

Dan Brockington, Rosaleen Duffy, and Jim Igoe: Nature unbound: conservation, capitalism and the future of protected areas

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In *Nature Unbound: Conservation, capitalism and the future of protected areas*, Dan Brockington, Rosaleen Duffy and Jim Igoe provide a critical account of the politics of environmental conservation within the context of capitalist expansion and neoliberal governance. According to these authors, “conservation and capitalism are allying mutually to reshape the world” (p. 4). Because of the logic and nature of this alliance, conservation strategies distribute benefits across society unevenly. As a consequence of this, conservation not only produces fortunes and misfortunes, but it also causes significant—and often unexpected—consequences. Therefore, in order to understand these diverse consequences, it is important to understand how conservation creates different types of values that comply with the logic of the global economy. It is in this context that we can understand why, for instance, the most notorious growth of protected areas worldwide occurred in a period when neoliberal economic policies became globally dominant.

The book is organized into nine chapters. The first chapter sets out the aforementioned central arguments of the book. Chapter Two explores the historical configuration of the ideas that inform the creation and expansion of protected areas. The process of defining specific geographical areas that have to be regarded as protected areas is in itself a power-laden process. Thus, geographical information systems, species habitat mapping, and remote sensing data intersect with a variety of ideas in order to make landscapes legible. In this process, social and ecological relations are inevitably concealed. Chapter Three

analyzes two important imperatives that underlie the creation of protected areas: the wilderness lobby and the extinction crisis. The protection of wilderness from human disturbance has been one of the most powerful imperatives behind the creation of protected areas. This idea involves a particular ethic which considers distant and exotic landscapes as worth protecting, and conversely proximate and mundane landscapes as unworthy. The second imperative, the extinction crisis, identifies extinction as the main problem that must be addressed by conservation projects. The book problematizes the idea of extinction by suggesting that rates of extinction are not necessarily an accurate measure of human impact. Even though the crisis is real, the book argues, the mandate for conservation is a political issue. Chapter Four addresses two questions: how well do protected areas work? And what are the effects of parks on people? The chapter questions the idea that protected areas are the only mechanisms capable of achieving conservation aims. Many studies show, for instance, that occupied reserves are also effective in protecting areas against fire and deforestation. With regard to the effects of parks on people, the chapter argues that the benefits of conservation for some people may constitute a disadvantage to others. That is the case in the establishment of protected areas producing different forms of eviction and dispossession.

Chapter Five sets forth a criticism of the idea that conservation by local communities is an equitable form of conservation, and that this type of conservation results in more prosperous and empowered people. Instead, the authors argue that community conservation carries its own inequalities and ways of interaction with capitalism and market forces. Chapter Six addresses a paradox, noting that the protection of biodiversity as a discourse has been closely connected with the idea of protecting cultural diversity and

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indigenous rights. However, while conservation has been an instrument deployed by indigenous groups to gain access to natural resources, conservation has also historically been a mechanism to dispossess indigenous people from their land and resources. Chapter Seven makes more explicit the links between conservation and neoliberalism by analyzing how the tourism industry has influenced the nature and direction of conservation. Tourism has turned nature into a profitable business, and has thereby placed conservation within the logic of neoliberal governance. By rendering nature a commodity, the “ecotourism bubble” obscures the historical, social, and ecological relations that configure the landscapes under protection. Chapter Eight places conservation within the matrix of international relations. This global connection reveals how environmental governance reconfigures the role of the state in controlling and managing nature. Furthermore, these global connections lay bare the ways in which sovereignty is reconfigured by the advent of public–private partnerships, and the proliferation of organizations engaged in conservation projects. This cartography of conservation management also reveals the myriad inequalities and power relations among these organizations. Chapter Nine analyzes the relationships between capitalism and conservation. The governance of carbon, certification of conservation, and the privatization of natural parks exemplify the different ways in which capitalism and conservation shape each other.

Drawing on the concept of fetishization, the authors illustrate how capitalism creates a global circulation of images, ideas, and values around nature. This “Spectacle of Nature”, however, conceals the production of inequalities and the contradictory character of conservation.

Due to its wide range of topics, *Nature Unbound* is an excellent introduction to critical perspectives on conservation. Furthermore, the organization of every chapter makes it possible to read each of them separately without losing sight of the central argument. I only have two complaints. First, it would have been more helpful if the theoretical discussion of Chapter Nine had been placed at the beginning of the book. This would have made clearer the theoretical connections between capitalism and conservation, as well as the differentiation between neoliberalism and capitalism. Secondly, the discussion of the future of protected areas, announced in the title, is rather brief and leaves the reader wishing that it had been further developed by the authors.

Alejandro Camargo is a PhD candidate in Geography at Syracuse University. His research interests include the relationships among agrarian property rights, waterscape transformations, and environmental conservation; the connections between agrarian political economy and environmental disasters; and the politics of post-disaster reconstruction projects in rural areas.