Changing People/Nature Representations in International Conservation Discourses

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1 Introduction

This article explores contrasting framings of people/nature relations within international conservation texts and media images since the 1960s. It argues that the adoption of more 'people-oriented'[1] conservation narratives has helped to re-legitimise global conservation programmes since the 1980s. However, these discourses do not necessarily represent rural peoples' interests, and are often contested by indigenous peoples' groups. In general, orthodox views of people/nature relations, taking the form of crisis narratives, play an important fund-raising role in the West. But the diversity of contemporary people/nature representations also generates a conveniently heterogeneous montage, which can be manipulated for market advantage. The article points to some interesting interactions between public response to media representations and the development of conservation policy, and suggests how media representations help construct and reproduce environmental knowledge in the West. It also examines how diverse characterisations of rural peoples and nature tend to reflect the different ideological positions of various 'conservation communities'.

Science/policy debates are not free-floating, but are embedded in particular institutional contexts, constraints and opportunities. This article focuses for illustration on WWF (World Wide Fund for Nature), the world's largest independent conservation NGO. After introducing WWF and its funding context, the article outlines the evolution of policy narratives and counter-narratives[2] (Roe 1991, 1995; Hoben 1995) within international conservation since the 1960s and how these have represented in WWF, with particular emphasis on their representations of people/nature relations.

2 Introduction to WWF

WWF is an international charitable organisation, with 4.7 million supporters (WWF 1995). It was established in Switzerland in 1961. The priorities of WWF's Global Conservation Programme are to conserve forests, freshwater ecosystems and oceans and coasts. The programme consists of about 600 field projects combined with policy, advocacy and campaign work. It is divided into four regional areas: Africa and Madagascar; Asia/Pacific; Europe and Middle East, and Latin America and the Caribbean.

WWF is currently composed of an International Secretariat based in Switzerland, with 27 affiliated National Organisations (NOs) worldwide and 24 Programme Offices (POs) in different countries. In 1995, the total WWF network income amounted to about SwissFr336 million (US$270 million), making WWF one of the best resourced environmental NGOs in the world. The main source of income is from individual donations (c. 61 per cent of network income in 1995), complemented by income from governments, aid agencies, earnings, corporations and trusts.

The original objective in founding WWF was to raise money for international conservation initiatives. While there have been important changes in the organisation's identity since the 1980s, its origins and structure highlight the fact that it was established primarily as a fundraising organisation, and its success in raising funds helps to explain its neo-corporatist identity, which persists today (see Jordan and Maloney 1997).

3 Early representations from the 1960s: 'People are the threat'

3.1 Nature: the wisdom of wilderness

Early conservationists often had theocentric views about nature, valuing it as an expression of God, and as 'spiritually charged wilderness'. Literature in the 1960s frequently made use of religious metaphors, extolling 'nature's infinite capacity to uplift the human spirit'. The titles of WWF's first two annual reports: *The Launching of a New Arc* (WWF 1965) and *The Arc Underway* (WWF 1967) also testify to the appeal of such metaphors. Religious representations also resonated with influential WWF supporters from the South, aiding the establishment of protected areas during the 1960s and 1970s. Nevertheless, anthropocentric values, which prize nature for its contribution to humankind, also prevailed within the early literature and have provided an important basis for later people-oriented approaches to conservation. As WWF stated in 1965: 'The Fund's campaign is not a case of animals versus man. Conservation is for man, and for the long-term benefit of humanity' (WWF 1965: 23). Such explicit anthropocentric views are probably unacceptable to many activists today, and are increasingly challenged by contemporary nature ethics.

3.2 People as problems

In the 1960s and 1970s threats to nature in developing countries were widely framed in terms of the ignorant behaviour of rural peoples and uncontrolled population growth, once referred to as 'senseless multiplication like crazy rabbits' (Nicholson 1981: 10). Early literature focused for example on the poaching of wildlife, over-grazing, and the impoverishment and degradation of vegetation leading to the disappearance of climax habitats (e.g. WWF 1971). The perception of rural people as environmental mis-managers prompted their removal from protected areas, and underpinned early education programmes, which sought to improve attitudes and primitive practices. The environmentalism of the so-called 'Prophets of Doom' of the late 1960s and 1970s also clearly influenced early conservation crisis discourses (McCormick 1995). Paul Ehrlich (a self-professed Malthusian) was an influential speaker at the WWF Annual Conference in 1973 and Dr Aurelio Peccei, founder and President of the Club of Rome (of *Limits to Growth* fame) was elected as a WWF Trustee during the same year.

3.3 Solutions to problems: parks and more parks

In the early years, WWF funds were used to finance preservationist approaches to conservation, such as establishing protected areas and reserves; removing local populations; conducting animal and plant surveys; and supplying anti-poaching equipment. Many post-war conservationists were interested in creating a 'new international order for conservation', a 'big league' of global environmental management (Nicholson 1981). WWF founders believed that with money raised by the Fund, 'large reserves and refuges could be bought and safeguarded, and experts and leaders could be sent out and maintained in action at danger spots' (Norman 1981: 24). Establishing protected areas was also tied to ideas of nation building, as the term 'national park' itself suggests. Even though early preservationist and utilitarian values co-existed, the former, linking the values, interests and power of the socially privileged, tended to eclipse the latter. Nevertheless, conservation practitioners frequently saw themselves as preservers of nature for 'all mankind'. Conservation was an unquestioned good: 'about as safe a subject in which one can possibly be

interested. Like God and Mother, nobody can really hate it' (cited in WWF 1967: 198).

Early conservation discourses have been widely critiqued on several grounds. They have been considered ethnocentric, favouring Western ideas of nature (e.g. Anderson and Grove 1987); elitist, overlooking resource management by indigenous inhabitants (e.g. Colchester 1994); ecologically outmoded, based on models that 'freeze-frame' the ecological status quo (e.g. Zimmerer 1994), and self-defeating, because outside pressures eventually impinge on protected areas, generating conflict (e.g. Adams and McShane 1992). These and similar critiques have helped to develop new thinking from the late 1970s.

4 Representations from the 1980s: 'People are a resource'

By the end of the 1970s, the international conservation movement adopted various 'conservation with development' narratives, promoting the idea that conservation and development are mutually interdependent (e.g. IUCN, UNEP and WWF 1981, 1991). These involved quite different framings of people/nature relations.

4.1 Nature as ecosystems

Many conservationists began to move away from earlier preoccupations with 'flagship' species and special areas, to question the underlying causes of environmental degradation. They adopted more strategic, programmatic work with an emphasis on ecological processes and life support systems. In this context 'nature' came to be represented more as 'ecosystems' and 'biodiversity'. New interpretations were reflected in WWF's change of name from the 'World Wildlife Fund' to 'The Worldwide Fund for Nature' in 1986. This was intended to be more acceptable to developing countries, which did not see wildlife conservation as a priority. However, WWF did not abandon its older interests, but rather added new ones (WWF 1988). The so-called bio-diversity extinction crisis has also developed into a central theme of conservation science. These concerns were linked to a greater incorporation of ecology and ecosystems into conservation narratives. The adoption of scientific approaches, along with

the growing influence of deep green values, served to enhance the authority of the ecological expert and manager within international conservation.

4.2 Recasting people as a resource

These conservation and development narratives have recast the role of rural people in two important ways. First, it is now widely accepted that it is neither politically feasible nor ethically justifiable to exclude poor people from parks without providing alternative livelihoods (Brandon and Wells 1992). They are no longer blamed as the principal agents of destruction, or if they are, more attention is given to the 'poverty' which forces people to depend on non-sustainable resources. Second, other new narratives have begun to extol the virtues of 'traditional peoples' who have lived for generations in 'harmony with nature'. In contrast to earlier discourses, they are now considered to make important contributions to global understandings of sustainable use and conservation (e.g. McNeely and Pitt 1985; Kemf 1993). Despite important variations, both new narrative themes usually see local people as a 'resource' for achieving conservation objectives, as identified by scientific experts.

Thus one of WWF's new guiding principles is to 'involve local communities and indigenous peoples in the planning and execution of its field programme, respecting their cultural as well as economic needs' (WWF 1996a). The term 'community-conservation' was incorporated into WWF's project database in 1992, partly in response to field experience but also to pressure to include the label in project proposals to donors because, post-UNCED, it was becoming increasingly important for fundraising purposes. However, a review of policy and projects in the 1990s indicates how the label has been employed in inconsistent and unclear ways. The term tends to mask important social differences at a local level, which have crucial implications for who has access to and control of resources, and who bears the costs and reaps the benefits of protected areas. Projects have also tended to make blanket prescriptions for communities, which have had a differential impact at a local level, failing to benefit and sometimes further marginalising vulnerable groups (e.g. Metcalfe 1996; Rosendo 1996; Adams 1996).

WWF supports a participatory approach in their all their biomes, and in their eco-regional-based conservation (WWF 1996a). However, evidence suggests that many 1990s projects undertook work with local people because there were no preferred alternatives[3]. At the Annual Conference in 1997 it was emphasised that: 'For WWF, participation is not an end in itself, but a *means* to achieving conservation' (WWF 1997). This tends to reflect an instrumentalist view of participation as a 'social tool' for achieving objectives already defined by conservation scientists, rather than a basic human right or means of self determination. However, there are important qualifications to this assertion, and some WWF projects clearly do involve different approaches to participation, including support to self-mobilised initiatives (e.g. Newby 1996; Laidlaw 1996).

4.3 Solutions to problems: integrated conservation and development

The wider reorientation of thought, internal concern over bad publicity, and record levels of income in the late 1980s, helped prompt a restructuring of the organisation and lent support to the development of a more socially progressive Mission and programmes (WWF 1990, 1994), assisted by broader social networks. During the 1980s and 1990s field activities focused on introducing buffer zone management; integrated conservation and development approaches; sustainable utilisation; and forms of community-based conservation. However, a common view within conservation organisations at this time was that:

> ...conservation projects should be more people-oriented – but not people projects.... Conservation organisations should always be looking for ways to ensure the long-term success of their protected area projects by linking them with integrated conservation and development projects (ICDPs), but conservation organisations must remember that they are not development agencies.[4]

The new orientations in thought and practice were resisted by some members of the international conservation movement, who argued that the emphasis on sustainable development was at the expense of wildlife preservation. For example, Ian McPhail, WWF's first campaigns manager commented that the 'World Conservation Strategy' would be more aptly called the 'World Conservation Tragedy' (McPhail 1990), while others emphasised that tackling social concerns was only a means to an end – nature conservation.

The evolution of conservation and development narratives have been widely critiqued on several grounds, including among others, the global presumptions of international conservation planning (Anderson and Grove 1987); poorly conceived linkages between conservation and development (e.g. Redclift 1989; Adams 1990); lack of attention to equity and 'trickle down' (e.g. Ghimire 1991; Utting 1996; West and Brechin 1991), and extending coercive power relations (e.g. Peluso 1993; Hill 1996). While the narratives may differ in acknowledging local needs, knowledge and practices, they constitute a 'repackaging' of conservation but not a radical redefinition of the field (Adams 1990).

5 Counter-narratives from 1990: Conservation for whom?

Alternative people/environment perspectives have been promoted since the early 1990s, influenced both by wider, post-modern intellectual currents, and by the growing prominence of Southern scholars and perspectives in debate. While not dismissing scientific approaches, these works do not start with the assumption that science generates a single, definitive set of 'objective facts' about the environment. Rather, they are more inclined to ask 'what counts as an environmental problem?' and 'to whom?' (Redclift and Benton 1994), and to show that there is continuous struggle over problem definitions and meanings (Hajer 1997). These perspectives draw attention to the power of language, social interests and networks in defining 'truth' and how 'regimes of truth' become institutionalised through practices.

These emerging viewpoints serve to de-stabilise culturally elitist and orthodox scientific views of nature, environmental problems and solutions. The 'alternative environmentalism' in the South, for instance, promotes different eco-cosmologies and sees its objectives in terms of ecological requirements for livelihoods, social justice, and spiritual values

(e.g. Guha 1989; Guha and Martinez-Alier 1997; Peet and Watts 1996). It is increasingly recognised that local populations find Western ideas of nature, conservation and parks perplexing and unintelligible (e.g. Alcorn 1994; Colchester 1994).

At the same time, many of the perspectives on people/environmental change which underpinned earlier crisis narratives have been fundamentally challenged by new research (see Leach, Fairhead and Amanor *infra*.). Of particular pertinence to international conservation, research now suggests that rather than destroying 'nature', local people may actually have enriched biodiversity and landscapes in many areas (e.g. Posey 1985; Gilmour and Fisher 1991; Gomez-Pompa and Klaus 1992; Fairhead and Leach 1995). Indeed, the absence of local management may actually cause biological simplification (e.g. WWF-India 1996; Western and Giochio 1993; Chase 1987). Undermining earlier theories concerning the role of population growth and pressure in land degradation and deforestation, research suggests that forest cover and biodiversity can sometimes increase with rising population density, which increases the incentives for efficient resource (Sayer 1995). Drawing on 'new ecology', the new narratives regard nature as a product of both social and ecological history, and emphasise spatial and temporal variability, and dynamic, non-equilibrial processes (see Zimmerer 1994). In themselves, the counter-narratives do not necessarily imply new approaches to people, but rather provide new frames within which peoples' activities can be better appreciated.

These new lines of research have inspired some practitioners, and dimensions of practice, within international conservation organisations. They have generated new questions such as 'nature conservation for whom and for what?' 'species of special concern – to whom?' and 'who decides?' (e.g. Lohmann 1991; Pimbert 1993; Freeman and Kreuter 1994). They have justified participatory approaches to conservation planning and helped promote the role of indigenous knowledge and management. And they embody a new social commitment, which promotes human rights as an end itself. The broader challenge presented by the new thinking is not simply to redraw the map of conservation, but to change what that map is actually about. The promotion of such new perspectives can be seen as broadly aligned with a philosophy of 'reversals' and a 'new professionalism' in development and conservation, implicating different principles of action, choices, behaviour, and alliances of power (Chambers 1993, 1997; Pimbert and Pretty 1995).

However, discussions concerning a new professionalism and alternative perspectives on protected areas have been contested by other conservation communities on various grounds – for insufficient attention to nature ethics; for portraying conservation professionalism in historically inaccurate ways, and for emphasising changing professional behaviour at the expense of wider political change. The challenge of the new professionalism has also seemed to irritate some for appearing to assume the moral high ground (PASSC 1993). Other actors promoting radically new approaches to conservation, such as Life Reserves based on Southern environmental ethics and religious values also met resistance from the mainstream in the 1990s (Sochaczewski 1997).

To understand the reasons for such resistance, and to explore further the extent to which changing ideas about nature, rural peoples, environmental problems and solutions are influencing international conservation, the article now turns to two important sets of issues. The first concerns the role of media representations in conservation, and the second concerns the existence and interactions of diverse 'conservation communities' within particular organisations.

6 Representations in the media

Many experiences point to important interactions between media representations, fundraising and conservation policy. As Soutter (1996) puts it: 'Finding financial support for conservation is far more than the acquisition of funds. It defines, promotes, and perpetuates conservation itself'. Many environmental groups prefer to have large number of individual contributors, rather than government or corporate money, because it provides more room for manoeuvre, and frees the organisation from control of how and where the money is spent (Bosso 1995; Jordan and Maloney 1997). However, reliance on a large supporter base

renders organisations extremely sensitive to the effects of publicity on subscriptions and donations in the West, and as the WWF case illustrates, this can mediate the imaging and uptake of policies in support of rural peoples.

In WWF's first fundraising appeal in 1961, business contacts were used strategically to launch a 'shock issue' of the *Daily Mirror*. Seven pages were devoted to the threat to wildlife, largely blaming local people for the crisis. The appeal raised £50,000, which helped to launch WWF in 1961. In a feature entitled 'How they made a Million', a former WWF-UK Director argued that: 'WWF is a business like any other – except what is being marketed is a concept rather than a product' (WWF 1979). He went on to claim that Britain is an animal-loving nation, and that WWF should not move too far away from the 'cuddly panda' image to achieve its goals. However, such images epitomise and help reproduce the classic 'crisis narratives' discussed above, often portraying rural peoples as the principal threat to nature.

Since the 1980s, fundraisers have also incorporated glamorous images of indigenous peoples into the marketing of conservation, reflecting important changes in the way local people are inserted into conservation narratives. However, not only are the images sometimes misleading, but the new tactics are contentious in other respects. Rather than appearing as destroyers of nature, local and indigenous peoples are now frequently presented as resources for, or intermediaries in, the new phase of global conservation. The images continue to imply Western control and management of the global environment, albeit operating in decentralised ways.

In the 1990s, bad publicity resulting from media representations of indigenous people apparently 'destroying their rainforest' helped to catalyse socially-progressive policy work. The misleading images caused a torrent of criticism from indigenous peoples and interrupted WWF's work in the Amazon. The resulting WWF (1996b) statement of principles on indigenous peoples is the first official conservation publication to endorse explicitly and promote indigenous peoples' rights as set out in international and national laws and agreements. It is acknowledged that this policy development was driven by the need to re-polish the organisation's

image, as much as an institutional desire to address these issues. Nevertheless, it opened a window of opportunity for various staff to extend social policy commitments. This work also helped prompt other innovations, such as a new 'People and Conservation Unit' established in 1998 at WWF International. The statement has also been welcomed by indigenous peoples, with the statement's negotiation and promotion processes continuing to provide space for certain groups to engage in creative dialogue with WWF and indigenous peoples.[5]

7 Conservation 'communities'

Within conservation organisations, who promotes which ideas and why? International conservation organisations comprise various groups, communities or coalitions, both formal and informal. They consist of social networks, which extend beyond particular organisational boundaries, which individuals use to guide their opinions and judgements (see Haas 1992; Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1993; Hajer 1997). For example, at least four groups could be distinguished within WWF in the mid-1990s, on the basis of their different conceptions of nature, policy goals, backgrounds and social commitments.[6]

A first group, which one might term 'cosmocentrics', promotes ecosystem, eco-regional and biodiversity conservation. This group consists of individuals with backgrounds in ecological and biological sciences. They champion global conservation planning and management, based predominantly on positivist scientific values, but many hold deep green views. While some represent rural peoples as a threat to nature and advocate the cessation of all activities in protected areas, others acknowledge the importance of integrating social concerns into conservation, and have reworked traditional conservation thinking to incorporate development concerns. While some have been field practitioners, many work at a research level and network mainly with others from biological research institutions. The values and ideas of this group currently predominate within international conservation organisations, from the most senior management levels to field programmes. They are broadly associated with the second people/conservation narrative outlined above, that 'people cannot be ignored/can be a resource.'

A second group of 'anthropocentric neo-liberals', in contrast, promotes a politically distinct conservation agenda, emphasising economic and political processes, such as the role of the market; structural adjustment; world trade, and policy lobbying at the highest levels. Members of this group frequently have backgrounds in economics, politics or law, and network with others in similar professions. They frequently have influential allies in government and policy and financial institutions, such as the World Bank, Club of Rome and European Parliament. This is a smaller group within international conservation, which has been represented at the most senior management level, but has lacked wider field-based support. In terms of social commitments, this group is also broadly associated with the second narrative above.

A third group, 'radical anthropocentrics' has emphasised human rights issues in natural resource management and participatory approaches to conservation, and focuses on the livelihood needs and rights of marginalised groups. This group consists of individuals from social anthropological, development and new ecology backgrounds, and some grass-roots practitioners. Members have been influenced by critiques of orthodox development and conservation models, and the inequalities of the capitalist system, emphasising the effects of unequal power structures and relations. While members promote biodiversity conservation, some have incorporated the broader critique of orthodox science into their work. This group has sought alliances with promoters of human rights, social justice and indigenous people's issues. While the views of this group are influential, appealing to many dissatisfied with the failures of traditional conservation in the field, they do not predominate within international conservation. The group is associated with people/conservation counter-narratives already discussed under 'Conservation for whom?'

Finally, 'anthropocentric elites' promote a more traditional conservation agenda underpinned by anthropocentric (and formerly theocentric) values. Historically, local people were seen as a threat to nature, and their removal from protected areas was traditionally unquestioned. This group consists of socially privileged members from both North and South, from aristocratic, business, political and land-owning circles. They have often legitimised protected areas on the grounds of 'nation building'. Many early promoters of the global conservation movement came from this group, and many continue to have influence at senior executive levels, particularly in former colonial and commonwealth countries. Historically, they have been broadly associated with the earlier crisis narrative that 'people are the threat'.

8 Discussion: Some comments on people/nature representations in international conservation discourses

While there have clearly been many significant changes in the ways that people/nature relations have been represented in international conservation over the last 20 years, these do not imply that objectives have radically changed. Rather, mainstream conservation discourses have been reworked in less radical ways, framing people as 'a resource' for conservation as defined from above. Indeed, international conservation appears to have appropriated the language of participatory natural resource management into its own narratives. Such developments have, in turn, helped international conservation organisations to re-legitimise their global programmes.

There is a danger that the use of concepts such as 'community involvement' and 'participation' within international conservation discourses can become rhetorical devices that confer an aura of authority on organisations, but which are used to legitimise access to and control of resources in ways detrimental to local interests or goals (Brosius *et al.* 1998). Nevertheless, the notions of community and participation should not be dismissed altogether, not least because they provide important room for manoeuvre for local groups and means for articulating, negotiating and legitimising their concerns (Agrawal 1997; Li 1996). Furthermore, such paradigm appropriation cannot be viewed as strictly technocratic or insidious. Many practitioners genuinely attempt to redress the social inadequacies of older conservation styles, and seek to integrate social concerns into conservation policies and field activities. Compared with those of the 1960s and 1970s, the new approaches provide more

opportunities for rural peoples to negotiate a middle ground of shared interests.

'International conservation organisations' are clearly not monolithic entities, but rather consist of diverse groupings with sometimes, divergent values and agendas. These 'communities' extend beyond organisational boundaries; are made up of individuals with plural and overlapping interests, and are dynamic. A more differentiated view of organisations helps to explain the sometimes contradictory representations of people/nature relations which they generate. It also suggests opportunities for promoting alternative under-standings of people/nature within science-policy dialogues. However, it also apparent that these do not occur in political vacuums, and some ideas are more dominant than others. The differential power and influence of various networks within organisations is an important variable in the evolution of new conservation approaches.

At the same time, changing people/nature representations cannot be viewed outside fundraising and public relations concerns. To mobilise large funds, conservation groups need to appeal to public interests and values in the North. Fund-raisers and campaigners acknowledge that some images of nature work better than others and while some know and care about the conflicts of interests between local people and animals, they are not convinced that rich northern publics do – hence the panda image (see North 1990). Crisis images and narratives are often preferred because they have a clear market advantage, i.e. they are good for business.

The new heterogeneity of conservation constructions and expressions, which characterise marketing today, is also a positive advantage in fundraising. Multiple assemblages and conceptualisations of 'nature' and 'local people' are produced and packaged for different audiences who consume and participate in different meanings. In this, 'nature', 'conservation' or 'indigenous people' may be considered as elements in a post-modern collage or hyper-real montage[7] whose meanings are never fixed or stable: conservation can mean protected areas, or livelihoods, or flagship mammals, or indigenous people. It is the very incoherence of different conceptualisations that allows for mass-market manipulation.

Supported by corporate sponsorship, and globalised through media networks, it is important to question the extent to which international media images, tailor-made for Western audiences, out-compete local representations, making it more difficult for alternative voices to be heard. Experience indicates how susceptible conservation groups are to the pressures of Western markets and animal rights supporters who tend to equate environmental ethics with non-use. I would suggest that these pressures can put rural peoples in a disadvantaged position, and may constrain the uptake of more participatory conservation approaches. Many marketing and fundraising images are contested by indigenous people themselves, because they obscure alternative meanings of nature, and because they frame environmental problems and solutions in ways which fail to acknowledge their land claims and human rights (e.g. Lasimbang 1995; IWGIA 1996). An alternative and more participatory approach to fundraising and marketing might provide support for rural peoples to speak for themselves.

Images of nature and conservation in photography, film and television are intricately bound up with patterns of environmental knowledge construction (Beinart 1998). The marketing strategies of well-resourced conservation organisations enable these images to be brought into the heart of popular culture, where they play an important role in mediating Western environmental knowledge. As Burgess (1990) argues, the communications industry participates in a complex cultural process, through which environmental meanings are produced and consumed. Such relationships suggest important circuits between knowledge, media representations, the imperatives of fundraising and conservation approaches, which may act as real constraints to genuine change.

Many of the issues raised in new discourses help to dissolve old received wisdoms and to create space for new social commitments. However, the promotion of 'reversals' and 'counter narratives' within conservation is not without its problems. Ironically, while aiming to promote local complexities and diversities, it may caricature development and conservation histories in simplistic and historically inaccurate ways, which obscure diversity in policy and practice (Grillo and Stirrat 1997). Politically, emphasising reversals frequently serves to crystallise

latent opposition, making it even harder to create room for alternative policy practices within organisations. A more disaggregated understanding of relationships between conservation 'communities', knowledge, representations and organisational structures may guide more nuanced, and ultimately more effective, approaches.

9 Conclusion

It should not be assumed that people/nature representations in international conservation discourses reflect the discovery of incontrovertible truths about the environment. Many factors play a role in the construction of these changing representations. First, conservation narratives and media images are influenced by much wider intellectual currents and debates. The 'Prophets of Doom' environmentalism of the 1960s; sustainable development discourses of the 1980s and the so-called post-modern concerns of the 1990s, have clearly generated a diversity of conservation narratives and counter-narratives. Second, the differential power of various conservation 'communities' and social networks within and between organisations is an important variable in the evolution and authority of particular discourses and icons. The fundraising and marketing concerns of conservation organisations also mediate people/nature representations. Orthodox, but financially lucrative, crisis narratives are deeply embedded within fundraising strategies in the West, partly because these are good for business. The mutually reinforcing relationships between these factors can work against alternative representations of people/nature relations and social interests. However, as the case study has suggested, organisations are clearly not monolithic entities nor inflexible, and taking account of and working through these networks creates scope for alternative narratives and project styles to be adapted and reworked to the advantage of both rural peoples and international conservation.

Notes

1. The phrase 'people-oriented conservation' is understood as a generic term to include policies and projects, which claim a simultaneous interest in the welfare of people and nature. Such approaches cover a wide range of activities such as community-based conservation; integrated conservation and development; primary environmental care; collaborative management, etc. While each of these terms carries its own assumptions, histories and contested meanings, they represent practices that seek to integrate, rather than separate nature conservation and development.

2. Policy narratives constitute identifiable bodies of belief and knowledge, which stabilise decision-making and inform policy and practice, but which are often simplistic, misleading or incorrect. Crisis narratives are policy discourses, which legitimise the claims of experts in managing resources; while counter-narratives aim to reverse old patterns of thinking.

3. For example, it is not uncommon to find the following kind of statements in the project literature of the mid-1990s: 'The cooperation of the villagers is essential for the protection of the conservation area, due to lack of government staff to act as wardens' (WWF 1995: 3122). Similarly: 'Local people have been granted sustainable use rights in the park in exchange for their active participation in its protection' (WWF 1995: 3144).

4. Response in a survey of WWF field staff, 1992.

5. However, the International Alliance of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples continue to express concern about a number of international conservation projects which are resented by indigenous peoples, and are not being developed in conformity with WWF's new principles (IWGIA 1996).

6. Three broad metaphysical subtexts can be identified in contemporary environmentalism: (1) cosmo- or ecocentric perspectives – that humanity and God are contained in nature, and that it is nature that mediates culture and God; (2) anthropocentric views that nature and God are contained in humanity – and that it is culture that mediates nature and God; (3) theocentric perspectives that nature and humanity are contained in God, and that it is spiritual consciousness that mediates culture and nature.

7. Hyper-reality consists of constructed images, which replace, rather than represent the outside world. The model becomes more real than the reality it is supposed to represent, and people interact on the basis of images, illusion or simulation. It is a model 'of a real without origin or reality' (Baudrillard 1983: 2).

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