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Article Title	"Introduction: Between Capitalism, the State, and the Grassroots: Mexico's Contribution to a Global Conservation Debate"
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Journal Title	Conservation and Society
Citation	Haenn N, Olson EA, Martinez-Reyes JE, Durand L. Introduction: Between Capitalism, the State, and the Grassroots: Mexico's Contribution to a Global Conservation Debate. Conserv Soc 2014;12:111-9
Link to article on publisher's website	http://www.conservationandsociety.org/text.asp?2014/12/2/111/138407
Version of article in FSC	Published article
Link to this article through FSC	https://dspace.allegheny.edu/handle/10456/36248
Date article added to FSC	September 24, 2014
Final manuscript available at	http://www.conservationandsociety.org/text.asp?2014/12/2/111/138407
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Introduction: Between Capitalism, the State, and the Grassroots: Mexico's Contribution to a Global Conservation Debate

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Abstract

This introduction situates Mexico in the research on conservation and society, illustrating some nuances and characteristics of the Mexican model of biodiversity conservation in relation to neoliberal economic development and state formation. The paper critiques the way neoliberalism has become a common framework to understand conservation's social practices. Drawing on the ethnographies collected in this special section, the paper considers the importance of state formation and disorganised neoliberalism as intertwined phenomena that explain conservation outcomes. This approach lends itself to the papers' ethnographic descriptions that demonstrate a particular Mexican form of conservation that sits alongside a globalised biodiversity conservation apparatus. The introduction presents some additional analytical interpretations: 1) conservation strategies rooted in profit-driven models are precarious; 2) empirical cases show the expansion of both state structures and capitalist markets via conservation; and 3) non-capitalist approaches to conservation merit greater consideration.

Keywords: protected areas, metropole conservation, ethnographies of conservation, capitalism, Mexican conservation apparatus

INTRODUCTION

This special section focuses on the anthropology of Mexican biosphere reserves, including their cultural, political, economic, and environmental dynamics. In this introduction to the special section, we highlight a particular set of concerns raised indirectly by these papers. The first concern relates to everyday forms of state formation, an area of research that, not coincidentally, has strong roots in Mexican historiography. The second concern is

that of the relationship between environmental conservation and capitalist forms of economic development—a topic we connect to everyday forms of state formation. We believe these points merit attention as they point to the papers' collective lessons. While each paper offers its own, individual lesson regarding biosphere reserves in Mexico, together they point to new ways of theorising conservation and society research.

In elaborating their idea of everyday forms of state formation, Joseph and Nugent (1994) offered a research program that was highly amenable to ethnographic inquiry. They placed attention on the state as a set of power relationships, and emphasised the processual quality of governance. State actors, Joseph and Nugent asserted, need to engage popular cultural groups in locally recognisable idioms. This engagement is fraught with struggles over “words, images, symbols, forms, organisations, institutions and movements” (Roseberry 1994: 361). Thus, hegemony is always problematic, arising from the struggles themselves rather than the consent of the governed.

Access this article online

Quick Response Code:



Website:

www.conservationandsociety.org

DOI:

10.4103/0972-4923.138407

The papers in this special section detail these sorts of struggles—in part in their shared interest in some common conservation themes, including the expansion of protected areas in number and size, disputes over territory, and cultural understandings of protection measures. The authors also document a variety of conservation-related economic activities, including conservation's close association with ecotourism, connections between federal conservation initiatives and state welfare programs, the relationship between reserves and small-scale economic development, protected areas as a source of employment, as well as the institutions that broker these economic relationships. These institutions may be state, private, local, federal, or global, but readers of the papers will observe a preponderant role played by the Mexican federal state. Biosphere reserves in Mexico continue to combine two contrasting ideals—the separation of people from nature and the state-brokered integration of people into sustainable economies. The ethnographies collected here commonly demonstrate the tensions associated with this contrast.

Consequently, our introduction draws on both the individual papers and the collection as a whole to illustrate how they can be read as a critique of neoliberal capitalism, one that advocates that researchers re-cast conservation's relationship to capitalism in order to account for particular state contexts. In the paragraphs that follow, we first situate Mexico within the literature on conservation and society. We then depict how a variety of researchers are applying a capitalist critique to conservation. Returning to the papers presented in this special section, we expand our argument, focussing on three interpretations of the authors' findings—the fragility of profit-oriented approaches to conservation, the simultaneous expansion of state-directed and market economies, and a cautioning against capitalism becoming a hegemonic way of understanding conservation. Overall, we note that Mexican conservation is *both* similar to, and different from, global conservation models—a contrast that constitutes an important new terrain for research (Dove 2011).

MEXICO: A CASE STUDY

Researchers, at least in the USA and Europe, tend to conceive of conservation as a First World export which then undergoes a recontextualisation in developing countries, especially in Africa and southeast Asia¹. This geographical framework has revealed the neo-colonialist tendencies within conservation as well as the social problems that accompany the exclusion of local populations from protected areas (Adams and Mulligan 2003; Brockington et al. 2008). The papers in this special section reiterate these points and add more. The papers ask readers to consider a unique, Mexican form of conservation (Simonian 1996; Wakild 2011) that arises from the country's political system, including the historical dynamics among indigenous people, peasants, broker groups such as non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and the state. The complicated issue of land tenure is a common topic in these papers because it helps structure these groups' interactions (Haenn 2005; Trench 2008).

Mexico's uniqueness stems partly from the way conservation programs there demonstrate the strengths and weaknesses of biosphere reserves in a setting where economic growth is accompanied by a state apparatus that is both elaborate and fractured (Rubin 1997; Doane 2012). Mexico is the second largest economy in Latin America², and the country houses the largest income inequality among the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries. "The average income of the poorest 10% is below 1,000 US\$ in purchasing power parities which is lower than in any other [OECD] country."³ One might think of Mexico as situated somewhere between the world's wealthier and poorer countries. As a consequence, Mexico provides a unique standpoint from which to reflect back on—and make sense of—metropole conservation, i.e., conservation as a form of neo-colonialism both within and between countries.

Where capitalist critiques of conservation tend to describe conservation as placing people and the environment in the service of free market actors (Fletcher 2010), the Mexican case suggests a different theoretical ground. In Mexico, global processes—marked by disjuncture among economy, culture, and politics (Appadurai 1996)—encounter a state that is both committed to facilitating global flows and fearful of the social instability that such flows precipitate (Klor de Alva 1995; Polanyi 2001). As a result, Mexican conservation is regularly accompanied by an expansion of the state apparatus in a number of ways.

The papers in this special section, for example, show that when conservation programs are accompanied by enduring resistance and failures at development (including sustainable development), state actors manage social pressures by applying subsidy programs. These programs are disguised and promoted as 'projects' for conservation. International funding for conservation—whether from UNESCO, The Nature Conservancy, or the World Bank—tends to be similarly packaged. This close connection between conservation and state subsidy programs is less pronounced in the broader conservation literature, but it resonates with examples from Western countries where state financial support has been a key component of environmental programmes (Shoreman and Haenn 2009).

Other characteristics further establish Mexico's uniqueness in conservation research. An estimated 52% of Mexican territory belongs to *ejidos* and *comunidades agrarias*, two distinct forms of collective land tenure (Perramond 2008). In Mexico, peasants and indigenous people own as much as 80% of the country's forests (Klooster 2003). Such ownership does not mean people can do as they please. State environmental bureaucracies such as *Secretaría de Medio Ambiente y Recursos Naturales* (SEMARNAT, Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources), *Comisión Nacional de Áreas Naturales Protegidas* (CONANP, National Commission for Natural Protected Areas), and *Procuraduría Federal de Protección Ambiental* (PROFEPA, Federal Environmental Protection Agency) now reach deep into the Mexican countryside, often replacing the federal department of agriculture that once affected agrarian production in intimate

ways (Otero 1999). NGOs and private consultants extend the scope of conservation beyond the confines of government to include an array of social actors. What this means is that researchers cannot reckon with conservation in Mexico without also reckoning with the complex social relations surrounding land tenure (Olson and Gerritsen 2011). Federal protected areas alone number 174, totalling 25 million ha. These protected areas are inhabited by more than two and a half million people (or 2.5% of the country's total population) and cover almost 13% of national territory (Bezaury-Creel and Gutiérrez Carbonell 2009). An estimated 60% of protected area territory belongs to established *ejidos* and *comunidades agrarias* (Bezaury-Creel and Gutiérrez Carbonell 2009).

What seems curious regarding the geographical tendencies within conservation and society research is that Mexico has been, in many ways, at the forefront of biodiversity conservation. The country was an early adopter of the Man and Biosphere program (Simonian 1995). During the 1980s and 1990s, when countries across the globe declared a growing number of protected areas (West et al. 2006), Mexico took the effort to greater lengths. At the federal level, the creation of protected areas has constituted a primary strategy for national environmental management (Halffter 1995; Graf et al. 2003). New federal agencies such as *Comision Nacional Para el Conocimiento y Uso de la Biodiversidad* (CONABIO; National Commission for Knowledge and Use of Biodiversity), as well as CONANP were formed in 1992 and 2000, respectively, to inventory the country's biodiversity and consolidate federal management of protected areas. Biosphere reserves have become a growth area of their own, closely linked to the country's expansive tourism sector (Lee This issue). The continual growth of the conservation apparatus became evident in 2006 when UNESCO announced the creation of 25 new biospheres reserves, of which 18 were located in Mexico.

Mexico was also an eager adapter of free market policies, a place where the word "neoliberal" entered policy discourse in the late 1980s. At that time a Harvard-trained economist ascended to the presidency and began to lobby for the creation of a North American Free Trade Agreement. The pre-eminence of free-market thinking among Mexican economists and economic policy-makers has continued (Babb 2001). Mexico has signed 12 free trade agreements with a total of 44 countries. These agreements likely aim to counteract the country's dependence on the USA for exports. About 80% of Mexico's exports go to the USA, and 50% of its imports come from the USA (Villareal 2012).

In brief, the papers collected in this special section share this historical backdrop, one in which environmental management is an economic endeavour, defined through Mexico's unique neoliberalism. At the same time, we view the authors as pushing back against this tendency, as we explain below.

CAPITALISM, CONSERVATION, AND SOCIETY

Mexico's ongoing commitment to free market economics merits a deeper exploration of the role economics plays in the country's

natural resource management. In this regard, researchers have a number of critiques to draw on. An early identifier of the relationship between conservation and free market economics, Escobar (1996) surmised that protected areas serve to incorporate under-capitalised areas into market economies. Other researchers have similarly drawn connections between the astonishing growth globally in the number of protected areas during the 1990s and 2000s and state commitments to free market policies (Zimmerer et al. 2004; Brockington et al. 2008). In this reckoning, the creation of transnational conservation initiatives, such as the Mesoamerican Biological Corridor, parallels the establishment of free trade areas (Grandia 2007). In recent years, researchers have pushed beyond capitalist analyses of conservation, while maintaining a steady focus on the state and NGOs as often facilitating the magnification of private enterprise. The overarching question in this body of work is one of how conservation programs fit within capitalist ideals of profiting from nature.

The most visible proponents of this new generation of scholarship include a circle of scholars roughly linked to the anthropologists James Igoe and Daniel Brockington. In a series of articles and specially edited journal issues, these authors detail the process that Escobar described in broad strokes (e.g., *Conservation and Society* Volume 5 Issue 4; *Antipode* Volume 42, Issue 3). These researchers theorise the existence of a "neoliberal nature" which they define as "the restructuring of the world to facilitate free markets" (Igoe and Brockington 2007: 433). They argue that connections between protected areas and private businesses hold a few attractions for this restructuring. In places where states exclude local participation in natural resource management, local people can use the private sector alliances to pressure for representation. Where neoliberalism results in decreased state budgets and a failure to fund conservation, private sector initiatives provide resources that keep protected areas viable. In an idealised world, public-private conservation partnerships increase democracy, shift resources from wealthier to poorer nations, and increase environmental awareness by tapping into the globalised social networks that accompany neoliberalism, especially in the form of ecotourism (Igoe and Brockington 2007).

As critics of this neoliberal approach to nature, Igoe and Brockington (2007) assert that, in reality, protected areas provide a new way to capture natural resources and direct any associated financial gains to elites. Conservation is, in effect, a capitalist innovation, one whose novelty rests on "reterritorialization" (i.e., the creation of protected areas), the construction of conservation as a consumer activity (i.e., through ecotourism; Hughes 2005), and the declaration that both protected areas and the businesses linked to them belong *not* to local people, but to private businesses and state agents working in their own, private interests (Igoe and Croucher 2007).

The trend in conservation toward privatisation is facilitated by another aspect of neoliberalism, namely the ideological preference for a small state apparatus. Cuts in funding have diminished the size of the state, made it less influential, and

opened the way for private appropriation of natural resources. In these accounts, prominent, international NGOs appear as complicit in the privatisation of natural resources and the privatisation of the conservation apparatus. NGOs step in to fill the power vacuum left by a shrinking state, sometimes becoming foreign arbiters of local ecologies (Fortwangler 2007; Levine 2007). In the last decade, researchers argue, many such NGOs have accepted hefty contributions from corporate donors and ceased to be environmental watchdogs. Instead, NGOs now serve as green cover for advocates of market-based solutions to environmental degradation (Hari 2010 makes this argument in the popular press).

There are additional connections to be drawn between conservation practices and free market practices. Carrier (2010) and Neves (2010), for example, link conservation activities to forms of consumption and tourism. Sodikoff (2009) uses Marx to question conservation's relationship to international structures of labour. She argues that, in Madagascar, internationally funded integrated conservation-development projects (known as ICDPs) aim to provide a financial alternative to slash-and-burn-farming. The programs, however, pay their staff so poorly that they generate the very kind of low-wage, natural resource dependent conditions that conservation programs seek to combat.

These critiques certainly apply to Mexico (see Doane 2012) where, for example, connections among state agents, entrepreneurs, and NGOs are evident in events such as the 2009 World Environment Day Commemoration. The commemoration was held at a private amusement park located on the Riviera Maya, a tourist district that has undergone intense development. In addition to Mexico's then President, Felipe Calderón and the Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme, Achin Steiner, guests included the Executive Director of the World Wide Fund for Nature, Carter Roberts, the Mexican billionaire, Carlos Slim Helu, and the president of Mexico's National Business Council, Armando Paredes (Enciso 2009). Interestingly, however, all these approaches tend to employ the definition of neoliberalism that Castree (2010a: 1728) characterises as including a "state roll back", "market friendly reregulation", and "state-led measures to promote the growth of voluntary, charitable, 'third sector' and community groups who are seen as being able to fill the vacuum created by the absence/diminution of direct state-support". In Castree's (2010a, 2010b, 2011) synthesis of writings on neoliberalism, he contrasts this definition with "roll out" neoliberalism (Peck and Tickell 2002), a form of neoliberalism in which the state sector actually expands not only in order to facilitate free market practices (Fletcher 2010) but also to compensate for the social and ecological problems such practices foster (Castree 2010b). Following Polanyi (2001), observers of "roll out" neoliberalism argue that free market expansion will inevitably entail an overreach. This overreach will result in pushback, whether in the form of "resurgent anti-neoliberal moral economies", re-regulation as markets fail to address social and ecological problems, or a re-location of formerly privatised social services as NGOs

find social and ecological problems beyond the scope of their capabilities (Castree 2010b).

Castree (2011) distinguishes between different forms of neoliberalism, insisting that neoliberalism is actually quite diverse in practice. There is, he says, no such thing as neoliberalism *per se*, only the varied manifestations of an idea. Consequently, he calls on researchers to specify this variance and elaborate the different forms of neoliberalism, as well as their ecological contexts (Castree 2011). To our way of thinking, such specification necessarily returns researchers to questions of everyday forms of state formation and the sort of ethnographic descriptions offered in this special section.

For Castree (2010a: 1731), the biophysical world was always going to be vital to neoliberal endeavours given the financial opportunities nature offers, but observes that nature presents some challenges to human efforts to control it: "This means that the biophysical world represents a set of challenges, opportunities and potential threats to neoliberalism". A similarly central role for ecology might be recognised in processes of state formation. Questions of property, territory, and environmental management have been fundamental issues in the construction of states since the earliest days of state institutions (e.g., Brumfield 1983; Earle 2000; Smith 2011). These connections are by no means straightforward, as the growing body of literature on 'environmentality' points out (Luke 1995; Agrawal 2005; Hanson 2007). State attempts at environmental management are often built around "a complex articulation whose outcomes are not guaranteed or fore-closed but are rather historically contingent" (Moore 1999: 674). In this sense, some aspects (but not all) of neoliberalism and state environmental management are comparable. Identifying the commonalities and distinctions between ecology's role in state formation and neoliberal practices stands as a challenge for future research in conservation and societies.

Conservation and the fractured Mexican state

The papers collected in this special section convey these complex articulations by providing specific cases of the conservation apparatus in Mexico. As a group, the authors do not situate capitalism as their main concern. In part, this absence arises from the authors' diverse theoretical orientations and their understanding that Mexican conservation has precise forms associated with local contexts. This approach leads the authors to focus on questions of community development, decision-making, and broader issues related to governance. Nonetheless, we view the research in this special section as holding lessons for future research on biosphere reserves and their connection to neoliberalism.

Some aspects of the authors' findings clearly support ideas of roll back neoliberalism. Lee and Martinez-Reyes, for example, describe a conservation marked by outsourcing to private organisations. Durand et al. describe forced relocations that resonate with the land grabs that other scholars have criticised. Hoffman, and Doyon and Sabinot's contributions reiterate the tensions between state conservation discourses

and frameworks employed by lay citizens. In our reading, however, these affinities argue for a greater contextualisation of neoliberal critiques in particular state settings. This contextualisation takes place at two levels, at the level of theory and the level of ethnography. At the level of ethnography, thick descriptions open the way for multiple theoretical entries into the researchers' findings.

The following paragraphs demonstrate this multiplicity, as we interpret the papers to show that critiques of neoliberal conservation require greater acknowledgement of capitalism's inherent weaknesses. Researchers have been quick to note that capitalism depletes the very natural resources that underpin wealth creation (Stonich 1993). We find in the authors' narratives the environmental import of additional aspects of capitalism, such as the tendency toward monopoly capitalism (and monopolistic forms of conservation) and, perhaps more saliently, the expectation that enterprises will fail. Following in the vein of Foucauldian approaches, capitalism intrinsically requires a fractured state to which it can relate. We interpret the papers' ethnographic details as adding to our understandings of how market-disciplining scenarios unfold in relation to a "disorganized capitalism" (Appadurai 1996).

The idea of conservation operating via a fractured state working in the context of disorganised neoliberalism offers new avenues of interpretation of such commonly remarked upon phenomenon such as the global growth in protected areas and a conservation that is similarly increasing in ideological and instrumental force (Naughton-Treves et al. 2005). For example, read in one way, Hoffman's paper supports the idea of conservation's instrumental force. Hoffman describes how the surveillance that accompanies biodiversity conservation added vigour to illegal activities and violent conflicts when access to an important local resource became increasingly controlled by outside forces. Read through the lens of disorganised capitalism and a fractured state, however, we see how this account offers a broader understanding. Conservation's power might be omnipresent, but it is not, and can never be, omnipotent. "The limited budget, enormous territory, and limited capacity of the conservation authorities to deal with the systematic illegal extraction" described by Hoffman (This issue) could well apply to other conservation sites.

Lee's paper can be interpreted in a similar manner. The paper's examination of ecotourism could be read as placing natural resources in the service of market-driven growth. Read through the lens of disorganised neoliberalism and a fractured state, ecotourism also appears to fill a vacuum created by the state through its bureaucratic overreach and paralysis. The overreach is evident in the boundaries of the Tehuacán-Cuicatlán Valley Biosphere Reserve. Sharing in the trend toward ever-larger protected areas (Peterson et al. 2010), this site grew to include 490,000 ha housing 230,000 people in 51 municipalities. From its beginning, the Tehuacán-Cuicatlán Valley Biosphere Reserve was socially challenging. The challenge resulted in paralysis when, for 10 years, the Reserve's scientific-technical committee could not agree upon a management plan. Discursively, ecotourism

offered a solution to the complex and unmanageable application of the protected area formula.

Lee's paper points to another reading based on ideas of disorganised neoliberalism. One problem for the Tehuacán-Cuicatlán Valley Biosphere Reserve is Mexico's overall reliance on ecotourism. Tourism consistently ranks among the top three sources of the country's foreign exchange. Mexico is so saturated with tourism possibilities that conservation-related ecotourism enters a highly competitive arena. Consequently many such projects fail—as did the one in the Tehuacán-Cuicatlán Valley Biosphere Reserve. While it is tempting to ascribe this failure to economics alone, Doyon and Sabinot offer supplementary explanations. Working in a site that has a long history of ecotourism, they find that large sections of the Mexican citizenry, after decades of conservation messaging, have failed to adopt state notions of environmental management.

Researchers and practitioners alike have looked to participatory governance mechanisms to manage complications arising from conservation programme and diverse ethnoecologies. Picking up on this theme, Durand et al. note that, by demanding an expansive state bureaucracy, socially complex conservation makes protected area management vulnerable to bureaucratic incompetence. The participatory forums meant to counteract such complexities actually marginalise the very citizens they aim to include (cf. Cornwall and Coelho 2002). The authors describe the declaration of the Comunidad Zona Lacandona in the 1970s as a kind of protected area that attempted to stem frontier colonisation. The decree assigned rights to a broad swathe of land to the numerically small Lacandon indigenous group. However, the decree overlooked Ch'ol and Tzeltal groups living in the same territory, an oversight that led to relocations and the formation of new towns whose inhabitants were ultimately accorded legal rights within the Comunidad Zona Lacandona. The distribution of land rights became muddled again, with the declaration of the Montes Azules Biosphere Reserve, which overlapped with both settled areas in the Comunidad Zona Lacandona and an already existing protected area. Montes Azules Biosphere Reserve was declared in 1978, but the ramifications of this declaration were delayed for nearly 15 years until the Mexican state (with funds from the Global Environment Facility) first staffed the reserve offices. Another six years passed until a formal management plan was put in place. Unsurprisingly, Durand et al. (This issue) conclude that a consistent aim within participatory management is to "reduce social conflict and to legitimate conservation goals, prioritising the actions and views of certain actors over those of others".

Again, through the lens of roll back neoliberalism, Durand et al.'s paper might be read as an account of elite land grabs. In Chiapas, the Montes Azules case has included blatant human rights abuses and the taking of innocent lives.⁴ Ideas of disorganised neoliberalism and a fractured state, however, allow for additional interpretations. For example, the authors might be viewed as describing a conservation that establishes a heightened sense of scarcity. In general, the authors in this

collection describe conservation as associated with various kinds of scarcity—land scarcity, a scarcity of agrarian livelihoods (Lee); resource scarcity (Hoffman; Martínez-Reyes); a scarcity of accountability and social justice (Durand et al.; Martínez-Reyes); and a scarcity of time (Durand et al.). The question of time, in particular, has received little attention in the conservation and society literature. Durand et al. show how capitalist time is distinct from bureaucratic time, with the former moving at a much faster pace. Some conservation effects can be understood in light of this difference.

Important for expanding the theoretical ground of capitalism and conservation, the ethnographies in this special section report that rural residents rarely turn to economic markets to resolve these problems of scarcity. Instead, rural residents place responsibility on the state for shaping the quality of their lives, including conservation successes and failures. The fractured and multi-faceted quality of the state impinges not only on its ability to deliver conservation programmes, but also its ability to link ecology and social justice, as exemplified in the Martínez-Reyes contribution. As a point of background to Martínez-Reyes's argument, Mexican peasants and indigenous people are often depicted in national discourses as the 'prodigal sons of the state' (Arturo Warman 1964), people whose poverty has led them to be excluded from state benefits and who need to be brought into the national community. This discourse sets the stage for 'clientelistic' relations (Trench 2008: 622) which can be quite expansive and, sometimes, challenge capitalism's predominance.

Martínez-Reyes (This issue) argues that the *ejido*'s collectivism points to the possibility of a post-development conservation. Using the notion of a "coloniality of nature," he characterises present-day dynamics among the Maya people, NGOs, and government bureaucrats, as building on a particular conflict—the nineteenth century Caste War of Yucatan. The Maya people continue to seek forms of justice from the state that make amends for the war. Conservation projects, however, draw on the War's resulting ethnic configurations to treat the Maya people as clients by subordinating local knowledges and practices. Ideals of *ejido* autonomy contradict this clientelistic subordination, and, in this case, resulted in the expulsion of conservation NGOs from an *ejido*. For Martínez-Reyes (This issue), collectivism and roll back neoliberalism are interwoven in Mexican conservation efforts (cf. Mathews 2002; Wilshusen 2010). The NGO in question benefitted from the state outsourcing conservation programmes to the private sector, and had been working on market-based conservation-development projects. When it became clear the programmes would not fit Mayan notions of sustainability, *ejido* members forbade the NGOs from returning to work in their community.

The ethnographies in this special section show that the state and economic structures associated with biosphere reserves are not only overarching but also patchy and flawed. In their overarching quality, these institutions often appear similar to such states and economies in other places, thereby allowing for an international comparison of biosphere reserves. Their patchy quality, however, brings to the foreground the culturally

constituted, historically contingent, dynamic, and fragile aspects of states and economies. In the following section, we extend this latter approach to depict Mexico's commitment to a welfare state in relation to environmental conservation. Different kinds of states connect differently to different kinds of neoliberalism. In Mexico, as the papers show, this neoliberalism includes a significant dose of socialism.

Conservation and socialism in Mexico

In light of our advocacy of different possible interpretations of the papers in this special section, one might argue that the papers illustrate an active and intrusive state, a conservation that demonstrates roll out neoliberalism. The qualities of these intrusions bear consideration. In the previous section, we argued that the authors' observations of a fractured state might push conservation research away from a strict capitalist framework and toward ideas of everyday forms of state formation. Because states are intimately tied to global networks, this move expands, rather than alters, terms of the debate surrounding neoliberal nature. In this section, we see how Mexico's commitment to welfare programs requires that some assessments of conservation-as-capitalism be accompanied by assessments of conservation-as-socialism. This move shifts the focus away from conservation's connection to global economic trends and places attention on the role that biosphere reserves play in connecting a particular state to a particular citizenry.

The notion that capitalism and socialism are twin phenomena, born at the same moment, finds its origins in Karl Polanyi's (2001) *The Great Transformation*. Polanyi argues that free markets create such social distress, the result is an immediate response by the state. In effect, free markets can foster expanded state infrastructures. In neoliberal terms, the roll back of the state is followed by a roll out in which governance takes place through the "manipulation of external incentive structures" (Fletcher 2010: 178). Polanyi's work inspires the following question for conservation researchers: 'If conservation is about incorporating undercapitalised areas into markets, what compensatory moves might state agents undertake to offset the social consequences of this assimilation?'

The papers by Martínez-Reyes, and Doyon and Sabinot are instructive in this regard. Both describe communities immersed in a web of subsidies. Some of these subsidies derive from federal agencies and some from international organisations (such as the UNDP; cf. Haenn 2011). Because NGOs ultimately rely on state monies, aid recipients understandably tend to identify private sector initiatives as state programs. Doyon and Sabinot, for example, describe a relationship between state and NGO offices that is so close, the two groups are nearly indistinguishable to the casual observer. Where the relationships are clear, aid recipients continue to locate private sector conservation within their understandings of the state. Martínez-Reyes relates the frustration voiced by aid recipients who view NGOs as constantly inventing new aid projects in order to obtain state financing.

Historically, Mexico's welfare programs have been closely tied to electoral politics (when seen in a positive light) and corrupt vote buying (when seen in a negative one). The ethnographies collected here suggest, in the context of conservation and community development, this truism needs reconsideration. Welfare programs linked to conservation take place within a new national discursive context that contrasts patron-client relations with a scientifically-based meritocracy. The shift is part of larger changes in the Mexican state which once was ruled by a single political party and now undergoes competitive elections. This change has placed in dispute the very structure of Mexican society and government. Should Mexico continue to be governed by old boy (and now, old girl) networks, in which state offices and economic opportunities are meted out to the followers of powerful individuals? Or, should society be structured around a series of laws, in which state offices and economic opportunities are meted out to those who understand and adhere to a legal framework? For those who opt for the latter position, the supposed regularity of scientific laws resonates with the accountability people seek in the consistent application of state laws. In this way, scientific expertise parallels democratic, accountable government (although Mexico's environmental agencies have not been able to shake a history of patron-client ties or the use of inaccurate scientific information; see Mathews 2011).

Martínez-Reyes (This issue) shows that this idea of a scientific meritocracy has not left behind older forms of clientelism since both are present simultaneously. Despite acknowledging that biodiversity loss has reached a critical point, state and NGO experts do not appear willing to transcend social differences to craft enduring ecological solutions. In the same way, Doyon and Sabinot (This issue) demonstrate how ideas of meritocracy get translated into the application process for ICDPs in a way that they create both new opportunities and new constraints. Aid applicants frequently depend on state officials or private technicians (*técnicos*) to access and fill out aid applications, which require feasibility studies among other documentation. The result is a hybrid governmental form that combines aspects of both meritocracy and clientelism, with social exclusion as the main outcome (see also Durand et al. This issue).

This is just one way in which conservation in Mexico has served to increase contacts between state and citizenry. Another important consideration is the way protected areas can place government agents in formerly remote regions. Various authors in this special section base their work around the social outcomes that followed once paper parks became staffed and conservation activities become a reality. Notably, an expanded state presence provides rural residents the opportunity to make claims on the state. These claims often centre on livelihood issues, and on questions of social justice and the state's willingness to fulfil a social contract. In brief, rather than displace the state, Mexican conservation programs often provide a forum for discussing the structure of the state itself, as well as the appropriate relationship of different social groups to the state and to one another.

The environmental promise of cultural diversity

As we noted earlier, the authors in this special section employ thick descriptions that both shy away from theorising and allow for multiple theoretical interpretations. We consider this refusal to reduce complex socio-ecologies as a cautionary tale to researchers. By declining to close off their conclusions, the authors provide a looser discursive setting that increases the possibilities for crafting solutions to ecological dilemmas (Peterson et al. 2010). The commitment to ethnography bolsters non-capitalist approaches to environmental sustainability that seek to expand the conservation toolkit beyond protected areas (Escobar 1998). As anthropologists, the authors here retain that field's promise that alternative cultural worlds—located outside the state and on the margins of Mexican society—offer solutions to today's environmental problems.

This ethnographic approach lends a certain hopefulness to these papers, one arising from a particular crossroads that characterises present social science research on conservation, and especially the anthropology of conservation and society. On the one hand, researchers critique conservation institutions for not living up to the ideals of ecological protection. For some contributors to this collection, protected areas are places where policy-makers rope off bits and pieces of natural resources for conservation only to amass markedly unsustainable development around the borders of fragile ecosystems (Doyon and Sabinot This issue; Hoffman This issue). For others, conservation is a laudable goal, one that would be strengthened if conservation institutions were less punitive, and recognised the valuable cultural institutions and preservation ideals that sit outside Western scientific, state-sponsored frameworks (Martínez-Reyes This issue). On the other hand, the authors of these papers worry that conservation institutions might live up to their ideals all too well. Durand et al. (This issue) describe conservation as a conflictive process, one marked by agrarian struggles, social exclusion, and, at its worst, human rights abuses. A few papers in this collection manage to combine both standpoints to express a deep ambivalence regarding conservation's social impacts. Doyon and Sabinot review conservation activities that, after decades, have failed to change the hearts and minds of local residents. The findings of Doyon and Sabinot (This issue) stand in contrast to Lee's (This issue) assessment that the failed ecotourism industry was compatible with the dominant neoliberal paradigm in Zapotitlán.

The hopefulness lingers because the ethnographies highlight this disjuncture rather than resolve it. We view the authors as committed to the preservation of biodiversity. They are, however, troubled by the conservation techniques currently being used in Mexico's biosphere reserves. In this sense, they offer some lessons for metropole conservation in the interest of crafting more practicable and just conservation strategies.

These lessons include misgivings regarding an overweening reliance on ecotourism as a financial rationale for conservation (Lee This issue). If ecotourism as a strategy is not successful in Mexico (with its long history of tourism development), it seems that its fundamental role in the conservation toolkit

needs rethinking. The papers also raise questions about protected areas as a one-size-fits-all kind of conservation programmes. Even in sites that have been subject to intense land-use development, alternative notions of natural resource management exist, and potential conservation allies continue to work without an audience or counterpart for their ideas (Martínez-Reyes This issue). Conservation programmes might see an influx of fresh ideas regarding natural resource management if they were more flexible.

A final lesson entails hesitation about the marketplace as a source of conservation solutions and a source of conservation analyses. The ethnographies in this special section show both state agents and the public look to one another for environmental management strategies—techniques that often include welfare and subsidy programs. We have already suggested why this demands a reconsideration of the state in analyses that otherwise emphasise neoliberal economies. We mention here another problem with locating conservation in Mexico's marketplace, namely that "there is no tradition of philanthropy in Mexico" outside a very limited circle of individuals (Stein de Levy 2007: 46). Consequently, in the world's 14th largest economy,⁵ where corruption is a common feature of both the state and the private sector,⁶ market activities have no strong counterweight in civil society organisations. In Mexico, conservation research and practice that look exclusively to the market are unlikely to find enduring environmental strategies. Environmental strategies that address social inequity are even less likely to arise from this setting. Instead, other theoretical and practical entry points are needed to achieve these goals.

In Mexico, both the state and the public agree that government institutions have a crucial, if highly contested, role in natural resource management. In Mexico, avoiding the state, either in practice or in research analyses, is not an option. As we have indicated, the state is not a unitary or united entity. As a result, the state's role in conservation, alongside its relationship to market practices and ideologies, must be considered carefully. To close, we notice, along with the papers presented here, that often this kind of detailed examination reveals another social world—the grassroots or popular culture groups. This grassroots movement is not the civil society envisioned as comprising NGO participants and their advocates. Instead, these actors include, among others, *ejido* members, small-scale resource users, local intellectuals who catalogue regional biota, small business owners, and (the largest group of all) people seemingly unconnected to the conservation apparatus but whose daily activities profoundly affect biodiversity preservation. Rather than obscure their agency, research on the state-economy nexus can bring this amorphous grassroots movement into sharper focus, thereby delineating conservation's social context at its broadest points.

NOTES

1. Maxwell, K. Unpublished manuscript. Beyond nature/culture and global/local: sources and circulations of Peruvian protected area policy.

2. According to World Bank estimates. See <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/mexico/overview>. Accessed on February 18, 2013.
3. For OECD information on income inequality in 2011, see <http://www.oecd.org/els/soc/49499779.pdf>. Accessed on February 18, 2013.
4. The human rights centre *Centro de Derechos Humanos Fray Bartolomé de las Casas A.C.* maintains an online archive of bulletins regarding events at Montes Azules. See <http://www.frayba.org.mx>. Accessed on December 12, 2012.
5. According to World Bank estimates. See <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD>. Accessed on December 12, 2012.
6. Respondents to Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index assigned a score of 34 to Mexico, "on a scale of 0 - 100, where 0 means that a country is perceived as highly corrupt and 100 means it is perceived as very clean." See <http://cpi.transparency.org/cpi2012/results/>. Accessed on December 12, 2012.

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