

# Elusive Meanings: Decentralization, Conservation and Local Democracy



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IS DECENTRALIZATION A PANACEA  
FOR CONSERVATION? OR CAN  
DECENTRALIZATION "SAVE"  
CONSERVATION? (1990S–2000S)

- ✖ Role of discourse/‘discursive regimes’ in shaping social reality
- ✖ Sharply distinct –if not opposed– discursive regimes at their origin
- ✖ Both theories and policies have problems of their own
- ✖ Joining the 2 without addressing those discrepancies hinders our capacity to learn from the practice of decentralization or conservation
- ✖ A problem of language as well as history and epistemology

## BASIC OUTLINE

- ✖ Short histories
- ✖ How the two discourse regimes did come to be joined
- ✖ Backlash, criticisms and issues
- ✖ 5 major forms of local constructions at the interface of decentralization/conservation
- ✖ African, Asian and Latin American cases
- ✖ The question of ‘fugitive power’
- ✖ Blood rights and civil rights
- ✖ Local Democracy & Conservation
- ✖ Space-taking, space-making and space-granting

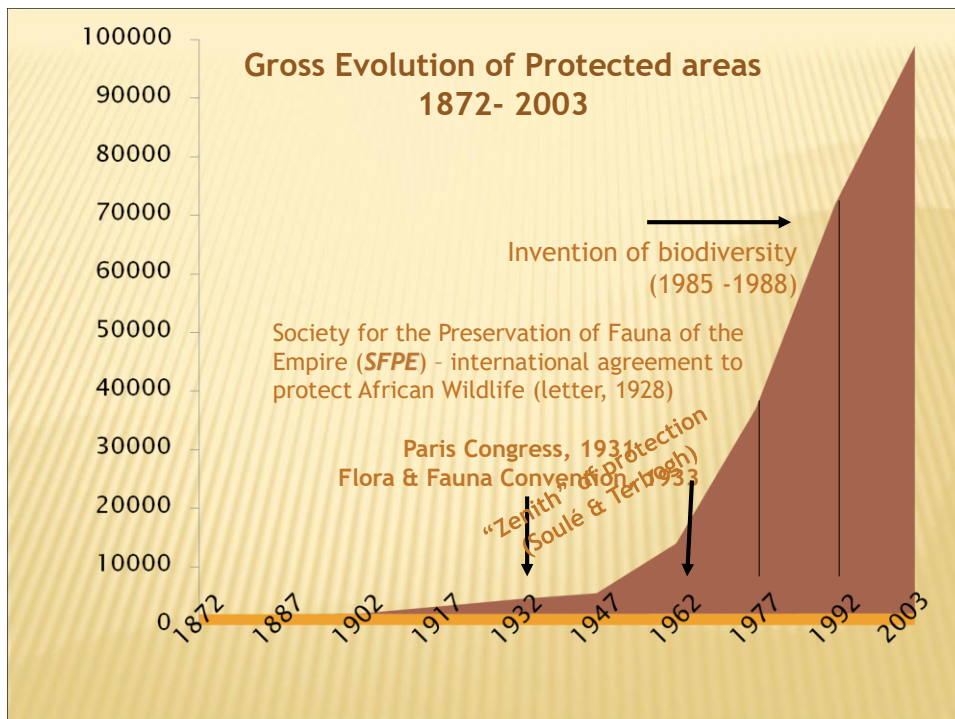
## DECENTRALIZATION AND CONSERVATION

## A short history of decentralization

- ✗ **Current decentralizations**
  - + Unraveling post-war, post-keynesian, soviet bloc growth economies – 70s
  - + Initiated from above ; "enhance state capacity for non coercive governance" (Manor)
- ✗ **Older decentralizations**
  - + Brazil (1891), Philippines (1901), Sri Lanka (1931)
  - + Argentina –struggle to incorporate Buenos Aires
  - + Mexican revolution –near state collapse
  - + Post war India and African British colonies
  - + Reverse African movement at Independence – French vs. British colonies – 1960 → 1972 (Senegal)
- ✗ **Ways to build the state**
  - + Commandist beliefs
  - + Decentralization as political market
  - + Democratic decentralization – accountability paradigm
  - + **2 forms:** deconcentration / devolution
  - + **2 channels:** State / Natural Resource Sectors
- ✗ **Roots in political theories of the state**

## A short history of conservation

- ✗ **Roots in Western theological romanticism and moral activism**
  - + Transcendentalism (Emerson, Thoreau...)
  - + John Muir, 'inventor' of national parks
- ✗ **Context of colonial violence**
  - + 1<sup>st</sup> parks, all in settlers territories –19<sup>th</sup> C.
  - + Indian wars, "Yellowstone model"
  - + Vacant lands without masters
- ✗ **Public forests and reserves: the 1<sup>st</sup> global form of protection (18<sup>th</sup> c.)**
  - + Tobago, Mauritius, Europe, USA, railway
  - + Tensions in the West between utilitarian & esthetic demands on nature
- ✗ **Parks & extractive reserves as "twin mammals of the commercial and esthetic dreams of colonialism"**
- ✗ **Global Spread of "fortress conservation"**



# The *invention* of biodiversity

*THE YOSEMITE PARK  
VIEWED BY JOHN MUIR*

**Metamorphoses of "Nature"**

Landscapes as Scenery

Wildlife

Wildlife & Flora

Environment

Biodiversity

*Landscapes without people*

## THE JOINING OF CONSERVATION AND DECENTRALIZATION

- ✚ Biodiversity not a "stable construction"
- ✚ Epistemological pluralism- CBD, Indigenous rights, bio-sovereignty, bio-democracy, next to the old paradigm
- ✚ 1970s: community forestry
- ✚ 1980s: emergence of "community conservation"
- ✚ 1990s: move of community forestry from dry to humid environments -- family farms, planting rights & common property
- ✚ *These = on the heels of the decentralization movement*
- ✚ *A problem for hortodoxies*





## COMMUNITY CONSERVATION CHALLENGES

### ✖ Two key elements

- + Participation
- + Linkage between conservation and development

### Two poles



### The fortress backlash

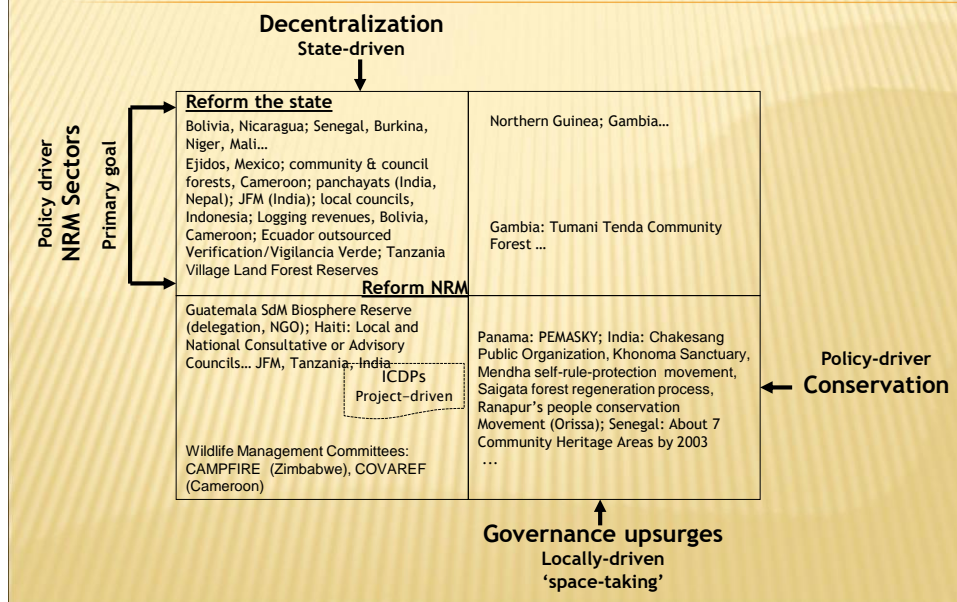
- UN & lending institutions are... continuing to propagate the myths of... sustainability and...economic development as a necessary precursor of conservation (Soulé & Terbog, 1992)
- A national parks remains powerless without the backing of those who carry the guns (Terbog, 1999)
- Biodiversity transcends national boundaries and belongs to no one (Terbog, 1999)
- In today's world...local autonomy is effaced (Sanderson, 2005)

## DECENTRALIZATION CRITIQUES

- ✗ Mixed feelings
  - + “paradoxycal outcomes”
  - + “Elite capture”, predation
  - + “Tyranny of minorities”
  - + “Limited/partial decentralization”
  - + Devolution “against local people”
  - + “Trojan horse” & “copy cat” strategies next to “blind mice” & “busy bees” situations
  - + “Immense proliferation” of user committees without proper democratic credentials – usurp the role of elected political bodies

Mainly sympathizers or advocates of ‘real’ decentralization

## WHAT LOCAL GOVERNANCE?



### DECENTRALIZATION

- ✗ Political decentralization & NRM
  - + Francophone West Africa
  - + Bolivia vs. Cameroon
  - + Lasting tensions on land, tenure & taxation; beyond issues of funding, resource transfers, competencies....
  - + Legal local associations vs. indigenous institutions – problem of social unit of action
- ✗ Conservation schemes
  - + Delegation, NGOs, Advisory councils
  - + ICDPs or SCDPs???
  - + Wildlife Management Committees

### GOVERNANCE 'UPSURGES'

- ✗ PEMASKY, Panama
- ✗ Nagaland, Maharashtra & Orissa: Self-rule and people conservation movements
  - + Tribal ownership, from clans to political federations
- ✗ Senegal: Community Heritage Areas (*Natural community space Kër Cupaam*)
- ✗ Gambia: Tumani Tenda

## SELECTED CASES AND ISSUES

### FUGITIVE POWER (FARELL, 2004)

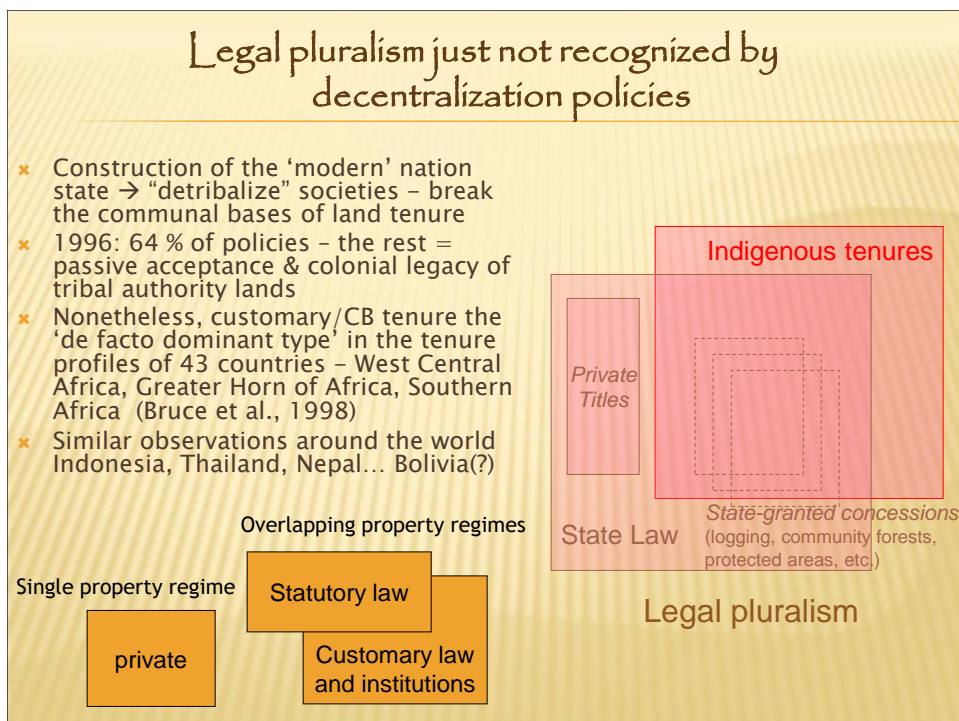
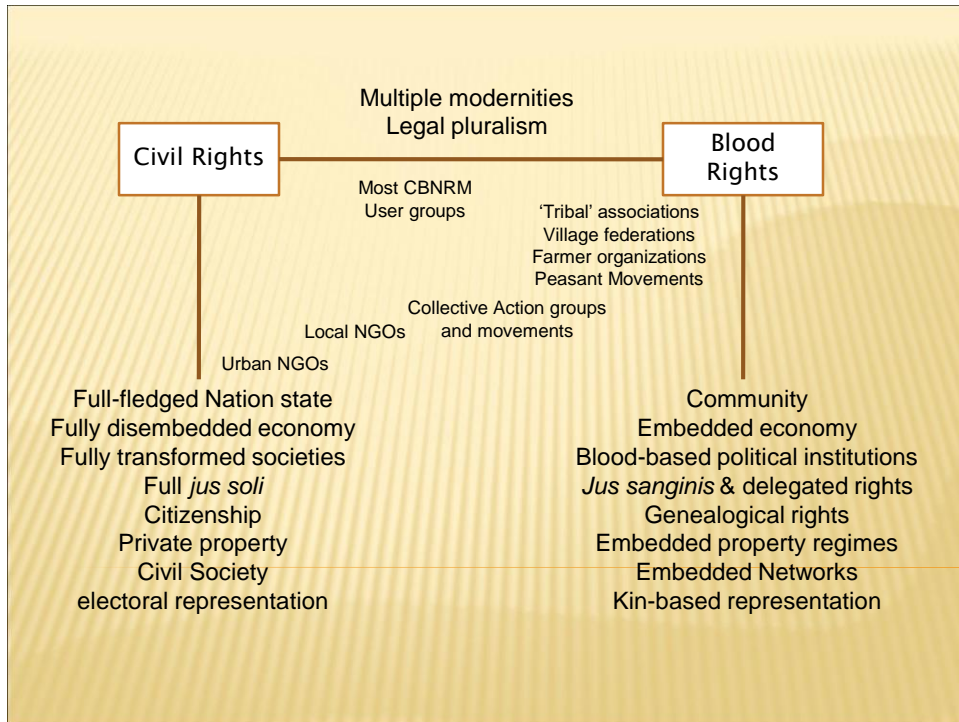
- ✗ The propensity of power to operate beyond the law and the scope of legitimating structure
- ✗ Emerging property of political systems, i.e., given sufficient conditions power will go 'fugitive'
- ✗ Democracy as a constant quest to 'recapture power' by improving legitimacy, governance
- ✗ So, why is 'power capture' almost a defining characteristic of decentralization?
- ✗ Valuable explanations but neglect of *infrastructural conditions of local legitimacy – nature of NR entitlements*

### WHY NOT 'DEMOCRATIC CONSERVATION?'

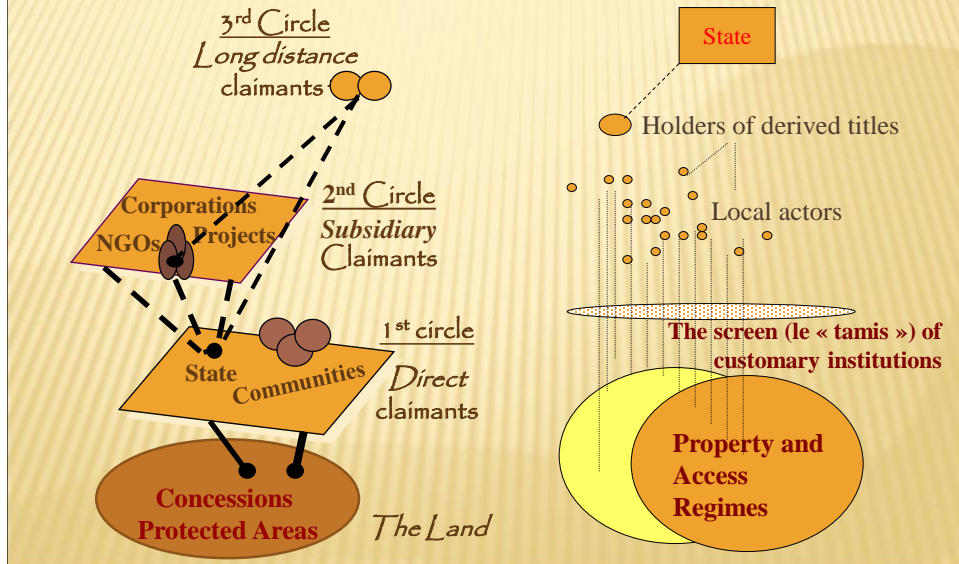
- ✗ 'Non comparable' value systems
- ✗ 'Equality of species before Creation
- ✗ Easier not to negotiate on 'core values'
- ✗ Fundamental democratic deficit
- ✗ Legal fencing
- ✗ Same 'invisibility' of *infrastructural entitlements*







## RIGHTS AND LEGITIMACY: A GLOBAL TO LOCAL STAKEHOLDER ANALYSIS



## Space-taking, space-making & space-granting: Alternative paths of local governance

- ✗ Citizens and communities as moving democratic subjects
- ✗ Need more complex concepts of governance where the political sphere has deeper and more diverse legitimating structures
- ✗ Grant or make Space rather than impose forms
  - + State level (e.g. Nagaland) to coalitions (mass federations) to landscapes (e.g. Model Forests) to villages and lineages...
- ✗ Electoral vs. participatory and deliberative democracy
- ✗ Negotiate objectives as well as meanings – bring conflicts to the level where they can be deliberated over and transformed ...



Thanks