



Market-oriented conservation governance: The particularities of place

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ABSTRACT

Conservation policy and practice is increasingly turning towards market-based interventions to reconcile the growing conflicts between environmental conservation and rural livelihood needs. This short introductory paper to the special issue on “market-oriented conservation governance” critically investigates the growing commitment to markets as a means of meeting conservation objectives and livelihood security. We distinguish market oriented conservation from neoliberal conservation and argue for a grounded, empirically rich investigation into the passive and active promotion of markets in conservation landscapes – analysis which pays attention to how and why certain markets are promoted by NGOs, governments and private sector, as well as how rural people negotiate livelihoods and markets when adjusting to conservation pressures. Such an approach takes seriously how the particularities of place, from local harvests to trans-local trade, shape market-oriented conservation in practice and expose the messiness of such ventures. The range of papers in this special issue show how neither neoliberal nor market-based interventions in conservation are uniform in character, impact and outcome, and that while identifying the patterns and logic behind these processes remains crucial, the basis for understanding how markets inform conservation, must be done by drawing on empirical data that speaks clearly to how actors variously engage the logic of market-driven conservation in terms of their histories and contemporary realities. We argue that doing so makes it possible to understand not only what is ‘new’ about contemporary market-oriented conservation but also its continuities with earlier forms of command and control conservation.

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1. Introduction

The policy decisions of conservation authorities and advocates along with the livelihood decisions of people living inside conservation territories are aligning to produce an increased presence of market-oriented conservation governance. This trend has emerged from long-standing debates about the conflicts arising between development, conservation and poverty in rural areas, which have supported the idea that social well-being, rural livelihoods and economic development must not be at odds with conserving valued species and ecologies. While the early days of protected area expansion post-World War Two saw a concerted effort by the state to keep people’s livelihood activities out of conservation territories, the kinder, gentler 1980s and 1990s emphasized community-based models, integrating restrictions on extractive activities with ‘off set’ developments such as schools, health care facilities and environmental education (Barrett and Arcese, 1995; Brosius et al., 2005). The shift towards community-based models was unsatisfactory to many disillusioned with the

capacity of communities to advance conservation goals and fairly quickly there was a re-entrenchment of early coercive conservation – it remains in the trenches today (Wilshusen et al., 2002; Locke and Dearden, 2005). Concern over communities living in conservation landscapes persists, however, as demonstrated by the Durban Accord signed at the 2003 World Parks Congress and the principles of Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) (Brosius, 2004; IUCN, 2003; UN, 2007). Such international agreements and principles push local conservation authorities to take the livelihood concerns of people residing in conservation landscapes seriously, leading to the continued search for on-the-ground mechanisms that can facilitate a reconciliation between conservation and livelihood.

Market-based conservation emerged under the mantra that assigning a monetary value to nature was the most efficient and effective way of saving it (McAfee, 1999), and had the additional benefit of being able to provide livelihood opportunities for those most affected by conservation practice. With a promise to reconcile the longstanding tension between livelihood and conservation, market-based conservation appeals to both coercive and community-based approaches, as evidenced from their wide-scale adoption (Igoe and Brockington, 2007; e.g. The Nature Conservancy, 2011; Conservation International, 2011). There are now a range

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of financial mechanisms that emerge out of, and easily integrate into, capitalist markets, leading to a dominance of market-based approaches to deal with the tensions between financing conservation, meeting conservation objectives and ensuring rural livelihood security. In particular, the creation of markets which value nature in monetary terms is an increasingly popular means of raising the money necessary to finance conservation and, as the thinking goes, securing local income to wean local users off of 'scarce' resources. Meanwhile, as farmers adjust to the loss of resources associated with conservation policy amidst rural economies diversifying, intensifying and capitalizing, they themselves seek out and take advantage of emerging market opportunities and, in doing so, inform and shape the markets they engage (Dressler and Roth, 2011; Higgins et al., 2012). Conservation and, by extension, carbon, wildlife, landscape esthetics and ecosystem services, have now become the commodities to be produced and exchanged as livelihood strategies.

Critical scholarship on conservation and development has been a bit slow to the market-based conservation party (though McAfee, 1999 is an early exception), being mostly pre-occupied with the roles of the state and local communities in environmental governance. Widespread discussion of neoliberalism in the social sciences has recently helped to push scholars' gaze towards markets as an agent of dominant, perhaps hegemonic, governance in conservation landscapes. Similarly, critical conservation scholars have built upon insights emerging from the expanding literature on neoliberal nature that makes a strong case for understanding how nature has become central to neoliberal projects and documents the ways that natures have become neoliberalized in tangible and less tangible ways (Peck and Tickell, 2002; McCarthy and Prudham, 2004; see Hughes, 2005 for 'third nature'; Castree, 2008; see Büscher, 2010 for 'derivative nature'; see Igoe et al., 2010 for 'spectacle of nature'). It is widely acknowledged that associated trends in environmental governance, such as decentralization, privatization and commodification, are greatly informed by a neoliberal logic that is now reaching once remote frontiers of the world, where nature–society relationships were once more socially embedded than monetary in nature (Polanyi, 2001). Likewise, it has become increasingly common to interrogate the trends in conservation practice as part of neoliberal processes and to understand how the shift towards decentralized environmental governance 'inserts' markets that facilitate (existing and new forms of) commodification of environmental goods and services as well as growing corporate, private sector involvement in global conservation initiatives (Cammack, 2003; Chapin, 2004; Igoe and Brockington, 2007). The production of nature as a fictitious commodity, in that it pre-exists and transcends capitalist commodification, is understood in these accounts as part of a double movement (Polanyi, 2001), where the state moves in cyclical fashion to regulate–deregulate *laissez-faire* capitalism (Foster, 2002), ostensibly managing nature from the excesses of capitalist exploitation.

Drawing on such Polanyian analysis has informed an understanding of the neoliberalization of nature as a necessarily incomplete and fractured process where competing logics can persist and progressive opportunities can emerge (Higgins et al., 2012). Perhaps the most visible work in neoliberal conservation comes from Brockington, Igoe, Duffy and others who have provided in depth analysis of the ways in which capitalism and conservation are increasingly co-produced into what Fletcher (2010) calls 'neoliberal environmentalism'. Consequently, we now have a clearer picture of the 'business of conservation', its inner workings, assumptions and assertions (Brockington et al., 2008) and its ability to entice a large variety of actors to adopt markets as a panacea to solving the current environmental crisis (Bücher and Dressler, 2007). Neoliberal conservation is thus increasingly understood as

the outcome of a confluence of factors meant to protect (if not expand) the processes of capital accumulation and to simultaneously promote market-based mechanisms to address environmental concerns which also meet the requirements of neoliberal governance (e.g. private property).

Neoliberalism has, as Ferguson (2010) notes, become a favoured target of critical scholars in the social sciences. Both as ideology and practice, neoliberalism appears to function as another means for corporations, governments, NGOs, farmers and middlemen, among others, to disenfranchise the rural poor and to further elite interests in controlling and commodifying landscapes and livelihoods. Some of these critiques are clearly very dangerous to the conservation establishment, as the stories of 'disobedient' knowledge attest (Igoe et al., 2010). While we align with this critical narrative, and with the importance of the social and ecological injustices it identifies, there are other associated processes unfolding that also require critical exploration. In particular, we have become mindful of the need to interrogate, through the analysis of place-based empirical data, the types of markets emerging within and through conservation interventions, and critically engage the ways in which markets 'neoliberalize' nature, humans, and non-human species in an effort to 'save' all three (Castree, 2008, pp. 153–154).

Yet grounded empirical details often remain missing or disconnected from the discussion of how, when and why markets 'neoliberalize' nature, or empirical details are examined in an *a priori* fashion – and here we include some of our own work in the critique. While conducting ethnographic research in rural Southeast Asia, we have found it fruitful to use the specifics of place as an entry point into what are a confluence of processes which, articulated through local social relations and institutions, result in market-oriented 'solutions' to tensions between conservation, livelihoods and economic growth. Doing so enables understanding of how market oriented conservation mechanisms serve to promote market access alongside state control and how they function to present production for market exchange as the best solution to the challenges faced by rural resource dependant farmers. We have thus become aware of the need to examine the various socio-political and economic dynamics involved in creating markets, and how these inform our current interpretation of what constitutes neoliberalism relative to pre-existing, endogenous forms of production, exchange and circulation in rural areas of the world (see Gudeman, 2001).

Though it is well-established that many neoliberal characteristics (e.g. faith in the 'free' market) are rooted in their liberal genealogy and thus there are continuities between liberal and neoliberal forms of governance (McCarthy and Prudham, 2004), the critical literature on conservation has given little attention to the continuities present in the transition to neoliberal conservation governance. Much literature has over-emphasized what is 'new' by highlighting the creation of new commodities, new markets and the involvement of the private sector in financialization while neglecting to explore with the same enthusiasm the ways that contemporary forms of market-oriented conservation have a long history and connection to a 'pre-neoliberal' form of conservation. Conservation as a practice has long relied upon capitalist markets to help meet conservation objectives; this is not new. Philanthropy has driven conservation acquisitions, recreational hunting and the economic interests of the wealthy have informed the location of conservation territories while the lure of urban labor markets and promotion of agricultural intensification have been relied upon to reduce the pressure on conserved resources (see Brockington, 2009). There are, however, new forms of market-oriented governance strongly informed by, and increasingly constituted by, neoliberal logic such as biodiversity offsets, ecosystem services and tradable quotas. But even these, when articulated through often contradictory political economic processes, are not

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