

# Nature-Based Tourism and Neoliberalism: Concealing Contradictions

**Rosaleen Duffy**  
**Development Studies, SOAS**

Pre proof version -forthcoming (2015) *Tourism Geographies*

## **Abstract**

This paper demonstrates how tourism, including nature based tourism, simultaneously produces and conceals the contradictions of capitalism; this is because it relies on creating attractions, or new sources of accumulation from the very crises it produces. Nature-based tourism is promoted as a ‘win-win’ that can resolve the contradiction between continual economic growth and finite natural resources (Fletcher, 2011; O’Connor, 1988). This is made possible via a process of neoliberalising nature, which cuts the threads that bind ecosystems together, so that the constituent parts can be transformed into new commodities (Büscher et al, 2012; Castree, 2009; Heynen et al, 2007; McCarthy and Prudham, 2004: 275-277; Peck and Theodore, 2007). To draw out these broad arguments, this paper firstly examines the claims around tourism as ‘Green Economy’ – which proponents claim can produce environmentally sustainable economic growth – a benefit also associated with nature-based tourism. I also show that this can be regarded as simply the latest version of an existing debate rather than offering a new interpretation. This is explored further via a comparative analysis of how tourism neoliberalises nature at the scales of the individual animal (elephant trekking in Thailand) and the landscape (by global networks of NGOs operating in Madagascar). In the case of neoliberalisation of nature at the individual animal scale, the notion of bodily fix is also important. It is not just the elephants that are primed for commodity capture, it is the emotional experience of close interactions with elephants which is commodified (Fletcher, 2014: 185; Fletcher and Neves, 2013). Such changes reshape societal relations with nature, but in uneven and incomplete ways. This is underlined by a discussion of the case of the Durban Vision Initiative in Madagascar – which reveals how neoliberalisation was incomplete as a result of its encounter with local level materialities.

**Keywords:** ecotourism, green economy, neoliberalising nature, Madagascar, Thailand, conservation, elephants, capitalism, nature-based tourism.

## MAIN TEXT

### Introduction

This paper offers a critical analysis of the ways that nature-based tourism, as a key driver of neoliberalism, conceals the contradictions between economic growth and environmental sustainability. In essence, nature-based tourism allows neoliberalism to turn the very crises it has created into new sources of accumulation (Büscher et al, 2012). In this paper I will use the debates around neoliberalisation of nature (see Bakker, 2010; Braun, 2008; Castree, 2009; 2008a; and 2008b; Heynen et al, 2007; McCarthy and Prudham, 2004: 275-277; Peck and Theodore, 2007), as a framework for understanding the ways that nature-based tourism is promoted as a means of creating a ‘win-win’ of resolving these contradictions (Fletcher, 2011; O’Connor, 1988).

Nature-based tourism is one of a number of global dynamics that has expanded and deepened neoliberalism, allowing it to extend neoliberal logics to a greater range of non-human biophysical phenomena. Extending neoliberalism to new arenas in nature requires exposing and categorising the various ecosystemic threads and linkages so that they can be subjected to further separation, marketization, and alienation. This process of separation allows nature to be ‘flattened and deadened’ into abstract objects, primed for commodity capture to create economic value (Büscher, et al, 2012: 8-23). While there is a debate on how tourism might contribute to economic development in the South (for example see Sharpley and Telfer (eds) 2002), little attention is paid to understanding how nature-based tourism intersects with neoliberalism. There have been some recent critical studies by Fletcher (2011), Fletcher and Neves (2012), Davidov (2012), West and Carrier (2004), Schilcher (2007), Lacher and Nepal (2010) and Neves (2010) but they deserve further examination. In this paper, I seek to extend and develop critiques of the relationships between tourism and

neoliberalism. I will examine tourism as part of the promotion of the idea of the Green Economy, and then analyse the ways that neoliberalisation of nature occurs at two very different scales: neoliberalising individual animals via the development of elephant riding experiences in Thailand, and neoliberalisation at the landscape scale by global networks, notably by conservation NGOs in Madagascar. This comparative approach seeks to address one of the central weaknesses of the neoliberal nature debate, as identified by Castree (2008a, 2008b), that it tends to focus on single case studies that provide explanations of dynamics at particular sites, but which do not then expand the analysis to identify broader patterns, commonalities and divergences. It is important to interrogate how and why some types or processes of neoliberalisation occur, while others do not (Bakker, 2010, 70-72). This paper seeks to interrogate the question of whether there are similarities in the ways tourism conceals the contradictions of capitalism despite the significant differences between the case studies.

### **Neoliberalism, Tourism and the Green Economy**

In this paper I argue that using a tourism lens we can better understand how capitalism produces and then conceals crises by reconfiguring them into new sources of accumulation (see Büscher, et al, 2012). Drawing on Marx, capitalist production requires extraction of surplus from labour and nature. As extraction increases certain contradictions emerge that prevent further growth, and so capitalism sows the seeds of its own destruction. In order to prevent that, contradictions must be overcome, and growth can only continue if there is greater exploitation (extraction from) labour or the environment (see O'Connor, 1988; Robbins, 2-12: 54). However, nature-based tourism promotes a 'win-win' scenario that allows its supporters to claim it can resolve this contradiction (Fletcher, 2011; O'Connor, 1988; Fletcher and Neves, 2012).

Tourism, more broadly, is often presented as a ‘clean industry’ that stands in contrast to heavy industries, able to provide more environmentally sustainable forms of economic development. Focusing on individual initiatives such as ecolodges or nature based experiences renders invisible the wider environmental effects of tourism. For example, for European or North American clients to visit an ecolodge in the South, they need to fly vast distances, but this contribution to climate change is concealed (see Gössling and Upham (eds), 2009; Hickman, 2007). An examination of recent discussions around the role of tourism in Green Economy allows us to examine these concealed contradictions in greater detail.

Tourism has recently been identified as a core component of the Green Economy, which refers to a shift to economic activities that are also ecologically beneficial. While there is no agreed definition of the Green Economy, or related ideas of Green Growth, it is promoted by the leading international organisations, including the World Bank, UNEP and the Asian Development Bank (Wanner, 2014). The World Bank, for example, defines it as economic growth that is ‘environmentally sustainable’; the recent World Bank *Report on Green Growth* states that current growth dynamics are unsustainable, and it identifies ‘inclusive green growth’ as the pathway to sustainable development (World Bank, 2012: 1). UNEP has a more detailed definition, but one that still presents the green economy as a means of producing sustainability, economic growth and poverty reduction:

‘we consider green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication as one of the important tools available for achieving sustainable development and that it could provide options for policy making but should not be a rigid set of rules. We emphasize that it should contribute to eradicating poverty as well as sustained economic growth, enhancing social inclusion, improving human welfare

and creating opportunities for employment and decent work for all, while maintaining the healthy functioning of the Earth's ecosystems' (UN, 2012: 9).

The importance of the idea and of the term was cemented in 2011 when it was launched as an official policy launched by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). It further developed from the 'Green New Deal' (UNEP 2009) and was central to discussions at the Rio+20 Earth Summit in 2012. It is a core part of the document entitled *The Future We Want*, adopted at Rio+20. With such powerful supporters, the notion of a Green Economy is beginning to supplant the 'sustainable development' approach promoted since the Brundtland Report in 1987 (Brand, 2011; Wanner, 2014).

Wanner (2014) argues that the Green Economy is a means by which neoliberal forms of capitalism sidestep and obfuscate the contradictions inherent in the tensions between continual economic growth and ecological limits. In this paper I argue that the Green Economy approach, and tourism as a potential contributor to it, is an example of how nature can be regarded as a new frontier of capital accumulation, as more and more non-human phenomena are identified, captured and reconfigured to draw them in to the dynamics of global capital. This is especially relevant when we consider the centrality of tourism to the notion of Green Economy. For example, UNEP and the UN World Tourism Organisation also produced a joint report in 2012 entitled *Tourism in the Green Economy*; the report defined tourism in the Green Economy as 'tourism activities that can be maintained, or sustained, indefinitely in their social, economic, cultural, and environmental contexts: "sustainable tourism".' (UNEP/UNWTO, 2012: 1). The report also set out a series of key messages, they included the argument that tourism could act as a driver for world economic growth, green tourism could create more green jobs and that tourists themselves were demanding the greening of tourism (UNEP/UNWTO, 2012: vii-viii). A Green Economy

Tourism System (GETS) is being developed to model and evaluate how tourism can contribute to the Green Economy (Law et al, 2012). As a major international policy direction, the Green Economy has the potential to promote tourism further and thereby intensify neoliberalism.

However, while these recent reports and international policy statements cement the role of tourism in developing a Green Economy it is important to note that the positive claims about the role of tourism in sustainable development are not necessarily new. These claims pre-date the current fashion by some decades, and have been closely associated with the development of a wider range of 'alternative' tourisms, including sustainable tourism, ecotourism, community based tourism, Pro Poor Tourism, even back-packing and adventure tourism. Cater (2006) for example, argues that ecotourism is a Western construct, and is deeply implicated in the expansion of global capitalism. It can also be argued that these are anchored in more established debates around utilization, notably selling nature to save it (McAfee, 1999) and notions of Natural Capital (Costanza et al, 1997). This is discussed in greater detail in the next section. It is important to unpick and analyse the ways that tourism has not just been reflective of the expansion of global neoliberalism, but has intensified and amplified it, even that it has been constitutive of neoliberalism. Indeed, high level international calls for a move to a Green Economy are just the latest version of older claims that tourism is a 'cleaner' and more environmentally sustainable form of economic development.

Since the late 1970s global tourism flows have rapidly increased, while there have been dips in tourist numbers following major world events (such as 9/11 and the financial crisis in 2007-8), the reductions were temporary. The overall pattern for global tourism is consistent growth, partly due to the rise in demand from emerging markets in Asia. The expansion of the ability to travel for leisure has been accompanied by the development of

more specialised products centred on ethical, responsible or green travel ( Butcher, 2003; Fletcher, 2014: 91-112; Hampton, 2013). As a result, tourism has proved to be highly attractive and has been promoted and driven forward as a key policy agenda of international financial institutions , private sector organisations, NGOs and national governments (Fletcher, 2011, 451-454; Lee, Hampton, and Jeyacheya, 2014). Crucially it has been identified and promoted as a means of achieving economic growth that is environmentally sustainable, or even environmentally beneficial – a key claim that is repeated in the current debates around the importance of a shift towards a Green Economy (UNEP, 2012; UNEP/UNWTO, 2012; Law et al, 2012). It is worth reiterating here that the current interest in the Green Economy centres on the idea that continuing growth can be achieved via a shift to economic activities that are also ecologically beneficial, which is essentially the same set of claims that have long been associated with the assumed benefits of nature-based tourism. This brings me neatly on to discussing the key mechanisms through which tourism and neoliberalism are inter-twined. In the next section I will discuss how tourism is constitutive of neoliberalism via a process of neoliberalising nature.

### **Neoliberalising Nature**

There is a substantial debate around how to define neoliberalism itself and the meanings and practices of neoliberalising nature, which has obvious implications for how we think about why nature based tourism might be considered as an expression or driver of it (for debates on neoliberalising nature see Castree, 2009; 2008a; and 2008b; Bakker, 2010; McCarthy and Prudham, 2004: 275-277; Heynen and Robbins, 2005; Peck and Tickell, 2002; Liverman, 2004; Heynen et al, 2007; Brand and Gorg, 2008). Briefly, the commodification, regulation and appropriation of a range of non-human phenomena are central elements of the extension

and intensification of market logics (Zeller, 2008: 91). Furthermore, McCarthy and Prudham argue that neoliberalism can be regarded as an inherently and necessarily environmental project, because it changes the relationships between human communities and biophysical nature (McCarthy and Prudham, 2004, 275-277; also see Heynen et al, 2007). As Büscher, argues, neoliberalism has produced 'derivative nature' because the value of nature is brought into the arena of commodities and priced in monetary terms; for Büscher, derivatives are financial mechanisms whose monetary value is derived from value of the underlying assets. We can extend this to help us understand nature-based tourism: 'nature' constitutes underlying asset, while the real source of value are images and symbols in the realms of branding, public relations and marketing; the investment of capital is focused on 'creating value out of meanings and images that nature (and poverty) (ideally) *represent*, rather than what they *are*' (emphasis in the original, Büscher, 2010a: 271).

It is via mechanisms of pricing, regulation and appropriation that promoters of tourism claim to offer an environmental fix for capitalism. One of the main processes through which nature can be reconfigured through tourism is via commodification. This involves the creation of economic value from landscapes, animals and experiences. One of the core justifications for nature-based tourism is that nature can be conserved or saved because of its 'market value', and hence it can be commodified (see McAfee, 1999; McAfee, 2012; West and Carrier, 2004; Neves, 2010; Fletcher, 2010; Fletcher, 2014; Büscher et al 2012: 12-23; Costanza et al, 1997). Ecotourism, in particular, intersects with ideas of 'last chance to see' tourism that clearly captures and defines certain aspects of nature as deeply threatened and mobilises arguments about scarcity and precarity as a rationale for creation of new attractions; as Lemelin, Dawson and Stewart (eds) (2012) show how it is promoted as an opportunity to witness (and consume) the demise of ecosystems, the extinction of species, or even ecocide, at first hand.



Bakker suggests that current forms of capitalism are neoliberal because they are characterised by increasing involvement of private corporations in resource ownership, biotechnological innovation and the provision of ecosystem services (Bakker, 2010, 715; Bakker, 2005; Perelman, 2007, 59-60; Brand and Gorg, 2008). As Büscher et al suggest, environmental initiatives increasingly *entrain* nature to capitalism, while creating greater opportunities for capitalist expansion – nature (paradoxically) constitutes the ‘friend of capitalism’ (Büscher et al 2012: 7).

However, while the debate around the neoliberalisation of nature is helpful for understanding the ways tourism is interwoven with neoliberalism, it is important to note its weaknesses and gaps. Neoliberalism itself is an unevenly applied doctrine and there are significant disconnections between the theoretical definitions of neoliberalism and how it is practiced in a range of settings (Brenner and Theodore, 2002; Harvey, 2005; and Mansfield, 2004; Bakker, 2005; Castree, 2008a; McCarthy and Prudham, 2004; Peck and Brenner, 2007; Peck and Tickell, 2002; Bakker, 2010: 717). Castree (2008a and 2008b) argues that there are three weaknesses of the neoliberal nature debate: first, the failure to sufficiently explain the interactions between neoliberalisation and the environment; second, the ways that different kinds of neoliberalism are conflated into one single unitary global project; third, a focus on single case studies that provide explanations of particular resources, places or processes but do not expand their analyses to interrogate and articulate broader patterns, commonalities and differences (also see Bakker, 2009). The two case studies presented in this paper address Castree’s second and third criticisms; they indicate how neoliberalism needs to be regarded as differentiated, uneven and incomplete, and draw comparisons between two different geographical locations and at two different scales.

In the next section I will examine the ways that tourism acts as a driver of neoliberalism via processes that capture, entrain and reconfigure nature so that it can become

a site of accumulation. Comparing the two cases will indicate that there are common themes: the outcomes are not necessarily negative for the animals, people or landscapes involved, but that their neoliberalisation reconfigures them in ways that allow them to be sold and re-sold, turning them into significant new sites of accumulation for global capital. It further indicates that despite the differing contexts and scales, there are common patterns through which the contradictions of capitalism are concealed via tourism.

### **Neoliberalism, animals and tourism**

Fletcher suggests that some forms of nature-based tourism produce another kind of ‘bodily fix’ for capitalism – that it uses the human body as a site of accumulation by selling experiences that evoke desired emotions and sensations. It sells a particular affective state: excitement, satisfaction, peace and so on. Since these are transient *experiences*, they can only be recaptured by being purchased anew (Fletcher, 2014: 185; Fletcher and Neves, 2013; also see Straughan (2012) on the importance of embodied engagement in her study of intertwining of touch, water and scuba diving). For Fletcher, tourism (especially ecotourism) produces a ‘fix’ for the problems associated with routinized, alienating forms of labour (Fletcher, 2014:185). But we can push this further, it can also be argued that the production of new sensory experiences also intensify, deepen and extend neoliberalism by conjuring up a new commodity, *the experience*, that can be sold over and over again. Neves (2010) argues in her study of whale watching tourism, that most operators present and market the product they sell as if it were not a commodity *and* as if it were not based on capitalist relations amongst different groups of people. Similarly, Bulbeck presents an excellent analysis of the production of close encounters with dolphins at Monkey Mia in Western Australia; her study indicates the ways nature, in the form of ‘wild’ dolphins are ‘*entrained*’ (in Büscher’s (2012) terms) and reconfigured to create products to sell as interactive tourist experiences. The

dolphins are encouraged to visit the bay via strategies of feeding and interaction with tourists in the long term, but the problems associated with producing such interactions, including poor health and shortened lifespans for dolphins are rendered invisible to tourists (see Bulbeck, 2005). As Fletcher and Neves (2012) suggest in their study of ecotourism as a manifold fix, it has the capacity to transform bodies into sites of virtually limitless capital accumulation by promising a satisfying experience yet usually delivering instead a mere 'pseudocatharsis' that paradoxically stimulates a desire for further experience in pursuit of the fulfilment continually deferred.

This notion of the bodily fix, coupled with the environmental fix is especially useful for understanding the dynamics of elephant trekking experiences in the Thai tourism industry. Thailand is a well established tourist destination. Its product is highly varied, and includes standard packages of the three or four 'S's: sun, sea, sand and sex; it also markets itself as a destination for cultural tourism (especially to see Northern Hill communities), adventure tourism (eg scuba diving, sea kayaking), nature-based tourism (visiting national parks, wildlife viewing) (for further discussion see Cohen, 2008; Peleggi, 1996). There are 40-50 elephant camps in Thailand, and they form a central part of the tourism industry in Northern Thailand, especially around Chiang Mai (Kontogeorgopoulos, 2009: 431). Thailand has 3000 elephants, 2000 of which are privately owned elephants and only 1000 living in national parks (figures are approximate). There is a long standing cultural practice of owning and training elephants as work animals in Thailand (see Lair, 2004). This is reflected in the fact that the government authorities responsible for Thailand's captive elephants are the Department of Livestock, Department of Transport, and the Forest Industry Organisation, rather than the Department of National Parks or Ministry of Environment (further discussion of ownership categories of captive elephants see Lair, 2004: 15-30; also see Kontogeorgopoulos, 2009: 440; Locke, 2011).

Following the 1989 logging ban there was a need to find alternative forms of employment for working elephants and their mahouts (in Thailand Mahouts are those who work closely with elephants; they can be trainers, keepers and/or owners, for further discussion see Lair, 2004). It is difficult to argue trained elephants in Thailand should simply be released into National Parks. Not all trained elephants will be capable of living without human oversight and close management because they have not developed the necessary foraging skills. Furthermore, the National Parks system in Thailand is not extensive enough to accommodate them. Since captive elephants are costly to keep, they have been engaged in paid employment. For mahouts the elephant is a source of income, but it eats between 120 and 250 kgs of food per day and can cost up to US\$400 per month to keep (Cohen, 2008: 142). Without access to work in the logging camps the elephants and their mahouts had to find alternative employment (interviews with representative of the Mahout Training School, TECC, Lampang, March 20, 2008; interview with representative of Patara Elephant Farm, Chiang Mai, April 6, 2008; also see Kontogeorgopoulos, 2009b). Tourism was identified as a key sector to provide opportunities for working elephants, and a range of elephant-based experiences have developed since 1989. Elephant trekking, for example, is marketed in a variety of ways to attract the vast range of tourists that visit Thailand seeking different kinds of tourist experiences. Thailand has reconfigured and mobilised the historical practice of using elephants as a labour force in the logging industry to attract international tourists. The transfer of working elephants from the public to the private sector came from small beginnings in the Government-run Thai Elephant Conservation Centre. It started out as the 'Young Elephant Training Centre' as a place for training mahouts and providing short courses for officials who might encounter elephants as part of their duties (e.g. police officers who confiscated elephants in urban areas, zookeepers etc). The Thai Elephant Conservation Center (TECC) then began to offer tourist rides for elephants and a short show where

elephants displayed the skills they had once used in the logging industry, such as skidding and piling up logs. As the TECC tourist 'product' developed, the mahouts trained the elephants to play musical instruments. The idea was then taken up by the private sector, a number of elephant camps have opened in the Chiang Mai area and the product was extended again to include elephant painting) (interview with representative of Maetaman Elephant Camp, Maerim, April 07, 2008) aimed at the international tourist market. Other common activities found in elephant shows (for example Mae Sa and Maetaman elephant camps) include elephants playing football/ basketball and re-enactments of the trust between mahout and elephant where the elephant steps over a mahout lying on the ground (personal observations from Maetaman Elephant Camp, April 7, 2008; Mae Sa Elephant Camp, April 10, 2008; and TECC, March 13, 2008 and April 10, 2008; also see Kontogeorgopoulos, 2009; and Locke, 2011).

However, while tourism serves to expand neoliberalism further, it is important to note that many of those involved in elephant management in Thailand recognise that that it is unlikely to provide a long term solution. Further, this is indicative of the ways that the process of neoliberalising nature is necessarily incomplete and uneven (Brenner and Theodore, 2002; Bakker, 2010). For example, a senior manager for Thai Elephants and Mahouts at TECC pointed out that tourist rides and mahout training experiences were unlikely to be a sufficient and sustainable funding stream for elephants in the longer term. Therefore, TECC had developed new products from their elephants, including elephant dung paper and organic fertiliser. He was also involved in a medical study with the University of Chiang Mai about the positive influence of experiences between elephants and autistic children (interview with representative of the Training School for Thai Elephants and Mahouts, TECC, Lampang, March 20, 2008; TECC, Undated). Therefore, staff at TECC were exploring a combination of producing new commodities as well as demonstrating their

importance beyond a market value. This builds on and extends the historical relationship with elephants through the practice of mahoutship. For example, mahouts will pray to Ganesha (elephant – headed deity commonly associated with Hinduism and Buddhism) before any journey with an elephant; Ganesha is very popular in Thailand, as well as the wider South and Southeast Asian regions. In addition to this, elephants were once a status symbol in Thailand. Elephant symbolism is common in Thailand, from the logo of Chang Beer to the lapel pins worn by students at Chiang Mai University. Furthermore, in 1998 the Government declared 13 March National Elephant Day, during which elephants are celebrated and treated to large ‘fruit buffets’ that draw crowds of Thai and foreign tourists to elephant camps (The Times, 2009). So the development of new tourist experiences with elephants has not displaced other ways of interacting with and understanding elephants *per se*.

Nevertheless, Kontogeorgopoulos (2009b, 443) suggests that the future for elephants depends on demonstrating the economic importance and utility to human beings because of the large number of trained elephants that are not suitable for release, the lack of space available for releasing them into national parks and the costs of their upkeep. Therefore, the dynamics of neoliberalising nature via tourism development are uneven and incomplete – in line with arguments around actually existing neoliberalism (Brenner and Theodore, 2002). Here it is useful to examine these dynamics at a very different scale to draw out how tourism neoliberalises nature in very complex and uneven ways. I now turn to the inter-relationships between nature, tourism and neoliberalism at the landscape scale to draw comparisons about how tourism simultaneously creates and conceals contradictions.

### **Neoliberalising Nature at the Landscape Scale**

Tourism is also an important underpinning for neoliberalisation of nature at the scale of landscapes. Wildlife conservation organisations are increasingly keen to support ‘landscape scale’ projects that encompass larger ecosystems than those contained within individual protected areas. The Peace Parks Foundation, in particular, has been at the forefront of promoting Transfrontier Conservation Areas (TFCAs) across Sub-Saharan Africa as a means of achieving sustainable development; and they are clear expression of neoliberalism (Duffy, 2006; Büscher, 2010b). It is assumed that tourism revenues will be part of the funding to allow TFCAs to become financially self-sustaining. These assumptions are not confined to TFCAs, but are also deeply embedded in thinking around the development of other landscape scale projects that aim to link individual protected areas.

The Heartlands programme by the African Wildlife Foundation (AWF) is a good example of the complex linkages between global dynamics, tourism and changes in how local communities can access land and resources (including wildlife). The Maasai Steppe Heartland is presented by AWF as an area with a dense elephant population and interesting local culture, its strap line is *‘Engaging communities so that wildlife can wander’* (AWF, Undated). Further it is assumed that the area will be a major tourist destination and that the revenues will produce incentives for local people to engage in wildlife conservation (Büscher and Igoe, 2013: 293-295). Here again we can see the global dynamics of neoliberalism at play – global tourism is presented as the funding engine for a perceived ‘triple win’: simultaneously producing wildlife conservation, local community development and national economic development. However, this is only one side of the story, and as Büscher and Igoe (2013) detail, the material realities of elephant conservation on the ground where those promised benefits to communities failed to materialise, farmers suffered from greater levels of encroachment by elephants on their crops, and some communities were displaced by the growing elephant populations. It is important that we are fully cognisant of the ways that

tourism as a means of expanding and intensifying neoliberalism into a greater range of non-human phenomena actually play out on the ground. Here it is worth further exploring the ways that tourism can be used to neoliberalise nature at a landscape scale. I now turn to the development of a network of new protected areas in Madagascar during 2003-2008 to provide a comparison of the ways tourism neoliberalises at the very different scale of the individual animal, but yet produces certain patterns of divergence and commonality.

Under the Government of Ravalomanana (2002-2009) Madagascar underwent a wide programme of liberalisation, which included a planned expansion of the tourism industry and the establishment of a new network of protected areas under the Durban Vision Initiative. Ecotourism has been identified as a critical sector for Madagascar, and has been promoted by the Government, private sector, IFIs and global NGOs as a means by which the country can achieve environmental protection with economic development. For Madagascar, the main attraction is wildlife-based ecotourism, especially visiting national parks, reserves and (to a lesser extent) beaches and marine-based tourism including scuba diving and whale watching (interviews with representative of Ministry of Tourism March 30, 2004; representative of the Professional Association of Tour Operators in Madagascar, Antananarivo, April 19, 2004; representative of the Office National Pour L'Environnement (ONE), Antananarivo, March 31, 2004). Most of the tourism industry is located in the island of Nosy Be (off the north coast of Madagascar), with another popular but less visited route through south-central Madagascar from the capital, Antananarivo, through Isalo National Park, to Ifaty and/or Fort Dauphin, to visit the privately owned Berenty Reserve (interviews with representative of ANGAP, Antananarivo, March 31, 2004; representative of Ministry of Tourism March 30, 2004). In 2010, under the aegis of the Indian Ocean Commission, Madagascar became part of a global branding exercise known as The Vanilla Islands; and in 2012 the Vanilla Islands Organisation was established (funded by the European Union). The aim is to draw together



Comoros, Mauritius, Madagascar, La Reunion, Maldives, Mayotte and Seychelles under one marketing banner, to increase connectivity for tourism (and tourists) travelling between islands, and the creation of multi destination products to attract more visitors to the Indian Ocean region (UNWTO, 2013; Madagascar Tourisme, Undated). According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), although Madagascar is relatively small tourism market in global terms, the total contribution of tourism to GDP was significant, at US\$1.5 billion in 2011 (taking account of the wider effects of investment and supply chain). Out of 181 countries, Madagascar was placed 120<sup>th</sup> in terms of absolute contribution of tourism to GDP, but was 49<sup>th</sup> in terms of relative contribution (WTTC, 2012: 7), so tourism is a significant sector for the economy (also see Scales, 2014b). Tourism has faced more turbulent global markets and has been disrupted by political instability following a coup by Andry Rajoelina (President 2009 to 2014). In more recent years, tourism has been overtaken by mining (and latterly oil and gas exploration) as a major economic driver in Madagascar; two high profile examples are the worlds' largest nickel and cobalt mine (developed by Sherrit International, SNC-Lavalin Inc, Sumitomo Corporation and Korea Resources Corporation) at Ambatovy (Ambatovy, Undated) and the ilmenite mine in Fort Dauphin, developed by Qit Madagascar Minerals /Rio Tinto and Government of Madagascar (Rio Tinto, Undated) (discussed in greater detail later).

Turning back to the period under the Ravalomanana Government, ecotourism was promoted and developed by a complex network of actors that spanned the private sector, international organisations, civil society and state agencies (see Horning, 2008). The Ravalomanana Government was one player in a wider global network of NGOs and donors that was able to shape the pace and nature of ecotourism development which facilitated and intensified the neoliberalisation of nature. In essence, ecotourism was developed to suit the global marketplace, or 'global bazaar' as Walsh (2012) puts it. For Walsh, Madagascar's

biodiversity has been redefined and promoted globally as a ‘natural wonder’ to be visited, experienced and consumed; however the global systems that funnel tourists to Madagascar are rendered invisible (Walsh, 2012). It is these very global systems that create the contradictions between economic growth and sustainability, and it is via ecotourism that those contradictions are at once rendered invisible and developed as new sources of accumulation.

Madagascar has been a key focus for conservation NGOs and donors keen on ‘saving biodiversity. It is an example of a ‘mega diverse’ country, with large numbers of endemic species, high rates of habitat loss as land is converted to agriculture and mining, and Madagascar is also one of the world’s poorest countries in economic terms. This confluence of rich biodiversity, poverty and habitat loss means it has been identified by donors, NGOs and IFIs as a critical site for supporting conservation. In many ways Madagascar can be regarded as an object of prestige for donors and NGOs engaged in conservation (see Kull, 1996; Corson, 2010; Scales, 2014a). As a result, from the late 1980s Madagascar experienced a boom in conservation activity by international organisations, and ecotourism was promoted as a means of creating the win-win of economic development and environmental sustainability, thereby concealing the contradictions between them. Ecotourism can neatly provide a source of agreement between organisations that would ordinarily be regarded as being in contestation with one another; in particular, conservation-oriented NGOs, including Conservation International, the Wildlife Conservation Society and World Wide Fund for Nature joined with multilateral lenders, such as the World Bank, and with global donors to promote ecotourism. Such wide-ranging networks can then constitute powerful sets of supporters of ecotourism, which in turn serves to extend and intensify neoliberalism by capturing and entraining nature to the logics of global capital.

This is illustrated very well via an analysis of the influence of the Donor Consortium and the Durban Vision Initiative. Under the Ravalomanana Government, a Donor Consortium developed, which was a national level mechanism through which international NGOs, donors, IFIs developed and implemented ecotourism policy. It was made up of USAID, the German Government (GTZ), the Japanese Government, the French Government (Co-operation Francaise); the Swiss Government (Co-operation Suisse), Conservation International, WWF, Wildlife Conservation Society (joined in 2004), but the key lynchpin of the Donor Consortium was the World Bank (interviews with representative (a) of the Madagascar Programme, Wildlife Conservation Society, Antananarivo, March 25, 2004; representative of the World Bank, Antananarivo, March 26, 2004). It met monthly to review the progress made so far, and to determine future funding priorities and policies for Madagascar. Members of the Donor Consortium engaged in active lobbying to persuade the new Ravalomanana Government to announce a major commitment to conservation as a core part of national policy.

The result of lobbying by Conservation International and Wildlife Conservation Society was that in 2003 Ravalomanana announced the Durban Vision Initiative (DVI): that Madagascar was to triple the area under protection within 6 years to create a 6 million hectare network of terrestrial and marine reserves to protect its unique biodiversity; this represented an expansion of land under protection from 3% to 10% of Madagascar. The supporters of the Durban Vision Initiative strongly argued that ecotourism development would make the scheme economically self-sustaining, and that the country could sell itself internationally by claiming to be a regional leader in ecotourism (interviews with representative of the Madagascar Programme, Wildlife Conservation Society, Antananarivo, March 25, 2004; representative of the World Bank, Antananarivo, March 26, 2004). The Initiative was implemented by the Durban Vision Group, which included some of the organisations in the

Donor Consortium (interviews with representative (a) of the Madagascar Programme, Wildlife Conservation Society, Antananarivo, March 25, 2004; representative of Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust, Antananarivo, March 31, 2004; and representative of Conservation International Madagascar, Antananarivo, March 23, 2004).

However, it would be a misrepresentation to argue that the DVI was implemented evenly and without any resistance. Instead the complexities of implementation are indicative of what Brenner and Theodore (2002) refer to as ‘actually existing neoliberalism’. It is important to be cognisant of the fact that the neoliberalisation of nature is an uneven, highly differentiated and incomplete process. The Durban Vision Group quickly recognised that it would be impossible to implement the policy within the time frame. Therefore the Group quickly set up a new category of protected area, which did not require such strict regulation as formal national parks, but which satisfied the spirit of the 2003 announcement at the World Parks Congress. The new category of protected areas was called a *Site de Conservation*, which contained different portions zoned for different uses (interviews with representative (a) of the Madagascar Programme, Wildlife Conservation Society, Antananarivo, March 25, 2004; representative of Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust, Antananarivo, March 31, 2004; and representative (b) Wildlife Conservation Society, Antananarivo 24 March, 2004; CEPF, Undated).

It is also important to point out that since the end of the Ravalomanana Government and the advent of the Rajoelina Presidency, the development of new protected areas and associated tourism schemes were also interlinked with the growing mining sector in Madagascar. This speaks to a wider set of debates about how ecotourism can work with other forms of neoliberal expansion that extend capitalist logics to a greater and greater range of non-human phenomena. For example, Davidov (2012) explores the ways that ecotourism and extractive industries can work in tandem. She refers to this as *ecotourism-extraction nexus*.

This can be related to the wider debate about the neoliberalisation of nature and debates on how we think of valorisation of nature in this case (see Bakker, 2010; Braun, 2008; Castree, 2009; 2008; Heynen et al, 2007; McCarthy and Prudham, 2004: 275-277; Peck and Theodore, 2007). The discursive and material re-creation of landscapes (for mining and for ecotourism) allows nature to be captured, entrained and re-created by neoliberalism (see Büscher, 2010a; also see Büscher and Davidov (eds) 2013).

### **Conclusion**

Tourism, including the sub-set of nature based tourism, produces contradictions because it relies on creating attractions from the very environments it is simultaneously using, changing and reshaping. However, tourism is also a mechanism through which capitalism conceals its contradictions; nature-based tourism is promoted as a ‘win-win’ that provides a way of resolving the contradiction between continual growth and finite natural resources (O’Connor, 1988; Fletcher, 2011). This is possible via a process of neoliberalising nature, where the ecosystem threads are cut, to create definite constituent parts that can be primed ready for development into commodities to be consumed in global markets. This is very apparent in the claims around tourism as a core component for developing a Green Economy – one that can produce and sustain continued economic growth in an environmentally sensitive manner. However, in this paper I argued that such claims around the ‘powers’ of tourism as a force for sustainable development are not new, its recent linkage with the Green Economy is merely the latest iteration of a very old debate, centred on sustainable use, making nature pay its way, notions of Natural Capital and the idea that tourism can provide a win-win solution to tensions between economic development and sustainability. This is clear from a comparative analysis of how tourism engages in neoliberalising nature at two very different scales: the individual animal and the landscape.

In the case of neoliberalisation of individual animals, the notion of bodily fix (Fletcher, 2014: 185; Fletcher and Neves, 2013) is important – this adds a further layer and dimension to the neoliberalisation of nature: it is not just the elephants that are promoted and made ready for commodity capture, in addition, bodily experiences are created that can be sold, re-sold and sold gain to create seemingly unending revenue streams. It is important for scholars of neoliberal nature to approach nature in a more expansive way, and not view it in narrow terms just as a resource (Bakker, 2010) which prevents critical interrogation of emerging patterns which develop and create new commodities. The neoliberalisation of nature via tourism renders contradictions invisible and allows for the continued expansion of capitalist logics to a greater and greater range of non-human phenomena. This inevitably reshapes societal relations with nature, but uneven and incomplete ways. This is clear in the cases of elephant trekking in Thailand and the Durban Vision Initiative in Madagascar - in both cases the processes of neoliberalisation were incomplete and rendered more complex (or messy) by the encounter with local level materialities. This responds to Castree's (2008a, 2008b) criticism that the neoliberalisation of nature debate tends to focus on single case studies, which prevents researchers from discerning broader patterns (Bakker, 2010); further, the use of specific cases to interrogate wider theoretical debates allows us to introduce a greater degree of subtlety and nuance to those overarching theoretical constructs. Most notably, as argued above, that we can see how processes of neoliberalisation are rendered more complex and messy by their encounter with local level processes. In sum, a critical analysis of the ways that tourism engages in processes of neoliberalising nature reveals how even at very different scales and in apparently different contexts tourism simultaneously creates and conceals the contradictions of capitalism.

## References

- Ambatovy (Undated). *Creating and brighter and sustainable future*, <http://www.ambatovy.com/docs/> (accessed 05 July 2014).
- AWF (Undated). <http://www.awf.org/landscape/maasai-steppe> (accessed 12 June 2014).
- Bakker, K. (2010). The Limits of 'Neoliberal Natures': Debating Green Neoliberalism. *Progress in Human Geography*, 34, 715-735.
- Bakker, K. (2009). Commentary: Neoliberal Nature, Ecological Fixes, and the Pitfalls of Comparative Research. *Environment and Planning A*, 41, 1781 – 1787.
- Bakker, K. (2005). Neoliberalising Nature? Market Environmentalisms in Water Supply in England and Wales. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 95, 542-565.
- Brand, U. (2011). Green Economy – the Next Oxymoron? No Lessons Learned from Failures of Implementing Sustainable Development. *GAIA*, 21 (1), 28–32.
- Brand, U. and C. Gorg. (2008). Post Fordist Governance of Nature: The Internationalisation of the State and the Case of Genetic Resources – A Neo-Poulantzian Perspective. *Review of International Political Economy*, 15, 567-589.
- Braun B. (2008). Environmental Issues: Inventive Life. *Progress in Human Geography*, 32, 667–679.
- Brenner, N. and N. Theodore. (2002). Cities and the geographies of 'actually existing neoliberalism'. *Antipode*, 34, 356-386.
- Bulbeck, C. (2004). *Facing the Wild: Ecotourism, Conservation and Animal Encounters*. London: Earthscan.
- Büscher, B. (2010a). Derivative Nature: Interrogating the Value of Conservation in Boundless Southern Africa. *Third World Quarterly*, 31, 259-276.
- Büscher, B. (2010b). Anti-Politics as Political Strategy: Neoliberalism and Transfrontier Conservation in Southern Africa. *Development and Change*, 41, 29-51.

Büscher, B. and Igoe, J. (2013). 'Prosuming' Conservation? Web 2.0, Nature and the Intensification of Value-Producing Labour in Late Capitalism. *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 13, 283-305.

Büscher, B. and Davidov, V. (2013). Conceptualising Lived Experiences Within the Political Economy of the Ecotourism-Extraction Nexus' in Büscher, B. and Davidov, V. (eds) *The Ecotourism-Extraction Nexus: Political Economies and Rural Realities of (un)Comfortable Bedfellows*. Abingdon: Routledge. Pp,17-34.

Butcher, J. (2003). *The Moralisation of Tourism: Sun, Sand ...and Saving the World?*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Castree, N. (2009). Researching Neoliberal Environmental Governance: A Reply to Karen Bakker. *Environment and Planning A*, 41, 1788 – 1794.

Castree, N. (2008a). Neo-liberalising Nature 1: The Logics of De- and Re-regulation. *Environment and Planning A*, 40, 131-152.

Castree, N. (2008b). Neo-liberalising Nature 2: Processes, Outcomes and Effects. *Environment and Planning A*, 40, 153-173.

Castree, N. (2003). Commodifying what nature?. *Progress in Human Geography*, 27, 273-92.

Cater, E. (2006). 'Ecotourism as a Western Construct' *Journal of Ecotourism*, 5, 23-39.

CEPF (Undated). 'An Overview of CEPF's Portfolio in the Madagascar and Indian Ocean Islands Biodiversity Hotspot: Madagascar'

[http://www.cepf.net/Documents/cepf.madagascar.overview\\_3.05.pdf](http://www.cepf.net/Documents/cepf.madagascar.overview_3.05.pdf), p.7 (accessed 08 July 2014).

Cohen, E. (2008). *Explorations in Thai Tourism: Collected Case Studies*. Amsterdam: Elsevier Science.

Corson, C. (2010). Shifting Environmental Governance in a Neoliberal World: US AID for Conservation. *Antipode*, 42, 576–602.



- Costanza, R. et al (1997). The Value of the World's Ecosystem Services and Natural Capital. *Nature*, 387, 253-260.
- Davidov, V. (2012). From a Blind Spot to a Nexus: Building On Existing Trends in Knowledge Production to Study the Co-Presence of Ecotourism and Extraction. *Environment and Society: Advances in Research*, 3, 78-102.
- Duffy, R. (2006). Global Governance and Environmental Management: The Politics of Transfrontier Conservation Areas in Southern Africa. *Political Geography*, 25, 89-112.
- Fletcher, R. (2014). *Romancing the Wild: Cultural Dimensions of Ecotourism*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Fletcher, R. (2011). Sustaining Tourism, Sustaining Capitalism? The Tourism Industry's Role in Global Capitalist Expansion. *Tourism Geographies*, 13, 443-461.
- Fletcher, R. and Neves, K. (2012). Contradictions in Tourism: The Promise and Pitfalls of Ecotourism as a Manifold Capitalist Fix. *Environment and Society*, 3, 60-77.
- Gössling, S. and Upham, P. (eds) (2009). *Climate Change and Aviation: Issues, Challenges and Solutions*. London: Earthscan.
- Hampton, M. P. (2013). *Backpacker Tourism and Economic Development: Perspectives from the Less Developed World*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Hickman, L. (2007). *The Final Call: In Search of the True Cost of Our Holidays*. London: Eden Project Books.
- Harvey, D. (2005). *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Heynen, N. and Robbins, P. (2005). The Neoliberalization of Nature: Governance, Privatization, Enclosure and Valuation. *Capitalism Nature Socialism*, 16, 5-8.
- Heynen, N., McCarthy, J., Prudham, W.S., and Robbins, P. (eds.) (2007). *Neoliberal Environments: False Promises and Unnatural Consequences*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Horning, N.R. (2008). Strong Support for Weak Performance: Donor Competition in Madagascar. *African Affairs*, 107, 405-431.

- Kontogeorgopoulos, N. (2009a). The Role of Tourism in Elephant Welfare in Northern Thailand. *Journal of Tourism*, 10, 1-19.
- Kontogeorgopoulos, N. (2009b). Wildlife Tourism in Semi-Captive Settings: A Case Study of Elephant Camps in Northern Thailand. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 12, 429-449.
- Kontogeorgopoulos, N. (1999). Sustainable tourism or Sustainable Development? Financial Crisis, Ecotourism, and the 'Amazing Thailand'. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 2, 316-332.
- Kull, C. A. (1996). The Evolution of Conservation Efforts in Madagascar. *International Environmental Affairs*, 8, 50-86.
- Lacher, R.G. and Nepal, S.K. (2010). Dependency and Development in Northern Thailand. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 37, 947-968.
- Lair, R.C. (2004). *Gone Astray: The Care and Management of The Asian Elephant in Domesticity* (Fourth Edition). Bangkok: FAO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific.
- Law, A., McGrath, G.M. and Delacy, T. (2012). A Green Economy Tourism System (GETS) Architecture and Usage. In Fuchs, M. et al. (eds.) *Information and Communication Technologies in Tourism*. Vienna: Springer/Lit Verlag. pp.203-214.
- Lee, D. and Hampton, M. P. and Jeyacheya, J. (2014). *The Political Economy of Precarious Work in the Tourism Industry in Small Island Developing States*. *Review of International Political Economy*. iFirst, DOI: 10.1080/09692290.2014.887590
- Lemelin, R.H., Dawson, J. and Stewart, E.J. (eds) (2012). *Last Chance Tourism: Adapting Tourism Opportunities in a Changing World* (Abingdon: Routledge).
- Liverman, D. (2004). Who Governs, at What Scale and at What Price? Geography, Environmental Governance, and the Commodification of Nature. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 94, 734-738.
- Locke, P. (2011). 'The Ethnography of Captive Elephant Management in Nepal: A Synopsis *Gajah*, 34, 32-40.

Madagascar Tourisme (Undated). *Vanilla Islands*, <http://www.madagascar-tourisme.com/en/vanilla-islands> (accessed 05 July 2014).

Mansfield, B. (2004). Neoliberalism in the Oceans: 'Rationalization', Property Rights and the Commons Question. *Geoforum*, 35, 313–326.

McAfee, K. (2012). The Contradictory Logic of Global Ecosystem Services Markets. *Development and Change*, 43, 105–113.

McAfee, K. (1999). Selling Nature to Save it? Biodiversity and the Rise of Green Developmentalism. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 17, 133–154.

McCarthy, J. and Prudham, S. (2004). Neoliberal nature and the nature of neoliberalism. *Geoforum*, 35, 275–283.

Neves, K. (2010). Cashing in on Cetourism: A Critical Ecological Engagement with Dominant E-NGO Discourses on Whaling, Cetacean Conservation, and Whale Watching. *Antipode: A Radical Journal of Geography*, 42, 719–741.

O'Neill, J. (2007). *Markets, Deliberation and Environment*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Peck, J. and Theodore, N. (2007). Variegated Capitalism. *Progress in Human Geography*, 31, 731–777.

O'Connor, J. (1988). Capitalism, nature, socialism: A theoretical introduction. *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism*, 1, 11–38.

Peck, J. and Tickell, A. (2002). Neoliberalising Space. *Antipode: A Radical Journal of Geography*, 34, 380–404.

Peleggi, M. (1996). National Heritage and Global Tourism in Thailand. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 23, 432–448.

Perelman, M. (2007). Primitive Accumulation From Feudalism to Neoliberalism. *Capitalism Nature Socialism*, 18, 44–61.

Rio Tinto (Undated). *Diamonds and Minerals*

<http://www.riotinto.com/diamondsandminerals/qit-madagascar-minerals-4645.aspx>

(accessed 05 July 2014).

Scales, I.R. (2014a). A Brief History of the State and the Politics of Natural Resource use in Madagascar. In I.R. Scales (ed) *Conservation and Environmental Management in Madagascar*. Earthscan, London.

Scales, I.R. (2014b). Tourism, Conservation and Development in Madagascar: Moving Beyond Panaceas?. In I.R. Scales (ed) *Conservation and Environmental Management in Madagascar*. Earthscan, London.

Scigliano, E. (2004). *Love, War and Circuses*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc.

Schilcher, D. (2007). Growth Versus Equity: The Continuum of Pro-Poor Tourism and Neoliberal Governance. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 10, 166-193.

Sharpley, R. and Telfer, J.D. (Eds.) (2002). *Tourism and Development*. Clevedon: Channel View.

Straughan, E. R. (2012). Touched by Water: The Body in Scuba Diving. *Emotion, Space and Society*, 5, 9-26.

TECC (Undated). <http://www.thailandelephant.org/en/> (accessed 14 July 2014).

The Times (2009). 'A Jumbo feast to trumpet Elephant Day in Thailand', 14 March 2009, available at <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/asia/article5904308.ece> (accessed 13 July 2014).

United Nations Environment Programme and World Tourism Organization. (2012). *Tourism in the Green Economy – Background Report*. Madrid: UNWTO.

UNWTO (2013). *UNWTO shows full support –Vanilla Islands*, <http://media.unwto.org/press-release/2013-09-11/unwto-shows-full-support-vanilla-islands> (accessed 05 July 2014).

Walker, J. and Cooper. M. (2011). Genealogies of Resilience: From Systems Ecology to the Political Economy of Crisis Adaptation. *Security Dialogue*, 42, 143-160.

Walsh, A. (2012). *Made in Madagascar: Sapphires, Ecotourism and the Global Bazaar*. Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press.

Wanner, T. (2014). The New 'Passive Revolution' of the Green Economy and Growth Discourse: Maintaining the 'Sustainable Development' of Neoliberal Capitalism. *New Political Economy*, DOI: 10.1080/13563467.2013.866081

West, P. and J.G. Carrier. (2004). Ecotourism and Authenticity. Getting Away from It All?. *Current Anthropology*, 45, 483-498.

World Bank. (2012). *Inclusive Green Growth: the Pathway to Sustainable Development*. Washington, DC: World Bank.

WTTC. (2012). *Travel and Tourism Economic Impact 2012: Madagascar*. London: WTTC.

Zeller, C. (2008). From the Gene to the Global: Extracting Rents Based on Intellectual Property Monopolies. *Review of International Political Economy*, 15, 86-115.