



# Corridors of Power: Assembling US Environmental Foreign Aid

Catherine Corson

*Department of Environmental Studies, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, MA, USA;  
ccorson@mtholyoke.edu*

**Abstract:** Using the US Agency for International Development’s environmental program in Madagascar as a lens, I offer a historically grounded, relational, and multi-sited methodology for understanding the transnational processes that constitute political forests in the contemporary era. Neoliberal reforms conditioned the emergence of a public–private–non-profit alliance, which promoted biodiversity conservation as a US foreign aid priority. As these reforms weakened state capacity and liberalised economies, the downsized Madagascar and US governments became reliant on conservation actors to mobilise political support for their programs. This reinforced the need to maintain strategic relationships with capital-city actors, undermining prior efforts to devolve forest management to local communities. By isolating deforestation as a peasant problem “over there” and by expanding protected areas to meet global biodiversity targets, the conservation alliance created an avenue to be green that did not threaten extractive industries or key constituents. In this manner, saving the environment via protected areas expansion offered politicians a pathway through the inherent contradictions of green neoliberalism.

**Keywords:** Madagascar, neoliberal conservation, ethnography, development, assemblage

In September 2003, at the Fifth World Parks Congress (WPC), Madagascar’s former president Marc Ravalomanana announced a plan to triple the size of Madagascar’s park network to six million hectares or 10% of the country’s territory in order to meet International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) targets. Following the announcement, foreign aid donors, international non-governmental organisations (NGOs), consultants, and private commercial companies began establishing the boundaries, resource rights, and authorities associated with these new areas. By December 2010, the system encompassed 8.7 million hectares, with an additional 10.5 million more identified as “potential sites”. Even though the original goal had been surpassed, Ravalomanana’s successor President Hery Rajaonarimampianina announced at the Sixth WPC in 2014 his intention to continue the expansion by tripling Madagascar’s marine protected areas by 2020.

Two years into the park expansion effort, I visited a US Agency for International Development (USAID)-funded Community-Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) project in the Ankeniheny-Zahamena eastern rainforest corridor. Initiated during the second phase of a donor- and government-coordinated Madagascar National Environmental Action Plan (NEAP), which began in the 1990s,

the project had been part of an effort to devolve forest management responsibility to communities. During my visit, village leaders expressed frustration at their increasing inability to control their land in the face of mining and conservation pressure. The president's high-profile commitment had reinforced a top-down expropriation of land that undermined previous efforts to devolve conservation authority to local communities. Although official compensation had not been offered, one villager angrily underscored that it was not money, but control over his family's means of livelihood that he wanted: "Even 100 million ariary is not enough for one hectare because we earn our living from this land forever."<sup>1</sup>

A few weeks after this village meeting, the newly established International Conservation Caucus Foundation (ICCF)—an NGO–business partnership set up to persuade members of the US Congress to support international conservation programs—held its inaugural gala in Washington, DC. The event was sponsored by Conservation International (CI), the World Wildlife Fund (WWF-US), the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), and the Nature Conservancy (TNC) as well as International Paper, Walmart, and Exxon Mobil. In order to attend the event, guests had to pay between US\$1000 and US\$50,000, the equivalent of between 2 million and 100 million ariary—the amount that would have been insufficient to purchase a Malagasy farmer's land.

These three events—an international conference, a village meeting, and a celebrity gala—occurred in different countries and among people of very different financial means. Yet they were deeply intertwined—connected through the transnational corridors of power that comprise contemporary global conservation politics. In tracing the specific corridors that connect a village in eastern Madagascar to Capitol Hill in Washington, DC, I offer a relational and multi-sited methodology for capturing the constitutive forces behind what Vandergeest and Peluso (2015:171) identify as the fourth and latest moment in the production of political forests, one defined by "entry of diverse non-state actors into the making and administration of forests".

The emergence of biodiversity conservation as a foreign aid priority in the mid-to-late 1980s was conditioned by neoliberal reforms in both the United States and Madagascar that reduced state management and enforcement capacity, liberalised economies, and encouraged foreign direct investment (FDI). These reforms underpinned the emergence of a political alliance among representatives of USAID, the US Congress, and US-based transnational conservation NGOs. The downsized Madagascar and US agencies became dependent on conservation NGOs to mobilise public funding for environmental programs, which impacted the Madagascar environmental program in three interrelated ways. First, contrary to what neoliberal advocates might presuppose, the need for regional and local conservation actors to maintain strategic organisational relationships with actors based in the capital cities of Antananarivo and Washington, DC reinforced upward accountability to capital city decision-makers and undermined prior efforts to devolve resource management authority to rural communities. Second, a transnational public–private–non-profit coalition of champions for conservation funding was held together by a discourse that isolated "the environment" geographically, as biodiversity "over there", threatened by Malagasy farmers conducting slash and burn agriculture and best conserved by expanding protected area networks. Ultimately, this framing,

legitimised by appealing to global biodiversity targets, offered politicians in both countries an avenue to become “green” without impeding commercial resource extraction industries or confronting key political supporters. In this manner, saving the environment via protected areas expansion became a political pathway through the inherent contradiction of green neoliberalism.

## **Capturing the Dynamics of Political Forests in the Fourth Moment**

The term “political forests” draws attention to the socio-political dimensions of forests. While forests have ecological elements, political forests “produce and are products of particular political-ecological relations—congealed and convergent in material, ideological, discursive, and institutional relations” (Vandergeest and Peluso 2015:162). Much of the foundational literature on political forests has concentrated on state power, but the increasing claims by non-state actors to what was once state authority demands a rethinking of how we define political forests and understand the work that they do (Baca and Devine forthcoming). Using the term “contentious coproduction”, Baca and Devine (forthcoming) urge that we move beyond dichotomies of state domination and peasant resistance “to emphasize how a diversity of unequally empowered actors make political forests through situated practices and social-ecological relations, which range from contradictory collaboration to unimaginable violence”. In advancing a dynamic and relational understanding of political forests, they conceptualise the state as “a multicomponent entity among other human and non-human actors who shape forest political-ecologies across an uneven field of power”; they point to how new discourses, practices, and technologies have created new forms of knowledge, subjects, and territorialisation; and they underscore that coproduction occurs across multiple sites of contestation and by multiple actors.

The roots of the fourth moment are found in the emergence of what Goldman (2005) terms “green neoliberalism”, or the convergence of liberal efforts to expand and intensify markets with movements for environmentally sustainable development in the global South. Though international agreements are still premised on the central role of the state, numerous multilateral institutions have institutionalised participatory mechanisms to involve non-state actors in their deliberations (Chatterjee and Finger 1994; Lemos and Agrawal 2006), and global environmental governance increasingly occurs through transnational networks of public, private, and non-profit organisations (Ferguson and Gupta 2002; Swyngedouw 2003, 2005). At the same time, as binding legal agreements are being replaced by voluntary compliance mechanisms, multilateral organisations are maintaining their importance in transnational governance through the embrace of global targets, such as the United Nations’ sustainable development goals and the Convention on Biological Diversity’s protected area targets. These have legitimised new expropriations of land and resources under the guise of protecting “global goods”, while the increasing involvement of private sector actors in conservation has led to a multiplicity of new green forms of capital accumulation from carbon credits to biodiversity offsets.

A rapidly growing scholarship critiques these emergent approaches, which claim to save the environment from the human impacts of capitalism while simultaneously embracing capitalism as the means to do so. Scholars document the ways in which nature is being commodified, privatised, and financialised (Arsel and Büscher 2012; Büscher and Fletcher 2015; Sullivan 2013), as well as how conjured conservation realities are actually brought into existence (Carrier and West 2009; Igoe 2010; Igoe et al. 2010). However, critics of this literature point to a tendency toward totalising critiques (Castree 2014), urging attention to the *processes* of neoliberalisation across multiple and “often connected, places, and times” (Castree 2010:1732) and a focus on everyday practices of actually existing neoliberalism (Brenner and Theodore 2002) in order to understand the variegated and hybrid ways that it has manifested across the globe (Bakker 2010; Castree 2006; Larner 2003; Peck 2004). I argue that, to do this, we need to move beyond the traditional studies that examine how conservation and development transpire in particular places (Agrawal 2005; Li 2007b; West 2006) to trace the rise of green neoliberalism *across* multiple, connected sites and to understand the interorganisational and transnational social relations that associated narratives sustain (Leach and Mearns 1996; Mosse 2005; Roe 1994). In short, we need to understand not only *how* but *why* green neoliberalism manifests in particular ways in specific sites.

This challenge demands a relational and multi-sited methodology that can capture the everyday practices that constitute contentious coproduction, that can locate influential moments, actors and ideas within transnational networks, and that can analyse how and why particular elements come together at particular moments in time and space. This requires moving beyond dichotomies that posit institutional spaces as “inside” or “outside” (Billo and Mountz 2016) to focus on how power unfolds within the “interstices of hegemony’s production” (Goldman 2005:24–25) and to situate organisations in historical context and in relation to shifts in global economic structures, political priorities, and inter-organisational dynamics (Cooper and Packard 1997). It necessitates examining foreign aid as a continually contested process (Li 2007b; Moore 2005), rather than as an imposed Western monolithic anti-politics machine (Ferguson 1994), and attending not only to formal political negotiations and bureaucratic practice but also to informal, everyday interactions (Corson et al. 2014).

## Conducting Multi-sited Critical Ethnographies

The methodology presented in this article draws on the work of institutional ethnographers who have extended the application of ethnography in order to “study up” (Nader 1972). These scholars have combined various methods to produce the equivalent of “thick description” (Geertz 1973) in circumstances in which accessing, much less immersing oneself in, centres of power to gain a situated understanding of internal dynamics and bureaucratic “culture” is challenging (Bebbington and Kothari 2006; Bebbington et al. 2007; Lewis et al. 2003). Long-term immersion as an employee in some of the studied organisations shaped my research design and analysis, afforded me personal contacts, and offered a familiarity with the studied bureaucratic practices and political dynamics. Nonetheless,

I was not engaged in many of the negotiations I studied and thus not privy to the hidden transcripts that shaped them, and, like Tsing (2005), I piece together “fragments” from participant observation of public meetings, policy documents, personal and colonial archives, and key informant interviews. I relied heavily on 214 interviews with public, private, and non-profit actors primarily in the United States and Madagascar between 2003 and 2010 to reveal motivations and “hidden transcripts” behind particular decisions.

The approach presented here also draws on the work of multi-sited ethnographers who trace the movement of concepts, programs, and politics across transnational networks (Bebbington and Kothari 2006; Bebbington et al. 2007; Perreault 2003). Here, a key challenge is constructing and then bounding the field of study (Hannerz 2003). In focusing on how and why particular processes come together at specific historical conjunctures, I offer an alternative to analyses that combine Foucauldian and actor-network theory (Fairhead and Leach 2003; Lewis and Mosse 2006; Mosse and Lewis 2005) and those that bound the ethnographic field of study by following people or things (Gusterson 1997; Marcus 1995) or by tracing “distended networks” (Peck and Theodore 2012). Instead, I build on a group of critical ethnographers who examine how and why diverse elements are assembled into materially and discursively significant constellations at particular points in time and space (Büscher 2013; Goldman 2005; Hart 2002; Li 2007b). This approach confronts both structural and discursive determinism, understanding power not as inherent in structures, but relational and dynamic, formed through everyday practices and productive of structures as well as reproduced through them. Here, events such as WPC, moments such as presidential announcements, and institutions like the ICCF can be seen as places—bundles of social relations and power dynamics that are formed through historically and geographically sedimented practices and processes. They are defined by “particular articulations of these social relations, including local relations ‘within’ the place and those many connections which stretch way beyond it. And all of these [are] embedded in complex, layered histories” (Massey 1999:41).

While the analytic of assemblage is useful in turning our attention to *how* diverse elements are assembled across these connected places, and the ongoing work of assembling them (Li 2007a), Moore’s (2005) concept, “articulated assemblages”, helps to theorise which nodes become significant and *why*. Keeping the concept of articulation—as both the joining together of diverse elements and expression of meaning through language (Hall 1985)—at the centre, Moore draws on Gramsci’s understanding of hegemony as a terrain of struggle to emphasise that “there is nothing automatic” about hegemony—it must be “actively constructed and positively maintained” (Hall 1986:15). Furthermore, connections are not given but require particular conditions to exist and rearticulations are constantly being forged: “power relations and historical sediments formatively shape contingent constellations that become materially and discursively consequential” (Moore 2005:25). This attention to historically specific contingencies allows us to understand USAID’s environmental agenda in Madagascar as a negotiated terrain of contingent, temporary, and fragile articulated assemblages that are made in historically specific contexts, emerge through practice, and are subject to continual

reworking. The ethnographic field is constituted by and across multiple sites and organisations and through multiple corridors of power.

I begin with a discussion of how the rise of green neoliberalism at the critical historical conjuncture of the mid-to-late 1980s conditioned the emergence of a transnational environmental alliance across the United States and Madagascar. I trace how biodiversity conservation, achieved through protected area expansion that isolated deforestation as a peasant problem “over there”, and legitimised in action plans, maps, and global targets, offered Malagasy and American politicians an avenue to be green that did not impede the extractive industries or key constituents. Finally, conclude with a discussion of how these processes collectively dispersed authority across transnational networks of state and non-state actors.

## **Modelling Green Neoliberalism**

Contemporary conservation interest in Madagascar has roots in longstanding European scientific interest in Madagascar’s species, recorded as early as the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century. European and Malagasy research institutes, such as the Académie Malgache and Institut de Recherche Scientifique de Madagascar, supported scientific expeditions during the French colonial empire and after independence in 1960. In 1970, foreign and Malagasy scientists affiliated with these institutions and others organised the International Conference on the Conservation of Nature and Resources in Madagascar to raise awareness about perceived deforestation in Madagascar.<sup>2</sup> Their efforts were hindered by the 1972 revolution against continued French influence and resulting rise of a socialist Madagascar state that prompted Western governments to halt aid to the government, which in turn began restricting foreign research permits.

Nonetheless, the seeds of the future foreign-funded Madagascar environmental program were forming at this time, grounded in the 1979 creation of a WWF-International office in Madagascar and the conference on lemur biology hosted by the Académie Malgache. A group of foreign scientists invited Malagasy officials to discuss research permits and conservation at meetings on the islands of Jersey in the Channel Islands (Durrell 1983) and St Catherine’s in the United States (Mittermeier 1987). A scientist at the later meeting recalled that it “was ostensibly about getting animals for zoos, but really it was about the Malagasy opportunity to see the US interest in zoos and animals”.<sup>3</sup> Through these events, they cultivated personal relationships with government officials, outlined conservation priorities and drafted institutional protocols that formed the basis of contemporary conservation policy in Madagascar. For example, it was during a tour of US zoos after the St Catherine’s meeting that US scientist Russell Mittermeier handed Minister Randrianasolo, Minister of Livestock, Water, and Forests, a document entitled “A Draft Action Plan for Conservation in Madagascar”, which informed the future NEAP (Corson 2017; Jolly 2015). A confluence of political and economic forces in the mid-1980s provided the opportunity to assemble this budding informal network into a foreign aid agenda.

In 1980, with a foreign debt of over US\$1 billion, the Madagascar government abandoned its nationalist and socialist agenda and agreed to the International



Financial Institutions' (IFI) structural adjustment reforms, which prioritised fiscal austerity, trade liberalisation, privatisation, and deregulation. That same year, the IUCN World Conservation Strategy endorsed economic development as a means of achieving conservation, rather than a threat to it, and it recommended that countries prepare national conservation strategies (IUCN 1980). In 1984 Madagascar issued its conservation strategy (Repoblika Demokratika Malagasy 1984), which formed the basis for a 1985 WWF-International and IUCN-sponsored Second International Conference on Conservation and Development in Madagascar. In contrast to its predecessor, this conference catapulted the country's environmental issues into the political realm. As one attendee recalled, "[t]hat was the defining moment, at the 1985 meeting. From there, the World Bank took over and started putting together these national environmental action plans".<sup>4</sup> Madagascar's resulting donor- and government-funded 15-year, three-phase NEAP aligned a diverse set of state and non-state actors around the aim of integrating environmental policy into the island's overall development plans, and it became *the* model for the World Bank's global environmental agenda, announced by Barber Conable in 1987 (Andriamahefazafy and Méral 2004; Pollini 2011; Sarrasin 2007a).

The conceptualisation of Madagascar's NEAP at this critical historical conjuncture shaped the realm of possibilities for the country's environmental future in numerous ways. Over 75% of the US\$96 million that the World Bank gave between 1981 and 2005 was directed toward formulating a liberal regulatory framework (Sarrasin 2003, 2007b), specifically to "accelerate export-led growth by increasing private investment and productivity through reforms in the policy and business environment, upgrading of private firms' capabilities and global market knowledge and involvement, and attracting FDI" (World Bank 2001). The Malagasy Environmental Charter of 1990 (Law 90-033), which codified the NEAP, attributed deforestation to, "excessive state control of the economic factors of production" and "tavy [or] shifting cultivation on land cleared by burning" (Democratic Republic of Madagascar 1990:14). In order to combat this "failure", it called for reduced state bureaucracy and education for the poor to stop shifting cultivation (Democratic Republic of Madagascar 1990). Subsequent policies focused on changing rural peasant land use patterns while endorsing policies to attract foreign investment in resource exploitation. This included reducing taxes, royalties, and other fees; eliminating restrictions on the repatriation of profits; and strengthening investor rights (Ferguson et al. 2014). Mining and land tenure laws were restructured to promote FDI, to reduce state interference, and to encourage private investment. Mining exports doubled between 1996 and 2000, and investments increased on average by US\$3.6 million per year between 1990 and 2001 (Sarrasin 2009:152). Almost the entire mining surface of the country was allocated to permit holders by 2008 (World Bank 2010). Yet, with reduced budgets and personnel, the state had little capacity or incentive to enforce the environmental regulations that came out of the NEAP process (Duffy 2007; Hufty and Muttenter 2002; Randriamalala and Liu 2010; Sarrasin 2006).

The subsequent transfer of state responsibilities to NGOs reflected the softer form of neoliberalism that had appeared by the 1990s, encompassed in the "*post-Washington Consensus*" with idealised visions of NGOs as alternatives to

states, more cost efficient than governments, and a counterbalance to the private sector (Gore 2000; Mohan and Stokke 2000). As the IFIs pushed to downsize the Madagascar state, they also leveraged the creation of new, independent institutions that could circumvent the corrupt forest service and pay higher salaries, since structural adjustment was holding down civil service salaries (Falloux and Talbot 1993; Jolly 2015; Sarrasin 2007a). This reinforced the state's dependence on external actors for program design, management, and enforcement (Moreau 2008), and NEAP planners had to recruit scientists, NGO representatives, and consultants to develop and implement the program's priorities. However, as pressure to speed up the process hindered regional consultations, these agents abandoned the goal of garnering "wide public participation", consulting primarily foreign or capital city based actors (Falloux and Talbot 1993:1). In this manner, the participatory effort ironically strengthened relationships among capital city based actors, rather than engaging regional and local actors.

Concurrently, protected areas, designed to safeguard forests from rural peasants' farming practices, were becoming a way to protect and isolate "the environment" so that its protection did not impede economic growth. In 1996 the World Bank and IMF launched the Highly Indebted Poor Country initiative and began requiring aid recipient countries to develop Poverty Reduction Strategy Plans (PRSPs) that detailed how their economic growth strategies would also reduce poverty (Craig and Porter 2003; Froger and Andriamahefazafy 2003). The premise of Madagascar's PRSP was that export growth would both reduce poverty and protect biodiversity. While it included reforms to promote transparency in the governance of mining, fishing, and forestry sectors, like the Environmental Charter, it emphasised the need to protect natural resources from unsustainable rural community practices like shifting cultivation by establishing protected areas (Republic of Madagascar 2003). And as mining enterprises expanded, companies like QIT Madagascar Minerals launched biodiversity offsets programs that endeavoured to "compensate" for its environmental damage of its mine by creating new protected areas (Bidaud et al. 2017; Kraemer 2012; Seagle 2012; Waeber 2012).

## **Sowing the Seeds of Neoliberal Conservation in USAID**

As Madagascar was undergoing economic transformation, the United States was doing the same. Guided by Keynesian principles, US environment and development policy in the 1970s hinged primarily on public confidence in the state to regulate private activities and to protect human welfare. USAID's initial environmental projects emphasised state intervention to manage natural resource supplies for the poor and to redress any negative environmental impacts of its development projects (USAID 1988). By the early 1980s, US environmental NGOs, organised initially to support the 1970s' emphasis on protecting public goods, had turned to mobilising public and congressional opposition to the Reagan Administration's emphasis on private enterprise and rollback of environmental programs (GTC 1981), and as the Democratic Congress embraced these NGOs as key partners in the fight against the Reagan administration, they "encouraged [USAID] to work with NGOs".<sup>5</sup>



The discipline of conservation biology was founded in the 1980s, and the term “biodiversity” was coined at the 1986 National Forum on BioDiversity, where Madagascar was proclaimed one of the world’s top biodiversity priorities (Mittermeier 1988). Species conservation groups—such as National Wildlife Federation, WWF-US, and the National Audubon Society—helped to push through amendments to the Foreign Assistance Act, which set aside US\$2.5 million for forests and biological diversity and directed USAID to channel these funds to NGOs (USAID 1988; US Congress 1986). These amendments launched a USAID-NGO partnership, in which USAID subsequently not only funded but also trained NGOs to run USAID projects.<sup>6</sup> A USAID Madagascar official reflected on the factors that came together in this time period: “In the mid-1980s, there was a growing global awareness of the importance of biodiversity ... The US really got on the bandwagon at that time ... There was a convergence of money from Congress.”<sup>7</sup>

While the Clinton administration continued neoliberal efforts to reduce government and to contract out public programs to private companies and non-profits, in contrast to the Reagan and senior Bush administrations, it saw environmental NGOs as key constituents. By 1997 USAID had closed more than two dozen overseas missions and reduced its staff by one-third (Smillie 1999), and it began hiring temporary private contractors and NGO partners to do the work instead (Zeller 2004). Both the Democratic congressional minority and Clinton Administration encouraged it to channel biodiversity funds through NGOs, and USAID’s New Partnership Initiative in 1995 required USAID to channel 40% of aid funds through NGOs (USAID 1995). A former USAID official recollected that there “was a huge lobby of NGOs, and we had a mandate to work with them”.<sup>8</sup> This fuelled both the growth of conservation NGOs and the agency’s reliance on them for political support, and NGOs became the primary advocacy group on Capitol Hill for USAID’s environmental programs, including in Madagascar (Corson 2010).

## **Creating a Transnational Conservation Enterprise**

Citing the government’s adherence to IFI reforms, USAID had begun expanding its programs in Madagascar in the 1980s. USAID Foreign Service Officer Sam Rea recalls his mandate to “prepare a program of long-term assistance, which AID could implement at such time as the US was convinced that the Government of Madagascar was truly committed to policies of economic liberalization and reform” (Rea 1998). The agency drew on research by US-based NGOs that documented deforestation in Madagascar to justify its new environmental interventions (WRI 1985), and its 1989 budget request for environmental funds in Madagascar emphasised the importance of NGOs, “as one of the most effective mechanisms to support natural resource activities”, to implement the program (USAID 1987:56). USAID leveraged the aforementioned congressional biodiversity mandates to require its traditional development recipients to partner with conservation NGOs in Integrated Conservation and Development Projects (ICDPs). A former WWF official reflected on the political legitimacy these gave conservation NGOs: “Without the support of USAID, not just financial support, but also the interest that USAID showed in the WWF program, I don’t think we would be where we are today ...”<sup>9</sup>

Eventually, USAID became the second largest donor behind the World Bank to the NEAP (USAID 1997), and, as USAID's budget for conservation increased, US-based conservation NGOs progressed from external advocates and information providers to program implementers, contributing to their rising influence in Madagascar politics (Duffy 2006; Erdmann 2010; Horning 2008; Kull 2014).

By the mid-to-late 1990s, ICDPs were being surpassed by a new concept: CBNRM, which more specifically advocated that conservation "be pursued by strategies that emphasize the role of local residents in decision-making about natural resources" (Adams and Hulme 2001:13). However, insufficient investment in Madagascar's two CBNRM programs, Gestion Locale Sécurisée (GELOSE) (Locally-Secured Resource Management) and Gestion Contractualisée des Forêts (GCF) (Contracted Forest Management) led to weak institutional structures, and both ICDPs and CBNRM were superseded by 21<sup>st</sup> century market-based conservation and ecoregional planning approaches (Bertrand et al. 2009; Blanc-Pamard et al. 2012; Montagne and Ramamonjisoa 2006). Drawing on the science of island biogeography, ecoregional planning advocates scaled up conservation to focus on biodiversity corridors, landscape conservation planning, and expanded protected area networks with a reduced focus on local control over natural resources (Brosius and Russell 2003; Wolmer 2003). Ecoregional planning became the centrepiece of USAID's strategy, and regional leaders used geographic information systems to develop biodiversity prioritisation maps under the auspices of ecoregional planning. In the rush to implement Ravalomanana's proclamation to triple protected areas, they were then used to determine, in the absence of community engagement, the boundaries of the new protected areas (Corson 2011).<sup>10</sup> In this manner, ecoregional planning offered new ways for centralised actors to expand their control of and authority over Madagascar's forests, countering the decentralisation initiatives of the 1990s, instead (see also Ribot et al. 2006).

Concurrently, market-based programs such as payment for ecosystem services, carbon trading, biodiversity offsets, and conservation trusts were redefining who could garner wealth and how from Madagascar's forests. For example, USAID supported feasibility studies for a project to finance conservation through carbon credit sales in the Makira protected area (Brimont and Bidaud 2014; Ferguson 2009; Méral et al. 2009). QIT Madagascar Minerals also launched a program to offset its environmental impacts by creating new protected areas (Kraemer 2012; Seagle 2012; Waeber 2012). Finally, WWF, CI, and the Madagascar government established the Madagascar Biodiversity Fund, an investment fund that by 2014 had raised over \$US50 million (Madagascar Biodiversity Fund 2015; Méral 2012; Méral et al. 2009). These initiatives created new commodities, rights, and associated realms for capital accumulation that empowered global market actors and justified extractive investments.

## **Weaving a Pathway through the Contradictions**

NGOs were also expanding collaborations with multinational corporations, the financial sector, and the entertainment industry at this time in order to increase political power. As conservation NGOs became increasingly influential on Capitol

Hill, congressional set asides for biodiversity in annual congressional appropriations bills grew from \$2.5 million in fiscal year (FY) 1986 to \$25 million in FY 1995 to \$195 million in FY 2008. USAID, NGO, and Congressional staff collaboratively drew up guidelines that restricted how these funds could be used. These guidelines prioritised programs that could demonstrate a direct impact on biologically significant areas, such as expanding protected areas, which were an easily measured achievement (Corson 2010). The growth of these funds and the restrictions shaped what the Madagascar mission could prioritise as almost 100% of the USAID–Madagascar environmental program was funded by the biodiversity funds (USAID 2008; see also Freudenberger 2010).

In 2003, WWF-US, WCS, CI, and TNC created an International Conservation Partnership (ICP), which aimed to build congressional support for conservation, and in 2006 they formed the ICCF as a separate 501C(3) organisation.<sup>11</sup> Drawing from the advisory boards of its founding members, the ICCF’s advisory “conservation council” included representatives of corporate giants like Exxon Mobil, International Paper, and Unilever. By the end of 2007, the International Conservation Caucus (ICC) had become one of the largest bipartisan caucuses in the House. The group attracted diverse bipartisan membership by invoking an anti-big government message (even as they pushed for more public expenditures on conservation) and focusing on foreign conservation.<sup>12</sup> By defining “the environment” as biodiversity “over there”, to be protected in parks, away from competing US economic and political interests, it created an avenue through which US politicians and businesses could appear “environmentally friendly” without confronting campaign contributors or constituents who might be less environmentally oriented. As a former USAID official reflected: “It is easier to do biodiversity overseas than in this country because the conflicts don’t involve constituencies of Congress”.<sup>13</sup> NGO-organised trips for congressional members and staff to biodiversity sites overseas not only helped to sustain congressional support,<sup>14</sup> but also reinforced the idea that conservation was a foreign problem. As one aide observed: “In his/her travels [name of Congressman/woman] sees so many different examples of people not taking care of natural resources effectively”<sup>15</sup> (Corson 2010).

## **Reinforcing Upward Accountability**

Importantly, these NGOs lobbied not just for biodiversity conservation, but also specifically for the USAID Madagascar program, and as the conservation lobby based in Washington turned into a critical ally, the USAID Madagascar mission’s concentration on biodiversity conservation and protected areas became a strategic manoeuvre to ensure a continued stream of environment funds guaranteed by congressional support for biodiversity. Mission officials reported pressure to give grants to CI, WWF, and WCS so as to maintain the necessary Washington support for its program.<sup>16</sup> One official stated bluntly that “USAID couldn’t not give money to CI/WWF. They would go straight to the Hill [US Congress]”.<sup>17</sup> In turn NGO and congressional caucus leaders pressured the US Congress to protect environmental funding to Madagascar in the face of foreign aid cuts.

The ICP and ICCF organised a number of events that nurtured personal connections between members of congress, the conservation NGOs, and Madagascar government officials. Conservation NGOs brought the Madagascar Minister of Environment, Water, and Forests to Washington, DC for a film screening of the USAID-Madagascar mission funded film, “Madagascar: A New Vision”, in order “to demonstrate Madagascar’s commitment to biodiversity”.<sup>18</sup> In a letter to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and USAID Administrator Natsios, House of Representative ICC chairmen specifically advocated for biodiversity funding in Madagascar, arguing that “USAID’s conservation investment in Madagascar is a powerful example for how biodiversity conservation can support economic growth, community development ... We urge you to ensure that it receives sustained support” (Shaw et al. 2005). In 2009 the ICCF hosted a congressional briefing with CI, WCS, and WWF-US on the negative effects of discontinuing environmental funding following a coup in Madagascar. These events and others provided opportunities provided informal opportunities for NGOs, Madagascar government officials, and Members of Congress to build collaborative informal relationships.

The mission also nurtured its DC connections, inviting headquarters staff to visit. A USAID mission official summarised their strategy:

We try to have the DC biodiversity team come here ... Every two years we have a partners’ meeting in DC, [and a mission official] goes to make a presentation ... We also try to have congressional members come ... So we work with NGOs, our partners, Congress ... As a result, we haven’t really had budget cuts, like other missions have.<sup>19</sup>

Even as USAID cut back its environmental programs elsewhere, US environmental foreign aid flourished in Madagascar. Yet, the mission’s successful political strategy reinforced upward attention from the Antananarivo mission to Washington headquarters. Mission officials stressed that their client—the actors to whom they felt accountable on a day-to-day basis—became Washington rather than the people affected by the programs.<sup>20</sup> Numerous USAID officials commented on the double-edged sword of the biodiversity earmark, which simultaneously saved the mission from being closed, but forced it to narrowly address environmental issues.<sup>21</sup>

## Claiming Global Authority over Forests

This upward focus was magnified as global environmental organisations became critical sites for the negotiation of public–private–non-profit environmental authority, hegemonic discourse and techniques of rationalisation. Global targets, have reinforced multilateral authority to define what “conservation is, how it will be accomplished, and who is responsible for it” (Campbell et al. 2014:60). They have provided conservation actors the political leverage needed to expand protected area networks at the national level. For example, CI led the campaign at the 10<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Parties (CoP) to the CBD to increase the CBD’s protected area target to 17% of terrestrial areas and 10% of coastal and marine areas (Campbell et al. 2014). After succeeding at the CBD/CoP, CI staff then lobbied the Madagascar government to further increase the protected area network (World Bank 2011), ultimately triggering the 2014 commitment to triple Madagascar’s *marine* protected areas.

Ravalomanana's 2003 pledge was developed by a subset of the Malagasy delegation to the 2003 WPC, which included government officials, conservation NGO representatives, and officials from USAID and the World Bank who wanted Madagascar to meet global targets.<sup>22</sup> Prior to the announcement, a small group of NGO representatives and government officials gathered in a hotel room to debate the details of an announcement to meet global targets: "We had ratified the Convention on Biodiversity, which advocates for 10%. We had only 3%. That's [how] we persuaded the president to make this declaration in Durban".<sup>23</sup> A consortium of Madagascar government officials, foreign aid donors, consultants, private sector agents, and national and transnational NGOs based primarily in Madagascar's capital, Antananarivo, then acted as "the state" in implementing the initial park expansion effort (Corson 2011).

Advocates emphasised that the new protected areas would involve communities to a greater extent than previous approaches, and numerous implementation guidelines underscored the need to consult with potentially affected communities (e.g. Borrini-Feyerabend and Dudley 2005; Commission SAPM 2006; Repoblikan'i Madagasikara 2005; World Bank 2005). Yet, the high-level nature of the President's initiative and rush to complete it drew day-to-day attention to capital-city meetings, rather than ensuring the participation of regional and rural actors in planning processes. Numerous regional agents complained about political pressure from Antananarivo-based policy-makers to implement the program quickly, and SAPM earned a reputation for being top-down, undermining commitment to it by rural people (Corson 2012; Freudenberg 2010). In Toamasina, one agent explained that, because it would be more than two days' walk to reach certain sites, it would require human resources, time, and material that they did not have to conduct a thorough consultation. Notwithstanding the millions of dollars supporting conservation in Madagascar, Antananarivo-based donors, government agencies, and NGOs provided inadequate financial support for and guidance on how to conduct local consultations (Corson 2012).

In the absence of information from villagers about what they needed from the forest, Antananarivo-based conservationists, scientists, donors, and government officials debated what kinds of resource uses should be allowed in parks and what the economic incentives for conservation should be. Even as they negotiated with mining interests to minimise the extent to which the expansion of protected areas interfered with the rapidly growing mining industry,<sup>24</sup> certain conservationists fought to restrict local use rights. Development assistance demanded by regional authorities to compensate small farmers for reductions in access to land and resources never materialised. Ultimately, the new legislation implementing SAPM left the decisions about allowable resource uses to individual park managers, which were often non-state entities (Corson 2011).

## **Creating New Forms of Authority in the Fourth Moment**

In moving across sites and scales, I have tried to show how the fourth moment entails new forms of authority and territoriality, which are constituted and

reproduced through particular discourses, practices, and technologies. We see the political work that green neoliberalism does—that is how it is embedded in and productive of transnational, interorganisational relationships that are continually reworked via informal as well as via official interactions. Uncovering these and the elements, such as maps, targets, and narratives, assembled with and reinforcing of these relationships, requires a relational and multi-sited methodology that can pinpoint how and why various state and non-state actors come together across multiple institutional sites and through corridors of power. And it demands understanding the historical conditions under which particular assemblages form.

This methodology allows us to see how the critical historical moment of the late 1980s and early 1990s—characterised by the neoliberal reduction of the state, the participatory turn in international development, the World Bank's adoption of the environment as a central issue, and the rising global attention to biodiversity—transformed public–private–non-profit relations of governance. The push for participatory policy development legitimised non-state actors' influence on the environmental priorities even as the participation was primarily by Antananarivo-based and foreign actors. Likewise, the Madagascar government's debt, subsequent reduction of the Madagascar state under structural adjustment and the resulting lack of state capacity and accompanying need for foreign exchange created the conditions under which the Madagascar government had to embrace NGO and USAID priorities. In this context, the need to maintain transnational relationships in order to secure funding reinforced narratives that had been prominent for decades, which attributed blame and responsibility for Madagascar's deforestation on peasants. However, these narratives have been discounted by political ecologists who have pointed to the ways in which such narratives have justified investments by extractive industries and conservation organisations (e.g. McConnell and Kull 2014). As private and non-profit actors became active partners in state policy processes in the wake of modified neoliberalism, the US and Madagascar governments pursued environmental policies that could be implemented in the context of state reduction, liberalisation of the economy, and efforts to attract FDI. Biodiversity conservation through the expansion of protected areas became a means by which to retain a commitment to the environment, the backing of foreign conservationists, and bipartisan congressional support, while also promoting the extractive industries that were critical to the economy. In this regard, saving the environment via protected areas expansion assembled a political pathway through the inherent contradiction of green neoliberalism while also restricting the peasants' ability to garner livelihoods from forest resources. However, in framing Madagascar's environmental issues as a peasant problem, the agenda elided the needs for sustainable national economic policy and state and community capacity to sustainably manage Madagascar's resources.

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## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Interview, 12 August 2006. The names of all interviewees and village locations are anonymous. When citing an interview, instead of using interviewees' names, I use one of the general position references. I also use s/he to protect the gender identity of the informant and/or the people about whom the cited person is talking. Some quotes are translated from French or Malagasy into English. The currency in Madagascar is called the ariary. At the time of my field research, US\$1 was worth approximately 2000 ariary.
- <sup>2</sup> Interview with a former Malagasy government official, 10 October 2005.
- <sup>3</sup> Interview, 24 September 2006.
- <sup>4</sup> Interview with a senior international conservation NGO representative, 29 September 2006.
- <sup>5</sup> Interview with former congressional aide, 10 January 2007.
- <sup>6</sup> Interview with a USAID official, 21 August 2005.
- <sup>7</sup> Interview, 24 November 2005.
- <sup>8</sup> Interview, 21 June 2006.
- <sup>9</sup> Interview, 2 January 2007.
- <sup>10</sup> Interview with a regional conservation NGO representative, 28 November 2005.
- <sup>11</sup> After a number of exposés published in *Mother Jones* magazine in 2013 and 2014, WWF-US and CI left the ICCF (Hiar 2014), but the ICCF continued to expand, establishing outposts in other countries as well as an Oceans Caucus Foundation.
- <sup>12</sup> Interviews with a conservation NGO congressional liaison, 16 June 2006, and NGO senior staff, 30 June 2006.
- <sup>13</sup> Interview, 3 August 2005.
- <sup>14</sup> Interviews with a conservation NGO congressional liaison, 22 June 2006, and former and current congressional aides, 29 June 2006 and 5 January 2007.
- <sup>15</sup> Interview, 5 January 2007.
- <sup>16</sup> Interviews with former and current USAID Madagascar officials, 10 December 2005 and 6 July 2006.
- <sup>17</sup> Interview with a USAID Madagascar mission official, 18 October 2005.
- <sup>18</sup> Interviews with a USAID Madagascar mission official and a senior international conservation NGO representative, 18 November 2005 and 3 December 2005.
- <sup>19</sup> Interview, 18 November 2005.
- <sup>20</sup> Interview with a USAID Madagascar mission official, 1 August 2006.
- <sup>21</sup> Interviews with USAID Madagascar mission officials, 18 November 2005, 29 November 2005, and 23 September 2006.
- <sup>22</sup> Interviews with an international conservation NGO representative, 24 October 2005; a bilateral donor representative, 27 October 2005; and a former senior Madagascar government official, 15 September 2006.
- <sup>23</sup> Interview with a senior international conservation NGO representative, 29 September 2006.
- <sup>24</sup> Interviews with a mining company agent, 13 December 2005, and centrally and regionally based international conservation NGO representatives, 19 October 2005 and 18 August 2006.

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