



Culture and Conservation

Investigating the Linkages between Biodiversity
Protection and Cultural Values and Practices



Over the past few years the Arcus Foundation has commissioned several pieces of research with the aim of identifying opportunities for strengthening the conservation and social outcomes of its programme by engaging with and being more mindful of the notion of 'culture' in its many forms. The five papers contained in this publication present the author's chosen topic in the context of biodiversity protection, equality and inclusivity, with the ultimate aim of stimulating discussion in the conservation community and beyond.

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Credits

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Introduction

Having originated within highly developed ‘western’ societies, many of the key principles of the current conservation movement have traditionally been based on systems of predominantly restrictive control, set up and enforced by Nation States, and often in conjunction with international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (Dowie, 2009). However, the underlying assumption that to protect territory and species one must exclude certain categories of outsiders or specific activities judged to be harmful has come under considerable criticism in recent years (Brockington, 2002; Berkes, 2004). Exclusion may be harmful rather than beneficial to wildlife as well as humans, and the integration of local forms of knowledge and behaviour related to resource use, critics say, is a more equitable and sustainable way of furthering both social and environmental goals (Igoe, 2006; Pyhälä *et al.*, 2016). In disciplines as wide-ranging as ecology, anthropology and philosophy there is a growing interest in posing normative questions about human–wildlife interaction: how a given society or sub-group of society should behave towards the species that share their environments (McKenna & Light, 2004; Corbey & Lanjouw, 2013).

Over the last few years the Arcus Foundation has begun to recognize the importance of this issue for ape conservation, and is thus attempting to strengthen both the conservation and social outcomes of its programme by engaging with and being more mindful of the notion of ‘culture’ in its many forms (Drani & Infield, 2014). How to engage with this issue has emerged as a key consideration, considering the diversity of cultural practices, an evolving context, and a dominant conservation ethos that has traditionally privileged science and western doctrine over indigenous knowledge and practices (Pyhälä *et al.*, 2016). The various papers presented here form part of a response to this, with the overall objective of stimulating debate and dialogue in both the conservation community and beyond. In the following set of essays, contributors from a variety of different backgrounds investigate this notion of ‘culture’ in a way that reflects their particular interests and experience. Contributors looked carefully at their own disciplines, considering the frameworks they traditionally use, and how these influence the way ‘culture’ is defined.

Chris Kidd's opening essay looks at how this dominant paradigm of protection may marginalize those communities that are best placed to conserve wildlife, and includes a plea to re-think the traditional western division between nature and culture in a way that would safeguard the diversity of all life rather than only some of it. Shonil Bhagwat's investigation of the role that global religions might play in conserving biodiversity presents examples of how differing systems of faith, themselves cultural constructs underpinned by ethical and moral codes, could promote positive relationships between people and the natural world. Coming from a development perspective, Emily Drani then assesses some of the diverse perceptions of conservation and culture in Uganda, emphasizing how culture and conservation exist on a spectrum of belief and behaviour that includes both economic and spiritual attitudes to nature. An exploration of how narratives around particular species (the crocodile, the tiger) can also be used as tools for a meaningful intercultural dialogue is presented in Jet Bakels' essay on Indonesia. Finally, and in contrast to Kidd's opening piece, Mark Infield presents an assessment of how cultural values might be integrated into the management of protected areas, presenting these as important components of any strategy to conserve wildlife.

While not all the authors focus on great apes and gibbons, there are a number of important commonalities and differences in the topics they present. As Bhagwat shows, despite the fact that the evolution of human development has depended upon the exploitation of various species in one form or another, our relations with them are not simply utilitarian; interaction also takes place on a much broader symbolic level depending on geography, history and faith. In Infield's case study from Uganda, engaging with communities on the basis of cultural connections to nature is a more socially responsible response to their needs. Indeed, what the essays share is a notion that these broad notions of 'culture', and how a given set of beliefs and attitudes might influence behaviour towards the environment, can help us understand how animals may be subject rather than object, how they inhabit the human mind as well as the physical environment, and how they can be culturally relevant to humans in ways that may be beneficial or harmful to them. In the case of great apes and gibbons, both Drani and Bakels show that a better understanding of the nuances of these relationships may provide conservationists with opportunities for both improved engagement with communities and insights into how to halt the global decline in primate population numbers. However, it is clear that there is also a need to test some of the assumptions that have traditionally enforced restrictive practices of control. Kidd highlights how in Baka pygmy culture, for example, hunting is as much about identity and complex social processes as it is about

simply supplying protein for families. These dynamics deserve a more sensitive approach than has often been taken in the past.

Despite the huge variety of practices, knowledge, values and institutions across ape range states, it is clear that questions about ape conservation and the protection of their habitat are also questions about human wellbeing. Viewing resource use in the context of specific livelihood systems (socio-economic, cultural and spiritual) will put conservationists in a better position to understand how decision-making can impact apes positively or negatively. The values held by communities in these areas often indicate important connections to nature that could be of benefit to ape conservation, as well as to the communities themselves and their environments. While some of the authors offer recommendations on how to improve engagement at this interface, it is clear that a closer look at the context of these practices (and the thinking that supports them) has implications not only for the conservation of biodiversity but also for the people who inhabit and interact with these shared spaces. ■

The Political Ontology of Conservation

Chris Kidd

Introduction

In a 2005 journal article, Ben Campbell suggested that the '[d]ivision between nature and society [is] apparently being replaced in ideas and administrations of global environmental protection', and that the 'clarity that nature and culture once seemed to offer has been overtaken by a world in which the certainty of nature as both a reality and a concept has diminished' (Campbell, 2005: 281–2). This current paper comes ten years after Campbell's and attempts to understand why conservation paradigms and practices continue to maintain a separation (as suggested by the overarching theme of this publication), and provides a possible explanation of why they appear to maintain that separation.

The Political Ontology of Conservation

Mario Blaser has described modernity, or more specifically the 'Modern World', as the area where the specific arrangement of three elements is operative: 'a relatively stark distinction between nature and culture, a dominant tendency to conceive self and other in hierarchical terms and a linear conception of time' (Blaser, 2007). As Blaser implies, modernity's defining feature may be best explained as one of rupture and of separation between nature and culture, the self and the other, and between the past and the future.

Mark Dowie writes that conservationists and indigenous peoples 'have been terribly at odds with one another over the past century or more; violently so at times, due mostly to conflicting views of Nature, radically different definitions of 'wilderness', and profound misunderstandings of each other's science and culture' (Dowie, 2008: 86, see also Dowie, 2009). From this analysis we are led to believe that the problems between conservationists and indigenous peoples come down to conflicting views and definitions: in essence, that there is one reality, in this case nature, but several ways in which this reality of nature is socially explained. Whilst there are different perceptions of the environment, there is only one such environment to perceive. This analysis of the conflicts

surrounding biodiversity conservation can best be described as a political ecology or political economy analysis.

However, in opposition to this analysis, Blaser has recently suggested that understanding conservation through a political ecology model does not adequately represent what is really happening in dialogues between indigenous peoples and protected area managers.

The term *political ontology* . . . refers to a field of study that focuses . . . on the conflicts that ensue as different worlds or ontologies strive to sustain their own existence as they interact and mingle with each other. Thus, political ontology recasts political economy and political ecology's traditional concerns with power and conflict in light of the notion of multiple ontologies that is emerging from ethnographic works on Indigenous ontologies and scientific practices. (Emphasis in original; Blaser, 2009: 11)

Using Blaser's 'political ontology' to re-evaluate the dialogues between indigenous communities and conservationists opens up new opportunities to understand the conflicts that are experienced between biodiversity protection and the lived experiences of indigenous peoples. Blaser explains that,

. . . the 'misunderstandings' that occur in settings where attempts are made at integrating Indigenous and modern scientific knowledge might turn out to be instances of what Viveiros de Castro calls uncontrolled equivocation, 'a type of communicative disjuncture where the interlocutors are not talking about the same thing, and do not know this'. . . . In other words, these misunderstandings happen not because there are different perspectives on the world but rather because the interlocutors are unaware that different worlds are being enacted (and assumed) by each of them. (Blaser, 2009: 11)

If it is the case that different ontologies are being enacted during these dialogues, it is important to outline some of the ontologies in question, starting with the binary ontologies of dominant 'Western' thought.

The Nature–Culture Divide

In the West, historically with Judeo-Christian and Greek traditions and supported by the Enlightenment and later Social Darwinism, Western thought has evolved an ideology

which dictates that culture and nature cannot co-exist, culture being civilised and nature being wild (Thomas, 1983: 17–50; Colchester, 1994: 1). As a result ‘nature’ was ‘to be mastered, tamed, brought under “man’s” control, bent to his will, forced to reveal her secrets, compelled to satisfy his needs and minister to his happiness’ (Argyrou, 2005: vii). John Locke had famously recounted his theories of property in *Two Treatises of Government* (Locke, 1823). It is here that Locke justifies the private ownership of land and goods through the application of labour:

Though the earth and all inferior creatures be common to all men, yet every man has a ‘property’ in his own ‘person.’ This nobody has any right to but himself. The ‘labour’ of his body and the ‘work’ of his hands, we may say, are properly his. Whatsoever, then, he removes out of the state that Nature hath provided and left it in, he hath mixed his labour with it, and joined to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it his property. It being by him removed from the common state Nature placed it in, it hath by this labour something annexed to it that excludes the common right of other men. For this ‘labour’ being the unquestionable property of the labourer, no man but he can have a right to what that is once joined to, at least where there is enough, and as good left in common for others. (Locke, 1823: 116)

Not only are Locke’s theories of property ownership outlined in this text but we can see his reliance on a distinction between land in a ‘state of Nature’ and domesticated land which has been adapted by the labours of ‘men’.

The most important implication of Lockean thought for this current debate is that his theory of property compounds the distinction between culture and nature and creates the ‘wild lands’ and ‘wildlife’ needed to sustain the conservation discourse. For Locke, the removal of goods and land from the state of Nature was achieved through the application of labour, and the purpose of this was the production of economic value. Of indigenous communities in America he wrote,

There cannot be a clearer demonstration of anything than several nations of the Americans are of this, who are rich in land and poor in all the comforts of life; whom Nature, having furnished as liberally as any other people with the materials of plenty . . . for want of improving it by labour, have not one hundredth part of the conveniences [sic] we enjoy, and a king of a large and fruitful territory there feeds, lodges, and is clad worse than a day labourer in England. (Locke, 1823: 122)

The distinction between 'wild' and 'domestic' lies at the heart of conservation discourse and continues to structure the way it conceives of the lands and animals it attempts to 'conserve'. Conservation discourse was able to grasp this ideology and transform the non-human world into areas of wilderness and wildlife it believed it could then lay claim to: specifically because it believed no one else had the right to.

Africa, seen as the prototypical model of nature, is represented in often dialectic images in the West's imagination. On the one hand it can represent the site of the primordial aspects of our perceived human nature, the savagery and barbarism, and on the other, at the very same time, the site of extreme beauty and paradise. As Colchester remarks, nature is seen as 'both a threat to social order and as a refuge from the stresses of civilised life' (Colchester, 1994: i). This second image is portrayed most fervently by conservationists who cling to the faith of Africa as a wilderness, often in stark contrast to its reality. As Adams and McShane write, 'The march of civilisation has tamed or destroyed the wilderness of North America and Europe, but the emotional need for wild places . . . persists' (Adams & McShane, 1996: xii). Early European explorers promoted the belief that Africa was a virgin land, untouched by humankind, and it is this belief that shapes conservation discourse and was expressed most vividly by the conservationist Grzimek, who wrote, 'A National Park must remain primordial wilderness to be effective. No men, not even native ones, should live inside its borders' (in Adams & McShane, 1996: xvi). The irony is that nature as an enclosed system, untouched by human influence, is nowhere more inconceivable than in Africa itself, where 'man has been an integral part of the African landscape for over 2 million years' (Adams & McShane, 1996: xiii). However this belief persists amongst conservationists today. The mission statement of the African Wildlife Foundation, an important actor in the conservation of the mountain gorillas in Uganda, paradoxically reads 'The African Wildlife Foundation, together with the people of Africa, works to ensure the wildlife and wild lands of Africa will endure forever'.

However, as Cronon so clearly explains, 'The more one knows of its peculiar history, the more one realizes that wilderness is not quite what it seems . . . it is quite profoundly a human creation – indeed, the creation of very particular human cultures at very particular moments in human history' (Cronon, 1995: 69). Cronon argues that the concept of wilderness has been socially created specifically to respond to the core values of modernity; to create a place where modernity could escape its relationship with the world. This of course is problematic:

. . . the trouble with wilderness is that it quietly expresses and reproduces the very values its devotees seek to reject. The flight from history that is very nearly

the core of wilderness represents . . . the illusion that we can somehow wipe clean the slate of our past and return to the tabula rasa that supposedly existed before we began to leave our marks on the world. The dream of an unworked natural landscape is very much the fantasy of people who have never themselves had to work the land to make a living. . . . Only people whose relation to the land was already alienated could hold up wilderness as a model for human life in nature, for the romantic ideology of wilderness leaves precisely nowhere for human beings actually to make their living from the land.

This, then, is the central paradox: wilderness embodies a dualistic vision in which the human is entirely outside the natural. (Cronon, 1995: 80–81)

Against this understanding of ‘wilderness’, other cultures have conceptions that place the human entirely inside the natural, or more accurately which deny the separation in the first place. At an International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) summit held in Almeria, Spain in 2007, held to discuss the IUCN Protected Area Categories, the anthropologist Deborah Bird Rose questioned the very premise of these categories in a paper titled, ‘What do we mean by wild?’ (Rose, 2007). In her paper Rose highlighted the social and historical genesis of the concept of wilderness and questioned the validity of such a concept in the Australian context,

Here in this continent, there is no place where the feet of Aboriginal humanity have not preceded those of the settler. Nor is there any place where the country was not once fashioned and kept productive by Aboriginal people’s land management practices. There is no place without a history; there is no place that has not been imaginatively grasped through song, dance and design, no place where traditional owners cannot see the imprint of sacred creation. (Rose, 2007: 28)

Not only does Rose suggest that Australia’s Aborigines have ‘imaginatively grasped’ and inhabited every corner of their landscape, rendering no area truly ‘wild’, but she also implies that there is no part of Australia that has not become what it is today without the land management practices of indigenous communities. This has implications that are not restricted to Australia, and conservationists and anthropologists are beginning to understand that the ‘wild’ areas of the world, that Europeans found rich in biodiversity hundreds of years ago, were not rich in biodiversity because ‘man’ had not laid his hand on these areas, but paradoxically because the hand of (non-western) ‘man’ was integral in sustaining such rich biodiversity.

In Tanzania ‘the savanna eco-systems of East Africa, which support the richest variety and density of large mammals in the world, have been strongly shaped by human activity and are not the “wilderness” areas so often considered by early explorers and naturalists’ (Little, 1996: 37). The grazing of Maasai cattle herds increased bush encroachment and therefore increased the grazing areas favoured by ‘wildlife species’. In Australia, traditional Aboriginal fire ecology has been shown to have created mosaic habitats that increased biodiversity (Bird *et al.*, 2005; Rose, 2005; Yibarbuk *et al.*, 2001). In North America, Krech III has written that, in light of Native American fire management practices,

By the time Europeans arrived, North America was a manipulated continent. Indians had long since altered the landscape by burning or clearing woodland for farming and fuel. Despite European images of an untouched Eden, this nature was cultural not virgin, anthropogenic not primeval, and nowhere is this more evident [than] in the Indian use of fire. (Krech III, 2000: 122)

Despite this accumulating evidence, conservationists still seem to construct an artificial view of the contexts in which they work as existing in a state of purity, if not in the present then certainly in the past, and hopefully again in the future. In actuality the language used by the IUCN to describe its protected area categories uses words such as ‘integrity’, ‘pristine’ and relatively ‘unmodified’ landscapes, which, while not excluding the presence of humanity, certainly suggest that a ‘natural’ state of purity is preferred. It seems then that humans can participate in ‘wilderness’ as long as they leave before their presence becomes visible.

Hunter–Gatherer Ontologies

From within the hall of mirrors it is almost impossible to imagine talking, thinking, writing, doing, smelling, imagining and realizing worlds without ‘law’, ‘spaces’, ‘places’, ‘time’, ‘scale’, ‘nature’ and ‘self’. However, local and indigenous communities are doing this as they construct processes, experiences, thoughts and actions. (Howitt & Suchet-Pearson, 2003: 566)

The preceding section outlined the dominant European ontological understanding of the world based upon the foundational dualisms of nature/culture and wild/tame. What is missing from this account is the understanding that alternative ontologies exist, and – in particular in this case – indigenous peoples’ ontologies. For example, indigenous peoples

relate to their environments in ways manifestly different to the dualistic approach outlined above which divides nature and culture. Many authors have already commented on the difference between 'Western' societies and hunter-gatherers' economic, cultural and societal structures (for examples see Sahlins, 1972; Bird-David, 1990; Barnard, 2002; Kenrick, 2002). However, for the purpose of this discussion I want to focus on environmental relationships amongst hunter-gatherers and for this I am indebted to works by Tim Ingold (1999, 2000, 2004).

Ingold argues that in 'Western' ontology, culture and nature are represented as two distinct entities, where nature is representative of what might be called scientific nature. Culture has also become divided to form the culture that the Western world creates and the culturally perceived world of nature (Ingold, 2000: 41). By this Ingold means that each individual or society is understood as having the capacity to ascribe meaning to the environment it occupies and which may be completely different to the representation created by another person. These different representations are culturally created and are distinctly different to the 'real' nature science is understood as having access to. In the 'West' we see nature as something to which we have to ascribe meaning, something which we stand outside of, as opposed to something which we dwell within. What Ingold argues is that hunter-gatherers perceive themselves as acting within an undivided world and as engaging with its constituent parts which are already inherently meaningful, '(the western) [ontology] may be characterised as the construction of a view, that is, as a process of mental representation. As for the other, apprehending the world is not a matter of construction but of engagement, not of building but of dwelling, not of making a view *of* the world but of taking up a view *in* it' (emphasis in original, Ingold, 2000: 42).

How does this dwelling manifest itself for hunter-gatherers? Turnbull (1962, 1983) and later Mosko (1987) have shown how Mbuti Pygmies relate to the forest as their 'father' and 'mother', 'sibling' and 'lover' and describe themselves as 'children' and 'people of the forest'. As Bird-David demonstrates, this account shows remarkable similarities to her study of Nayaka hunter-gatherers from India who refer to their forest environment as 'big father' or 'big mother' and themselves as 'son' or 'daughter' in that context (1990: 190). In this way the Mbuti and Nayaka understand their environment as something which they are able to interact with on a daily basis, so that there is no fundamental differentiation between relations with human and non-human constituents of the environment. As Ingold remarks, 'one gets to know the forest, and the plants and animals that dwell therein, in just the same way that one becomes familiar with other people,

by spending time with them, investing in one's relations with them the same qualities of care, feeling and attention' (2000: 47).

Ingold provides ethnography from the Waswanipi Cree of northeastern Canada and their experiences with the animals they hunt, experiences which go against the 'Western' belief that only humans have the capacity for personhood. For Cree hunters, respect must be given to their prey at all times on the understanding that they will not present themselves as gifts to the hunter if they are not respected by the hunter (see Feit, 1995; Scott, 1996). Kohler (2000) describes similar experiences with regard to relationships between Baka Pygmies and elephants, so that for both peoples 'hunting itself comes to be regarded not as a technical manipulation of the natural world but as a kind of inter-personal dialogue, integral to the total process of social life wherein both human and animal persons are constituted with their identities and purposes' (Ingold, 2000: 49).

Finally, Ingold uses the example of Pintupi Dreamtime to show an understanding of how landscape can be perceived differently by hunter-gatherers. He uses Myers' accounts of how Aboriginal people understand their environment as being created by ancestral beings during the 'Dreamtime'. They acknowledge their own interaction with their environment and see their lives mapped out on the landscape in much the same way as their ancestors' lives were mapped out during Dreamtime. Myers writes that 'for each individual, the landscape becomes a history of significant social events . . . previous events become attached to places and are recited as one moves across the country' (in Ingold, 2000: 53). As Barnard also suggests, unlike most social scientists who see society sandwiched between the environment and cosmology in a hierarchical world order, in 'Aboriginal thought, all these elements are so interrelated that it becomes difficult to separate them and certainly difficult to give priority to material causation or social behaviour over cosmological assumptions' (1999: 63).

In this ontology, the singularity of nature and culture is not just figuratively expressed but profoundly experienced in very real ways. As Rose explains,

Damage to people is damage to country. Old Tim told me: 'when old people die they kill the country.' He gave examples. When Allan Young's father died, a Walujapi (black-headed python) Dreaming tree broke in half and the water it contained all ran out. . . . It was from many such statements, concrete examples, and correlated behaviour that I developed the abstract proposition: the relationship between people and country is reflexive. The reciprocal proposition is also true. Damage to country, and to Dreamings in particular, causes death or injury to people. (Rose, 1992 [2009]: 108)

Bridging the Nature–Culture Divide

In October 2008 I attended the World Conservation Congress in Barcelona, Spain, working for an indigenous rights group. The conference was a disappointment, and I remember feeling despondent at the lack of progress the indigenous people's agenda was making at the conference. Whilst there had been great gains for indigenous peoples in 2003 at the World Parks Congress in Durban, it seemed that the current climate change crisis had removed any urgency in securing the rights of indigenous peoples because there were now 'much bigger fish to fry'. Rather than acknowledging the role indigenous peoples have in preventing the environmental crisis, it seemed the environmental crisis served only to cement the role of conservationists as the technocrats of the environmental movement and those best placed to save humanity from impending catastrophe. As a result, instead of seeing indigenous peoples take on responsibilities for their own territories (as mandated by previous IUCN agreements), indigenous peoples were relegated to scant funding to help alleviate the impacts of climate change on them.

In the middle of these 'paradigm wars', a side event was organized which I hoped would provide a space and context in which the dialogue between 'nature/culture' ontologies could move forward. The event was titled, 'Bridging the Nature–Culture Divide to Conserve the Diversity of Life' and the purpose was to discuss the proposition that:

The apparent divide between nature and culture poses constant challenges in how we practice conservation, evident in how we value different resources, assign institutional responsibilities and communicate priorities. At the same time there is growing recognition of the linkages: for example that landscapes are shaped by human cultures as well as the forces of nature, that areas of high biodiversity often coincide with high cultural diversity, and that threats to natural diversity are often paralleled by threats to cultural diversity. Bridging the nature/culture gap will be critical to making conservation relevant to people and to meeting future conservation challenges – for example, across large landscapes, where there are multiple natural and cultural values. Embracing the cultural aspects of nature conservation – itself a cultural construct – can open the door to new strategies for how we can safeguard the diversity of life. (Brown, 2008)

One of the first speakers, Joseph-Maria Mallarach, made the vital ontological point that the terminology used by the IUCN was not necessarily shared by other world languages. He suggested that the official languages of the IUCN – English, Spanish and French – share the same worldview, as they were shaped by the scientific revolution in Western Europe in

the seventeenth century and the spread of positivism and reductionism (see also Mallarach, 2008: 9–10). Mallarach suggested that, in most other cultures, the Cartesian distinction between the material and the spiritual does not exist, and people consider humans, nature and the entire universe to share the same material and spiritual dimensions.

Later speakers, including indigenous representatives, spoke of the diverse worlds where humans are seen as part of the natural world, not separate from it. However, after these positive presentations I soon began to question what was being suggested in the statement ‘Bridging the Nature–Culture Divide’. From the perspective espoused in this review, bridging the nature–culture divide can only be achieved through the acknowledgement of the social production of the divide. Many of the indigenous speakers confirmed this point as they spoke of ontologies where no divides exist and where there is no bridge to cross. However, as the event progressed it became more and more apparent that the conservationists present, whilst acknowledging the bridge within Western thought and the absence of such a divide in indigenous thought, continued to talk of nature and culture as ontological truths. In effect they discussed and accepted the epistemological differences in the concept of nature without understanding that there were distinct ontological differences in such a concept. The idea of the event, in the eyes of the conservationists present, was not to deconstruct the nature–culture divide but to imagine creative ways in which to bridge the divide, a process which only served to solidify the ontological certainty that such a divide existed.

The final comment from one of the participants, loudly applauded by the conservationists, neatly encapsulates the dominant views at the event. The participant suggested that the most interesting places for investigation are the bridges which link the human and nature divide and he ‘remind[ed] the group that in earlier times in cities such as London, bridges were the places where people would congregate. As he noted, that becomes the most interesting and vibrant place to be – why would anyone want to be anywhere else?’ (Brown & Mitchell, 2008).

I believe this ethnographic moment is symptomatic of the inability of different ontologies to communicate with each other. This narrative, and the history of the interactions of conservation with indigenous peoples, is symptomatic of what Blaser describes as ‘uncontrolled equivocation’:

... a type of communicative disjuncture where the interlocutors are not talking about the same thing, and do not know this’... In other words, these misunderstandings happen not because there are different perspectives on the world but rather because the interlocutors are unaware that different worlds are being enacted (and assumed) by each of them. (Blaser, 2009: 11)

Conclusion

Through the deployment of ‘protectionist’ policies by conservationists, communities which surround protected areas are produced from the same ‘modernist’ mould that sees humans as separate from nature: where before there were hunters, now there are only poachers. In the indigenous people’s context, any claims to have introduced meaningful community participation in conservation management are ill-founded. All that has changed is that the practices and discourses of conquest have been replaced by those of community conservation. Whilst these new practices espouse rhetorics of participation they nonetheless mask the fact that they are still informed by an understanding of human/non-human relationships centred on dominance and separation. These new practices are still unable to validate alternative ways of relating to the environment and therefore fail to genuinely offer the management of protected areas to local communities.

As Argyrou suggests in relation to ‘Environmentalism’,

... environmentalism reflects a return of the same, the reproduction of the same sort of global power relations and the same sort of logic that mark the modernist paradigm at its core ... the ability of a group of societies to define and redefine, construct and reconstruct the order of the world and the world order. Environmentalism repeats the historical gesture that marked the colonial enterprise and its civilising mission. The rest of the world is once again presented with a new reality ... and is expected, cajoled, encouraged, assisted, threatened to take a stance and come to recognise it as such a reality. (Argyrou, 2005: x–xi)

However, as Campbell rightly warns his readers, ‘it is easy to delude oneself into thinking that power can be undermined simply by revealing it and talking about it. It is intractably embedded in social practices and situations that cannot be deconstructed in reality simply by possession of insight and the ability to objectify’ (Campbell, 2005: 306). And this may be one of the reasons why the movement away from the nature–culture dichotomy, suggested by Campbell in 2005, has still not materialized. Blaser’s understanding of political ontology shows us that the basic discrepancies between conservationists and indigenous peoples are not simply framed by misunderstandings or a difference in opinion. There is much more at stake in the dialogues between indigenous peoples and conservationists:

... it is important to stress that the political implications of engaging Indigenous ontologies seriously necessarily goes beyond the immediate politics of a given

project or institution to involve the inherent coloniality of the modern ontology. Indeed, if Indigenous worlds and ontologies were taken seriously, the modern constitution would collapse. (Blaser, 2009: 18)

So, whilst Blaser's 'political ontology' is not seeking to bridge a 'nature–culture divide' which does not exist (except in our imaginations and the practices which flow from these), what he describes as 'political ontology' is a strategy to persuade us to take indigenous peoples' understandings seriously. I believe he is arguing that ideologies such as conservation, products of the 'modern constitution', collapse under his strategy because the foundational dualisms upon which modern ideologies are based are shown to be no more than the social constructs they are.

Political ontology goes a long way to illuminate the politics at play in the ongoing dialogues between conservationists and indigenous peoples. It crucially accomplishes this by highlighting the fact that the very attempt to 'bridge' the nature–culture divide only serves to deepen that divide further. The only way to avoid this rupture and find union between conservation managers and indigenous peoples is to start by recognizing that the origin of the divide is not in the world of relationships but in a deeply held and deeply flawed assertion of dominance, separation and a denial of our dependence on a world of reciprocating relationships, which we must instead accept and embrace in profound ways.

Our goal is not to understand how we can better integrate culture into nature conservation but instead to accept that it already is integrated. Our goal is to start seeing our world's landscapes, not born out of a longing for the primeval and the pristine, but born out of the inherent longing of indigenous peoples and local communities to care for the lands that sustain them. Only then will we finally see our landscapes not only survive, but thrive. ■

Religion, Culture and the Natural World

Shonil A. Bhagwat

Introduction

To explore the linkages between culture, religion and the natural world, it is first necessary to define the scope of these terms, each of which can be interpreted in multiple different ways.

Culture, according to the World Commission on Culture and Development, can be broadly defined as ‘ways of living together’ (WCCD, 1995: 24). The ways in which human beings live together with other human beings form the basis of cultures across the world. The Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (UNESCO, 2002) regards culture as a ‘set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group’ (p. 4) and acknowledges that culture therefore takes diverse forms across time and space. This paper embraces the notion of cultural diversity as central to the concept of culture.

Religion, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, is ‘belief in or acknowledgement of some superhuman power or powers (esp. a god or gods) which is typically manifested in obedience, reverence, and worship’ (OED, 2015). Religious beliefs are central to many cultures and they provide moral codes of conduct to people. Hand-in-hand with cultural diversity, religions also take a wide variety of different forms. This paper acknowledges that there is a wide variety of religious beliefs and practices that manifest in an equally wide variety of relationships among human beings, as well as the relationships of human beings with the natural world.

Nature or the natural world – consisting of all living things, land and sea – features prominently in all religions. In many religions the natural world is considered to have divine properties and therefore nature is also often revered or worshipped. The moral codes of conduct expressed in all religions therefore include caring for the natural world, perhaps also motivated by the fact that the natural world provides for human needs. While the natural world is often seen with awe or reverence, there is also sometimes fear of the powerful elements of the natural world and the desire to conciliate these powerful

elements for the benefit of humanity. A combination of this reverence and fear results in practices that aim to protect the natural world, seen often as the God's creation that has been endowed on human beings.

Culture, religion and the natural world are therefore linked in complex ways through beliefs and practices that impinge on the survival of humans and other living beings. Broadly speaking, culture has its focus on the relationships among human beings. Religion has an influence on these relationships, but it also has a say in how human beings should relate to other living beings and the non-living parts of the natural world. Religion can thus be seen as a bridge between nature and culture: a moral code of conduct that defines how human beings should live with each other and with the natural world that surrounds us.

The role of religion as a bridge between nature and culture forms the basis of this paper. It reviews the influences of religion on people's relationships with the natural world. Whilst focusing on examples that portray the complexity of these linkages, the paper sets up the ground for exploring the harmonies and the tensions between religion, culture and nature. It then goes on to reflect on the ways to achieve reconciliation. The paper concludes by looking at the challenges and opportunities for conservation practice as it applies to the protection of the natural world in diverse cultural contexts.

Religion and its Influences on Conservation of the Natural World

The diversity of religions

The Alliance of Religions and Conservation, an organisation working at the nexus between religion and conservation, considers 11 religions (Bahai, Buddhism, Christianity, Daoism, Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, Judaism, Shinto, Sikhism and Zoroastrianism) as 'mainstream faiths' (ARC, 2010). In addition there are many animistic beliefs that are known to have approaches supportive of conservation (Dudley *et al.*, 2009). This paper has a broad focus on this variety of religions and other belief systems. The geographical focus of the paper is also broad and it spans countries that are considered important for conservation. Conservation International's 34 Biodiversity Hotspots (CI, 2015) cover 125 countries, comprising more than 60% of countries in the world and including over 95% of the developing countries. These are referred to here as 'hotspot countries'. Over 70% of the population in hotspot countries, more than four billion people, follow organized religion. Over 85% of hotspot countries have at least 70% of people following organized religions. Nearly 60% have 90–100% of their population subscribing to mainstream faiths; 20%

have 80–90% and 10% have 70–80% of their population subscribing to mainstream faiths (Bhagwat *et al.*, 2011a). The mainstream religions therefore have substantial influence on cultures around the world and the practices of people within those cultures.

In addition, there is a wide variety of animistic faiths for which very little quantitative information is available. In Africa, for example, almost all sacred natural sites are associated with animist faiths (Sheridan & Nyamweru, 2007). In countries such as Madagascar and Togo, over 50% of people follow indigenous religions (O'Brien & Palmer, 2007). A survey of sacred natural sites in protected areas found that most are related to animist faiths (Dudley *et al.*, 2009), and analysis of around 100 research projects within sacred natural sites found that they contained consistently high biodiversity (Dudley *et al.*, 2010), suggesting that minority religions play a disproportionately important role in biodiversity conservation. Therefore, it can be surmised, even though few quantitative data are available, that the influence of minority religions on cultures around the world is also substantial.

The values of stewardship of nature or compassion towards others that underlie many religions overlap with the ethical and moral approaches to the natural world that many cultures subscribe to, suggesting that religions can provide a positive force that promotes harmonious relationship with nature (Bhagwat *et al.*, 2011b). However, some scholars (Winkler, 2008; Hall *et al.*, 2009) argue that these concepts may not translate into action. Some fundamentalist elements within religions can compromise the ethical and moral foundations of many cultures and those of conservation of the natural world. These include:

- different worldviews leading to differences in ideologies (e.g. Selinger, 2004);
- conflict between identities leading to proselytizing or denigration by faith groups (e.g. Clarke, 2007); and
- attitudes and behaviour of religious followers that are counterproductive to conservation of the natural world (e.g., Peterson & Liu, 2008).

Each of these is explored in greater detail below.

Differences in worldviews

Different worldviews of religious groups and conservationists often make religion and the conservation of the natural world incompatible (Ruse, 2005). This goes back to Darwin's theory of evolution (Darwin, 1859), which was interpreted by some as a challenge to

religious beliefs of the creation of the world by God and the superiority of humans over other forms of life (Dunlap, 1988). However, the differences in worldviews arise not just between religious and secular groups, but also between religions. For example, many religions consider the sacred to be above or beyond the Earth, which leads to differences between religions that consider the Earth sacred in some way, and those that do not (Taylor, 2010).

Conflict between identities

Although there is substantial overlap in the ethical and moral values advocated by different religions, there is also a long history of conflict between religions (Kaplan, 2007). It has been suggested that these conflicts originate in strong religious identities, which, when threatened, result in inter-group hostilities (e.g. Ysseldyk *et al.*, 2010). Such strong identities might therefore be counterproductive to the conservation of the natural world. This is because communicating a conservation message to mixed audiences consisting of members drawn from different faiths can be challenging, particularly if these faiths have strong identities that come into conflict with each other.

Divergent attitudes and behaviours

Although most religions advocate ethical and moral values, these values may not always promote pro-environment behaviour. Peterson and Liu (2008) examined the environmental worldviews of various social groups in the Teton Valley of Idaho and Wyoming, USA. After controlling for demographic factors, they found that environmental behaviour is not positively correlated with religiosity and that those not affiliated with organized religion were the most environmentally concerned and active. Tomalin (2004) provides an example of sacred grove conservation discourse in India, and argues that while protection of sacred groves has been touted as an example of Hindu religious environmentalism, the attitudes and behaviour of a majority of middleclass elite Hindus do not demonstrate awareness of the environmental ethic of using natural resources responsibly.

Therefore, even though religions advocate ethical and moral values these may not necessarily translate into action, and the reasons underlying the attitudes of different religions toward conservation can vary widely (Foltz & Saadi-nejad, 2007; Winkler, 2008; Hall *et al.*, 2009; Plant 2009). An anthropocentric mainstream Muslim position, for example, is that humanity has responsibility for Allah's creation, which has been given to humans as a gift. At the other end of the spectrum, the biocentric Jain belief advocates that every being – animal, plant, or human – has a soul and should be treated with respect (Hall *et al.*,

2009). Foltz and Saadi-nejad (2007) discuss Zoroastrianism, a religion that respects and protects many aspects of nature including certain species (e.g. cows and dogs are considered sacred). However, Zoroastrianism also posits an ongoing struggle between the forces of good and evil; certain species groups (e.g. ants, snakes) are seen as evil and are thus to be destroyed whenever possible. Religious affiliation therefore does not always promote pro-environment behaviour. These admitted problems, however, should not overshadow the potential for positive benefits of religious influences over people's relationships with the natural world.

Religions and conservation of the natural world

Although some religious doctrines have been questioned over their exploitative approach to the natural world (e.g. White, 1967), in general religions have historically promoted ethical and moral codes of conduct, including support for conservation (Boyd, 1984; Palmer & Finlay, 2003). The modern-day Western conservation ethic arose with the emergence during the late nineteenth century of the wilderness protection movement in the USA. Although in the seventeenth century some Puritans viewed nature with foreboding, by the nineteenth century, figures such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau and John Muir had transformed the American view of wilderness into something of great spiritual value (Schmitt, 1969; Nash, 2001; Callicott, 2008; Taylor, 2010). This ethic, articulated most forcefully by Thoreau and Muir in the nineteenth century, acknowledges the moral right of non-human species to inhabit the Earth and aims to set aside areas for their preservation. By the late nineteenth century, such values began to influence public policies promoting the protection of nature in the USA. Muir was especially influential in the political realm, founding the Sierra Club, and advocating for the protection of wilderness through the creation of national parks (Muir, 1901 [1998]; Fox, 1985; Nash, 2001; Callicott, 2008), but during the twentieth century many other figures, most notably Gifford Pinchot, Aldo Leopold and Rachel Carson, effectively championed environmental conservation and, in diverse ways, linked their cause to spiritual or religious perceptions (Schmitt, 1969; Fox, 1985; Oelschlaeger, 1991; Nash, 2001; Gatta, 2004; Taylor, 2010). Over time, the term 'conservation' has come to refer to all environmental protection efforts. Although some indigenous and native communities around the world have long established environmentally sustainable ways of living, such cultures have often come into conflict with the modern Western conservation apparatus, but, increasingly, traditional methods of conservation and involvement by local communities are valued by conservationists as key elements of conservation strategies (Wild & McLeod, 2009).

Religions increasingly view environmental issues as part of their ethical compass, and leading figures in all mainstream religions have stated support for a conservation agenda (Colwell *et al.*, 2009). While this paper acknowledges that religions are internally diverse, with competing versions and perspectives, some of which are more amenable to environmentalist concern than others (e.g. Taylor, 2005), its outlook is deliberately broad, providing an overview of religions' influences on conservation of the natural world. A growing body of literature suggests that conservation of the natural world is driven by ethical or moral values and can earn legitimacy through cultural acceptance, public engagement and mass support (Van Houtan, 2006; Child, 2009; de Groot & Steg, 2009). Influential thinkers such as E.O. Wilson (Wilson, 1984) have suggested that ethical or moral values can play an important role in developing compassion towards non-human species and that these values underpin conservation of the natural world. Although religions vary in their ethical positions (Morgan & Lawton, 2007) there are some themes found within the world's major religions that can be understood in ways that cohere with the most common, global, understandings of the ethics of conservation. Given the wide variety of values found in the world's diverse religions, a thorough examination of their ethical positions is beyond the scope of this paper. Instead, the paper postulates where the ethical and moral values can provide common ground between people variously involved in religion and conservation.

Ecological advocates within many religions adhere to the principle of 'stewardship of nature' or the idea that nature should be revered. The Abrahamic traditions – Christianity, Judaism and Islam – all tend to centre their environmental ethic on the concept of stewardship and, therefore, the upkeep and management of nature as the responsibility of humans. Religions originating in Asia, and some indigenous religions, by way of contrast, often tend to emphasize the divinity in nature, its forces, or its creatures. All of these religions, in various ways, tend to value altruistic behaviours and consider compassion a virtue, sometimes even compassion toward non-human beings. These sorts of themes can inspire environmental concern and action (e.g. Palmer & Finlay, 2003; Tucker & Grim, 2004; Gottlieb, 2007; Colwell *et al.*, 2009).

Reconciling the Influences of Religion on Culture and Nature

The paper has so far examined the ethical and moral values that religions could bring to conservation of the natural world. The paper now turns to examine the links between ethical or moral values and the activities of faith groups, with a view to reconciling the diverse influences of religions on culture and nature. The values of compassion towards

others and the stewardship of nature that are often found in religions have motivated and continue to motivate many faith-based organizations to engage in environmental conservation. At the same time, prominent conservation organizations (CII, 2005; WWF, 2009) have mutual interest in forming partnerships with faith-based groups. Many examples suggest that religious groups are attempting to address the perceived incompatibilities between their values and practices, reviewed above (differences in worldviews, conflict between identities, and divergent attitudes and behaviours), and those of secular conservation and development organizations. These examples are explored here in the context of perceived incompatibilities between religion and conservation.

Differences in worldviews

Despite differences in worldviews, religious organizations in many parts of the world are working cooperatively with each other. For example, Christian organizations, such as Plant with Purpose, have taken direct conservation action by planting trees in a wide range of developing countries across the world (Plant with Purpose, 2008), even though Christianity is a minority religion in many of these countries. Members of other religions, including Buddhism, Daoism, Hinduism and Islam, have put their differences in worldviews aside and found a common moral ground, and are now cooperating in environmental conservation projects (Vigne & Martin, 2000; ARC, 2004, 2006; CII, 2005; Basil, 2010). For example, after a successful campaign by WWF with 400 mosques in the state of Terengganu, Malaysia, focusing their sermons on turtle conservation issues, Malaysia's Imams (Muslim spiritual leaders) also pledged to preach against poaching of threatened species such as the tiger (WWF, 2009).

Conflict between identities

Many faith groups have attempted to leave aside conflict between identities and have jointly contributed to ethical investments. The International Interfaith Investment Group (3iG, 2010), for example, has been instrumental in encouraging substantial investments from religious organizations in environmentally responsible and ethical projects (Dudley *et al.*, 2009). Although inter-religious conflicts do arise, due to the sectarianism and fundamentalism found in most religions, consolidated actions such as 3iG suggest that some faith groups are able to overcome their strong identities and faith-related tensions and are able to cooperate. The Community of Sant'Egidio, a movement which has its origins in the Catholic Church, is actively engaged in brokering peace in situations of inter-religious conflict (Sant'Egidio, 2010). The annual Prayer for Peace organized by this community has become a prominent global interfaith meeting where many groups work cooperatively.

Divergent attitudes and behaviours

Many faith groups are making efforts to change the attitudes and behaviours of their members. Conservation-focused education programmes undertaken by Islamic religious leaders in Pakistan or Malaysia are illustrative (Sheikh, 2006; WWF, 2009). Similarly, active forest protection efforts by individuals from faiths including Buddhism, Daoism and Hinduism (ARC, 2004, 2006; CII, 2005; Bhagwat & Rutte, 2006; Chimesengee *et al.*, 2009; Ormsby & Bhagwat, 2010) also suggest that stronger pro-environment attitudes and behaviours are emerging.

Strengthening the Links between Conservation Organizations and Religious Groups

While conservation of the natural world is in need of greater public support, which faith groups may well be able to provide, there are a number of things that secular conservation organizations can in turn do to enhance linkages with religious organizations. This can be brought about by establishing strong working relationships with faith groups, leaders and adherents. To this effect, focusing on the common ground between ethical or moral values advocated by religious groups and conservation organizations would be necessary, rather than dwelling on incompatibilities. ‘Planetary stewardship’ as a framework for science and society rapidly to reduce anthropogenic damage to the biosphere (*sensu* Power & Chapin, 2009), for example, has shared subtext with the Abrahamic religions’ ideology of ‘stewardship of nature’. Identification of synergies between religious programmes and conservation initiatives is likely to help establish a common ground between faith groups and secular organizations. There are two areas in which such synergies can be explored:

- outreach and education; and
- action.

Outreach and education

Religious leaders can be important agents in effectively communicating issues in conservation, and their support is often necessary for outreach activities. Faith group leaders are conversant with their group’s vocabulary and are most effective in communication, knowing what is evocative to their religious audience. For example, phrases such as ‘creation care’ are helpful to communicate a conservation message when working with

Abrahamic religions (Wilson, 2006). In addition to faith group leaders, involvement of institutions such as religious colleges, universities and training centres in conservation activities might be an effective way of reaching out to the target audience. It is also vitally important to develop training material in environmental conservation and sustainable development for faith groups. Each group in the US-based National Religious Partnership for the Environment, for example, has resource kits enabling congregations to integrate environmental concerns (Gorman, 2009). Such material is not yet available for other religions and in other parts of the world, but the development of this type of material may be an effective way for conservation and development organizations to reach out to religious groups. This model may also be relevant to ape range states.

Action

While religious audiences may be able to identify with ethical or moral values of environmental conservation, their own faith is often their primary concern. Furthermore, religious groups might place a high value on maintaining a separate cultural identity. When planning activities with faith groups, it is essential to recognize this and to respect social and cultural boundaries in order to initiate effective partnerships. However, it might be important to encourage religious groups to create opportunities for dialogue across faiths and with secular organizations so as to dissolve the social and cultural boundaries. The Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC, 2010), a secular body that helps the major religions of the world to develop their own environmental programmes based on their own core teachings, is notable in this respect. This organization actively creates opportunities for predominant religious faiths around the world to promote environmental conservation and sustainable development and, occasionally, to encounter one another. Effective action for helping conservation in most cases, therefore, seems to demand changes in attitudes and behaviours from religious adherents and secular organizations alike. Such changes can be brought about by highlighting success stories where adherents are shown examples of people of their own faith engaging in conservation activities (e.g. Kula, 2001). This way of encouraging participation is often effective because members of the same faith group share the strongest cultural associations with each other. Similarly, there is need for empathy and an open mind towards faith groups on the part of conservation volunteers, professionals, NGOs and donors. Finally, it is important to help religious leaders to establish common ground between their practices and those that help environmental conservation. Although this may often require a re-evaluation of the remit of conservation action and finding trade-offs, it is also likely to ensure that collaborative actions with faith groups are most effective.

Conclusion: Challenges and Opportunities

It should be acknowledged that there is no direct causal effect of faith on conservation, nor is there concrete evidence that individuals or organizations affiliated with religions are more likely to be concerned about the environment than those who are not. It is possible that faith groups are simply embracing ideas and practices that are popular or generally accepted in society. On the other hand, the examples discussed above suggest that ethical or moral values related to conservation may at least sometimes play a role in faith groups' choice of ideas and practices. This fact signals important possibilities, because over 80% of the world's population is affiliated with the religious faiths that are under discussion here: over four billion people have ethical perspectives rooted in these religious traditions (Bhagwat *et al.*, 2011a). These examples thus suggest that, over time, dramatic public action may emerge, at least in part due to religious values and from the world's predominant religious faith traditions through their influences on diverse cultures.

Many non-governmental organizations as well as prominent donors, such as the World Bank, concur that faith groups are important potential partners in conservation. There are increasing examples in which religious individuals and groups express ethical and moral values and engage in activities with precisely such objectives. While there are challenges in forming partnerships – including differences in worldviews, conflict between identities and divergent attitudes and behaviours – it is possible for conservation practitioners to work with religious individuals and groups to promote environmental values. As the examples discussed in this paper suggest, some faith-based groups recognize and are addressing incompatibilities between their own values and practices and those of secular conservation organizations. This has enabled religious and secular organizations to establish a common ground based on shared ethical and moral values. Although such partnerships have a mixed record, it is possible for secular conservation organizations to strengthen linkages with faith groups in the cause of protecting the natural world. ■

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Dealing with Diverse Perceptions of Conservation and Culture in Uganda

Emily Drani

Introduction

Colonial administrations have had a decisive impact on defining and establishing conservation management systems in Sub-Saharan Africa. At that time, conservation was driven by two schools of thought: a romantic tradition that decried the impact of modernization, and a scientific 'rational' tradition that sought to manage nature for human enjoyment and material benefit (Bate, 1991; Veldman, 1994; Adams, 1996). Of special concern was the preservation of game for hunters and, later, the conservation of exotic species and, more generally, of 'wild' Africa (MacKenzie, 1988; Neumann, 1998) (in Adams, 2003).

In spite of expectations to the contrary, the post-colonial states retained these models. The public trust doctrine enshrined in the national constitution of several countries dictated that governments protect national heritage, including natural heritage, for the common good of all citizens. This was implemented through a series of measures that allowed citizens and foreign visitors access to such resources in a prescribed manner, but in fact frequently resulted in state agencies denying people access to and use of what they considered 'their' heritage resources, especially when located in protected areas where this was sought forcefully and 'illegally'. Violent confrontations between the two parties then ensued.

In the 1980s, the emergence of community-based conservation approaches reflected escalating protests and subsequent dialogue with local communities that were affected by international attempts to protect biodiversity. These attempts were, however, still informed by the notion that nature and culture are separate, in the process therefore disregarding the interests of indigenous people. Such conservation actions often continued to bar people from their land and negated any understanding of non-human nature and non-Western cosmologies.

The globalization of nature conservation efforts, as exemplified by the 1992 Convention on Biological Diversity, also led to an agenda emphasizing the conservation of biological diversity and the preservation of nature for its own sake (Lewis, 1992; Merachn, 1992; Holdage, 1996; Adams, 2001), fostering a conceptual separation between humans and nature and between nature and culture, and in the process leading to both moral and practical dilemmas, especially in poor countries where human needs cannot be set aside from pursuing the 'intrinsic' rights of nature. Although organizations such as the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) have moved towards a position emphasizing sustainable resource use (and its human element), Western-inspired conservation ideology has remained dominant.

In this paper, I discuss the notions of conservation, from both traditional and externally inspired 'development' perspectives, and how these have evolved over time, taking Uganda as an example. I focus on the relationship and contradictions between culture and conservation in this local setting, and explore how Ugandan communities have attempted to manage the complexities created by these diverse perceptions and attendant conservation initiatives.

Uganda: Conservation from an Exogenous Perspective

As elsewhere in Sub-Saharan Africa, conservation efforts in Uganda have largely been shaped by a perspective informed by external bodies of thought. These efforts date back to 1923, when the Elephant Control Department was established by the Protectorate Government to reduce damage to peasant farms by limiting the size and range of elephant populations. Gradually, policies and structures were put in place by the colonial administration to ensure the effective management of forests and other protected areas. In the 1960s, the importance of the tourism industry was recognized and additional natural resources were gazetted and supported by the development of tourism infrastructure. Areas prone to disease or host to the tsetse fly were also gazetted and remained so even after the elimination of these threats.

After independence, Uganda continued to define its conservation agenda from a conceptualization born in Western thought, specifically an understanding of conservation as primarily meant to preserve game and exotic species. The main threat to these resources was (and still is) considered to be human activities, such as poaching for bush meat, illegal timber harvesting, charcoal burning and encroachment of farmland.

The turbulent political period that followed in Uganda from the 1970s up till 1986 saw an almost total breakdown in state structures and authority. Conservation regulations were flaunted, resulting in the neglect and encroachment of many of the country's protected areas and nature reserves, as Uganda lost its tourism appeal. With the restoration of the rule of law after 1986, the relevance of conservation to development led to renewed efforts to manage protected areas and resources. This however took on an iron-fisted, fortress mentality, mirroring the colonial approach to conservation that Uganda previously experienced, excluding local people's cultural values and interests.

Since then, conservation has been heavily influenced by biological interests, reflected in frequent surveys, the establishment of research institutions that focus on flora and fauna protection, and attempts to generally preserve Uganda's 506 protected forest reserves and 60 other protected areas, including nine national parks. The Uganda Wildlife Authority, a statutory body established in 2000, is mandated to manage, conserve and promote these protected areas and their wildlife. The mountain gorilla and chimpanzees, the exotic plants and birds found in such protected areas as Bwindi, Kidepo, Queen Elizabeth, Mt Rwenzori and Mt Elgon form the basis of Uganda's current tourism attractions, all helping to make tourism the main foreign exchange earner for the country. The inscription of natural heritage as Tangible World Heritage or Biosphere Reserves has heightened the country's tourism potential and led to investment in their preservation. The Wildlife Authority, however, makes limited reference to the socio-cultural context within which wildlife and protected areas are located.

Over the past five decades, Uganda's population has grown from 6.8 million in 1960 to close to 38 million today. This inevitably creates competition for land, food, wood fuel and other natural resources and puts intense pressure on protected areas, often considered by local communities as 'free' or 'ancestral' land. As a result, tensions between protected area authorities and communities have frequently escalated into violent conflicts, sometimes resulting in deaths on both sides. The state perception, motivation and management of protected areas is still reminiscent of a colonial mentality: authoritarian tendencies, harsh restriction of access, the use of arms with live ammunition, violent evictions and imprisonment for 'trespassing' all create further grounds for conflict between protected area authorities and neighbouring communities.

The lack of state capacity to enforce exclusive access to protected areas has, however, more recently led to the resettlement and compensation of communities (such as through revenue-sharing schemes and multi-access arrangements) in and around national parks. Being a signatory to a number of international instruments on conservation and heritage preservation, Uganda is also obliged to demonstrate adherence to commitments

that increasingly stress the recognition of human and cultural rights, as well as community participation in development processes, which have challenged the previous 'fortress mentality' exhibited by state agencies.

Conservation and Culture in the Local Setting

MacDonald (2003) asserts that, while a desire to minimize resistance may be the motivating factor, it is the linkages between knowledge, practice and sustainability that are used to promote the inclusion of 'local' communities in the planning and implementation of conservation initiatives. For local communities, participation in conservation activities is often not so much an issue of conservation as it is a way of retaining control over surroundings that they have historically considered themselves part of.

Uganda, a culturally diverse country, has about 65 ethnic groups of distinct culture, language and traditions, and diverse indigenous knowledge and governance systems. In the past, these groups had defined territories and areas of jurisdiction, although new geographical divisions were, in places, crafted in the colonial era and redefined by post-colonial governments.

Land and its resources, however, remain central to ethnic identity and are to date a cause of inter-ethnic conflicts (CCFU, 2014). During pre-colonial times, traditional kings, chiefs and clan leaders were responsible for managing society and its use of resources. The living had a duty to hold land in sacred trust for the dead and the unborn generations (Njoh, 2006). To date, land is not only considered important because of its ability to sustain life but also as a source of religious power and aspiration. Thus, land tenure does not imply outright and individual ownership but comprises rights, duties of use and transfer, administration of access and occupation, reflecting the belief that land is a communal property collectively owned by the social group such as the extended family, clans, chiefdoms, kingdoms or communities of ancestrally related people. Rituals related to rain making, thanksgiving and prayer have thus historically been tied to land (Njoh, 2006).

Traditional conservation practices are therefore integrated in cultural governance systems and include the careful identification of animal or plant species to be used for different purposes including rituals, hunting, food and medicine. This knowledge is mostly passed down the generations through informal education. Clans often identify with a particular plant or animal species, or a cultural object, referred to as a totem. In the case of living totems, consideration is not only given to the totem but also to its habitat and food. In 1966, amidst Uganda's turbulent post-independence era, traditional kingdoms

were abolished, only to be restored in 1995, albeit without executive or administrative functions. This period of inactivity had an impact on the effectiveness of the common ownership regulations, customary laws and rules that governed the sustainable use of natural resources, while, in some instances, customary land was taken over by the state and gazetted as protected areas (CCFU, 2014b).

Nevertheless, following the restoration of traditional institutions, most cultural groups revived their traditional governance structures and in some cases introduced new elements to address contemporary development concerns. Clans, among the smallest units of a cultural institution, remained resilient, given their primary cultural (rather than political) function. They continued to preserve and to transmit traditional knowledge in accordance with cultural and customary regulations. In many ethnic groups, particular clans, families or individuals continued to be assigned the responsibility of taking care of specific heritage resources such as forests, water bodies, sacred trees and animals, premised on a philosophy of collective ownership, protection, use and benefit defined by goodwill and unwritten societal norms. Remnants of these conservation systems can still be found in ethnic groups across the country, for instance in Kabarole, where members of the Abathangi clan established an organization to protect their totem, the chimpanzee; or in Hoima, where cultural heads under the traditional Kingdom of Bunyoro have sought to preserve trees associated with a traditional naming practice (*Empaako*).

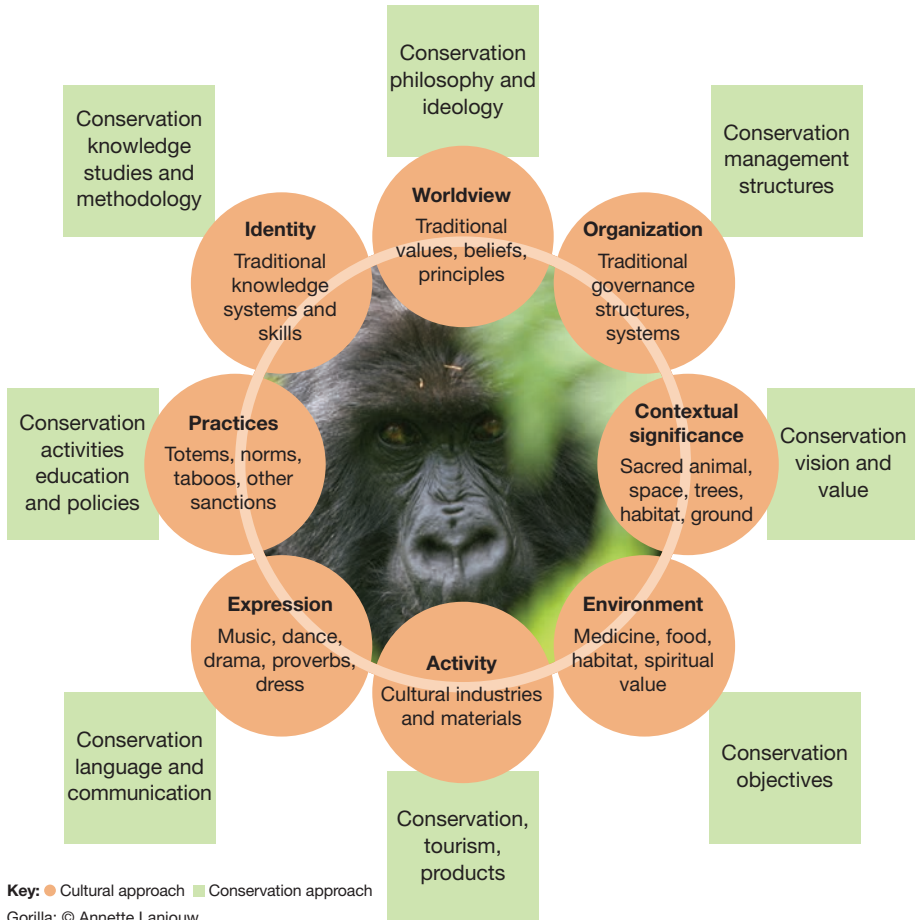
Such conservation systems were, however, most effective in and suited to relatively small, atomized, low density, homogeneous populations that subscribed to a singular traditional governance system. The introduction of new religions and education systems that exclude and even demonize indigenous culture has resulted in the erosion and breakdown of traditional transmission mechanisms and presented competing knowledge systems. Indigenous knowledge, including conservation techniques which did not have the opportunity to develop at a pace that would match societal changes and respond adequately to the needs of high density and heterogeneous communities, have been especially threatened. Diminishing cultural knowledge and skills relevant to contemporary challenges, coupled with mobility and the pressing demands of economic development, have also produced younger generations that still identify with their clans and totems, but have little or no knowledge of traditional conservation mechanisms.

The effectiveness of traditional systems also depends on the influence of the cultural institution in a community, *vis-à-vis* the authority of state agencies. The state is increasingly adopting community-based approaches that include co-management of protected areas, revenue sharing, and consensus to regulate community access to heritage resources within protected areas.

CCFU's Work on 'Cultural Heritage and Conservation'

The link between culture and development (or, in this case, conservation) can best be understood by recognizing the existence of diverse bodies of knowledge that determine how a society relates and utilizes its natural resources. Further, the concepts of cultural heritage and conservation can be seen as mutually reinforcing, not only because they share common principles but because natural resources are central to their definition.

Figure 1 Culture in Conservation Framework



The Cross-Cultural Foundation of Uganda (CCFU), which developed and employs a “Culture in Development” approach, proposes objective ways through which, culture – people’s ways of knowing, being and doing – can be understood and used as a basis for social and economic transformation. This entails a clear understanding of the local cultural context, the repositories of knowledge, skills and related values, as well as the traditional structures, systems, reference points and resource persons that perpetuate various aspects of culture in a society. Thus, using cultural lenses, communities make sense and find relevant different plants, animals or objects in their environment. In order to motivate engagement in conservation, CCFU believes that it is necessary to understand what cultural or historical value the community attaches to it. The illustration above highlights various cultural elements that may be associated with, for instance, a chimpanzee, and how these can be explored to create synergy between culture and development.

Identifying and integrating aspects of these elements in development thinking, practices and policies also fosters an enhanced understanding of the development agenda by the community concerned. It creates synergy between the ‘modern’ and the ‘traditional’ goals but also draws on local expertise and intellectual resourcefulness. This underlines the essence of ‘people-centred’ development, where communities are not invited spectators of their own development, but are resourceful contributors.

Shea Nut Preservation in Aryek Chiefdom, Alur Kingdom

The survival of many aspects of culture is dependent on the conservation of nature, a link that goes some way to explain the existence of traditional cultural mechanisms intimately aimed in many parts of Uganda at preserving and protecting the natural environment for posterity. Using a ‘culture in development’ approach, the CCFU has worked with cultural leaders of the Alur Kingdom in northern Uganda to understand their traditional role in conservation. This case illustrates how the convergence between development-inspired and community-defined (traditional) understandings of conservation, and an appreciation of the existence of diverse objectives and motivations related to conservation efforts, can yield a common desired outcome.

Land in Alur is communally owned: it is a resource that all men belonging to a particular lineage can use to cultivate and feed their families. Its management and that of other natural resources is the responsibility of chiefs (*Rwot*) who report to the king and are assisted by clan leaders. Among these natural resources is the shea butter nut tree, whose uses are spiritual, cultural, nutritional and medicinal, as well as economic. The tree has a lifespan of over 300 years and is an important asset to the community. The shea nuts

are locally processed by women using grinding stones and boiled to extract the oil. During processing, traditional knowledge and skills are passed from one generation to the next through practical demonstration and legends, songs, riddles, proverbs, etc. Traditionally, shea butter is smeared on newly born babies, brides and pregnant women and in related traditional ceremonies. The oil is also used as ointment for wounds and dislocations. During the installation of the king and chiefs, shea butter is one of the items used in various rituals. It is considered a valued gift during other ceremonies. In recent years, however, threats to the tree have included bush and charcoal burning, and indiscriminate clearing of land by foreign investors.

The Aryek chiefdom, one of the 52 in Alur, headed by Chief Stanley Ogama was identified as exemplary in his efforts to preserve the shea nut trees, including negotiations with non-indigenous development agents to prevent the replacement of these cultural trees with foreign species such as eucalyptus and pine. Through the regular chief's meetings, information on the threats to and the need to preserve the shea nut trees was communicated to the community. Clan leaders were assigned the responsibility of inventorying all the shea nut trees in the chiefdom. A total of 14,000 trees were marked and their location and age recorded. Working in close collaboration with one of the Kingdom ministers, records were compiled and given to the chief for safekeeping. The community was then mobilized to collect shea nut seeds which would be used to propagate seedlings. The Chief pronounced a penalty of a curse to any member of the community who cut down a shea nut tree and called upon the community to report any culprit. This information was also communicated to the relevant local government authorities.

With CCFU's support, members of the chiefdom developed and implemented a conservation plan which involved the establishment of a nursery for shea nut seedlings on a piece of land allocated by the chief; a study tour to a neighbouring district to learn how to propagate the seeds, which usually grow wild; and capacity building to manage and market the project. To mitigate the threat of charcoal burning, the community used part of the nursery to plant seedlings for fast growing trees that could be used for firewood or charcoal. Men and women, working on a voluntary basis, have now established a bed with thousands of seedlings, the first of its kind in this part of the country. They have attracted orders from a neighbouring country and from several districts, and the local government has pledged to support the project.

In this case, the community's motivation, primarily driven by their appreciation of the cultural values associated with the shea nut trees (rather than Western-inspired concerns for conservation and biodiversity), is likely to contribute significantly to sustained conservation efforts. Collaboration between the local cultural institution and development

partners led to an exchange of knowledge and the sharing of principles, as well as to a more structured approach to traditional conservation practices than had hitherto been the case. When conflicts in objectives and approaches emerged, these could be addressed through consultations and consensus. Prospects for a lasting impact appear enhanced as conservation efforts find resonance in the community's cultural logic.

Conclusion

Uganda's experience highlights the need to recognize the existence of often parallel, but different, bodies of knowledge that inform conservation efforts: on the one hand, traditional perspectives, worldviews and needs, which in turn determine how most people relate to and care for their environment and, on the other, the comprehensive body of researched Western-inspired knowledge on conservation.

The imposition of one school of thought upon another provides a potential source of conflict, whereas identifying and harmonizing points of convergence, in respect to the principles and the ultimate goal of conservation efforts, is not only possible but necessary for sustained outcomes.

It is therefore not surprising that international narratives that create a conceptual separation between cultural values and nature, and subsequently influence national policies and practices, inadvertently cause community resistance to the conservation agenda they promote. Given that a large portion of natural resources that are the objects of current conservation endeavours are located in the less developed countries (where human needs take priority over the 'intrinsic' rights of nature), it appears essential to view these resources in their totality, including their social, cultural, spiritual, ecological and economic values. As the rightful custodians of such resources, the concerns of communities need to be taken into account to avoid disengagement and, in some instances, undermining of conservation interventions.

To the contrary, traditional conservation mechanisms present opportunities to enhance community participation and to support sustainable conservation interventions. It may, however, be that the impact of civil strife, the breakdown in traditional governance structures and knowledge transmission mechanisms, and the influence of religion and education have in some instances reduced their effectiveness. Our experience in Uganda nevertheless indicates that reviving cultural values, seeking convergence with other bodies of knowledge and supporting culturally informed processes that resonate with conservation needs may provide lasting solutions. ■

Sharing Stories. On the Intercultural Dialogue on the Protection of Species

Jet Bakels and Gerard A. Persoon

Introduction

On frosty mornings the cranes cry out

On autumn nights the gibbons sing

(Yu Hsin, 513–581, in R.H. van Gulik, 1967: 54)

What does nature mean? To us, to others, to the future of the planet? How could we, through a better understanding of the cultural values people ascribe to nature, come to a better approach to protect biodiversity and conserve wildlife?

In the case of great ape conservation, western-based organizations (often in cooperation with national governments) have sought to protect these species and their natural habitat in Africa and Asia. In these situations western ideas about the value of landscapes, plants and animals are imposed upon a totally new setting with a local population that has its own cultural values and a relationship with nature which is often unknown and poorly understood by individuals with a modern, urban-oriented lifestyle in Africa, Asia or the west. Local valuations of nature and associated perceptions of life, death and extinction might be so different from the traditional scientific, environmentalist approach that miscommunication is often inevitable. In confrontation everybody loses, and nature foremost.

Whales and Pigs, Orangutans and Hornbills

A better understanding of how local people – the community that interacts with a given environment and its wildlife – relate to nature and which cultural values are guiding them is needed. The value of nature, for us or any society, is seldom purely economic. Nature can be identified with beauty or danger, with riches and misfortune, and can be the abode of ancestors or demons. It can contain sacred sites and gods in the guise of

animals; it can be a source of deep affinity and love – or offer easy meat or a cash income. Often it reflects all these perceptions, but in different circumstances – as we are too familiar with in a modern ‘rational’ world that is full of cultural preoccupations and contradictions itself. How can we rationalize treating dogs and cats as family but put calves and chickens in small cages as commodities for food? How can we explain that we imbue whales with almost neo-totemistic qualities, but have no problem eating no-less intelligent and sensitive pigs for lunch – as the Japanese are eager to point out? And to stick to the example of the whale in our culture and others: it is difficult for westerners to understand that religious reverence for an animal such as the whale is not necessarily contradictory to eating it. In societies such as those of the indigenous peoples of Canada and the USA, or the Inuit of Greenland (and to a degree also in certain Japanese traditions), whales were highly respected. Hunting them was preceded by days of rituals and offerings, in which the whale was asked to ‘present itself to the hunter’, an act that was understood as a gift from the Mother of the Sea. Respect was paired with killing and eating in a way we have lost in modern society. We also seem to have forgotten how recent some of our dominant views on nature actually are. Many new sensibilities about animal rights and protection developed in the second half of the twentieth century.

Another example of how modern environmentalist ways of thinking might contrast with local community views towards a specific species concerns the orangutan, considered a flagship species by nature conservationists. At the time of its introduction in western Europe in the seventeenth century, documented by Dutch anatomist N. Tulp in a publication titled *An Indian Satyr*, a hot debate broke out about its status. Was it human? An animal? Something in between? (Cribb, 2014: 10). Since then the discussion of how to – if at all – make a clear qualitative distinction between humankind and the animal world has only become more urgent and outspoken, and today there are strong voices that argue for the granting of human rights to certain intelligent and sentient non-human animals, starting with the great apes (Steven Wise in *Politics of Species*, 2013: 241).

One would expect that in the societies that share the environment with great apes, similarities between humans and apes would attract the attention and fascination of local communities. But this does not seem to be the case with the orangutan in the local cultures in Sumatra and Borneo; not now, and not in the past. Orangutans are virtually absent from myths, stories, rituals and art that might reflect a special meaning or respect, as was and to a degree still is the case elsewhere with the crocodile and the tiger. The Dayak tribes that originally inhabited Borneo’s interior have in the past incidentally hunted the animals for meat and trade, but they did not play an important role economically, nor

in any religious sense. The ape that we regard with such great interest and compassion 'loomed larger in the imagination of the West than it did in its native Borneo and Sumatra' (Cribb, 2014: 85, 212). The family likeness between ape and human failed to inspire any connection. There is a Dayak story in which a Dayak woman is kidnapped by an orangutan and gives birth to a son (similar to European stories about wedlock between a bear and a woman), but this does not seem to have had any impact on behaviour such as hunting, for example. The species that does occupy a central role in the cosmology of the forest of the Dayak is a bird, the hornbill, that due to its nesting behaviour is associated with the gods, and the cycle of the regeneration of life.

Nowadays the traditional Dayak culture has radically changed, and immigrant groups from other parts of the country have entered the forests. These relatively new populations work as farmers, plantation workers and woodcutters in an effort to make a living from Borneo's resources, but they do so without a spiritual bond with the forest. Primarily, for them, the forest is an economic resource. They know little about its non-human inhabitants, with whom they have never built up a relationship. As a result the orangutan population of Borneo – and parallel to Borneo's development, that of Sumatra – is heavily threatened not only by habitat loss, but also because the animals are killed for meat or caught to sell as pets, notwithstanding their protected status.

Experiments have been done in Borneo to test possible effects of films that focus on the human-like display of emotions such as love, attachment and playfulness between orangutans. In one example it moved a man that had formerly killed orangutans to compassion, explaining 'that if he had knew that the animal was so human-like, he would not have killed it' (Serge Wich, personal communication).

Culture, Nature and the Cycle of Life: Mentawai and Cameroon

'Nature' is not a neutral concept. In all its aspects (landscape, plants, animals) it is culturally constructed and defined. It is made meaningful through practical engagement and cognition (categorization, labelling, intellection and sensation). It varies among cultures and populations and it varies over time (Ellen, 1996: 3). Culture, in brief, is what we (or any other animal) have learned. It embodies interpretation and meaning in a way that guides our actions and inspires our decisions. People develop an idea of what nature means to them through the tales their parents tell them in their youth, through lessons learned from religious books or moral tales told under the shadow of a tree, through values and experiences implicit in everyday life, through shared rural or urban values. 'It is always

a synergy of the utilitarian and the aesthetic, the pragmatic and the symbolic, and knowledge can never be independent of relations with it' (Norgaard, 1987 in Ellen, 1996: 12). Nature and the cultural conceptions of nature develop together; they co-evolve (Dove in Ellen, 1996: 12).

Nature in its shortest biological definition however, refers to 'everything that grows'. In that sense we humans are also nature. Some philosophers of nature have therefore preferred to use the word 'wilderness' – such as the tropical forest – to refer to the kind of environment that is 'untouched by humans', and this is what we often refer to when we use the word nature (Schefold, 2002: 432). The word 'wilderness', however, in itself is also imbued with meaning and suggests a place 'wild, without rules and regulation', while in the perception of many traditional, local religions, it is in fact the opposite of this. Wilderness is never a neutral term: nature is always seen and mediated through cultural perceptions. In the perception of many societies living in or close to the forest, wilderness is perceived as a 'mask, that conceals what is in reality another cultural domain, a "culture of the beyond"' (Schefold, 2002: 428). An understanding of this 'culture of the beyond' is important if one also wants to get an understanding of the way certain animals are viewed. In the perception of the inhabitants of the interior of the Mentawai islands, situated on the west coast of Sumatra, this 'wilderness – culture of the beyond' is populated by the spirits of the forest, who are mostly invisible. Mirroring the villagers' possession of cattle, so too do the spirits of the forest have 'cattle' of their own: the wild animals of the jungle such as deer and monkeys (macaques). Both are hunted for food. Before departing on a monkey hunt, and after a successful hunt, several obligations and taboos have to be taken into account and certain rites have to be performed in order to please the forest spirits and persuade them to let their 'cattle' – the monkeys – be taken by the hunters.

In a hypothetical situation (which is in fact now an occurring reality) where over-hunting has depleted population numbers, leading to the failure of the hunt, the Mentawaians would blame the unwillingness of the forest spirits to 'give' the hunting party what they wanted rather than see it in terms of their own hunting pressure. Perhaps the spirits were angered because a taboo was overlooked or a rite was poorly performed. In the worldview of the Mentawaians this is a logical conclusion, and one that has not harmed them for generations. But in the last 30 years modernization has found its way to these remote islands, and in some cases efficient rifles have replaced the traditional bow and arrows, causing macaque numbers to dwindle more rapidly.

The gibbon, on the other hand, is not targeted as the subject of a hunt, because – according to some sources – its call and face are too human for the Mentawaians (it is

associated with evil forest spirits), although a gibbon may be shot when encountered in the forest. The animal is then consumed by children and women, whereas 'respected men' refrain from such meals (Scheffold, 1988: 327). According to other opinions, however, it may also be the loud cries of the animals that discourage a hunt (R. Tenaza, personal communication). In other words, 'respect' for nature is not an all-encompassing conception, related to the idea of the entire 'wilderness', but a selective outlook that may differentiate between the protection and exploitation of certain species, in different circumstances and locations.

Another, Cameroonian example highlights how local narratives (such as fables, public stories and myths) are used by anthropologists as a source of information and insight into a specific worldview, including the way the natural world is perceived. An interesting study by Natascha Zwaal (2003) shows how such narratives can also be used as tools for a meaningful intercultural dialogue and as stimulus for rethinking the discussion around relationships with nature. Contrasting the modern, western 'supra local' narratives with local ones, Zwaal shows how at the supra local level a highly developed individual responsibility towards the environment is central. From this perspective (*communis opinio* in the modern world), moreover, nature is seen as extremely vulnerable. In Europe the vulnerability of nature is a relatively new idea, in vogue perhaps since the industrial revolution, the period when humankind started to control and exploit their natural surroundings on a large scale. The present impact of humans on the environment, for better or for worse, has recently led to the introduction of the term 'Anthropocene', indicating a new era in which humans influence all aspects of nature, including the climate. This idea of individual and/or collective human responsibility and influence stands in contrast to the ideas expressed in the local narratives in Cameroon analysed by Zwaal, where the environment is perceived as a domain that is perfectly well capable of taking care of itself. The idea of the vulnerability of wild nature is, according to Zwaal, in the narratives she analysed 'almost absent'. Furthermore, 'extinction' as a concept is also often absent from local thought. As a Cameroon woodcutter explained: 'the forest and its powers will always be able to overrule man' (Zwaal, 2003: 168, 205). Of course it is easy to see that certain animals disappear – at least temporarily, or are present in lesser quantities – but often they are thought 'to have moved elsewhere'. Like the Mentawai monkey hunters mentioned earlier, in the local worldview there will always be another forest, another hill, or another savanna where the animals have moved to and, when the time is ripe, they will simply come back.

A second contrast between supra local and local ideas, that, as in Mentawai, comes to the fore in the local narratives in Cameroon, is that the environment is perceived in *moral*

terms. Human responsibility to the environment is embodied not in direct action such as hunting, but is instead linked to social codes in a completely different social domain. For example, animals can punish a person who has been stealing from their neighbour, and thus breaking an important social code, by staying away. Additionally, Zwaal gives examples where organized storytelling sessions in local villages form an effective platform for the exchange of ideas on the environment, and provide the local population with alternative insights and solutions. Self-made dilemmas are wrapped up in a story, and people are invited to discuss their views. In this way people feel that one of their own cultural ways of approaching a dilemma is used: the narrative – they are attracted to the entertainment, and engage in a solution-oriented manner (Zwaal, 2003: 277).

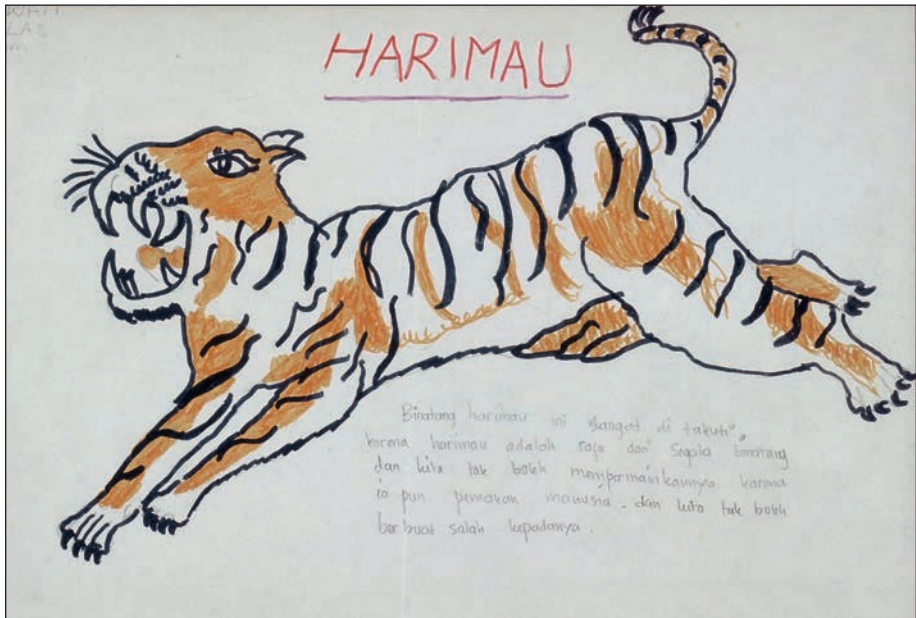
These examples from Mentawai and Cameroon can perhaps help us understand how relatively limited, local perceptions of one's position in the larger world may encounter difficulties when attempting to adapt to new financial markets, modern tools and population growth. While other kinds of local knowledge may remain valuable, on the medicinal properties of plants or about the behaviour of certain animals, for instance, the examples discussed highlight a complicated gap between external and local points of view, which in turn may hamper a fruitful intercultural dialogue on environmental solutions.

Eroded, Revived and Invented Traditions: Tiger, Crocodile and Sun Bear

Local perceptions may not always favour environmental conservation, but sometimes they do. In the case of the Sumatran tiger there is a long cultural tradition supportive of this dangerous animal, and the recent example of the sun bear in Borneo shows that local traditions can be changed or invented and thus geared to a more conscious relation with certain species.

Since it was a threat to both the colonial powers and the local population under their responsibility, the Sumatran tiger was a focus of Dutch colonial rules. William Marsden, travelling southern Sumatra in the 1770s, remarked that, 'the number of people annually slain by these rapacious tyrants of the woods is almost incredible. I know of whole villages depopulated by them' (1986: 185). It has been estimated that up to a few hundred people were killed each year in Sumatra in the nineteenth century (Boomgaard, 2001: 40). In 1862 a decree of the Dutch government established a bounty of 30 guilders (about one quarter of the yearly income of the local farmer) for every tiger killed. To the astonishment of the colonial government, however, the effect of this on the bloodthirstiness of

Figure 1 Children's drawing from Kerinci, Sumatra



The text says 'the tiger is a frightening animal, he is the king of all the animals and a man-eater, we should respect him and not behave badly towards him.' Picture by Jet Bakels.

the local farmers was zero. Slowly it dawned upon them that in the local belief system of the rural population a tiger was not 'just' an animal, but was considered the incarnation of an important ancestral figure and as such was entitled to protection. Killing one's ancestor was unthinkable. As an ancestor figure, the tiger became a moral force that would only attack a person when he or she had violated traditional rules of behaviour laid down by the ancestors. We cannot go more deeply into the complexities of this 'tiger-complex' here (see Bakels, 2000, 2004), but it is sufficient to say that this is an example of a cultural complex that worked strongly in favour of the protection of a certain species. Thus, local traditions for a long time formed a buffer against the modern economic policies of the Dutch colonial government.

But ideas change, for better or for worse. With the rise of orthodox Islam in Indonesia the spiritual relationship with the tiger that protected the animal came under pressure from the local government and Islamic functionaries as being paganist and 'un-Islamic'. Apart

Figure 2 The changing value of the crocodile



Through cultural performances the historical fate of the crocodile is shown to various audiences. The animal was on the brink of extinction, whereas now the emphasis is put on its value. The crocodile has been turned into 'something to be proud of'. Picture by G. Persoon, 2013.

from poachers from outside rural areas, this change in the worldview of the local people eroded the local protection the tiger had always enjoyed, resulting in an increase in local poaching that now threatens the rapidly declining tiger population in Sumatra. Perhaps, if the tiger could be revived as a natural and cultural symbol of Sumatra, removed from accusations of 'primitivism' and 'paganism' (both explicitly negative values in present-day Indonesia), it may still survive. If environmentalists, local communities and various levels of government could collaborate, then such a case could be made and local pride reinforced, thereby celebrating an inspiring cultural tradition and helping to protect the animal.

An example of this is the recent 'upgrading' of the freshwater crocodile in the Philippines and the sun bear in Borneo from marginal and sometimes hunted beasts of the wild into respected flagship species and icons of local identity. Led by foreign environmentalists and a (newly founded) local Philippine NGO, the nearly extinct Philippine crocodile (*Crocodylus mindorensis*) appears to have been saved by a well-organized *in situ* con-

servation programme jointly supported by the municipal government of San Mariano (in northern Luzon), the village-level councils and the local population. It is generally believed that only by securing economic benefits can protection of a species be successful, but in this case such an approach failed and another type of campaign was initiated, focusing instead on the cultural and intrinsic values of the animal. This involved several layers of government, engagement of the local population using posters, theatre plays, puppet shows and community dialogues, and involved taking schoolchildren into the wild to see the species. It was this strategy, actively focusing on a bottom-up approach in combination with enforcement legislation, that stimulated local support and ultimately led to success. In this campaign the generally negative perception of the animal (dangerous, ‘devil in disguise’) had to be overcome and a link was made to the pre-Catholic religious traditions of the local communities. Today a well-organized and widely supported programme protects the animal and it is largely due to cultural pride that this municipality has an animal within its borders that was thought to be extinct in the country but that now survives and is doing well ‘only in San Mariano’ (Van der Ploeg & Van Weerd, 2013).

The campaign for the Malay sun bear (*Helarctos malayanus*) in a part of East Kalimantan, Indonesia, is similar to this case. Largely due to a creative initiative established by a foreign researcher, the sun bear has become the icon of the boom-town of Balikpapan in East Kalimantan. The water supply from the neighbouring forests for this rapidly expanding oil town was threatened by illegal logging, and forest fires. Protection of the Sungai Wain watershed was essential to safeguard the water supply for this city, and the forests of Sungai Wain are also a key habitat for the endangered Malay sun bear. In a successful campaign, the administration of the city agreed to adopt the species as its iconic animal, thereby associating the survival of the sun bear with the protection of the Sungai Wain watershed and thus guaranteeing the inhabitants of Balikpapan an adequate supply of safe drinking water (G. Fredriksson, 2013).

Conclusion

The biologist E.O. Wilson has postulated that there is a biologically based, inherent human need to affiliate with life and lifelike processes that he calls biophilia (Wilson, 1984). According to him, not only our economic needs but also our human identity and personal fulfilment somehow depend on our relationship with nature. So the degradation of nature naturally leads to a deprived and diminished existence, not only materially but also spiritually (Wilson, 1984: 42, 43). Is this too romantic? Certainly economic gain, easy money and bush meat remain a seduction, and a threat to species under protection.

However, a number of our examples indicate that this is not always the case. It could have worked for the Sumatran tiger had efforts been made systematically. It did work for the Philippine crocodile and the Sun bear, and might also work for the orangutan – and for other species. What this needs, apart from the ‘fines and fences’ approach, is an intensive campaign that responds to local values, using interesting and open, amusing and if possible local communication systems such as stories and theatrical plays in the dialogue. Protection of species can also be related to other cultural values than just utilitarian material gains and food. Even when ancient preservative religious beliefs are non-existent or dissolving, cultural values such as pride, intellectual interest, appreciation of heritage and/or respect for nature may be equally important. Species of animals may also be valuable and respected on the basis of their associative or indicative relations with a healthy environment and all the services (economic and others) that it supplies. Finally, elements or aspects of nature may also evoke emotions that can form the basis for protective actions. In that sense, communicating the dominant natural value perspectives of other cultures may be useful and lead to initiatives based on similar ideas, and to shared stories. ■

Integrating a Cultural Values Approach into Protected Area Management

Mark Infield

Introduction

The survival of wild apes, along with much other biodiversity, will greatly depend in the future on effective protected areas. Understanding the cultural meanings of sites and species from a local perspective and incorporating these values into protected area design and management will enhance conservation. This approach makes use of cultural links between people and apes as well as connections that exist between people, places and nature and the contributions such connections make to human wellbeing.

This paper discusses the significance of cultural values approaches to protected areas with particular reference to conserving apes and their habitats. Before investigating this, however, it is necessary to step back a little and investigate the reasons for conserving apes at all. Not surprisingly, answering this question needs a cultural perspective too.

Why Conserve Apes?

Ape conservation, indeed conservation in general, can be considered at two levels. The first looks at questions related to existence. Why should apes exist, what are the implications of their loss and, therefore, why should they be protected? The second level looks at how we can best conserve apes. Both levels of examination need to be considered through a cultural perspective as well as through the disciplines of science and economics that are more usually applied to such questions. The immediate subject of this paper is the role that culture and values can play in ape conservation. Linked to this, however, are more general questions of how a cultural perspective can influence the policies and practices of conservation and the conceptual framework in which they are undertaken. But first the question of why to conserve nature, and in this case apes, must be addressed as, if there are no compelling reasons to conserve them, the practical question of how to do it is redundant.

Decisions made by individuals or communities on whether or not to conserve apes, or indeed anything else, animal, vegetable or mineral, necessarily depend on perceptions of value. How can we think about the value of apes, a handful of species amongst millions, each with its own claims to existence? Conservation theory encoded in arguments based on science and economics calls for the protection of all species¹. The sciences of genetics, evolution and ecology provide the foundations of arguments for the conservation of biodiversity in relation to concerns over ecological stability, threats of ecosystem collapse, the ending of evolution and others, all of which can be paired with economic arguments of lost worth and production. The precautionary principle argues against tampering with things we don't understand or destroying things whose functions we don't know. Financial arguments are also made on behalf of the material goods and services biodiversity provides or may provide to humanity in the future (MEA, 2005). None of these arguments works particularly well as an argument for conserving apes. Apes may be keystone species (Nasi *et al.*, 2011; Vanclay, 1999) but their loss from large areas of forest in Africa and Asia has not led to ecological collapse of these ecosystems². Ape tourism is important to the economies of some countries – tourism based on viewing mountain gorillas (*Gorilla gorilla beringi*) is economically important in Rwanda and Uganda – but tourism revenues have not delivered the conservation of Indonesia's orangutans, Asia's many gibbon species or most of Africa's chimpanzees and bonobos, all of which have experienced significant reductions across their ranges (Neilson & Spenceley, 2010; Adams & Infield, 2003).

Some environmental problems manifest in ways that can be hard to perceive. The pollution of the seas can be recognized, but collapsing fish populations are concealed by shifting perceptions of abundance, elasticity of price and industry strategies that shift from species to species while modifying consumer preferences. Soil erosion goes unnoticed or at least unremarked while farming continues. All seems fine until rocks begin to show and even then a crop may still be harvested³. Climate change shows itself in global

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- 1 Some species, for example bacteria considered too threatening to humans to be allowed to exist, malaria-carrying mosquitoes and human fleas, seem to be excluded from this rule.
 - 2 The ecological consequences of the loss of any particular species are uncertain. Britain, for example, has lost several species including keystone predators, some through historical climatic change, others through human actions. Major changes to ecosystems resulted but not ecological collapse, cascading losses of species or loss of production. The collapse of wildlife populations in the UK across all genera has been the result of twentieth-century industrial farming rather than the historical loss of species. See Burns, F, Eaton, M.A, Gregory, R.D, *et al.* (2013), *State of Nature report*. The State of Nature partnership.
 - 3 In the highlands of Ethiopia, where farmers have been farming for millennia, a field will be abandoned only when three quarters of its area is rock. Personal observation. Anecdotal evidence of Ethiopian farmers.

trends, but local changes are difficult to predict accurately and can be ignored, denied or attributed to normal changes in weather and climate. The increase in extreme weather events would seem hard to ignore but we manage, through selective blindness and shifting reference points and expectations.

The loss of biodiversity is for a number of reasons perhaps the most insidious, even when apes are involved. First, there is generally a long and often slow decline before extinction, local and global, making timely responses harder⁴. Some species declared extinct have been rediscovered, suggesting incorrectly that extinction is not for ever⁵. Every schoolchild understands that without plants, or perhaps earthworms, without nature itself, there is no life. But that does not help us figure out which and how many species to keep and what we can safely allow to disappear. This in part explains the precautionary principle that says we must keep them all, though in practice we are not and probably cannot achieve this⁶. We may not know how much biodiversity we need or how much we can afford to lose⁷, but we know that loss of the dodo (*Raphus cucullatus*) did not result in the end of life on Earth or even life on Mauritius, just the end of life for the dodo. What then for the Hainan gibbon (*Nomascus hainanus*), the world's rarest ape, or the Sumatran orangutan (*Pongo abelii*)? On what basis do we argue for the conservation of these or indeed any of the apes?

In comparison to the threats posed to human existence and that of innumerable other species by the unsustainable use of our planet's resources, the dangers of incremental loss of biodiversity seem less worrying. In the final analysis, loss of all species spells human doom, but as a justification for conserving any single species, including apes,

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- 4 The story of the extinction of the baiji freshwater dolphin of the Yangtze River as conservation organizations argued over its plight is instructive and saddening. See Turvey, S. (2008). *Witness to Extinction: How we Failed to Save the Yangtze River Dolphin*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.
 - 5 Occasionally species believed extinct for decades are rediscovered, for example the Eastern black crested gibbon (*Nomascus nasutus*) in northern Vietnam and the ivory-billed woodpecker (*Campephilus principalis*) in Arkansas, USA. For other examples see www.sciencenews.org/blog/wild-things/year-rediscovered-species
 - 6 There is a natural 'background' rate of species extinctions due to evolutionary competition and stochastic events. It is not easy to determine whether a species is approaching extinction for natural reasons – such as the panda (*Ailuropoda melanoleuca*) due to its low reproductive rate and narrow diet, or the endemic Mountain chicken frog (*Leptodactylus fallax*) threatened by a volcanic eruption – or because of human impacts, and therefore whether we should attempt to save it or not. It is also unclear whether innumerable and undescribed life forms can or should be actively protected.
 - 7 Some research findings indicate that ecosystems are more stable and more productive with higher levels of biodiversity; see for example Gamfeldt, L., et al. (2013). Higher levels of multiple ecosystems are found in forests with more tree species. *Nature Communications*. doi: 10.1038/ncomms2328

the arguments are weak. Ask a conservation professional about the importance of a particular species or population and we resort to the ‘it depends’ answer; it depends on the species’ economic or ecological importance, or on it being a cure for Alzheimer’s, on whether it is the lynch pin of a complex ecosystem function, or perhaps simply because it is the subject of their PhD thesis. In essence then, even for conservationists, whether a species should be conserved or not depends on how and for what it is valued. But species are just as likely to have particular cultural values as economic or ecological ones. The sudden and near terminal loss of vultures in India in recent years resulting from the use of diclofenac, an anti-inflammatory drug used to boost production of cattle, left most of India without its clean-up and recycling service⁸. The wholesale loss of these important and charismatic species stimulated a government ban on diclofenac and successful initiatives to save them. Among the many voices raised to demand action, one voice was unexpected. It was not conservationists, though their voice was loud, or government servants, or health workers concerned about epidemics, it was the Parsi community (Modi, 1928). Parsees believe that when the soul leaves the body, the body must not be allowed to corrupt the earth or water, which are considered sacred. To prevent this Parsees have depended for centuries on vultures to dispose of the bodies (Modi, 1928). For the Parsi, the extinction of vultures presented a very particular threat to their beliefs and way of life.

The loss of such an essential and irreplaceable value for Parsees suggests we can look at the precautionary principle through a cultural lens. For any animal or plant out there in the wide world, someone, somewhere, may value it for reasons you or I might not be aware of, and might not understand, but for very compelling reasons of their own. It is the existence of such special, particular and sometimes surprising relations between people and nature that provides compelling reasons for integrating cultural values into nature conservation initiatives, including for apes, both for the peoples and the species concerned.

Rather than constructing absolute, imperative arguments for ape conservation, similar to those invoked over environmental concerns about climate change or soil erosion, conservationists need to think in relative terms about the values of apes, and about human life rather than human existence. It is the quality and meaning of our lives that are central to arguments for conservation rather than simply the persistence of our lives. There are many ways to think of and plan for ensuring our future existence that are very different to the innumerable considerations of what makes a human life good. Human physical survival is relatively simple. Consideration of a human life worth living requires considering

8 www.rspb.org.uk/joinandhelp/donations/campaigns/vultures/diclofenac.aspx

what is valued, what is felt to be important by an individual or a community. It is such values that explain the culturally relative responses people have to apes as compared, for example, to aphids.

The most powerful arguments for conserving apes are cultural in nature, are experienced and expressed in cultural terms, and need to be investigated through the relative values of culture. Though there is no more absolute value in a Hainan gibbon than in a siamang or even a slug, it is not surprising that humans place a higher value on lifeforms seen as closer to themselves. We do not need a genetic analysis to recognize our closeness to apes. That iconic moment when David Attenborough looked deep into the eyes of a gorilla on primetime television, and expressed his feelings of a profound connection, confirmed what people already knew. The plethora of myths and stories, ancient works of art, the rituals and beliefs of peoples throughout the old world who co-existed with apes are testament to a universal recognition of our similarity. Africa is full of tales of apes assisting humans and humans assisting apes, of apes with familial relationships with people, of apes with human capacities. Similar tales are told in Asia of gibbons and orang-utans (Drani & Infield, 2014). Even when expressed in the opposite terms of disdain, disgust or fear, and when apes are denigrated as degraded humans, the recognition of similarity remains. Recognition of a connection between apes and humans and therefore the potential to build on that connection to support ape conservation, or to understand and mitigate threats, is more widespread than the potential for apes to contribute to livelihoods. Cultural rather than economic values therefore present a greater and more compelling set of explanations of why we should protect apes, the first question posed at the start of this section, and have a more widespread applicability to practical initiatives to conserve them.

How to Conserve Apes; A Cultural Perspective

The roots of modern conservation lie in a set of complex cultural relationships between people and nature that developed during the nineteenth century. Importantly for this discussion, the evolution of the national park ideal, terrain from which people are removed in order to protect their natural values, was, ironically, founded on the perceived importance of nature to people. The early thinkers, writers and promoters of conservation in the USA, where the national park ideal was born, presented their ideas in cultural and religious terms. They talked about the grandeur of nature, the sacredness of nature, the necessity for Americans to remain connected to their spiritual selves and to their Christian god though wilderness. The social construction of wilderness as a physical place in which

to struggle and suffer and eventually achieve salvation morphed from wilderness as a metaphor for an internal, spiritual struggle (Nash, 1982). It is sad that, in order to protect wilderness, equivalent values held by Native Americans were trampled on. The economic and scientific arguments that now dominate conservation developed later and, despite contradictions⁹, have been used to support the exclusive national park ideal that aimed at very different purposes.

The global network of protected areas is considered by many to be the crowning achievement of the conservation movement, and indeed they play important roles in biodiversity conservation. The acceptance of protected areas by governments is significant because it demonstrates that land and resources can be removed from the immediate demands of the economic world for their present and future values. Though most frequently expressed in economic terms – the most recent development of which being the language of Ecosystem Services – they have nonetheless been set aside from the short-term, immediate demands of the globalized market, the ‘business as usual’ way of regarding the world¹⁰.

Protected areas have without doubt been important for ape conservation. The majority of Asia’s gibbons survive within often small protected areas. The Hainan gibbon (*Nomascus hainanus*), of which just 25 remain, exists only in the 65 square kilometre Bawangling National Nature Reserve. In 2002, the Eastern black gibbon (*Nomascus nasutus*), thought to be extinct since the 1960s, was rediscovered in a fragment of forest growing on steep limestone hills lying across the Vietnam–China border, surrounded by dense human communities and under pressure from farmers, timber cutters and charcoal burners. If local communities and the governments had not been supported to establish a protected area, it is unlikely that the 40 or so animals would have survived, let alone increased to the current number of 110 (Rawson *et al.*, 2011). The entire population of Africa’s 900 mountain gorillas is confined to four parks, in Uganda, Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo (UNEP/WCMC, 2003). Africa’s rarest gorilla, the Cross River gorilla (*Gorilla gorilla diehli*), numbers about 200 to 300 and survives in a mixture

9 For example, superimposing biodiversity conservation objectives over national parks established for cultural reasons has left much biodiversity outside; describing ‘nature’ as ‘natural resources’ suggests economic value, contradicted by the national park management that prohibits use.

10 In theory at least, these areas have been set aside in perpetuity, though this concept is challenged and some industries, oil, gas and mining in particular, demand rights to extract resources from conserved areas. The UK government, for example, has recently allowed fracking under protected areas (see www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/fracking-for-fossil-fuels-will-now-be-allowed-under-britains-national-parks-and-world-heritage-sites-a6775736.html).

of protected and unprotected forests along the Nigeria–Cameroon border. The unprotected forests are being rapidly lost to agriculture and the fate of groups in these areas seems uncertain¹¹.

This is not to say that protected areas are always able to conserve apes and other species – many of Asia’s protected forests sufferer from ‘silent forest syndrome’, having been emptied of their animals and birds by unsustainable hunting and collecting – or that important ape populations do not exist outside protected areas¹². Nonetheless, the historical importance of protected areas in ape conservation is clear, and they are likely to become more important as unprotected lands are converted to farming or other uses as both local and globalized ‘business as usual’ pressures prevail. Protected areas, often strongly contested by local communities, are likely to come under increasing pressure as local communities and international corporations pursue resources, as well as from opponents of the protected area concept. Though the Virunga National Park, Africa’s first national park and a World Heritage Site, is critical to the conservation of mountain gorillas, this has not stopped it being occupied by refugees, harvested extensively for charcoal burning, hunted and trapped by local and non-local people, used as a refuge by guerrilla bands, and explored for oil and gas extraction.

The Weakness of Protected Areas

The importance of protected areas and the rising threats to their existence suggest that they need to be made more effective and sustainable. Though all too often designed and managed with little regard for communities that live in and around them, and though they continue to be policed using ‘fines and fences’ models, it has long been recognized that their continued existence depends on the degree to which they are supported by local communities (Adams & McShane, 1992). Integrated conservation and development approaches have been implemented in parallel with exclusionary models to build local and political support. Integrated conservation and development seeks to create economic interdependences between protected areas and local communities. They have had mixed success but have given rise to various forms of collaborative management in which communities and conservation authorities work together (Bitariho *et al.*, 2015).

11 www.crossrivergorilla.org/index.php/en/species-profile/geographical-range

12 The Easter black crested gibbon, when rediscovered, was surviving outside a protected area. The very steep karst limestone mountains in which they were living, unsuitable for farming and difficult to penetrate, provided a form of natural protection.

These models tend to rely on the purported economic importance of protected areas to local livelihoods as incentives for communities to engage with and support the conservation endeavour. The economic incentives rarely outweigh the costs communities experience by living near protected areas, however, let alone the opportunity costs of land and resources taken from them, indicating the weakness of economic approaches (Blomley *et al.*, 2010). Though responding to the economic needs of the often-poor communities that live around protected areas is essential, placing the future of conservation on the balance of financial outcomes seems a dangerous, not to say foolhardy, approach. It plays to the flawed logic that the unending economic growth required by capitalism will deliver a sustainable future, and that the free market demanded by neo-liberal fundamentalism will save nature. The global loss of wildlife over the past 50 years seems to prove that these arguments, if not fundamentally wrong, are at least not working (WWF, 2014).

The need to keep protected areas outside market mechanisms and accept that there are costs to achieving conservation seems clear. What is less clear is how to achieve this. If market forces alone are unable to deliver conservation, the conservation movement must look to other means. Working to identify and emphasize the importance of the cultural values of nature, especially the cultural values of nature to local communities, is an important way forward. This does not mean that nature does not need to be protected, but that the arguments for why protection is necessary need to incorporate sets of values and ways of thinking that have been ignored or actively discouraged to date. It is ironic that, as the conservation movement attempts to encourage people to connect to nature, its isolationist model serves to sever these connections. Rather, conservation policy and practice should recognize them, celebrate them and work to integrate them into arguments for conservation, the design of conservation initiatives, and the day-to-day management of conservation areas. Determining the meaning and value of a species or a place, of what and who conservation is for and therefore what must be done to achieve it, must be shared between communities and conservationists.

A cultural values approach to conserving chimpanzees and their habitat in the Rwenzori Mountains National Park, Uganda

In 2005, a pilot project commenced work with communities and managers of Uganda's Rwenzori Mountains National Park. The project assessed cultural connections between the people and their natural world. Fourteen sites of spiritual or historical significance

were identified within the park. The communities identified the mountains themselves as a sacred landscape. The sacred sites ‘controlled’ the mountain ridges and the communities that lived on them. The meanings and uses of different zones of the mountains are directed by the spiritual power that flows from *Kithasamba*, the god who inhabits the glaciers, to the *Omusinga*, the king, who is responsible for the ceremonies, rituals and institutions that channel the mountains’ power. Power passes from the king to the chiefs, and finally to ridge leaders. Ridge leaders have both spiritual and political authority and formerly controlled access to the mountains and their resources (Infield & Mugisha, 2013). Some people claimed a special relationship with chimpanzees. Members of the Bathangi clan regard chimpanzees as kin or family and are sworn to protect them as family. These findings of cultural connections to the park were not new discoveries. Conservation managers knew of them but ignored them. Neither park management plans nor the World Heritage Site inscription made reference to the sacredness of the landscape or the traditional role of ridge leaders in its management. The project, however, rather than ignoring these relationships, focused on them.

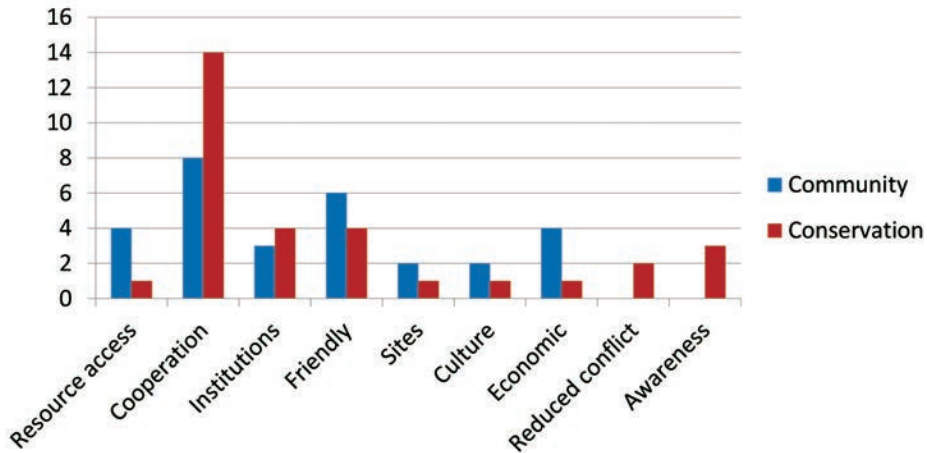
A series of initiatives was undertaken to integrate local values into the management of the park. Sacred and historical sites were mapped and community access negotiated. The Bathangi clan were assisted to monitor and protect chimpanzees and helped to enlist the support of other clans to pursue this cultural interest. The cultural institutions of the kingship were assisted to negotiate recognition and integration of their values into the day-to-day management of the park. The park management plan was revised to respond to these agreements and a formal memorandum of understanding was signed by the King and the Uganda Wildlife Authority. Perhaps most significant, park rangers and ridge leaders were brought together to manage and regulate access to cultural zones and uses of the park, employing a mix of official and traditional understandings, arrangements and sanctions.

Unpublished data collected through interviews with 24 members of local communities and 27 members of park staff connected to the Cultural Values and Conservation Project¹³ show that working to integrate the values and beliefs of the local people into park management had positive outcomes for park and community.

Respondents were asked whether the cultural values approach had changed relationships between communities and the park: 83% of community members and 78% of

13 The Cultural Values and Conservation Project was a partnership between Fauna & Flora International and the Uganda Wildlife Authority, funded by the MacArthur Foundation.

Figure 1 Responses made to the question ‘How has the cultural values approach of the project changed relations between communities and the park?’



conservation workers responded that it had. When asked in what ways, 50% of all responses from community members and park staff noted that relations between them were more cooperative and friendly while seven responses referred to recognition of cultural institutions by park managers as important (Figure 1). Differences between community members and conservation workers also emerged: community members referred to resource and site access, while conservation workers pointed to reductions in conflict and increases in awareness of the park's values. That 50% of responses noted improved relations represents a considerable achievement for the cultural values approach as, despite several decades of initiatives designed to bring communities and parks closer together, relations continue to be strained. The project improved relations between communities and park managers by engaging with something that communities considered important: 100% of community respondents 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' with the statement 'Culture provides important links between people and nature.'

By working with communities and park managers to integrate cultural values and cultural institutions into the day-to-day management of the park, the project defused tensions between the park and communities, improved the efficiency and effectiveness of protective measures, enlisting the support of local leaders to protect the park and its resources, including chimpanzees, and established a form of partnership based on pursuit of different though complementary values rather than economic interests in nature.

These findings confirm rich anecdotal evidence of enthusiasm for the cultural values approach amongst community members and park staff. Communities perceive efforts to engage them on the basis of their cultural connections to nature as quite different in tone and intention to the many previous efforts to engage them through integrated conservation and development and governance initiatives. As one respondent said during a meeting to assess cultural connections to nature, 'Now, after all these years of calling us to meetings to talk about the park, you are finally talking about things that are important to us.'

A Cultural Model for Protected Areas

A cultural values approach is not a solution for all protected areas' problems with communities or communities' problems with protected areas. Nor should it be thought that engaging with culture is a soft or easy option. It requires strong commitment from protected area organizations and staff, a willingness to engage with communities in a very different way to common practice, and a requirement to think about nature and the reasons for conserving it in a more open and participatory way.

It is clear that most protected areas are not engines for local economic development. Though they can and should contribute to livelihoods, ensure that they do not contribute to or exacerbate local poverty, and rebalance the equation of costs and benefits, the economic benefits generated by protected areas and received by local communities are not generally a sufficient justification for them, and additional benefits are required. A way to increase contributions that protected areas make to their neighbours is to reconsider what constitutes a benefit from nature. Integrated conservation and development was focused on material benefits, almost to the exclusion of all others. However, the ecosystem services framework that is dominating approaches to describing the benefits of nature, and ensuring they are considered in planning decisions, includes consideration of so-called cultural ecosystem services (Church *et al.*, 2011).

Areas of connection between people and nature that protected area managers can explore in order to integrate the cultural values of local communities might include:

- The place and meaning of nature, with regard to communities' sacred sites and species, spiritual beliefs and practices, ceremonies and rituals
- The light cast on community understandings of and relationships with nature represented by their world views, creation myths, legends and histories

- The role of nature, places and the history of connections to place in the formation of personal identity and group identity and the relevance of these to social cohesion
- The recreational pursuits of communities that link them to nature, including the collection of foodstuffs, including through hunting, for reasons other than nutrition, and the use of sites for meditation, inspiration and cultural activities including song, dance, drama, handicrafts, etc.
- The collection of fibres, dyes, plants and other materials used by local communities in cultural activities, including the use of materials in the material arts and for rituals and ceremonies
- Traditional practices of natural resource use and management that retain and enhance knowledge of and feelings for historical and current connections to nature
- Institutions with roles related to managing connections to nature, including the traditional management of resources
- Local perceptions of how nature supports and contributes to wellbeing in non-material as well as material ways.

These are important parts of the ways in which people interact with and relate to nature. Working to understand them, respect them and integrate them into the design and management of protected areas will help to build positive relations with local communities. It will also help protected area managers and local communities recognize underlying causes of conflicts and assist in finding ways to resolve them.

It has been argued that using local culture in this way ‘cherry picks’ cultural values considered acceptable by conservationists while continuing to exclude others. Critics argue that this represents a narrow and mechanistic way of viewing culture and is an inappropriate response to peoples’ rights to enjoy and practise their culture. I would argue that a cultural values approach to protected areas provides a practical and pragmatic approach that offers opportunities to link efforts to conserve culture with efforts to protect nature. It creates synergies and the potential for the development of common causes between communities and conservationists, a form of mutual support that has the potential to deliver benefits to both parties. This is not to suggest that cultural interests and agendas are always compatible with conservation. The approach does, however, provide a way of discussing differences and designing conservation initiatives that have meaning for and resonate with more groups of people than the current focus of conservation and protected area management on science and economics allows.

Conclusion

As these submissions have shown, the notion of ‘culture’ is itself a fluid, contentious concept. Finding means for conservationists to engage with communities via a better understanding of what their cultural beliefs, values and practices are will require a reassessment of both the concept itself and the attitudes and practices that comprise it, as well as assumptions about the term and its meaning. For conservation to succeed in ape range states, two interlinked ideas at this interface must be considered: the need to build strong public support at the grass-roots level, and recognition that human wellbeing, an essential component of successful and *sustainable* resource management, depends on non-material as well as material inputs, many of which are intimately linked to or are part of what we in the West refer to as ‘nature’. This dynamic, between nature and culture, needs to be reassessed in the context of dominant modes of thought and practice.

As many of the case studies have shown, indigenous knowledge systems based on collective identification with place/land/ancestral territory favour the central role of social relations and reciprocity amongst individuals, as well as in the unity of humans and nature. In some cases these practices may be detrimental to ape populations (the hunting of gibbons for traditional medicine, for example), and in others positive (the association of chimpanzees with ancestors in Guinea). However, the continuity of relations between past, present and future generations, and the intergenerational transmission of values, knowledge and responsibilities is currently being threatened by rapid social, economic and political change. This not only threatens the integrity of cultural values and institutions in a general sense, but also poses a problem when trying to view the conservation of apes through this lens.

All perspectives, be they local or international, are ‘cultural’ in some way; knowledge of a given environment and its species is embodied in action, morality and spirituality. The world’s religions, themselves a cultural product, have significant influence on people’s everyday cultures. While there are challenges in forming partnerships between conservation organizations and religious groups – due to the differences in worldviews, conflict between identities, and divergent attitudes and behaviour – it is possible for conservation practitioners to work with religious individuals and groups to promote environmental values. This can be beneficial to the missions of conservation organizations in need of greater cultural acceptance, public engagement and mass support.

While cultural continuity needs to be encouraged, the choice of whether to continue to modify old ways should be left to the people themselves and not imposed upon them.

The historical overview of the evolving nature of cultural perceptions of the environment, and the complex 'meaning' attributed to land ownership and resource use in Uganda highlighted this need to work from the ground up rather than the top down. This issue, of citing conservation and culture in a local setting, in the context of social and familial relationships, is now being recognized as an essential component of conserving biodiversity *and* promoting development. As shown in the examples from Indonesia, it is clear that supporting and where possible reviving these customary methods of protection will be an important tool moving forwards, a way of re-thinking narratives that maintains a link to the past but also makes them relevant for the twenty-first century.

As the connections between nature and human wellbeing are better understood, the importance of the relationships between culture, values and the conservation of nature is increasingly recognized. But while conservationists cite the support of local communities as being essential to the sustainable delivery of conservation, there are limited examples of the successful integration of local cultural values into initiatives. The Liberia case study presented here demonstrates the utility of a cultural values approach in improving conservation and land use management by modifying the typically conflictive relationships between local communities and formal conservation area managers, thereby creating positive engagement based on connections to nature and place. By explicitly integrating the needs, values and beliefs of the local communities in conservation strategies, the sustainability of these actions can be strengthened.

Ultimately, in areas where human communities and ape and gibbon populations cohabit, understanding and supporting local ecological knowledge and practices may be a way of demonstrating that conservation and social aims are not mutually exclusive or, worse, oppositional. While there is an increasing desire amongst conservationists and state actors to adopt community-based approaches to the management of protected areas, for most cultures of the world the gulf between nature and culture is an imposed one. By investigating and re-thinking what practitioners mean when they talk about cultural values, perhaps conservationists can build linkages with traditional institutions, ultimately reinforcing their own efforts and the sustainability of these interventions. Perhaps a better appreciation of 'culture' in all its myriad forms may help to persuade both conservationists and indigenous people that conservation objectives can contribute to improved social justice to the lasting benefit of all parties, human or otherwise. ■

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