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Tanya Richardson
Wilfrid Laurier University, trichardson@wlu.ca

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ABSTRACT

Participatory management techniques are widely promoted in environmental and protected area governance as a means of preventing and mitigating conflict. The World Bank project that created Ukraine's Danube Biosphere Reserve included such 'community participation' components. The Reserve, however, has been involved in conflicts and scandals in which rumour, denunciation and prayer have played a prominent part. The cases described in this article demonstrate that the way conflict is escalated and mitigated differs according to foundational assumptions about what 'the political' is and what counts as 'politics'. The contrasting forms of politics at work in the Danube Delta help to explain why a 2005 World Bank assessment report could only see failure in the Reserve's implementation of participatory management, and why liberal participatory management approaches may founder when introduced in settings where relationships are based on non-liberal political ontologies. The author argues that environmental management needs to be rethought in ways that take ontological differences seriously rather than assuming the universality of liberal assumptions about the individual, the political and politics.

INTRODUCTION

'Conflicts' figure prominently in the lives of protected areas and in scholarly accounts of them (Adams et al., 2003; West and Brockington, 2006: 613). This has certainly been the case in Ukraine's Danube Biosphere Reserve (DBR), a protected area of 50,252.9 hectares in the Kiliya District that directly borders on the town of Vilkovo, and the villages of Primorskoye and Liski. When I began an anthropological study of the regulation and use of natural resources in Ukraine's Danube Delta in June 2008, managers firmly informed me that I should not 'ignite conflict' by asking residents 'provocative questions' about their attitudes towards the Reserve. After several years of intense legal battles over the Ukrainian Government's decision to dredge a shipping lane in the Bystroye Branch in the DBR's core zone, relations with residents of Vilkovo — most of whom had supported the government initiative — had finally settled down.[1]

The World Bank project that financed the DBR's establishment in 1994–98 on the basis of an earlier-existing reserve began during a watershed moment in world history. New states such as Ukraine were forming after the break-up of the Soviet Union amidst the 'wild' capitalism unleashed by market liberalization. This was also the moment when participatory governance techniques became a prominent feature of World Bank-funded conservation and development projects around the globe as a means to prevent or mitigate resource conflicts (Dearden, Bennettt, and Johnston, 2005; Mansuri and Rao, 2013). The World Bank's project to create a biosphere reserve in Ukraine's Danube Delta included components focused on consultation with stakeholders, public awareness, a small grants programme, the cleaning of Vilkovo's canals, and the construction of a public dock on the town's main canal. Yet the 2005 World Bank project impact assessment report rated managers' achievements in securing local involvement as 'unsatisfactory' (World Bank, 2005). It claimed that their failure to involve local residents in meaningful participatory management initiatives and to improve residents' economic livelihoods had led townspeople to support the government's canal initiative rather than the Reserve.

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[1] Ukraine's official language is Ukrainian. However, I have transliterated place names and personal names from Russian because this is was the language my research collaborators spoke. I use the Library of Congress system without diacritical marks. However, I use conventional English spellings of place names and personal names such as Kiliya instead of Kiliia and Vasily instead of Vasilii. In cases where I have not used real names, I indicate this in the text or in a footnote using quotation marks as in 'Ivan'.

While relations between the DBR administration and residents have been relatively calm since I began my research, issues of the escalation and mitigation of 'scandals' and 'conflicts' figured prominently in Reserve employees' accounts of their work and in some residents' descriptions of the Reserve. I heard not only of court cases, public hearings, and the denunciation of Reserve employees as Romanian spies during the shipping canal conflict, but also of rumours about DBR employees releasing new species of snakes and the role a healer's prayer played in mitigating a conflict between a church and the DBR over one of the Reserve's buildings. Juxtaposing the 2005 report's criticisms with residents' and managers' accounts of conflict and scandal in the DBR highlights two key issues. First, the implementation in 2004 of the form of participatory management that the World Bank expected, would have undermined the DBR's ability to uphold the law on protected areas. Second, proponents of participatory management assume that the logics of public deliberation will also be adopted, make sense, and displace other ways of being political and doing politics.

This article analyses the contrast between the liberal assumptions about politics and the political that underlie many participatory governance techniques such as 'stakeholder consultations', and the assumptions embedded in practices of rumour, denunciation and prayer in Vilkovo. It seeks to contribute to an emerging ontological critique of conservation practice that reconsiders participatory approaches in ways that challenge some of modernity's foundational assumptions (see Blaser, 2009). Some scholars have focused on conflicts about what things are, and the impact of the nature/culture dualism on what counts as politics (Blaser, 2009; Nadasdy, 2007). I focus, instead, on the contrast between a political ontology in which power is inherently opaque, capricious and arbitrary, which prevails among many actors in Vilkovo (and Ukraine), and the liberal political ontology underpinning some of the participatory techniques propagated by the World Bank. I argue that liberal participatory approaches will likely founder when introduced in settings where relationships are based on non-liberal political ontologies. I join other scholars' call to rethink environmental management in ways that take ontological differences seriously rather than assuming that in spite of cultural differences, people share basic liberal assumptions about the individual, the political and politics.

Methods and Materials

This article is based on six months of ethnographic and documentary research conducted between 2008 and 2013 on the impact of the DBR's creation on landscapes and livelihoods in Ukraine's Danube Delta. I employed a mix of research methods such as structured and semi-structured interviews, informal conversations and participant observation in various settings in Odessa, Vilkovo, Liski, Primorskoye, and the delta. I interviewed a range of different resource users including twenty gardeners, eight fishermen, five small tour operators, and the directors of three fishing firms, two reed-harvesting firms and two large tourist firms. I also interviewed Vilkovo's deputy mayor and the ex-mayor, DBR scientists and administrators, and I attended a meeting of the DBR's Scientific-Technical Coordinating Council, where local 'stakeholders' and DBR staff discuss management issues. However, key insights for this article come from informal conversations with individuals during tea breaks at the Reserve, over meals in people's homes, walking with scientists on their field expeditions, selling strawberries at markets, picking apples, weeding gardens, and drinking coffee with tour operators as they waited for tourists to arrive.

PARTICIPATION, POLITICS AND THE POLITICAL IN ENVIRONMENTAL GOVERNANCE

A vast critical literature now exists assessing the rhetoric and practice of participatory governance in the management of natural resources and protected areas. Global conservation organizations began introducing different forms of participatory governance in the 1990s in response to the failures of 'fortress-conservation' trends in development practice, and the recommendations of the 1992 Rio Convention (Berkes, 2004: 622; Dearden, Bennett and Johnston, 2005: 89; Francis, 2001). People-centred conservation projects were introduced not only to 'democratize' governance, but also to improve 'efficiency' by downloading labour onto local residents and incorporating market-based mechanisms (Stringer et al., 2009: 78). Critical assessments of participation in environmental management can be categorized according to Mosse's distinction among 'instrumental', 'critical' and 'practice-oriented' views of development (2004: 641). Whereas instrumental approaches focus on 'how to implement policy and realize programme designs in practice', critical approaches view policy as a 'rationalizing discourse concealing

hidden purposes of bureaucratic power or dominance' (ibid.). An ethnographic, practice-theory inspired approach analyses how beneficiaries both comply with and contest projects. A fourth line of critique, an ontological one, is found primarily in work on the incorporation of indigenous knowledge in co-management projects. After reviewing these four areas, I outline an approach situated between practice-oriented and ontological critiques.

Instrumental analyses of participation in community resources management accept the benefits of techniques such as 'stakeholder participation' as self-evident. Although some authors highlight problems with implementing stakeholder participation processes (O'Riordan and Stoll-Kleemann, 2002), they remain convinced that one can learn from experience 'to enhance the possibility for more meaningful involvement' (Stringer et al., 2009: 79). Recommendations include 'systematic representation of stakeholders', 'setting clear objectives', 'enhanced role for NGOs [non-governmental organizations]' and 'integrating different knowledges' with particular emphasis on science. Explanations for why stakeholder processes encounter problems may refer to what is lacking in a milieu — such as a robust civil society in the case of Romania (Stringer et al., 2009) — and are based in liberal normative assumptions. Instrumentalist analyses acknowledge that multi-stakeholder processes may be implemented more for pragmatic ends (to improve environmental outcomes) than to empower people (Mannigel, 2008: 499), and thus leave in place entrenched inequalities. However, these authors are confident that the process can be tinkered with to minimize these inequalities and to enhance opportunities for dialogue, deliberation and achievement of consensus in ways that benefit both social groups and the environment (Stringer et al., 2006: 40). While the limitations of deliberative democracy may be recognized (O'Riordan and Stoll-Kleemann, 2002), the normative good of deliberative democracy and its conflict-mitigation potential is not.

Critical approaches to participatory environmental governance demonstrate not only the gap between the rhetoric and practice of participatory techniques in people-centered conservation, but also how these practices are part of the workings of neoliberal capitalism (Büscher, 2010; Büscher and Whande, 2007; Igoe and Brockington, 2007). Grounded in political economy and political ecology, these authors assert that participation has become a management technique aimed at 'producing consensus' and rarely offers 'local actors the resources and clout to change the structural conditions that are the ultimate causes of environmental degradation' (Brosius and Russell, 2003: 44). Stakeholder participation, they write, is naively premised on the idea that workshops and other tools can 'level the playing field and enable different stakeholders

to interact on an equitable and genuinely collaborative basis' (World Bank in Brosius and Russell 2003: 44; World Bank, 1996: 7). These structural inequalities not only exist between rural peoples and conservationists, but also among community members themselves (Agrawal and Gibson, 1999). While some analyse the success of participatory governance in disciplining environmental subjects and extending the state and market into new terrain (Agrawal, 2005), others consider how the discursive construction of 'local' in policy discourses shapes the availability for participation (Van Assche et al., 2011). For these authors, conflict will persist as long as historically rooted political and economic differences in access to resources remain unaddressed regardless of efforts to involve different stakeholders.

Practice approaches devote more attention to *how* participatory processes work, the strategies, tactics and cultural idioms people deploy in maneuvering within political, economic and institutional constraints (see Heatherington, 2010: 187–91). Local populations make contradictory statements about the effects of conservation, and simultaneously criticize and employ science-based discourses of nature in contesting conservation authorities (Van Assche et al., 2012). Informal decision-making processes outside formal institutions are often as efficacious in managing resources and resolving conflicts as formal ones (Cleaver, 2001). When residents *do* engage in participatory processes such as in the creation of a Marine National Park in Mafia Island, they often use their own political logics such as patron–client relationships (Walley, 2004).

A fourth line of critique — an ontological critique — is similarly attentive to practice but also analyses how modernist assumptions about 'nature' and 'culture' marginalize indigenous knowledge in co-management projects (Blaser, 2009). Indigenous knowledge is usually recognized as valid when it lines up with scientific knowledge (Nadasdy, 2003). For example, a sustainable hunting programme gave the Yshiro indigenous people of Paraguay control over hunting permits because their traditions were recognized as a form of conservation (Blaser, 2009). For the Yshiro, individual animals are a manifestation of *bahlut*, a power or potency, while their availability and the cosmos itself is sustained through relations of reciprocity among humans and *bahluts*. When relations of reciprocity required the incorporation of non-Yshiro, and hunting outside their land's official boundaries, they were accused of depredation and playing the 'culture card' to increase profits. Animals were different entities to scientists and indigenous people — an ontological difference that could not be recognized within the existing management framework.

In comparing the stakeholder consultation with practices of rumour, denunciation and prayer, this article builds on both practice and ontological critiques of participatory governance. However, rather than focusing on conflicts arising over what an animal is or the significance of the nature/culture dualism for what counts as conservation, I consider how assumptions about power's inherent opacity and capriciousness give rise to political practices that challenge the premises of deliberation — the foundation of participatory approaches. I therefore follow Chantal Mouffe and others in distinguishing between 'politics' and 'the political'. 'Politics' refers to practices while 'the political' refers to ontological assumptions about the make-up of society (Mouffe, 2005: 8–9). For example, Mouffe contrasts her agonistic conception of the political with Hannah Arendt's deliberative one. For Arendt, 'the political' is a 'space of freedom and public deliberation', whereas for Mouffe, who draws on pre-World War II German political philosopher Carl Schmitt, it is a space of 'power, conflict, and antagonism' (ibid.: 9). Following Schmitt, Mouffe argues that because 'liberalism negates the ineradicable character of antagonism' it is unable to deal with conflicts for which no rational solution could exist, in other words, conflicts for which there can be no consensual solution (ibid.: 10). She therefore proposes that conflict be recognized as constitutive of any order, and that an adversarial, or agonistic, form of politics is what can allow antagonism to exist in ways that do not destroy the political association.

'Participation' is a concern not only in classical political liberalism, but also in republican and Marxist political philosophies (Held, 2006). Deliberative practices also have long histories in Hindu, Buddhist and Muslim societies pre-dating European colonialism (Mansuri and Rao, 2013: 20). Interest in participatory approaches in the development field is traced to Rousseau, who sought an alternative to notions of individual liberty in ideas about individual citizens deliberating to uncover the collective will (ibid.: 21). While some political theorists stress the differences between liberal and deliberative democracy (e.g. Barber, 1984), others argue that key tenets of Locke's philosophy (society as made up of rational individuals who consent to be governed) form the normative underpinnings of western political theory and the 'modern social imaginary' more generally (Hindess, 1996: 12; Taylor, 2004: 3–22, 86). It is thus important not to assume that the social imaginaries (or ontologies) underpinning practices of deliberation in different traditions are the same. Misunderstandings can occur when non-Western practices are translated using Western political theory (Clastres, 1977).

Participatory development is now ubiquitous in World Bank development practice (Mansuri and Rao, 2013: 16, 25–31). Although radical thinkers such as Paul Freire influenced

some early practitioners, in the mid-1990s the World Bank defined participation as a 'process through which stakeholders influence and share control over development initiatives and the decisions and resources which affect them' (World Bank, 1996: 3) and was explicit in its preference for stakeholder participation over popular participation (ibid.: 6). Pinpointing liberal assumptions (following Taylor and Hindess) embedded in participatory practices in the 1990s helps elaborate the contrast with the political in Vilkovo and Ukraine. In aggregative liberalism, for example, politics refers to the 'establishment of a compromise between different competing forces in society' where individuals are rational beings driven by the maximization of their own interests who act in the political world in a basically instrumental way (Mouffe, 2005: 12). This is evident in the language of 'stakeholder' itself and the assumption that individuals precede society (e.g. Prell et al., 2010: 35). By contrast, the deliberative paradigm of Hannah Arendt and Jürgen Habermas emphasizes communicative rationality in that political debate is seen as a means to create 'in the realm of politics a rational moral consensus by means of free discussion' (Mouffe, 2005: 13). This is evident not only in the emphasis in participatory approaches on meetings, committees and consensus building, but also in the assumption that more and better information can alleviate suspicion and generate trust.

In dwelling on the contrast between a liberal and an agonistic political ontology, my intention is not to demonstrate that what we find in Vilkovo and Ukraine is a version of Mouffe's political ontology. Rather, the contrast Mouffe draws between an agonistic and a liberal political ontology opens up analytical possibilities for considering how assumptions about the political found in Vilkovo differ from those embedded in participatory governance schemes. Rumour, denunciation and prayer do not figure in Mouffe's ultimately modern, secular form of democratic politics. Whereas the prevalence of rumour is premised on assumptions about power as always opaque rather than transparent, prayer suggests the existence of transcendent forms of power. Neither form is recognized in a liberal political ontology or in Mouffe's agonistic one. Denunciation, meanwhile, signals assumptions about antagonistic politics of precisely the type Mouffe thinks can be transformed into agonistic politics.

I aim here to highlight the liberal relationship to conflict and its mitigation through deliberation that is imported into certain participatory governance techniques. Understandings of power and politics are foundational — ontological — and not always simply and easily refigured or translated into the assumptions that underpin 'participation' or 'stakeholder consultation'. This is important for two reasons. First, although deeply embedded in anthropological common sense,

it can be overlooked or marginalized when anthropologists employ analytical frameworks that scale power up to the workings of global political economy. Second, comments about 'individuals' preceding and being influenced by 'social structures' in analyses of stakeholder approaches seem completely unaware of the liberal ontology informing this analytical framework (e.g. Prell et al., 2010). Participatory approaches may fail not just because of underlying tensions stemming from economic disparities, but also because the notions of power as transparent that are embedded in deliberative models contradict understandings of power as opaque in many places in the world, including postsocialist countries such as Ukraine. Murky processes of dispossession and accumulation in post-Soviet states led to the proliferation of mistrust and 'stories about universal lies and deceptions' (Oushakine, 2009: 75, 109). By the late 1990s, among Muscovites 'a general conviction of the necessarily falsified nature of all public representations' had become a central pillar of individuals' sense of personal identity (Shevchenko, 2008: 151). Meanwhile, desecularization led to an expanded role for non-human powers (God, spirits) in people's lives (e.g. Pederson, 2011; Pelkmans, 2009; Wanner, 2007). I turn now to the implication of these conditions for introducing participatory approaches.

NATURE CONSERVATION IN UKRAINE'S DANUBE DELTA

The Danube Delta is the second largest, relatively unmodified river delta in Europe. It is a labyrinth of lakes, rivulets and islands and is home to diverse species of plants, fish and birds. Roughly 80 per cent of the delta is located in Romania and 20 per cent in Ukraine. The delta is considered to begin just above the town of Izmail, where the Danube splits into the Tulchea branch that flows into Romania, and the Kiliya Branch that forms the border between Ukraine and Romania and is now also an external border of the European Union. The Kiliya Delta in Ukraine, a secondary delta which begins below the town of Vilkovo, is the youngest part of the Danube Delta and is roughly 400 years old, though parts nearer the sea were formed less than 100 years ago (Kovalenko et al., 2009: 66–67).

Over the past few centuries, the Danube Delta has been a frontier with mobile multi-ethnic populations. In the mid-eighteenth century, Vilkovo was settled by Russian Old Believers (Lipovani) who were fleeing persecution and by Ukrainian Cossacks who moved to the area following the break-up of the Zaporizhian Sich (Silantieva-Skorobogatova, 1996). These settlers

were attracted to the lower Danube because of its distance from centres of power (hence persecution) and because of the presence of rich fishing stocks (Prigarin, 2015). However, at least as early as the latter half of the nineteenth century, some residents of Vilkovo cultivated gardens and orchards on the islands near the town. Alexander I's decree that gave Vilkovchani privileges to limitless use of delta resources without taxation remains strong in townspeople's historical memory (Prigarin, 2010: 101).

Since Vilkovo's establishment, residents have found themselves part of the Russian Empire, the Ottoman Empire, Romania, the Soviet Union and Ukraine. After Vilkovo and Southern Bessarabia became part of the Soviet Union in 1944, authorities substantially transformed the political economy by building a fishing collective, a fish processing plant, a port, the Prorva shipping channel, and a ship-repair enterprise, as well as branches of enterprises headquartered elsewhere, and by opening clinics and schools (Bassov, 2008). When relations between the USSR and Romania worsened in the 1960s, Vilkovo and other towns on the river became part of a closed border zone. Although elderly people born in the 1920s and 1930s recall hardships in the post-war period, they remember the 1960s and 1970s as a period of stability and relative prosperity, as do post-war generations.

Nature conservation in the Kiliya Delta began in 1967 after the Council of Ministers of the Ukrainian SSR passed a resolution that created a protected area (a monument of nature or *pamiatnik prirody*) in the coastal zone of the Kiliya Delta. In 1973 more territories were added to this protected area (7758 hectares) and it became the Danube branch of the Black Sea Reserve under the auspices of Soviet Ukraine's Academy of Sciences. In 1981 it was expanded again to form the new Dunaiskii Plavni Nature Reserve (14,851 hectares) (Kovalenko et al., 2009). Like other Soviet *zapovedniki,* this reserve was created in a top down manner for the purposes of scientific research without any kind of consultative process (Weiner, 1988). Hunting, pasturing cattle and the harvesting of water nuts, reeds and berries were prohibited. Fishing should have been banned too but an exception was made because of its economic significance for the town and regional economy.

The creation of the Danube Biosphere Reserve out of the Dunaiskii Plavni Reserve occurred after the designation of the Romanian part as a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Natural World Heritage Site (Van Assche et al., 2011: 8). A World Bank project to build 'institutional capacity' in nature protection in the Romanian delta was expanded to include the Ukrainian delta. In 1998, the DBR was created by a presidential

decree which expanded its territory threefold. In 1999, the DBR became part of a UNESCO Transboundary Biosphere Reserve, together with the Romanian reserve. While the original nature reserve became the core zone with restricted access, additional areas were zoned to allow gardening, pasturing, reed harvesting, fishing and, until 2010, hunting. In 2004, a presidential decree that rezoned the reserve to allow shipping in the Bystroye Branch also added some new territory in the neighbouring Tatarbunary district (Kovalenko et al., 2009).

World Bank money flowed in to the nature reserve when most residents were grappling with crisis and impoverishment in the wake of the collapse of socialism. Small towns such as Vilkovo experienced dislocating processes of privatization and decollectivization characteristic of both rural and urban areas (see Allina-Pisano, 2007; Nazparzy, 2001). For example, the fish cannery was purchased by a competitor and deliberately bankrupted. Its rusting equipment and disintegrating buildings now mar Vilkovo's picturesque waterscape because town authorities have allegedly been unable to locate the owner. Well-positioned managers in the fishing collective were able to acquire equipment, land and buildings through various machinations in a manner similar to what occurred in agricultural collectives elsewhere in the country (Allina-Pisano, 2007). However, in contrast to many agricultural collectives where former directors were able to reconstitute de facto ownership over the land, no single owner has emerged in Vilkovo's fishing industry. Several fishing firms (which have three to four permanent employees) work as intermediaries between fishermen and buyers. They secure the quotas and permits and hire fishermen for short periods when fish are available. Fishermen now provide their own equipment and fuel and have no social protection in the event of injury.

As enterprises closed in the 1990s, residents came to rely more heavily on the delta's natural resources. Besides fishing, the sale of strawberries, apples, grapes and currants from garden plots remain important sources of income, though many gardens with boat-only access have been abandoned due to fuel costs (Richardson, 2015). The Reserve facilitated the development of tourism and reed harvesting for commercial export in the early 2000s (which initially provided seasonal employment for nearly 1000 Vilkovchani). By 2008, owners of tourist, reed-harvesting, construction and fishing firms had replaced enterprise directors in the town's elite. Vilkovo has also seen a significant decline in its population similar to other small towns and rural settlements where enterprises and collective farms have ceased to operate. Official census data show a decline in population from 11,022 in 1989 to 9260 in 2001 although Vilkovo's town administration estimates that the town's population may actually be less than

8000. Against a backdrop of murky privatization and social differentiation, the DBR's World Bank-financed computers, fax machines, photocopier (the first in the town) and expensive Yamaha boat motors generated envy and resentment. As a direct result, rumours spread that the Reserve employees were growing rich at the townspeople's expense and were receiving their salaries in dollars (which was untrue).

A LOW GRADE FOR PARTICIPATION?

 In 2005, a World Bank consultant published a Project Assessment Report with the following statement: 'Three of the four objectives were substantially achieved with few shortcomings. However, failure to introduce participatory protected area management to the Danube Biosphere Reserve now threatens project sustainability' (World Bank, 2005: ix). I do not want to suggest that there could not have been deeper engagement of non-elite residents in the process of creating the Reserve. However, by juxtaposing the 1994 project document and the assessment of 2005, and providing evidence on how Reserve managers communicate with resource users, I will argue the following: a) that the World Bank assessment retrospectively applies (vaguely articulated) criteria of participatory management to a project whose 'participation' component focused mainly on consultation and public awareness; and b) it overlooks legal constraints and obligations of administrators as state employees and informal ways in which resource users communicate with and influence Reserve managers.

The 1994 project document states that the project would 'strengthen the [reserve administration's] capacity … to expand and manage the protected areas effectively, and to work with local community groups to ensure sustainable resource use' (World Bank, 1994: 2). The project overview identifies 'community participation' as a key concern and specifies that it should be addressed through meetings, workshops and public awareness campaigns to be organized by the Reserve authorities and NGOs (ibid.: 4). The project's Component 6, 'Biosphere Reserve Establishment' (valued at US$ 59,000) envisaged two workshops annually with mayors, village heads and deputies, and its Component 5, 'Public Awareness' (US$ 131,000) was well elaborated with education, publicity and NGO grant initiatives. Component 4, 'Wetland Restoration' was to provide US $173,000 towards cleaning the town's canals to

'enhance the local people's attitude' towards the Reserve. While public awareness initiatives targeted many groups, consultation involved primarily elites.

The 2005 report assesses the project on four key objectives: strengthening capacity of the Reserve authority; introducing 'participatory protected area management'; enhancing delta ecosystems; and coordinating with the Romanian project (World Bank, 2005: ix). However, the 1994 project document and the 1999 project completion report (World Bank, 1999) specified eight components, none of which is entitled 'participatory protected area management'. The 2005 report has retrospectively reframed a component on public awareness and sub-items of other components. Whereas 'public awareness' and 'biannual workshops' imply processes of informing and deliberating about the Reserve's expansion, 'participatory protected area management' implies the involvement of residents *not* employed by the Reserve in actually implementing and enforcing the regulation. The 2005 report claims that state-employed experts lack a culture of participatory management and consider locals' views irrelevant to the management of protected areas. Evidence for this is supported by the fact that a grants programme was implemented in 'paternalistic fashion'. Although the report acknowledges that stakeholder participation was a new practice when the project began, with clear guidelines only emerging in 1997, it concludes that because local stakeholders were not involved in reserve management itself, the Ministry of Transport found local communities willing to support their proposal to dredge a shipping channel through the core zone of the Reserve.

By implying that residents should have the responsibility for making decisions about running the territories of the Reserve, the 2005 report overlooks the specifics of Ukrainian legislation and disregards Reserve employees' legal responsibility for upholding contradictory laws and regulations and for management decisions. When rules are broken, administrators can face job loss or arrest. Although critical literature on protected areas presents managers as law enforcers, in Ukraine they are also regularly subject to inspections (*proverki*) by law enforcement and an army of audit agencies. These include the tax police, district, oblast and national level branches of the Ministry of Environment's Ecological Inspection, the Sanitary and Epidemiological Service, the Fire Protection Service, the Ministry of Transport's inspection agency, and many others. During President Leonid Kuchma's second term — during which the canal conflict took place — audits came to be used as an explicit political tool to blackmail officials (Darden, 2001). Indeed, since the early 2000s, the director and deputy director of the

DBR have spent ever-increasing amounts of time in court appealing the decisions of inspection agencies.

Introducing a more fully participatory management scheme could have undermined other liberal principles (laws and regulations). According to DBR administrators, November 2004 — the month in which the author of the 2005 World Bank report visited — was the peak of anti-reserve sentiment in the town, region and country. In the previous year, the Reserve had been subject to twenty different inspections (including multiple inspections by the same agency). Most media outlets carried articles that criticized the Reserve for its opposition to the canal and for standing in the way of the economic revival of a depressed region.[2] The anti-Reserve position in the media and among officials found a sympathetic audience with many Vilkovchani not only because of their desire for state employment, but also because many felt they should have unfettered access to the core zone of the Reserve.[3]

In 2004, four pro-canal local deputies and some Ministry of Environment officials allied with the Ministry of Transport in an attempt to create a new coordinating body to replace the scientific-technical council that already existed (as stipulated by the law on protected areas). It was to be co-chaired by the DBR director and the deputy head of the Oblast state administration; the four deputies were to be part of this body, which would have given them significant influence over decision making. The DBR responded by expanding representation on the scientific-technical council to include more non-reserve staff (such as teachers, a mayor, representatives of tourist, reed-harvesting and fishing firms). This deflected the deputies' initiative because the DBR's status as an Academy of Sciences reserve gives it more autonomy than Ministry of Environment reserves have. According to the DBR's deputy director, Vasily Fedorenko:

> These deputies took this idea [for a new coordinating body] from the Seville Strategy. But
> implementing the Seville Strategy in the reality of Vilkovo of 2004, would have produced
> results completely contrary to what the strategy intended. The success of such measures

[2] See for example Alexei Smirnov 'Komu vygodno pererezat girlo Bystroye', *Komsomolskaia Pravda* 10 August 2004.
[3] On support for the canal in the region see Yelena Udovichenko 'Kanal Dunai-Chernoye Morie. Obshchestvennyie slushaniia', [Danube-Black Sea Canal. Public Hearing] *Moriak* No. 10 (326) 17 March 2004 and Larisa Chernysheva 'Dunai otkroiet v moria novoie okno', [The Danube Will Open a New Window to the Sea] *Moriak* No. 10 (7660) 10 March 2004.

> [participatory management] depends on people understanding their role. This would have become a body that served the interests of a few people in Vilkovo.[4]

DBR managers were not keen to share decision making with individuals who would likely push for decisions in violation of laws for which they (the managers) could be held criminally responsible.[5]

The 2005 report also overlooks the informal ways in which managers communicate with resource users, respond to their concerns and mediate conflicts. It paints a picture of 'local people' and 'reserve employees' as essentialized categories. However this effaces intra-local differences (Brosius et al, 2005; Li, 2002) and overlooks power differentials among them. It occludes how the managers, scientists and their children have quite intimate ties with 'locals' as godparents, co-godparent (*kum*), friends, neighbours and spouses, how information circulates through these relationships, and how concerns are addressed through them. Several scientists and managers have lived in Vilkovo for twenty to thirty years and have raised their children in the town. Informal communication takes place in the market, over dinners, at bars, and as part of neighbourly exchanges. It is also important to note that very few individuals rely on a single source of income or livelihood, including employees of the Reserve. State salaries are low and insufficient to support a family. The deputy director is a beekeeper; the ichthyologist is a commercial fisherman whose fishing partners have been 'locals'; the ornithologist used to combine his work in the Reserve with running a tourist firm before he left the reserve to work full time in tourism. In the 1990s, several Reserve employees maintained large gardens from which they sold produce. In pursuing other forms of livelihood, reserve managers and scientists are very much part of other so-called 'local' milieus. Although this informal communication is not considered to be participatory management because it does not involve formal public deliberation, it is nevertheless a channel of influence.

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[4] Telephone interview, Vasily Fedorenko, 20 February 2013. An Old Believer resident critical of the canal project made the same point. Other Vilkovchani explained that one of the deputies caught sturgeon on which there was a complete ban. Another had been caught hunting wild boars in the core zone of the reserve.

[5] This council did subsequently play an important role in resolving resource users' problems. In 2008 when the Ministry of Environment banned all resource use on all Reserve territories, resource users and Reserve administrators worked together through the council to have the ban overturned.

RUMOUR, DENUNCIATION AND PRAYER: POLITICS AND THE POLITICAL IN RELATIONS WITH THE DBR

Like many citizens throughout the post-Soviet world, Vilkovchani have assumptions about politics and the political that differ from those underlying participatory management. For them, power is inherently opaque while the state is simultaneously and unpredictably too absent and too present in their lives (Pederson, 2011). Citizens' assumptions that lies and deception are the norm in politics leads to a preoccupation with debunking and uncovering hidden motives (Shevchenko, 2008, 149). By the 2000s, the crisis experience had produced a collective identity of disengagement among Muscovites that undermined possibilities for a politically effective public sphere (ibid.: 168). While there are important differences between Ukraine and Russia and between urban and rural milieux, Shevchenko's observations align quite closely with Vilkovchanis' practices. Indeed, during both of Ukraine's revolutions most residents supported the status quo represented by now-deposed President Viktor Yanukovich.

The delta's borderland location also plays a part in reinforcing these assumptions about politics. Commenting on townspeople's general suspicion towards outsiders, Nikolai Izotov, an Old Believer man explained: 'Power has changed hands often. We don't trust outsiders and we don't even trust each other'.[6] Even though Nikolai is 'local', he had found it difficult to keep a gardening association going because gardeners thought he would secretly obtain a benefit at their expense for his efforts to negotiate a better price for grapes. Residents also expect state authorities to provide special privileges and the freedom to use the delta's resources without state interference, the model for which is the Tsar's Declaration (see Fedorenko, 2002). This may partly explain contradictory statements that the Reserve should heed residents' demands but that residents' involvement in any formal body would not resolve their problems. The rest of this section will examine how the enactment, content and political efficacy of rumour, denunciation and prayer affected relationships with the DBR.

Rumour

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[6] Interview, Nikolai Izotov, 22 October 2009, Vilkovo.

On 12 May 2010, Alexander Voloshkevich, the DBR Director, expressed exasperation after reading an article in the Kiliya District newspaper *Novoie Vremia* about changes to the law on protected areas. As I sat in his office, Voloshkevich explained to me that these changes, which had come as an unwelcome surprise to everyone, had banned hunting in all zones of the DBR (and on nearly all protected areas in the country). However, the article stated that the law now banned *all* resource use in the reserve: hunting and gardening, fishing and reed harvesting. Voloshkevich called up the journalist and a tense conversation followed. He confronted the journalist with having misinformed the public. The journalist defended the article by saying that information had come from the Vilkovo town council and blamed Voloshkevich for not providing correct information on the situation. Voloshkevich replied that he had not been invited to that meeting of the town council. After the phone call, he said to me: 'The hardest thing to fight is the spreading of lies. For some reason, they spread faster than anything else. It's much easier to deal with a court case — there is an objective situation. Dealing with subjective things like the circulation of lies is much harder. It's like dealing with a stab in the back'. The director's concern was not unfounded. A lie can spread as rumour as it is conveyed among people who have no alternative source of information and who are predisposed to expect such actions. Indeed, a year after this event, when I asked a fisherman in his sixties about the Reserve's policies, after criticizing the limitations it had placed on harvesting water nuts in the 1980s, he expressed concern about rumours he had heard that reed harvesting would be banned too. He was inclined to think they were true.[7]

On several other occasions the reserve administrators commented on the prevalence of rumour, the complications it had created, and how they responded. One component of the World Bank project aimed to generate goodwill with the townspeople by having several of the town's canals dredged. A local entrepreneur was hired. However, shortly after he began, numerous residents showed up at the Reserve demanding payment for their work digging canals. They had heard that the Reserve would pay US$ 20 per metre to anyone who dug up canals. (During this period, the official salary of a teacher would have been US$ 50–70 month.) The director responded by writing a clarifying article in the newspaper explaining that the Reserve did not have funds available to compensate residents for their work. So although this component was intended to directly benefit the townspeople and generate goodwill, it only created disgruntlement.

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[7] Interview, 'Ivan' 5 June 2011, Vilkovo.

In another case, in the summer of 2008, DBR employees learned that residents in Kiliya District thought the Reserve was introducing a new species of water snake. These rumours spread after a non-poisonous water snake bit a young boy. Parents began forbidding children to swim in the Danube and the Black Sea. The rumour spread to the neighbouring resort village, Prymorskoye, to the distress of hotel owners and tourists who began to cut their vacations short. Once again, the Reserve administrators tried to dispel the rumour by publishing an announcement on 15 August in the paper *Dunaiskaya Zarya*:

> The DBR administration officially informs the public that the reserve has never released serpents (*zmei*) or snakes (*uzhei*) or any other kind of reptile in the Danube region. In recent years, an olive-coloured water snake has appeared in our region. People have encountered them more frequently because of the run off of floodwaters from the Carpathians. This species is neither poisonous nor dangerous to humans.

The following year, the DBR's herpetologist, Andrei Matveiev, gave a long interview to a local journalist (Silikova, 2009). In describing Ukraine's snake species he emphasized that while poisonous snakes are found on the steppe and in the Carpathians, no poisonous snakes reside in the delta. He reported on his conversation with the mother of the child who had been bitten, in which he explained that a poisonous snakebite would leave two marks where the fangs pierced the skin, whereas most of the non-poisonous variety (such as the one that had bitten the boy) have a series of teeth.

Denunciation

The construction of the Danube–Black Sea shipping lane through the core zone of the DBR provoked one of most widely publicized environmental conflicts in independent Ukraine, with local, national and international dimensions. In the early 2000s, during the authoritarian years of Kuchma's rule, the Minister of Transport, Heorhy Kirpa, and an affiliated state enterprise, Delta-Lotsman, decided to renew shipping, one goal of which was to counter Romania's monopoly. The Prorva Channel had filled in with silt in 1994 because of hydrological changes and because the Ukrainian government lacked the funds to maintain round-the-clock dredging (Vorotniuk, 2002: 8; Shtefan, 2003: 16-17). The option to dredge the Bystroye Branch was chosen from several alternatives because it was the cheapest and the quickest to implement, and could thus yield valuable financial and political dividends in the run-up to the 2004 presidential elections

(Fedorenko, 2006: 32). In 2003, the Cabinet of Ministers officially declared its intention to dredge Bystroye despite the fact that this violated its national legislation and international conventions.

The DBR and Academy of Sciences objected to this option for several reasons: a) the costs involved in constantly dredging the canal--necessary because of the hydrological processes of that part of the delta--would make it unprofitable in the long run; b) it would have a negative ecological impact on the Ukrainian Delta; and c) it violated Ukraine's law on protected areas and its international obligations under the Ramsar, Espoo and Bern conventions, and UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere Programme (Fedorenko, 2006: 24-30; Koyano, 2009: 261-2). The Academy of Sciences and the DBR thus joined forces with Ukrainian and international environmental organizations to oppose the decision. Meanwhile, the Romanian government, citing studies by Romanian ecologists, claimed that dredging the Bystroye canal would have negative effects on its delta. The Council of Europe, the UN Economic Commission for Europe and the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River lined up behind Romania, soon to be a EU-member state, and criticized the Ukrainian government for violating its international obligations (Koyano, 2009).

Canal proponents worked through town and district councils in the Danube region to create support for their project and antagonism towards the reserve.[8] A prominent narrative circulating in the media and among residents claimed the DBR was putting birds before people and obstructing economic revival. Although some local residents were opposed to the canal because they were concerned about harm to fish habitats and reduced access to them, the majority of residents sided with Delta-Lotsman (see Udovichenko, 2004). In 2003, Delta-Lotsman launched a lawsuit against the DBR to invalidate its land title based on the claim that waterways had never belonged to the Reserve (Fedorenko, 2006: 25). When the case's outcome seemed uncertain, in 2004, the Ministry of Transport arranged a presidential decree rezoning the reserve (ibid.). Shortly after the canal's official opening in August 2004, the Odessa Oblast Prosecutor launched a criminal investigation of the DBR in response to a letter from the head of Delta-Lotsman.[9] Letters from local residents and town deputies to various state institutions accusing the

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[8] See 'Dunaiski khvyli – 2', [Danube Waves – 2] *Uriadovyi kurier* (239) 21 December 2002.
[9] See Alexander Voloshkevich 'Kak ucheniie "ugolovnikami" stali' [How Scientists Became 'Criminals'] *Zerkalo Nedeli*, 19 November 2004. http://gazeta.zn.ua/ENVIRONMENT/kak_uchenye_ugolovnikami_stali.html. Last accessed January 18, 2015.

Reserve of criminal offences were cited in Delta-Lotsman's letter and became the formal pretext for the investigation. For instance, the four local deputies who had tried to create the new coordinating council had written to the District prosecutor accusing the Reserve of 'accounting irregularities' despite having no empirical basis.[10] The inspection agency responsible for monitoring the use of state finances audited the Reserve for several months during which time employees had no access to their computers or documents. The goal was the removal of the administrators. The criminal investigation was eventually closed and no irregularities found — a decision that was helped by the post-Orange Revolution political environment and the replacement of Delta-Lotsman's director. The Reserve's land title case went to the Supreme Court, which ruled in favour of the Reserve.

According to Vasily Fedorenko, some local deputies claimed that Reserve employees should be physically removed from the town during a town council meeting in 2004.[11] One employee received violent threats. At a meal I attended with some reserve staff and a tourist entrepreneur on June 10, 2008, DBR director Alexander Voloshkevich described how the Minister of Transport had said, 'I will put that bandit in prison', (meaning Voloshkevich) during an official meeting.[12] Fedorenko recalled that reserve employees were denounced as 'Romanian spies' in national papers, as 'enemies of the people' and 'traitors' during public hearings in the town. While this was expressed most vociferously in 2004, even during my first visit in 2008, the DBR director explained that the father of his son's classmate had called him a Romanian spy during the end-of-year school banquet.[13] Several townspeople remarked in passing that the Reserve employees had been 'working for the Romanian Secret Service'. Fedorenko (a historian by training) said the atmosphere during 2004 reminded him of the Stalin period.

Prayer

Following the passage in 2002 of a law on restitution of sites of worship to churches, a conflict erupted between the DBR administration and a local church over the ownership of a building

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[10] Telephone interview, Vasily Fedorenko, 20 February 2013.
[11] Telephone interview, Vasily Fedorenko, 20 February 2013.
[12] Ironically, it was Kirpa, the Minister of Transport who had links with organized crime; he was killed mysteriously shortly after the Orange Revolution.
[13] Interview, Alexander Voloshkevich, 9 June 2008.

belonging to the Reserve. I learned about this on 20 November from a DBR employee I will call Daria, who moved to Vilkovo as an adult. I dropped by to speak with her about a seminar I had attended about shipping and to ask about sorcery, something I'd recently learned was prevalent in the town. In responding she turned to the 'scandal between the church and the administration over the ownership of the Reserve building we were sitting in.

Prior to World War II, the church had owned a hostel on the location of the disputed building constructed in the local style using reeds and mud. In the late 1960s, this building was appropriated from the residents and given to the Academy of Sciences to house a nature museum, which Daria remembered visiting as a child. This building was torn down and rebuilt by reserve employees after a massive flood in 1968. In 1973 it became the office of the Black Sea Reserve and subsequently the Dunaiskiy Plavni Reserve. The World Bank project allocated funds to build a new head office on the edge of town to ensure better access to the river, but they retained ownership of the original office to serve as a tourist information centre.

According to Daria, Church representatives began requesting that the building be returned in 1997. The mayor at the time sought to avert a conflict by allocating another plot to the church in compensation for this building. Demands intensified in 2002 after the new law on returning former places of worship to churches. Relations became tense. Some church members regularly entered the building and demanded its return. Windows were broken. Threats of vandalism were made.

Not all residents or church members condoned the attempt to reclaim the building and were aware that the church had received compensation. One such church member, who regularly visited the office to speak with staff, was known as a traditional healer who can neutralize curses. One day she came to the building with a large jar of holy water. While reciting prayers, she sprinkled holy water over the gate, in the rooms, and then left the jar of water in the building. According to Darya, the scandals stopped immediately. Employees left the water jar where it stood for a long time, convinced of its efficacy in mitigating tension.

ON THE LIMITS OF LIBERALISM IN PARTICIPATORY ENVIRONMENTAL GOVERNANCE

In delineating the differences between the 'political' in Vilkovo and Ukraine and the 'political' of participatory environmental governance, this section focuses on three issues: a) the opacity and capriciousness of power; b) the limits of deliberation; and c) secularity and the domain of 'the political' itself.

Participatory governance techniques are premised on a notion that power is or can be made transparent. Assumptions about 'transparency' are found in modernity in both its socialist and capitalist variants and modernity's emphasis on humanity's capacity to master the environment through reason, scientific pursuit and discovery of truth (Sanders and West, 2003: 7). Managers' assumptions that the 'objective facts of the matter' can be made transparent likely stem as much from having lived under socialism as from their inculcation into the norms of liberal environmental governance. Their attempts to dispel lies and rumours via the media reflects these assumptions. They thus seem to share some liberal assumptions in their understanding of antagonisms as being about the clash of interests (between the state enterprise and the Reserve) and in their assertions that these can be resolved through rational deliberation, argumentation and the analysis of evidence in courts.

While transparency 'presumes a surface to power that can be seen through and interior that can… be seen' (ibid.: 16), spreading lies and rumours acquire heightened significance as a political practice in places where 'reality' (facts) always has hidden dimensions and power is capricious. Rumour (*slukh*, in Russian) is a tricky term. In its most positivist form, rumour may be seen as 'officials' term for information they have not engendered' (White, 2000: 210). However, rumours may be conceived as a form of 'collective problem-solving' of people caught in ambiguous situations (Shibutani, 1966: 17). Many people passing on rumours see themselves as telling others what they know, not an untruth (Perice, 1997) and consider what they tell to be plausible. In her study of vampire stories in eastern Africa, White conceptualizes rumours as an epistemology, a way of knowing, commenting on and explaining the operation of colonial and postcolonial power. In contrast to gossip, rumours 'move between ideas about the personal and political, the local and the national' (White, 2000: 62). Thus, passing on rumours is a form of talk or storytelling. However, the designation of a story as a rumour or lie also occurs within fields of power similar to the way in which an account is labelled a conspiracy theory (Pelkmans and

Machold, 2011). Administrators differentiated between deliberate attempts to spread misinformation (the case with the journalist), and less malign embellishments of information that occurred as a result of misunderstanding (the case of the snake). Thus, assuming a priori an exclusively relativistic or realistic approach to rumour may result in overlooking how such distinctions are made in ethnographic settings.

In Soviet and Ukrainian state-making/breaking projects the exercise of power has been 'unpredictable and capricious' rather than 'rational and transparent' (Sanders and West, 2003: 7). One consequence is an ambivalent relationship with the state. Residents simultaneously lamented shrinking state employment and benefits and the expansion of mind-boggling regulation involved, for example, in privatizing a plot, registering a boat, and fishing commercially. The following lines were often recited to me: 'Question: Which state authorities were best? Answer: After the Romanians left and before the Soviets returned'. The message is that no state is the best state. From this viewpoint, any restrictions on resource use are an affront. At the same time, residents positively referenced the Tsar's declaration when complaining about the Reserve, which suggests an expectation that the state provide special privileges to locals. Given that consultations conducted in the course of creating the DBR targeted local elites, it is not surprising that non-elite residents (particularly fishermen and cattle owners) experienced the DBR's expansion as an arbitrary imposition analogous to the creation and expansion of the reserve. Indeed, in one conversation, a male resident named three reserve administrators and stated, 'they are a force, they are the state'.[14] Thus, while a rumour about the introduction of foreign species of snakes is the inverse of a rumour about the banning of an existing resource use, it is part and parcel of a world in which state power is exercised arbitrarily with bans, prohibitions and special privileges. By contrast, the rumour about payment for digging up canals was likely an attempt to cajole out of the reserve a more equitable distribution of funds instead of giving a large grant to a single firm.

The experience of power as opaque and capricious may also be connected with a preference for political acts that resemble 'a stab in the back'. Vilkovchani, outsiders who had moved to the town as adults, and an Odessa-based ethnographer asserted that sorcery is more prevalent in the town than elsewhere in the surrounding districts. Sorcerers are regularly consulted by opponents in business and legal disputes. Arson is another tactic used. In August 2011, a particularly dry year, fire was deliberately set to reed beds causing significant losses. The

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[14] 'Petr', 18 August 2010, Vilkovo.

perpetrator was never found. A Reserve scientist speculated that someone might have been attempting to undermine the profits of reed firms and the Reserve administration (which receives fees from the reed firms). In another case, some small-scale entrepreneurs claimed they would set fire to a prominent businessperson's boats if the latter continued efforts to limit their access to the tourist market.

While rumours signal the existence of a world in which power is opaque rather than 'transparent', acts of denunciation signal assumptions about the political more akin to Carl Schmitt's. For Schmitt, the friend/enemy distinction and antagonism are foundational while elimination of the enemy rather than deliberation is the key mode of action. Denunciations refer to 'spontaneous communications from individual citizens to the state (or to another authority such as the church) containing accusations of wrongdoing by other citizens or officials and implicitly or explicitly calling for punishment' (Fitzpatrick and Gellately, 1996: 747, 763). Although forms of denunciation exist in most societies, states like the Soviet Union made extensive use of *donosy* in consolidating citizen loyalty (ibid.). In the Soviet Union, although informers were a special category of denouncers, ordinary citizens also wrote spontaneous denunciations with grievances, complaints and requests, but did not think of themselves as collaborators (ibid.: 758).

Two aspects of denunciation stand out in these conflicts: the letters to prosecutors and public accusations about Reserve managers being 'Romanian spies' and 'enemies of the people'. Local deputies' letters to the prosecutor accusing reserve managers of accounting irregularities is most similar to the Soviet practice of *donos*. The prosecutor was obliged to investigate — although he did not need to initiate a criminal investigation. This is thus a disciplinary rather than a deliberative practice that sets in motion the coercive apparatus of the state. Media reports accusing the Reserve managers and other opponents of the canal of treason and collaboration also foreclose the possibility for deliberation. They imply that the traitor has transgressed law and morality and put the integrity of the state at risk as a result of which s/he should be denied certain rights of citizenship (Kelly and Thiranagama, 2010). The friend/enemy distinction in acts of treason is about 'perverted sameness' — the enemy within — rather than the distant other of nationalism (ibid.: 2, 9). However, the two converge in border zones such as the Kiliya district. The conflict between the Romanian and Ukrainian governments and the DBR's prior international cooperation with the Romanian reserve created key preconditions for accusing DBR employees of treason.

As a conflict-mitigating practice, healing works very differently from the deliberative model of participation in which antagonistic parties can talk through their differences in a formal public meeting. In the healer's use of prayer, DBR employees and a healer shared assumptions about the capacities of invisible, transcendent powers to help mitigate conflict. No courts, newspapers, public debate or offers of compensation could end the antagonism. Although the healing ritual is not private, in that a healer comes to a state office to perform the ritual in front of employees, the parties are kept apart and the healer invokes invisible powers (God, Jesus, Mother of God) to end overt antagonism.

Considering the efficacy of prayer in mitigating conflict takes us to the limit of the modern domain of 'the political' itself. First, moderns of different types (socialist, liberal) would deny the efficacy of a healing ritual involving prayer and holy water. Although moderns might concede that people *believe* it mitigates conflict, they would argue that in reality, there must be other objective or material reasons that caused the conflict to end, rendering the 'efficacy' of the ritual a mere coincidence. Second, while protected area and environmental managers might allow for the performance of rituals, their classification as 'religion' or 'culture' makes them peripheral to the central practices of participatory management (see Blaser, 2009). Third, even radical conceptions of participation as empowerment are embedded in secular understandings of the political as a distinct realm (see Hickey and Mohan, 2005) in which religious institutions should not interfere.

Oppositions such as belief/knowledge, reason/imagination, natural/supernatural and sacred/profane pervade modernity (Asad, 2003:23). In conceiving conflict and antagonism as 'political', conservationists and analysts may be engaged in 'uncontrolled equivocation' (Blaser, 2009: 17-18; Vivieros de Castro, 2004: 11), that is, an act of mistranslation that occurs when parties do not recognize that misunderstanding is taking place. Anthropologists have long made the point that the very assumption that there is a 'political' domain as opposed to 'religion', 'kinship', and 'economy' is grounded in modernity. Positing these domains as given means we miss the relevant distinctions of other places, even places that might not appear, at first glance, to be so different. This case provokes us to think of how attempts to mitigate antagonism around conservation might differ if they were thought of in terms other than those typically associated with liberal secular understandings of 'the political'.[15]

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[15] Religious institutions acknowledge the efficacy of prayer on the environment. The Vatican sanctioned changes to an existing prayer as a way to help reverse the retreat of glaciers in the Swiss Alps. See National Geographic 10

CONCLUSION

Participatory management techniques are aimed at preventing or mitigating conflict around natural resource use in protected areas. However, how conflict arises differs according to foundational assumptions about what the political is and what counts as politics. Juxtaposing an analysis of the World Bank report and practices of politics in rural Ukraine demonstrates how and why the participatory management processes envisaged by World Bank consultants founder in this environment.

First, where local elites allied with central government officials in using the repressive apparatus of the state, a participatory management body would have made it easier to pursue the shipping agenda and oust 'problematic' reserve personnel. Second, for ordinary residents, the experience of power has been opaque, capricious and arbitrary rather than transparent, orderly or equitable. Rumour is thus a practice for making sense of and commenting on the way power works where people live. The notion of open and transparent communication on which participatory processes are based runs up against the assumption that public statements cannot be taken at face value as representing a person's interests. Third, in situations where central government officials use coercive measures to undermine reserve administrators and to depict them as traitors to the national interest, the conflict is already beyond the realm of deliberative argument. Fourth, and perhaps most troubling for secular moderns, there are what we might gloss over as non-secular techniques of conflict resolution such as healing rituals and prayer that invoke invisible powers. The model differs from the face-to-face dialogue of deliberative democracy in recognizing first, that power and interests are not transparent, and second, that semi-public acts of prayer and ritual carried out with the separation of conflicting sides are more efficacious than open, public discussion.

The aim of my critique is neither to say that we should stop striving for a more just conservation practice nor that DBR management practices adequately engage non-elite Vilkovchani. It is rather to press for a more radical rethinking of the foundational (ontological) assumptions on which such conflict resolution measures are built. Conservation projects that

August 2012 http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2012/08/120810-glaciers-vatican-prayer-alps-science-gobal-warming/

overlook differences in foundational assumptions about power, antagonism and the practice of politics — or reduce them to 'culture' — may misrecognize and misunderstand the dynamics of the conflicts they seek to mitigate. In evaluating the success and failure of conservation projects, the liberal assumptions informing the World Bank's practice leads to unfair expectations of reserve administrators who should single-handedly transform the local economy and prevent officials from carrying out anti-conservation agendas.

In closing, I echo calls for creating management processes that allow spaces for dissent and disagreement (Brosius and Russell 2003). I also echo calls to recognize informal decision-making and management practices (Cleaver 2001). Finally, those designing participatory management processes might consider the possibilities of non-liberal practices of conflict management like local healing rituals. Perhaps separating parties, at least for some time, rather than bringing them together to have a dialogue would work better to resolve conflict. Sometimes semi-private or semi-public deliberation may be more effective than public deliberation. Most important, though, is the recognition that foundational assumptions about the world — about individuals, power and relationships — are not the same everywhere. This is a basic point but one that is worth reiterating given the ubiquity of liberal assumptions in globally propagated forms of participatory environmental management.

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Tanya Richardson is associate professor in the Department of Global Studies at Wilfrid Laurier
University. She researches the politics and history of biodiversity conservation and ecological
restoration around Ukraine's Danube Delta. Postal address: 75 University Avenue, Waterloo,
N2L 3C5, Canada. Email: trichardson@wlu.ca.