



# The Conservationist Mode of Production and Conservation NGOs in sub-Saharan Africa

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**Abstract:** The work of conservation non-governmental organizations (NGOs) is vital to the conservation movement and has attracted a good deal of comment and observation. Here we combine recent writings about the interactions of conservation and capitalism, and particularly the idea of “the conservationist mode” of production to explore the roles of conservation NGOs with respect to capitalism. We use an analysis of the conservation NGO sector in sub-Saharan Africa to examine the ways in which conservation NGOs are integral to the spread of certain forms of capitalism, and certain forms of conservation, on the continent. We examine their mediating role in mediating and legitimizing knowledge, in effect forging and reproducing desires for particular visions and versions of Africa, and in producing and promoting new commodities which meet these needs, all of which facilitates capitalism’s growth. Finally we consider a number of limitations to the activities of NGOs, and on the nature of the research we have undertaken, which may help to place their work in context.

**Keywords:** Conservation NGO, conservationist mode of production, Africa

## Introduction

In October 2009 the Wildlife Conservation Network held its annual “Wildlife Conservation Expo” in San Francisco. Primatologist Jane Goodall was the keynote speaker and it was billed as “the premiere wildlife conservation event in the Bay Area”. Visitors had a chance to learn about conservation work locally and internationally and meet a number of prominent international conservation activists. The following day a garden party, complete with large cats, provided food, art sales, entertainment and further opportunities to meet great conservationists in a more exclusive setting, as the entrance fee was set at \$1000 per person.<sup>1</sup> Previous events (in 2006) were celebratory dinners in which guests could, for a \$1500 individual ticket or \$10,000 for a table for eight, become a “global sponsor” which carried privileges of a pre-dinner VIP reception to meet some of the conservationists whose work was being celebrated.

The Wildlife Conservation Network is well connected. Its board members and advisors are wealthy philanthropists who have done well on the high-tech and software industries of the Bay area. It works by supporting individuals who are doing great deeds for charismatic wildlife. These people, labeled “conservation entrepreneurs” or “conservation heroes”, each tend to have their own charitable organization which the Wildlife Conservation Network then supports. The Wildlife Conservation Network’s appeal, to the public and causes selected alike, is that it offers a chance personally to meet significant conservationists at exclusive fundraising gatherings. All the sites of the conservation work sponsored are in exotic overseas locations, in South America, Africa and Asia. In addition, then, to the shopping, entertainment and variety on display that can make saving nature so enjoyable (cf Brockington and Scholfield 2009), the Wildlife Conservation Network allows supporters to connect with and support far and distant places, through the person of the celebrity conservationist (Brockington 2009).

We begin with this example because it captures clearly the ways in which conservation non-governmental organizations (NGOs) bring the wealth of the North together with the experience, knowledge and stories of exotic wild places to generate support for their causes. In this essay, following an extensive survey of conservation NGOs operating in sub-Saharan Africa, we explore the general role of conservation NGOs supporting African conservation in transforming the region’s natural capital (forests, wildlife, protected landscapes), and conservation work in the same, into symbolic capital and money. A sceptic might retort that it is obvious that NGOs raise money, and that conservation NGOs should do so from stories and images of wildlife and nature. Our argument, however, is not that simple. Following Garland’s recent writings (Garland 2006, 2008) we argue that conservation NGOs are integral to a “conservationist mode” of production which intertwines wildlife and biodiversity conservation with capitalism. Conservation NGOs are not simply raising money. They are incorporating nature and wildlife into a broader capitalist system by producing images and commodities whose circulation mediates relationships between people and between people and nature (cf Igoe, Neves and Brockington this issue). They are also forging the conditions, discursively and materially, for capital to appropriate aspects or parts of wildlife and nature which had escaped being turned into commodities. In part this is achieved through legitimizing particular visions for African landscapes and wildlife, and specific types of nature production. All this highlights and demonstrates how conservation is not a domain separate and set apart from capitalism. It is produced by it, and thoroughly integrated into it, such that capital and conservation become two core complementary and mutually enforcing processes in the contemporary production of nature (Castree 2003).

Before we can proceed we must define what we mean by “NGOs” and what sort of conservation we are referring to. Neither definition is straightforward, and the term “conservation NGO” can in fact invoke a blurred area of fuzzy conceptual space rather than a precise tool for analysis. NGOs are usually understood to encompass a broad gamut of non-profit organizations which are not part of government (Bryant 2009), but the distinctions of NGOs from business and the state are becoming increasingly hard to maintain (cf Igoe, Neves and Brockington this issue).<sup>2</sup> NGOs may best be characterized by the high levels of expectation that surround them. Bebbington, Hickey and Mitlin’s recent, and otherwise definitive, collection on the work of NGOs in development, eschewed defining what NGOs actually are. Instead they began with “the conviction . . . that NGOs are only NGOs in any politically meaningful sense of the term if they are offering alternatives to dominant models, practices and ideas about development” (2008:3).<sup>3</sup> By “conservation” in this essay we mean wildlife and biodiversity conservation. In African contexts it has generally encompassed state legislation and regulatory regimes that govern hunting, protected areas (national parks, wildlife sanctuaries, forest reserves and the like), wildlife trade and forestry policies. This apparently simple definition conceals considerable tension. For how can one distinguish wildlife and biodiversity conservation from a more general environmentalism and how does one deal with the overlaps between conservation and development activity? We return to these questions in the methods where we explain how we delimited and described the conservation NGO sector.

In the meantime it is important to observe that there are very good reasons to suggest that one could and should overcome the conceptual difficulties and examine the work of this rather hazy sector. For despite the problems of delimiting “conservation” and “NGOs”, there does exist a large core of entities that self-identify as “conservation NGOs”. More importantly they enjoy widespread public recognition for being “conservation NGOs”. While it may be difficult to argue that conservation NGOs actually exist ontologically, and are therefore quite hard to isolate epistemologically, they do exist relatively unproblematically as a social fact. Conservation NGOs matter because this very label has made them some of the most important players in wildlife and biodiversity conservation internationally. There is a space in popular, corporate and government thinking, and in policy discourse resulting, for “conservation NGOs” and those occupying it enjoy considerable influence.

In part there is their sheer size. Some of the larger international conservation NGOs are among the biggest NGOs in the world. The Nature Conservancy (TNC) is a multi-billion dollar organization, the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), Wildlife Conservation Society

(WCS) and Conservation International annually spend hundreds of millions of dollars (Brockington, Duffy and Igoe 2008). They are significant to the conservation movement because their reach is global, and they can be particularly influential in poorer parts of the world where government expenditure on conservation issues is slight, and NGO expenditure proportionally larger. They have been favoured vehicles for spending bilateral and multilateral donor funds. They are also one of the principal means by which conservationists can channel funds from the wealthier parts of the world to the poorer parts of the world where so much biodiversity can be found.

They also matter because of their vigour and variety. Conservation NGOs in all their diversity have been at the forefront of the campaigning and image-making activities of conservation and have been since the early 1900s. They are drivers of much conservation science and policy lobbying. They are significant employers of, and provide a social habitat for, conservationists themselves. Adams, in his history of the conservation movement, found their influence profound and described them as “noisy, visionary . . . also extremely powerful, for their grip on international thinking about conservation” (Adams 2004:55).

Finally it is important to examine conservation NGOs because their influence, in common with NGOs generally, has grown in the neoliberal era. From the late 1980s NGOs enjoyed particularly privileged status within international development and conservation circles (Edwards and Hulme 1992). These years were the heyday of neoliberal policies that emphasized small government and resourced service provision from the community, or from cheaper independent suppliers (cf Corson this issue). NGOs were also thought to be essential elements of good democracies, providing independent data and reports by which governments could be held to account and active and vocal lobby groups for particular interests. Since the 1980s, NGOs have generally expanded in size and number to meet the demand for them. Conservation NGOs were no exception. Our survey of those active in sub-Saharan Africa, which we describe below, showed NGO numbers increasing dramatically from the 1980s onwards. Given the conditions of their growth it is quite likely that they will be vectors of new ideas and policies their donors were promoting at the time.

It is traditional for social scientists' attention to NGOs generally to take the form of critique, questioning the difference or viability of the alternatives that they offer, or the problems of the images and fund raising that they employ.<sup>4</sup> That is not, however, our purpose in this essay. Instead we wish to provide a new framework to conceptualize their activities. We suggest that in many cases conservation NGOs are best conceived as constitutive of, and central to, the workings and spread of capitalism in sub-Saharan Africa. We argue that NGOs play a vital role in the creation of value from wildlife and nature, both in their work

of protecting and reproducing wildlife and wild areas, and in creating demand for the conservation's commodities and imagery overseas. Through the activities of conservation NGOs new commodities and images are produced whose circulation comes to mediate relationships between people and between people and nature.

Within our argument there are echoes of the Gramscian critique of civil society (Forgacs 1999). Gramsci observed that an unintended effect of civil society was that it forged consent for capitalism. Even where civil society organizations fought the worst social abuses of capitalism, they ultimately sustained the legitimacy of capitalism at the same time as they decried its effects. The critics within civil society challenged specific aspects of capitalism's functioning, but they did not challenge capitalism itself. For example, tackling problems of child labour, low wages, pollution and slum housing did not in itself challenge the labour relations that lay at the basis of capitalism. But these actions did make the social reproduction of these relations more palatable and made capitalism more socially legitimate and ultimately more sustainable.

Likewise one could see environmental and conservation NGOs generally as tackling the ecological ills that capitalism produces such that ultimately capitalist economies emerge healthier but unchallenged; indeed they enjoy more legitimacy. However, our argument differs from this position in that the conservation NGOs we describe are not dealing with the contradictions internal to the operation of capitalism. Rather they are working on the frontiers of capitalism, creating the conditions conducive to its expansion. As we shall demonstrate, they provide means of turning the financial wealth produced in northern economies into new commodities, and of creating new markets for some conservation associated industries.

We have restricted our arguments to Africa partly for pragmatic reasons. It is the region we know best, a continent on which we have conducted extensive research on the conservation NGO movement. It is also the region about which our colleagues wrote on whose theories we build. Perhaps most importantly, African case materials provide some of the clearest examples of the power of audience demand in the North for marketable conservation stories and causes. We will explore the reasons for this later in the essay.

We begin by outlining recent work exploring the general intertwining of conservation and capitalism, and more specific writings that have addressed their relationships specifically within Africa. We combine this framework with the findings of a recently completed survey of conservation NGOs in sub-Saharan Africa to explore its usefulness and consider what questions it raises for further research. Finally we link this to work on epistemic communities and transnational networks to develop a richer theoretical framework to characterize the work of conservation NGOs. Our goal is to develop a more robust theoretical and

conceptual framework for understanding the actions of NGOs both in the African sites of their field activity, and their other global sites where they generate their resources, exert influence and build networks.

### **The Conservationist Mode of Production**

In *Nature Unbound*, a general survey of conservation practice globally, Dan Brockington, Rosaleen Duffy and Jim Igoe argued that:

conservation is not merely about resisting capitalism, or about reaching necessary compromises with it. Conservation and capitalism are shaping nature and society, and often in partnership (2008:5).

To radical geographers reared on ideas of the “production of space” and “second nature”, this point may seem straightforward. We know that capitalism produces nature—and vice versa (Castree 2003). The observation is required, however, because we have been slower to recognize the thorough imbrication of conservation in capitalist transformations of the world. Conservation can be seen as separate to capitalism and governed by a different logic. Brockington and colleagues, after exploring a variety of conservation practices such as mitigation, offsetting, sports hunting, certification and the creation and transformation of communities and indigenous peoples through conservation activities, found it difficult to tell whether conservation was transforming the world using capitalist instruments, or vice versa. Conservation, they said, does not so much save the world as remake and recreate it (Brockington, Duffy and Igoe 2008:6).

In the last chapter of the book, Jim Igoe elaborated the general theoretical implications of the transformative work of conservation. He observed that tourists’ use of consumptive nature depends upon fetishized commodities whose origins and social relations are concealed just as much as jars of coffee on supermarket shelves. The fact that they are consumed in situ, in the landscapes and societies where they were created, does not make them one jot less alienated (cf Neves this issue). Tourists, even eco-tourists, live and move in a bubble, cut off from surrounding societies and landscapes (Brockington, Duffy and Igoe 2008:185–190; cf Carrier and Macleod 2005). Their experiences are produced for them, carefully tailored by tour companies (West and Carrier 2004). As the tourists came with expectations shaped by friends and families, or television documentaries, and as they themselves then use their travels as reference points to assess the veracity and authenticity of their experiences, the whole is brought together in a self-referential loop. Igoe further observed, following Debord (1995 [1967]), that these experiences and bubbles were not confined to the tourism circuit, but were proliferating through society in the production of fetishized images and signs as “spectacles”, whose link to their referents was lost, and who

were becoming the original authority against which experience of the places referred to is now measured.

[A]n iterative process develops. The images and ideas of these landscapes become the source for the production of more virtualisms. These virtualisms in turn become the source for the production of more “wilderness” landscapes. The dialogues occurring between these landscapes and the virtualisms that informed their production become increasingly impervious to ideas and arguments that are not derived from the realities they describe and prescribe (Brockington, Duffy and Igoe 2008:194–195).

Igoe went on to explore how the spectacle of nature raises money in different contexts for different conservation actors. His writing, however, was general. It was not tied to particular varieties of conservation, or forms of capitalism. What we require are more detailed analyses of particular aspects of the conservation sector, or particular sectors of capitalism, that explore the specific processes, tensions and contradictions at work.

Writing at almost exactly the same time, Liz Garland, after studying the character of wildlife conservation in Africa, reached a very similar conclusion to Brockington, Duffy and Igoe. She found that:

[Conservation] spaces are not a bulwark against the forces of human activity and global capitalism, but rather products of a very particular mode of engagement with these forces (2008:64).

Garland’s argument differs in two ways from the previous authors. First, she was exploring the activities of a more specific arena of activities and group of actors, namely the individuals and organizations who lobby for wildlife conservation in Africa. Second, she outlined a more complete theory of how a particular conservation sector transforms African landscapes and people. Her argument is worth summarizing in detail.

Like Igoe, Garland observed a preponderance of images of African wildlife, whose charismatic fauna and scenery have diffused globally such that they are “part of the natural symbolic repertoire of people all around the world” (2008:52). Yet she also observed that Africans who guard and live with this global heritage are relatively invisible in the global imaginary. Saving wildlife and wildlands is a northern task in which the work of Africans is largely hidden.

Most critiques stop there. They view conservation as a form of the white man’s burden imposed on the continent by colonial and neocolonial powers. Garland found it more productive to argue that wildlife conservation in Africa is:

foremost a productive process, a means of appropriating the value of African nature, and of transforming it into capital with the

capacity to circulate and generate further value at the global level (2008:52).

Viewed thus wildlife conservation is “a particular kind of capitalist production” (2008:62), turning the natural capital of wildlife into symbolic capital and, ultimately, money. Garland observes that the “conservationist mode of exploitation” (2008:63) differs from other use of natural resources (timber, mining, fishing, farming) because it does not depend on the physical use and appropriation of the resource. It is consumed by looking, by tourists’ gazes, and by the work of photographers and filmmakers.<sup>5</sup>

Garland’s insights came from an exploration of the hidden work of (black) Africans in the conservation sector. She observed how (white) northerners’ interactions with wildlife could be turned into “Ph.D.s, research grants, jobs with international NGOs and tourism companies, academic positions, gigs on the conservation lecture circuit, popular memoirs, starring roles in *National Geographic* specials” (2008:67, and we could add newspaper articles and wildlife film documentaries). She noted that virtually identical interactions by black African conservation workers simply did not produce such profitable exchanges. Brockington, discussing the same phenomenon (2009:74–78), observes that this is a peculiarly African feature of the conservation mode of production. The racial politics simply work differently in India, Asia and South America where there is much less domination by white conservationists.

Garland goes on to argue that vital to the production of these profitable visions and transformations is the image, the expectation, that Africa *is* wild and natural (meaning free from human interference). This is the vision of Nature which West and Carrier (2004) observe at work in conservation virtualisms generally. As numerous authors have observed, and as Garland reports, the environmental histories of these “wild” places are far more anthropogenic than most visions allow (Adams and McShane 1992; Anderson and Grove 1987; Brockington 2002; Igoe 2004; Neumann 1998). Consequently investing places with conservation importance has profound social implications. Landscapes and resources are removed from one set of users, and transferred to others.

This process of appropriation for appreciation is market driven. Garland insists that the value created from the conservationist mode of production hinges on “the desires and fantasy structures” of the audiences (2008:64). Similarly Brockington has argued in *Celebrity and the Environment*, that with respect to the white celebrity conservationists with which Garland illustrates her argument, they:

are a creation of society, a group of individuals’ varyingly similar responses to market forces which demand they perform particular roles. The products they create, and the stances they adopt, are demanded of them, as much as they arise from their own breasts.

They quote and mimic the dreams of their audiences (Brockington 2009:64).

Crucial then to the production of value from the natural capital of African wildlife is a hungry audience ready for images of wild Africa and a complex apparatus of people, organizations and marketing practices that reproduce and ultimately sell particular visions of what “wild” Africa looks like and how it can be experienced. The conservationist mode of production hinges on this apparatus. But what does this apparatus look like and how does it work? We wish to build on Garland’s theories here and explore in more detail the functioning of conservation NGOs that we contend are an essential element of the conservationist mode of production. We believe that they are vital to the mediations through which wildlife’s natural capital are converted into exchangeable and symbolic forms. To develop this idea we must examine the nature of NGOs’ work in sub-Saharan Africa in more detail.

## Methods

The central difficulty facing any analysis of the work of conservation NGOs in sub-Saharan Africa is that there has not, until recently, been any overview of the sector at all. We did not know how many NGOs there are, where they work, what sorts of activities they do, or how much they spend. It has therefore been difficult to make any sort of informed judgment of their role and activities.

We had to start from scratch to build up as complete a list as possible of conservation NGOs at work on the continent. Our first problem was that the uncertainties over what NGOs are, and what conservation is, makes a comprehensive list of conservation NGOs difficult to produce. There are self-identifying conservation NGOs, but there are also a great many other organizations whose identity is less certain. The task is not made easy by the general absence of published definitions. Conservation NGOs have attracted a great deal of attention in the academic literature; recent reviews include Brockington and Scholfield (2010a, 2010b) and Bryant (2009), and historical treatments include Adams (2004), Dowie (1996, 2009) and Neumann (1998). Despite this writing there have, curiously, been few, if any, attempts to define conservation NGOs. The idea of conservation NGOs has been invoked in general, but their boundaries have not been defined in particular.

It was the disputes of the nature of conservation that posed us most difficulty. First we had to distinguish the realm of conservation we were interested in from a broader set of environmentalist activity. Wildlife conservation is often distinguished from more general environmentalism. Historically, wildlife conservation was the concern of elites, whereas environmentalism was more populist, anti-establishment and activist. Environmentalists were concerned with problems of waste,

pollution and nuclear power (Bryant 2009:1544). However, these distinctions have blurred considerably. The larger wildlife conservation organizations are also concerned with sustainability in its broadest forms. Pollution destroys all sorts of habitats, particularly marine and riparian ecosystems, as effectively as deliberate land conversion. The climate change agenda has seen environmental organizations make tropical forests as much their habitat as their conservation counterparts. Conservationists also like to distinguish between their cause and that of animal welfare, the latter being concerned with individuals not species and populations. However, in practical terms, the care taken over the most endangered species (counted in individuals), and the work of animal welfare activists (protecting the habitat of wild species to facilitate their release) can look remarkably similar.

Second, there was the question about what forms of poverty alleviation might also constitute conservation interventions. Some conservationists see tackling problems of poverty as vital to wildlife conservation's core agenda wherever adverse use of wildlife is driven by poverty, or where opportunities to support wildlife habitat and populations depend on their sustained, profitable use. Others see development activities as a dangerous distraction that diverts funds and attention from conservation's core business of protecting valuable nature from unwelcome change (Adams et al 2004). The debate is confusing partly because it mixes normative prescriptions of what conservationists should be interested in with more pragmatic descriptions of what actually works. It is also confusing because, as we have argued elsewhere (Brockington and Scholfield 2010b), conservation is, in all sorts of ways, simply a variety of development. It is concerned with the planned use of resources for national (and international) prosperity, and with the unplanned changes that occur as societies respond and adapt to their circumstances.

We dealt with these problems using a mixture of assertion and consultation. We examined a variety of published sources, web searches and peer review and compiled a list of over 280 organizations using a conservative definition of "conservation", which included only those that were concerned with preserving wildlife, protected areas or wild habitat. We excluded, with some exceptions, animal welfare organizations and general environmental organizations. Inclusion or exclusion initially depended on whether, in our assessment, their projects and activities contributed to specifically wildlife, habitat or protected area conservation goals. For example, we included environmental organizations if they were working specifically around the edge of protected areas in order to reduce resource use pressures upon them. We did not include development organizations with the exception of one specific wildlife management project for which we had precise data. The list of NGOs we compiled, and more details of the organizations we

included and excluded, is available online (<http://www.sed.manchester.ac.uk/idpm/research/africanwildlife/>), and in published sources (Brockington and Scholfield 2010a, 2010b).

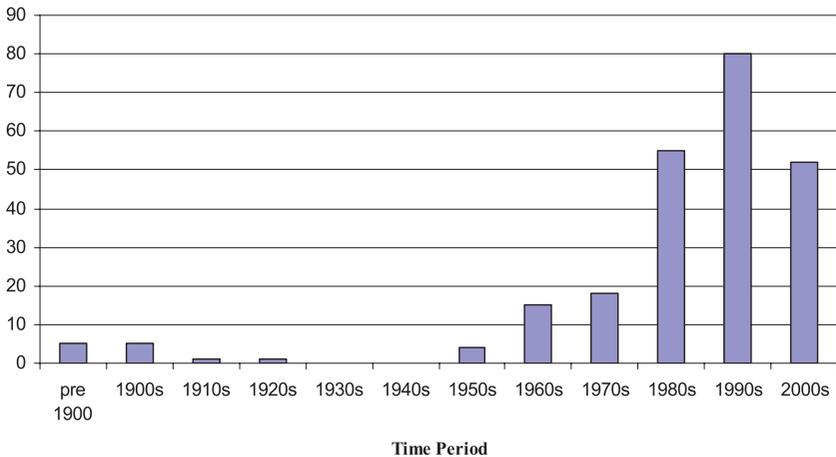
The pitfalls in these methods have already been discussed in these other writings. One of the main issues is whether it provides at all an accurate picture of the conservation NGO sector in the region. Our principal method for checking the validity of our list and the authority of our interpretation of it was two consultation exercises in which we sent out copies of our list and our interpretation of its implications to all the NGOs on our database. Their comments led to some organizations being removed, and more being identified. We have since also had work based on this list peer reviewed by four journals.

Despite these checks it is important to point out that the list we are using was researched remotely, and relied heavily on the internet. It poorly captures organizations that do not have websites or access to email and therefore misses a great deal of the local colour and variety on the ground. Nevertheless it has been vigorously tested and remains by far the most comprehensive of all we have come across and was most positively received by the NGOs we sent it to. It does provide a basis on which to proceed.

For each organization we examined where they were working and what sort of projects they undertook, looking at about 900 overall. We also tried to work out how much money conservation NGOs were spending, and were able to get financial data on what 87 NGOs were spending for the years 2004–2006. We have used these data to produce a new and detailed classification of the different varieties of NGOs on the continent (Brockington and Scholfield 2010b) and explore conservation finances (Brockington and Scholfield 2010a). The present essay builds on the earlier empirical essays by providing a richer description of how different NGOs' activities fit with our understanding of how capitalism and conservation interact. We are able to write it as a result of many months' engagement with project literature, websites and correspondence with conservationists. It is important to emphasize, however, that we have not conducted any detailed schedule of interviews with particular conservation NGOs or NGO networks. That was beyond the scope of this survey, but is the subject of ongoing research by Katherine Scholfield.

## **Conservation NGOs and the Conservationist Mode of Production in Sub-Saharan Africa**

Our survey showed that conservation NGOs have kept pace with the global expansion of NGOs that is associated with neoliberalism. Figure 1 shows that conservation NGOs in sub-Saharan Africa expanded rapidly from the 1980s onwards, and most especially in the 1990s. Conservation



**Figure 1:** The development of conservation NGOs working in sub-Saharan Africa

NGOs have not just grown in number with time, they have also grown in size and influence. Major new organizations have come into existence, other older players have expanded their work dramatically. Thus Conservation International (the third largest conservation NGO on the continent) was formed in 1987, the Peace Parks Foundation (the fifth largest) in 1997, the African Parks Foundation (ninth largest) in 2000. Sachedina (this issue) shows that the older African Wildlife Foundation (AWF, established in 1961) doubled its income to nearly \$20 million within the last 10 years. Other, smaller organizations have also expanded dramatically in size. The Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund International (10th largest), the Rainforest Foundation and the Jane Goodall Institute (sixth largest) have all grown with the celebrity of their founders (Dian Fossey, Sting and Jane Goodall respectively).

It is also clear that these NGOs are plainly vital brokers mediating the production of value from wildlife in Africa. Half of all NGOs' headquarters are located in Europe and North America. This influence is particularly clear if we take the size of the organization into account. In the top 10 conservation organizations only one was founded and has its headquarters in the South (the Peace Parks Foundation of South Africa). Clearly mediating the relations between states, civil society and economic elites within African conservation is facilitated with a northern power base.

The sector is marked by its inequalities (Table 1). The top 10 organizations control the great majority of observed expenditure (more than 80%), and the budget and geographical activities of the largest (the WWF) is greater than the next two combined. In this respect the common concentration in the literature concerned with conservation NGOs on "BINGOs" (Big International NGOs) to the exclusion of

**Table 1:** The structure of the conservation NGO sector in sub-Saharan Africa

Size class	Range of expenditure inc overheads	Counted NGOs	Average expenditure inc overheads	Predicted number of NGOs for each size class	Predicted total expenditure inc overheads	Predicted structure (%)
7	Over \$40 million	1	42,708,026	1	42,708,026	21
6	\$10–21 million	4	15,559,663	4	62,238,652	31
5	\$4.2–6.2 million	5	5,467,690	5	27,338,450	14
4	\$0.8–1.9 million	10	1,351,520	18	24,327,360	12
3	\$0.3–0.72 million	14	479,142	43	20,603,106	11
2	\$0.1–0.3 million	26	200,090	90	18,008,100	9
1	Up to \$0.1 million	27	54,927	104	5,712,408	3
<b>Total</b>		<b>87</b>		<b>265</b>	<b>200,936,102</b>	

all organizations seems merited (Chapin 2004). However, it is also plain that there are a great many smaller organizations at work whose activities are not particularly well understood. It is when we look at the varieties and hierarchies of NGOs at work on the continent that the value of Garland's framework and the idea of the conservationist mode of production become clearest, for these make plain the different strategies employed to turn natural capital into more symbolic value and financial capital.

Conservation NGOs are either fundraising organizations that then distribute funds to known causes they seek out on the ground, or they can raise funds for causes they have identified and spend money on themselves. In both instances, however, these actions are more than just fund raising. As we stated earlier, they also legitimate (particular kinds) of conservation work (in particular places) facilitating the materialization of specific views of the world and thus of the interests that are associated with them. Indeed the legitimation function is crucial to the creation of symbolic capital from conservation work, which in turn underpins the fundraising. What was interesting from our survey was the variety of means by which conservation organizations have found of turning (legitimized) interactions with wildlife into symbolic capital and then actual funds.

One particularly prominent strategy in this region is organizations' reliance on the celebrity of their founder and his/her associations with particular animals, or causes. Thus the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund International, Iain-Douglas Hamilton's Save the Elephants, the Jane Goodall Institute, Cynthia Moss' Amboseli Trust for Elephants, the David Shepherd Foundation, the David Sheldrick Foundation and Born Free (associated with George and Joy Adamson and the actors in the *Born Free* film, Will Travers and Virginia McKenna), and Laurie

Marker's Cheetah Conservation Fund all rely upon the renown and charisma of their organizations' founders. These individuals are vital mediums in the production of conservation value. One might say that they are some of the key machines at work producing money for conservation out of the ideas and images that the conservation mode of production evokes. It is books, pictures, films, magazine articles by or about them, and their lecture tours, which provide the actual products that satiate the needs of northern publics for conservation images and stories. Some of these individuals themselves benefit from the support of organizations like the Wildlife Conservation Network in California which raises funds, as we have seen, by hosting special galas and dinners that specialize in concentrating these charismatic figures into a relatively small place for one evening.

In many of the cases above, the appeal of the individuals involved is combined with the charisma of particularly well known species. Other organizations, without the support of famous people, rely on the appeal of particular taxa alone. Prominent groups include primates, elephants, rhinoceros, big cats and birds (the Bonobo Conservation Initiative, the Wild Chimpanzee Foundation, the Elephant Conservation Foundation, the Lion Conservation Fund, Rhino Ark). Other organizations (the Rainforest foundation, Savanna International, the Sahara Conservation Fund) work for particular types of habitat. Finally there are the organizations that lobby for particular places, individual national parks and protected areas. An interesting feature here is the tendency of some conservation organizations to cluster around particularly iconic parks and reserves on the continent (Kruger, Amboseli). There are few such icons, however, and the more common pattern is for NGOs to space themselves such that they are not representing the same place.

There are also isolated cases where part of the appeal of the organization is their ability to work so directly and decisively in urgent conservation situations that they can appear to usurp states' prerogative of legitimate violence. The Owens Foundation for Wildlife Conservation and the George Adamson Wildlife Preservation Trust, for example, both take pride in being on the front line defending protected areas from people, to the consternation of their critics who query the ecological rationale of this hard line stance and its impact on people (Brockington 2002; Owens and Owens 1992; Ward 1997). The African Rainforest and River Conservation Organisation (and prior to it Jean and Mathieu Labreur; Adams and McShane 1992) tried to take a hard line against poaching in the Central African Republic, and was awarded considerable freedom over a large concession by that country's leaders (Clynes 2002; Ferguson 2006; Igoe 2002; Neumann 2004). Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands (see Wels and Spierenburg this issue) also secretly donated money to the WWF which was ring-fenced to be used in a military operation against poachers (Bonner 1993). In these instances

the blurring of the lines between states and NGOs are particularly salient.

More common are organizations that act as fundraising organizations in the north to raise and channel funds for conservation causes. Perhaps the best organized is Birdlife International, a collection of independent bird conservation organizations from different countries. Birds arouse particularly strong conservation passions and have done for some time. Bird conservation organizations are among the oldest in the movement and birds are the best known of all taxa. Birdlife International capitalizes on this passion and specializes in linking wealthy bird organizations in the North with suitable partners in the South. Other examples of such organizations in the UK include Save the Rhino, perhaps best known for its marathon runners dressed as rhinoceroses; Tusk Trust, Friends of Conservation (both with royal connections). In the USA they include the Wildlife Conservation Network (see above), the Centre for Rural Empowerment and the Environment and the swaggering International Conservation Caucus Foundation, a lobby group in Washington that enrolls the support of over 100 members of congress (see Corson this issue).<sup>6</sup> This Foundation organizes expensive galas in Washington serving African presidents and giving prestigious awards to prominent politicians and wealthy individuals.

These NGOs are particularly important agents within the conservationist mode of production because they depend on a set of images being produced in different field projects that they then market to northern publics in order to raise money. These organizations produce many of the arenas in which nature is converted into symbolic capital, and symbolic capital is converted into financial capital. They also, with their fundraising balls, galas, fun runs, fashion parades and charity auctions, substantially influence the character of the conservationist mode of production in its northern manifestations. They make supporting conservation fun. Fundraising work involves pleasurable activities in desirable locations with much popular participation (Brockington and Scholfield 2009). This is the business of actually existing mediation. In the process these organizations also reproduce the expectations of what wildlife conservation work should look like, and thus the value of the currency of images, symbols and expectations upon which the conservationist mode of production depends.

The fundraising organizations also exemplify the common feature that conservation NGOs often function in networks. They combine because of their common geographical interests, projects, personnel and ideas as well as fundraising activities. The performance and activities of these networks could be the subject of an entirely separate essay, and we will return to them in the conclusion. Here it must suffice to say that some are carefully planned operations. For example, the Bushmeat Crisis Task Force (BCTF) is based in the Washington DC

office of the WCS but enjoys a great and varied membership from NGOs, zoos, societies and universities. Their mission is essentially to use these networks to “eliminate the illegal commercial bushmeat trade” (BCTF 2009). Others, also planned, are quite fluid, as in the case of mountain gorillas. The International Gorilla Conservation Project (IGCP) is made up of staff from AWF, WWF and Flora and Fauna International who have initiated transboundary conservation of the mountain gorilla in the Virungas region of Central and Eastern Africa. The IGCP is a formal network and a hybrid entity, funded as a distinct project supported by all participant organizations and government. In addition to these three, there are others working on mountain gorilla projects in the individual countries of Rwanda, Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo alongside the IGCP. For instance, there is the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund International, the Gorilla Organisation (which split from the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund), and the Mountain Gorilla Veterinary Project which works in partnership with the three governments of Uganda, Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Within the mountain gorilla conservation community there is considerable fluidity of personnel. Staff have moved between NGOs, or split off to set up their own, between NGOs and donors, between NGOs and academia and between NGOs and state.

Other networks can be thrown into existence by unforeseen events. For instance, in 2005, the President of Kenya called for the downgrading of the Amboseli National Park to a national reserve, which prompted immediate outcry from a number of international conservation experts, NGO and wildlife groups. A “Save Amboseli” campaign (and website) was launched through the combined efforts of a number of conservation NGOs prominent in Kenya (although not including any of the larger and more powerful organizations).<sup>7</sup>

Finally we must note that the larger conservation NGOs combine all the above features. They are able to enroll the support of conservation celebrities [like Mike Fay with the WCS, as Garland (2008) shows] as well as drawing upon the popularity of familiar places and animals. They have programmes and field offices in numerous locations on the ground, as well as extensive and sophisticated fundraising departments and expensive, glittering, sponsorship events. They also act as funding bodies, forming alliances with local NGOs that will allow both funder and grantee to fulfill their objectives.

## **The Scope and Limits of the Conservationist Mode of Production**

In the examples above, the conservationist mode of production raised its money from rich northerners, but there are other means of turning knowledge of African environments into financial capital.

The conservation NGO sector is also a community of scientists—an epistemic community (Haas 1992)—that produces and purveys authoritative knowledge about wildlife, biodiversity and their conservation to states and donors. This is a deliberate exercise. Many of the larger NGOs have their own research departments publishing in—indeed prominent contributors to the conservation content of—the more prestigious scientific journals. Viewing conservation NGOs as part of a larger epistemic community is important because it shows how the conservationist mode of production can access the large sums available from bilateral and multilateral donors and produce its greatest impacts on conservation practice.

At its most extensive, the scope of conservation NGOs' activity is visible in some of their more far-reaching impacts on states' decision makers. Their GIS models of habitat, threat and wildlife migration urge action. In Gabon, the WCS was instrumental in encouraging the country's President to set aside 11% of the land area of the country into 13 new national parks (Garland 2008). In Madagascar conservation NGOs used their influence within the donor community to facilitate the adoption of strong conservation policies by the state (Duffy 2006). The Peace Parks Foundation has maps promoting the spread of protected areas across southern, and into eastern Africa. This is mediation writ large, with the confidence, scope and ambition to transform land use and alter economies.

More generally, the larger NGOs active in sub-Saharan Africa, and indeed the rest of the world, demonstrate their potential reach through their prioritization models. These models provide mechanisms for identifying the most important places for conservationists to save, and the most urgent places demanding action (cf Sachedina this issue). There are a plethora of such measures that variously prioritize threat, wilderness and biodiversity (Redford et al 2003). Indeed through them the conservation movement collectively prioritizes 79% of the world's land surface for action (Brooks et al 2006). What is interesting here, however, is that each organization tends to have its own separate prioritizing mechanism, which acts as a fundraising brand. Conservation International has its "Hotspots", WWF its "Ecoregions", the AWF its "Heartlands", Birdlife International has "Important Bird Areas" and "Endemic Bird Areas" and the Wildlife Conservation Society "the last of the wild". The proliferation of these measures has caused some concern within the conservation community for the duplication of effort each entails (Mace et al 2000; Redford et al 2003).

In fact these measures are best understood not as devices that make it easier to decide where to work, but as fundraising tools and, as such, central to the conservationist mode of production (Smith et al 2009). This much is plain in the way that they are used, debated and devised. First, it is difficult to tell how well these prioritizing mechanisms have

actually directed expenditure, because few organizations keep those sorts of records. Where these comparisons are made they have shown that expenditure is poorly related to conservation priority mechanisms (Castro and Locker 2000; Halpern et al 2006; Mansourian and Dudley 2008). Interestingly our data on patterns of conservation expenditure are the first to show the opposite pattern, and a close correspondence between measures of threat and biodiversity at the country level (Brockington and Scholfield 2010a). It was not at all obvious, however, that we could infer cause from this correlation. We could not explain why such a close match had been achieved. When these prioritization models are defended, it is on the grounds of the money that they raised (\$750 million for hotspots; Myers and Mittermeier 2003), not on the grounds of how effectively they have directed money to needy places. Finally consider how they were devised and marketed. As Sachedina shows (this issue), AWF came up with its “Heartlands” idea after advice from a consultant as to a label that would appeal to Middle American values.

While the ability of the larger conservation organizations to raise, and spend, large sums of money, both individually and as part of larger networks, should be clear, it is important that the scope of this mode of production should not be exaggerated. Significant influence is visible in the individual countries like Gabon and Madagascar, but these are unusual and isolated cases. Brockington (2006) has previously claimed that the financial power of the environmental sector in Tanzania makes it possible to speak of an “environmental–conservation complex”. However subsequent work suggests that the international conservation NGOs are not dominant to the inner workings of this complex. Rather, Sachedina (2008) has observed that prominent NGOs have been effectively disciplined and tamed by the state in Tanzania, and Nelson and Agrawal (2008) have similarly noted that it is state command of wildlife revenues, not NGO payments, that are most influential in the hunting sector. An overview of the conservation NGO sector suggests that while they may be part of a dominant ideology and elite interest, within the elite itself they are relatively marginal, and much less important than the thrust of much recent writings on BINGOs suggests.

As we have argued elsewhere (Brockington and Scholfield 2010b) it is probable that conservation NGOs’ influence and reach is generally constrained and limited across sub-Saharan Africa. They are particularly prominent in the North, where so many of them are based, and where they have been raising money for decades. They will therefore be prominent in the minds and perceptions of western-based academics writing about conservation issues in the South. However, their prominence here does not necessarily translate into a similar prominence on the ground in Africa. The actual day-to-day experience of conservation by rural Africans may well have very little to do with NGOs, and there will

be much more to the conservationists' mode of production than the work of NGOs.

Some simple statistics will demonstrate this. Conservation NGOs support under 15% of the protected area network, and their influence within the continent is highly uneven. In general terms it is slight in West Africa and greatest in South Africa. Within each region there are sub-metropolises of activity and larger areas where conservation NGOs are relatively absent. The work of conservation NGOs on the continent is patchy (cf Ferguson 2006). Transnational connections leave out vast swathes of African society and environments. They involve carefully chosen actors and target areas, but exclude and marginalize others. The conservationist mode of production is severely circumscribed in space and society.

The conservation NGO sector's annual turnover in sub-Saharan Africa is, in the broad scheme of things, small. We have predicted that it will be about \$200 million a year (Brockington and Scholfield 2010a, 2010b). It is less than 1% of Overseas Development Aid to the region (Scholfield and Brockington 2008). It is less than the annual budget of many large individual companies. There are other varieties of the conservationist mode of production that are as significant financially. For example, the trophy hunting industry has a similar turnover (\$200 million annually; Lindsey, Roulet and Romanach 2007). Hunting requires an extensive presence on the ground, for hunting operations hinge on patrolling hunting territories with (wealthy) clients. There is also the work of photographic safari tour operators who are part of the apparatus producing images of, expectations of, and experiences of particular forms of nature in the region, and turning them to profitable purpose. Both of these sectors of the conservationist mode of production are closely related to, and overlap with, the work of conservation NGOs.

It is the limits to their practical scope of action, and the contrast between that and the breadth of their vision, which underline the value of seeing conservation NGOs as part of a conservationist mode of production. The significance of conservation NGOs on the ground in sub-Saharan Africa is not so much the scale or extent of their funding and projects. Rather they are significant because of their role as brokers and introducers of new practices in Africa, as the creators of new conservation commodities, as promoters and lobbyists for more capital investment through the production of images and fundraising literature, as legitimators of conservation practice and entrepreneurship—in sum in mediating between the desires of states, economic interests and civil society nationally and internationally.

For example, conservation NGOs have been given special responsibilities in Tanzania to introduce wildlife management areas on village land. This scheme demarcates areas of village land near protected areas for wildlife use so that tourists can stay there, in return

for payments to the villagers, brokered through safari companies (Igoe and Croucher 2007). However, it requires significant changes to the way in which communities and their land use are organized. Here, and in the many other cases in which NGOs have been involved in community-based wildlife management (Nelson and Agrawal 2008), NGOs are at the forefront of creating new commodities, and altering landscapes and communities as a result. Indeed some NGOs specifically see themselves as introducing market relations and market revenues. For example, the African Parks Foundation explicitly states that its role is to enable protected areas to pay their own expenses through developing strong business models. The general point is that fund raising around this work, the ideas it embodies, and peddling the new commodities (community wildlife committees, ethical ecotourism, certified hunting arrangements) raises money that can in turn fuel the commodification process on the ground and the transformation of social relationships and those between societies and nature. The actual places and societies transformed thus may be few, but the virtualisms they invoke can be quite intense, demanding substantial change (cf Brockington 2002). They could initiate new waves of similar commoditization. Indeed that is their goal.

## Envoi

The findings of this essay suggest two further enquiries. First, with respect to conservation NGOs, we have only offered an outline of the conservationist mode of production. We have offered a theory that locates conservation NGOs' work within a broader framework of capitalist endeavour, facilitating economic growth, creating new commodities, promoting and legitimizing visions that require considerable alterations of nature and society. However, to understand how these separate entities work as a sector—as a mode of production—requires understanding how they interact with each other, how they seek and acquire legitimacy, how they are joined together, and how they move around money and ideas. This would require a careful ethnography of how large and small, local and international organizations interact, and the negotiations about how money is spent and what ideas are implemented within this network.

Not all of this sort of activity is easily observable, but an ethnographic approach will clearly be informative here. Anna Tsing's (2005) study of rainforest destruction and the resistance to it in South Kalimantan, Indonesia raises important questions about the transnational connections involved. Tsing argues that "[c]onservation inspires collaborations" and the "friction" between such collaborations shapes the conservation project (2005:6–9). That is, when certain actors come together in different ways across space and time and in different political, economic,

historical and social situations, new culture and different forms of power are created and destroyed. In the case of conservation, these connections will determine how ideas are negotiated, how a conservation project is implemented, and ultimately, the outcome of such a project. Therefore, exploring individual connections, encounters, relations that take place within the conservation sector and looking in detail at the negotiations that they involve will help us to better understand the power dynamics at play within transnational conservation networks. In turn this may help us understand how particular ideas travel across distance and how they come to be implemented in a given project, or for instance, how a particular project comes to be funded over another. Exploring the communication between these partners, and in particular, how they negotiate conservation ideas and funds may help us understand how such different organizations work across transnational borders.

Second, if conservation NGOs are only working in particular places, or “enclaves”, then it becomes even more important to establish the extent to which other types of conservation activities are taking place outside of these areas and what these activities might be. There are aspects of the conservationist mode of production such as the hunting and photographic tourist industries that we have barely mentioned here. Finally, and perhaps unusually for a review of the NGO sector, with respect to Africa it may actually be most important to re-examine the work of states in conservation. For these have the most extensive influence on conservation practice on the ground. If we can set these activities within the broader contexts of the work of states and other nature-based industries, and if we can build up comparative material and ethnographies from other parts of the world, we will be in a better position to understand the challenges of the conservationist mode of production that Igoe and Garland have thrown down.

## Acknowledgements

Our thanks for some trenchant and incisive comments from three anonymous reviewers, to Katja Neves for her patient reading and the many people who took part in the survey of NGOs. This work was partially supported by Dan Brockington’s research fellowship from the ESRC (RES-000-27-0174) which we gratefully acknowledge.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> <http://wildlifeconservationnetwork.org/events/expo2009.html> (accessed 7 November 2009).

<sup>2</sup> Numerous studies have noted the difficulties in defining boundaries between states, NGOs and donors who work alongside each other and together and who have staff who move between and within, or hold positions that straddle across, the different sectors (for instance, see Bebbington 2004; Jackson, 2005; Mitlin, Hickey and Bebbington 2007; Temudo 2005). Many NGOs develop businesses to fund their operations and market their brands to the public. There has also been slippage between NGOs and the state,

with the former either taking over many state roles, or collaborating closely with them, or being sought out by donors to undertake work, and administer funds, which states are perceived not to be able to do so well by themselves. Mbembe (2001) speaks of “privatized sovereignty” and “private indirect government” in which states will lend their sovereign authority to other actors (companies or NGOs) who in turn provide the personnel, funds and equipment to give that sovereignty power on the ground. Following a Gramscian perspective (Forgacs 1999), it could be argued that NGOs have similar effects to those of state bureaucracies: the creation and implementation of policies and governance techniques that ultimately shape the world in accordance to dominant economic and political interests. Or, put differently, NGOs mediate between the interests of civil society, state power, and political-economic elites.

<sup>3</sup> This is a common position. Edwards (2008:58) insists that the “best of civil society [of which NGOs are part] exists to meet needs and realize rights regardless of people’s ability to pay”. Civil society has “distinctive roles and values” that cannot and should not be simply joined to business (2008:91). Bryant (2009:1545) notes that despite critique of particular NGOs, “there tends to be a disposition to see them as a positive and indeed an essential intervention in politics”.

<sup>4</sup> A strong body of criticism aimed at conservation NGOs suggests that they are far too close to powerful corporate interests and governments (Chapin 2004; Dowie 1996, 2009). The broader literature on development NGOs again queries the extent to which these organisations are really part of an alternative movement (Bebbington, Hickey and Mitlin 2008; Edwards and Hulme 1995; Hulme and Edwards 1997; Igoe and Kelsall 2005). Bryant (2009:1550) observed that environmental NGOs generally are “disciplining agents in wider power structures” and are part of new architecture of “green governmentality”. This can impede their autonomy and transformative potential. Others have queried the representations inherent in conservation fundraising events. All too often the places represented are simplified and decontextualized such that problematic projects can be portrayed as simply and straightforwardly good (Adams and McShane 1992; Brockington 2002; Igoe 2004; Igoe and Croucher 2007; Katz 2001).

<sup>5</sup> Using the case of whale watching and its “antithesis” whale hunting, Neves (this issue) demonstrates how the division between consumptive and non-consumptive is not always as clear cut as at first it may appear and, for many reasons, whale watching is a highly “consumptive”, as well as a capitalist activity. Consumption here does not just refer to visions that are consumed but to actual damage caused to a whale as a result of boats used. Similar examples can arguably be found in coral reef diving, or Landrover wildlife safaris—often outwardly promoted as non-consumptive, and non-exploitative, yet with potential to cause varying levels of damage to the environments which they seek to avoid impact upon.

<sup>6</sup> Swaggering because it believes that “as America has exported freedom, democracy, and free enterprise, we have the ability and the interest to see that America also exports good natural resource management”. <http://www.iccfoundation.us/aboutus.htm> (accessed 22 August 2008).

<sup>7</sup> The following NGOs signed an open letter to the Kenyan President: Born Free Foundation Kenya, Youth for Conservation Kenya, East African Wild Life Society, David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust, World Society for the Protection of Animals, Pwani Environmental Resources Alliance, Animal Defenders International (UK), Animals Asia Foundation (Hong Kong), Born Free Foundation (UK), Born Free (USA), Care for the Wild International (UK), Cetacean Society International (USA), Co-Habitat (UK), David Shepherd Wildlife Foundation (UK), EIA (UK), Friends of Elephant/Vrienden van de Olifant (Netherlands), Humane Society International, Humane Society of the United States (USA), IPPL (USA), International Wildlife Coalition (Canada), Last Great Ape Organisation (Cameroon), League Against Cruel Sports (UK), One Voice

(France), Pan African Sanctuary Alliance, Prowildlife (Germany), Rainforest Concern (UK), RSPCA (UK), Society for the Conservation of Marine Mammals (Germany) and African Ele-Fund. Source <http://www.bornfree.org.uk/amboseli/letter2.shtml> (accessed 31 July 2009).

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