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Keri Vacanti Brondo
Michigan State University

Laura Woods
School of Environment and Development, University of Manchester, UK

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Articles

Garifuna Land Rights and Ecotourism as Economic Development in Honduras' Cayos Cochinos Marine Protected Area

Keri Vacanti Brondo¹ and Laura Woods²

Ecotourism has been embraced by a number of developing nations hoping to improve their economies in a way that is environmentally and socially responsible. The Afroindigenous Garifuna population located in the Cayos Cochinos, a Marine Protected Area (MPA), is undergoing a livelihood transition from fishing to ecotourism. This paper draws on ethnographic research conducted with Operation Wallacea (Opwall), a private scientific research expedition organization, to begin to explore the potential barriers to the promotion of ecotourism as an alternative livelihood strategy. The historical struggle for territorial control in the region is presented as having created distrust between the Garifuna communities reliant on MPA resources and the organizations working to conserve those resources. Funding priorities of conservation organizations working within the area are considered, and the impact of the relationship between the NGO that manages the local resources and its major funding source has on the ability of the Garifuna to control and manage their traditional resources is explored. Finally, Garifuna mobilization to regain control over local resources and economic development is discussed.

KEYWORDS: Ecotourism, Marine Protected Areas, Resource Management, Land Rights, Garifuna

Introduction

Ecotourism has been embraced by a number of developing nations hoping to improve their economies in a way that is environmentally and socially responsible. The Cayos Cochinos Marine Protected Area (MPA) includes a set of two small islands (Cayo Menor and Cayo Mayor) and thirteen coral cays off the north coast of Honduras, located at the southern most point of the Meso-American Barrier Reef (see Figures A and B for maps of the MPA; HCRF 2006). The area offers some of the country's best natural and cultural attractions: white sand beaches, eco-adventure marine and terrestrial tourism, and Garifuna "living culture." In 2005, a resource management plan was developed by the MPA's managing body, the Honduran Coral Reef Fund, with assistance from the World Wildlife Foundation (WWF). This plan included a series of regulations on the extraction of marine resources that would eliminate the possibility of fishing for livelihood; ecotourism was suggested as a sustainable development option for the local Afroindigenous Garifuna communities that have historically relied on the area for fishing.³ The Cayos Cochinos MPA waters are home to a rich variety of fish, lobster, and conch and have served as the site for Garifuna subsistence fishing since their arrival in the early 1800s.

The Garifuna are descendants of Africans and Amerindians (i.e., Carib and Arawak Indians) who intermixed on the island of St. Vincent. Prolonged warring over the island's fertile lands eventually led to

¹ College of Social Science, Michigan State University

² School of Environment and Development, University of Manchester, UK

³ There are a number of regulations on fishing for which the Garifuna must comply. Local fishermen are banned from diving for lobster and other marine species. Lobster traps are permitted during an established season and juvenile and female lobsters must be returned to the sea. Moreover, the collection of conch is prohibited. Like lobster, conch is a key ingredient in traditional Garifuna recipes. Hook and line fishing of select species is permitted, but within time, this too will be under restriction in certain areas of the MPA. Navy boats patrol the MPA twenty-four hours a day to ensure compliance with the regulations, and fisherman caught breaking the rules can be subject to having their boats and equipment taken from them and incarcerated in Roatan.

a defeat of the Garifuna by the British, who exiled the Garifuna in 1797 to the island of Roatan, off the north coast of Honduras (Gonzalez 1988; Palacio 2000). From there, many Garifuna crossed to the Central American mainland, establishing settlements along the North Coast, from Nicaragua to Belize. Honduras has the largest Garifuna population, located in 48 coastal and island communities.

There are two Garifuna settlements within the MPA that are particularly affected by MPA regulations because many residents rely on fishing for subsistence and sale: Chachahuat, an island without water, sanitation, or electricity; and, East End, a small settlement on Cayo Mayor. Both settlements are tied to mainland communities (i.e., Chachahuat is Nueva Armenia's MPA settlement and East End is Rio Esteban's sister settlement). Chachahuat and East End began long ago as temporary residencies for mainland fishermen, but were later transformed into permanent settlements. Other mainland communities (i.e., Sambo Creek and Corozal) have temporary dwellings on other cays for fishermen to overnight; thus, some of their residents are also dependent on the Cayos Cochinos resources for their livelihood.

All activity within the MPA is overseen by the Honduran Coral Reef Fund (hereafter, the HCRF). The HCRF is a non-profit organization formed by Honduran business investors, and is reliant on external funding. Funding sources include international conservation groups, such as AVINA and the WWF, as well as conservation research organizations. Their primary funding source is Operation Wallacea (hereafter, Opwall), a private scientific research expedition organization. The authors worked as volunteer researchers for Opwall during the summer 2005 and 2006 field seasons. This paper draws on ethnographic data collected as affiliates of Opwall to explore the promotion of ecotourism as a strategy for sustainable development in the Cayos Cochinos MPA. While definitions of ecotourism have coalesced around principles of sustainability over the last decade in theory, in practice ecotourism programs are not always sustainable. This is because organizations and individual actors work under distinctly varied definitions of what constitutes ecotourism and how it should be developed.

In what follows, we explore some of the barriers to promoting ecotourism as an alternative livelihood strategy for the Garifuna communities reliant upon the Cayos Cochinos MPA. We begin by describing the historical struggle for territorial control in this particular region, which has created a significant amount of distrust between the Garifuna communities reliant on MPA resources and the organizations working to conserve those resources. Next, we present the current levels and types of tourism existent in the Cayos Cochinos. We then consider the funding priorities of conservation organizations working within the area, and the impact the relationship between the NGO that manages the local resources and its major funding source has on the ability of the Garifuna to control and manage their traditional resources. We close with a discussion of Garifuna mobilization to regain control over local resources and economic development.

Ecotourism as a Development Strategy

Tourism has become Honduras' second largest source of foreign exchange, and is now a national development priority, with the government projecting the industry to generate 70,000 new direct and indirect jobs (Thorne 2005). Honduras' tourism opportunities are commonly advertised in three broad categories: 1) the nation's "living cultures," which includes the archeological Maya ruins and Honduras' nine indigenous and ethnic groups, 2) eco-adventure opportunities, and 3) beachfront "fun and sun." For many southern nations, such as Costa Rica, Tanzania, and Kenya, ecotourism has become their number one generator of foreign currency (Moreno 2005: 217). Ecotourism destinations mostly fall on the north coast and islands (Bay Islands and Cayos Cochinos), areas rich in ecological and cultural diversity.⁴

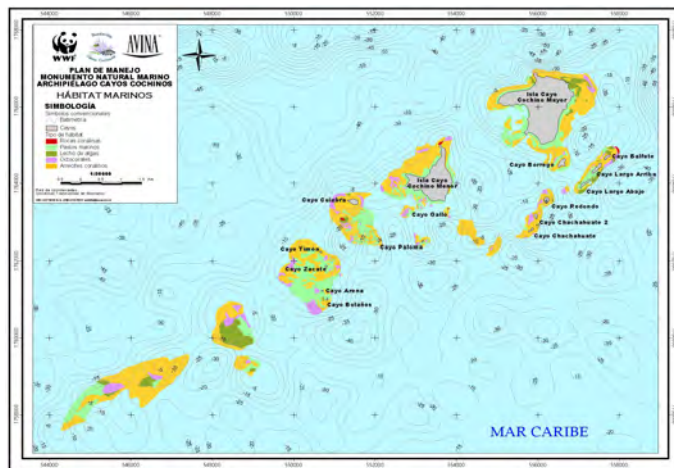
⁴ In October 2004, the Honduran government announced its plan to become the first country with an official "geotourism" strategy. Geotourism is a concept developed by the National Geographic Society to refer to "tourism that sustains or enhances the geographic character of a place – its environment, culture, aesthetics, heritage, and the well-being off its residents" (Burnford 2004). The tenets of geotourism include: 1) following international codes of sustainable tourism, 2) establishing policies and practices based on cultural and natural preservation, and 3) building

Figure A.
Location of the Cayos Cochinos Marine Protected Area



Source: Honduran Coral Reef Fund (2005). <http://www.cavoscochinos.org>

Figure B. Cayos Cochinos Land and Cays



Source: Honduran Coral Reef Fund (2005). <http://www.cavoscochinos.org>

While earlier definitions of ecotourism referred to travel to relatively undisturbed or designated natural areas with the specific objective of studying and enjoying the scenery and its flora and fauna, alongside associated cultural manifestations of the destination (Ceballos-Lascurain 1987: 13), more recent elaborations have moved beyond “nature tourism” to a focus on responsible and sustainable tourism (Medina 2005; Honey and Steward 2002). According to the International Ecotourist Society (2003), “eco-tourists” are tourists who travel to

natural areas and partake in tourism that aims to responsibly conserve the environment and improve the well being of the local people. Hence the shift in understanding what constitutes ecotourism is a move in focus from what travelers do (as defined by nature tourism) to what the social and environmental impacts of their travel are on the host community (Medina 2005: 283). Emphasis is placed on sustainability.

Ecotourism is often offered as the ideal method of achieving sustainable development at the small-scale (Wen and Tisdell 2001). Here we understand sustainable development to be development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the

ability of future generations to meet their own needs (WCED 1987). Sustainable development focuses on three components: economic development, environmental protection, and social development, which the UN views as “interdependent and mutually reinforcing pillars” (UN 2005). Yet there are numerous examples where ecotourism has not achieved its potential of sustainable development, and one or more of

community-based tourism partnerships that emphasize economic and social benefits to locals (Burnford 2004). In 2004, Honduras’ President Maduro and the Minister of Tourism, Thierry de Pierrefeu, signed an agreement to follow these tenets. This partnership between Honduras and the National Geographic Society has increased the country’s positioning as a “sustainable tourist destination.” (While Honduras’ official tourism strategy is “geotourism” and the Cayos Cochinos Marine Protected Area (MPA) is moving to embrace this strategy, the MPA’s management plan was developed and published prior to the country’s adoption of geotourism. Given this, throughout the paper we use the term “ecotourism” as a generic umbrella term under which ecotourism falls conceptually and pragmatically.)

the three prongs of sustainability has not been fully realized. For instance, Lück and Kirstges' (2003) study of a small-scale ecotourism project in Nuie in the South Pacific concluded that while it was sustainable in environmental and socio-cultural aspects, it was not economically viable (i.e., the area did not receive enough visitors to make it economically sustainable). The economic revenue gained from ecotourism must at least match that of the original livelihood income to deem it sustainable. In the Cayos Cochinos MPA this is an especially crucial factor because the restrictions on fishing have culled their only livelihood source.

In theory, MPAs are ideal stages for the development of ecotourism as an alternative development strategy because they are areas where ecosystem and community sustainability are interdependent, and therefore development specialists often suggest it as an alternative income source for previously fishing-dependant communities living within or in proximity to MPAs (WWF 2005). If managed well, ecotourism has the potential to conserve the environment within an MPA, protect cultural traditions, and generate revenue for the local and national community, meeting all three of the objectives of sustainable development (France 1997; Turner 1988; Wen and Tisdell 2001). Yet the success of this development is only possible when all stakeholders are able to participate fully in the development of a practical strategy for resource management and sustainable development (Michaelidou et al 2002; Scholz et al 2003). Unfortunately, varying values and expectations of stakeholders often break down the interdependence between environmental sustainability, economic, and social development (Michaelidou et al 2002).

Generally, the primary objective of the central managing actor of an MPA (usually a NGO) is environmental conservation. These organizations typically prioritize environmental sustainability over the social and economic development of the local population. As director of all activities within the given MPA, the decisions and allowances made by the NGO managing body shape the actions of other stakeholder groups. To avoid conflict among stakeholders and resultant degradation of resources, resource management scholars suggest that the central managing body adopt integrated eco-sustainable development approaches (Michaelidou et al 2002; Courvisanos and Jain 2006). Such an approach entails identifying all the significant priorities of stakeholders in order to deliver a long-term strategic goal of ecological sustainability alongside short-term goals such that each actor understands what immediate actions they must take and what the immediate and ultimate goals are of those actions. In sum, the central managing body must ensure that their restrictions do not isolate or completely control the local communities, as well as avoid situations where they become the main drivers and implementers of policies as opposed to facilitators (Koku and Gustafsson 2003). The best way to avoid these potential conflicts is by engaging local participation in all aspects of the planning, implementation, and monitoring of local development projects (Belsky 1999; Cernea 1991; Chambers 2000; Stonich 2000).

While we do not deny the fact that there is abundant research showing how "participation" is often far from participatory and representative (e.g., Chambers 2000; Cooke and Kothari 2001; Nelson and Wright 1995; Stonich 2000; Woost 1997), stakeholder participation and community-based natural resource management continue to be emphasized by international lending institutions, governmental offices, and NGOs involved in natural resource management planning and development initiatives. Therefore, we feel it is our role as social scientists to continue to seek ways to improve full participation of all stakeholders. We believe that the identification of the barriers to collaboration in this paper may serve to ease past tensions and facilitate improved communication across stakeholder groups.

Box 1: HCRF Highlighted Management Plan Objectives

- To establish and maintain an annual biodiversity monitoring program that will enable derogations or improvements to the reefs to be identified.
- To establish and maintain a fish monitoring program that will enable data on fishery performance to be given to the reef management committee to determine appropriate management actions.
- To carry out research in order to assess how the reef ecosystem functions are maintained.
- To assess the potential for developing alternative sustainable incomes for the local communities who benefit from living in or around the marine protected area.
- To assess the cultural and environmental impacts of development occurring in or adjacent to the marine protected area.
- To assist in the preparation of funding applications to support the research and community development program of HCRF.
- In the 2004 season the first full biodiversity, fisheries and socio-economic monitoring program was implemented (www.cayoscochinos.com).

Data and Methods

This case study exploring the promotion of ecotourism as an alternative development strategy is based on data collected over the summers of 2005 and 2006 as volunteer researchers affiliated with Opwall, the private conservation and scientific research organization mentioned earlier. Opwall runs biological and social science expedition projects designed to achieve specific wildlife conservation. They lead expeditions in six countries across three continents (i.e., Indonesia, Honduras, South Africa, Egypt, Cuba, and Peru). The organization sustains its research through fees paid by student researchers who wish to join their expeditions. In addition to their conservation goals, Opwall seeks to provide direct economic input to local communities by coordinating accommodation, food, transport, and manpower with local residents. Opwall also uses the data their social scientists collect during the expeditions to develop businesses that can provide alternative incomes to local communities: some examples of their success have been in securing funding for coral growing for the aquarists market in Kaledupa, and Fair Trade for cashews, chocolate and coffee in Indonesia and Honduras (Opwall 2006). Opwall has been operating in Honduras since 2003; the Cayos Cochinos expeditions began in 2004.

As members of Opwall's social science research team, we were engaged in a myriad of data collection activities developed to explore a range of topical research areas. The Opwall social science agenda in the Cayos Cochinos is longitudinal and contains several threads. These include 1) the assessment of levels of participation in the development and implementation of the MPA management plan (a five year plan developed jointly by the Honduran Coral Reef Fund (HCRF) and the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), discussed later); 2) the assessment of community expectations and potential for ecotourism development; and, 3) the development of a standardized socioeconomic monitoring program assessing the effects of MPA regulations on Garifuna community residents. Our research sites within the MPA included Chachahuat, East End and the Plantation Beach Resort (both located on Cayo Mayor), and Cayo Menor, where the HCRF and Opwall staff are based. Our mainland field sites included Nueva Armenia (Chachahuat's sister community), Rio Esteban (East End's sister community), Sambo Creek, and La Ceiba (i.e., Honduras' third largest city, located on the north coast and a gateway to the Cayos Cochinos).

Over the course of the two field seasons, we have conducted a total of 152 household surveys, 10 focus groups with residents of each community, and 43 in-depth interviews with key informants in communities and organizations. Household surveys were tailored to collect basic demographic data and shifts in income, as well as levels of support for the MPA and its management plan; 100% of occupied households were surveyed within the MPA; and 35 households were surveyed in each of the mainland communities. In-depth interviews were conducted with community leaders including members of the Patronato (i.e., the local governing system in Garifuna communities), individuals listed as participants in the development of the management plan, members of local fishing cooperatives, independent fishermen (i.e., not part of the cooperatives), tourism workers (e.g., boat operators, heads of dance troupes, hotel owners and workers, women who board ecotourists). The social science team also interviewed and received archival data from staff at the HCRF, Opwall, Digepesca (i.e., the Fisheries Department), the Ministry of Tourism, the Garifuna Chamber of Tourism, and several local independent tour operators. Additionally, the social science team visited mainland hotels to interview their owners. The bulk of these interviews occurred over the 2006 season and analysis of the data is still in process. This paper therefore reports on preliminary findings regarding stakeholder opinions of ecotourism development in the Cayos Cochinos. In order to make sense of these preliminary findings, it is necessary to explore the historical struggle for resources in this region and place that struggle within its current neoliberal development.

Contested Rights to Cayos Cochinos Resources

There has been a long-standing struggle over the creation of the Cayos Cochinos MPA and the violation of Garifuna rights within the reserve. The 1993 presidential decree creating the Cayos Cochinos Biological Reserve placed a moratorium on the removal of any form of marine life in an area extending five miles in all directions from the central cay. While the decree was intended to protect the area from overexploitation and continued ecological degradation, it implicated the local Garifuna population as responsible, who had historically relied on the area for their subsistence. A system of surveillance and policing were established, and navy patrols began to enforce the regulations.

Garifuna organizations and residents of the island communities and affected mainland communities formed committees in opposition to the creation of the MPA (i.e., the *Comité Prodefensa de los Intereses Garifunas de los Cayos Cochinos* and the *Sociedad de Pescadores de Chachahuat*). When local resistance was not met with action, activists reached out to the Food First Information and Action Network (FIAN International) in June 1994, who wrote a letter to the Honduran government denouncing the moratorium as unconstitutional and in violation of international treaties signed by Honduras (Anderson 2000: 222).

The presidential decree violated international law because 1) no provisions were made to include the participation of Garifuna fisherman in the implementation of the project, and 2) the moratorium on fishing and diving prohibited the Garifuna to access their means of subsistence and essentially forced them to abandon their “cultural patrimony” (a right protected under the International Labour Organization’s Convention (no. 169) Concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries) (Anderson 2000: 222-223). Responding to the activism, the government incorporated *one* Garifuna representative into the commission in charge of formulating the regulations and procedures for the reserve (the individual appointed to the commission was the president of one of the national Garifuna organizations). Furthermore, the government modified the moratorium on fishing to permit “subsistence fishing” by inhabitants of the reserve and fishermen from the mainland, but only by hand-held lines. Diving prohibitions remained and the Garifuna were prohibited from cutting any trees or palms to build or repair their homes (Anderson 2000: 225-226).

Public officials, including the Minister of Culture, who sat on the Commission overseeing the development of the original procedures, were documented on record as arguing that Chachahuat and East End were “temporary residences” for the fisherman of Nueva Armenia and Rio Esteban (Anderson

2000: 222-230). This sentiment has not disappeared amongst public officials, and the communities still do not hold official land titles. The lack of recognition of Garifuna territorial rights increases tension between the community members, the HCRF, and the government, and continues to lead to questions over the Garifuna right to use the local natural resources (even for subsistence purposes).

Territorial rights for the Garifuna is a broader struggle than legal recognition to their Cayos Cochinos settlements. No Garifuna communities held formal titles until 1992, and many did not receive titles until the late 1990s. Communities only held titles of occupation, issued by the National Agrarian Institute in the 1970s. However, titles of occupation are not secure documents; they merely state that a group of people occupies the land, but they do not grant ownership of that land to those people. Titles of occupation include only the areas in which homes and community infrastructure are constructed. Thus, cultivation lands, harvest lands, and territories of spiritual significance (including the sea) are not included in the titles.

Without formal titles recognizing Garifuna territorial control, consortiums of Honduran businessmen, wealthy mainlanders, and foreigners have come to own the majority of the islands and cays within the MPA. Many of these landowners use the property for vacation homes or rent to researchers or tourists. In an interview, Adrian Oviedo, the director of the HCRF, described the landowners within the MPA to include the HCRF, *La Sociedad de Inversiones Ecológica* (SIEC), another consortium of businessmen (similar to the HCRF) who negotiated with the HCRF to use the land for conservation purposes (i.e., to house visiting researchers), and two families from the La Ceiba area (located on the mainland).

The 1994 ratification of the International Labour Organization's (ILO) Convention Concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries (commonly referred to as ILO 169) opened a space for Garifuna activists to lay claims to their ancestral territories. ILO 169 recognizes the right of indigenous peoples to maintain control over their institutions, ways of life, economic development, and identities, languages, and religions within their State's frameworks (Anaya 1996: 48), and are tasked with safeguarding and guaranteeing the right of indigenous peoples to ownership of both the territory (i.e., land and sea) that they currently occupy as well as areas that they traditionally accessed for subsistence and other activities.

When the Honduran government did not take immediate action after ratifying ILO 169 to resolve outstanding land claims, the Garifuna continued mobilizing in the capital city. On October 12, 1996 (La Día de la Raza or Columbus Day), several thousand Garifuna traveled to the capital city and staged a massive protest, which has since become known as *La Primera Gran Marcha Pacífica del Pueblo Negro de Honduras* (the First Great Peaceful March of the Black Hondurans), demanding that the government take action to produce land titles for Garifuna communities (Anderson 2000: 231). The protest resulted in a signed agreement to resolve the land problem, establishing three streams of action: *titulación* (titling), *saneamiento* (regularization) and *ampliación* or *dotación* (extension). Subsequently, most communities were issued titles to the land they occupied, including the Cayos Cochinos communities.⁵

East End, Bolaños, and Chachahaute, were granted communal land titles in 2001. However, the Griffith family, who claimed to be the legal owners to this land, contested the title in court, claiming that the communal titles to the Garifuna for territory within the MPA were insufficient based on the fact that they were granted by the National Agrarian Institute (or INA, its Spanish acronym). The INA has jurisdiction only over rural land, and the Cayos Cochinos were rezoned as urban land in 1992 under Decree 90/90.

⁵ There are now 52 Garifuna land titles, including communal and cooperative landholdings. All land titles granted to communities are of *dominio pleno* (definitive titles of ownership) and communal, which means that the land cannot be sold and can only be passed through inheritance to members of the community. Despite what appears to be significant achievements in terms of securing land for the Garifuna, the land titles excluded ancestral lands.

Decree 90/90 reclassified all areas that the Ministry of Tourism designated to have tourism potential as urban land (including the cays that lacked basic infrastructure and services, such as Chachahuat.)

The case against the Garifuna communal land title to the Cayos Cochinos settlements made it to the Supreme Court. *La Organización Fraternal Negra Hondureña* (OFRANEH) or the Fraternal Black Honduran Organization, a grassroots organization working to promote political and land rights of Garifuna communities, responded on behalf of the affected communities by filing a case with the Inter-American Human Rights Court (Anderson 2006). On February 22, 2006, after years of legal debate, the Honduran Supreme Court ruled in favor of the Garifuna communities, upholding the title issued by the INA, recognizing the Garifuna right under ILO 169 to be guaranteed their ancestral territory. However, despite the state's ruling, the Register of Property at the municipality level (i.e., Roatan, the capital of the Bay Islands and Cayos Cochinos), has neglected to inscribe and send the title to the Garifuna community. In an interview with a key figure from the HCRF, it was suggested to us that Roberto Griffith (the major landowner in the Cayos Cochinos) is influencing this process. We were told that while the HCRF board of directors agrees with the government decision to declare the Garifuna legal owners of Chachauate East End and Bolaños, Roberth Griffith's legal team is still pushing to overturn this decision. This official of the HCRF shared with us:

[Chachahuat] was owned by the original person who bought the cays – Samuel Griffith; he has since passed away and his son, Robert, has inherited the land. Samuel Griffith had a verbal agreement with the community on Chachahuat that they can remain on the island, but that it can only be used by people from Nueva Armenia. The paperwork filed in the municipality of Roatan lists Griffith as the owner; therefore, Robert Griffith claims he is the owner and will not turn the title over to the community. [But] he says he will respect the wishes of his father and allow the community members to remain living there. The situation now is that the Honduran government says that Chachauat belongs to Nueva Armenia and Bolaños to the community of Sambo Creek. The Board [of Directors of the HCRF] agrees with this decision. But Robert Griffith disagrees and is trying to overturn the government's decision... There was a meeting in Tegucigalpa [the capital of Honduras] with all the relevant parties present [including the board members of the HCRF, the Griffith family, Garifuna leadership] and the HCRF agreed to turn Bolaños over to Sambo Creek if Griffith would turn Chachahuat over to Nueva Armenia. The President [of Honduras] was supposed to call both parties to sign the document in Tegucigalpa, but he has yet to call anyone...

This quote summarizes the conflict over territory in the MPA. Despite being the original occupants, the Garifuna have been forced into legal battles with parties who arrived later in history, and their case is not looked upon with much optimism from those actors directly involved in the Cayos Cochinos resource management (evidenced by the HCRF official's comments regarding the phone call from the President). The continuing struggle for territorial recognition, which is linked to control over local economic development, has made it difficult for the HCRF to establish trust with the local Garifuna population. Distrust of the HCRF and other organizations working to conserve the area's natural resources creates difficulty in obtaining local buy-in for the development of ecotourism as an alternative livelihood strategy. Moreover, even if the Garifuna are granted legal rights to their traditionally occupied and utilized resources, the use and extraction of terrestrial and marine products will continue to be under strict regulation of the HCRF. The HCRF will continue to monitor Garifuna activities and place limits on construction and development on Garifuna territory.

Current Tourism in the Cayos Cochinos

While the Cayos Cochinos is being promoted as an ecotourism destination, there are a wide range of tourist ‘types’ who currently visit the area, the degree to which these tourists are engaged in ecotourism activity is debatable. The majority of visitors to the MPA are research tourists and day tourists, most of who snorkel or dive in the protected reefs. There are two high ‘tourist seasons’: the first is in the spring during Semana Santa, and the second over Opwall’s summer research season. During Semana Santa, wealthy nationals and Central Americans travel to the North Coast to enjoy the beach and coral reefs. These tourists are mostly day-trippers who stay in hotels on the mainland or in the Bay Islands, arranging travel through their hosts to the MPA where they dive, snorkel, and/or visit Chachahuat, one of Honduras’ postcard Garifuna communities (because of its idyllic “close-to-nature” character). Some tourists stay at the all-inclusive Plantation Beach Resort, a ten room guesthouse built prior to the prohibition on construction within the MPA. Except for high tourist season (e.g., Semana Santa), the hotel rarely fills to capacity. Another option for wealthier tourists is to rent the privately owned homes on the smaller cays.

Table 1: Entrance fee schedule to Cayos Cochinos Marine Protected Area (HCRF, 2004)

| | One Day | One Month | One Year |
|--|----------------|------------------|-----------------|
| Foreign Visitors | \$10 | \$20 | \$40 |
| Foreign Visitors with Tour Operators | \$5 | \$10 | \$20 |
| Honduran Nationals | \$2 | \$4 | \$8 |
| Licensed Captains, Guides and Inhabitants | No Fee | No Fee | No Fee |

The second major tourist season is Opwall’s research season, a time when approximately 1,200 British students enter the MPA and spend a week at the HCRF research station. In addition to Opwall’s researchers, other research tourists travel throughout the year to the region and stay at the HCRF scientific research station on Cayo Menor.⁶

Across both seasons, relatively few visitors to the Cayos Cochinos overnight on Chachahuat; and even less so in East End. Those who do stay in the Garifuna settlements are typically backpackers or “adventure tourists” seeking experiences in remote places with traditional cultures. These tourists come to experience “Garifuna culture:” they stay with a family, eat traditional Garifuna dishes, buy locally made jewelry, and interact with community members.

Both Opwall and the HCRF recognize that the current forms of tourism in the Cayos Cochinos are not “ecotourism.” However, the organizations believe that ecotourism would be the most sustainable income-generating activity for the local population, and if developed properly, would ensure conservation of the local natural environment. However, each actor has a different idea about who should finance and manage its development.

⁶ The Opwall social science team stayed on Chachahuat while conducting research within the MPA.

Funding Ecotourism in the Cayos Cochinos

The Garifuna communities impacted by the management plan regulations believe that ecotourism (or any other form of tourism activity) should be locally developed and managed, however they believe it should be externally funded. The source of funding can be a source of contention for organizations representing Garifuna communities or activist community members, as some prefer not to accept funds from organizations that have been involved in past development projects that have had detrimental impacts on the Garifuna population. While there are activist community members that would not accept grants from some of the following organizations, our research indicates a likelihood that a majority of residents of the communities reliant on the MPA would accept financing to begin alternative business ventures from the HCRF, WWF, Opwall, Avina, and/or US Peace Corp (i.e., a selection of the organizations working in the region). Small projects funded by some of these organizations are currently being developed.

One example of an initiative funded through one of these organizations is the development of a scholarship program, begun by Opwall volunteers in 2006. The program assists the area's youth in obtaining education past primary school, intended to provide them with the necessary tools to engage directly in the management of local resources and community development initiatives. Through donations made by overseas donors, the Opwall Cayos Cochinos Scholarship Fund generated \$25,000 and made awards to eight Garifuna youth, between the ages of 14 and 18 years; fundraising and the granting of rewards are ongoing. A second example is the construction of tourist cabañas in East End, a project funded by the US Peace Corp. This project was in its planning stage during the 2006 field season. This project is intended to be community-led and managed, with community members providing the labor to construct, staff, and maintain the tourism infrastructure. Participants in the project would share profits.

While the HCRF was supportive of the US Peace Corp's cabaña project in the 2006 season, their first priority continues to be the management of the protected area resources. The HCRF is a conservation organization first and foremost, tasked with controlling activity, infrastructure, and tourist levels in the MPA. As some of their leadership have shared with us, one strategy for conservation is to have the Garifuna leave the MPA altogether and take up agriculture or wage labor on the mainland. Tourism development on Chachahuat, in particular, is unsustainable; the island cannot handle increases in infrastructure, nor does it have sufficient water or sanitation services to receive tourists. Given these environmental constraints, the HCRF is limited in what they can promote and little resources have been spent on ecotourism development.⁷

Moreover, as an organization dependant on external funds, the HCRF funding priorities are determined by their funding sources, and hence the facilitation of ecotourism development and training of the local population in ecotourism is directed from outside.⁸ One example of ecotourism training coordinated by the HCRF with external funds (from the WWF in this case) was their facilitation of the participation of local fishermen in WWF regional workshops. During these workshops, fishermen traveled to other protected areas to see "success stories" where ecotourism had grown in place of fishing. In 2006, one of the authors attended a workshop where a representative from the HCRF gave a PowerPoint presentation describing a visit to a Mexican reserve. There was a lot of resistance to the transferability of the account; fishermen were skeptical that their Mexican peers had no financial assistance to launch ecotourism activities. They asked questions like, "How did they buy their boat

⁷ Possible programs for tourists could include advertising the community as a "living heritage museum" where tourists could visit in the same way they do now, and this is something that the HCRF has considered assisting the community to develop and promote.

⁸ Through the summer of 2006, relatively little money had gone towards ecotourism. During the 2006 field season, the HCRF negotiated new contracts with the WWF and Avina, both of which placed a priority on community development. It will be of interest to track the activities the HCRF funds in coming years through these sources.

motors to transport guests?; and, How did they construct the cabanas?” The HCRF representative explained that the community developed their tourism infrastructure “bit by bit,” beginning with fallen trees from the forest to construct small restaurants and make signs to mark a nature trail. The attendees at this presentation also reminded the HCRF representative of the number of potential ecotourists in this area of Mexico (outside of Cancun), as compared to where they live in Honduras, explaining that their Mexican peers had an advantage from the start. The general sentiment from this gathering was not that the community was against the idea that ecotourism could serve as an alternative livelihood strategy, but rather that the HCRF (as the managing body for the Cayos Cochinos resources) should not restrict fishing without offering financial assistance to grow ecotourism in its place.

The Garifuna recognize how relationships to resources have shifted unfavorably for them in the Cayos Cochinos. In the past, the Garifuna culture mediated access to natural resources, for themselves and for tourists. They were in direct relationships to both the environment and the income that could be generated from use of local resources. Now organizations are mediating access to natural resources, and stand between the Garifuna and their local resources as well as the potential income those resources may generate for the local population.

Organizational Relationships

A key factor in understanding rights to resource control in the Cayos Cochinos is that as an MPA under an era of neoliberal development policy, profit from the area has become linked to conservation. Profits are generated either through the protection of endangered resources (e.g., through scientific research, monitoring and compliance activities) or through ecotourism. Because governments do not typically fund conservation, NGOs and other organizations must move into this arena, but they too must generate profit in order to conserve. The HCRF is therefore reliant on external funds, and Opwall remains their largest funding source. The HCRF’s relationship with Opwall enables the organization to continue to control and monitor (and ultimately, to conserve) the area’s resources, but its contract with Opwall means that research tourists arrive in unsustainable numbers, a fact recognized by the HCRF. The following quotes are from a senior staff member from the HCRF. Responding to the question of whether or not he agreed with all of the foundation’s policies, this staff member said:

Last week we had 215 people and that was far too many for the island’s ideal capacity of 90...the other main problem is that they are damaging the reef and dives are taking place in areas which are designated as no fishing zones for communities. The extra people that are diving could affect the number of juvenile fish and this could lead to further resentment from the communities. We then asked him to explain the reasons for going over the ideal capacity, to which he responded: This is not official, but I think it is because the foundation is trying to become more self-sufficient and self-sustainable. So the more money we receive from organizations, the closer we get to meeting this objective.

This senior staff member is suggesting that the board is using contracts such as the Opwall agreement to become self-sufficient, and decrease their dependence on external funding sources. A question of intention arises from these statements: why is the HCRF seeking autonomy from outside organizations? It would be irresponsible to speculate here without input from the HCRF leadership, although the question warrants further investigation.

Contextualizing Resource Rights Under Neoliberalism

Under neoliberalism, essentially everything has become commodified, from products and services, to experiences. The environment is now a commodity, from experiencing it to protecting it. This is the context in which we should understand the Cayos Cochinos MPA and its management. What we see when we look closely is the rights of wealthier landowners (who have privatized the land for vacation

homes) and the rights of foreign researchers are prioritized over the rights of the local Garifuna community, despite their 209 years in the region.

Our preliminary analyses are showing exaggerated income inequalities in communities, with a select group benefiting from the establishment of the MPA and HCRF's relationship with Opwall and other research tourists (and benefiting very well), and the remainder of the local population essentially forced into migration. This later comment applies mostly to families living within the MPA who reported feeling as though their only option is to return to the mainland because they can no longer fish for a living (or they report feeling forced into breaking the rules of the management plan in order to sustain their families). Last year the military presence increased in the Cayos Cochinos. In addition to the 24-hour navy patrol which has continued since the 1993 establishment of the MPA, two armed officers now spend sunrise to sunset on the island of Chachahuat. In interviews with the navy and with HCRF officials, we were told they were there to protect the community from themselves, because there were multiple drunks on the island⁹. Yet in an interview with Opwall staff and HCRF staff we were also told that the Garifuna are no longer permitted on Cayo Menor because a wallet disappeared from one of Opwall's research tourists last year, and the Garifuna were suspected to be the bandits (at a time when approximately 100 research tourists were on the island, the majority of whom were between the ages of 16-18). The Garifuna were also blamed for theft of a motor from a HCRF boat. It is possible they did steal the motor since the only way to fish from the MPA is to leave the MPA, and a motorboat makes the trip far easier. Alternatively, the sale of a motor could enable a family to purchase the food they can no longer obtain through fishing.

Garifuna Avenues of Recourse

The Garifuna do have some avenues of recourse in this struggle for resource control and local economic development, made possible by the international indigenous rights movement. In addition to ILO 169 (described earlier in this paper), Honduran Garifuna have also been able to draw upon the 2001 UNESCO proclamation that the Garifuna possess "intangible culture." Like the ILO 169, the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage affirms that the maintenance of cultural identity is tied to one's surroundings, recognizing that culture is shaped through historical relationships to the environment. OFRANEH, the Garifuna organization introduced earlier,¹⁰ draws on both ILO 169 and the UNESCO proclamation to demonstrate that the relationship between the survival of Garifuna culture and the sustainability of the natural environment has been internationally validated. The following excerpts from OFRANEH statements before the Honduran government (released to the public) illustrate this position.

28 [of our 48 communities] are located in protected areas or tropical zones. This is a clear signal of the role we have played in the conservation of natural resources and how our traditional knowledge is essential in the management of coastal and marine ecosystems...The erosion of biodiversity and the destruction of ecosystems affect the development of the tourist industry, as it depends in great measure on the supply of this country's environmental and cultural wealth...To date, Garifuna communities have preserved the traditional culture of our people, which was declared last year by UNESCO as "the cultural patrimony of humanity." Our communities have one of the lowest crime

⁹ The HCRF indicated that the community leaders requested the military presence; this was denied to us in interviews.

¹⁰ There is a second nationally recognized Garifuna organization, *La Organización de Desarrollo Etnico Comunitario* or ODECO (the Organization for Ethnic Community Development). ODECO splintered from OFRANEH in 1992 due to differences in philosophies. I focus here on OFRANEH due to their public activism on behalf of the Cayos Cochinos Garifuna communities.

rates, yet we are a society that struggles against insecurity... (OFRANEH 2002; translated from Spanish by author)

...the potentially rich zones for tourism development are the areas where the Garifuna are located... For indigenous peoples, the concept of conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity is not an empty concept... These concepts, for native peoples, are intimately related to their spirituality and respect for the mother earth. The Honduran state ratified ILO 169 in May 1994, an international legal instrument that recognizes the collective rights of indigenous and tribal peoples worldwide... (OFRANEH 2002; translated from Spanish by author)

In these statements, OFRANEH reminds the Honduran nation that the success of the tourism industry “depends in great measure on the supply of this country’s environmental and cultural wealth,” and that tourism relies on areas where visitors feel physically safe and psychologically fulfilled (Garifuna communities are presumed to evoke these feelings). Yet, as the organization points out, the natural environment in these zones has deteriorated since Garifuna management of those resources has been usurped. OFRANEH makes clear that for the Garifuna, conservation and the sustainable use of resources are integral aspects of their culture, almost as if they are primordial practices with which they, as indigenous peoples, are provided by virtue of their heritage. Using language of this manner, OFRANEH recently filed with the Inter-American Human Rights Court on behalf of the injustices within the Cayos Cochinos, and have made specific demands on the national government, including:

1. Immediate registration of titles to Garifuna territory in the Cayos Cochinos.
2. Review and revise the management plan with complete and informed participation of the various Garifuna communities in the zone.
3. Immediate demilitarization of the Cayos Cochinos (and respect for human rights of residents).
4. Call for a meeting between the Secretary of Security, navy, and community to establish security measures for the Cayos to which the community consents (OFRANEH 2006; translated from Spanish by author).

As of the writing of this paper, none of these demands have been met at the local level. However, international indigenous and human rights law do enable Garifuna activists to substantiate their demands and increase international attention to “local” transformations in resource control and community development initiatives, giving community members hope for the future. It remains to be seen if Garifuna activism will bring sufficient attention to restore loss of resource control, especially as the environment becomes increasingly commodified.

Conclusion

This paper has both practical and theoretical contributions. On the practical side, this paper has begun to sketch out some of the potential problems for developing ecotourism in the Cayos Cochinos. First, the long history of conflict over the creation of the MPA without participation of the Garifuna community and the continuing lack of territorial recognition are huge hurdles to establishing trust between local residents and the HCRF, as the managing body of those resources. Moreover, restricting traditional livelihood practices without offering seed money to assist with the development of an alternative income strategy has further marginalized local residents. Finally, local residents are aware that the resources they once controlled are now available to tourists, but not tourists who travel through Garifuna tour operations. Rather, the tourists who are enjoying the MPA resources mostly arrive through the HCRF and/or non-Garifuna tourism operators. For the management plan’s regulations (including the restriction of fishing

and the development of ecotourism in its place) to be successful, and the conservation of resources to follow, there must be increased communication between the various stakeholder organizations and the Garifuna community. The research being pursued by Opwall and other scientific researchers can prove to be quite valuable in building these bridges between stakeholder communities and organizations working within the area.

Theoretically, this paper contributes to the literature on the intersection of global rights, the environment, and development policy. New global rights discourses and international law point towards the 'natural' and sustainable relationships between particular cultural groups and the environment, and are there to 'protect' indigenous peoples from exploitation and loss of resource control. Nation-states are expected to guarantee this relationship, which gives promise to the above demands. Yet, under neoliberalism, the market breaks up the relationship between cultural groups and the environment, as the environment becomes a commodity. This in turn transforms conservation from being a practice pursued for the preservation of resources into a practice intended for the *development* of resources (see also West 2006 for a discussion of conservation as development). In this case, the search for economic resources has encouraged the HCRF's dependence on student research tourists who do not necessarily preserve resources or contribute to conservation.¹¹

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¹¹ Research conducted by scientists affiliated with Opwall and the HCRF helped inform the two organizations as they renegotiated their contract. The number of student research volunteers that travel through the Cayos Cochinos drastically reduced in 2006.

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