Review

Protection, Politics and Protest: Understanding Resistance to Conservation

George Holmes

Abstract: *This paper presents a framework to understand how conservation, in particular protected areas and national parks, are resisted, based on theories of subaltern politics and a review of thirty-four published case studies. It is informed largely by Scott's concept of everyday resistance, which considers the informal subtle politics involved in social conflicts where there are constraints on the ability of some people to take open, formal action. These ideas are critiqued and adapted to the particular context of conservation regulation, which is distinct from many other types of rural conflict. In particular, it recognises the importance of continuing banned livelihood practices such as hunting or farming in resistance, and the particular symbolism this has in conflicts. It also shows the importance of not just social factors in these conflicts, but also the role of physical properties of natural resources in determining the form of resistance. As well as the theoretical contribution, by showing the variety of responses to this resistance this paper aims to make conservation practitioners more aware of the forms local resistance can take. Rather than being a simple call for a more socially just conservation, it goes beyond this to provide a tool to make conservation better for both local communities and biodiversity.*

Keywords: conservation, resistance, subaltern, protest, protected areas

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INTRODUCTION

IN RECENT YEARS, international conservation organisations have become increasingly powerful in influencing policy in protected areas, particularly in the global South, bringing a set of ideas that often contrasts to that of local populations (Chapin 2004). This has coincided with growth in the amount of land globally in protected areas. Researchers have considered the social consequences of conservation, such as the eviction and exclusion from protected areas of people with strong historical, -cultural and economic ties to them (Neumann 1998; Adams and Hulme 2001; Brockington 2002; Wilshusen et al. 2002; Adams 2004). This paper goes beyond the social consequences of conservation to ask what forms the reaction to this may take, particularly through ideas of resistance. Since the 1980s, research has revealed the detail and depth of the ways in which seemingly weak classes use material and symbolic acts to counter the claims of dominant groups, and the everyday politics of resistance has now grown into a major field of social study (Isaacman 1990). This paper combines theory and critique with a review of case studies to explore how this field can contribute to understanding resistance to conservation, particularly protected areas. Rather than simply adding to calls for a more socially just conservation, this paper may help conservationists achieve this goal, by highlighting the often ignored or misinterpreted subtleties of the political reaction to injustice.

JAMES SCOTT AND EVERYDAY RESISTANCE

James Scott, whose 1985 text *Weapons of the Weak* is regarded as a landmark text in resistance studies, defined subordinate resistance as:

> '…*any act(s) by member(s) of a subordinate class that is or are intended either to mitigate or deny claims (for example, rents, taxes, prestige), made on that class by superordinate classes (for example, landlords, large farmers, the state) or to advance its own claims (for example, work, land, charity, respect) vis-à-vis those superordinate classes*' (Scott 1985: 290).

This definition is deliberately broad to include resistance that is individual and collective, material and symbolic, failed and successful. Previous studies had too narrow a definition, only studying subordinate politics when it became open and organised, such as during peasant uprisings, and had missed out on the much larger field of everyday resistance. Scott's study of a village in Malaysia showed how changes in the agrarian economy introduced by elites, such as introduction of mechanised harvesting and increased rents, led to a loss of resources and a lowering in social standing of peasants. Rather than open rebellion, these peasants used everyday methods of resistance, such as

spreading malicious rumours, pilfering, arson and exaggerated claims to counter the actions of the elites. These methods are characterised by the little planning that they require, their avoidance of direct confrontation, and their function as a type of self-help for the perpetrators.

Weapons of the Weak, and Scott's earlier (1979) work *Moral Economy of the Peasant*, followed that of the Marxist historian Thompson (1971), whose concept of moral economy described the unwritten rules about how different actors in relationships are expected to behave, such as landowners not inflating the price of grain excessively, and how social conflict would emerge when this became contested. Scott aimed to determine why the transition to a capitalist mode of production in agrarian economies, with resultant changes in moral economy and negative impacts on the peasantry, did not produce revolutions. He found that a number of factors that, while not eliminating the possibility of organised revolution, did set constraints to resistance, so that subordinate groups favoured everyday techniques over open insurrection. Fear of repression (actual, remembered or anticipated) restrains the overt actions of peasants who then take advantage of the anonymity of acts such as covert sabotage. The heterogeneity of the peasants and of their relations with the land-owning class, as well as the slow overall pace of change, reduced the incentive for collective action and mobilisation. Likewise, the individual needs of peasants to survive on a day-to-day basis can make the sacrifices needed for large-scale change unaffordable.

Just as Scott's peasants face constraints limiting their potential for open rebellion and pushing them towards subtle protest, individuals affected by protected areas and other conservation projects are similarly constrained. As there are some common trends found in many conservation projects globally (Wilshusen et al. 2002), so too there are some constraints to open rebellion to conservation that are found frequently in case studies. Despite these general trends, the exact nature of the constraints to open rebellion is dependent on local, political, economic and social circumstances. Many studies (Peluso 1993; Deb Roy and Jackson 1993; Neumann 1998; Fairhead and Leach 2000; Jacoby 2001; Roth 2004) have shown the brutality and often deadly violence used in the enforcement of conservation regimes, while Neumann (2004) argues that conservation is justifying and using unprecedented levels of violence. Fear of actual, anticipated or remembered violence will dissuade conservation's neighbours from open rebellion. Like Scott's peasants, individuals affected by conservation need to balance protest with gaining a living, and the way that locals are affected individually by conservation regulations constrains their ability to take collective organised action. This is not to say that legal challenges, petitions, marches and other formal protests do not occur, but they are rarer than everyday resistance (for example, see Prochaska 1986; Neumann 1995; Rangan 1995; Sullivan 2003; Frias and Meridith 2004; Roth 2004; Carswell 2006).

In contrast to Scott's peasants, who encounter the elite landlords on a daily basis, local people around protected areas will probably never meet those who make the decisions about how the park is run, especially in 'fences and fines' approaches where there is less emphasis on community involvement (Brandon 1998). This entails a very different type of constraint, as rather than having resistance limited by constant surveillance and a personal relationship with someone who controls their livelihood, conservation's neighbours have to deal with decision makers they can rarely reach. With the increasing involvement of international NGOs and aid agencies, many of the decisions about conservation policy are made hundreds or thousands of miles away from the protected areas, in political arenas that local people have no access to (Chapin 2004). Even when conservation is driven by elites from the same country, people living in the affected areas may not be able to contribute to the closed shop that makes decisions (Theodossopoulos 2003; Walley 2004). With many NGOs pushing for conservation decisions to be based overwhelmingly on scientific analysis, rather than political or social factors, this limits the potential for political debates on conservation (Fairhead and Leach 2003). Even in community conservation, the opportunities for registering dissent through formal politics may be limited by social divisions internal to the community affected, or because community conservation projects only allow for discussion in certain areas (Adams and Hulme 2001; Dzingirai 2003; Sullivan 2003). There are few arenas for including the voices of local people in conservation and these are often very difficult to access, dissuading locals from openly airing their grievances and pushing them towards everyday resistance.

The aim of everyday resistance is to test the limits to practices and customs, rather than large-scale change, where both subordinate and dominant groups are constantly trying to seize the advantage of everyday relations (Scott 1985). Resistors and oppressors contest the same symbols and material conditions involved in these relations. The resistors then try and exploit the gaps and inconsistencies within these, particularly parts of oppression whose symbolism makes them more effective targets of resistance than others. For example, the value placed on large charismatic mammals in East Africa makes the deliberate killing of these a high profile and powerful political statement, and resistors have learned to exploit the gaps and inconsistencies in the regulation of this, such as the sanctioned killing of animals in self defence or to protect crops (Gibson 1999). Similarly, high-profile government anti-fire measures in Madagascar are challenged using loopholes that allow fires to be set in exceptional conditions, such as against locust swarms, combined with the language of farmers' right to protect their livelihood (Kull 2004).

This cultural context is important as it reveals acts of resistance that otherwise would remain hidden. In order to avoid confrontation, resistance must not contest directly the formal modes of oppression, which would invoke repression, but appear to conform to the dominant power, containing the resistance in the culturally specific symbolism of the acts. For example, a peasant

might challenge the large share of rice held by a large landowner not by openly demanding egalitarian redistribution, but by petty pilfering of rice when processing it as part of his tenant duties (Scott 1990). Unlike an open demand or large-scale theft that would prompt the attention of the landlord, this gives them an insignificant amount of rice and seems to be unimportant, yet it is full of symbolic meaning about the moral economy of rice distribution. This gives the act, which would otherwise be classified as theft, an aspect of resistance—pilfering of rice is part of peasant struggle because peasant struggle is all about access to such goods. In peasant politics, material struggle is not separated from ideological struggle.

> *'To resist a claim or an appropriation is to resist, as well, the justification and rationale behind that particular claim'* (Scott 1985: 297).

With resistance to conservation, the continuation of banned practices is itself a political statement, as it contains, alongside other motivations, an implicit statement that these practices should be allowed—someone hunting inside a national park is automatically and implicitly making a statement that hunting should be allowed in a national park. This is explored in more detail in Section 4.1.

This presents the image of the rational peasant constantly taking regular, small-scale action to incrementally improve their situation while avoiding direct conflict. Because of the constraints to collective action, these are almost always actions aimed at the immediate situation of the individual, although it may have the consequence of affecting a whole community. Although this is very different from open peasant rebellions such as popular uprisings, Scott argues that everyday acts are the foundations for large-scale change by constantly foiling policies and thus limiting the options of the state, yet this is neglected in the literature:

> *'Just as millions of anthozoan polyps create, willy-nilly, a coral reef, so do thousands upon thousands of individual acts of insubordination and evasion create a political or economic barrier reef of their own. And whenever the ship of state runs aground on such a reef, attention is typically directed to the shipwreck itself and not to the vast aggregation of petty acts that made it possible'* (Scott 1985: 36).

This demonstrates the potential power and importance of everyday resistance, that when a conservation project fails it is possibly the result not of a single large act such as changes in legislation, but of the constant dripping effect of thousands of small everyday acts of resistance. Kull (2004) shows how constant resistance in the form of deliberate fire raising, foot-dragging and non-compliance has created a stalemate where the Madagascan state has not been able to successfully impose fire regulations for over a century. It is possible

that recent debates on lowering restrictions on use of Amboseli National Park to allow more use by pastoralists are linked to the long history of everyday resistance (Peluso 1993; Western 1994; Brockington and Igoe 2006).

An important difference between resistance in conservation and Scott's example of resistance in peasant politics is that although both are about access to and the meanings of resources, the nature of the economic relations are different. Rather than increased production and extraction of surplus from that land, conservation aims to limit the use of resources. Likewise, although the populations around protected areas often practice pastoral, peasant, subsistence or nomadic lifestyles, similar to the peasant farming in Scott's study, the peasantry is a category defined by economic activity (selling labour), which does not fit well with those affected by conservation regulations, or with the manner in which they are affected. Individuals from all classes may be affected by conservation regulations, in contrast to the rigidly class-based analysis of many studies of rural change (Grove 1990). Despite this, the case studies indicate that acts of resistance are never perpetrated by elite classes, as they do not face the same constraints limiting their ability to change things. They have other means to get around regulations, such as political power or ability to bribe, and so everyday resistance is undertaken by the poorer, more constrained classes (e.g. Sullivan 2003; Roth 2004; Frias and Meridith 2004).

Conservation regulations are often driven by the desire to create a more authentic nature, valued for its distance from humanity, often in areas designated as non-use. Creating protected areas as zones of non- or strictly limited use often involves removing humans from protected areas not just physically, but socially and historically.

> '*It is not enough to physically remove human agency and occupation from the landscape, they must be purged from history completely*' (Neumann 1998: 30).

The competing histories about protected areas between local users and conservationists create resistance to exclusion from protected areas that is not just about access to resources, but also about the meanings and identities associated with that landscape (Neumann 1998; Brockington 2002). In order to justify the controls on land use, and the whole philosophy of conservation, some landforms and land uses that 'humanise' the landscape and do not fit into the view of the 'natural' landscape need to be seen as illegitimate and irrational, and therefore immoral (Prochaska 1996). By contrast, those wanting to use the natural resources within protected areas may consider the conservation regulations themselves to be illegitimate and immoral, as they are linked to social systems that promote inequality. Neumann (1998) shows how the connections of African protected areas to the legacy of colonialism leads to accusations that conservation is a continuation of the injustices and dispossession of colonialism. Struggles over protected areas are often mixed in with wider

political struggles, particularly during fights against colonialism, and so protected areas become a target of protest against government policies because they are such a strong symbol of the state, and state ideology of land use (Deb Roy and Jackson 1993; Bryant 1993; Neumann 2000; Heatherington 2001). The contest over conservation is a contest over the meanings of the resources under protection, who they are seen to belong to, who has a right to them, and these arguments are grounded in the history, politics, economics and culture of the area.

CRITIQUES AND PROBLEMS OF APPLYING EVERYDAY RESISTANCE TO CONSERVATION

The primary critique of resistance concerns the ubiquity of resistance studies, and the lack of critical thinking over what constitutes resistance; the term has lost its meaning as it has been overextended by studies that give heroism to trivial and mundane practices, such as tattooing, music videos and psychic mediums (Ortner 1995; Brown 1996; Fletcher 2001). Resistance studies are widespread and popular because they are about justice and oppression, subjects researchers feel strongly about, and because they are part of the romanticisation of counter-movements by leftist academics (Isaacman 1990; Gupta 2001; Moore 1997).

The academic literature reveals some trends that make studies of resistance to conservation less vulnerable to these charges of loss of academic rigour. Rather than finding resistance in more subtle and hidden acts such as slander, they have highlighted more overt acts, such as marches and petitions (Sullivan 2003), sabotage and property damage (Campbell 2002), fire (e.g. Bryant 1993), deliberate and calculated destruction of protected natural resources (Harkness 1998), foot-dragging (Nygren 2003), and threats and ostracism (Jacoby 2001). This can be attributed to the greater social and geographical distance between dominant and subordinate individuals in conservation than in relationships such as tenant farmer–landlord, as discussed above. Increased social distance gives more opportunity for overt acts, while the reduced contacts simultaneously reduces the potential damage of covert resistance such as slander or rumour spreading, as these have a lesser chance of reaching their intended target.

Sivaramakrishnan (2005) challenges the assumption in resistance literature that peasants always know fully who their oppressors are, and the nature of their oppression, leading to a 'rational' resistance. In complex scenarios where different organisations may be working together, subordinate groups may resist the most immediate and visible part of oppression, without recognising the hidden relationships that determine their exploitation (Brosius 1997). This has important implications for resistance to conservation, as the increasing involvement of NGOs in state-run protected areas and projects has made it more difficult to determine who determines policy and who enforces

it, particularly for those marginalised subordinates who are greatly distant from the policy-making arena (Ghimire 1994). If resistance in these cases is not targeted directly at the source of the oppression, it may be more difficult to recognise as resistance, and it may have less chance of being successful.
A particularly incisive critique of peasant resistance comes from Gupta (2001) who argues that the evidence in Scott's case study for petty theft and foot dragging comes almost exclusively from the elites. While Scott accounts for this by stating that peasants are not going to admit to their crimes, and many critics accept this, Gupta uses his case study to show that these stories reflect oppression rather than resistance. By portraying as lazy, dishonest, thieving delinquents, landowners can justify harsh behaviour.

> *'There is every reason why the propertied and the dominant classes should exaggerate. It is by exaggerating the flawed features of the oppressed that ideological justification for domination is constructed and secured'* (Gupta 2001).

Applying this to conservation, exaggerated stories about wanton environmental destructiveness may not show acts of resistance, but may be a means by which conservationists can justify strong treatment of those allegedly doing this damage. Jacoby (2001) cites how stories about the destructiveness of hunters and loggers in the Adirondacks at the turn of the twentieth century were used by the authorities to justify increasingly harsh conservation measures. There are many cases from the literature of deliberate damage to protected resources such as large mammals in East Africa (Western 1994) and trees in China (Harkness 1998), but these stories may mean different things depending on their source: coming from local communities they most probably reflect an overt form of resistance, but from conservationists or the state they may reflect this or an exaggerated story that serves to justify strict measures.

CONSERVATION AND RESISTANCE

The history of conservation has been one filled with exclusion and subsequent resistance, yet studies of everyday resistance have tended to neglect opposition to conservation (Neumann 1998; Jacoby 2001). This work aims to fill a gap in the literature by including resistance in stories of conservation, and conservation in stories of resistance. It is based on a survey of the academic literature that found thirty-four case studies where conservation regulations were resisted explicitly, covering a wide variety of places and time periods, though this paper does not claim that this includes every case study on the topic. The criteria for selection was to include resistance to conservation, such as protected forests in a national park, but exclude resistance to environmental regulations that were created with commercial motives, such as

forestry regulations for commercial logging. This should give a clearer idea of how people react to conservation, rather than other types of rural change and regulation.

In Jacoby's extensive study of the social effects of early conservation movements in turn of the twentieth-century US, he argues that these were driven by urban middle classes, who saw the conservation of large areas of wild land as 'a triumphant tale of the unfolding of an ever-more enlightened attitude towards the environment' (Jacoby 2001: 3). In this view, debates about conservation turned out to be between crusading heroic conservationists and villainous, small-minded opponents. This led to controversies in early conservation projects in the US, such as mass dispossession of lands and traditional livelihoods being ignored, as opposition to conservation projects such as national parks was derided as being driven by ignorance and personal interests. This was exacerbated by the handing over of conservation practice to natural scientists, who viewed themselves as dispassionate technicians working on scientifically defined issues, avoiding questions about the social consequences of their actions. Similar views of heroes, villains and technicians continue today, and the oppression associated with early conservation projects is mirrored in current projects. Just as in the late nineteenth-century US, where there was a tension between different views between local populations and conservation authorities of what is appropriate and acceptable resource use, the case studies show how such differing views can be seen today. Accompanying this continuation of differing views on resource use is the continuation of everyday resistance to conservation, and as is explored below, similar patterns of informal protest seen in nineteenth-century US are being seen across the globe today.

The patterns of resistance that emerge are the results of the type of conservation being enforced, and the methods of enforcement, the particular social context of the communities affected, and the physical properties of the resources being conserved. The uniqueness of each individual case study means it is difficult to make statements comparing how resistance to conservation varies between cases from different eras and different geographical areas. Similar techniques of resistance are seen in case studies from disparate epochs and distant parts of the world that use very different conservation strategies (e.g. Bryant 1993; Nygren 2003), yet similar projects may provoke different responses (Peluso 1993; Neumann 1995; Sunseri 2005). As NGOs and the state often work together, and because they are commonly conflated by resisting populations, no clear distinctions emerge between patterns of resistance to state and private conservation (Peluso 1993; Ghimire 1994; Walley 2004; Sunseri 2005). However, a number of patterns are seen in resistance to different conservation strategies across different continents and time periods; the continuation of livelihood practices and the links between implicit and explicit protest, the unique symbolism involved, and the popularity of fire. These are common because they are often logical responses for when re-

sources with a long history of use are protected, irrespective of time period, location and strategy of conservation.

Continuing Livelihood Practices and Implicit Resistance

A central aspect of resistance to conservation is the continuation of banned livelihood practices, and the way that this becomes an implicit challenge to conservation. Almost every case study of conflicts with conservation contains an example of people continuing to perform long-standing livelihood practices that have since been banned or restricted. Of the 34 cases, 27 used in this study describe the continuation of hunting, fishing, logging, farming, burning and other activities inside protected areas despite these being banned.

Such activities are normally described by conservationists as encroachment, or a failure of regulation, but this hides their political content. Acts of illegal hunting or farming are not just a livelihood activity to provide income or food, but an implicit challenge to the ban on these same activities. Someone who chooses to hunt illegally is not only gaining the benefits from a dead animal, but they are simultaneously and implicitly making a statement that they have a right to kill animals. This is because those who are resisting conservation see their struggle as being over the right to be able to continue these activities, and performing these activities becomes a way of asserting this right. Continuing livelihood practices are the most common form of protest because livelihood activities are often the main target of conservation regulation, they provide material benefits alongside political statements, and because it is an easy, logical and immediate form of protest—it is easier to continue to do an activity once it is banned than to start a new strategy such as protest marches.

However, Kull (2004) warns that resistance is often overestimated in such situations, as although any illegal use of natural resources is implicitly protest, it should not be assumed that resistance is the main motivation for the act. A distinction needs to be made between when protest is the sole motive, with an explicitly political nature, and when the politics are implicit in the performance of an illegal act for material gain. For example, cases where animals are illegally killed in a protected area, but no meat, hides, horns or other benefits taken and the bodies left to rot (see for Kenya; Peluso 1993; Western 1994; for USA; Jacoby 2001), would be considered explicit resistance, but if animals are illegally killed, but benefits such as meat or hides taken (e.g. Neumann 1998) this would be implicit resistance, as the political and livelihood functions are mixed. Cutting down trees, but not using them, to protest against national park regulations (Harkness 1998; Sunseri 2005) is distinct from continuing to extract lumber from national parks (Deb Roy and Jackson 1993). There is a qualitative difference between the two, whereas both are political acts, explicit protest is a much more powerful and unambiguous statement for both perpetrator and target. In cases of implicit resistance, it could be ques-

tioned if there is any political content if the perpetrators are not knowingly performing an illegal act, or are being coerced by force or circumstance into doing so. It is only through understanding the motivations for illegal acts can such a distinction between explicit and implicit protest be made, with its important implications for understanding the power of resistance to conservation without romanticising or exaggerating it.

Symbolism in Resistance to Conservation

Part of the strength of implicit resistance comes from the strong symbolism that it contains. Previous practices became outlawed, giving them a new meaning to both conservationists and those who practiced them—e.g. hunting became poaching, and the animals themselves come to be seen as the property of conservationists and the state, rather than the local populace. As conflicts over conservation are struggles over what is considered appropriate use of a resource, then these acts are important because they are full of symbolism that makes a statement about who should control these resources. For this reason, symbols of ownership are involved in resistance to conservation of all types, locations and time periods. Western (1994) argues that resistance involving natural resources, such as wanton killing of animals in Kenya, is the local populace's way to showing the state that they control the resources, not the authorities. Both Neumann (1998) and Norgrove (2002) tell of examples in Tanzania and Uganda, respectively, where boundary markers of national parks are deliberately relocated by locals to make the park smaller. As well as being an attempt to reclaim land for farming, it is also full of symbolism stating that the land should belong to the locals rather than the park. Locals are prepared to suffer the consequences of destroying or damaging a resource that they previously valued and protected because under conservation regulations they are not just of no value to locals, but they are seen as being in opposition to their interests as they are a vehicle for state regulation of their lives. Harkness (1998) describes how peasants destroy trees that they had previously nurtured as their community-managed forest in China was turned into a state-run nature reserve (see also Gadgil and Guha 1992; Jacoby 2001; Dzingirai 2003; Frias and Meridith 2004; Sunseri 2005).

Struggles against national parks take on a particular symbolism when they are mixed in with other conflicts; Bryant (1993) shows how protest against national parks in colonial Burma were part of wider struggles against colonialism, with national parks specifically targeted as a symbol of the state. Similarly, arson, legal challenges and protests against colonial forestry legislation in early twentieth-century Indian Himalaya were part of wider protests against all forms of colonial regulation (Rangan 1995). Indeed, Neumann (1998) shows how park guards themselves were complicit in resistance to national parks as part of the anti-colonial struggle in British Tanganyika. Deb Roy and Jackson (1993) show how militants fighting for autonomy for the region of

Assam became involved in conflicts over a local park, while Heatherington (2001) describes how violent protest against a national park in Sardinia is the continuation of a long history of peasant violence against state control of their lives. Struggles over conservation are not isolated struggles, but are part of a wider political landscape, and must be considered as such.

The Popularity of Fire as a Form of Protest

One of the most popular forms of protest against conservation is fire, found in fifteen of the thirty-four cases in the survey,[1] a reflection perhaps of its popularity throughout history as a tool for rural protest (Kuhlken 1999). It derives its popularity from the way it mixes the common practices of continuing livelihood practices with strong symbolism, and as such, it is a common strategy of resistance throughout the history of conservation. Fire is often at the heart of conservation conflicts, as it is a widespread livelihood practice, used for clearing land, creating new grazing, clearing pests and many other activities, yet it is also one that is widely considered by conservationists to be destructive (Kull 2004). Its status as both a long-standing livelihood practice and as a major enemy of conservation has given a strong symbolism to the setting of fire in a protected area. A fire or patch of burnt forest is a very visible and powerful claim against attempts to restrict the right to set fires, much more so than foot dragging or a boycott, while at the same time providing a livelihood opportunity through freshly cleared land or regenerated pasture.

Adding to the popularity of fire as a tool is its physical properties that give comfort to the protestor. A fire burns the traces of what causes it, it can be attributed to many causes (an illegal fire can be disguised as a legal fire that got out of control, or as a natural fire caused by lightning), and it is virtually impossible to prove who set a fire, making it an anonymous form of protest (Bryant 1993; Kuhlken 1999). This makes fire a key form of resistance—it allows a powerful statement to be made, with some livelihood benefits, while it has fewer constraints than other forms of protest because of its anonymity.

Protest and the Physical Properties of Resources

This then raises the importance of the physical properties of resources, a key and unique part of resistance to conservation. As these resources are the grounds for struggle, they are almost always involved in resistance—only four of the thirty-four case studies did not contain an explicit reference to protest that involved natural resources.[2] In other forms of subordinate protest the constraints and opportunities come from the social and political circumstances, yet because resistance to conservation is about battles over resources, the properties of these resources become constraints and opportunities as well. For example, although the physical properties of fire, particularly its anonymity, give it particular opportunities for protest, it also provides constraints to

protest because it can only occur in certain conditions. The studies of Gadgil and Guha (1992) and Kull (2004) both show a strong seasonal trend in the use of fire as a tool of protest, with fires only set in the dry season, as they are not physically possible in the wet. Seasonal migration and other movements by wild animals provides both an opportunity and a constraint to resistance—killing of animals for explicit or implicit protest is constrained to times when the animals are present, yet knowledge of animal behaviour provides opportunities for protest by allowing the hunter to chose an optimum time to hunt an animal. For example, in Jacoby's (2001) study of Yellowstone, knowledge of bison behaviour in a snowstorm allows a hunter to be able to kill them with minimum risk of being caught (for similar examples, see Gibson 1999; Kepe et al. 2001). The resistance in each case study is not just shaped by the uniqueness of the society affected, the particularities of the conservation regulation, but also by the physical properties of the resources being contested.

Reactions to Resistance

By its nature, everyday resistance is subtle and hidden, and this means that it is often misinterpreted. In particular, conservation authorities are quick to label any illegal use of natural resources as 'encroachment', yet this ignores the political content of these acts. This misreading of the situation can lead to policies that are not only ineffectual, but that also backfire on the conservationists, as well as acts of resistance that make the situation worse for protestors. Exclusion of Maasai from Amboseli national park in the late 1970s not only led to continued grazing, but also to explicit protest in the form of wanton killing of animals, as well as increased collaboration with poachers. The conservationists interpreted what were acts of protest as acts of encroachment, and tightened up the protection of the park, despite these policies were what was provoking these incursions and killings (Peluso 1993). In late nineteenth-century Algeria, collective fines set against communities that continued to practice fire-driven agriculture despite a ban from the colonial authorities were met with non-compliance and an increase in malicious fire raising (Prochaska 1986). Attempts to protect the Calakmul biosphere reserve in Mexico were met not only with threats to conservationists, but also with fires specifically aimed at lessening the value of the forest and limiting state control, which in turn resulted in the rejection of community conservation in favour of strict protection (Haenn 2005). Similarly, the use of fire as protest specifically because it was banned in the Ngorongoro crater in Tanzania, and when conservationists could not enforce this ban, they resorted to the eviction of the indigenous population (Neumann 2000). It is possible that if the political content to these acts had been analysed, rather than simply denouncing it as bad behaviour, a solution would have been reached that was more favourable to both the goals of conservationists and local communities.

In other cases, the political content of the use of natural resources has been recognised, and this has constrained the activities of conservationists who fear a destructive backlash. In early twentieth-century Cyprus, the banning of fire gave it a far higher symbolic value in protest, and this increased value directly led to an increased incidence of fire. Hence as increasingly harsh anti-fire measures were imposed, communities would retaliate with increased numbers of deliberately set fires. Legislators realised the futility of confrontational regulation, and were forced into a compromise with local communities (Thirgood 1981). Jacoby (2001) shows how incidents of hunting, burning and timber cutting in protected areas in the Adirondacks were not prosecuted, less it provoke an even more destructive incident as a retaliation. In Madagascar, punishment for fire setting sometimes provokes even larger fires, and so Kull (2004) argues that this threat has created a stalemate between those enforcing and those resisting the law.

Other examples show how the concerns of local communities have been addressed following protest and resistance, either through cooperation or submission on the part of authorities. Rumours that a national park would be created in Amboseli without compensation for locals led to a mass killing of wildlife by Maasai pastoralists (Western 1994). In response, the New York Zoological Society helped set up a community programme that devolved the management of wildlife to the Maasai, resulting in tourism development, less poaching and increases in the populations of key species. An extremely similar story is observed with community protest against proposed turtle protection in Costa Rica (Campbell 2002). Communities protesting against restrictions on cultivating in parks in Guatemala, in the context of unequal land distribution and lack of farmland, took park scientists hostage and set fire to park buildings. As a result, some cultivators were allowed to stay in the park (Meyerson 1998). Similar overt and sometimes violent protest prevented the Peruvian government from enforcing park rules on Lake Titicaca (Orlove 2002), while continued hunting and threats of violence against park rangers have meant that decisions on hunting regulations in South Africa have been postponed (Kepe et al. 2001). More subtle approaches, such as continued grazing and non-compliance with regulations have forced conservation NGOs in Tanzania to take more community-based action (Neumann 1995). Likewise, covert protest fires against strict forest regulations in Guinea lowered support for the forestry department, who were forced to ease regulations (Fairhead and Leach 2000, see also for India, Rangan 1995).

It is difficult to link type of conservation and type of reaction to resistance. Both misinterpretation and recognition occur due to colonial projects (Prochaska 1986; Fairhead and Leach 2000, respectively), community conservation (Haenn 2005; Western 1994), state (Neumann 2000; Bryant et al. 1993) and NGO-driven policy (Peluso 1993; Roth 2004), and a more exhaustive study would be needed to draw definitive conclusions.

CONCLUSION AND A CALL TO ACTION

The concept of everyday resistance, although problematic, is still useful for understanding conflicts around protected areas and conservation projects. It provides a way of explaining the relationship between conservation authorities and local populations; why locals are dissatisfied with protected areas, how they react to this and what determines the nature of these actions. The nature of conservation regulation and resistance to it can make some important contributions to theories of subaltern politics, particularly in differentiating between explicit and implicit forms of resistance.

Most importantly, applying the ideas of everyday resistance to conservation reveals a vibrant and highly contested politics that may otherwise remain hidden. This paper goes beyond the many claims for conservation to be more socially just: by making policy makers aware of the more subtle forms that community objections to conservation may take, it gives them a tool to help achieve this. By revealing the potential political content of the fires, timber cutting and hunting, it aims to provoke new approaches to conservation conflicts that take this into account. The literature shows examples of political acts that are misinterpreted by policy makers, who then impose ineffectual measures, or even ones that make the situation worse. As resistance is specific to the political, social and cultural context in which it takes place, this review cannot recommend specific steps for developing new approaches to conservation. However, it aims to make practitioners move away from labelling all infringements of conservation regulation as encroachment, and to recognise and address this vibrant everyday politics to produce policy that is both better for biodiversity and those who live close to protected areas.

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Notes

1. Examples come from India (Gadgil and Guha 1992; Deb Roy and Jackson 1993; Rangan 1995), Mexico (Haenn 2005), Guinea (Fairhead and Leach 2000), Italy (Heatherington 2001), Burma (Bryant 1993), Cyprus (Thirgood 1981), Algeria (Prochaska 1986), USA (Jacoby 2001), Madagascar (Ghimire 1994; Jarosz 1996; Kull 2004) and Tanzania (Neumann 1998 2000).
2. Nygren 2003; Sullivan 2003; Walley 2004; Carswell 2006.

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