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Social impacts of neoliberal conservation: formations, inequalities, contestations

Abstract:

In recent years, perhaps the two most prominent debates in geography on issues of biodiversity conservation have hinged upon, firstly, the positive and negative social impacts of conservation projects on human populations, and, secondly, the apparent neoliberalisation of conservation. Yet so far there have been few explicit linkages drawn between these debates. This paper moves both debates forward by presenting the first review of how the neoliberalisation of conservation has affected the kinds of impacts that conservation projects entail for local communities. It finds that, whilst there are important variegations within neoliberal conservation, processes of neoliberalisation nevertheless tend to produce certain recurring trends in their social impacts. Firstly, neoliberal conservation often involves novel forms of power, particularly those that seek to re-shape local subjectivities in accordance with both conservationist and neoliberal-economic values. Secondly, it relies on greater use of use of representation and spectacle to produce commodities and access related markets, which can both create greater negative social impacts and offer new opportunities for local people to contest and reshape conservation projects. Thirdly, neoliberal conservation projects frequently widen the distribution of social impacts by interacting with pre-existing social, economic, and political inequalities. Accordingly, the paper illuminates how neoliberal approaches to conservation generate novel opportunities and constraints for struggles toward more socially and environmentally just forms of biodiversity preservation.

Key words: Neoliberalism; conservation; social impacts; political ecology; protected areas

Running header: Social impacts of neoliberal conservation

Introduction

The last few decades have witnessed a rapid proliferation of interest amongst conservation agencies, civil society organisations, bilateral and multilateral donors, and academics about the social impacts of conservation measures, or the ways in which efforts to conserve biodiversity might positively and/or negatively affect the wellbeing of various human populations. Here, wellbeing encompasses a range of factors including livelihoods, culture and cultural survival, political empowerment, and physical and mental health. While conservation projects can deliver benefits such as employment opportunities and revenue from ecotourism or payment for ecosystem service schemes, they can also entail direct or indirect negative consequences, including restrictions on livelihoods, resource access, and forced displacements (West and Brockington, 2005).

Disagreements over the nature and distribution of these impacts have given rise to a vociferous and occasionally quite polarised debate within the pages of academic journals, as well as in conservation organisations, donor agencies, and international conferences (e.g. Roe 2008; Brockington and Wilkie 2015). In recent years, these debates have been further complicated by an additional trend within academic publications – and largely without attaining a comparable degree of prominence within conservation organisations – about a perceived turn towards so-called 'neoliberal' forms of conservation (e.g. Igoe and Bockington 2007; Dressler and Roth 2011; Arsel and Büscher 2012). Here, 'neoliberal conservation' refers to a complex and multifaceted trend characterized largely by the rise of practices and discourses of financialisation, marketization, privatization, commodification, and decentralisation within conservation governance (Igoe and Brockington 2007; see also Castree 2010; Fairhead et al. 2012). Although the rise of the academic literature on neoliberal conservation has been precipitous – including empirical case studies that explore how neoliberal forms of conservation have affected human wellbeing – there has been no comprehensive overview of these cases. Moreover, literatures on both neoliberalism and neoliberal conservation have grown so rapidly that they have arguably already engendered a certain 'neoliberalism fatigue' (e.g. Springer 2016), and an accompanying search for novel modes of analysis. Yet, in order to truly appraise the enduring value of neoliberalization as an analytic for examining shifting geographies and political ecologies of conservation, there is a need to carefully examine its identifiable social impacts, with a particular focus on how its novel forms of governance and finance may have precipitated similarly novel patterns of social impact. Only then, we argue, can we properly take stock and identify points at which these inquiries can be productively complemented by other modes of inquiry.

This paper begins by briefly outlining key features of the literature on the social impacts of conservation and on neoliberal conservation. Second, we outline the methodology that guided our selection and analysis of relevant scholarship. Third, we present the key findings of a review of empirical case studies exploring neoliberal conservation projects and strategies, focusing on how these are: i) highly empirically diverse, exhibiting different constellations of marketization, privatization, commodification, financialisation, and decentralisation, ii) frequently involve novel forms of power, particularly those aiming to create new market and conservation-friendly livelihoods and subjectivities, iii) rely upon greater use of representation and spectacle to both produce commodities and access related markets, and iv) interact with and exacerbate pre-existing social, economic, and political inequalities. Throughout, we argue that these social impacts of neoliberal conservation present novel opportunities and constraints for achieving more socially and environmentally just forms of conservation in the context of both global ecological and political-economic change.

The Social Impacts of Conservation

Although some publications, conference outputs, and organisations have raised the issue in previous decades (see Roe 2008 for an overview), concerns over the social impacts of conservation rose to unprecedented prominence in the early 2000s through three trends. Firstly, key academic publications on the issue by Stevens (1997), Chatty and Colchester (2002), Brockington (2002), Adams et al. (2004), West and Brockington (2005), West et al. (2006), Wilkie et al. (2006) and Brockington and Igoe (2006), amongst others, explored current and recent impacts from conservation, whilst Neumann (1998), Spence (2000), and Jacoby (2001) explored the negative impacts brought about by the earliest national parks in North America and Africa. Secondly, articles in popular press such as Chapin (2004) and Dowie (2005) brought the issue of negative impacts from conservation projects to a much broader audience, provoking a variety of responses by conservation organisations including denial, disavowal, and irritation. Thirdly, conservation's negative social impacts on indigenous people – both historical and contemporary – were a key theme of discussion at the 2004 World Parks Congress (WPC), to the extent that some prominent conservation biologists complained that such concerns 'dominated and drowned out the discussion of themes more directly related to conserving nonhuman life on this planet' (Terborgh 2004: 619). Related debates have also been sustained to a greater or lesser extent at subsequent WPCs and similar high-level conferences.

Some conservation organisations and scientists have responded by disputing the reliability of some case studies of negative social impacts (e.g. Curran et al. 2009; Burgess et al. 2013), by arguing that the literature disproportionately focuses on negative impacts of conservation (e.g. Dudley and Stolton 2010), and by seeking to mitigate such consequences through establishing ostensibly more equitable policies and institutions (see Roe 2008; Dressler et al. 2010). Nevertheless, these debates remain unresolved, with researchers, activists, journalists, and civil society organisations continuing to critique a range of active conservation projects with regard to their social consequences for affected populations.

A number of trends can be identified from this literature (for an overview, see reviews including Brockington and Igoe 2006; West et al. 2006; Adams and Hutton 2007). Negative impacts include eviction and exclusion from customary land and natural resources such as grazing land, firewood, bushmeat, medicinal plants, timber, and culturally important resources and places, with implications for both monetary income and non-monetary livelihoods (e.g. Cernea and Shmidt-Soltau, 2006, West et al 2006, Vedeld et al. 2007; Holmes and Brockington, 2012, Oldekop et al. 2015), health and physio-psychological wellbeing (Zahran et al. 2015), as well as culture and cultural survival (West and Brockington, 2004; Hitchcock et al. 2015). Conservation regulations are sometimes imposed or enforced in a harsh, violent, or corrupt manner, precipitating allegations of human rights abuses (e.g. Beymer-Farris and Basset 2012; Cavanagh and Benjaminsen 2014, 2015). Other negative impacts are less direct, such as the social upheaval caused by the sudden growth of a tourism industry (e.g. Benjaminsen and Bryceson 2012; Ojeda 2012). Many of these negative impacts are imbricated within Eurocentric notions of 'wilderness', and the corresponding desire to territorialise conservation spaces that are insulated from human impacts, habitation, and influence (West et al. 2006; Adams and Hutton 2007). Such spaces can be imposed because – although conservation organisations may occasionally represent themselves as valiantly struggling to save biodiversity from the callous and incessant expansion of human economies – conservationists tend to have substantially more resources and political influence than the rural communities whose lives they affect (Brockington 2004; Holmes 2013). This is especially the case when the state forcibly imposes conservation regulations, and when conservation objectives become aligned with with (inter)national 'security' objectives (Lunstrum 2013; Cavanagh et al. 2015; Massé and Lunstrum 2016).

Reported positive impacts mirror their negative counterparts, and include more secure land tenure (particularly in the case of indigenous and community conserved areas [ICCAs] – Stevens, 1997, Berkes, 2009), increased income from ecotourism and payment for ecosystem service (PES) schemes, secure or reliable access to natural resources and ecosystem services, employment opportunities, insulation from natural hazards, and compensation schemes for either direct or opportunity costs of conservation (Dudley and Stolton 2010). The question over whether positive impacts tend to be more or less frequent than negative ones is complex and fraught with methodological complications, such as difficulties in systematically gathering data, or comparing very different kinds of impact (Oldekop et al. 2015, Wilkie et al. 2005; Brockington and Wilkie 2015). In some instances, it is complicated by the vested interests of those involved in debating such research, and the reliance on self-reported data within some analyses (Holmes and Brockington 2012). This is despite the number of different frameworks and approaches used to study the impacts of conservation, including cost-benefit analyses, institutional approaches, livelihoods frameworks, and political ecology studies rooted in political economy and environmental history. Additionally, the literature to date exhibits a strong focus on protected area issues, particularly stricter terrestrial protected areas (Oldekop et al. 2015), although many other forms of conservation intervention have also been studied.

Moreover, calculations of conservation's costs and benefits often fail to consider the unequal *distribution* of impacts, and the ways in which those individuals or groups who experience negative impacts are often distinct from those who experience benefits. Both positive and negative impacts are frequently unevenly distributed along pre-existing social cleavages, such as gender, class, caste and ethnicity (Adams and Hutton, 2007; Dressler et al. 2013; Tumusiime and Sjaastad 2014). Conservation practices may exacerbate social difference, wherein benefits accrue asymmetrically to wealthier or more powerful members of a community, for example, through processes of elite capture (To et al. 2012; Benjaminsen et al. 2013; Cavanagh and Benjaminsen 2015). Conversely, costs sometimes appear to disproportionately fall upon the already socially, politically and economically marginalized (Adams and Hutton, 2007, Holmes and Brockington, 2012). In some cases, this may be because the impacts of conservation are wrapped up in wider conflicts – for example, the treatment of indigenous groups in Kenyan, Zimbabwean, or Botswanan protected areas largely reflects their respective marginalization in society and politics more generally (e.g. Hitchcock et al. 2015).

Further, there has been insufficient exploration, either by reviewing empirical case studies or by drawing upon theoretical insights, of the precise mechanisms that link certain conservation policies to their social impacts. For example, it is unclear how projects using payments for ecosystem services as a key conservation mechanism might result in different impacts, with a different distribution, compared to projects relying upon strict regulations to prohibit the use of natural resources. In part, this is due to a lack of theorisation on the more subtle dimensions of power, of how different conservation strategies seek to mould human behaviour into more conservation-friendly forms (but see Neumann, 2001, Agrawal, 2005; Fletcher 2010). Whereas some forms of power in conservation are straightforward and relatively crude, such as the deployment of state violence to impose the boundaries of conservation 'fortresses', others are more complex and subtle, such as attempts to generate support for conservation through collective self-surveillance, employment opportunities, incentive payments, or compensation schemes. Whilst a growing literature examines how conservation regulations might be contested and resisted (Holmes 2007; Benjaminsen et al. 2013; Cavanagh and Benjaminsen 2015; Holmes 2016), there is perhaps inadequate exploration of why these efforts might fail or succeed, and how this relates to the shifting deployment of power in conservation.

Although there has been some discussion of trends such as ecotourism and the rise of civil society involvement in conservation governance (e.g. West et al. 2006) there has not been much *empirical* attention to the ways in which processes of neoliberalisation may alter the social impacts of protected areas. This lacuna is particularly curious given the number of scholars who work thematically on both neoliberal conservation and the social impacts of conservation. That said, the former inquiries have yielded a number of important conceptual insights on the 'nature' of neoliberal conservation, which we briefly review below.

Neoliberal Conservation

The literature on neoliberalism is vast, precluding a thorough review here. That said, we concur with many geographers and political ecologists that conceptualize neoliberalism as a complex and variable assemblage of ideologies, institutions, discourses, actors, and related practices that seek to broaden and deepen processes of financialisation, privatisation, marketisation, decentralisation, and/or commodification in society (e.g. Peck and Tickell 2002; Igoe and Brockington 2007; Brenner et al. 2010; Peck 2010a; Springer 2010). In this sense, neoliberalism is perhaps better conceptualized as an ongoing and dynamic process rather than a steady economic or social state (Peck, 2010a), which proceeds in uneven and variegated ways in different empirical contexts (see also Brenner et al. 2010). In many cases, such variegation results from the underlying historical-geographical context or 'out there' (Peck and Tickell 2002) that processes of neoliberalization inevitably articulate with, from the intensification of state-led capitalism in China, to oil-fuelled urbanization in the United Arab Emirates, to circuits of patronage-based rule in Cambodia (e.g. Springer 2011).

Despite such variegations, a number of scholars have now examined the interface between various processes of neoliberalization and the environment, identifying several of neoliberalism's 'constituent processes' (McCarthy and Prudham 2004; Heynen et al. 2007; Castree 2008), the most prominent of which are defined in Table 1. In short, the specification of these constituent processes assists us – following Brenner et al. (2010) – in avoiding the twin pitfalls of both monolithic fetishization, on one hand, and endless contextualization on the other. By focusing on the constituent processes of neoliberalism outlined in table 1, we can analyse the phenomena of neoliberalized conservation, whilst avoiding the analytical trap of simply chronicling the potentially limitless range of place-specific idiosyncrasies.A further analytical danger concerns the (dis)junctures between neoliberalization and various other formations of capitalism. Processes such as marketization, commodification, and privatization were underway in the nineteenth century as they are today in many of the historical-geographical contexts discussed below (see also Silver and Arrighi 2003). That said, we have focused our attention on heightened, intensified, or otherwise novel incarnations of these constituent processes, and especially so when these were previously absent from prevailing forms of conservation governance.

Table 1 – Constituent processes of neoliberalisation. Adapted from Harvey (2007), Büscher (2010), Castree (2010), Fairhead et al. (2012), Sullivan (2013).

Marketisation	The regulation of exchange in goods or services via markets rather than an alternative mode of distribution. Often entails commodification and/or privatization as a necessary precondition. Example: Payments for ecosystem services on privately-owned lands in the Amazon (Pokorny et al. 2012).
Commodification	The legal or institutional re-inscription of ‘things’, interactions, processes or services as commodities rather than gifts, entitlements, or rights. Commodities are generally obtained by monetary payment, but not always via markets, and are not always privately owned. Example: Commodification of carbon sequestration or other ecosystem services originating within state-owned protected areas with public trust funds (Nel and Hill 2013; Cavanagh et al. 2015).
Privatization	The conversion of property rights to land, resources, services, or commodities from communal, state, or open access non-property to private ownership. Sometimes entails commodification as a necessary precondition. Example: Privatisation of wildlife on private game reserves in South Africa (e.g. Snijders 2014).
Financialization	The creation and valuation of ‘derivative’ commodities without necessarily commodifying or privatizing an underlying asset or resource. Derivative commodities are not always traded via markets or privately owned. Example: Carbon or biodiversity offsets derived from state managed protected areas and circulated on voluntary ecosystem service markets (e.g. Cavanagh and Benjaminsen 2014).
Decentralisation	The delegation, outsourcing, or extension of administrative functions without necessarily altering underlying property rights, typically via the involvement of ‘flanking organisations’ such as NGOs, community organisations, or private firms. May also be combined with ‘new public management’ strategies and the budgetary surplus-driven management of state agencies. Example: Extension or delegation of protected area management via private and civil society organisations (e.g. Adams et al. 2013).

Neoliberal conservation is frequently accompanied by a triumphalist ‘triple win’ discourse that eulogises its ability to simultaneously protect the environment, grow the economy, and deliver benefits to local communities (Igoe and Brockington 2007). Accordingly, neoliberal conservation’s proponents typically frame these interventions as fundamentally technical or apolitical in nature, or simply as ‘commonsensical’ attempts to relieve tensions between conservation, environmental change mitigation, and community livelihoods (e.g. Bracking 2015). Conservation’s neoliberalisation has been explained in terms of the search for new outlets for overaccumulated capital, particularly under the auspices of the so-called ‘green economy’, as well as emerging from incentives for conservationists seeking to align with dominant actors, trends, and ideas in order to gain additional power, resources, and influence (Igoe et al. 2010; Fairhead et al. 2012, Holmes 2011). Although conservation’s ability to actually deliver returns to investors – much less ‘market-rate’ returns – has recently been brought into question (e.g. Dempsey and Suarez 2016), we emphasise as well the ‘extra-economic’ dimensions of neoliberalization, which may be as much concerned with the inculcation of new subjectivities and forms of governance as they are with securing profits for individuals and institutions (see especially Neumann 2001; Fletcher 2010).

From Table 1, it is clear that neoliberal conservation projects retain the potential for high levels of empirical variegation. For example, individual projects might not always entail the privatisation or decentralisation of state control over natural resources. Indeed, the commodification and financialisation of forest carbon potentially offers incentives for the *re*centralisation of government control over forest resources and the exacerbation of conflicts resulting therefrom (see also Phelps et al. 2010; Sandbrook et al. 2010; Cavanagh et al. 2015). Likewise, although payment for ecosystem service (PES) schemes have sometimes been classified as non-neoliberal or pseudo-neoliberal due to their occasionally tangential engagement with markets (Dempsey and Robertson 2012; McElwee 2012; Milne and Adams 2012) – perhaps operating even as an ‘indirect subsidy’ (Lansing 2013) – they may still entail neoliberal processes of commodification, decentralisation, or financialization, with implications for the wellbeing of affected populations.

Nonetheless, claims that neoliberal conservation is ‘new’ must be treated with caution. Capitalism was involved in conservation long before neoliberalism emerged (Igoe and Brockington 2007). Many projects labelled as neoliberal conservation also bear the imprint of much longer histories of environmental regulation and its relationship to state formation (Vandergeest and Peluso 1995; Roth and Dressler 2012; Cavanagh and Himmelfarb 2015). There is also often a gap between the neatly conceptualised neoliberalising intentions of conservation projects, and the messy realities of how they are implemented (Fletcher and Breitling 2012). These issues are not always fully accounted for in the literature, perhaps because of an apparent tendency to take political economy theory as a starting point for exploring neoliberal conservation, rather than the empirics of case studies. Further blurring the line between neoliberal and non-neoliberal forms of conservation is the prevalence of global processes of neoliberalisation, denoting that even attempts at non-neoliberal conservation must take place within this broader context and are frequently shaped by it. For example, efforts in Chile to create private protected areas to counter the increased integration of the region’s natural resources into global capitalism are shaped by the Chilean state’s highly neoliberal political structures and economy (Holmes, 2015). Thus, while some conservation strategies attempt to offer a bulwark against neoliberalisation, they discover that they must engage and harness such processes in order to achieve conservation goals. In this sense, ‘neoliberal’ and ‘non-neoliberal’ forms of conservation do not exist in binary opposition, but rather constitute opposite ends of a messy and complex spectrum. In general, however, the above discussion suggests that – just as processes of neoliberalisation and neoliberal conservation variegate across different empirical contexts – so too will their social impacts. It is therefore difficult to deduce the general consequences that practices of neoliberal conservation will produce for the populations they affect (see also Dressler and Roth

2011; Roth and Dressler 2012). Nonetheless, based on the methodological approach outlined below, we have sought to identify general patterns or tendencies of social impact within the empirical literature on neoliberal conservation.

Methodology

This study aims to identify patterns and trends in the social impacts of neoliberal conservation projects. To do so, we utilised a comprehensive selection of empirical case study literature as our starting point for informing our findings, as well as for broadly distinguishing between explicitly neoliberal and comparatively non-neoliberal projects. We aimed to identify any general trends in the literature, especially causal mechanisms linking particular social impacts to specific conservation approaches or tools used, and how these regulations were accepted or contested. To identify case studies, we used the Scopus database (first accessed 29th December 2014, and supplemented by further searches throughout 2015). We searched for papers which included in their title, keywords or abstract the word “conservation”, as well as one of “neoliberal*”, “market*”, “PES”, “payments for ecosystem services”, “ecotourism”, “NGO”, as well as one of “resistance”, “cost”, “benefit”, “eviction”, “exclusion”, “impact”. This produced 128 papers. This sample was screened, and papers were included in the final analysis if they detailed at least one empirical case study of an effort to conserve biodiversity, and whether it was judged to be an example of neoliberal conservation. To meet this latter criterion, the case study described must contain one or more of the processes outlined in Table 1. This resulted in an initial sample of 43 papers, which was later supplemented following reviews of literature identified with the same search terms throughout 2015. These papers were coded according to certain criteria, to guide qualitative analysis of the patterns emerging, rather than a quantitative analysis of trends. Criteria included the geographical location of case studies, the nature of the conservation intervention (e.g. a protected area), the presence and type of negative and positive social impacts experienced, whether local people had contested these impacts formally or informally, and the form of neoliberalised conservation being introduced. These included state roll-back, re-regulation, and use of payment based conservation, where the latter was subdivided into ecotourism, carbon-based payments for ecosystem services, and other mechanisms. To ensure that we were capturing the social impacts of specifically neoliberal forms of conservation, rather than broader conservation practices, we only included in our analyses those impacts which were explicitly linked to the constituent processes of neoliberalisation of conservation present in the case study. This does not mean that the impacts can be ascribed entirely to neoliberal conservation, as discussed below, but it does give greater confidence that they are the result of neoliberal logics and processes.

While this approach is broad enough to capture the breadth of projects considered as neoliberal conservation, we include three main caveats. First, we do not claim that this is a universal or representative sample of the literature on neoliberal conservation, a virtually impossible task given its variegations. Second, there is a distinct geographical bias in our sample, with almost all cases taken from the global South, reflecting the inattention to the North in both the literature on social impacts of conservation (Oldekop et al, 2015) and that on neoliberal conservation (Apostolopoulpou and Adams 2015). Third, there is a challenge in drawing broader lessons from varied case studies (Castree, 2005). As Sullivan (2005) pointed out in an early piece on neoliberal conservation, these cases are bound together by similar logics and practices, the ‘constituent processes’ of neoliberalism. In order to emphasise where the comparability lies between these cases, we focus on how the social impacts identified in the case study are related to the fundamental logics and practices at the heart of neoliberalism, as set out in Table 1. It is this focus on the underlying logics and practices, on neoliberalisation as a phenomena rather than neoliberalism as a singular thing (Sullivan 2005; Peck 2010a), that allows us to compare case studies effectively. Whilst we cannot claim that the social impacts we identify are omnipresent or somehow determined by the adoption of neoliberal conservation practices, we can say that they are common and recurring outcomes of the neoliberalisation of conservation.

Results

Many of the same kinds of impacts, and the same trends regarding their distribution, were found to be present within both the literature on neoliberal conservation and the more general literature on the social impacts of conservation (West et al. 2006, Oldekop et al. 2015). Neoliberal conservation projects have been shown to bring both extra income – for example, as private-community partnerships in Uganda allowed local residents to earn money from ecotourism (Ahebwa et al. 2012) – and reduced income, such as where a neoliberal approach to a marine protected area in Honduras favouring foreign tourist companies heavily restricted the livelihoods of artisanal fishermen (Brondo and Bown, 2011). They can sometimes empower local communities – for example, through greater civil society involvement and community participation in a reserve in Mexico (Doyon and Sabinot, 2014), or of fishing communities near a marine protected area in the Philippines (Segi 2014). Conversely, neoliberal conservation projects have also been shown to disempower communities and expose them to greater risk of harsh treatment, such as where tourism economies have led to local communities losing control over their land and suffering from violent enforcement of regulations in Tanzania (Benjaminsen and Bryceson, 2012) and Colombia (Ojeda 2012). Different articulations between the conservation, carbon offsetting, and ecotourism industries have also led to communities being evicted from their land in Guatemala (Devine 2014), Honduras (Timms 2011), and Uganda (Nel and Hill 2013), occasionally with significant violence (Cavanagh and Benjaminsen 2014). Impacts have been found to be unevenly distributed by class (Ahebwa et al., 2012), gender (Ogra 2008), ethnicity (Dressler and Roth 2011, Devine, 2014), the ability to maintain congenial relations with conservation authorities (Nakakaawa et al. 2015), and other social characteristics (Tumusiime and Sjaastad 2014; Silva and Motzer 2014). They are occasionally also regressive, with benefits accruing to the already powerful and costs to the weakest (To et al. 2012; Benjaminsen et al. 2013; Lansing 2014). Market based conservation schemes such as ecotourism and payments for ecosystem services are more easily harnessed by the powerful because they have greater economic, political or social capital, which serves as leverage to access such markets (Fletcher 2012). For example, Igoe and Croucher (2007) explore how reforms to facilitate community involvement in ecotourism led to elite capture of wildlife revenues through both legal and illegal means, with similar dynamics leading to the elite capture of revenues from PES schemes in Vietnam (To et al. 2012). At the same time, the weakest in society are most vulnerable to resource grabbing associated with conservation and to cope with the restrictions placed by conservation projects: for instance, Benadusi (2014) shows how local elites, allied with the state, were able to dispossess weaker peasants of their lands surrounding Yala National Park in Sri Lanka during a government initiative to liberalise land markets and facilitate ecotourism.

Another broad similarity is that the social impacts of neoliberal conservation projects cannot be understood outside of the broader historical and political context in which they are located. For example, projects in South Africa aiming to integrate communities, ecotourism and protected area management were fundamentally shaped by wider trends in land reforms, race and ethnic relations, and development in the post-Apartheid era (Fay, 2013). Devine (2014) demonstrates how the class and ethnicity based evictions and violence in creating ecotourism in Guatemala are a continuation of previous rounds of such evictions and violence experienced during the long civil war. Cavanagh and Himmelfarb (2015) illuminate how conservation governance in Uganda is inextricably related to much longer processes of state formation and (re)territorialisation, where long histories of tensions between conservation authorities and historically marginalised local populations are only now beginning to articulate with 'neoliberal' interventions.

Nonetheless, our review also highlights three trends not widely seen in the broader social impacts of conservation literature, concerning: i) new forms of power and the formation of neoliberal-environmental subjectivities, ii) the use of representation and spectacle to link conservation projects to markets and consumers, and iii) the exacerbation of inequality and social differentiation.

New Forms of Power and Neoliberal Subjects

Regardless of the precise 'formation' in question, neoliberal conservation is often integrated into people's everyday lives in ways that are different to conventional forms of conservation governance. In classically 'fortress conservation' schemes, regulations generally act primarily against people's livelihoods, for example, as legal-juridical restrictions on using certain resources, enforceable through the courts and punishable by fines and imprisonment. However, in neoliberal conservation there is a tendency to act not simply against, but also *through* existing livelihoods; to re-regulate them by advocating or incentivizing certain kinds of practices rather than merely enforcing restrictions upon pre-existing strategies. The emphasis is not on stopping local people from undertaking certain practices, but also on incentivizing them to adopt desired alternatives. Whilst there is a longer history of conservation interventions working through livelihoods which predates and exists outside of neoliberal forms of conservation, such as alternative livelihood projects, what is different is the extent to which this happens, and the way it is fundamentally linked to novel logics of marketization and commodification in particular. There is an assumption that market mechanisms and forces are the best tools or approaches to saving biodiversity, and these are inevitably livelihood focused. The point of these processes is that local people must become part of this process, their relationship with natural resources reshaped by and conditioned by these market mechanisms.

Our review identifies a range of cases in which new, ostensibly both nature and market friendly livelihoods are being created in ecotourism, payments for ecosystem services and related sectors. For example, NGOs and state bodies working to conserve protected areas in Mexico's Yucatan peninsula have sought to regulate local people's behaviour not just through bans on harmful activities, but through measures to transform livelihoods to more conservation-friendly forms dependent on ecotourism, through education programmes, small grants and other means (Doyon and Sabinot, 2014). In Thailand, after decades of coercive bans on certain livelihood activities as the key conservation measure, authorities moved to compliment these with planned transitions from traditional subsistence livelihoods to ones based on conservation, ecotourism, and market friendly agroforestry and cash crop production through low-cost loans, agricultural outreach programmes and privatisation of communal property (Dressler and Roth, 2012; Youdelis 2013). Rather than just banning traditional agriculture as the Vietnamese government expanded its Ba Vi National Park, conservation authorities sought to create conservation-based livelihoods by granting local people private land rights and paying them to reforest land (Dressler et al. 2011). Moreover, case studies from marine protected areas in the Philippines show that, even when strict conservation regulations were 'forcibly imposed' around marine protected areas in the Philippines (Segi 2013), relevant authorities and civil society organisations still sought to change behaviour and attitudes through different types of outreach and community participation schemes. As Seki (2009) puts it, the subtlety of such forms of power also leads to complex forms of agency, ones that defy categorization under any simple 'domination-resistance' binary. This is also a more insidious form of power – whereas previously local people may have only interacted with conservation when they encountered park rangers or boundary fences, they are increasingly now being incorporated into conservation every time they conduct their new conservation friendly livelihood activities, such as working in tourism, paid reforestation, or growing 'forest-friendly' cash crops.

Whilst our empirical review shows this increased frequency and depth of regulation within neoliberal forms of conservation, the theoretical literature points to regulation at the level of thoughts and values, particularly via the extension of Foucault's work on governmentality and subjectification to environmental regulation (e.g. Neumann 2001; Agrawal, 2005; Fletcher 2010). As Neumann (2001) observes, the 'limits of coercive approaches' to conservation had become fairly evident by the 1980s, giving rise to a number of community-based conservation (CBC) initiatives (see also Dressler et al. 2010). Neumann (2001: 326) draws upon Foucault's notion of disciplinary power to explore how conservationists sought not merely to coerce local people into certain patterns of behaviour, but also to internalise conservationist norms by recruiting locals as game scouts, creating a structure in which communities surveil and regulate each other. Similarly, Agrawal (2005) explores Foucault's work on governmentality, attributing changing local behaviour towards forest resources in India to the way in which governance structures changed the values and ideologies of local people, resulting in the wholesale production of 'new political subjects' that adopted or even *desired* new forms of stewardship over the environment. Fletcher (2010) theorises 'neoliberal environmentality' as the provision of 'incentives sufficient to motivate individuals to choose to behave in conservation friendly ways. Especially in the later case, we see the ways in which conservation works not just through threats of legal and/or physical violence, but also via the creation of pro-environment and pro-market subjects. The point here is not that neoliberal forms of environmentality have supplanted the use of coercive sovereign power or disciplinary power, but that each of these forms articulate in novel ways within distinct empirical contexts to produce both environmentally and market-friendly subjects.

As a note of caution, it is important to stress that the empirical case studies explored did not demonstrate a total creation of environmental subjects, whose behaviour and subjectivity closely matched that of the ideal neoliberal conservation subject. This may be because the timeframes between the creation of neoliberal approaches in these places and the empirical observations of the researchers was too short, compared to the decades-long framing of Agarwal's (2005) study. It may also arise from contradictions in the process of subject creation; indeed, as Youdelis (2013) shows, the creation of environmental subjects can also undermine conservation, as attempts to create 'authentic' nature-loving Karen people in Thailand to promote ecotourism also allowed people to articulate 'authentically' egalitarian Karen-ness as a way of critiquing the uneven spread of benefits of ecotourism. More likely is that the interventions are too partial and limited. Within any community, individuals use a portfolio of mixed livelihood strategies, of different activities at different times, and not all individuals share the same portfolio. Market based conservation projects may only target a few of these activities, or add a few more options, but this still leaves space for alternative strategies, with their own subjectivities. Certainly, local people retain the potential to operate as 'organic intellectuals', with the agency to demystify neoliberal conservation, and to use strategies and express ideas and behaviours that do not follow that of the ideal neoliberal conservation subject (Cavanagh and Benjaminsen 2015). This is not to say that there is no shaping of subjectivities by neoliberal conservation, only that it should not be assumed to be all-powerful.

Representation and Spectacle

Another of neoliberal conservation's distinctions concerns the necessary centrality of spectacle and representation to its operations (Igoe 2010). Whilst the literature on the social impacts of conservation more generally has identified how Eurocentric ideas, myths, and representations of wilderness has driven certain negative impacts (Brockington 2004; West et al. 2006; Adams and Hutton 2007), neoliberal conservation projects go well beyond this, often relying not only on selling particular goods or services, but also normative ideas or images of how those commodities *should be experienced*, such as pristine landscapes and 'authentic' cultures that are consumable via ecotourism (Carrier and Macleod 2005; Youdelis 2013), or the global commensurability of different types of carbon emissions (Cavanagh and Benjaminsen 2014). What is being marketised is not only these places and ecosystems, but also an underlying image, conception, or representation of their functionality in practice. Needless to say, such representations may or may not correspond to reality. Yet in order for these markets to operate effectively, they must nonetheless maintain the idea that purchasing an ecotourism package or carbon offset contributes directly to both conservation and local livelihoods, or that reforestation in a tropical country might assist in mitigating climate change. In some cases, these objectives are pursued via the 'spectacular' (Igoe 2010) enrolment of celebrities and other notable personalities in marketing activities, often mediated by sleek websites and social media campaigns, to the extent that a productive sub-field of critical research has now emerged around the concept of 'Nature 2.0' (e.g. Büscher 2013). Crucially, these 'virtual' representations can also reshape reality, as individuals internalise the images of nature and culture they are selling to tourists, or as nature is reshaped to be more "authentic", closer to the image sold to tourists than to the pre-existing reality (Youdelis, 2013; Carrier 2004).

These representations can entail negative social impacts. In some cases, local people appear to have been evicted from land or be forced to change their livelihoods so that the reality of ecotourism projects match the image and spectacle used to sell them; in other words, communities must leave so that life imitates the advertiser's 'art' (Hansen et al. 2011). For example, at Tayrona National Park in Colombia, 'the protection of nature – allegedly made possible by its commodification for tourist consumption – justifies and even legitimates the dispossession of local community members' (Ojeda 2012: 364). Likewise, Vedeld et al. (2012) link their discussion of eviction for conservation at Mikumi National Park in Tanzania to post-independence evictions from the Tanzanian protected area estate more generally, highlighting the overarching ecotourism-driven dimensions of this process. Such expulsions are not *always* undertaken directly by the state. Timms (2011) writes of how the displacement caused by Hurricane Mitch in Honduras resulted in a unique form of ecotourism-driven 'disaster capitalism' at Celaque National Park, as population movements suddenly raised the prospect of newly 'pristine' and therefore commercially valuable landscapes, prompting state enclosure.

Similarly, the representation and spectacularisation of carbon and biodiversity offsetting schemes also appears to provide additional incentives for the removal of certain populations. In some cases, such expulsions appear to be necessary so that processes of carbon sequestration might be more easily measured, quantified, and modelled over time — and therefore more reliably represented as commodities. A number of cases have reported carbon forestry related displacements in Uganda (Cavanagh and Benjaminsen 2014, Nel and Hill 2013, Westoby and Lyons 2015, Grainger and Geary 2011). Beymer-Farris and Basset (2012) present a case of large-scale evictions for alleged REDD+ readiness activities in the Rufiji delta, Tanzania, apparently to enable similar processes of carbon accounting in mangrove forests. Cavanagh et al. (2015) suggest that such processes may be at work in across the forest estate in eastern Africa more broadly, given that national-level REDD+ readiness activities increasingly provide financial incentives for the removal of alleged 'squatters' or 'encroachers' from within forested protected areas.

Conversely, the centrality of 'spectacular' representations to neoliberal conservation also presents novel opportunities for local people to shape or resist conservation projects, and to potentially accrue positive social benefits. In *neoliberal* conservation, a growing range of initiatives and schemes rely increasingly on global markets and donors via certain forms of representation and spectacularisation. This produces new vulnerabilities for conservation, giving disenchanted local populations new avenues to pursue their struggles, particularly challenging the financial support for conservation. Brondo and Bown (2011) show how Garifuna communities, aided by human rights organisations, were able to successfully challenge the management plan and strategy of a marine protected area in part by demonstrating that claims made by conservation NGOs and government that it would combine environmental protection with local development had not been met. Likewise, the framing of capitalism and conservation as compatible in South Africa was used by Makalele communities to claim rights to land within Kruger National Park, and benefit from ecotourism revenue (Ramutsindela and Shabangu, 2011). The desire – or even the necessity – for some carbon offsetting projects to be seen as a 'triple win' for biodiversity, climate mitigation, and local livelihoods creates opportunities for local populations to seek redress for projects that flout one or more of these objectives. .In a context of prevailing scepticism and low consumer confidence in carbon markets, there is additional pressure for carbon offsets to be 'virtuous' in order to be marketable (Paterson and Stripple 2012 Cavanagh and Benjaminsen 2014).

Conservation-affected populations sometimes lack the knowledge or resources to challenge the image and spectacle created around such projects, and to present a counter-image to appropriate audiences in government or the international media (Holmes, 2013). For example, Igoe (2010) demonstrates the huge disparity between representations of conservation and tourism interventions in media produced by conservation NGOs and tourism companies, and the way these media successfully obscure the reality of the impacts of these interventions on local communities. In the cases described by Brondo and Bown (2011), Ramutsindela and Shabangu (2011), and Cavanagh and Benjaminsen (2014, 2015) communities received help from other organisations to 'jump scales' (Smith 1992) and access important political and legal arenas. In the latter case of carbon offset forestry at Mount Elgon National Park in Uganda, such opposition was successful to some degree, and precipitated the decline and eventual cessation of the scheme in question.

But precisely where and when will local populations choose to utilise such opportunities for contesting neoliberal conservation? In the penultimate section of our review, we examine this question through the prism of neoliberal conservation's apparent effects on different forms of inequality and socioeconomic differentiation.

Inequality and Differentiation

Lastly, our review suggests that processes of neoliberalisation substantially influence the dynamics of both new and pre-existing conservation projects, whether by enhancing or diminishing certain kinds of social impacts. Moreover, regardless of the precise dynamics at work, a key finding seems to be that neoliberalisation alters the *distribution* of both positive and negative benefits, often – but perhaps not universally– increasing pre-existing inequalities and social differentiations.

Of course, conventional forms of conservation have also been shown to reproduce or exacerbate existing social and economic inequalities (Paudel 2006; Adams and Hutton 2007), but neoliberal conservation projects can further exacerbate such dynamics, as the commodification and marketization of nature creates new rents and incomes for formal or informal appropriation by elites and patron-client networks. For example, elite capture or manipulation of rents from ecotourism, carbon and biodiversity offsetting, and other PES schemes has been identified as a feature of case studies in Tanzania (Igoe and Croucher 2007; Benjaminsen and Bryceson 2012; Benjaminsen et al. 2013; Kijazi 2015), Namibia (Silva and Motzer 2014), Nigeria (Schoneveld 2014), Uganda (Cavanagh and Benjaminsen 2015), Vietnam (To et al. 2012), and Zambia (Bandyopadhyay and Tembo 2010). Crucially, the extent of such forms of rent capture appears to both open up and shut down opportunities for resistance. Although the elite appropriation of additional rents may simply consolidate existing power relations, such intensified consolidation may also catalyse resistance. For example, Dressler et al. (2013) show how villagers near Ba Vi National Park in Vietnam had long resisted conservation regulations through non-cooperation with government directives. Such strategies were undermined by the introduction of neoliberal policies to contract out the management of land and forests, leading to elite capture. In response, local people surreptitiously damaged trees in reforestation schemes on contracted land, and targeted elite-controlled land for sabotage, resulting in an unprecedented worsening of conservation-related conflicts.

Secondly, a variety of case studies suggest that the 'baseline' assets of an individual or household also significantly influence the ability to access benefits from new conservation schemes. For example, Pokorny et al. (2012) show how local 'undercapitalized' actors in a transboundary Amazonian PES scheme face competitive disadvantages for accessing payments, largely due to high transaction costs and information asymmetries, with wealthier individuals and firms best placed to benefit from the initiative. These findings corroborate with Lansing's (2014: 1310) study of Costa Rica's PES programme, in which payments were found to 'generally go to larger landowners and […] exclude certain kinds of smallholders', primarily as a result of the government's broader unwillingness to address historical patterns of land consolidation and inequality. In Vietnam, rising land values in and around forested protected areas as a result of neoliberal conservation have been shown to precipitate a 'land rush' of sorts, in which elites have utilised surplus capital to acquire properties in such locations, exacerbating land consolidation (Dressler et al. 2013).

Conversely, in Osborne's (2011) analysis of carbon offset forestry payments specifically to smallholding farmers in Mexico, conservation agroforestry practices were found to result in immediate negative impacts in the form of lower productivity and higher labour expenditure, thereby contributing to the concentration of poverty rather than wealth among the smallholding community. Similarly, in Lansing's (2015: 605) comparative analysis of two specific carbon offsetting projects in Costa Rica, household socioeconomic stability or 'flexibility' at baseline was found to influence the ability to benefit from carbon payments, given that relative wealth denotes the ability to absorb costs or shocks related to 20-year commitments to carbon offset contracts, which would 'foreclose upon a number of future livelihood adaptation choices.' By implication, then, such findings suggest that neoliberal conservation schemes potentially reinforce much broader processes of agrarian change and differentiation (e.g. Bernstein 2010), wherein new revenue streams contribute to the further consolidation of wealth among larger and more prosperous landholders, and the marginalization or exacerbation of vulnerability among less well-off smallholders.

Third, and relatedly, neoliberal conservation may exacerbate inequality by imposing culturally arbitrary distinctions and symbolic differentiations between communities or ethnic groups. For instance, Sundberg (2006) shows how conservation donors and 'flanking organizations' of NGOs favoured a group classified as 'Petenero' in their management plans for the Maya Biosphere Reserve in Guatemala, on the somewhat arbitrary grounds that the Petenero were inherently more conservationist than other communities living nearby. Likewise, Ojeda (2012: 371) writes of a conservationist-driven process of differentiation in Colombia, wherein individuals and communities who were able to demonstrate their 'embodied greenness' via an association with various 'indigenous' identities were better placed to benefit from new conservation interventions, whereas other nearby communities were labelled as 'bodies out of place' and therefore as 'eco-threats.' Similar processes are at work in East Africa, where ecotourism enterprises have decreed certain communities, such as the Maasai, to be especially 'indigenous', 'iconic', and therefore of particular interest for incorporation into combined ecotourism and cultural tourism schemes – a move that is somewhat ironic given that the Maasai were in fact one of the last groups to migrate into the territories that are today Kenya and Tanzania (e.g. Comaroff and Comaroff 2009; Hodgson 2011).

Finally, although the evidence for this last dynamic was decidedly thinner than the other trends identified above, there may in fact be cases in which neoliberal conservation stands to widen the distribution of *positive* impacts. For instance, Silva and Motzer (2014) provide a somewhat counterintuitive account of ecotourism-based neoliberal conservation in Namibia, in which already marginalized individuals within local communities emerged as some of the most earnest supporters of the implementation of such initiatives. The reasons for this are complex, but appear to arise from the disenchantment of certain elements of communities with their position in prevailing economic and status hierarchies, perhaps related to land inequality and resultant barriers to marriage, respectability, or full social adulthood. Here, neoliberal conservation appears to have provided new opportunities for social mobility in the context of otherwise entrenched social and economic inequality. Indeed, as Gardner (2012) argues, certain individuals and communities may elect to support similar neoliberal conservation initiatives, notwithstanding the inequities and inequalities that they entail. This may be so simply because they create a limited number of economic opportunities in the context of otherwise serious poverty and material deprivation, or because they provide a novel arena for contesting state claims to land and territory. Likewise, Green and Adams (2015: 112) explain why certain local-level individuals elected to actively participate in ecotourism schemes within Tanzanian Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs) – even as such schemes resulted in instances of 'green grabbing' more broadly – precisely 'to position themselves to benefit from the opportunities presented by neoliberalization'.

Collectively, such findings are highly suggestive for a broader understanding of why communities or certain community strata may or may not elect to contest neoliberal conservation, perhaps even if it entails a certain degree of negative social impact. In other words, even the most highly marginalized individuals within a given community may choose not to resist neoliberal interventions if such schemes promise novel opportunities for upward social mobility, checks on the power of the state, or broadened access to resources or privileges normally enjoyed only by local elites. Consequently, it is this interplay between the exacerbation and alleviation of different forms of inequality, along with the corresponding possibilities for successful forms of contestation, which will greatly influence whether communities choose to resist neoliberal conservation in its various empirical formations.

Discussion and Conclusion

Overall, it is difficult to infer from our review that neoliberal forms of conservation either collectively improve or degrade human wellbeing, whether absolutely or in relation to other forms of conservation intervention. In large part, this is due to broader difficulties in measuring and comparing very different forms of impact, and the availability of appropriate data. Yet this is also due to the status of neoliberal conservation projects as an evolution or reworked continuation of previous initiatives, which therefore contain within them the legacies of previous iterations of design, function, and social relations (Roth and Dressler 2012; Cavanagh and Himmelfarb 2015). Indeed, such historical (dis)continuities complicate any straightforward analysis of how the social impacts of conservation shift in accordance with contemporary governance strategies. Moreover, although it might be tempting for critical researchers to conclude that neoliberal conservation universally produces negative social impacts on human wellbeing, one must also acknowledge the empirical instances in which diverse constituencies have discovered the perhaps counter-intuitive ‘uses of neoliberalism’ (Ferguson 2010) for contesting their marginalization or subjugation to the whims of more powerful actors.

Notwithstanding these complexities, we have identified four broad trends concerning the relationship between neoliberal conservation and its social impacts. Firstly, it must be said that the incarnations of neoliberal conservation are empirically diverse, resulting in different patterns of social impact depending on the exact neoliberal ‘formation’ involved. Indeed, the cases reviewed above each involve novel constellations of marketization, privatisation, commodification, financialisation, and decentralisation, understandably resulting in a similarly diverse range of social impacts.

Secondly, despite such empirical variability, neoliberal conservation strategies collectively tend to involve novel forms of power relations – ones that work through rather than merely upon or against local identities, subjectivities, and livelihoods. In some cases, this appears to involve the production of so-called ‘neoliberal environmentalities’, in which people come to desire new forms of engagement with both markets and the environment. In other words, conservation regulations are moving from being an external force to working within the lives of rural people, changing their behaviour not just by threatening them with the law and its agents, but also by appealing to economic rationales and altering values and ideologies.

Thirdly, we find that practices of representation and spectacularisation are increasingly central to the workings of neoliberal conservation. In the first instance, such representations are necessary for linking particular ecotourism or PES projects to global markets and often geographically distant consumers. Conversely, such representations also present novel vulnerabilities for resistance to conservation, giving disenchanted actors a novel means of challenging the distribution of negative social impacts from conservation. Though communities often need to forge alliances with NGOs, activists, researchers, or journalists to fully harness such strategies, they perhaps nuance more pessimistic accounts about the capacities of fortress conservation to simply repress local opposition (e.g. Brockington 2004, Holmes, 2013).

Finally, we find that neoliberal conservation broadly tends to intensify dynamics pertaining to the distribution of both positive and negative social impacts. In does so in a variety of ways: by increasing the scale of resources available for elite capture; by structurally rewarding participants that were economically better-off at baseline; and occasionally by imposing arbitrary symbolic distinctions between certain social or ethnic groups, which retain implications for who is most able to benefit from conservation. Conversely, we have also identified a modest amount of evidence to suggest that, under certain conditions, neoliberal conservation may actually contribute to the *alleviation* of certain forms of pre-existing inequalities, primarily via the disruption of prevailing economic and status hierarchies. Accordingly, the interplay between the exacerbation and alleviation of such inequalities will greatly impact decisions about whether communities – or certain strata within communities – choose to resist or acquiesce to different neoliberal interventions. Future research might thus consider, whilst taking into account the particularities of place and the variegations between specific formations of neoliberal conservation, why different processes involved in the neoliberalisation of conservation do or do not elicit various forms of resistance, or produce certain patterns of social differentiation and class formation (e.g. Bernstein 2010). Further, there is also a need for studies which review and explain the varieties of specifically *environmental* or ecological – rather than merely social – impacts of neoliberal conservation, which are of growing importance in relation to deleterious processes of global environmental change.

In aggregate, then, these findings suggest the need for sustained, critical engagements with the geographies and political ecologies of neoliberal conservation, but also perhaps point to the limits of neoliberalization as a useful empirical analytic. Admittedly, the distinctions and divergences between the above-discussed neoliberal conservation initiatives and neoliberal doctrine *as such* might lead some analysts to classify them as 'hybridized', 'impure', 'incompletely neoliberal', or otherwise 'pseudo-neoliberal'. In this regard, there is surely space for novel analyses and interrogations of the changing forms of conservation governance, as well as explanations of its diverse social and economic outcomes. Conversely, though – as Peck (2010a: 15) once put it – 'just because neoliberalism does not, indeed cannot, satisfy these absolutist, hyperbolic criteria, this does not mean that it is a figment of the (critical) imagination.' What should fascinate us about both neoliberalism and neoliberal conservation, we argue, is precisely their empirical variability or flexibility; in other words, their chameleonic 'nature' and adaptability to diverse social, economic, and political contexts or agendas. Ultimately, it is the durability of neoliberal approaches and the support from elites that they continue to enrol that demands sustained examination from critical human geographers and political ecologists, especially those concerned with identifying more socially and environmentally just modes of conservation in an era of both global environmental and political-economic change.

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