

Neoliberal Conservation: A Brief Introduction

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Abstract: *The growing body of work on the 'neoliberalisation of nature' does not as yet pay adequate attention to conservation policy and its impacts. Similarly, studies of conservation have much to learn by placing conservation policies in the context of broader social and economic changes that define neoliberalism. In this introduction, we outline and analyse the ways in which viewing conservation through a neoliberal lens adds value (if you will excuse the metaphor) to the collection of critiques we offer, placing quite different geographical areas and case studies in a comparative context. We argue that neoliberalisation involves the reregulation of nature through forms of commodification. This, in turn, entails new types of territorialisation: the partitioning of resources and landscapes in ways that control, and often exclude, local people. Territorialisation is a starkly visible form of reregulation, which frequently creates new types of values and makes those values available to national and transnational elites. Finally, neoliberalisation has also coincided with the emergence of new networks that cut across traditional divides of state, non-governmental organisation (NGO), and for-profit enterprise. These networks are rhetorically united by neoliberal ideologies and are combining in ways that profoundly alter the lives of rural people in areas targeted*

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for biodiversity conservation. The studies this collection brings together, which are all rooted in place-based detailed research, are united by their experience of these processes. We argue that the disparate collection of critiques on the neoliberalisation of nature needs more grounded studies like these. We conclude this introduction with some tentative recommendations for future research and policy on neoliberal conservation.

Keywords: neoliberalism, neoliberalisation, neoliberal conservation, reregulation, commodification, territorialisation, privatisation of sovereignty, displacement

THE APPEAL AND INCONGRUITIES OF NEOLIBERAL CONSERVATION

THE PHENOMENON of global neoliberalism, which revolves around the restructuring of the world to facilitate the spread of free-markets, is currently the subject of much debate in the social sciences. However, it has been sparingly discussed in the context of international conservation. The term 'neoliberal' is not commonly invoked at conferences, on e-mail lists, or in professional journals of biodiversity conservation. To the extent that it is discussed, the suggestion is that international conservation represents a bulwark against neoliberalism by protecting our planet's ecosystems from the advance of free-market capitalism.

This, mostly informal, perspective resonates with the 'World Society Theory', which posits that transnational intergovernmental and NGOs have fostered norms of state responsibility for environmental protection, through the creation of international conventions and by grooming state actors in developing countries to become champions of conservation (Frank et al. 2000). They are supposed to have also fostered new types of 'hybrid environmental governance', in which states, businesses, NGOs, and communities share responsibility for conservation. In addition to its putative positive conservation outcomes, this type of governance holds the promise of being democratic, efficient, equitable, and profitable (Lemos & Agrawal 2006).

Though neoliberalism is not explicitly mentioned, it is at the heart of this scenario. In 1999, Agrawal and Gibson wrote that advocates of community-based conservation saw the spread of markets and private enterprise as a key obstacle to their agenda. In the context of 'hybrid' governance, which includes communities in its ambit, conservation-business partnerships are becoming increasingly common, if not the norm. This can be seen in increased corporate sponsorship of conservation organisations; the increased management of protected areas by private for-profit companies (Levine, this issue); and increased emphasis on ecotourism as a means of achieving economic growth, community prosperity and biodiversity conservation.

These new types of neoliberal conservation promise to infuse new types of resources into biodiversity conservation, especially in the poorer parts of the world, where states lack the resources and capacity to effectively protect biodiversity. Neoliberal conservation also promises more. It promises increased democracy and participation by dismantling restrictive state structures and practices. It promises to protect rural communities by guaranteeing their property rights and helping them enter into conservation-oriented business ventures. It promises to promote green business practices, by demonstrating to corporations that green is also profitable. Finally, through ecotourism, it promises to promote environmental consciousness for western consumers by encouraging them to fall in love with the environment through direct connections to it.

As all the authors in this issue point out, such promises are difficult to resist. At the heart of these appealing promises is another one that is even more fundamentally appealing: a simple solution to complex and difficult problems. In the words of Grandia (this issue), it promises a world in which it is possible to 'eat one's conservation cake and have development desert too.' This is an apt metaphor, since neoliberal discourses often present the world as a pie that can grow bigger and bigger until everyone can have a piece. This metaphor is literally reflected in the growing size of conservation organisations and conservation interventions. Protected areas are increasingly designed to provide mitigating services to offset the spread of environmentally destructive commercial activities, while simultaneously facilitating the spread of economic benefits from commerce to wider areas. As such, the size of protected areas must increase apace with the spread of free-market capitalism (Büscher & Dressler, this issue). Spreading across five countries, and connecting two continents, the Meso-American Biological Corridor emerged alongside equally extensive trade corridors and free-trade agreements and presents itself as 'a solution to environmental problems caused by both greed and need' (Grandia, this issue). One of the key agendas for the Greater Limpopo Transfrontier Park is to ensure that the benefits from the 2010 World Cup in South Africa have a regional impact in Southern Africa by drawing tourists away from urban areas to spend money in more remote places (Büscher & Dressler, this issue).

These mega-protected areas are consistent with neoliberalism's metaphor of the world as an ever-growing pie. This is a world in which it is possible to create value *ad infinitum* (Sonnenfeld & Mol 2002; Harvey 2005; Büscher & Whande 2007; Castree 2007a, b), meaning that there are no losers (or at least no excuse for people to be losers) and little need for compromise, since there are no longer any fundamental conflicts. In this putative world, every new problem becomes an opportunity for profit and economic growth (Liverman 2004). Nature is protected through investment and consumption (Hartwick & Peet 2003), and conservation can be achieved without addressing the difficult and systemic inequities and power relationships that are inextricably linked to so many of our global environmental problems today (McAfee 1999). As

Grandia (this issue) points out, neoliberal conservation moves beyond a world of win-win solutions to a world of win-win-win-win-win-win-win (or win⁷ if you like) solutions that benefit: corporate investors, national economies, biodiversity, local people, western consumers, development agencies and the conservation organisations that receive funding from those agencies to undertake large interventions.

In contrast to the rosy scenarios described by these broad-brushed assertions, the fine-grained case studies presented in this issue reveal a world that is much messier than the neoliberal ideal suggests. Fortwangler's study shows how state-sponsored protected areas have coincided with skyrocketing real estate costs in St. John, Virgin Islands to the point where many local people can no longer afford to live there. Berlanga and Faust present a case in which local people in Yucatán, Mexico worked to start a protected area only to see it taken away by the federal government and its benefits appropriated by outside investors. Grandia's study introduces us to Guatemalan peasants who have been displaced by commercial tree farms established to offset carbon emissions. Ironically, the farms are destroying the biodiversity of the rainforests they replace. In her research in Zanzibar, Levine found that 75 per cent of the people in Mnemba Village viewed a privately managed island that was a protected area as a business venture that excluded them for the benefit of tourists. Meanwhile, in mainland Tanzania, Igoe and Croucher studied the controversies surrounding a community-based wildlife management area, which entailed (among other things) a group of elders being thrown into jail and a group of youth organising themselves to attack a tourist camp (this never materialised). Finally, Büscher and Dressler's work reveals Mozambiquan villagers being displaced by the Greater Limpopo Transfrontier Park, while private companies in South Africa benefited from business ventures 'under the guise of community-based natural resource management'.

These types of problems, which appear to be common place in international conservation, are consistently concealed by what Büscher and Dressler (this issue) refer to as a 'discursive blur'. They suggest this blur has a value of its own, as ideas such as participation, sustainability, and win-win solutions are used by competing networks of people to mobilise resources as efficiently and quickly as possible. In such a context, they continue, there is little incentive to test these valuable but reified ideas against the complex realities of actual communities in actual environments. Such ideas are also brought to life by the concentration of resources into showcase projects (Chambers 1983; Mosse 2004; Levine this issue). Increasingly, they are also represented in websites, which effectively associate the central elements of neoliberal conservation without using a single related word. Accordingly, Grandia (this issue) describes a website for the Meso-American Biological Corridor, which features an indigenous looking man's face, fading into a forest landscape that fades into a seascape, cuts to some coffee beans, a toucan, and some ancient Mayan Temples. Finally, these ideals are imposed onto actual landscapes, by manag-

ing them in ways that highlight specific aesthetics and their leisurely aspects (West & Carrier 2004; Fortwangler this issue). Of course this simultaneously renders these landscapes more marketable and valuable as touristic and consumptive experiences.

While these kinds of approaches may be effective in mobilising paradigmatic technical and administrative interventions, the studies in this issue suggest that such interventions often have negative social, and sometimes negative ecological, consequences. The critical literature on neoliberal conservation goes a long way in helping us to understand why this might be so. Unfortunately, relevant studies are often inaccessible to many conservation practitioners, especially those who are non-social scientists. In the remainder of this introduction, therefore, we seek to outline some of the most salient features of neoliberal conservation. We illustrate these with specific examples of how they may manifest themselves in specific local contexts. Our central motivation in doing this is to reinforce that the social side of conservation should be as empirically driven as the ecological side. Accordingly, we believe that conservation with equity can only be achieved by moving beyond the illusion of certainty presented by rigorously formulated technocratic solutions. Doing so represents a crucial first step in effectively engaging with the uncertainties, paradoxes and complex inequities of undertaking conservation in a rapidly neoliberalising world.

NEOLIBERALISATION, TERRITORIALISATION, COMMODIFICATION AND CONSERVATION

The term neoliberalism is frequently associated with the abstract jargon used by critical theorists. However, this is no reason for dismissing neoliberalism. Its power and ubiquity are such that we can no longer afford to ignore its implications for conservation. In order to better understand these implications, it makes sense to conceptualise neoliberalism less as a thing than as a bundle of processes—to speak of ‘neoliberalisation’, rather than neoliberalism in the abstract (Heyden & Robbins 2005; Castree 2007a, b). Neoliberalisation is a global process that varies from location to location. For the most part, however, it revolves around the key experiences presented in the case studies of this special issue.

One of the processes popularly associated with neoliberalisation is deregulation, the scaling back of states and their capacity to regulate. The assumption is that corrupt and inefficient states restrict free trade, free assembly, free speech, and free press. It follows that if the states were less intrusive in these matters, people’s lives would naturally improve. [This logic was clearly reflected in the neoliberal policy reforms of the 1980s and 1990s, which prescribed smaller states, a vibrant NGO sector, and the promotion of private enterprise as the solution to these problems (for a detailed discussion see Igoe & Kelsall 2005)].

Conservation's relationship to these processes has been consistently ambiguous. While conservationists frequently decry corrupt and inefficient states as a major hindrance to their project, state-sponsored protected areas (Smith et al. 2003) have remained the mainstay of international conservation. In fact, during the past twenty years of neoliberal ascendancy, state-sponsored protected areas proliferated on a global scale (West & Brockington 2006; West et al. 2006). This global trend is evident in several of the study countries in this issue: Tanzania, with approximately 30 per cent of its total land set aside as protected areas; Belize with 50 per cent; Guatemala with 30 per cent; and Panama and Costa Rica, each with 25 per cent. It can also be seen in mega-protected areas like the Greater Limpopo Transfrontier Park and the Meso-American Biological Corridor. At the same time, deregulation, decentralisation, and privatisation were increasingly heralded as the key to conservation success. Private game reserves proliferated and transnational conservation NGOs began openly brokering conservation-oriented business ventures (Langholz 2003; Igoe 2007).

These apparently confusing conditions are better understood from the perspective that neoliberalisation does not entail *deregulation* as much as it entails *reregulation*: the use of states to transform previously untradable things into tradable commodities (Castree 2007a). This may be achieved through privatisation (Vandergeest & Peluso 1995), as in the instance of Zanzibar's *Environmental Management and Sustainable Development Act*, which delegates management authority over protected areas to "any person qualified to exercise these powers" (Levine, this issue). It may also be achieved through the sub-division of collectively held land; for instance, article 27 of the Mexican Constitution, allows private investors and conservation NGOs to buy up land throughout Yucatán (Berlanga & Faust, this issue; also cf. Luke 1997). Conversely, it may be achieved by presenting collective legal titles to rural communities, allowing them to enter business ventures with outside investors (Lemos & Agrawal 2006), as in the case of Tanzania's *Wildlife Management Areas Regulations* (Igoe & Croucher, this issue). Finally, it may be achieved through state-controlled territories being made available to investors through rents and concessions, as in the case of the Greater Limpopo Transfrontier Park (Büscher & Dressler, this issue). These types of territorialisation also appear to add new types of value to areas that have not been directly territorialised, as with the real estate booms in St. John and Yucatán that have coincided with the creation of new protected areas (Fortwangler this issue; Berlanga & Faust this issue) and the rapid spread of tourist resorts that Grandia (this issue) has labelled 'the Cancúnisation' of Central America.

These types of changes are closely associated with what Vandergeest and Peluso (1995) call territorialisation —'the demarcation of territories within states for the purposes of controlling people and resources'. Territorialisation, which is essential to state-making, obviously predates neoliberalisation, such as the creation of Virgin Islands National Park in 1956 (Fortwangler) and in-

corporation of Maya territory into the Mexican state when the government began to develop mass tourism in the 1970s (Berlanga & Faust). If states were declining under neoliberalism, however, one would expect territorialisation to also decline. In fact, however, just the opposite has occurred. Territorialisation has intensified under neoliberalisation, as seen in the proliferation of protected areas.

Territorialisation in this context can be read as a new type of state-making, which is producing new types of neoliberalised state forms. The radical shift of money away from states during the 1980s and 1990s has caused these new state forms to be more decentralised and uneven than the previous ones. Their increased dependence on external funding, technology, and expertise also make them easier to penetrate by external actors and institutions. As such, processes of reregulation and territorialisation are frequently driven by multi-lateral funding imperatives, which are premised on putative synergies between conservation and sustainability, on the one hand, and investment-driven economic growth, on the other (Goldman 2001a, b; Lemos & Agrawal 2006; Levine, this issue). Increasing numbers of conservation interventions run on the assumption that the biggest obstacle to effective conservation is that nature has not yet been adequately commodified (McAfee 1999; Grandia, this issue). Through territorialisation, neoliberalised states meet the terms of the funding imperatives by commoditising resources. This, in turn, facilitates the capture of resources from the external actors and institutions on which neoliberalised states depend. Resources thus captured can be used to undertake more territorialisation.

Neoliberal forms of territorialisation are also characterised by increased direct involvement from for-profit businesses, and NGOs. Corporate involvement is especially evident in Africa, where the Africa Parks Foundation (APF), indirectly bankrolled by SHV Gas in the Netherlands and Wal-Mart in the United States¹, seeks to restore parks and set them up as secure businesses. The APF was implicated in the eviction of residents of Nech Sar National Park in Ethiopia (Pearce 2005a, b). It has similarly caused discontent in South Africa by evicting farm workers from land it wishes to add to protected areas (Goenewald & Macleod 2004). In Tanzania, the African Wildlife Foundation has taken over a previously state-run livestock ranch, which it now runs as a protected area (Igoe 2007; Igoe & Croucher, this issue). Meanwhile a private company called Ngrumeti Reserves Ltd., bankrolled by American futures trader Paul Tudor Jones, has taken over the management of two state-sponsored game reserves (Igoe 2007). Even in the United States, private support for parks has become increasingly essential over the past 25 years, as the Parks Service is operating with a backlog of \$4.8 billion (Fortwangler, this issue). The Virgin Islands National Park could not fulfil its mandate without such support. It receives millions of dollars in support every year from Friends of the Virgin Islands, a non-profit, which received forty-five corporate contributions in 2005, in addition to the use of luxury island homes for

their fundraisers (Fortwangler 2007). This includes donations from Disney Cruise Lines, Hawaiian Tropics and three resorts on the island.

On the world stage, these processes are associated with the rise of the a few large conservation NGOs (BINGOs—big non-governmental organisations), who have come to dominate the funding available for environmental causes. They are some of the world's biggest NGOs, collectively controlling billions of dollars, employing tens of thousands of people worldwide, and adopting increasingly corporate strategies, organisation and cultures. There is also concern that they have become too closely allied to corporate interests and fail to oppose some initiatives because they rely on the companies involved for funds (Chapin 2004; Price et al. 2004; Romero & Andrade 2004; Dowie 2005, 2006). Corporate environmental offenders like Chevron, DuPont, Exxon-Mobil, and Monsanto, can also be environmental donors (Dowie 1996). Dorsey (2005) has noted that the boards of directors of major conservation NGOs in the United States are now dominated by the Chief Executive Officers of major corporations, making it increasingly difficult for BINGOs to take a hard stand on environmental issues that might contradict the interests of their corporate sponsors/board members. Environmental mitigation projects and eco-development corridors present conservation BINGOs with significant sources of funding, but often also constrain their agendas and voice.

But this is only part of the story. In the context of global neoliberalism institutions like states, corporations, multi-lateral financial institutions and conservation BINGOs are increasingly interlinked by dense networks of actors, ideas and money. In fact, it has become increasingly difficult to distinguish where these institutions end and the networks that connect them begin. (Escobar 1995; Vandergeest & Peluso 1995; Goldman 2001b; Li 2002; Ferguson 2006; Sodikoff 2007). To quote Büscher and Dressler (this issue):

Continuous shifting authority has created enormous possibilities for and diffusion of environmental governance among actors and across scales and as a result of tremendously increasing complexity. Many individuals, NGOs, private companies, and transnational institutions regularly cross boundaries to influence governance of environmental affairs in a variety of localities. But not only can all these actors intervene elsewhere, they often feel entitled to do so, morally, economically, or politically (emphasis theirs).

This situation reflects what Mbembe (2001) refers to as 'private indirect government', while Ferguson (2006) calls it 'the privatisation of sovereignty'. Both terms refer to an emerging system where sovereignty has become highly decentralised and fragmented—controlled by different state actors, in different contexts and for different purposes. These actors still occupy the offices of 'hollowed out states', but without the resources to govern, or even pay their salaries, they become involved in other types of enterprises. For these actors,

sovereignty becomes an important and valuable asset, which they can use to broker alliances with private investors and donors.

The commodity of sovereignty is essential to the legitimacy of externally-driven interventions that revolve around the appropriation of land and other natural resources. Outsiders bring money on which officials from impoverished states are highly dependent, as well as new skills and technologies that are essential to increasingly sophisticated forms of territorialisation. This has created an emerging class of ‘hybrid’ actors who maintain their positions in developing states while simultaneously working for transnational institutions that can pay them much more remunerative salaries and higher consultancy fees than defunded states can afford (Goldman 2001a, b; Garland 2006; Igoe & Croucher, this issue). Often these individuals are torn between the agendas of transnational institutions and the interests of their constituents.

In contrast to the ‘World Society’ perspective, which sees the world as discrete entities of states, private enterprise, NGOs, and communities, these relationships form global networks of thought and action that interpenetrate and elide these categories. Such networks include people from the community level to the global headquarters of major corporations, multi-lateral agencies, and transnational conservation BINGOS². These networks also frequently function as ‘interpretive communities’ by representing specific interventions as successes according to prevailing policy goals (Mosse 2004).

In the case of wildlife management areas in Tanzania, for example, a group of well-placed Tanzanian wildlife officials worked with representatives of the African Wildlife Foundation to select a group of villagers who would represent ‘the community’. This network rigorously engaged in the reregulation and territorialisation according to neoliberal imperatives that emphasised the commodification of nature to promote conservation (cf. Igoe & Fortwangler 2007; Thoms 2007). The accountability of this group was upward to the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), The World Conservation Union (IUCN) and the Washington Headquarters of the African Wildlife Foundation. All the members of this group had a vested interest in representing wildlife management areas as a success, even though they did not all get along or even know each other. They benefited from their membership in these networks through salaries, per diems, awards travel, and being able to claim a ‘conservation success story’ (Igoe & Croucher, this issue).

In spite of their extensiveness, however, these networks are also highly exclusive. Flows of money within them—be they investments, multi-lateral loans, or conservation funding—tend to stay within them. In the case of wildlife management areas, only a handful of people at the community level realised any significant benefit (Igoe & Croucher, this issue). Another example is the Friends of Virgin Islands National Park ‘friendly links’ website, which links together networks of investors, tourists, park officials and philanthropists, but hardly any local people (Fortwangler, this issue). Finally, Berlanga and Faust (this issue), describe a situation in which the impacts of proposed

‘ecodevelopments’ are assessed by biologists whose careers depend on the goodwill of a small circle of developers.

Ferguson (2006), argues that the increasing power and pervasiveness of these kinds of networks creates a situation in which capital and development benefits do not spread as posited, for instance, by the idea that the Greater Limpopo Transfrontier Park would spread World Cup 2010 revenues to rural Mozambique and Zimbabwe. Instead, he counters, capital and development ‘hop’ over areas of low potential value directly to areas of high-potential value. Territorialisation of these valuable areas commoditises them and transforms them into intensely guarded enclaves. In this way, they become transnationalised spaces, governed according to the needs and agendas of transnational networks of actors and institutions, rather than according to the development needs of specific countries. Ferguson (2006) identifies protected areas as an especially salient example of the type of point-to-point territorialised spaces mentioned above—describing them as ‘transnationalised spaces of high biodiversity value’, which have been reregulated to give them new types of economic value and to make that value available to transnational interests and national elites, often at the expense of local rural communities.

While this assertion begs a systematic and comparative investigation of protected areas around the world, it is consistent with all the case studies presented in this special issue. To quote Berlanga and Faust (this issue):

The prevailing discourse of conservation policy in Mexico and many other Latin American countries has frequently presented protected areas as benefiting local communities. It has been claimed that these communities are privileged in receiving programmes for combining economic development with conservation of natural resources, as part of the policy of ‘sustainable development’ recommended by the Convention for Biodiversity in 1992. Unfortunately, however, our findings do not accord to these claims. To the contrary, we discovered that external actors with economic power (commercial tour agencies, eco-developers, and hotel owners) are in the process of becoming the primary beneficiaries of the (Yum Balam) Reserve.

Finally, Büscher and Dressler (this issue) argue that the processes and relationships briefly outlined in this section are especially amenable to the promotion of neo-protectionists agendas. To begin with, they point out, the urgency of creating protected areas so that countries can achieve a competitive advantage in the global tourist economy is consistent with the urgency with which neo-protectionists insist that we ‘must make the right decisions now’ concerning setting aside crucial areas of the world’s biodiversity³. Next, investment in landscapes for apparently ‘non-consumptive’ activities not only contributes to the extension of state-sponsored protected areas, it also contributes to the extension of green spaces beyond the boundaries of state-sponsored protected

areas. The important question that remains, one that is addressed in detail by all of the articles presented in this special issue, is: what are the impacts of these processes on local people?

EXCLUSION AND IMPACTS

The question of what happens to local people is one that remains poorly addressed in conservation literature (Brockington & Igoe 2006). To be sure, literature on community-based conservation abounds, but as Büscher and Dressler (this issue) point out, it is being produced in an institutional and ideological climate in which there is a widening gap between rhetoric and reality. Negative assessments, even if empirically grounded, are consistently labelled as unproductive and destructive. Consequently, the discourses of these institutions will become increasingly self-referential and divorced from reality. “It thus becomes less important whether something is correct in grounded reality, as long as it makes sense to the discursive reality that many of us are in” (Büscher & Dressler, this issue)⁴. In such a context, it becomes easy to present facile paradigms of how local people will participate in, and benefit from, conservation interventions.

Ideas that the protection of biodiversity is inseparable from the protection of cultural diversity notwithstanding (Igoe 2005), local people are increasingly seen as having fundamentally flawed relationships to both nature and the market. As the most proximate and visible threat to protected areas, they are often treated as the primary threat. According to the dominant perception, their hope lies in being brought out of nature and into the market so that they can return to nature as competent conservationists.

In Goldman’s (2001b) words, they must become ‘eco-rational subjects’—the ‘eco’ in this case standing both for *economic* and *ecological*. This hinges on: 1) having legally guaranteed property rights, which: a) gives them the authority and incentive to protect natural resources as ‘environmental stakeholders’, and b) gives them the capital and/or collateral to enter into conservation-oriented business ventures; 2) being able to realise the present and projected market value of the nature in which they live; 3) being able to acquire the skills, technology, and ethics of accountability that are necessary to care for nature as prescribed by the transnational interpretive communities that oversee these transformations; and 4) gaining the skills that are also necessary to acquire jobs in the tourist sector (Child 2000).

Property rights qualify people with capital and/or collateral, allowing them to enter the global economy as investors, producers, and consumers. Investments, however, carry no guarantee. In fact, the way in which property rights add value to resources is by rendering them alienable (Mitchell 2007). It is possible, even probable, that people will lose their capital due to limited opportunities on the bottom rungs of the investment ladder (Dove 1993; Li 2002). Poor people are also more likely to consume capital due to the numer-

ous emergencies in their lives. Moreover, they have little capital and little experience of how to effectively invest it. The reregulation of resources, even when ostensibly for their benefit, often works to their detriment. They often find themselves divested of their property even when that property is putatively protected by law.

For instance, Berlanga and Faust (this issue) found that the more tourism spread through the Yucatán, the less competitive advantage local people enjoyed in the tourist economy. This situation was reflected in increased sale of land to outside investors. Likewise, Igoe and Croucher (this issue) documented a situation in which local people were being targeted for conservation easements to leave their land open to wildlife. While these easements would increase the value of the land to outside investors, they could not adequately compensate people who depended on access to that land for their livelihoods. Büscher and Dressler (this issue) further found that assumptions that rural people would be absorbed into the tourist industry facilitated and justified removing them from landscapes that would become valuable to that industry (cf. McAfee 1999). As Levine (this issue) points out, however, tourism is a fickle industry, one that is especially vulnerable to changes in the global economy and the impacts of distant political events. For instance, in addition to its regular seasonal fluctuations, Zanzibar's tourist industry experienced a significant downturn following the attacks of 11 September 2001.

In addition to these insecurities and inequities, neoliberalised conservation often devalues local environmental knowledge and undermines local environmental initiatives. As Fay (2007) discovered, this frequently occurs when local conservation initiatives are unable to articulate effectively with 'interpretive communities' and the resources they command. Levine (this issue) documents a case in which a group of fishermen established a conservation committee, only to see their village passed by for a conservation project because of its inconvenient location. Berlanga and Faust (this issue) worked with Maya villagers who voluntarily placed their land inside a protected area, which was then taken out of their hands. Igoe and Croucher (this issue) interviewed rural Tanzanians who thought they were making a conservation plan for their village, only to have the plan appropriated to create a wildlife management area, from which many of them were evicted. Igoe and Croucher were also scolded by a Tanzanian wildlife official who told them that they did not need to work with villagers. He was the expert on these issues. If they wanted to know anything they should just come see him. Finally, Fortwangler (this issue) quotes a St. Johnian employee of the United States National Parks Service, who told her: "the problem with park management is that they think locals don't understand or appreciate the environment. We do. We grew up here knowing how to conserve. We had to conserve and be resourceful. What we do not appreciate is being disrespected."

This sentiment is exacerbated by technocratic approaches to conservation, which target perceived deficiencies in the 'knowledge, skills and attitudes' of

local people. This approach can be intimidating, as when rural Tanzanians found themselves at workshops conducted in a language that they did not understand (English) and attended by high-ranking government officials and expatriate conservation practitioners (Igoe & Croucher, this issue). In other cases, it is merely insulting, as when Friends of the Virgin Islands National Park decided that local resentment to the park was happening because local people simply did not understand or value the parks in the ways they should. Their strategy was to help local people understand better through improved volunteer opportunities, dissemination of information, and outreach (Fortwangler, this issue).

St. John's provides an especially stark example of this kind of problem. Over a million tourists visit a national park on a twenty square mile island, with a population of 5000 people. In such a context, local people are literally overrun and displaced by tourists. In 2004, these tourists spent \$92 million on St. John, \$31 million of which went to personal income. This wealth is very visible, and for the vast majority of native St. Johnians it is abundantly clear that the wealth is not reaching them. It is also clear that the National Park Service is doing a poor job of employing St. Johnians. Finally, it is hard not to notice that Friends of Virgin Islands National Park is dominated by white expatriates, a number of whom have direct ties to the real estate industry, especially when one of them is driving around with a vanity plate that reads 'Buy St. J'.

Over time, this type of displacement of local people and their resource management systems often result in unforeseen transformations. Drawing on oral histories, Berlanga and Faust report that people in their research area participated in the global economy through the sale of exotic bird feathers up until the 1950s. Some of their informants suggested that the strict protection of birds after this time ironically resulted in the decline of bird populations. They believe that growing bird populations taxed local ecosystems, prompting birds to migrate away. The remaining bird populations were wiped out by a hurricane in the 1990s. Following this event, the tourist economy changed, and bird watching was replaced with scuba diving and swimming with whale sharks. These activities required special skills and licenses that local tour guides did not have and could not get. These long-term socio-ecological changes, followed by the introduction of neoliberalised conservation, resulted in ecosystems and economies that no longer made sense to the local people and were no longer available to them.

On a global scale, it appears that these types of transformations are displacing rural people in large numbers. As a result of the lack of real opportunities offered by neoliberalisation conservation, often only a select few local people can aspire to and succeed at becoming eco-rational subjects. The rest experience what Giroux (2006) calls 'the politics of disposability'. With no place for them in the emerging free-market economy, they simply become disposable. They are shunted about here and there, as they seek a viable place to live

and viable economic opportunities. Increasingly, they find their lives criminalised. They can no longer fish, hunt or farm to make a living. They have sold their land, or granted easements to it, or it has been simply taken away. As one informant told Igoe and Croucher (this issue), “it is like you are no longer a citizen of your own country. Wherever we go we are told: you can’t stay here.” Indeed, the very concept of citizenship is at stake in the context of neoliberal conservation, since what counts increasingly is ownership and access to the transnational networks that define conservation success.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, a word of caution is necessary about some of the building blocks of our argument. We obviously believe in the importance of investigating the consequences of neoliberalism. However, we are also mindful that the explosion of writing and attention to these impacts is introducing a lack of precision to the debate. The term ‘neoliberalism’ is at risk of becoming nothing more than a vehicle for academics who like to criticise things that they do not like about the world. Indeed, some would argue that it already has (e.g. Barnett 2005). Castree, while more sympathetic to the intellectual value of the term, has observed that critics of neoliberalism are still a long way from mounting a coherent attack on it, and that we still only have a disparate collection of excellent but individual studies to draw upon (Castree 2007a, b). Accordingly, it is important that we continue to pay attention to the types of patterns that emerge from these studies so that we may begin to generalise more effectively about neoliberalism and its impacts.

Such a project begs a nuanced appreciation of the diversity of ways in which neoliberalism can effect conservation policy. We have found, and the case studies presented below all suggest, that the outcomes of neoliberal policies can be problematic for conservation goals and local livelihoods. But the reverse is also quite possible. For instance, Castree (2007a) observed that the withdrawal of sugar farming subsidies in Florida created all sorts of space for nature. Outcomes which were problematic for sugar farmers were highly advantageous for many conservation interests. Anderson (2001) has documented the expansion of reindeer populations in the far north of Russia following the imposition of structural adjustment programmes, which withdrew state support for reindeer farming. The animals have been left to their own devices and gone feral. The consequences of this state deregulation has prompted a campaign from the World Wide Fund for Nature to save the ‘last great wild reindeer herd in Europe’ with plans to establish large new protected areas to contain them, which would allow indigenous hunting.

In contrast to Igoe and Croucher’s experience, there are rural groups in Tanzania seizing the opportunity to sell access to their land to tourist safari companies, and fighting their government for the chance to do so. Moreover, these were not simply instances of local elites having their way with commu-

nal lands for their private benefits. The size of the revenues generated prompted a radical change in the administration of village government resources, with regular independent audits being conducted of the use of the funds (Nelson & Makko 2003; Nelson 2004). Significantly, this instance involved local people successfully resisting the types of reregulation that Igoe and Croucher document. As such, it appears as a notable exception in Tanzania—an example of how market-driven approaches to conservation could work if local people truly gained exclusive rights to their land and the capacity to negotiate directly and effectively with potential investors. Of course, in such cases, they would also be free to withhold their land from business ventures, as well as choosing not to make it available for biodiversity conservation.

Whatever neoliberalism's impacts, however, the important point is that it does not automatically benefit local people and the environment as the types of rhetoric outlined at the beginning of this article assert. Most parsimoniously, we can say that neoliberalism opens up new spaces in ways that could either harm or benefit the environment, in ways that can either present opportunities or liabilities to local people. While it is important to understand the types of conditions under which it is likely to benefit local people and/or the environment, it is equally important to remember that such benefits are not an intended consequence of neoliberalism. Neoliberalism is about restructuring the world to facilitate the spread of free-markets. Proponents of neoliberalism hold that this will automatically benefit local people and the environment; the case studies presented in this special issue clearly demonstrate that this is an invalid assumption.

More ambitiously, we can say that neoliberalism's emphasis on competition, along with its the rolling back of state protection and the social contract, creates spaces in which local people are not often able to compete effectively in the face of much more powerful transnational interests. They simply lack the resources to play the neoliberal game effectively. This does not mean that they never will, just that the deck is heavily stacked against them. By the same token, neoliberalism may benefit nature to the extent that some spaces are deemed as lacking adequate value for extractive enterprises. To the extent that such value exists, however, it will be difficult to promote biodiversity conservation over large-scale extractive enterprises.

The bottom line is that neither protectionist conservation nor neoliberal economic development *needs to benefit the rural poor* in order to thrive (Brockington 2003). In fact, both thrive quite happily when poor people are displaced. Whether or not conservation has an ethical obligation to benefit rural communities is a question of values to be negotiated and debated from the community level to the forums of transnational conservation. But such negotiations and debates can never be effective as long as they take place in the context of a 'discursive blur,' which holds that free-markets and the commodification of nature will produce outcomes that benefit everyone without significant social and ecological costs or compromises. The case studies pre-

sented in this special issue provide the sort of empirically grounded understanding of neoliberalised conservation that we believe will be necessary for these negotiations and debates to begin to take place.

Notes

1. <http://conservationrefugees.org/apf>
2. The term BINGO simply stands for Big Non-Governmental Organisations. These are organisations that are transnational in scope, and command assets ranging from tens of millions of dollars to a billion. This term is now widely used in the world of transnational biodiversity conservation, where it usually designates the following organisations: the Nature Conservancy, Conservation International, the World Wide Fund for Nature, Flora and Fauna International, the Fund for Wild Nature, the Wildlife Conservation Society and the African Wildlife Foundation.
3. This type of urgency is reflected in the African Wildlife Foundation's recently created rapid response network, which entails downloading Collective Web Assistant, a special software that links users directly to various forms of media when the organisation puts out a new alert. The current alert takes users to a video on you tube about mountain gorillas. The software automatically rates the video as having five stars and adds it to the user's favourites. The video itself promotes the protection of mountain gorillas through the promotion of commerce that will benefit local people.
<http://ws.collective.com/points/point?id=zhKo0FQPe8vs>
4. Mosse (2004) has convincingly shown that 'despite the fact that the logic of practice routinely contradicts policy models, development projects are constrained to promote the view that their activities are the result of the implementation of official policy.'

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