

A reply to Adams and Hulme

As a 'conservative' or 'traditionalist' my views are grossly misrepresented by Adams and Hulme (2001) in their Panglossian philosophy of conservation with its narrow and somewhat eclectic approach, and either carelessly or mischievously they do not give the full title of my reference, *Social change and conservation misrepresentation in Africa* (Spinage, 1998). This apparent attempt to mislead and play down that which does not conform to the view of a radical change in approach is characteristic of the "new conservation" lobby. What I have opposed is the changing of the status of national parks and equivalent protected areas, and the nullifying of legislation designed to protect animals and their habitats. But I have not raised objection to 'community conservation' (CC) practised outside national parks and equivalent protected areas. I have also tried to make clear I have no objection to the CAMPFIRE programme *per se*, only to the lauding of it as a pan-Africa panacea for conservation.

I question Adams and Hulme's sweeping generalizations in their opening paragraph, and I do not believe the authors are debating constructively by using emotive language. The now favoured designation "fortress conservation" is patently absurd. The most that the majority of national parks can muster is a weak policing. Of course the authors may reply that I have misunderstood them, what they actually wrote was they were caricaturing the situation. However, this is a mischievous way of planting an idea in the reader's mind, even if it is denied afterwards. I do not believe there has been a change away from conservation or a "disenchantment" with it, merely that there is a parallel approach. The authors did not give the origin of this, which was the disastrous drought and famine in northern Africa in the 1970s-1980s. Whereas this had no relationship to protected areas, it was seen by many as not possible to support the protection of animals in the face of such appalling human suffering. It was the drought which led to the turning point in conservation, beginning with the launch of the World Conservation Strategy in 1980 and recognition of its principles at the World Conference on National Parks in 1982.

Any failure of, for example, the upgrading of protected areas following the launch of the UNDP/FAO programme of development in 1967 (Riney & Hill, 1967a, b), has been largely due to political instability rather

than "disenchantment" with conservation. But traditional national parks have not been a failure. Of 23 created 50 or more years ago in Africa, all still exist. Some smaller, some larger, one or two perhaps now in name only, but not one has been de-gazetted; and many undoubtedly carry higher densities of animals now than when created. Conservation may have become highly political, but the agitation has come largely from outside Africa.

"The CC narrative maintains that conservation must be 'participatory', must treat protected area neighbours as 'partners'". Yes, but not as controllers. It has long been promoted (e.g. Hobley, 1928) that protected areas and species yield economic benefit for both local people and the wider economy, but the latter seems to have been ignored in the present debate. Arguing that a national resource such as a national park has no obligation to profit those nearest to it, but rather is for the profit of the country as a whole, apparently makes me a 'traditionalist' regarding local people as wildlife's greatest enemy.

The analysis of Adams and Hulme is based solely upon materialism. It gives no credit to Africans for aesthetic appreciation. The 'new conservationists' want everything to be in terms of materialistic well-being; spiritual well-being for Africans is not in their book. The analysis of Adams and Hulme's Table 1 seems to me self-evident. If an area is unsuitable for exploitation, small and with low biodiversity, it is unlikely to be of conservation interest anyway, and certainly not controlled by a national park or other government wildlife agency.

The statement "The idea that there is a 'new conservation' is widely accepted" is a myth. It may be repeated that it is new until people believe it to be so, but that does not make it new. CC is not the new idea its present day proponents pretend. Neither is it a question of "love it or hate it", it is a question of whether CC is the only way forward or whether it is seen as additional to traditional protection methods. But Adams and Hulme present conservation as a sociological argument, this is apparently what 'new conservation' means. It does not consider the ecological reasons against national parks being preserved for eternity as islands in a sea of people. What I advocate is for the retention of the at least important national parks as national treasures, and the application of other methods as seen fit to their surrounds if that will help ensure their perpetuity. What I

condemn is the dismantling of national parks under the concept of CC. If CC has merit, then it will surely flourish on that merit and gradually supersede traditional protectionist conservation by coming to be accepted as a superior long-term alternative. Yet as long as it remains steeped in left-wing political radicalism it must continue to be viewed with suspicion as having a political agenda rather than one of merit. Until divorced from this and its diatribe against colonialism, CC must continue to be viewed as an inherently unsound ideology. If it has merit it should be presented dispassionately with unbiased factual information.

The belief that for successful conservation you do not require an understanding of science, of the species of animals and plants and their interrelationships with each other, their habitats and the environment, but simply an appreciation of human nature, which through its inherent benevolence will ensure the survival of species, to me is naïve, and at best a high-risk strategy. If there is a question to ask, it is can we afford to take the chance when human nature is shown to be so perverse? Whereas the 'new conservationists' may believe, like Leibniz, that we live in the best of all possible worlds, the scepticism of Voltaire would seem more appropriate.

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Reply to Spinage

We are sorry if our article caused Clive Spinage offence: it was intended to stimulate debate, not to provoke outrage at "left-wing political radicalism". He makes a number of points, but he does not engage clearly with the arguments that we made, or those who commented

on our article. His terminology, contrasting 'conservation' (i.e. National Parks) with 'community conservation' is unhelpful. It is not clear to what extent his suggestions reflect on contemporary work with African conservation managers or resource users.

Dr. Spinage's *bête noire*, that achievements in protected area designation would be destroyed by something called 'community conservation', seems to prevent him from hearing contemporary debates about conservation in Africa. Our article did not suggest that national parks should be dismantled. We did argue that there has been change in dominant ways of approaching conservation in Africa. Dr. Spinage's evident frustration suggests he believes this change is happening too. Our article tried to analyse this policy change, not blindly to promote it. Indeed, our main argument is that the current enthusiasm for 'community conservation' (especially if it is not in any real sense 'community-based' but simply aimed at the community from outside, cf. Western, 2001) needs to be thought about very carefully. We might have imagined Dr. Spinage would agree with this proposition.

The value of most of Africa's national parks is obvious, although there are serious questions about how their protection is best achieved. The colonial era of arbitrary exclusion from protected areas is over, and the needs and interests of the rural poor must be taken seriously, as must the level of support for conservation expressed by the growing urban majority. So too must the various costs of conservation.

The older references that Dr. Spinage cites to papers on wildlife management in Africa are useful. He is undoubtedly right in recognising that most contemporary obsessions in conservation have been tried somewhere before, and often in Africa, where for more than a century well-meaning outsiders have attempted to dictate who could do what with wildlife. Few current ideas are truly new. Our article suggested that it is perhaps time for constructive, creative lateral thinking. Dr. Spinage's letter confirms us in this view.

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