extractive industries in the eyes of local communities.

The ambiguity we find that comes with adopting REDD+ and other environmental discourses to further local aims and interests while reproducing state and corporate practices is reported on more often in environmental conservation (Benjaminsen et al., 2013; Mukono and Sambaiga, 2021). For Colombia, Rodriguez & Boelens (2015) show that payment of ecosystem services has been able to rapidly create consensus amongst diverse social groups, yet it also creates subjects who conform to state ideas and legislation. In a different but related manner, engagement with REDD+ activities has been found to encourage community members to access the market for wood and other non-wood products more efficiently (Gutiérrez-Zamora et al., 2023; Mukono and Sambaiga, 2022; Setyowati, 2020), and thus to adapt to globalized markets. Arguably, such adaptations to state or corporate schemes come with the risk of undermining alternative subjectivities and strategies.

For instance, social movements envisaging alternative trajectories of development and change, and resorting to strategies of direct protest and resistance, may be coopted and constrained. Hence, new collective identities may provide communities with new subjectivities that create access to national and international policies and resources, but at the same time limit their ability to represent diverse voices and perspectives (Dupuits et al 2020), or to outright oppose such interventions.

Notwithstanding the dangers of subjection and cooptation, we argue that "modernized" collective identities provide new leverage points for advancing "old" alternative political agendas through the specific technologies they adopt, including rituals, technologies, and political practices. Teijlingen & Dupuits (2021), Staggenborg, S. (2013), Lederer & Höhne (2019), and Ulloa et al (2021) all argue that bureaucratization, technification, and professionalization of social movements may be risky, but that they also provide alternatives to legitimize collective claims, reach new channels of communication, and can transform long lasting conflicts between the state and rural communities by building upon shared grounds. This also touches on the questions of reciprocity – meaning how states, the international environmental community, or corporations respond to such identities, in the interplay of various interests and power strategies.

The revitalization and redefinition of collective rural identities – in response or opposition to external conceptions of environment and development – is the common pattern across all three case studies analyzed in this paper. It raises challenging questions about how newly formulated environmental subjectivities rooted in historical rural identities will evolve in the future, and whom, what interests, or what ideas these identities will ultimately serve. Understanding the consequences of collective environmental subjectivation in the interplay of state and international policies with local communities and markets remains a highly interesting endeavor for future research, to which this article offers a modest contribution.

9 Conclusions

In this article, we have shown that collective subjectivities can be understood as a source of power. This power follows from building collective ways of relating, knowing and feeling with forests, and enables communities to cope with, and at the same time resist to, external pressure and alienation. Colombian indigenous, peasant and afro-descendant people have for a long time related their identities to forest conservation in order to resist extractive industries or large-scale cattle ranching. Environmental projects provide the political setting for this. The collective subjectivities we analyzed operate along a continuum between conforming to policy and state projects and maintaining local autonomy. This ambivalence of the created new identities, and the tension it brings across, is a key finding of the three case studies.

If the assertion that environmental subjectivities have become the *sine qua non* of politics (Anand and Mulyani, 2020; Asiyanbi et al., 2019; Bose et al., 2012; Choi, 2020; Cortes-Vazquez and Ruiz-Ballesteros, 2018; Erazo, 2010) is correct, the newly formed subjectivities we have assessed hold potential to reshape Colombian politics. Specifically, these subjectivities endorse particular ways of understanding and managing the environment in opposition to extractivism as an exploitative way of relating with nature, but also in contrast to strict conservation and "hands-off" approaches. Building collective subjectivity is therefore not only about a struggle against a state or an economic activity, but also a fight for being, feeling and becoming. Such intricacies point to broader debates in the Latin American context of the politics of knowledge, identity and furthermore the Pluriverse, the multiple and overlapping ways of relating with nature that has been described for this continent (Escobar, 2018a; Reiter, 2020).

The cases analyzed in this paper, finally, shed light on debates about post-development. They are exemplary for the subjectivities that are created around narratives that intermingle environmental protection, local (rural) identities and alternative pathways for development in Colombia and beyond. And yet, many of those initiatives around the world remain unrecognized and are stigmatized through a long history of state-led, hierarchical mode of nature conservation (Alvarez and Coolsaet, 2020, Lenzi, et al 2023). In Colombia, for over three decades, many similar initiatives to the ones analyzed in this paper have emerged. The Colombian government is currently advocating for a transition from an extractivist to a bioeconomic model of development, which does include conservation. The subjectivities mapped in this paper provide multiple possible connection points for such a state vision, including a vision that recognizes the various alternative ways of relating with nature expressed by the environmental identities observed in this paper rather than trying to replace them through state subjugation. These localized movements thus provide a potentially powerful reference point for conservation and sustainable resource use in opposition to larger drivers of capitalist development.

To conclude, collective environmental identities evolve in response, and dialectical with, superordinate environmental and development projects. They can be deployed as a strategy of resistance but may also serve as an access point for localized environmental development that recognizes non-state subjectivities. The creativity that has enabled the construction of those collective subjectivities, their being rooted in socio-cultural history and land use traditions, and their ability to respond to major state or business-driven discourses and policies of exploitation, gives confidence that rural environmental subjectivities in Colombia can and will play a significant role in Colombia's struggle for more sustainable development pathways in the future.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Darío Gerardo Zambrano-Cortés: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Jelle Behagel:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Supervision. **Georg Winkel:** Writing – review & editing, Supervision.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

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