

# **Revisiting the Lorax complex: Deep ecology and biophilia in cross-cultural perspective**

## **Abstract**

By supporting the creation of protected areas, conservation projects are known to bring economic prosperity to the local communities, but also incite criticism. A common theme in the critique of conservation organizations is the proximity to neoliberal agencies seeking to capitalize on the environment, which disadvantage the local communities. Community participation has been proposed as a panacea for neoliberal conservation. However, conservation efficacy is not always contingent on community involvement and reliance on 'traditional' practices in protected areas has not always benefitted biodiversity. Simultaneously, a critique of conservation ignores evidence of indigenous activism as well as alternative forms of environmentalism which provide a broader ethical support base for conservation. This article highlights the challenges and contradictions, as well as offers hopeful directions in order to more effectively ground compassionate conservation.

**Keywords:** biodiversity conservation; deep ecology; ecological justice; environmental justice; environmentalism

## **Introduction**

In recent decades, efforts to protect biodiversity have been influenced by a shift in governance toward neoliberal conservation with market-based mechanisms impacting both protected areas and the local communities. The shift is mainly characterized by promoting nature as a commodity, facilitating a greater role for markets, including payments for ecosystem services, expanding of ecotourism, private protected areas and biodiversity offsetting. These trends are changing the way in which communities that live in proximity to protected areas are affected by conservation.

Within environmental anthropology, political ecology, and political geography the broad shift towards neoliberal forms of conservation has come under scrutiny. While eco-tourism in protected areas and national parks has brought economic prosperity, studies have emerged that criticize conservation organizations for displacing local communities to create conservation areas and impeding their economic development. Benjaminsen et al. (2006) argue that it is ethically problematic to privilege biodiversity conservation at the expense of poverty alleviation. It is argued that conservation disadvantages local communities by prohibiting certain economically profitable but environmentally harmful practices, such as hunting or slash and burn agriculture (e.g. Peluso 1993; Adams and Hutton 2007).

A particular concern of the critics is the installation of 'fortress conservation' (e.g. Neumann 2004; Kothari et al 2013; Rantala et al 2013). In this 'fortress' model, enforcement implemented by park rangers patrolling the boundaries allows only non-intrusive tourism and scientific research within protected areas, and excluding local people (e.g. Brockington 2002; Chapin 2004; Holmes 2010; Igoe and Brockington 2007; Igoe 2011). The fortress model prohibits traditional practices, such as hunting with spears or land clearing for cultivation, as well as less traditional practices such as logging and commercial hunting (e.g. Kemf 1993; Wenzel 2009).

West and Brockington (2012) portray conservation organizations as naively romantic and simultaneously opportunistic. Conservationists, they argue, idealize biological diversity and seek to portray humans as the enemy. The common theme in the critique of protectionist paradigm is the proximity of conservation organizations to what is seen as a neo-imperialist enterprise, which Western elites, including the big NGOs (the so-called 'BINGOs'), imposing their own vision of romanticized 'imaginary wilderness' upon the local communities (e.g. Fletcher 2014). Indeed, critics contend, 'the environment has become just another vehicle for capitalist accumulation and, mostly, it feels that there is nobody there to stop this' (West and Brockington 2012:2). This critique has led to a wider backlash against conservation as practice, implicitly branding *all* conservationists as purveyors of 'neoliberal environmentality' (Fletcher 2010), misanthropic and elitist (e.g. Sax 1980; West 2008; Zehner 2012; Fletcher 2014; Marvier 2014). In a nutshell, the critics' analysis reveals that conservation is effectively 'reduced' to neoliberal environmentalism and that human (social, economic, indigenous) interests are subordinated to the whims of Western elitist conservationists.

Participatory community-based conservation (CBC) has been proposed as a panacea for the top-down neoliberal programs (e.g. Brosius 1999; Horowitz 2012; Temudo 2012). Some have argued that conservation should be completely left to the community and prohibitions against any form of hunting should be lifted. Duffy (2014) has protested against the use of negative and criminalizing connotations of the words 'illegal' and 'poaching' in cases when local communities engage in their traditional cultural practices.

However, there is evidence that stricter controls by large conservation organizations have led to positive results for the wildlife (e.g. Howard 2015; Kopnina 2015; Locke 2015). Simultaneously, it is observed that conservation efficacy is not always contingent on community involvement. The 'fortress conservation' proved out to be extremely efficient, especially when the restoration of fragile environment or protection of the critically endangered species required urgent action. Relying on local communities as natural 'guardians of the forest' has not always guaranteed the preservation of biodiversity due to the fact that today indigenous people are 'rarely isolated from global market forces' (Pountney 2012:215). Even 'traditional' slash and burn agriculture now occurs on such a large scale and with such frequency, that restoration of habitats becomes more problematic. Many communities

have reached populations exceeding the carrying capacity of their habitat, depleting resources, degrading environments, and relying on the exploitation of biodiversity (Sponsel 2014). In cases when the population of indigenous people has expanded, the risk of pushing remaining individuals of endangered species over the edge has increased (Strang 2013). More generally, the majority of traits that perhaps once enabled traditional societies to live in greater harmony with nature seem to have diminished (Turner 1993). These considerations have led to a heated discussion about ethics and justice in relation to conservation. Models reconciling human and non-human interests have been sought (Shoreman-Ouimet and Kopnina 2015).

This article will bring together three bodies of literature: on the intersection between environmental justice and environmental ethics, on the social impacts and ecological benefits of conservation, and on the evidence of cross-cultural environmental values that could form a wider ethical base for compassionate conservation. The argument will be developed that critique of conservation ignores cross-cultural evidence of environmental values pertinent to establishing a shared ethical base to support conservation efforts. The section below will address how conservation is understood and done, linking conservation to environmental justice and environmental ethics, particularly within the context of environmental sociology and environmental anthropology. As stated by one of the ‘founding fathers’ of environmental sociology, Riley Dunlap (2015), this sub-discipline’s focus on the relationships between modern societies and their environments represented a major departure from disciplinary norms, through a critical stance relative to the larger discipline. Sociology, developing during an era of general resource abundance, technological progress, and economic growth, became a distinct discipline by emphasizing the social – as opposed to biological or geographical – influences on behavior. The assumption that sophisticated social organization and scientific and technological advances had freed industrial societies from environmental constraints explains why sociological references to ‘the environment’ typically meant the social context of the phenomena being investigated. More fundamentally, mainstream sociology was premised on a Human Exemptionalism Paradigm (HEP) that sees people as fundamentally different from and superior to non-humans, assuming that modern, industrial societies had become exempt from ecological constraints (Catton and Dunlap 1978; Dunlap and Catton 1983).

In a similar fashion, environmental anthropology has developed as a critique of culturally deterministic positions that used to exalt human cultures above the natural environment (Milton 2002; Kopnina and Shoreman-Ouimet 2011; 2013; Shoreman-Ouimet and Kopnina 2015). While drawing on the work of environmental sociologists and anthropologists, this article will examine the cross-cultural evidence of environmental concern. Finally, the challenges and opportunities in the quest for combined social and ecological justice will be highlighted.

## Environmental justice and ethics

The Brundtland report (WCED 1987) speaks of ‘development that meets our own needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs’ thus relating sustainable development to the questions of social justice. Environmental justice is interlinked with notions of social and economic equity, seeking to redress inequitable distribution of environmental burdens (such as pollution) and benefits (such as natural resources or income from ecotourism) to economically disadvantaged populations, both within and between nations (Gleeson and Low 1999; Kopnina 2012b). A variety of environmental justice movements including civil rights, labor, women’s, and indigenous people’s movements, protested neoliberal elitism that compounds the disenfranchisement of vulnerable communities (Figueroa 2006:360). Geographically and temporarily, environmental justice is perceived as *the* moral imperative (Gleeson and Low 1999). From this perspective, the idea of ‘just conservation’ is rooted in environmental justice defined in strictly utilitarian terms of benefits to communities. But does this moral imperative extend to humans only?

While environmental justice insists that the environment is mostly related to social justice and is perceived in instrumental terms (Bell 2006), ecological justice extends beyond relations among humans to “justice to nature” (Low and Gleeson 1999:134). Ethically, supporters of ecological justice have argued that at present concerns for human life, human welfare, is taken for granted, but ecological justice and animal rights are not (e.g. Finsen and Finsen 1994; Baxter 2005; Cafaro and Primack 2014; Miller et al 2014; Ramp and Bekoff 2015).

Human Exemptionalism Paradigm (HEP) can be equated with ‘strong anthropocentrism’ (Norton 1984; Hargrove 1992) in which exploitation of nature for the benefit of humans is always morally justified. In HEP, protection of the environment is contingent on human needs– the position similar to the ‘shallow ecology’ perspective (Naess 1973). Eileen Crist (2012:151) has noted that the genocide of nonhumans is something about which the majority of academics, aside from a committed margin, refuse to talk about. Millions of cattle or chickens are slaughtered every day, millions of mice are used for scientific experiments, thousands of acres of forest are cleared for the ever-expanding agricultural development and this is not questioned as being unjust. Speciesism, or discrimination about entire species, is willfully avoided (e.g. Pluhar 1995; Baxter 2005; Desmond 2013). Some of the opposition to speciesism is tacit, primarily expressed through re-affirmation of market mechanisms propitiated by neoliberal commodification of nature (Foster 2002). This commodification promotes disregard for the intrinsic value of habitats through accelerating resource degradation if revenues are used to buy extractive equipment (Langholz 2003).

Although the dominant paradigm governing conservation policy in neoliberal societies is based on a limited anthropocentric version of utilitarianism, alternative ethical positions with implications for conservation and animal protection are in evidence. These reject the utilitarian view of the environment drawing inspiration from traditional cultures and a broader concept of ‘compassionate conservation’ (Munro 2001; Ramp and Bekoff 2015) and include spiritual ecology (Sponsel 2014) and deep ecology perspectives (Naess 1973).

While there is still some debate whether intrinsic value should be attributed to individuals or to entire species or to entire ecosystems and biosphere (e.g. Singer 1975; Taylor 1991; Ferry 1995), or even to ‘natural objects’ (Stone 1974), the common concern is the moral consideration beyond human boundaries (Crist and Kopnina 2014). This consideration is rooted in biophilia, or love for life.

### **“Love for life”: Acquired or inborn?**

An environmental anthropologist Kay Milton (2002:1) inquired: why some people in western societies grow up to be nature lovers, actively concerned about the welfare and future of plants, animals, ecosystems, and nature in general, while others seem indifferent or intent on destroying these things? Conservation psychologists have speculated that “love of nature” develops through early exposure, with childhood experiences of being in nature, playing with animals, taking part in outdoor activities such as hiking, camping, fishing, and berry picking (Sia 1984; Sivek 2002; Wells & Lekies 2006). These findings suggest that nature activities in childhood and youth are key ‘entry-level variables’ that predispose people to take an interest in nature and later work for its protection (Chawla and Cushing 2007).

However, this research has been criticized. Studies linking exposure to nature to positive environmental attitudes do not explain why people, who grew up next to forests, have not taken up the struggle to defend them when they were logged, while others from the same villages did. In the Cullman and Curry’s (2011) documentary film *If A Tree Falls: A Story of The Earth Liberation Front*, environmental activist Daniel McGowan reflects that he grew up as a ‘city boy’ but came to care about nature from watching a film about deforestation in his late twenties. While it appears difficult to discern why some individuals choose to stand up for nature, the strength of their commitment is demonstrated in different cultural contexts.

### **Radical biophilia?**

In the United States, for example, defenders of non-humans are treated as a high-security threat (e.g. Switzer 2003) with animal rights activists branded as terrorists (e.g. Churchill 2004). The US antiterrorist laws have targeted the radical environmentalist tactic of ecotage, conflating in the public mind a tactic that inflicts property damage with one that aims its violence against innocent persons, the US 'war on terror' (Best and Nocella 2004; Scarce 2005; Scruton 2012).

According to Will Potter, the author of *Green Is the New Red* (2011), much like the communist witch hunts of the 1940s and 1950s, the 'Green Scare' has been rhetorically associated with "terrorism" to push a political agenda, instill fear, and chill dissent. Potter argues that the courts are being used to push conventional boundaries of what constitutes "terrorism" and to hit non-violent activists with disproportionate sentences and demonizing or ridiculing 'tree huggers' in the eyes of the public.

Despite its political marginalization, radical environmentalism has attracted attention to the problems that more moderate environmental organizations fail to solve (Arnold 1997). Animal Liberation Front (ALF) or the Earth Liberation Front (ELF) place their opposition in the context of other liberation and social justice movements which have been unable to reach liberation through political lobbying and lawful protest (Merchant 1992; Zimmerman 1994; Nibert 2002; Masters 2004). Some of the environmental activists, as well as animal rights campaigners in Europe, have paid with their lives for their conviction. In the nineteen-nineties in England, a number of anti-hunt protesters, such as Tom Worby, Mike Hill, Jill Phipps, and Barry Horne were killed in clashes with the hunters or the police (e.g. Schoon 1994; Curtain 2005). In 2014, a French police grenade killed Remi Fraisse, a 21-year-old French biology student during an environmental protest (Winchester 2014).

On the other side of the globe, those conservationists who work in developing countries often put their lives on the line trying to protect vulnerable species or individual animals. Joy Adamson (1910–1980), a well-known author of a book about a lion, *Born Free*, was murdered in Kenya. Her husband, George Adamson, was murdered in 1989, trying to defend a tourist against a poacher. Dian Fossey (1932–1985), an American primatologist, and author of *Gorillas in the Mist* was killed by poachers. Joan Root (1936–2006) an Oscar-nominated maker of wildlife films, was murdered in Kenya, saving a lake from the ecological ravages of Africa's lucrative flower-farming industry (Seal 2006).

Such commitment to nature is not typically Western, or 'elitist'. Opposing the view that rich people are more environmentally-conscious than the poor as environmentalism is associated with postmaterial values (e.g. Fairbrother 2013), Dunlap and Mertig (1997: 24) demonstrate that national wealth is negatively correlated to citizens' environmental awareness and concern. There is no empirical evidence that richer societies are necessarily more 'pro-environmental' (Dunlap and York 2008). One of the manifestations of this is the proliferation of grassroots environmental organizations in

developing countries (Brechtin and Kempton 1997; Dunlap and York 2008). There is also a long list of non-Western activists who have died in defense of nature, from protesting mining to logging activities, to protests over hydroelectric dams, pollution and wildlife conservation (Lakhani 2014).

### **Non-Western activism**

From Laos to the Philippines to Brazil, the list of environmentalists who have paid for their activism with their lives is growing (Pearce 2013). Some individual stories have been widely known through the press. One of the well-known protestors, Kenule "Ken" Beeson Saro Wiwa (1941 –1995) dedicated himself to the amelioration of the problems of the oil producing regions of the Niger Delta. He was executed for his opposition to oil exploitation. In 2013, a Costa Rican conservationist protecting turtle nests Jairo Mora Sandoval (1987 –2013), was murdered on the beach which he has been patrolling (Fendt 2015).

In Cambodia, anti-logging activist Chut Wutty (1972–2012), was murdered while showing two journalists the illegal operations of a logging company (Global Witness 2013). Land grabs for agricultural development and logging by private firms in Cambodia are common-place, and observers have commented that government officials, as well as NGO's, are often complacent in this process (Vrieze and Naren 2012) and grass-roots resistance is often suppressed (Milne 2012). Whether Wutty was really trying to 'speak for the trees' (deep ecology), or protecting the interests of the local people who have lost 'their' forest (shallow ecology) remains unknown. What is clear is that environmental justice can be seen as an amalgamation of many grassroots efforts to identify, remedy, or at least ameliorate, injustices by confronting the government, social, and corporate power (Figueroa 2006:360).

Other stories were less known. Yet, a sheer number of deaths of local environmental activists speak of the human tragedy in defense of nature. At least 908 people were murdered for taking a stand to defend the environment between 2002 and 2013, according to a Global Witness report, which shows a dramatic uptick in the murder rate during the past four years (Hance 2014). In Brazil, 448 deaths were recorded between 2002 and 2013, followed by 109 deaths in Honduras and Peru with 58. In Asia, the Philippines is the deadliest with 67, followed by Thailand at 16. More than 80% of the recorded deaths were in Latin and Central America (Lakhani 2014).

There is also evidence that some local people strongly support the protection of wildlife even when faced with land shortages (Infield 1988; Infield and Namara 2001; Allendorf et al. 2006). The ethnography of Inuit culture demonstrates that despite certain globalizing influence, ecocentric perception of nature persists. Ann McElroy (2013: 149) reflects that

many Inuit perceive *inua*, a life force, within all living beings as well as within inanimate phenomena – rocks, rivers, ice, tides, mountains. Their language reinforces this imagery. For example, the weather is expressed as "Sila," a force that actively influences their lives, and the Inuktitut term for rain can be translated literally as "Sila is crying."

In traditional societies trees have multiple material and spiritual purposes, rather than being viewed as crops (Shiva 1993; Sponsel 2016). As opposed to straightforward Western neo-liberal economic rationality, many cultures have grounds for evaluating and conserving nature beyond simple economic rationality (Black 2010). Environmentalists could draw on these traditions in order to more effectively ground their actions.

### **Cautious hope**

Yet, caution needs to be exercised as there is also mixed evidence showing that cross-culturally people hold a variety of values which also differ from individual cases or situations (Tsing 1999; Milton 2002; Vining 2003; Van Petegem and Blieck 2006). The local people can mismanage wildlife as well as to oppose conservation (Netting 1993; Newmark et al. 1993; Trusty 2011). While native traditions of living in balance with nature are recorded by many anthropologists, the 'noble savage' perception of traditional cultures is presently challenged. While there are many anthropological accounts of evocative and transformative experiences in the Inuit stories and ceremony that link participants to nature through spirit worship (McElroy 2013), the young (and even old) generation these days prefer engaging with their smartphone rather than with spirits.

The indigenous protest movement in Malaysia, for example, has teamed up with environmentalists to fight a common cause, but this alliance eventually fell apart because they had ultimately incompatible agendas (Brosius 1999). In the case of New Caledonia, where an indigenous group had more power than the environmental group, the temporary alliance ultimately disempowered the environmentalists, who felt used when the indigenous group signed a pact with the mining company (Horowitz 2012).

In 2013, Solomon Islands villagers killed 900 dolphins, arguing that the Earth Island Institute, a Western conservation organization failed to pay an agreed annual amount to stop the hunt, with the Institute arguing that the renegade group of the islanders has appropriated funds meant for compensation for the whole community (Goldenberg 2013). The dolphin slaughter illustrates a collision of economic and conservation interests, revealing underlying ethical and practical tensions. Yet, these sad examples are overshadowed by examples of environmental commitment by both individuals and grass-roots organizations that defend 'their' nature.

In the essay, *The Lorax complex: Deep ecology, ecocentrism and exclusion* (Kopnina 2012a), the subject of environmental activism and conservation was explored. The Lorax is a creation of Theodor Seuss Geisel (1904-1991), an American writer and cartoonist better known as Dr. Seuss. The Lorax, the prototype environmentalist fighting against deforestation inflicted by the industrialist Once-ler, speaks for the trees ‘for the trees have no tongues’.

Studies of indigenous protest movements in many ways parallel Western radical groups that had to fight against the grain of dominant societal or political structures. For example, Amnesty International (2010) commented in their blog titled "They Are the Lorax, They Speak for the Trees". The story of the Lorax "amazingly parallels that of the Dongria Kondh peoples of Orissa" in India, "where Vedanta Corporation is wrecking the environment of the Dongria Kondh people" (Acharya 2010). Vedanta, a British mining company, attempted to extract bauxite from the Niyamgiri hill range which is revered by the Dongria Kondh tribe (BBC 2013). Tribe members testify both to their love of their forest and desperation at the authorities’ refusal to recognize its non-monetary value of their forest in the film “Niyamgiri You Are Still Alive”.

The fate of environmental activists in poorer countries is even less enviable than that of Western radical groups, and defense of nature can be also violently suppressed. There are multiple examples of indigenous activism against oil drilling, deforestation, and other environmental excesses committed by commercial companies (see for example the site of <http://www.survivalinternational.org/>).

Environmental activists in poor countries endure all forms of discrimination from local officials and international development agencies, silencing their voices (Watts 2012). Despite this silencing, the defense of nature and non-human species seems to transcend racial, national and gender boundaries.

Returning to the argument that mainstream environmentalists are too close to the capitalist enterprise, this argument can be turned on its head as a defense of indigenous rights and communities' rights to exploit natural resources can be seen as an expression of neoliberal economic discourse. Using terms like ‘livelihood security’, ‘carrying capacity’ (Benjaminsen et al. 2006; Kothari et al 2013); ‘monetary compensation for the measurable market value of lost physical assets’ (Rantala et al 2013:99), social scientists are imitating the fallacy of the dominant elites. What is needed instead is the recognition that many cultures have grounds for evaluating and conserving nature beyond simple economic rationality<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Aside from indigenous non-Western cultural traditions, contemporary urban minorities and ethnic communities are as likely to take on vegetarianism, animal rights, or indeed actions to combat climate change as white educated consumers. The blog of Vegans of Color (<http://vegansofcolor.wordpress.com/tag/animal-rights/>) illustrates this:

If transition away from automobile culture, towards renewable energies, and towards composting and water recycling are part of the green movement that might buy us all more time on the world as we know it, than

Dolores LaChapelle (1991) reflects that our Western culture is based on individualism which teaches people that they must *strive* and try and *do*, pitching humans against their natural environment. LaChapelle quotes a Canadian and member of the Odawa tribe, Wilfred Pelletier who explains that in Western society, one must spend the rest of one's life proving you're worth something. By contrast, in Indigenous tribes, the general approach was that the land itself gives them life and supports them in all they do. Instead of feeling like an individual substance, a free-floating, rootless atom, one becomes aware of being embedded in nature, part of an on-going web of life: "The land is sacred. You don't live off it, like a parasite. You live in it, and it in you, or you don't survive... You belong to the land. And that's who you are" (Pelletier and Poole 1973:209-210 quoted in LaChapelle 1991:20).

Thus, the voices of cultural or traditional wisdom need to be recognized in order to support conservation. Yet, caution needs to be exercised that not all voices will aid conservation, and indeed, the very multiplicity of perspectives can be easily subverted by the homogenizing influence of global industrial development. Minter and Manning (1999) and Marvier (2014) argue that environmentalists should learn to recognize a range of plural perspectives in 'framing' the environment. Kareiva and Marvier (2007) dismissed the old reason that "we have an ethical obligation to save the world's biodiversity for its own sake." Instead, they argue, we should be "largely scrapped in favor of an approach that emphasizes saving ecosystems that have value to people" (Kareiva and Marvier 2007: 50–51).

Opposing this view, Rolston (2015:356) asks, is the future we want to maximize development for human satisfaction? Katz (1999) and Crist (2012) have argued that anthropocentrically motivated environmental protection is largely inadequate in conserving species that do not directly cater to economic needs. Additionally, the 'metaphysics of mastery' (Bonnett 2007) over 'resources' and efforts to 'manage' the planet have often misfired. As Rolston (2015) states that managing the planet, humans are not likely to be able "to reconstruct global rainfall patterns, or photosynthesis, or tropic pyramids, or genetic coding and speciation, or heterotroph-autotroph relations, or bird migrations, or what earthworms do in soils and insects do in pollinating, or any other of the basic systems that nature

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veganism – a veganism cognizant of the human and Earth liberation elements of its actualization – also must be part of that same movement. And it has to be about as many of us humans as possible.

Since we pursue those things which materially and otherwise most benefit us, as do all other creatures, then a veganism that appeals to our longevity and the leveling of the balance of power in human societies should theoretically find mass appeal. Veganism in explicit combination with human rights, or veganism plus human liberation, can be understood as Liberation Veganism...

Wider application of this 'food for thought' is the idea of justice – and injustice done to the weaker party, be they local impoverished populations or felled trees.

provides”. Perhaps, by taking responsibility, we can limit or repair some damages we have introduced (global warming, ocean currents, toxics, endangered species), but the belief that we might engineer these foundational grounding systems is overblown fantasy.

Such an overblown fantasy seems to be a relatively recent outgrowth of post-industrial neo-liberal societies. In non-Western contexts, many anthropologists have found that traditional cultural views are close to deep ecology perspective (Milton 2002; Black 2010; Efirid 2011; Baines and Zarger 2012). The fundamentally instrumental treatment of the environment as a natural resource in modern neo-liberal societies stands in sharp contrast to ecological spirituality of traditional cultures (Anderson 1996; Taylor 1991, 2008, 2010; Sponsel 2016). Perhaps when humans become more philosophical about their world, in the midst of our development, we will also seek to sustain life on this wonderland planet (Rolston 2015).

### **Ways forward**

However, positions that are not concerned with the efficacy of conservation tend to reduce conservation to ‘discourse’ of endlessly ‘contesting’ social values. The calls for more ecumenical conservation (e.g. Marris 2014; Marvier 2014) need to be examined with more caution. If ‘anything goes’ in protected areas, for example, hunting or even poaching is de-criminalized (Duffy 2014), it can endanger entire species (e.g. Kopnina 2014; Cafaro and Primack 2014; Miller et al 2014; Shoreman-Ouimet and Kopnina 2015). Also, anthropocentric environmental values or shallow ecology might not be sufficient to protect instrumentally ‘useless’ species. Thus, most importantly, *the efficacy of conservation needs to remain its guiding principle* (Cafaro and Primack 2014; Miller et al 2014).

Recognizing that biophilia is present in different cultures, although currently suppressed by anthropocentric industrialism, the environmentalists’ need to balance a few objectives. First, environmentalists have to be able to talk to the public and power holders, thus openness and pragmatism, especially in communication with conservation critics need to be retained. However, there is still a need to present a unified front against the deeply entrenched rationality of anthropocentrism that is shared by conservation critics. Cultural alternatives present in traditional cultures as well as committed environmentalism can be drawn upon to inspire such unity. Crist (2012:150) reflects that “hope lies in humanity’s coming to realize the immensity of what we are irretrievably losing, which is not (*emphasis in original*) resources. Hope lies in the fact that we are native to the Earth: we have the potential of understanding that we are losing our own family” (Ibid).

This hope is encompassed in the realization that the place of humans is neither exceptional nor superior in this system, recognizing the intrinsic value of non-human species as well as

interdependency of all species (e.g. Devall and Sessions 1985; Callicott 1989; Jamieson 1998; Regan 2003). As Siddharth Chakravarty, an Indian Captain of the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society's ship has remarked: 'While whales in the Southern Ocean or pilot whales in the Faroe Islands are far removed from the realm of most Indians, it is important to preserve the biodiversity of the planet. If the oceans die, we die'.

Despite differences in opinion, most shallow and deep ecology proponents may agree that humans are dependent on the ecosystem, and thus human interests are congruent with the health of the ecosystem. The Lorax also speaks for 'Barbaloots' - creatures ambiguously drawn by Dr. Seuss to resemble both bears and humans.

I am the Lorax! I speak for the trees,  
Which you seem to be chopping as fast as you please;  
But I also speak for the brown Barbaloots,  
Who frolicked and played in their Barbaloot suits,  
Happily eating Truffula fruits.  
Now, since you've chopped the trees to the ground  
There's not enough Truffula fruit to go 'round!  
And my poor Barbaloots are all feeling the crummies  
Because they have gas, and no food, in their tummies.

The Lorax does not just worry about the trees, but also about food for the Barbaloots that the Truffula fruits provide (shallow ecology, weak anthropocentrism). Still, the Lorax's interference, whatever the motivation is, seeks to protect nature from the Once-ler, with his pursuit of the short-term economic gains. And here, in the common humanism and compassion, in Western and non-Western, and in industrial and rural contexts the opportunity for reconciliation of social and biospheric interests lies. The affinity we humans have for the rest of nature, as well as dependency on our environment, the process of remembering that attraction, and the urge to express it through the creation of restorative environments, can help confer resilience across both social and ecological scales (Tidball 2012).

Recognizing that the defenders of nature are not bound by country, culture or social class offers an opportunity for reconciliation between human and ecological interests. While we may never know what the 'driving force' of environmental activism is, it is clear that it is not nationally or culturally bound. It is not just a false dichotomy between protecting humans or protecting nature, or between Western neoliberalist ideology and traditional practices that need to be examined. It is the cross-cultural environmentalism itself that offers a broader ethical support base for conservation. Without

advocating for particular conservation philosophies, "reconciliation" opportunity between advocates of social and ecological justice can be found in these shared values.

## **Conclusion**

This article has outlined the critique that neoliberal conservation may be too proximate to political and corporate power holders. This criticism of Western environmentalism as elitist (Igoe and Brockington 2007; West and Brockington 2012; Fletcher 2014) tends to conflate *all* environmentalism pitching 'environmentalists' against local communities. Yet, these critics tend to ignore the evidence of traditional environmental values, as well as the power of industrial, corporate and neoliberal hegemonies that increasingly influences traditional practices and values. This re-evaluation brings in the mix of cross-cultural studies and theoretical environmental justice to more directly address what I see as a weakness in conservation critics' analysis.

This article has demonstrated that conservation has many sources, inspirations, and participants. There is evidence that grass-roots environmentalism, as well as individual activism, is a global phenomenon that, although not necessarily shared by all individuals, transcends social class, national and racial boundaries. The Lorax complex is manifested through indigenous activism as well as individual altruism. There is also evidence that compassion originating from identification with nature is common in all cultures, testifying to the human need and propensity to affiliate with other living organisms (e.g. Wilson 1984; Kellert and Wilson 1995).

In the case of Dongria Kondh tribe (*They Are the Lorax, They Speak for the Trees*) the world could be a better place if we listened to what they have to say (Acharya 2010). Environmentalists can draw inspiration from the commitment of dedicated individuals as well as on traditional cultures' ideological reserves in order to ethically ground their actions.

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