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The Good, the Bad, and the Contradictory: Neoliberal Conservation Governance in Rural Southeast Asia

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Summary. — The logic of the market economy increasingly informs the design and the outcomes of conservation in the developing world. This paper uses case studies from Thailand and the Philippines to investigate this changing conservation landscape and argues first that such conservation governance does not abandon but rather rearticulates forms of coercive conservation and second that the particular manifestations of neoliberal conservation are shaped by the national policies, local histories, and livelihoods of recipient communities. The conclusion asserts that market-based conservation governance may constrain as well as support farmer freedom to pursue particular livelihoods, resulting in contradictory outcomes for neoliberal conservation governance.
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1. INTRODUCTION

The logic of the market economy increasingly informs the motives, design, and outcomes of conservation policy and practice near protected areas in the developing world. International donors, governments, and NGOs have supposedly moved on from coercive conservation to identify and fund community-based initiatives that offer “win-win” market-based solutions for livelihood support and forest conservation (Damania & Hatch, 2005; Büscher, 2008). The move toward community-based conservation coincided, perhaps not coincidentally, with a general global neoliberal¹ turn to produce what can be referred to as neoliberal conservation governance, the contours of which go beyond mere market-based conservation to include a triumphalist faith in market mechanisms to solve conservation dilemmas and the devolution of conservation authority. Recent research has begun to show, however, that rather than replacing coercive forms of conservation, emerging forms of devolved neoliberal conservation have rearticulated older modes of governance, incorporating farmers into livelihood programs that have them intensify to produce more commodities with fewer resources (Heynen, McCarthy, Prudham, & Robbins, 2007; Nevins & Peluso, 2008). The political economic processes that drive neoliberal conservation have rural farmers intensifying commodity production as a way of generating incentives to abandon extensive land uses that clear forests.

Those interrogating neoliberal conservation have generated two persistent narratives—“the good”: increased democratization along with benefits going to rational economic actors, and “the bad”: negative impacts further stratifying and subordinating marginal farmers—the perpetuation of which obscures how and why local actors negotiate neoliberal conservation. While several scholars have described how local peoples’ perceptions of and responses to market-based interventions can enable and or constrain livelihood aspirations (Batterbury,

2001; Igoe & Brockington, 2007), many are only now examining how and why farmers negotiate the range of influences from neoliberal conservation governance in Southeast Asia (Li, 2008; Nevins & Peluso, 2008). As Zerner (2000, p. 6) argues, a better understanding of the increased presence of markets in environmental governance lies in investigating the “kinds of markets that are being promoted, the power relationships and the links between global, national, regional, and ‘local’ levels of articulation, and the consequences of market insertion in specific contexts.” We build on Zerner’s call by considering the contingent character of commodities, that is, how and why people relate with material things in social, cultural, and economic terms when they are produced as commodities in the name of neoliberal conservation (Tsing, 2008). How, for example, do local farmers respond to the ways in which new conservation strategies rework, rather than abandon, old conservation strategies in line with market-oriented agendas? Answering this question will help interrogate these contradictory narratives of neoliberal conservation.

We examine how political-economic relations affect neoliberal conservation policy and agrarian change at the national and local level in Southeast Asia. Rather than considering the impacts of earlier market-based initiatives and now neoliberal conservation as absolute in character—either uniformly

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good or bad—we consider the latter’s genealogy under earlier, centralized coercive and recently, devolved neoliberal approaches through the changing national and local level contexts in the Philippines and Thailand. While we acknowledge that the broader processes influencing neoliberal conservation govern farmers to produce more with less for markets, we argue that such conservation manifests itself in terms of on-the-ground negotiations between the individuals, families, and communities who engage such interventions. Local farmers and practitioners engage neoliberal conservation governance according to diverse social relations, ethnic politics, and livelihood strategies that are mediated and constrained by broader discursive practices (Peet & Watts, 2004; Tsing, 2008). Thus, while the contours of neoliberal conservation are observable, we do not assume there to be an absolute, fixed set of neoliberal characteristics in all places at all times, but rather a messy moshpit of market-based factors based in political economic conditions, past and present. This is, then, an investigation into a “neoliberalization” coproduced through discursive processes (Peck & Tickell, 2002; Brosius, Tsing, & Zerner, 2005) and the specificity of places, rather than an investigation into a perfect type of neoliberal conservation (Castree, 2008).

The first section reviews the global turn toward neoliberal conservation as the necessary context for conservation governance in the Philippines and Thailand. The second section examines how neoliberal conservation has emerged in the two countries and describes how local resource users negotiated the varied outcomes of such conservation on their livelihoods. The third section discusses and concludes that the way neoliberal conservation unfolds in practice is contingent upon the specificity of place-based histories, lived experiences, and local conditions.

2. THE DUAL MARKET TURN: AGRARIAN CHANGE AND NEOLIBERAL CONSERVATION

The global conservation debate has been preoccupied with the issue of how to approach the “problem” of people residing within or near protected areas. Proponents of state-led conservation have feared that the poverty of people located near parks causes them to over exploit natural resources for subsistence and commercial purposes, threatening the ecological viability of parks and protected areas (Soule & Lease, 1995; Terborgh, 1999, 2000). Strictly regulating how people used resources or removing them altogether from protected areas was, and often still is, considered the most efficient and effective way to preserve nature (Brechin, Wilshusen, Fortwangler, & West, 2003). Such conservation practice has involved establishing parks, reducing land available for rural people, putting constraints on their activities, and enforcing a particular vision of nature on rural communities (Agrawal & Redford, 2009; Dressler, 2006; Neumann, 1995; Roth, 2008; West & Brechin, 1991).² These political actions alone rely on markets passively: the reduction of land for farmers has contributed to the need to intensify agriculture and has led farmers to turn to market-oriented strategies to make ends meet. The outcomes have been ambiguous, with some farmers shaping markets in conservation contexts for the pursuit of livelihood goals, while failing to do so, producing stratification and conflict (e.g., Brockington & Igoe, 2006; West & Brechin, 1991; Sato, 2000).

Opponents of coercive conservation assert that “fences and fines” have failed to achieve management objectives. Restricting access, they argue, simply led to sustained poaching and/or direct resistance against park authorities, invariably leading to a decline in natural resources (Brandon & Wells, 1992; Kull,

2002; Adams *et al.*, 2004). Many scholars and practitioners have likewise argued that resource-dependant peoples in developing countries were suffering unnecessarily because they were not primarily responsible for resource degradation and, given the right conditions and ideal intervention, could actually help protect natural resources (see Berkes, 1989, 2007; Western & Wright, 1994). These arguments have led to schemes meant to better incorporate conservation with development including integrated conservation and development schemes, community-based conservation and extractive reserves (Browder, 1992). Yet such projects have equally experienced unclear outcomes and resulted in skepticism among many about their ability to contribute to effective conservation through development (Terborgh, van Schaik, Davenport, & Rao, 2002).

In the wake of these approaches are calls for new market-based solutions to help bridge conservation and development (Pagiola, Arcenas, & Platais, 2005; Wunder, 2008). Planners have moved quickly to bridge community-based conservation with market-based solutions that pull local users into new modes of active intensification that use fewer, higher value goods (Damania & Hatch, 2005). Conservation organizations and governments, instead of passively relying on market-based structures, actively promote market-oriented projects such as ecotourism and high value agriculture hoping that economic reliance upon healthy ecosystems, coupled with higher incomes, will reduce the livelihood pressures on park resources. An important development has been the rise of projects aimed at compensating landowners for the provision of ecosystem services (e.g., FAO, 2004; Pagiola *et al.*, 2005), the popularity of which promises to make markets central to the conservation policy of remote regions (e.g., the World Agroforestry Center’s “Reward Upland People for Ecosystem Services” program (Hangrove & Chandler, 2004.) Most major environmental NGOs also have programs dealing with market-oriented conservation initiatives; markets, in true neoliberal form, are now seen as the panacea to our social and environmental ills.

Most striking is how neoliberalism and conservation have merged in policy and practice through devolved initiatives, otherwise known as hybrid neo-liberalism: the bridging of free market enterprise and civil society ideals with community-based conservation (McCarthy, 2005). The concept refers to the consistency between neo-liberalism and devolved environmental governance where faith in the flexibility of markets and civil society is mutually supportive in meeting the supplies and demands of financial matters, conservation, and local responses (McCarthy, 2005). New hybrid forms of community-based conservation build on this discourse by expecting the benefits of markets to “trickle down” to rural communities. In this new era of neoliberal conservation governance, resource users rapidly enter into new, globalized capitalist markets where the things they once produced for domestic reproduction have new property rights assigned to them as they are transformed into commodities for markets owned by others (Nevels & Peluso, 2008). As local users are incorporated into neoliberal conservation they bear witness to how their social relations and relations with nature become reconstituted according to the structures of the free market, private property, and individual freedoms (Harvey, 2005, p. 2).

In Southeast Asia the unfolding of active neoliberal conservation has also become part of larger trends indicative of the agrarian transition—a process whereby regional and national economies move from being predominantly agricultural and rural to predominantly industrial and urban (Cramb *et al.*, 2009). Regional neoliberal conservation and national agrarian policies have merged to steer this transition by resettling

uplanders to the lowlands, replacing shifting agriculture with intensified, sedentary farming practices, and or directly incorporating smallholders into market-based activities (Saito *et al.*, 2006; Rigg, 2006). Working through national agrarian policies and market structures, those implementing neoliberal conservation have influenced farmers to intensify commodity production in order to make them less dependent upon extensive agriculture and resource extraction that supposedly depletes forests. Southeast Asian landscapes once peripheral to market activity are now, at a very fast pace, being governed through various local, regional, and global market processes. The implications of this are becoming known, but still remain unclear.

We examine how these broader processes emerge as modal forms of neoliberal conservation that become rearticulated in specific places according to local conditions and landscape characteristics (Castree, 2008, p. 134). Such an analytical perspective allows us to move beyond the enduring polemic of neoliberal conservation manifesting itself as either “good” or “bad” for nature and society in the developing world. We consider how the political economic drivers of neoliberal conservation move through national policies and practice, and how local histories, lived experiences, and livelihoods affect the outcomes of such interventions.

3. CONTRASTING MARKET-BASED STRATEGIES IN THE RURAL PHILIPPINES AND THAILAND

Contemporary conservation strategies in the rural Philippines and Thailand represent different modes of neoliberal conservation and, as the case studies demonstrate, rural people negotiate the opportunities and constraints presented by such governance in distinct ways. Both countries, however, share a history of coercive conservation strategies, the development of more community-oriented conservation associated with a strengthening civil society and an emergence of certain neoliberal policies aimed at both encouraging the spread of market activity into rural areas and at the devolution of responsibility associated with conservation. In both cases, a key element of conservation policy, both in its earlier coercive form and in its more recent community-based form, is the elimination of swidden cultivation directly as well as indirectly through markets. As we show, the promotion of market strategies to cope with the reduction of land associated with swidden eradication has now become the cornerstone of neoliberal conservation governance in both the Philippines and Thailand.

(a) *Market-based conservation on Palawan, the Philippines*³

Centuries of Philippine conservation centered on coercion where enforcement restricted peoples’ access to and use of forest resources. Centralized, coercive conservation had its roots in Spanish (1521–1898) and American Colonial (1902–45) control over public lands, timber, and land uses. Carried over until the demise of Marcos’ dictatorship (1965–86), such coercive conservation was situated in and drew on markets passively to inform policy and practice in rural areas. Civil society’s resistance to such oppressive governance culminated in the first “people power” revolution disrupting Marcos’ reign of tyranny. In the late 1980s, a surge of devolved, people-oriented programs apparently replaced earlier conservation approaches (Utting, 2000). Yet while many suggest this policy shift was for “the people,” the on the ground reality often suggests otherwise. The planners of devolved conservation have drawn on

markets actively to rearticulate older ways of regulating farmer behavior in line with market-based incentives to conserve forests.

Such market-oriented conservation has been particularly pronounced at Palawan Island’s flagship protected area, the Puerto Princesa Subterranean River National Park. Government politicians, park officials, and NGOs in Puerto Princesa City, the island’s capital, have used market-based conservation to replace the swidden agriculture of the indigenous Tagbanua and Batak people with intensified commodity production that is integrated with the economies of a mixed group of migrant paddy farmers. Conservation practitioners have tried hard to erase “dirty” swidden landscapes in traditional use zones by using market-based initiatives to incorporate upland farmers into intensification schemes in the multiple use zones of the lowlands. The objective is to wean uplanders off of subsistence practices to maintain the landscape esthetics that actively draw developers and tourists who consume the very objects they seek to conserve.

(i) *The advent of market-based conservation*

Ferdinand Marcos’ Presidential Proclamation 835 declared Puerto Princesa (then St. Paul’s) Subterranean River National Park official in 1971 (Figure 1). The national park was set at 3901 ha, with foresters strictly enforcing boundaries against swidden, arresting and jailing Tagbanua farmers (Dressler, 2009). While upland livelihoods were heavily regulated, migrant farmers settling in the 1950s faced few restrictions clearing forest for swidden and paddy in the fertile lowlands overlapping with park boundaries. Initial migrants settled from 1950 to 1980 for similar reasons, hiring their own and Tagbanua labor to clear forest and expand paddy rice fields along the market road, pushing indigenous harvesters to the uplands. Migrants gradually capitalized their farming practices to reap 2–3 harvests annually as Tagbanua were drawn into unequal commodity relations. Paddy farm homesteads and infrastructure grew, reaching the coastal *sito* (village) of Sabang, supporting tourism at the now world famous Underground River. The drive to marginalize swidden and intensify lowland production for sustained surplus, economic benefit and political authority supported a national park ideal of modern, productive landscapes.

On Palawan Island, after Marcos’ fall, government agencies and NGOs exposed human rights abuses and extensive logging on indigenous lands (Vitug, 1993; Vitug, 2000; Eder & Fernandez, 1996), drawing on and incorporating integrated conservation and development with pre-existing markets and, later, actively pursuing community-based conservation and tourism markets to help stabilize swidden for fear of deforestation. The DENR and NGOs soon introduced a new concept to the Tagbanua and Batak people: added market-value. The hope was that new income would offset the need for farmers to clear forest for timber.

In the late 1980s, the national DENR promoted market-based solutions by devolving park management to meet community livelihood needs. With the country’s first Debt-for-Nature Swap (DNS—US \$2 million) in 1988—where debt notes were swapped for financial support to conserve rain forests—the DENR offices on Palawan and World Wildlife Fund (WWF) Philippines secured major funds for improving livelihoods through integrated conservation and development, particularly community-based micro-enterprise initiatives (Pinto, 1999). These interventions sought to integrate swidden farmers into non-timber commodity chains and tree cropping, whereas paddy farmers consolidated larger, fertile land holdings, and received support for infrastructure

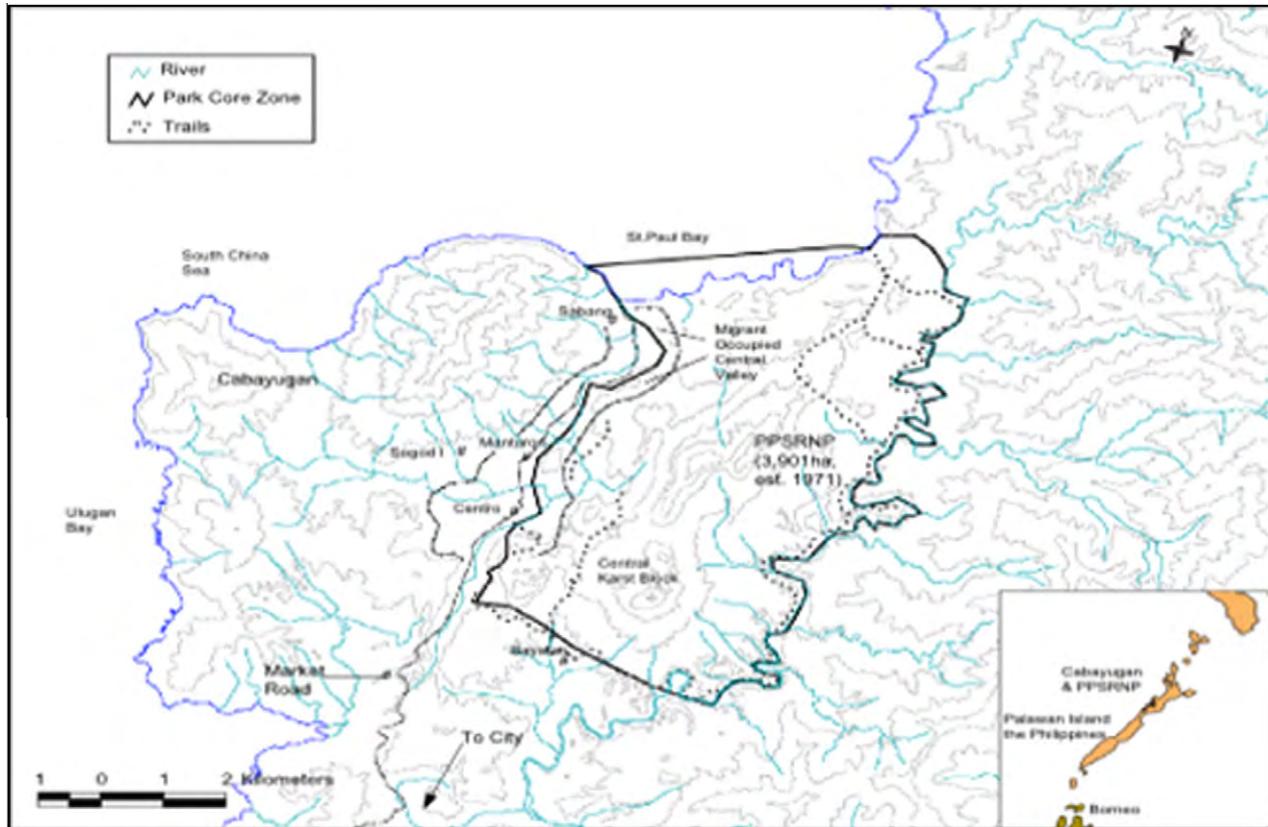


Figure 1. Puerto Princesa (the St Paul's) Subterranean River National Park (3901) (before 1999) (Dressler, 2009).

along the main feeder road and the port tourism *sitio* of Sabang.

(ii) *Emerging commodity landscapes*

Puerto Princesa City's local politics and conservation rhetoric fed off one another, drawing on preservationist ideals through community-based conservation via policies and market-based initiatives. During research in 2001, the City Mayor, provincial officers, and NGO community made it clear that, in addition to national level policy, Palawan needed its own legislative framework and that Puerto Princesa City needed to become an eco 'hot spot'. In the early 1990s, several national, provincial, and local laws supported a stronger push toward market-driven conservation in the ancestral lands of the Tagbanua and Batak people. At the national level, the Local Government Code (Sibal, 2001), Departmental Administrative Order No. 2, Indigenous Peoples Rights Act (1997), and National Integrated Protected Areas Strategy Act (1992) offered the state and local government new zoning platforms for interventions that nudged swidden farmers toward intensified cash cropping. At the level of Palawan Province, the Palawan Council of Sustainable Development and City Government of Puerto Princesa (Palawan's Provincial Capital)—to whom the national DENR had devolved park management authority—used the Strategic Environmental Plan's (1992) zoning system, the Environmentally Critical Area Network, to regulate indigenous peoples' harvest of non-timber forest products and swidden agriculture.⁴

Upon devolution, the City Mayor, Edward Hagedorn, set out to glorify the national park and the island's status of 'last ecological frontier' as leverage for his own green political cam-

paign. The Mayor's ideal of how Puerto should be—clean, green, and free of dirty swiddens—was to embolden his campaign and lure tourists to the national park. Surging with political power, the Mayor, his Council, and the City Protected Area Management Board (PAMB) issued new policy controls over burning for swidden in order to keep the forests flanking the road to the park intact and green for tourism markets. The City Council's efforts resulted in two ordinances—known locally as anti- and controlled burning measures—that curbed swidden among Tagbanua and Batak, inducing hunger and discontent (Dressler, 2009). These measures supported the Mayor's strategy of merging environmentalist rhetoric with devolved market-based governance to support politics and tourism in Sabang near the Underground River.

By now the Mayor-PAMB team had consolidated full control over the national park. In 1999, his team successfully nominated the national park a UNESCO World Heritage Site, amending zoning provisions for Presidential Proclamation 212, sealing boundary expansion from 3,901 ha to 22,202 ha (Figure 2). The City's political jurisdiction and management boundaries now defined the national park's internal organs, influencing the type of livelihood programs unfolding there according to the Strategic Environmental Plan's management zones. The "Core Zone," in typical fashion prohibited agriculture and commercial resource uses, whereas "traditional use zones" engulfed the Tagbanua and Batak ancestral domain claims (CADC) secured through the IPRA (1997). Here, projects sought to stabilize, intensify, or market traditional activities on marginal lands (i.e., swidden). "Multiple use" zones wrapped around these areas to accommodate intensive agriculture on prime lands, associated infrastructure,

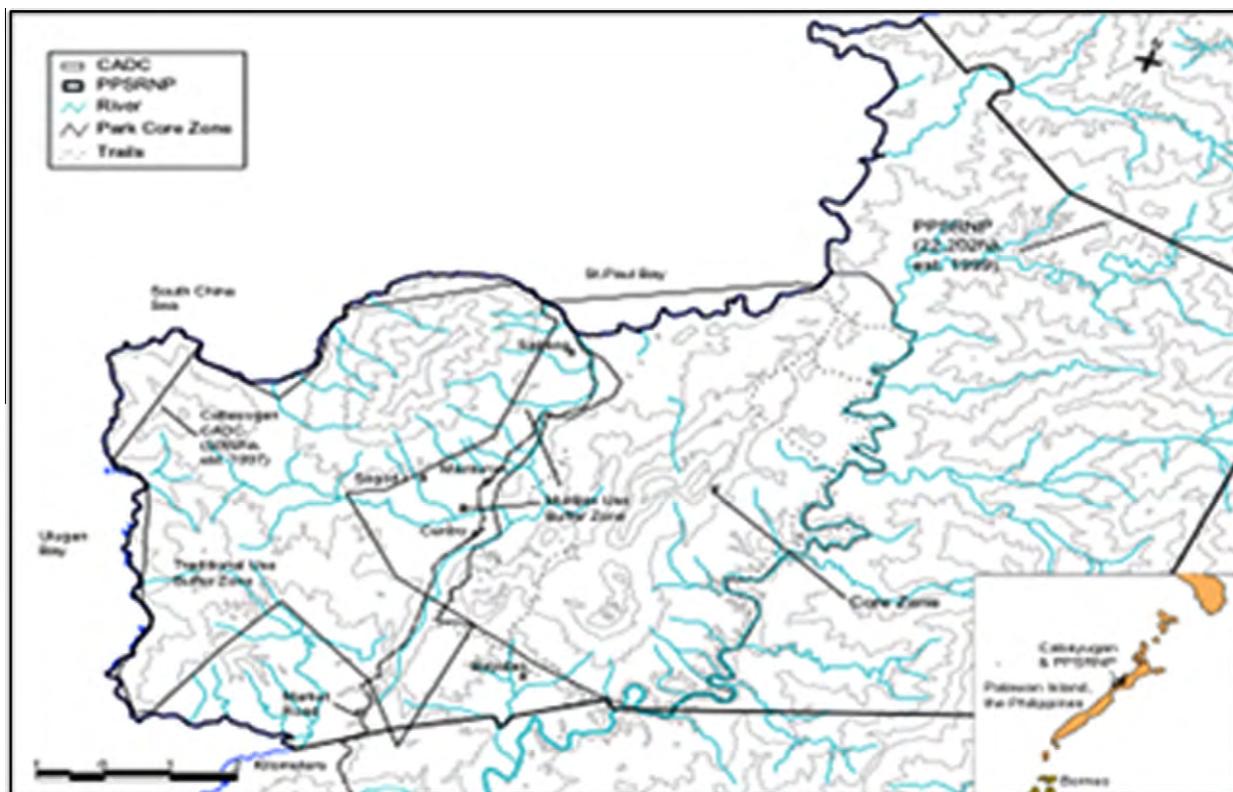


Figure 2. The traditional and multiple use buffer zones in Puerto Princesa Subterranean River National Park (22,202 ha) overlapping with Tagbanua ancestral lands and the main tourism port town of Sabang (Dressler, 2009).

and, increasingly, small-scale businesses and tourism in Sabang. NIPAS Act zoning overlapped with these zones, further defining how livelihood support unfolded at the national park. Active market integration for conservation and development was now well underway.

(iii) *Intensifying livelihoods in traditional use zones*

While projects in multiple use zones supported paddy farming and small scale businesses, with revenue from the former supporting the latter, and the selling of lands for small and larger development, interventions in the traditional use zone (Figure 2) set out to stabilize swiddens by reducing rotational cycles with sedentary, commercial agriculture, and or alternative livelihood schemes.

In 1995, the Palawan Council for Sustainable Development, Republic of the Philippines, and European Union entered into a Financing Memorandum to support the Palawan Tropical Forest Protection Programme (PTFPP) in conserving the island's remaining forests. The PTFPP set out to pursue its objectives in traditional use zones through community-based catchment management plans whereby "unsustainable" agriculture (read: swidden) would be stabilized by adding "market value" by converting fields to agro-forestry plots with lucrative tree crops. In just four years, over 15 agroforestry related projects were unleashed in Tagbanua villages within the "traditional spaces" of the national park. Programme staff planted thousands of fruit trees and tropical hardwoods with market demand within the swiddens of Tagbanua farmers. The PTFPP program list describes the projects: "coffee nursery," "mango induction initiatives" to enhance "income generation from a continuous supply of mangos," or under "agro-for-

estry" and "fruit tree production" to 'establish 1.4 ha of fruit tree orchards with 20 participants' and "set up 2 ha of high value fruit tree orchards with 20 participants..." In 2008–09, Dressler's field visits confirmed that most, if not all, tree crops were planted in recently fallowed swiddens, converting regenerating forest fallows into bushy orchards from which crops would be sold in pre-existing and emerging markets. The outcomes of such intensification schemes have been far from optimal. In some cases, land endowed ("wealthier") Tagbanua who planted several hectares to one species (e.g., cashew) benefitted by selling raw and processed fruits to wealthier migrants and store owners in towns nearby, but, in the end, lost swidden lands to mixed-orchards that could not be cleared and burned.

The Mayor's rhetoric and market-based programs have profoundly impacted local swidden practices. In contrast to 2001, when Tagbanua farmers were clearing and burning fields, most indigenous farmers in the wider Cabayugan area now spoke of swidden farming with great apprehension. In 2009, when asked if they still cultivated swidden, most Tagbanua farmers responded by saying: "*Hinda pa, nag sarip-sarip, nag-damo lang,*" meaning "*not us, we only clean and weed [the same field] by hand,*" underbrushing their fields without a long fallow. When asked why they discontinued swidden, most stated that they knew it was prohibited and feared persecution from (usually) migrant park rangers. One Tagbanua farmer mentioned: "*We only plant cassava, banana, and mangos in our fields now. I don't do kaingin [swidden] anymore. The cutting of big trees is prohibited, so we plant trees in our fields; we plant the crops given to us by the City, like cacao, also banana. We're supposed to sell these.*" These excerpts reflect more than a

dozen related comments by Batak and Tagbanua farmers who now fear clearing in mature forest and feel the need to be “productive” citizens.

The PTFPP initiative was just the beginning. In 2007, the Mayoral NGO, the Tagbalay Foundation established a nursery of 100s of seedlings of indigenous fruit trees and hardwoods that, as with the PTFPP, would be planted in swidden fallows. In 2008, Nestle Incorporated and the City Agriculturist’s office provided Cacao seedlings for planting in recent swidden fallows. In 2009, through the UNDP-COMPACT programme (the Community Management of Protected Areas for Conservation) the NGO, Haribon Palawan, set out to implement an irrigation scheme for several hectares of newly established paddy fields for Tagbanua. The project was to provide Tagbanua with high-yielding seeds and farming capital with which to enhance production in order to sell surplus rice in local and City markets. In the process, paddy fields were to be converted from older fallow swidden plots comprised of mature forest, plots which other Tagbanua and migrants may have already claimed. In contrast, Batak would voluntarily adopt an agroforestry initiative, which sought to stabilize swiddens with tree crops for sale in markets nearby. While some wealthier Tagbanua have accessed and used flat land and capital for enhanced paddy rice production and sustained tree crop yields, history has shown that very few Tagbanua and Batak have adopted paddy rice and agroforestry with any great success (Eder, 1987; Dressler, 2009). Then as now, an array of market-oriented projects have tried to enhance indigenous farmers’ incomes as an incentive for them to clear less forest for subsistence.

(iv) *Commodity landscapes in multiple use zones*

In multiple use zones, park managers and planners supported state, NGO, and private sector investments in projects that drew on markets assertively, boosting the (1) productivity of paddy rice, (2) the securing of private title, small scale businesses, and then (3) larger tourism development. In each case, those responsible for coordinating market-based conservation went through the ownership and access channels of migrant groups—the very channels first spurring on intensification. Project outcomes reinforced the historical trend of settlers exploiting market-oriented intensification in multiple use areas, further marginalizing indigenous farmers in the uplands.

(1) Park-based livelihood projects supported migrant paddy rice by maintaining water flows, nutrient inputs, high-yielding seeds, farm implements, and market outlets for rice sales and other business opportunities. The UNDP-COMPACT programmes first implemented in 2004 offered NGO and state actors direct funds with which to support paddy rice intensification and employment in wage labor. Receiving COMPACT support, for example, the migrant-operated Cabayugan Underground River Multipurpose Cooperative invested heavily in high-yielding rice varieties for paddy rice in the hope that yields would increase “by over 60% while reducing pollution in the river” (UNDP, 2004, p. 26). Moreover, 30% of migrant household heads interviewed were part of the associated Farmer Cooperative, which provided technical assistance, credit, and infrastructure support to paddy rice and vegetable farmers. If farmers applied collectively and held private title as collateral, the Coop granted them cash loans of PhP 35,000 (US \$729) for enhanced rice production.

(2) The ability of migrants to receive capital injections from market-oriented livelihood projects was because many had, or were in the process of, securing private title in the Sabang area. Private title ensured they had collateral for loans and the ten-

ure (fee simple and rented) upon which to build outlets that catered to local and foreign tourists. The new *Land Amortization Management Project* supported by the City and national park facilitated unresolved (private) land titling for migrants on territory the Tagbanua once occupied. Most of the migrant farmers who were interviewed stated they were keen to claim more title and to resolve boundary disputes. As it stood, however, there was little vacant land left to claim, with prominent Cebuano and Bulinao farmers owning much of the land suitable for agriculture and tourism. Drawing on the Property Identification Map of Sabang, a survey of the ethnicity of those farmers who secured private title on the Tagbanua commons indicated that all but 2 of the 62 private land owners were migrants (*of the total land area, a Tagbanua mother and son owned 7.6 of 496 ha of private land, 1.5% of all private title*). The acquisition of private title enabled migrant farmers to expand production, invest in small general stores, and develop other businesses that catered to Sabang’s tourism market.

(3) Wealthier migrants from Cebu and Pangasinan benefited further from market-based conservation through the economic investments arising from the City Mayor’s campaign to make the national park and its Underground River an international tourism destination. Since the park’s WHS declaration in 1999, tourism numbers have boomed (from 39,979 visitors in 1997 to 93,438 in 2009), leading to the concreting of the main market road, the rise of several new foreign and domestically owned restaurants and, more ominously, two large four star resorts—all built on Tagbanua land. First, migrants claimed Tagbanua usufruct holdings as private property with businesses and, second, they then sold their private holdings to wealthy business families from the City who erected the larger tourism resorts. With land and capital commodified, labor was the only outstanding item. Tragically, it was under-aged migrant and Tagbanua children who toiled away at the manufacture of hollow blocks for the resorts’ foundation at minimum wage (P150; US\$3.00). In 2008, the deputy Barangay Captain suggested the child labor issue had been taken to the City Government. The issue remains unresolved.

The above cases demonstrate that devolved market-based conservation has effectively supported the political and economic interests of those who are commodifying and intensifying different natural resources for rapidly emerging capitalist markets, particularly the translocal variety. While some upland farmers will have benefitted from such interventions, as in the Thai cases below, in most cases, neoliberal conservation has converged with agrarian change to fast-track broad-scale, landscape commodification in favor of the rural elite. The Thai case studies illustrate this further across social histories, cultures, and multiple localities.

(b) *Market-based conservation in Northern Thailand*⁵

In Thailand, coercion has long been the preferred mode of conservation, with particular consequences for the inhabited forests of Northern Thailand (Forsyth & Walker, 2008; Witiyapak, 2008). The Forest Protection and Reservation Act of 1938 established unoccupied land as property of the state, a law which was enforced beginning in 1958 during the military government of F.M Sarit (Peluso & Vandergeest, 2001). During the early 1960s, with the help of American officials, the Wildlife Conservation and Protection Act, the National Park Act, and the National Forest Reserve Act were all drafted and passed providing the basis for zoning which designated large areas of land as having use restrictions (Peluso & Vandergeest, 2001). The highland development plan of 1964–69 then targeted resident ethnic minority populations with the

primary goals of eliminating swidden, eradicating opium production, and instilling a feeling of loyalty to the Thai state (Luangaramsri, 2001). These initiatives were justified by characterizing ethnic minorities, or “hill tribes,” as uncivilized peoples and forest destroyers using outdated modes of cultivation; a characterization which continues to inform the policy and practice of conservation throughout the highlands today (Forsyth & Walker, 2008; Johnson & Forsyth, 2002).

The establishment and governance of protected areas over the past twenty years is, at best, accompanied by a considerable reduction in land used for agriculture, the elimination of swidden cultivation, and the introduction of fixed-field farming and, at worst, has driven people from their homes. This coercive style of conservation has not gone unopposed (Roth, 2004; Lohman, 1993). A strong domestic pro-poor movement and strengthening civil society has placed the rights of forest dwelling minorities and rural Thais more firmly on the agenda and a new tolerance, though no enthusiasm, for people living in and around protected areas has emerged, accompanied by a number of pilot programs in community-based conservation. For example, the Danish development agency funded an eleven park pilot project called JOMPA (Joint Management of Protected Areas) and the RFD has launched a now 26 park initiative titled “*The development of community participation in sustainable park management.*” The forestry department has thus largely abandoned overtly coercive policies (such as relocation, denial of electricity and road infrastructure) in favor of a softer range of tactics to deal with residents of national park lands. These softer strategies, however, do not represent a break from the goals of coercive conservation: a landscape with smaller and smaller territories of intensive farming and an insistence that farmers “do more with less.”

These changes in conservation governance have coincided with a populist national political agenda which, while developmentalist⁶ in many ways, also contains policies aimed expressly at the spread and strengthening of capitalist markets into once peripheral rural areas such as the highlands, a greater role for private enterprise, the decentralization of rural development funding and an increased constitutional right for local input into resource management. These policies have

set the framework for the emergence of neoliberal conservation governance. The most significant of these policies was the million-baht scheme⁷ which made available one million baht (approximately US \$30,000) for members of each village as one-year low interest loans. Released from a sole reliance on money lenders and with new access to low interest credit, villagers borrowed money to buy seed and agricultural inputs, motorcycles and pay for school tuition. Carrying debt, increasing numbers of rural households sought markets for agricultural goods and travelled to urban centers as low-wage workers. The increased mobility and market integration of rural residents coincided with a strong push by the government to increase the area of land in protected areas, resulting in increased market engagement for many who found their lands included in state-run conservation territories. The following examination of Mae Tho National Park shows how park and forestry department officials have passively relied upon, and at times actively promoted, emerging market opportunities as a means to compensate for livelihoods lost through conservation initiatives. Further, NGOs and residents themselves are increasingly taking on governance roles under the guise of community-based conservation.

(i) Mae Tho National Park

The Royal Forestry Department (RFD) decided to establish Mae Tho National Park (MTNP) in 1996 (Figure 3). About the same time, the forestry department signed a memorandum of understanding with an NGO to work with villagers located in the targeted zone on “community resource management.” The project’s goals were to help villagers establish a system of accountability for forest use including rules, penalties, and a watershed committee as a governance structure. They also distributed fruit trees, coffee trees, and helped with village improvements. By 1999, they began promoting private property and the elimination of swidden agriculture through the mapping of community agricultural land into household fields and mapping forest into watershed, community and conservation forest (Roth, 2007). These activities were meant to move the participating villagers toward the park director’s proposed “sustainable land use model” meant to curb what he saw as overly extensive land use. The model replaced swidden cultivation on

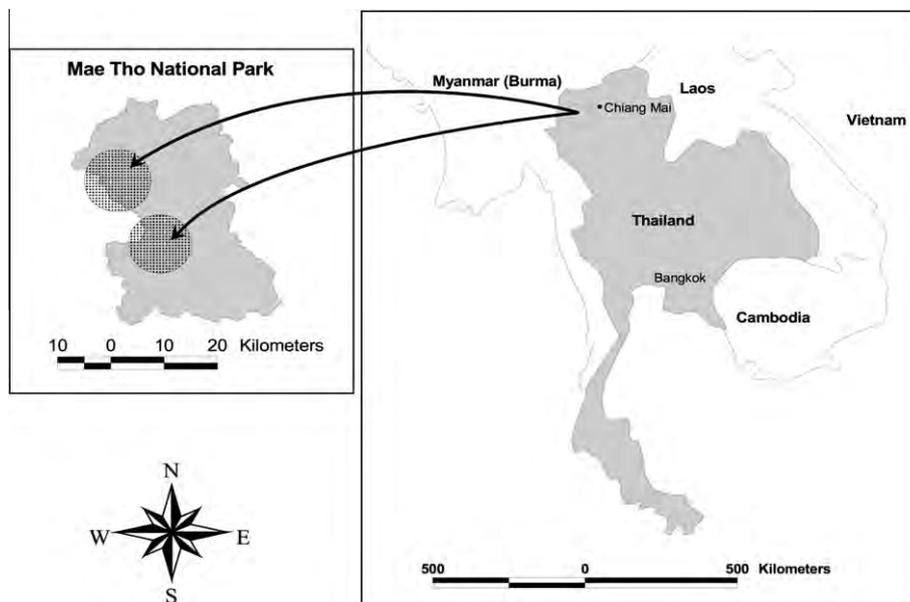


Figure 3. Location of Thai study site (top circle, Nira Village, bottom circle, Insom Village).

communal lands with fixed field cultivation on private lands with each family allocated four fields (as opposed to six or seven).

Faced with continued conflict in the region, the RFD started a project meant to 'develop community participation in sustainable park management'. The project overwhelmingly emphasizes ecological management with activities related to livelihood relegated to the active "promotion of economic aspects of conservation and tourism" and the "promotion of economic growth" (MTNP, 2003). Activities meant to change community livelihoods, such as the promotion of fish ponds, intensive crop production and soon—home-stay ecotourism, have been instituted. An interview in 2009 with the new park director indicates that he sees the project as successful because conflict has dissipated though land use is still more extensive than he would like. He remains hopeful that ecotourism will reduce the need for agriculture but believes that the villagers have a 'long way to go' before they are able to effectively serve tourists through safe and enjoyable home stays. The director is also hoping for the success of a pilot project in hydroponic agriculture that would not require land resources at all.

A related though separate initiative was the establishment of Om Phai Research Station in 2003 on land once slotted as part of MTNP. The station combines government units in fire suppression, forest conservation, soil conservation, irrigation, energy generation, livestock husbandry, and agricultural extension and works in various ways with neighboring villages. Outreach workers travel to villages located on the border of the park to promote coffee planting, integrated livestock rearing, raising laying chickens, irrigation, and, as part of the effort to eliminate shifting cultivation, the terracing of fields to aid in their conversion to fixed-field cultivation. Further, villagers can obtain day labor growing vegetables for market. In short, the station is encouraging the transition toward market-oriented livelihoods, recommending that fixed-field cultivation will allow for more intensive agricultural production, increased income, and thus, reduced demand for forest and land resources leading to more effective conservation.

(ii) *Livelihood intensification in Nira and Insom Villages*

Two communities of the Karen ethnic minority which have experienced a more than doubling of household income from 2001 to 2008 can serve as an example of how these initiatives are manifesting themselves locally. Nira Village (though not its forest) was cut out of the park in 2006 and has been receiving help from Om Phai station while Insom Village remains inside the park and has been the target of outreach from park staff and a Thai NGO. The active promotion of market-integration by the state and its partners along with the increased presence of private agribusiness and the individual desires of farmers can help explain the livelihood transitions. In contrast to the Philippine case, the Thai case reflects the creation of a commodity landscape as an end in itself, with the assertion that this landscape is compatible with forest conservation. The different ways these two communities have become greater participants in market-oriented livelihoods highlight how local histories, meanings, and culture merge with neoliberal economics and conservation policy to create unique commodity landscapes.

In Insom Village, where community members had generally cooperated with the establishment of the park by reducing the amount of household agricultural land to consist of 3–4 plots per household and by instituting the practice of private property, corn has taken root as the crop of choice. In 2005, an entrepreneur entered the village to promote growing feed corn and he guaranteed a price for the coming year. Facing a

slightly tentative audience, he brought the headman and four other community members to a village a couple of hours away to learn from them about their experience. After this introductory meeting, these five families decided to plant that season. By 2008, 75% of the households were planting corn and by 2009 that number was 89%. The money lender returns yearly with his mobile mill to purchase all the corn the community can plant. Other money making strategies in Insom Village include renting out upland fields to local farmers of the Hmong ethnic minority group for the growing of potatoes and temporary migration for the purposes of wage labor.

The primarily agricultural strategies of Insom Village were perhaps introduced by an entrepreneur but he found a willing audience—largely because of the transition the village had undergone in the wake of the park establishment. The reduction of farm land had resulted in low rice yields and a need to subsist on smaller plots of land. The arrival of corn (and the offer to rent land for potatoes) was well timed in that farmers were seeking ways of doing more with less. Further, because there had been a transition to private property, each farmer decided for him/herself whether or not to plant for sale instead of traditional collective decision-making. Since then, state extension agents coming to the village to promote fish ponds, coffee trees, and market crops have found many willing adopters. As one farmer explained "if it seems like a good idea, we'll try it."

In contrast, Nira village has not rapidly embraced agricultural intensification. They resisted the 'sustainable land use model' promoted by the park, maintained 6 fields per household and continued to manage the majority of their agricultural land collectively. Their resistance led to portions of their village territory being partially excised from the park and they have since become a target of the Om Phai research station, receiving regular visits from the outreach workers promoting subsidized terracing of shifting cultivation fields (effectively turning them into fixed cultivation plots), coffee production, rearing of laying chickens, and fish ponds. The village response to this has been to have one family to take on these suggestions as a pilot project for one year and then to report back to the community with a suggestion as to whether other households might want to attempt some of these suggestions. There is suspicion among the village leadership regarding the motives of Om Phai. As one leader explained in 2009 "Om Phai insists we can have padi rice fields here but I don't think we have enough water. I think they want to subsidize the creation of terraces and padi fields just so we'll stop swidden cultivation, not because it will actually work." The park's plan to replace swidden with fixed plot cultivation is not moving quickly in this community.

The increased incomes experienced in Nira Village are thus not the result of agricultural intensification but rather result from increased off-farm labor. Community members have found themselves in greater debt due to the million baht scheme and have sought to maintain their higher standard of living while paying back their loans. Young adults regularly migrate to the city for a few years prior to marriage working in restaurants and factories, and older, married adults, often get work picking fruit or on government sponsored infrastructure projects for a few weeks or a month at a time.

Insom Village has transitioned more rapidly into what the park director sees as acceptable land use in part because community members are, as a whole, more comfortable with risk and change. This emerges from a long history of being the target of development initiatives and of being located near one of the primary opium substitution sites of the 1970s. They have, both individually and collectively, been exposed to market-based

livelihood strategies for much longer than have villagers from Nira. Conversely, Nira Village, as a whole, is much more tentative about change to their agricultural system—they have less exposure to market-based agriculture and have not had the development assistance accorded to Insom Village. These contrasting cultures are compounded by the different reactions to park establishment. Insom Villagers, in their willingness to cooperate, reduced the amount of land available for agriculture and created a much more urgent need to alter their agricultural system to compensate for lost yields. Nira Villagers, in contrast, maintained much of their agricultural land, allowing for a slower transition. In both villages, there are individuals and families better positioned to take advantage of emerging opportunities, either in agriculture or in wage labor resulting in both ‘successful’ and ‘unsuccessful’ transitions to market-based livelihood. Further, the production of a conservation landscape has had various degrees of success. The park management is ironically unhappy with corn as it provides incentive to clear more land while they continue to be displeased with the shifting cultivation of Nira Village. Insom has experienced an overall increase in forest quality, however, while Nira Village has maintained forest cover and quality.

Villager experiences at Mae Tho National Park suggest the convergence of conservation practice promoting market-oriented livelihood change and neoliberal state policies supporting local resource commodification and intensification facilitating agrarian change. Regardless of whether these interventions are embraced by local communities, state actors and NGOs continue to manage farmer behavior to eradicate swidden and promote intensive agriculture for an emerging tertiary sector in rural areas, thus, rearticulating earlier forms of coercive conservation. However, local history and life experience give shape to the particular landscape transitions associated with the above initiatives.

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Our paper shows that, in two different parts of Southeast Asia, the current neoliberal turn influencing community-based conservation has come to regulate farmer behavior in ways deemed consistent with earlier, coercive forms of conservation. Although Thailand and the Philippines have very different histories, we find that neoliberalism has arisen to rearticulate coercive measures through community-based conservation with striking similarities. First, the Thai and Philippine states have throughout the post-war period drawn on ideology, finances, and personnel to demarcate protected areas around upland forests to ensure farmers and forest users limit their use of natural resources. Since the 1960s, both countries’ state agencies drew on earlier conservation discourse to coercively protect forests from “forest hungry” swidden farmers in order to guarantee timber stands for export, to plant hardwoods and other crops for market sales and, more recently, to maintain forest landscapes for esthetics that support markets. Second, with managers becoming aware that coercive conservation achieved limited success and was supposedly held in disregard, managers and local organizations pushed for community-based conservation in both countries demonstrating a new found tolerance toward people living in and around timber reserves and protected areas. Drawing on the populist rhetoric of “joint forest management,” “community-based,” and “participatory” conservation, it seemed that indigenous peoples and other local farmers were given political and economic spaces in which to cultivate swidden and pursue other livelihood activities as necessary. Yet what many activists saw as

an integrated approach to achieving poverty reduction and conservation, turned out to be a new tool through which the state could compel farmers to sedentarize and intensify production—clarifying their relationships with nature. Managers hoped that farmers would generate commodity surplus, sustain cash incomes from fewer value added resources or business enterprises, and thus offset the need to harvest forest resources and or cultivate lands extensively. In both countries, the community conservation mantra became “do more with less.”

The outcomes of accelerated market-oriented conservation in both regions cut through the two competing analytical perspectives described in the introduction, that is, benefits going to rational economic actors or the marginalization of victims of progress. In both cases, we see that how such conservation manifests itself varies depending on how local conditions unfold in terms of ethnic politics, livelihood change, and contrasting experiences. In the Philippines, the ability of migrants and indigenous peoples to negotiate neoliberal conservation is influenced by a long, complex history. The inability of poor Tagbanua and migrants to derive benefits from market-based interventions stems from a history of wealthy members in each group controlling production and exchange relations as agrarian change and conservation initiatives merge. Wealthier farmers who control the access channels to productive resources affect the ability of the poor to negotiate the myriad ways in which agrarian change and neoliberal conservation reinforce one another. Yet one also sees the differentiated character of neoliberalism as “marginal” farmers sometimes successfully negotiate and benefit from active market-based conservation. In the end, however, market-based conservation has spurred on capitalist development among migrant farmers who are able to engage in commercial activities (e.g., tourism) that support conservation, while, at the same time, having indigenous swidders intensify production for markets linked with lowland development.

In Thailand, we see how two different communities have negotiated the affect of neoliberal conservation in various ways, shapes, and forms. Both villages are Karen and arguably equally marginalized in the Thai political-economy. Nira Village, however, has had less exposure to market processes and has displayed a reluctance to change their land use but chose instead to integrate more fully into labor markets. In contrast, Insom villagers largely embrace the risk and change involved in accepting the conditions of livelihood programs advocating for fix-plot farming, intensifying agriculture on smaller plots of land so as to make more land available for conservation. The entrepreneurial savvy and proactive market engagement of Insom villagers represent what those facilitating neoliberal conservation could only hope for, though still not satisfied as even intensified production takes up valuable lands. In both communities, there are farmers who are better positioned to take advantage of emerging market opportunities and others either less inclined (as in Nira Village) or less able (in Insom Village). The individual village cultures, histories, and farmer life experiences help explain how the transition to a commodity landscape with intensive agriculture in one place and forests in another, supposedly compatible with conservation, is neither smooth nor inevitable.

More generally, then, contrasting and comparing the Philippines and Thailand cases reveal strong congruencies in how neoliberal conservation has intersected with and facilitated agrarian change toward greater levels of privatization, commodification, and commercialization. In Sabang, Palawan, we see more than simply the consolidation of capitalist development. Here, neoliberal conservation and local drivers of

agrarian change have worked together over time and space, further integrating migrant and indigenous peoples into the mainstream and marginal periphery of an intensifying commodity landscape, respectively—core, migrant agricultural lands support commercial agriculture that yields infrastructure, revenue, and surplus as the political economic foundation for tertiary, market-based investments, predominantly tourism. Peripheral, though once central, some swidden farmers negotiate such market-based investments relatively successfully, but the vast majority are further immiserated as they provide cheap labor and raw materials for an expanding commodity landscape, without control over productive capital. Asymmetrical market-based conservation and agrarian change have converged, producing uneven capitalist geographies of production: unequal outcomes through development schemes (e.g., tourism) with unlimited potential to commodify and objectify the landscape, peoples and forests by the national park.

In the Thai cases, we see similar processes of agricultural differentiation unfolding rapidly due to the convergence of neoliberal policies, commercial agriculture, and market-based conservation. Indeed, the case of Mae Tho National Park and its enclave and border communities demonstrates elements of both top-down promotion of market-oriented livelihood change meant to create an acceptable conservation landscape and bottom-up market integration resulting from neoliberal state policies, individual farmer desire for development and processes of agrarian change in the face of livelihood insecurity associated with conservation policy. There are elements, then, of both coerced and elective livelihood change. The state and its partners are actively regulating farmer behavior along the same lines they had under earlier more coercive strategies, to encourage the elimination of swidden, the pro-

motion of intensive agriculture and, if all goes as planned, the provision of accommodation to tourists. In both the Palawan and Thai cases, however, the exact way such programs manifest themselves in the field, is heavily influenced by the specificities of place and the lived experiences of target communities.

As such, while many suggest the Philippines and Thailand have undergone a profound shift from coercive to devolved conservation, the cases in each country have shown that park planners, NGO and powerful locals have rearticulated older ways of regulating farmer behavior through market-based conservation. Indeed, as much as Tagbanua, Batak, and Karen farmers have long engaged markets “passively,” they are now negotiating “active,” assertive forms of neoliberal conservation that effectively fast track agrarian change and commodification through local and national economies.

In this context, then, we conclude that recognizing the embedded nature of these trends forces us to take seriously the ways in which farmers can both welcome emerging market opportunities and feel coerced by them; in this sense, market-based conservation is not entirely driven by the logics of capitalism to the dismay of local farmers, nor is it entirely a natural and inevitable transition driven by the desires of the poor to get rich. The potential impacts of neoliberal conservation must thus be understood relative to the social history of people, their cultural character, and the economic play of the families and communities of the places in which interventions unfold. Recognition of the need to pursue embedded interventions that are situated in and reflect the socio-culture, economic, and ecological fabric of communities may well ensure that the potential benefits of market-based interventions are realized equitably.

NOTES

1. The term “neoliberal” is used herein to refer to a political and an ideological project which seeks to overhaul governance toward that with a smaller role for the state and a greater role for the capitalist markets and an assumption of an idealized homo-economicus as the primary subject and agent. Policies are marked by privatization, cuts to the public sector, mass commodification, voluntarist limits on capital and an increased role for civil society (McCarthy & Prudham, 2004; Igoe & Brockington, 2007). Despite the range of policies associated with neoliberalism, the defining feature is a strict adherence to market logic. Market-based or market-oriented policies are only a part (albeit a large part) of what constitutes neoliberal conservation governance. While we use the terms interchangeably as they are all “market-based,” we differentiate between passive, pre-existing markets and active, assertive markets that drive production and access to markets as a conservation strategy. We consider the latter market type closer to the neoliberal variety.

2. Southeast Asia is one of the few regions of the world which has continued to expand its commitment to strict conservation mechanisms (Zimmerer & Bassett, 2004).

3. The Philippines research has spanned 2001–09 and has involved key informant/oral history interviews, participatory wealth rankings and livelihood surveys. Recent research from 2006 to 2009 consisted of a purposive sample of 50 in-depth interviews and a livelihood questionnaire ($n = 60$) in Cabayugan among both migrant and indigenous farmers. Batak and Tagbanua communities gave their Free and Prior Informed Consent for this research.

4. The Palawan-specific Strategic Environmental Plan (SEP) (RA 7611) of 1992 and the Local Government Code provided the legal basis for local government units to exercise authority over land and forest management on the island.

5. Research conducted in two communities in Thailand has spanned 2000–09 and has involved key informant, life history and group interviews, livelihood surveys, and participatory mapping. The most recent research from 2007 to 2008 has consisted of a 50% sample livelihood re-study ($n = 48$) in two villages and a series of key informant interviews designed to understand farmer decision making *vis-à-vis* emerging market opportunities. Interviews with key forestry officials investigated state conservation initiatives in the region. Oral consent for the interviews was given from all participants in both study areas.

6. We thank a reviewer of an earlier draft of this paper for pointing out the developmentalist nature of many of the state’s policies in the late 1990s and into the 2000s, particularly the increased funding for health care and education and the state involvement in marketing rural goods (OTOP—One Tambon One Product).

7. Other policies of note include the decentralization of village development funds with individual villages obtaining decision-making power about spending a yearly allotment, and the devolution of resource management.

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