Developing Wilderness
Conservation and Nature Tourism in Tanzania and Costa Rica

Ariana La Porte
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Introduction: Cultural Constructions of Nature

In his influential book *World Risk Society* (1999), Ulrich Beck advances the hypothesis that “nature itself is not nature: it is a concept, a norm…a utopia…” (Beck 1999, 21). Nature, Beck theorizes, is a culturally constructed ideal rather than a concrete entity. Cultural traditions and worldviews, not empirical fact, shape what we mean when we talk about Nature.¹ Some perceive Nature as pristine, seemingly untouched wilderness. For some, it is the woods behind their house or a farm in the countryside. Others find Nature anywhere that plants grow. Differing conceptions of Nature govern our ideas about ecology, conservation, biodiversity, and development, and are at the root of the current discussion over Nature tourism.²

Some argue that Nature tourism is a perfect tool for development in the Third World, because it preserves the environment and brings industry and foreign capital to impoverished nations. Others counter that it is a culturally insensitive, ecologically harmful form of neocolonialism. These opposing points of view stem from different conceptions of Nature and what constitutes appropriate human “use” of the environment. An argument that frames Nature tourism as either “good” or “bad” neglects the complexities of the issue itself. Though Nature tourism arose as a way for the upper classes to escape the grime and stress of industrial life, today it has taken on a scientific and humanitarian character. The history of Nature tourism in Tanzania and Costa Rica, two principle countries in the Nature tourism industry reveals issues that emerge through this evolution. As the international community turned increasingly toward socially conscious Nature tourism in the late 1980s, new questions over the meaning and implementation of sustainable development became intertwined with old practices and mentalities.

¹ I capitalize Nature throughout to emphasize there is no concrete definition of the term. Nature, capitalized, refers to individuals’ conception of a natural landscape rather than a tangible entity.
² “Ecotourism” is the common word for tourism to natural destinations. Because its precise definition is vague and contested, however, this paper will use the term Nature tourism instead. For further discussion of this point see the “Terminology” section.
Tanzania and Costa Rica are both globally renowned Nature tourism destinations, and provide different perspectives on the evolution of the Nature tourism industry. Both attract conservationists because they host a startling percentage of the world’s biodiversity and appear on Conservation International’s list of biodiversity “hotspots” (www.biodiversityhotspots.org). Relative political stability increases their appeal to Nature tourism developers. These nation’s economies have previously been primarily agricultural, and both host large rural populations who compete for resources with its plants and animals. Despite these similarities, Nature tourism in the two countries has developed differently. The main difference between the two is that the colonial British introduced Nature tourism to Tanzania in the late 1800s, while Costa Ricans themselves began their industry in the 1970s. This paper examines Nature tourism in each country to determine how their histories combine with international policies and attitudes to shape their current practices. It will focus on whether the country itself has control over their Nature tourism industry and its financial and cultural costs or benefits to local communities. Though both countries have many national parks and tourism operations that involve different landscapes and groups of people, this paper pulls together a representative sample from each in order to illustrate consistencies and challenges in the contemporary Nature tourism industry.

**History: Early Nature Tourism**

In *Imposing Wilderness: Struggles Over Livelihood and Nature Preservation in Africa*, Roderick Neumann explains what he believes is the root of many of the current conflicts associated with contemporary Nature tourism. Today’s industry, he argues, has evolved from a 19th Century desire to “escape” to a “pristine” Nature. He argues that this construction of Nature laid the foundation for the idea of

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3 Conservation International defines biodiversity hotspots as “the riches and most threatened reservoirs of plant and animal life on earth” (www.biodiversityhotspots.org).
a national park, which today’s environmentalists herald as the ideal tool for conservation. The earliest national parks in the United States were not initially established to preserve biodiversity. The government set aside the land so that people could visit it. National parks are some of the first sites of large-scale, institutionalized Nature tourism. The plan for Yellowstone National Park, established in 1872, was that it be a “pleasuring ground for the benefit and enjoyment of the people” (United States Statutes at Large, 1872, quoted in Nash 108). Congress approved the Park in part because of pressure from the railroad industry, which saw it as a potential source of mass tourism—and mass travel—to the American West. Only later in the 20th century when environmentalists became more concerned with preservation did the public come to value Yellowstone for its ecological importance as well as its extraordinary geology. For Neumann, national parks are “quintessential landscape[s] of consumption” (Neumann 24). He argues that parks are as artificial as they claim to be natural, because setting aside the land as unusable is just as much a form of use and resource appropriation as is logging or cultivating it. The fact that most parks “manage” their wildlife exemplifies this point.

The idea of Nature as a vacation destination, Neumann argues, comes from the 18th century European and American upper class desire to escape from the pressures of crowded city life to estates in the countryside. In 1869, author William H. H. Murray wrote: “the wilderness provides that perfect relaxation which all jaded minds require” (Murray, quoted in Nash 116). As populations in the industrial world became more concentrated in cities, individuals were no longer connected to the land for their livelihood. Natural landscapes became a way to get away from the crowded bustle of modern life. Industrial capitalism removed the upper class from direct involvement in land-based work, which allowed them to cultivate an aesthetic appreciation for landscapes. Peasants remained part of the land, while the aristocracy “traveled through the landscape as…observer[s]” (ibid. Neumann 20). As Nature tourists, they used the land for its “appeal…as an object d’art” (Neumann 21) rather than as a source of subsistence. In seeing the scenery
as such, they removed themselves from it. This psychological divide between humans and Nature is critical to Nature tourism and many aspects of the conservation movement.

Neumann argues that the aristocracy valued landscapes that seemed as if they had not been touched by human labor. In England, landscape architects took pains to “hide all evidence” (Neumann 27) of their work on country estates, because their employers wanted them to look as “natural” as possible. Landscape paintings of the period rarely depict people working the land. By removing laborers from pictures, painters “transformed the world into a series of vistas and ‘pleasing prospects’” which appealed to their customers. British author Raymond Williams wrote that a “working country is hardly ever a landscape” because “the very idea of landscape implies separation and observation” (Williams 1973, quoted in Neumann 20). Practical use was anathema to the Nature tourists’ image of scenic terrain, which for them inspired poetic, philosophic, and spiritual growth. Theodore Roosevelt, a champion of early conservation and himself an avid Nature tourist, described ideal Nature as “wide waste places…unworn of man” (quoted in Nash 150). When peasants were depicted in landscapes, they were usually there as part of the scenery, as “cheerful, contented laborers” who worked “in harmony with nature” (Neumann 20). Those who lived on the land either disappeared from or became part of it in the eyes of Nature tourists. Human use defiled the pristine wilderness, which people valued because it could help modern man shake off “the clutches of mechanistic civilization” (Bob Marshall, quoted in Foreman 1996: 1). Evidence of civilization was therefore not allowed into Nature—a logic that has been critical to the history of Nature tourism and continues to shape the industry today.

Critique: A Contemporary Perspective

In “The Trouble with Wilderness: Getting Back to the Wrong Nature,” (1995) William Cronan extends Neumann’s historical framework to critique contemporary Nature tourism. Tour providers, such as
“ecoAfrica Travel,” promise trips to “explore Africa’s untamed wilderness” (EcoTour Website). Like the eighteenth-century gentry, however, the “wilderness” modern Nature tourists experience is mediated by an invisible human hand. Tours supply “reliable, responsible hosts” who guide visitors safely through the landscape. The fact that the African wilderness seems “untamed”—even though most safaris are Jeep rides through the savannah—is critical to its appeal. Cronan points out that this ideal leaves “nowhere for human beings to actually make their living from the land” (Cronan 1995, 80). Planners and managers usually relocate the area’s original inhabitants and prohibit them from using their traditional resources. Conflicts between local residents and conservationists surround the Nature tourism industry all over the world. Although protected landscapes often seem “wild,” most have histories of human use.

Cronan’s principle problem with Nature tourism is that it allows visitors to “escape from history” (Cronan 1995, 80) and ignore their role in the global ecosystem. Tourists drive or fly countless miles in order to view a “pristine” landscape without considering the carbon emissions their journey creates. Because they can experience real Nature, the kind without people, they can ignore environmental problems in the areas near their homes. The knowledge that some “untouched” lands are saved as artifacts, Cronan claims, makes people satisfied with the state of the global environment. They ignore the reality that their granola bar wrappers will go to landfills and that their aerosol bug spray spews chemicals into the atmosphere. Nature tourists connect with “wilderness,” Cronan argues, in order to revitalize themselves for their return to “civilization.” This separation between natural and human spaces is an idea rather than a reality, and has negative consequences for the environment as a whole. By encouraging “the dualism that sets humanity and nature at opposite poles,” Conan writes, Nature tourism “leave[s] little hope of discovering what an ethical, sustainable…place in nature might…look like” (Cronan 1995, 81). The rhetoric of “discovery” clouds visitors’ sense of responsibility for the resources they use.
Scientific Interest: The Value of Biodiversity

While Neumann and Cronan see conservation and Nature tourism as an irresponsible escape from environmental reality motivated by an upper-class desire to appropriate land for recreation, others argue that it is a good model for human-Nature interactions. Most environmental organizations today take a more science-oriented viewpoint rather than an aesthetic one. They argue that in order to preserve the world’s biodiversity, humans must set aside land in which plants and animals can live without people. They want to “preserve the diversity and abundance of life on Earth and the health of ecological systems” (World Wildlife Fund). Biologists and ecologists study species interactions on these parcels, and thereby contribute to the canon of scientific knowledge. These science-based responses seek to mitigate global environmental devastation and the destruction of biodiversity caused by human development. Logging, climate change, pollution and population expansion and myriad of other human activities threaten wildlife and its habitat worldwide. Anthropogenic land use is the biggest global foe to biodiversity. Farming in particular, destroys natural environments because it razes the land of its original vegetation and disrupts the soil (Conservation Biology Lectures by Dr. Michael Singer, Fall 2007).

Conservationists seek to provide a “home space for non-human beings” (Snyder 1996, 8) by excluding people from protected land. “Preservation of diversity,” they argue, “is essential to planetary ecological, spiritual, and evolutionary health for us all” (Snyder 1996, 8). When a species becomes extinct, the world loses an entire database of genetic code, a lineage that no power can resurrect. We are responsible for preserving the earth’s natural history for future generations. Humans have overtaken more than our share of the planet, and other species deserve a place as well. Habitat loss is the greatest threat to biodiversity, and national parks and other conservation areas are ideal sites for species preservation.

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4 Biodiversity is a measure of the number and abundance of species in a given area. High biodiversity indicates many species, which signifies a healthy ecosystem.
and recovery. In order to fund these areas, environmentalists need to make the public care about them. Few people will donate money or approve federal funding for a place they are not allowed to see. Nature tourism builds awareness and appreciation for the “wild” spaces that non-human life needs on the planet.

Indian writer Ramanchandra Guha argues that when applied in the Third World, this science-based justification for conservation and Nature tourism is a form of eco-imperialism. He questions the Western environmentalists' assumption that “intervention in nature should be guided…by the need to preserve biotic integrity rather than by the needs of humans” (Guha 1989, 2). The humans it cuts off are those who already lived in the area rather than those who visit it. Tourists and biologists live off of resources from elsewhere—they are not directly connected to the land, so turning an area into Wilderness does not threaten their subsistence. By appropriating land on which others live, conservationists ask these inhabitants to sacrifice everything they own for an ideal they may not believe in and do not benefit from. In order to implement the Indian conservation initiative “Project Tiger,” Western educated Indian officials helped the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) remove indigenous groups and peasants from their ancestral land. Their goal was to return it to Nature. Most of the displaced people were members of hunter-gatherer tribes who had coexisted with the tigers there for centuries. Conservationists, Guha argues, want to “protect the tiger…for posterity,’ yet [expect] other people to make the sacrifice” (Guha 1999: 477). Western conservationists invoke the science of conservation to legitimate their actions without acknowledging that the discipline itself is governed by a socially constructed ideal.

Some conservation efforts are more obvious forms of modern imperialism, Guha claims. Daniel Janzen, an American biologist, wants to save Costa Rica’s tropical dry forest. Those who currently live there, Janzen claims, are “are deaf, blind and mute to the fragments of the rich biological and cultural heritage” near their homes (Janzen 1986, quoted in Guha 1997). He established a conservation area so that he and future scientists would have “a tropics to biologize in” (Janzen 1986: 306). In Guha’s view, Janzen believes that Western biologists need to assume responsibility for ecosystems in the developing
world because the people there are too ignorant to do so themselves. Guha sees this as an “ecologically updated version of the White Man’s Burden” (Guha 1997) that epitomizes Western conservationists’ imperialistic attitude toward underdeveloped countries. Janzen’s view is dangerous because it employs science, which seems empirical and authoritative, to justify displacing entire communities.

Despite this criticism, economists and development experts as well as conservationists advocate for Nature tourism. They argue that it is a perfect avenue for environmentally sustainable economic growth in the Third World. Because they have not yet industrialized, many developing countries retain large areas of sparsely populated, un-modernized land. Many are also in the tropics, where biodiversity is naturally high. These places are ecological gold mines. Nature tourism supporters contend that it promotes both conservation and economic growth in impoverished regions. The International Society for Ecotourism (TIES) notes that 83 percent of developing countries earn a major part of their foreign currency from tourism, which “appears to be…able to guide…developing countries to higher levels of prosperity” (TIES Global Ecotourism Factsheet). Nature tourists are more likely to contribute to local communities and economies than are traditional tourists, TIES argues, especially if they want a “cultural” as well as a “Nature” experience.

The term “local community” suggests that all people who live in Nature tourism destinations are the same. Though they often have similar traits, they are not a homogeneous group. It is simplistic and unfair to think of all local peoples as the same because they have similar conflicts. Nationality, socioeconomic status, ethnic heritage, level of education and their historical use of the area are only some of the factors that differentiate these groups both between and within regions. Those who clash with the Nature tourism industry may be from indigenous groups with millennia of history linked with the area, like the Maasai in Tanzania, or have settled there in the past few hundred years, like the “ticos” in Costa Rica. Their ancestry, income, education, and attitudes toward conservation all depend on the national and regional history of where they live, and affect the types of interactions they have with ecotourism developers. These
groups are, however, under similar pressures from the modern Nature tourism industry. This paper considers them a distinct type of community in order to understand the pressures that affect them. It defines “local people” as those distinct from a country’s elite, who have established communities in places where people want to develop Nature tourism. In addition to their relative locations, these groups are united by the fact that they previously used the resources that conservation restricts. This paper recognizes that they are not all the same, but classifies them together in order to analyze the effects of Nature tourism.

**Terminology: Ecotourism and Greenwashing**

Just as the term “local people” can be vague and misleading, the word “ecotourism,” the common name for tourism to natural places, is fraught with myriad definitions and connotations. Different authors and organizations attach different meanings to the word. Some claim that it must contribute to the local community, some say it has to be educational, others contend it only needs to relate peripherally to the environment. TIES defines ecotourism as “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the welfare of local people” (TIES, 1990, from TIES Website). Members of the industry do not agree on this meaning, however, and many apply the term to practices that do not accomplish these goals. Sue Beeton, author of a handbook on how to establish an ecotourism destination, dismisses the debate over terminology saying that it will “probably continue in academic circles forever” (Beeton 1998, 1). The fact that the term has become so popular since its genesis in the 1980s demonstrates the increased global interest in alternative and socially responsible travel. Few can agree on ecotourism’s goal, however, which indicates how complex the issue is. Because the colloquialism is inadequate, this paper will refer to tourism in natural places as Nature tourism.
Because of its vague definition, some members of the industry abuse the positive connotations of the term ecotourism. Consumers associate “ecotourism” with environmentalism and social responsibility, and they like the idea that their vacation is a good deed. Like the words “green” or “natural,” however, there is no regulatory authority that governs what advertisers mean when they say “ecotourism.” Many criticize the industry for “greenwashing” its practices by making them seem more responsible than they are. The World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) implements the Green Globe program, which gives an official-looking stamp of “green-ness” to any company that pays them $200 dollars. The Green Globe logo the WTTC gives the organization is supposed to indicate that it has “pledge[d] to work toward more environmentally sound practices” (Merg 1999). When London’s Worldwide Television News (WTN) tested the program’s authenticity, however, they found that the WTTC granted their request for a logo without checking anything about them—including whether or not they were a real tour company (Merg 1999). In practice, the term “ecotourism” means little about the environmental character of the services a hotel or a tour company offers.

The Contemporary Nature Industry: An Overview

Neumann recounts that the Nature tourism began in the 19th Century as a voyeuristic pastime for the wealthy, which displaced local people in order to create an artificial ideal of “wilderness.” It continued in this vein unchallenged until the late 1970s, when ideas emerged in Latin America about its possible benefits for local economies in addition to conservation. A Costa Rican birding enthusiast coined the term “ecotourism” in 1984, and the idea of socially and environmentally aware tourism came into the international consciousness. Increased ease of international travel and interest in the environment had spurred rapid growth in the Nature tourism industry in the 1960s, and the volume of visitors was beginning to damage popular destinations (Budowski 1976, 27). In 1976, Costa Rican conservationist and Yale
Professor Gerald Budowski proposed that tourism could help the environment rather than hurt it if the industry channeled some of its revenue toward conservation. A “symbiosis” of tourism and conservation would further both interests, he argued, because Nature tourism cannot be successful without Nature to tour. Budowski advised that Nature tourism should finance conservation and promote environmental education for visitors. Michael Kaye, another instrumental voice in the development of Costa Rica’s Nature tourism, summarized the ideal as tour operations that “contribute to, rather than exploit (the land)...[and] emphasize cultural exchange rather than sightseeing” (quoted in Honey 2008, 15). Their main concern was conservation, but these Nature tourism pioneers’ goals did acknowledge the importance of ameliorating the social problems associated with it.

International lending agencies like the World Bank, the International Development Bank (IDB) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) also began to support tourism to developing countries in the late 1970s. They financed Nature tourism because it brought economic development to remote areas that had few other bases for an economy. Between its inception in 1969 and closure in 1979, the World Bank’s Tourism Projects Department (TPD) spent $450 million on 24 tourism development projects. Some of these succeeded in creating popular resorts like Bali in Indonesia and Puerto Plata in the Dominican Republic (Honey 17-18), which proponents argue have brought a stable economic base to impoverished areas. Because their goal was economic development rather than conservation or humanitarian aid, however, these resorts were often environmentally damaging and increased wealth inequalities within countries. In 1980, representatives from developing countries formed a coalition and issued the “Manila Declaration,” which stated “tourism does more harm than good to people and societies in the Third World” (Quoted in Honey 10-11). In response to this criticism as well as the fact that several of their attempts had failed, the World Bank, USAID and the IDB withdrew their support for tourism development in the late 1970s and early 1980s.
By the mid- to late-1980s into the early 1990s, these organizations had reformed their rhetoric and resumed funding tourism projects, this time with a more environmental and humanitarian focus. Instead of funding developers directly, USAID channeled their funds through the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), which carried out the projects. In this vein of social responsibility, the United Nations unveiled their Environmental Programme, Agenda 21, at the 1992 World Summit in Rio de Janeiro. The Agenda reflects a shift in the international attitude about environmental protection, which adopted more human-centered ideologies of conservation and sustainable development. Among numerous and widespread other initiatives including “Environmentally Sound Management of Biotechnology,” “Changing Consumption Patterns” and “Integrating Environment and Development in Decision-Making,” Agenda 21 includes a section on “Recognizing and Strengthening the Role of Indigenous People and Their Communities” (UNEP 1992 Table of Contents). This official recognition reflects the change in global sensibilities about the role and effect of conservation and development decisions on local populations. Critics argue that the Agenda “has no teeth” (Merg 1999) however, and claim that it is more of a rhetorical move than a commitment to practical change.

Though attitudes were shifting and international lending organizations began to reform their Nature tourism initiatives, their guiding principles retained the mentality that in order to be attractive, Nature must be protected from human use. Projects often nominally included local interests in their plans, but in practice did not benefit them. USAID attempts to “[incorporate]…gender equality, education and health into its tourism projects” (Honey 21), but critics argue that its emphasis on private investment undermines its community development efforts. Resource privatization alienates those who used the land for subsistence in favor of those who turn it into a commodity. Though these companies generate revenue by selling Nature, their “product,” the local communities rarely see a share of the profits. These ventures may seem successful because they raise the country’s gross domestic product, but in reality they transfer resources
from those who live off the land to those who charge others to look at it. Conservationists often support this strategy because it separates human use from the landscape and leaves it more Natural.

Tanzania: Imperial Legacy

Nature tourism in Tanzania is a classic example of Western dominated conservation and development. Europeans have been visiting the country's Nature since the colonial period, and the industry still reflects its imperialist past. Tanzania's 57,000 square miles Serengeti National Park host the highest density of wildlife in the world, and Ngorongoro Crater holds fossilized remains of the oldest human ancestors ever unearthed. Since the late 17th century when wealthy European adventure-seekers came to the area to hunt exotic game, tourism has grown to make up 15 percent of the country's annual income. After agriculture, it is Tanzania's the second most lucrative industry (Honey 217). The country's rich Nature has not historically benefited its people, however. Western tourism and conservation appropriated much of the land that its rural population once used, and conflict over this resource continues today. Practices have begun to change as the international community has become interested in sustainable development, but the country's colonial legacy is difficult to erase.

Europeans enacted Tanzania's first conservation measure in 1900. Game-hunters and adventure-seekers had been coming to the area, then German East Africa, for decades, and wildlife populations had dwindled as a result. In order to conserve the continent's Nature, representatives from all seven European nations with African colonies convened in London for the Convention for the Preservation of Animals, Birds and Fish in Africa. Their agreement “laid the foundation for the top-down, preservationist style management that came to characterize African conservation policies” (Honey 219). Without any input from the native Africans, who in German East Africa were mostly pastoralist, cow-herding Maasai, the representatives agreed to protect a few charismatic species like the giraffe, gorilla, and chimpanzee. They
restricted Maasai access to resources, even though their actions had not affected the wildlife. Colonists enforced their policies through colonial mandates and did not consider their affect on the existing population. Their policies were concerned with the animals' aesthetic value rather than their scientific importance—the Convention even encouraged colonists to kill large predators like lions and cheetahs because they threatened settlers' livestock.

“Top-down, preservationist style management” of landscapes and wildlife continued after the United Nations bequeathed the area to the British after World War I. Its new rulers renamed it Tanganyika, and in 1929 established a “closed game reserve” in Ngorongoro Crater. The British blamed the Maasai for diminishing the wildlife there even though the tribe only hunted for protection and food. The British did not enforce their new regulation, however, largely because the government had few resources to patrol the area. Many officials also realized how impractical the measure was, and feared violent uprisings from the indigenous population (Neumann). By 1934, there was enough tourist interest in the region that the government built a road and a hunting lodge along the rim of the crater (Charney 76). Though foreigners came to Tanganyika to hunt, the Maasai were not allowed to do so.

Westerners continued to blame native Africans for the decline in the continent’s wildlife throughout the 20th Century. Bernhard Grzimek's popular book *No Room for Wild Animals*, published in 1956, and *Serengeti Shall Not Die* published in 1959 claimed that human (native African) population expansion was threatening wildlife. He predicted that “the wild animals of Africa are doomed to die,” and recommended that the government relocate the tribes living within protected areas (Bonner 175-176). His son, Michael Grzimek, made documentaries of both books, which further impassioned the international community over this cause. The books touted a revised version of the White Man's Burden, saying that “We Europeans must teach our black brothers to value their own possessions...because we do not want them to repeat our mistakes and our sins” (quoted in Bonner 176). Though he claimed to view the Africans as his “brothers,” Grzimek, felt that left alone, Africans would abuse the region's resources and degrade the African
savannah. He condemns the Africans for using the land, because for Grzimek, its purpose was that of a landscape rather than source of sustenance. His position is similar to Daniel Janzen’s, and though Grzimek emphasizes aesthetic rather than scientific value, both views value Nature over working landscapes.

The British were so concerned that the Maasai were damaging Nature that in 1959 park officials removed the tribe from the area they wanted to keep most pristine. An ordinance split the Serengeti Game Reserve into Serengeti National Park and the Ngorongoro Conservation Area (NCA). Though they could not read it, park officials convinced tribal leaders to sign the ordinance, which stated that the Maasai “shall not be entitled henceforth...to cross...the boundary of the new Serengeti National Park,” nor would they “be entitled to reside in or use...the land...which [they had] habitually used in the past” (Quoted in Bonner 178). The ordinance forcibly removed the Maasai from the newly demarcated park, and consigned them to the Ngorongoro Conservation area, which the government had slated as a multiple use zone. Conservationists “breathed a sigh of relief,” because the existence of the Maasai in the national park was “the biggest problem they faced” (Honey 220). They were building the area in their “national park image,” which had no place for practical use of the land other than to attract tourists.

As African nations began to achieve independence from European rule in the 1960s, conservationists worried that “under new African governments, all prospects for conservation of nature would be ended” (E.M. Nicholson, the first head of the World Wide Fund for Nature-International, quoted in Honey 221). Tanganyika, now Tanzania, became independent in 1961. In 1967 the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (the ICUN, now the World Conservation Union) and the WWF called together the new African leaders in its capital, Arusha, to discuss the “state of emergency facing Africa’s wildlife” (Honey 221). Environmentalists held on to the paternalistic notion that Africans could not take care of their own resources—the “emergency” was the prospect of what might happen to the wildlife if Africans themselves managed it.
The Arusha convention was less a meeting of equals than a lecture by conservationists. Julius Neyere, Tanzania’s first prime minister, delivered the opening remarks, now commonly referred to the Arusha Declaration. Much to environmentalists’ pleasure, he stated that “the survival of our wildlife is a matter of grave concern to all of us in Africa...In accepting the trusteeship of our wildlife we solemnly declare that we will do everything in our power to make sure that our children’s grand-children will be able to enjoy this rich and precious inheritance” (quoted in Bonner 64). This wholehearted dedication to Africa’s wildlife was not, however, Neyere’s own idea. Leaders of the ICUN and the WWF had written the speech beforehand, in order to “commit Africa’s new rulers to both wildlife protection and continued reliance on European and American expertise” (quoted in Honey 222). Though Tanzania was an independent nation, its national parks were still ruled by West.

Though the words were not his, Julius Neyere was not a puppet to international interests—he agreed to give the speech because he supported wildlife conservation for its economic potential. He himself did “not want to spend [his] holidays watching crocodiles” but was nonetheless “entirely in favor of their survival.” Neyere “believe[d] that after diamonds and sisal, wild animals will provide Tanganyika with its greatest source of income” because “thousands of Americans and Europeans have a strange urge to see these animals” (quoted in Nash 1982, 342, cited in Neumann 144). Like Congress’ motivation to establish Yellowstone as a national park, the Tanzanian government hoped that wildlife conservation would increase tourism revenue. Westerners continued to run the parks initially, but in 1971, the government appointed the first Tanzanian national park director. This transfer of power did not take place until ten years after independence because conservationists first had to train Tanzanians on the proper values and methods of conservation. At first they did so by sending individuals to the United States, but in 1963 the African Wildlife Foundation (AWLF) and the WWF founded the College of African Wildlife Management (CAWM) outside Arusha. The CAWM trained Tanzanians in “Western ideologies and practices of natural

5 Sisal is a crash crop whose hemp-like fibers are used to make rugs and twine.
resource conservation" (Neumann 142) and produced an “elite class of bureaucrats” to run the national park system.

The Tanzanian government was committed to conservation for its role in economic development, and Westerners formed Tanzanian conservationists in their own image. The central lesson in their management style was that in order to make money, which is central to development, they must convert the environment to Nature by removing its human inhabitants. Though Nature tourism did generate revenue, hotel owners and tour operators kept most of the profits from it. Benefits rarely reached the local population, though the Maasai continued to pay the price for the country’s conservation. The tribe suffered as the country attempted to build their industry by making its Nature pristine and tourist accommodations more luxurious. Political policies that give the Maasai more control over the land and an active role in the industry can mitigate the negative effects of their displacement. Such measures did not appear, however, until the international community began to focus on sustainable development and the affect of conservation on human rights. During the first decades of Tanzania’s independence, park officials continued to marginalize the Maasai in the NCA in the name of conservation.

Like European conservationists before them, the new Tanzanian park officials saw the Maasai as an enemy to wildlife. In order to save the wildlife so that tourists could see it on their luxury safaris, they evicted the pastoralists from the floor of the Ngorongoro crater in 1975. In 1976, park officials banned any form of agriculture there (Bonner 183). Life became extremely difficult for the Maasai in the area. The eviction reduced their access to essential resources like water, grazing land for their cattle, arable land to grow maize and forested areas in which to collect firewood. Studies show that Maasai living in the NCA have fewer cattle and higher rates of malnutrition than do Maasai families outside the NCA (Charney 80). In her 2005 paper “From Nature Tourism to Ecotourism? The Case of the Ngorongoro Conservation Area,” Susan Charney argues that “land use restrictions favoring conservation and tourism interests…undermined Maasai well-being and imposed serious limitations on their ability to subsist” (Charney 80). Revenues from
tourism were supposed supplement the NCA Maasai’s income in exchange for their sacrifice, but the money never reached the tribe.

In the mid-1980s, the international community began, in theory if not in practice, to consider sustainability and human rights as priorities in economic development. Advocacy groups, academics and the people themselves began to criticize conservation practices like those in the NCA. Concerned about backlash from local populations and worried about the affect of local discontent on the parks themselves, conservation groups changed their rhetoric in the 1990s to “emphasize ‘local participation’ and ‘community development’ as key to the future of nature protection” (Neumann 8). The NCA Authority’s General Management Plan vowed to “encourage responsible tourism” and protect the rights of indigenous people in addition to their goals of resource conservation, wildlife protection and education (Charney 67). Without community control over resources, however, the NCA’s rhetorical commitment had little effect.

Raymond Bonner’s *At the Hand of Man: Peril and Hope for Africa’s Wildlife* documents the effect of displacement and Nature tourism on the NCA Maasai in 1993. Bonner found that not only did the Maasai receive no benefits from tourism, but also the way they interacted with visitors undermined their self worth and cultural values. Foreigners owned the tour companies and hotels, and most were reluctant to even hire Maasai to work for them. Bonner notes that the Ngorongoro Crater Lodge and the Ngorongoro Wildlife Lodge, the only two large hotels on the Ngorongoro Crater rim until 1992, had never hired more than twelve Maasai at a time out of a staff of 300 (Bonner 191). Bonner talked to one Maasai man who wanted “a job as a ranger or a guide to take...tourists down the crater” but the guide companies would not hire him. The man spoke perfect English and had lived in the crater until the tribe was evicted when he was twenty-four (Bonner 190). Though he was well qualified and could “entertain and educate with stories about his life as a warrior” (Bonner 190), this man did not get the job.

In Bonner’s account, the NCA Maasai’s interactions with tourists were often demeaning, but the Africans were so poor that many sacrificed their dignity to feed their children. Bonner described two
“severely malnourished” children of one of the wealthier families, who had “stick-thin arms and legs” (Bonner 185). Along the road to the crater rim, he recounts, there is the “ubiquitous scene” of begging children and men and women asking to have their pictures taken for money. When Bonner asked one woman if she liked posing for photographs, she said: “No, I feel that they are taking my picture because I am like a wild animal. It’s not good, but I need the money” (Bonner 186). Besides allowing tourists to photograph them, one of the only other ways the NCA Maasai make money from tourists is to dance for them. The young men, or warriors, charge visitors to videotape or photograph their performance of their traditional dance. One of the village elders is “uncomfortable with the project,” because he is afraid that these experiences will affect the young men's identities. “The warriors are young people who should look after their family and the cattle,” the man told Bonner. “Having them dance just to get some money, I think it will change them” (quoted in Bonner 187). The restrictions on their use of resources made life difficult for the NCA Maasai. The only benefit they got from it was the privilege of displaying their culture for money, though not in a way that honored their heritage.

Since 1993, the NCA has incorporated more socially conscious principles into its management. Charney recounts that though the NCA has made some changes that benefit the Maasai, the tribe still has no control over their own livelihood and remain in a marginal position. The NCAA now spends ten percent of its budget on conservationist-approved programs to benefit the tribe. Their efforts have built several schools, sponsored further education outside the park for some individuals, and helped build “pastoral infrastructure” (Charney 80). There is a cultural boma, or hut, where visitors can learn about the Maasai lifestyle in a structured environment. “Walking safaris,” in which visitors hike rather than drive through the savannah, are gaining popularity as a more culturally sensitive, low impact practice. Tourists who choose this way to explore are more likely to actually meet a Maasai, and might even have one as a guide (Charney 78).
Despite these changes, employers are still reluctant to hire Maasai. When they do, the Maasai warriors hold lower-status guard positions because most have no secondary education. Additionally, many cannot leave their cattle for an eight-hour workday. Their traditional lifestyle clashes with a modern one, and some employers see the Maasai as lazy or unreliable (Charney 80).

The NCA asks the Maasai to change their own lives and community structure in order to fit in with the top-down, preservationist-style conservation that Western ideals promote. These policies marginalize the tribe because they separate them from the land by making it impossible for them to subsist on it. Some Maasai leave the area for the city in order to send money home to their families. Even if they have the resources to get an education join the industrialized economy, however, they cannot do so without sacrificing their cultural identity and neglecting their family’s cattle (Sosovele 2005). The structure in which the NCA Maasai reside in some sense forces them to choose between remaining a tenuous part of Nature, as a object to be photographed by tourists, or abandoning their heritage for the modern world. Though they can return to their families, this dilemma disrupts the social and economic structure of their communities (Sosovele 2005). Park officials will not give the Maasai control over the land for fear that they will mismanage the resources and damage the pristine Nature.

Outside of the NCA, some Maasai like those in the village of Ololosokwan, do have control over their land and a stake in the Nature tourism industry. As a result, they fare better than the NCA Maasai do. Instead of residing between the metaphorical realms of Nature and industrial civilization, Ololosokwan’s political power allows them to retain their traditional land use practices and participate in the Nature tourism industry. By-laws give the village council legal authority over its lands, and in 1999, Ololosokwan used these to negotiate with a tour company that wanted access to the area (Nelson 2004:13). The company rented access to 25,000 acres of the Maasai’s land for U.S. $25,000, a fee they agreed to increase by five percent every year. The Maasai also charge them for every tourist that stays in the company’s hotel, and for each chartered airplane that lands at the local airstrip (Nelson 2004:13).
Revenue accrued from Nature tourism has changed the village’s economy so community members do not have to leave to earn money. Since they own the land, the Maasai can still herd their cattle there. Studies have shown that these herds do not affect wildlife populations—indeed, the Maasai were raising cows in East Africa long before wildlife began to decline—and Ololosokwan supports both a pastoralists and Nature tourism economy. Villagers are poor, but they have a higher standard of living than most Maasai, especially those in the NCA. Most importantly, they retain their cultural heritage and pastoral lifestyle while benefiting from Nature tourism on their land (Sosovele 2005). The Tanzanian government does not support the village’s efforts because they want the profits from tourism to go directly to the parks rather than the local people. Ololosokwan’s model is not perfect, but it does take a step toward breaking the colonial model of top-down Nature management (Sosovele 2005).

Costa Rica: A Different Story?

Conservation in Costa Rica has taken a different path from that in Tanzania. Where Tanzania’s industry reflects its colonial roots, Costa Rica’s Nature tourism began as the country’s own initiative. The idea that tourism and conservation could support one another originated here, the country’s Tourism Institute (ICT) successfully broadcast “Costa Rica: No Artificial Ingredients” as the national slogan in 1996 (Honey 160) and the country is widely recognized as the “world’s prime ecotourism destination” (Honey 160). Where only Tanzania’s elite are educated in Western environmental values, Costa Rica teaches nature conservation in its high school classrooms (Boza 242). National television has an ecology channel, and in 1993, there were over a hundred environmental groups in the country (Boza 1993, 240). Today, 25 percent of the country’s land is under some form of protection. Costa Rica hosts 38 national parks, eight biological reserves, eighteen forest preserves and 51 wildlife refuges (centralamerica.com). Unlike in Tanzania, science-based conservation has become part of Costa Rica’s national consciousness. The
emphasis the government places on conservation and Nature tourism gives it the appearance of a socially conscious, internally motivated industry. When compared with Nature tourism in Tanzania, however, a more nuanced perspective emerges. Despite the country's nominal success, some of the same problems that exist in Tanzania still plague it. Though Costa Rica's Nature tourism industry began in a more modern, socially conscious setting, the divide between humans and Nature in Western consciousness prevents the industry from implementing practices that benefit local communities.

Unlike Tanzania's sweeping savannah, which drew Western Nature tourists from their first contact with it, Costa Rica's dense rainforests did not appeal to European colonists' sense of the sublime in Nature. As a result, Nature tourism did not begin in Costa Rica until the 1960s, when biologists, in Costa Rica as well as Europe and the United States, began to take interest in the country's incredible biodiversity. The industry there is relatively young and lacks the imperialist legacy that marks Nature tourism in Tanzania. Costa Rica's physical landscape also shaped the country's social structure. Its paucity of mineral resources led Spain ignore the colony for most of its rule. Since early colonists had no capital with which to trade for slaves, the country never developed a stratified, hacienda-style social hierarchy (Baker). Disease decimated the native population within the first century of European contact, and today, only one percent of Costa Ricans claim indigenous heritage⁶ (geographia.com). Relative racial and class homogeneity gave rise to a “rural democracy” and an “individualistic and egalitarian” culture. These traits are a cornerstone of today's stable Costa Rican democracy (Baker), and have been critical in shaping the conservation ethic and Nature tourism industry there.

In contrast to conservation initiatives in Tanzania, the Costa Rican environmental movement began in the country itself. By the 1970s, cattle farming, trade in wildlife and “chaotic land settlement by campesinos (landless peasants)” (Boza 1993, 240), who were trying to make a living in the global capitalist

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⁶ Ninety-eight percent of the current population are “Ticos” or Spanish descendents, and less than one percent are of African heritage.
economy, were devastating the rainforest. A group of ecologists led by Mario Boza and Alvaro Ugaldo were concerned that the country's Natural history was disappearing. This group of scientists aimed to establish a system of national parks in order to save Costa Rica's Nature, both for its scientific and aesthetic value. In order to gain governmental approval and ensure the longevity of their efforts, these conservation pioneers worked to instill an ethic of conservation in the Costa Rican public. Unlike Tanzania's initiatives, which Westerners have historically imposed and which have excluded the native population, Costa Rica's movement aimed to include its people from the outset. Though these efforts have been successful in the country as a whole, conservation often marginalizes the rural populations it most affects. Overall, country treats its campesinos better than Tanzania treats the Maasai. International organizations and Nature tourism revenues fund, and therefore control, its style of conservation. Since the Western ethic still privileges unused landscapes over working ones, conservation in Costa Rica creates challenges for its local populations.

Costa Rica established its first four national parks in 1970 and 1971. In order to convince the population that there was an “obvious need” for National Parks in Costa Rica, Boza and the other conservationists decided to “merge historic, scenic, and natural values so that no one could object” which would “[make] it easy to sell the public on the idea of conservation” (Boza 1993, 240). Poas, Cahuita, Tortuguero and Santa Rosa National Parks protect different aspects of the Costa Rican landscape. In order to fund the new parks, the newly created National Park Service received a grant from the WWF. Later, in the mid 1980s, Costa Rica participated in a “debt for nature swap” to continue its conservation efforts. These swaps orchestrate an exchange in which an international lending agency forgives a developing country's debt in exchange for that country spending a portion of the money it would have owed on conservation (Boza 1993). Though Costa Rica initiated these efforts, its plans are beholden to the international community for financial support.
Environmental concerns initially motivated Nature tourism in Costa Rica, but in the past few decades, the industry has developed a recreational focus. In contrast to Tanzania, where Nature tourism shifting to emphasize sustainability and community participation, Costa Rican Nature tourism has become more commercial and less environmentally and culturally aware. Its first Nature tourists were biologists and ecologists interested in studying the rainforest (Vivanco), and drew “hardy people who weren’t afraid to get wet and dirty and learn something about the forests” (Monteverde tour guide, quoted in Vivanco 177). The scale of this early tourism was small enough that it did not disrupt local populations.

As Nature tourism has become more popular, visitors have become more separated from the land and their impact has increased. Today's Costa Rican Nature tourists come to view the landscape and the wildlife, and “want nicer accommodations and finer food.” According to a tour guide in Monteverde National Park, modern Nature tourists “don’t have as much interest in environmental issues as the tourists of years ago” (Monteverde tour guide, quoted in Vivanco 177). Parks like Monteverde used to be so difficult to access and the only thing to see there was the forest and the wildlife, they attracted mostly biologists and rugged, passionate environmentalists. Advertising and development, much of which is funded by international lending agencies, have “softened” many of Costa Rica's parks. As a result, the abundance and material demands of their visitors have increased. Ironically, the “sheer numbers and...consumption patterns” of tourists “despoil” the “pristine and untouched” landscapes they visit (Vivanco 178).

The move toward more amusement park-like experiences in Costa Rica’s conservation areas highlights Cronan's point about the hypocrisy inherent in Nature tourism. Luis Vivanco, in his book *Green Encounters: Shaping and Contesting Environmentalism in Rural Costa Rica* points out that “so called alternative tourism carries with it ‘the very defilements that…tourists wish to escape,’ because, among other things, it contributes to the perceived homogenization of the diverse cultures and landscapes deliberately sought by alternative tourism” (Vivanco 178). Nature tourists imagine themselves exploring new landscapes and new cultures, but the development of the industry has commercialized what they have
come to see. Many Nature tourism destinations in Costa Rica offer “adventure” experiences, which are “typically defined as capitalism’s new generation of nature-based products” like “zip-lines, Tarzan swings, paintball battle experience, all-terrain vehicle rentals” (Vivanco 179). The commodification and technolog-
ization of the rainforest does bring foreign capital to Costa Rica, but it also taxes ecosystems and demolishes the area’s existing community structure.

As in Tanzania, local populations must often sacrifice their land and livelihood so that Nature tourists can “escape from civilization.” Different initiatives affect these groups in different ways, as Costa Rican conservation initiatives are abundant and diverse. Like in Tanzania, those projects that give them power over their own livelihood and do not enforce a stark separation between Natural and used landscapes benefit the local populations the most.

Tropical ecologist-turned conservation activist Daniel Janzen’s established the Guanacaste Conservation Area (GCA) in 1987 with the intent to return the “trashed old pastures” (Janzen, quoted in Honey 178) in the Guanacaste region to their Natural state of dry tropical forest. Janzen know that if he “threw [the local people] out, [he’d] have a social problem”(Janzen, quoted in Honey 178) on his hands as well as an ecological one. He therefore decided to pay them for their land and give them the opportunity to work for him at the biological station if they wished. His effort is commendable, and some call the GCA a “center of innovation in park management and applied conservation research” (Honey 178). Many criticize Janzen for his imperialistic approach, however. Though he treats the local population fairly well, he controls the project from the top-down, and gives no power to those who used to live there. His conviction that “biologists [should be] in charge of the future of tropical ecology” (Janzen 1986) guides his policies. A private foundation funds the project, so Janzen is not beholden to the Costa Rican government for support. Though he nominally includes the local population in his efforts, the fact that Janzen does not give them power or allow them to retain their way of life compromises ultimately leaves them marginalized. They are
entirely beholden him and have lost their capacity to be self-reliant farmers. Like conservationists in Tanzania, Janzen imposed his financial power and moral quest for biodiversity on the local people.\(^7\)

The San Gerardo Socio-Biotic Community Project, begun in the Monteverde region in the early 1990s, went a step further than the GCA to include the local population in a conservation and Nature tourism initiative. It was conceived as “a model [of] integrated conservation and development…based on community participation” (Vivanco 105), in which the area’s campesino families could continue to live in the Arenal-Monteverde Protected Zone without compromising its conservation ideals. Unlike Janzen, the Monteverde Conservation League (MCL) undertook the project in conjunction with the community rather than above it. The League strove meld the campesinos’ traditional lifestyle with their conservation goals rather than forcing them to leave the area or making them employees. Its goals were admirable, and had it succeeded, it would have been a model for positive local participation in conservation and Nature tourism. Ultimately, however, the fact that Western sponsors prioritize “wild” Nature over used environments compromised the Project’s egalitarian goals.

The Project’s goal was to help the community transition to a lifestyle that would not harm the Zone’s biodiversity, and in doing so begin to “dissolv[e] the boundary between parks and people” (Vivanco 105). From a larger perspective, it meant to find a solution to the conflict between local people and conservation initiatives, and wanted to meld humans and Nature so that both would benefit. To this end, the MCL hoped to establish organic farming, organic cattle and small animal ranching, a biological station and a site for “selective, high end tourism” (Vivanco 105) in the Arenal-Monteverde Protected Zone. At the beginning of the project, the campesinos were equal partners in the project with the MCL, whose staff was North American and Costa Rican professionals. Some of the campesinos were excited about becoming

\(^7\) This critical perspective calls into question whether local interests should always be privileged, especially if their actions have negative environmental consequences. The scope of this paper cannot adequately address this question, and provides this example as a parallel to the Maasai’s situation in Tanzania.
guides to an area they knew so well, and many looked forward to learning new, more productive farming techniques.

The Project, however, failed. A few years after its promising beginning, most of the original sixteen families involved had sold their land to the organization and moved away (Vivanco). Its dissolution stemmed from a complex set of causes. A crucial problem was the power dynamic between the MCL officials and the campesinos, and the role that NGOs play in the projects they undertake. Though they have a positive reputation for their ability to avoid governmental red tape and enact direct benefits to individuals and communities, some argue that they are agents for First World structural adjustment policies that favor privatization and the economic bottom line rather than a community’s social well-being (Vivanco 108). Development agencies privilege moneymaking over community building both because it is a tangible marker of success or failure, and because ultimately, they want a return on their investment.

One of the biggest mistakes the MCL made was to focus its resources on revenue and research over the agricultural tools and other community benefits they had promised. One campesino woman noted that the MCL and the architecture students from the University of Costa Rica, who had designed the Project, had “redirected the project toward ecotourism and biological research” and away from the campesinos’ idea of an “agricultural project” which would “produce beans, corn, [and] milk, so [they] would have food in San Gerardo” (Vivanco 115). San Gerardo is cold and rainy, so farming is hard there, and it is remote enough that there is no real external market. Food production was a high priority for the campesinos.

The initial funding the MCL had received ran out before the Project had made much progress. When they began asking donors to contribute, they advertised that they were building a “socio-biotic community.” None of the donors, however, “would invest on the social side” of the Project, “only the technical side” (Vivanco 120). Both to honor the donor’s wishes and to prove to the campesinos that they could get something done, the MCL began the biological station. Another reason for their decision was that
the organization’s expertise was in biology and forestry rather than social support. Though they “tried” and “learned a lot” “through workshops,” about community development, they did not hire any experts in that field (Vivanco 120). Conservation work is seen as a “science,” even though it involves people at least as much as plants and animals. Because Western thought separates of Nature from human, projects like the Socio-Biotic Community have difficulty incorporating them. Since the Western donors who finance projects like these are interested in Nature, they often neglect their social aspect.

Though the campesinos were disappointed that the project decided to build the biological station before any infrastructure that would help them, some continued to participate. Again, however, they were disappointed by the power dynamic that developed during construction. A North American carpenter had volunteered to direct the station’s construction. Though he was friendly and open to everyone, he did not speak fluent Spanish. This made it difficult for the campesinos to communicate with him, (Vivanco 121) and they felt like laborers rather than partners in the project. The problem worsened when the station was complete and students and scientists came to use it. One campesino recalled: “they would introduce us…as the ‘socio-biotic community’…like we were little rabbits they would bring to show the donors” (quoted in Vivanco 122). He “realized that they didn’t think of [the campesinos] as equals, but as employees they could order around” (quoted in Vivanco 122). Like on the Guanacaste Conservation Area and the NCA, the original inhabitants became subjects to the powers of conservationists.

Both the GCA and the MCL projects were flawed because they asked the local people to give up their land and way of life without giving them control over their futures or ensuring that they would receive tangible benefits from their new livelihood. While their outcomes might indicate that human communities cannot realistically coexist with pristine Nature, Carlos Solana’s story provides a counter example. In “From Hunter to Conservationist: Carlos Solana, a Pioneering, Visionary Farmer Living in the Highland Forests of Costa Rica,” (2000) Xinia Ramirez describes Solana’s transformation from farmer to conservationist. The article shows that if government measures help farmers develop sustainable
industries and allow them to use the Nature they inhabit, local populations can thrive in conservation areas and still protect their biodiversity. Authorities must compromise, however, and agree that the landscape need not be “pristine,” or devoid of human use to still be valuable as Nature.

Though “a scant ten years [earlier, he] hunted and plundered the forest,” by 2000 Solano had developed a “serious and responsible commitment to conserving nature” (Ramirez 2000, 118). When his grandparents settled in the El Jaular in the Talamanca Mountain Range in the 1960s, their goal was to turn rainforest into farmable land. The majority of the deforestation in Costa Rica has been by small-scale campesinos like the Solanas, which has made them the enemy of conservationists. Like most rural areas in Costa Rica, the people of El Jaular burned the forests for farmland, cut them for timber, and hunted in them for food. The National Forestry Law of 1969 regulated logging, and many families left the area because it destroyed their livelihoods. More reserves and protected areas sprang up in the region, and the local economy stagnated (Ramirez 118-119).

In 1984, the Tropical Agriculture Research and Higher Education Center in Turriba, Costa Rica (CATIE), funded by the Swiss Agency for Development, came to El Jaula to study the local ecology and develop sustainable agriculture there. Solano became president of the committee of campesinos who provided a link between the government agency and the local population. The groups had a positive relationship, largely because CATIE’s research benefited the farmers by diversifying the industries in the area. Solana related how now they “can have tourism, ecotourism, research sites, blackberry projects, organic agriculture, and other alternatives” so that “a family [can] live in this area without having to cut down the forests” (Solana, quoted in Ramirez 2000, 119). The inherent value of the forests themselves was not Solana’s original concern, but since it had become illegal to cut them, he supported the government effort to develop new industries (Ramirez).

When he saw the financial gain the forest could offer, Solana “[began] to value it more” (Solana, quoted in Ramirez 2000, 120). When a plot of land went up for sale, Solana and a few others bought it and
started a biological station for foreign students. The operation has been quite successful. At first, the other local people were against the effort because it further restricted “the hunting and capture of birds on the property” (Ramirez 2000, 120), but many came to support it when they saw its economic potential (Ramirez 2000, 121). The government program successfully turned all but two members of the El Jaula community “100% conservationist” (Solana, quoted in Ramirez 2000, 121). As in Ololosokwan, the community members have a financial stake in the conservation and Nature tourism industry as well as control over their participation in it. They are able to thrive in protected areas without damaging them because each can still use the resources they need without over taxing them. Nature tourism motivates them to be responsible environmental stewards. If they damage the ecosystem, the community loses its tourism industry.

These examples from a diverse set local communities and conservation initiatives in Tanzania and Costa Rica reveal consistent themes in the Nature tourism industry, both about how governments and organizations undertake conservation initiatives and the affect these have on local populations. Nature tourism is not necessarily “bad,” but many strategies do marginalize the people who formerly lived on the protected area. Policies that permit a compromise between conservation interests and local subsistence can benefit these populations, but they can only thrive when the community has both a financial stake in Nature tourism and the ability to control its own livelihood. The Nature tourism industry traditionally removes inhabitants from its destinations in order to return it to a “pristine” state, and scientific interest in biodiversity adds credence to this practice. Nature as an untouched landscape by definition cannot support humans, and is itself a culturally constructed idea that privileges upper class Western voyeurism. When the international community began to incorporate goals of sustainable development into its Nature tourism projects, it failed to recognize that it would need to adjust its ideal of Nature if it hoped to assist local communities. These populations fare poorly when conservation authorities maintain a tight grip on their notion that people cannot use the landscapes for subsistence. In the cases where local communities retain
their own autonomy instead of becoming subjects to conservation interests, they are able to use the resources responsibly and do not necessarily damage the ecosystems.

Conclusion: Sustainable Development and the Human-Nature Gap

This paper's perspective on Nature tourism privileges community benefits over absolute conservation. While many support the stance that those who live off the land should continue to be able to do so, others contend that this lifestyle threatens endangered species and the overall biodiversity of ecosystems. There are ways for small communities to coexist with wildlife. In order to do so, however, they must limit the resources they use. Indigenous peoples could live in harmony with their surroundings because their populations were sparse and they used pre-modern practices. Maasai pastoralists subsisted in Tanzania for hundreds of years before Europeans came without diminishing the wildlife there. Those standards of living are no longer acceptable today. Development aims to improve people’s lives, but in order to do so, their impact on the land increases. “Sustainable growth” is itself an oxymoron—no population or industry can grow without using more resources. Economic prosperity inadvertently taxes the land. Ecosystems do thrive better without modern human impact, and many healthy, diverse natural areas are disappearing from the planet. In many ways, environmentalists are right—community improvement is the enemy of absolute conservation.

Nature tourists can also be the enemy. Though they privilege conservation over use of the land, visitors use resources as well, often at a higher rate than those who already live in the area. This industry wants others leave the “wilderness” alone so that they can visit it, but often does not mind despoiling the environment outside the parks or near their homes. Those who develop Nature tourism promote a consumptive lifestyle for those who can afford it, but they themselves do not feel the impact of their use. In addition to pushing local people off land in order to preserve it, the fact that others sacrifice their way of life
for visitors' entertainment contributes to the imperialist quality of Nature tourism (Cronan, Guha). Ideally, responsible Nature tourism should teach visitors that all environments are valuable and that everyone is connected to them. Even though someone from an industrialized country may feel disconnected to the land, the resources they use ultimately come from it. In this respect, they are no different from those more integrated with the land itself. Nature tourism should emphasize the importance of reducing one's overall impact on the biosphere rather than widening the psychological gap between wilderness and humanity. Conservation is critical to the physical and psychological health of the plant—ecosystems do have inherent value. Just because it is visible and obvious, however, does not make local use the problem. First World alienation from the landscape contributes to environmental degradation. It does not make sense to separate others from it as well.

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