

Practising Nature: A Phenomenological Rethinking of Environmentalism in Natural Protected Areas in Ecuador and Spain

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Abstract

The literature on environmentalism analyses how local people living in natural protected areas might come to care about, act in relation to, and think of their own actions in terms of environmental protection by becoming actively involved in conservation government and management. In this paper we contribute to a clearer, broader, and more nuanced understanding of the connection between different regulatory regimes and the formation of environmental subjects, using a phenomenological approach that places more emphasis on the agency of the people subjected to conservation. In particular, we examine how people living in three different natural protected areas in Ecuador and Spain negotiate, incorporate, and contest different regulatory frames of conservation; how, in this process, they end up creating and enacting new forms of practice that neither infringe nor fully comply with these regulations. With this analysis, our paper seeks to show that even if conservation makes the inhabitants of natural protected areas act and think differently, these people also have the capacity to manipulate these transformations via the creative use of different environmentalisms and under the influence of their own interests, habits, affects, and situated forms of human-environment engagement.

Keywords: conservation, nature, protected areas, environmentalism, practice, agency, Spain, Ecuador

INTRODUCTION

Conservation policies generate a wide array of livelihood changes and social impacts among the people living in natural protected areas (NPAs; Campbell 2005; Adams and Hutton 2007; Brockington et al. 2008; Oldekop et al. 2015; Holmes and Cavannagh 2016). One important outcome is the transformation of the environmental views, practices, and knowledges of local inhabitants as they gain exposure to, and participate in, conservation discourses and regulations (Vivanco 2006; Meiser and Dürr 2014). These changes have

attracted the attention of both conservation professionals and social scientists with an interest in knowing how local people are enrolled in conservation and develop new attitudes toward nature (Schelhas and Pfeffer 2008).

In recent years, the literature on 'environmentalism' has tried to shed some light on this field of research by looking at the links between certain governmental regimes in conservation-targeted areas and the development of environmental subjectivities among the local populations. The aim has been to elucidate whether, how, and to what extent people that live in NPAs might come to care about, act in relation to, and think of their own actions in terms of environmental protection. A number of important debates have followed from the ground-breaking work of Agrawal (2005), where he argues that the involvement of local inhabitants in environmental protection and regulation generates new subjects that understand the environment as something to be protected. New work has highlighted the limits and flaws of this approach. Some authors contend that the development of environmental subjectivities does not necessarily follow

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participation in conservation (see detailed reviews in Singh 2013; Forsyth and Walker 2014). Others make a distinction between different environmentalities (disciplinary, neoliberal, truth and sovereign, as well as hybrid forms) and suggest that each of these provides a different explanation of how conservation policies and pro-environmental attitudes might be linked (Fletcher 2010).

While we agree with the need to analyse the impacts of governmental conservation regimes in the way local stakeholders think, act, and engage with their surrounding environment (Ruiz-Ballesteros et al. 2009), we also share with some critics of the environmentality approach a deep concern about the sheer complexity behind the formation of new environmental subjects. In particular, in this paper we question whether it is possible for local inhabitants in NPAs to be brought into conservation discourses and practices while retaining their own environmental views and practices, even if some of these might seem incompatible with nature conservation. Rather than referring to these issues as incomplete or failed environmentality projects (Jessop et al. 2012; Silva 2015), we argue that as active subjects people that are compelled to adopt the policies and knowledges of conservation also have the capacity to negotiate, manipulate, and respond to them in ways that neither infringe nor fully comply with existing environmentality regimes. We conclude that, either as an active and conscious or a subtle and unconscious action, people living in NPAs can imagine, re-create, and enact new forms of practice and human-environment engagement within the rather restrictive regulatory frames imposed by conservation. In other words, they have the capacity to decide which kind of environmental subjects they would become.

To show this, our paper analyses some of the many new practices and forms of human-environment engagement that have emerged among local inhabitants following the introduction of conservation measures in three different NPAs in Ecuador and Spain—the Machalilla National Park, the Galápagos National Park, and the Cabo de Gata-Níjar Natural Park. This analysis shows that the incorporation and assimilation of different environmentalities is mediated and permeated by particular past histories of human-environment engagement as well as by the creative and active interpretation of conservation regulations. This argument resonates with those demanding a closer examination of the capacity of people to forge critical and culturally-framed perspectives on environmental protection (Cepek 2011; Jessop et al. 2012; Silva 2015; Faye 2016).

In the first section of this paper, we provide a description of land use changes and restrictions in each of these three different NPAs as well as an analysis of how conservation governance operates there. Despite the many differences, several common issues connect these three cases and their different environmentalities. We will highlight one in particular—the politicisation of environmental knowledge and narratives of environmental degradation (Forsyth and Walker 2008) as a strategy to define and hierarchise between different ‘frames of practice’. These frames give new meanings to past and present

human activities, condemning some of them because of their negative ecological impact, and supporting others because of their benefits to nature conservation. We argue that the overarching aim of these regulatory frames is to control the actions of all park users and dwellers, such as farmers, hunters, or people working in tourism, by defining them, *inter alia*, as nature destroyers, nature consumers, or nature guardians¹.

In the second part of the paper, we analyse how these environmentality projects are experienced at the level of individuals and their situated commitment and engagement with their surrounding environment. A detailed description of how the practices of these people have changed over recent years will show that local populations subjected to the regulations, environmental knowledges, and narratives of conservation can actively appropriate these and recreate them in a new way. We will compare these changing practices with the regulatory frames imposed in each NPA and highlight the main ambiguities and differences.

Overall, our aim is to suggest a theoretical reframing of the environmentality approach that makes it more sensitive to the role of agency. We propose to complement the strong reliance on Foucault’s (1977, 2008) notions of governmentality and practice with a phenomenological approach that places more emphasis on people’s creativity and situatedness. In this sense, we find particularly inspiring the ideas of Michel de Certeau (1984) who—speaking against the privilege given to the productive apparatus of discipline in Foucault’s analysis of practice—demands a closer look at the subtle procedures whereby people “manipulate the mechanisms of discipline and conform to them only in order to evade them” (xiv). By incorporating this way of understanding practice in environmentality studies, our paper seeks to show that even if conservation makes people act and think differently thereby transforming their way of ‘practising nature’, people also have the capacity to manipulate these transformations via the creative use of different environmentalities and under the influence of their own interests, habits, affects, and situated forms of human-environment engagement.

METHODOLOGY

In this paper, we compare different environmentalities and variegated individual experiences and narratives of conservation. However, we separate their analysis in different sections in order to highlight and render visible the discontinuities between governmental reasoning and the development of new environmental attitudes among the local populations. By looking at the creative manipulation and assimilation of conservation regulations shown in the everyday practices of people living in NPAs, our aim is to demonstrate the crucial role that their agency plays as a mediator in the relation between government and subjectivity. What is more, in order to show that this phenomenon pervades different environmentalities (Fletcher 2010), three cases of conservation in NPAs will be examined. These cases are representative of the most common conservation models that nowadays

exist—a fortress version of conservation (Brockington 2002), a community-based initiative (Berkes 2009), and a market-based example of neoliberal conservation (Brockington et al. 2008). Each of these conservation models hinges on a different form of environmentalism.

The analysis of conservation discourses and regulatory frames in each of these three cases will be followed by an in-depth examination of variegated individual narratives and experiences of nature conservation. In particular, we will analyse in great detail three individual stories—one person per case study. Such first-person-singular approach will allow us to show how different environmentalisms operate and are transformed at the level of the everyday practices of situated individuals. For this analysis of individual experiences, we will make use of a phenomenological approach that considers practice as a specific way of operating, of carrying out an action and an activity—a way that bears its own particular meanings, senses, and forms (de Certeau 1984). From this perspective, the very same activity can be developed through different practices (in other words, activities like tourism or agriculture might be carried out in many different forms and with different purposes).

This notion of practice shares many common points with broader phenomenological understandings of human action, and in particular with Ingold's (2000) 'dwelling perspective', which considers that people perceive and reproduce the environment differently depending on how they relate to it and how they appropriate it. It takes the being-in-its-environment rather than the self-contained individual as the starting point for analysis (Merleau-Ponty 1962; Le Breton 2006). From this perspective, studying our 'being-in-the-world' as acting and sensing bodies is essential to understanding the form we see and relate to the environment (Grasseni 2009). As such, we look at practice not as calculative rationality but as an act of exploratory improvisation embedded in networks of meanings, relations, and interactions whereby people's lives continually unfold (van Manen 2007).

Our comparative analysis of different environmentalisms and individual stories draws on ethnographic research carried out during 6 months (2006–2009) in the locality of Agua Blanca in the Machalilla National Park, Ecuador; 8 months (2009–2014) in Floreana in the Galápagos National Park, Ecuador, and 6 months (2007–2011) in El Hornillo in the Cabo de Gata-Níjar Natural Park, Spain. To study the different conservation models, we have examined current and past legislations and land-use planning as well as carried out interviews with park officials and conservation professionals. The primary means of data collection for individual experiences was participant observation, semi-structured interviews, happenstance conversations, and oral histories of people, places, and practices.

This ethnographic work involved following people around in their daily activities, meeting them in public and private contexts, discussing about their activities, their environmental impact, and their understanding of ecological values. The selection of informants followed a snowball process, starting

with key informants who subsequently helped identify other relevant actors, institutions, and stakeholders. Our selection criteria of specific individuals were inspired by the aim to provide three individual stories that were different enough to allow us to stress the pervasive character of the issues analysed in this paper. To ensure confidentiality, the anonymity of informants will be preserved.

THREE STORIES OF CONSERVATION

Agua Blanca, Machalilla National Park, Ecuador

Agua Blanca is a community of about 260 people living in an area of approximately 80 sq. km in the heart of the Machalilla National Park (MNP) in Ecuador. The area comprises three different ecosystems: tropical dry forest, cloud mountain forest, and river valleys. For most of the twentieth century, the local inhabitants (*aguablanquenses*) were employed as farmers and shepherds in a large estate (*hacienda*). When the *hacienda* closed at the end of the 1960s, the local inhabitants became involved in new activities, such as hunting, logging, and charcoal production.

In the late 1970s, the Ecuadorian government designated the MNP. This brought about new changes to the livelihood of *aguablanquenses*. The government seized the *hacienda*, which was in the centre of the MNP, in order to facilitate the enforcement of conservation measures. The introduction of bans and restrictions on many activities followed suit. Prohibition of extractive activities, like charcoal making, jeopardised many household economies. Hunting and logging also became illegal. The new scientific-conservationist regime that started to govern the area considered human presence and resource extraction incompatible with the preservation of its natural values. There were also plans to evict *aguablanquenses* from the protected area, although they were eventually dropped.

Between 1979 and 1985 conflicts with the park peaked as the local community progressively felt more and more alienated due to conservation restrictions. These conflicts tightened social bonds among *aguablanquenses* and facilitated the identification of collective interests. In 1986 the situation started to change. A new participatory government system was introduced in the park. As a result, like in Agrawal's (2005) work with the Kumaonis in India, *aguablanquenses* accepted park regulations, adopted a more proactive attitude in decision making, and moved from a defence of their land-use rights to the promotion of new sustainable economic alternatives (Ruiz-Ballesteros 2009). Park managers also went through a pivotal change of attitude. They not only conceded a number of government and management responsibilities to the community, including land rights over the *hacienda*, but also accepted the continuation, under controlled circumstances, of some extractive activities like charcoal making.

Such governmental changes facilitated the assimilation of conservation goals by *aguablanquenses* as, for the first time, the protected lands were considered a common property. At

present, the community owns farming and grazing lands as well as residential areas. The Community Assembly controls the distribution of land use rights among families and individuals. Although park managers still hold a supervisory role, the autonomy given to the community has generated a multi-level system of governance (Ruiz-Ballesteros and Gual 2012). The relation of *aguablanquenses* with conservation has further improved following the promotion of an initiative of community-based tourism relying on the archaeological and natural values of the area. The authorisation of small initiatives of subsistence farming also helped reduce the dependence of the locals on ecologically damaging activities (Ruiz-Ballesteros 2011).

Floreana, Galápagos National Park, Ecuador

Floreana is the smallest inhabited island in the Galápagos archipelago (173 sq. km). Although historically the first island to have a permanent population (in 1832), at the beginning of the twentieth century it was almost deserted. In the 1930s, new people started to arrive and settle down. At present, there are around 160 permanent residents, known as *floreanos*.

The island is part of the Galápagos National Park (GNP), which was established in 1959 and is now one of the most iconic protected areas on the planet. Conservation in Galápagos hinges on the idea that these islands are a paradise of wilderness. The rather recent arrival of humans reinforces the visions of untouched and unspoiled nature. These visions have inspired the introduction of highly restrictive conservation measures and a strict fortress conservation model. Paradoxically, the designation of GNP has also attracted the attention of hordes of nature tourists, causing the end of the historical isolation of Galápagos (Grenier 2007).

By the time the park was established, approximately 50 people were living in Floreana. They lived on subsistence farming, livestock rearing, and fishing. A flexible system of land ownership allowed every islander to use freely the lands they needed for farming and livestock rearing. However, the designation of the park changed this system. A land-zoning plan was introduced, dividing the island into two different areas. This resulted in 98% of Floreana becoming part of the GNP, which involved total restriction on human use, except some small sections where tourists were allowed. The remaining 2% of the island, where human activity was permitted, comprised some estates in the highest part of the island mostly dedicated to farming (2.71 sq. km) and a coastal residential area of barely 0.39 sq. km (Puerto Velasco Ibarra).

Similar to the Machalilla case, the decision and the pressure to protect Galápagos came largely from the outside—the national government, expert groups, and international NGOs. In Floreana, the uneven distribution of lands reserved for nature and for human activities was decided based on population numbers from the late 1950s when the park was established. The prediction was that this number would experience only a marginal increase in following years. Likewise, the area reserved for farming only included lands that were being

actively exploited in the mid-1970s. However, since then the population has tripled, increasing the pressure on the scarce resources that the park has left unprotected.

On this island, many conservation initiatives have been socially problematic, especially land-use restrictions and the eradication of exotic plant species and feral animals like donkeys, cattle, and goats. Nowadays, only non-intense subsistence activities such as wild fruit gathering and inshore fishing are allowed in a few restricted parts. Because most of the estates where farming and livestock rearing are permitted belong to older settlers, newcomers face greater economic uncertainty as they rarely have access to farming lands. Restrictions also affect those that used to fish, rear their herds, pick berries and other wild fruits, and hunt feral species (goats, pigs, donkeys, etc.).

However, conservation has also generated new forms of using and economically benefitting from environmental protection. In recent years, nature tourism has gained a pre-eminent position, becoming an important economic activity despite the strict restrictions. Other significant sources of employment are public sector jobs, mostly in conservation. For example, all the seven park rangers that the national park currently employs in Floreana already lived on the island, working in different activities such as farming before they started this new job.

El Hornillo, Cabo de Gata-Níjar Natural Park, Spain

El Hornillo is a small valley of approximately 20 sq. km within the Cabo de Gata-Níjar Natural Park (CGNP), a protected coastal area in south-eastern Spain. The valley hosts a few small villages and farmsteads that are sparsely distributed, where 160 people live. By the mid-twentieth century El Hornillo, like most other areas in Cabo de Gata, was renowned as one of the poorest and most marginal sites in Spain. Nowadays it is one of the most well-known ecotourism destinations in the country.

By the 1960s, decades of drought and resource misuse had led to an advanced level of desertification, causing a decline in conventional dry farming and the outmigration of many local inhabitants. This situation changed radically during the 1970s and 1980s, with the development of irrigated intense agriculture under plastic polytunnels. The designation of the CGNP in 1987, which aimed to protect the unique coastal landscape and key endemic and rare species, impeded the full expansion of polytunnels in *El Hornillo*. Like in Machalilla and Galápagos, the motivation and pressure to protect this park also came from abroad. The European Union was motivating new member states like Spain to adopt stricter environmental regulations, partly as a strategy to replace highly subsidised farming and fishing activities with the growth of a service economy in designated protected areas.

Today, small exploitations of dry farming and livestock farming alternate with only a few polytunnels in El Hornillo. Conservation introduced a total ban on new polytunnels and incentivised ecotourism as a new economic alternative

(Cortes-Vazquez 2014). These decisions triggered social conflicts with many local residents and small landowners, who wanted to invest in intensive agriculture (Valcuende et al. 2011). Some of these people ignored the ban and were subsequently fined by the park for cultivating in polytunnels. Other local inhabitants gave in to the restrictions and gave up the idea of installing polytunnels. Amid growing resentment because of the economic burden of conservation, these local inhabitants—most of them farmers or farmers’ descendants—argue that the priority given to biodiversity protection and ecotourism goes against the value and the life of Cabo de Gata. From their point of view, this is a barren, dry, and desert place, home of weed and pests, that can only be tamed and brought to life by cultivating it. It is agriculture (whether dry or intensive irrigated farming) which gives it some value (Cortes-Vazquez 2012). There is therefore a clash between two different forms of understanding the proper way of relating to the local environment and benefitting from its resources—one pre-eminently exploitative and one largely protectionist.

Conservation and new frames of practices

The three different stories of conservation in Agua Blanca, Floreana, and El Hornillo have some common traits: conservation is promoted by people from outside the local communities; it introduces a reorganisation of land-uses; this reorganisation motivates either the limiting or ban of certain economic activities along with the promotion of tourism; and, as a result, the livelihoods of the local population change radically. The main difference between these three stories is in the form of environmental governance. In Floreana, a top-down fortress conservation model (Brockington 2002) has been in place since the designation of the GNP. On the

contrary, in Agua Blanca, the initial fortress conservation model of the MNP evolved into a multi-level participatory system (Berkes 2009), where the local community takes part in management and decision making. Finally, in El Hornillo and the CGNP we found a rather flexible fences-and-fines model that provides incentives for the development of a green, service economy; it therefore combines sovereign and neoliberal environmentalities (Fletcher 2010).

Despite the different governmental regimes in these three parks, we have identified a key common feature—the strategy to pursue conservation goals hinges on the regulation of human actions via the constitution of different frames of practice. Like other studies on environmentality also reveal, in Machalilla, Galápagos, and Cabo de Gata, conservation policies compel people to practice new forms of engagement with the environment (Forsyth and Walker 2008). This is done through different categories of practice that classify human actions according to the role practitioners play in the protection of natural values (e.g., nature guardians, nature consumers, nature producers, nature destroyers).

As a result, different human actions and activities are tagged to specific ways of ‘practising nature’, which confine local inhabitants to these new categories of government. This governmental strategy eventually justifies the uneven distribution of resources, incentives, and land-rights among local stakeholders and the constitution of a new social hierarchy as each frame of practice either grants or takes off a number of privileges, rights, and capacities (Cortes-Vazquez 2014). Table 1 provides a nuanced list of the different frames of practice that we found in these three parks.

However, despite the regulatory capacity of these frames, in the following section we will show that people either experience, incorporate, absorb, consume, manipulate, or contest these frames of practice in active and creative ways,

Table 1
Frames of practice in hierarchical order

Frame of practice (form of practicing nature)	Targeted activities	Targeted people
Nature guardian	Conservation management, which channels the knowledge of experts and the interests of those who support the protection of nature	Bureaucrats, state officials, rangers (Floreana); bureaucrats, state officials, rangers and community assembly (Agua Blanca); state officials, bureaucrats, rangers, markets (Hornillo)
Nature knower	Scientific research, which is understood as the only activity able to know and speak for nature	Scientists, experts (Floreana, Agua Blanca, Hornillo)
Nature user	Environmental education and new environmentally friendly activities, such as ecotourism, that promote pro-environmental attitudes and transform nature into a source of economic revenues without degrading it	Tourism entrepreneurs, tourism guides, environmental educators (Floreana, Agua Blanca, Hornillo)
Nature producer	Customary and non-intensive activities, such as certain modes of farming, grazing, hunting, and fishing, which are considered as having traditionally contributed to the creation of modified ecosystems with certain natural values	Non-intense farming and grazing (Hornillo); self-consumption farming, fishing, and gathering (Floreana); self-consumption farming, gathering, and grazing (Agua Blanca)
Nature consumer	Activities based on the visual consumption and on any other strategy of consumption that is deemed compatible with nature preservation	Ecotourists (Hornillo, Floreana, Agua Blanca)
Nature destroyer	Modern and intensive activities, such as mass tourism, mining, and industry, which are deemed incompatible with nature	Industrial-scale farming and fishing, mass tourism, urban development (Floreana, Agua Blanca, Hornillo)

keeping part of the worldviews and practices from their own history of human-environment engagements as well as combining the new frames with current interests, even if some of these might barely be compatible with conservation. As such, echoing Agrawal (2005), locals are not only objects but also subjects of this process, in the twofold sense of being subjected to governmental power and also being active subjects (Jessop et al. 2012; Faye 2016). We move now from the communitarian-institutional level to that of the individual stories of three people, each one from a different community, who have experienced the story of conservation in Agua Blanca, Floreana, and El Hornillo.

SUBJECTS/ACTORS IN CONSERVATION

Ernesto (Agua Blanca)

Ernesto is over 60 years old. He used to work in the *hacienda* in Agua Blanca before it closed down. Later, he became a successful charcoal maker. He used to have several charcoal burners in operation across the valley. But this ended with the designation of the MNP, as police officers and rangers began to dismantle burners, seize tools, and even arrest charcoal makers. Ernesto also witnessed the later shift towards a more participatory government and the decision of *aguablanquenses* to abandon extractive activities. The new permission given for the development of tourism and some forms of subsistence farming and grazing was enough incentive for Ernesto and other locals to give up the production of charcoal, change their profession, and become a tourist guide.

Today, there are 30 tourist guides like Ernesto living in Agua Blanca. Their livelihoods have changed radically and this has had economic and demographic consequences. Ernesto's niece describes the situation quite neatly: "my uncle is now in tourism, but he's got twelve kids and he can't make the ends meet... he just has enough money to buy food but not to buy clothes... his daughters left... two went to Quito to do holiday jobs". Ernesto's day-to-day activities have also changed completely. The change of profession was difficult at the beginning and he had to go through an intense learning process. For his tours, Ernesto had to learn about the biodiversity of the different ecosystems in the region, the scientific names of plants and animals, and the landscape descriptions that the park had introduced. He no longer uses the axe to make a living; he now uses words. Even his view about charcoal making has changed—this activity is now considered the cause of negative impacts on both the environment and the new tourist activities.

Ernesto shows to tourists the natural values of the same lands that he used to exploit as a charcoal maker. These lands have changed significantly in recent years. After the community banned charcoal making and hunting, some species of birds and small mammals began to repopulate the area, to the delight of tourists. Tourist guides benefit from that: "if tourists have a good time watching motmots and squirrels, tips are better", says Ernesto. He has also noticed the recent ecological changes—from the once inevitable degradation generated by

logging and charcoal activities to the recovery of plant and animal species following the establishment of the park. But he cannot forget his past as a charcoal maker; this becomes apparent when he tries to describe the valley.

For example, Ernesto explains that when he is with the tourists and they stop in front of a leafy tree, the first thing that comes to his mind is the amount of charcoal that he could make out of it. But at the same time he also sees trees as objects of contemplation for tourists because of the birds and squirrels that they host. Ernesto realises that these two different ways of looking at trees cohabit his mind, although the former is deemed an old vice. Sometimes he tells the tourists that they used to make charcoal in the park but that at present they are reducing that activity to a minimum.

Although the old forms of engagement with and attachment to the surrounding environment still pervades the memory of people like Ernesto, those practices are either long gone or have undergone radical changes in order to comply with the new frames of practice introduced in the park. Ernesto has embraced the conservation logic and adopted a new discourse and a new perspective about nature, which is the one he uses while talking to tourists. The valley and the trees are not simply seen as sources of charcoal, they also have a beauty that can be contemplated from a certain distance through their experience as tourist guides. Many in Agua Blanca have gone through a similar transformative experience, from subsistence farming (nature producer) and old charcoal making (nature destroyer) to tourist guides (nature user). Throughout this transformation they have come to assume that their old job was environmentally exploitative and harmful, and that they should make a living by showing the beauty and value of nature to tourists rather than by destroying it.

Martín (Floreana)

Martín and his family arrived in Floreana in Galápagos at the beginning of the 1990s. They came from the Andes region to work on the lands of one of the local families. At the beginning, he found it difficult to adapt to his new life, especially because of the harsh landscape and the existence of a local society relatively hostile to the arrival of new people. For a while, he regretted having moved there. Nowadays, this feeling has completely changed and this island has become his home. He now works as park ranger and sees Floreana as a paradise where he wants to stay forever.

Soon after Martín arrived in Floreana, a neighbour lent him a small plot of land so that he could farm and rear some livestock. Another neighbour taught him how to fish in the ocean so that he could cover his most basic needs. In just 10 years, he came to know the island like the back of his hand. When Martín started employment as a park ranger in the early 2000s, he was already an expert in hunting feral goats and fishing as well as in picking fruits and berries. In short, Martín had successfully made a living off the combination of farming, hunting, fishing, and gathering (Ruiz-Ballesteros and Brondizio 2013). Through these activities he had developed a

deep engagement with his surroundings, which he saw more as a 'giving environment' (Bird-David 1990) than as a natural place reserved for contemplation, which are the ideas that the park promotes.

His life changed when he became a park ranger. His new responsibilities involved eradicating rats and feral cats, looking after the Galápagos petrel, eliminating brambles and guava trees, cleaning up beaches, patrolling the protected area, and warning neighbours in the event their livestock entered protected lands. However, he did not give up agriculture or fishing. Like most of his neighbours, he continued growing food on the parts of the island reserved for farming. He also kept collecting oranges, avocados, pineapples, passion fruits, and papayas. Martín and his wife still feel a deep attachment to this part of the island and they keep visiting it during their free time to enjoy some fresh air and clear their minds. He also keeps a fond relationship with the ocean and considers some activities such as diving for lobster fishing to be an essential part of his life.

For Martín, nature is not a large part of the island that is reserved from people, as the park policy claims, the park officials defend, and he contributes to enforce as park ranger. Instead, he feels part of the natural world, with which he engages via different activities. Part of his job as a park ranger has been to assimilate the conservation process. He is a nature guardian and, as such, embodies one of the key frames of practice in conservation. But in essence Martín is also still a cultivator, hunter, and fisherman (nature producer). He came to Floreana for reasons other than to protect its nature, and it was only after he had settled down in this place that nature protection became a way of making a living.

As a result, he, like many other rangers in Floreana, holds an ambivalent view of nature—one that emerges from the combined influence of production and gathering practices alongside the protection and conservation of the environment. People like Martín, who protect nature and benefit from that, and at the same time feel that they are part of nature, toy simultaneously with two environmental visions. Nature, for *floreanos* like Martín, is at the same time wild and domesticated, unspoiled and human-made, and they behave accordingly, simultaneously protecting and transforming nature.

Adrián (El Hornillo)

Adrián lives and works in one of the largest villages within the El Hornillo valley. Being 35 years old, he owns some lands within the CGNP, where he grows tomatoes in plastic polytunnels. He belongs to a family of farmers. His father and his grandfather also lived in El Hornillo and worked the same lands that he cultivates nowadays, though not in the same conditions. The tough life that they experienced in the past had nothing in common with Adrián's rather comfortable current situation. Nevertheless, that tough life has left some marks—the memory of those past years of poverty and migration is continuously recalled by both old and young farmers, and underpins a production-driven attitude towards the environment (Cortes-Vazquez and Zedalis 2013).

Nowadays, for farmers like Adrián, polytunnels are the only worthwhile economic activity. Although highly profitable, this is also an extraordinarily delicate, highly technologised, and economically risky form of production. The lands that are being cultivated need to be fertilised and disinfected every year, and the plastic covers need regular repairing, cleaning, and maintenance. The irrigation system has to be periodically checked, and the level of salt and other minerals in water continuously tested and regulated according to the stage of production. The sand used to prevent transpiration needs to be periodically replaced. Pest control must be exerted almost daily.

Ethnographic research in the area showed that a majority of local farmers lament and feel anger about the ban imposed by the park on intensive agriculture. They feel both symbolically and materially dispossessed of this place, which they say is protected to make the area more attractive to tourists and to preserve a few worthless animal and plant species. However, Adrián rarely complains about this. His lands were exempted from the park restrictions against polytunnels because they were already being cultivated when the park was designated. But more importantly, he also says that the park has become a crucial part of his livelihood.

Adrián specialises in a particular variety of tomato—the *raf* tomato. This variety is much more exclusive than conventional tomatoes and the demand is rather high. However, he has for a long time struggled to sell them at what he considers a worthwhile price. The problem mostly comes from those that sell hybrid varieties—a mix of *raf* and conventional tomatoes—pretending they are first class *raf* tomatoes. Because the tomatoes are all sold in public auctions, those sneaking hybrid varieties—whose production is easier and cheaper—tend to make most of the gains.

Adrián recently found a solution to this problem—he now sells part of his tomatoes directly to the park tourists as well as to local restaurants and hotels. This alternative way of selling his produce has only been possible because Adrián lives and works inside a park that is rather popular among tourists. He sells them at a local shop, advertising his *raf* tomatoes as a quality product of the natural park. To attract potential customers, he offers self-guided tours inside and around his polytunnels, where a number of recently installed signposts announce the location of beehives, heaters, and exit and entry points.

This new strategy has given new meanings to activities that are otherwise rather common in polytunnel agriculture, and as such has generated new practices. For example, keeping the polytunnel corridors clean from shrub, grass, and rests of plants, which is usually done for pest control, is now also done as part of the spectacle of cleanliness and hygiene offered to tourists and visitors. The sides of the polytunnels, which can be opened to decrease humidity and prevent fruit rotting, are now also opened to show the 'natural' background. Adrián has also set up a picnic area in an old orchard adjacent to his polytunnels, where he has planted olive, orange, and fig trees, and built a small zoo with chickens, turtledoves, and peacocks.

The entrance to the picnic area has a large sign with pictures of partridges, ducks, dogs, and horses, which welcome visitors with the expression “Enjoy Nature” (*Disfruta la Naturaleza*).

Like in the other two examples, Adrián has also creatively adapted to the frames of practice imposed by conservation initiatives in El Hornillo. He has absorbed the rationale that the park imposes and has hybridised it with his own conceptions of nature and value. Thus, a process devised to protect nature and to integrate a marginal area into the global economy through ecotourism is negotiated by a person whose main form of engagement with the land is intensive exploitation of resources. While some other farmers reacted negatively to the imposition of new frames of practice that classify them as nature destroyers, Adrián enacts a set of new practices and engagements as he produces tomatoes while also hosting ecotourists (nature user). He has thus been able to combine without problems two practices that are otherwise considered as rather incompatible.

PRACTISING NATURE

Our study of changes in the livelihood and practices of different people living in the three NPAs provides new evidence of how difficult it is to gauge, judge, and valorise the social changes and impacts of conservation. It also demonstrates that only detailed ethnographic work can identify some incommensurable outcomes, such as the transformation of practices. In Agua Blanca, for example, conservation has transformed the way many people perceive and use the environment. As such, what used to be for them unproblematic day-to-day activities (e.g., resource extraction by charcoal making) are now perceived negatively, as destructive to nature. Ernesto’s case is symptomatic of the complex ways in which conservation can transform people’s engagement with and attachment to their surroundings. While retaining the skills, knowledge, and perspectives of a charcoal maker, he now perceives this activity and the trees and animals that are linked to it in a more complex and ambiguous way.

Likewise, people in Floreana live in a ‘natural’ area since the park was established and this causes them great hardship. Nature, which is enclosed in the protected parts of the island, keeps *floreanos* cornered in just 3 sq. km of urban and farming lands. This should have alienated those who were used to exploiting those lands as farmers, shepherds, hunters, and gatherers. However, the everyday experiences of people like Martín, who have been enrolled in conservation, tell a different story. For them, nature can be seen both as wild and human-made. Likewise conservation and ecotourism can be totally compatible with farming and gathering practices. For Martín, combining practices that the park policy would consider ill-matched is instead perfectly valid.

Finally, in El Hornillo conservation policies have clashed with the local farmers’ historical forms of engagement with and attachment to their surroundings. This has caused bitter conflicts and opposition, which remain unsolved at present. Yet there has also been room for new and creative initiatives

that neither infringe the park policy nor operate within the exact parameters set by the frames of practice that the park has imposed. As the case of Adrián evidences, new practices have given birth to new natures that can be, at the same time, exploited in intensive agriculture and exhibited to ecotourists.

These multiple new practices in Agua Blanca, Floreana, and El Hornillo are just a few examples of the many different ways in which people engage with conservation. Although these examples by no means represent the full diversity of existing practices or cover all the variegated conservation models that exist nowadays, we use them in this paper to demonstrate that conservation introduces frames of practice which in many cases are experienced in creative and unexpected ways. Ernesto, Martín, and Adrián have, each in their own active way, internalised these frames (manipulating, mixing, twisting, contesting, and redefining), while also keeping part of their situated senses and forms of attachment with their surroundings. In doing so, they have ended up practising nature in many new different ways and producing new human-environment engagements that combine simultaneously—and to some extent without problems—frames of practice as nature guardians, users, producers, and even destroyers (Table 2).

CONCLUSIONS

We have seen in this paper that practice, understood as a meaningful way of developing a particular activity, plays a key role in the articulation between humans and their surroundings. Ernesto, Martín, and Adrián inhabit very different environments and it is through that inhabiting that they have historically developed particular human-environment engagements and understandings. Looking at their different individual stories after the introduction of conservation policies, we have tried to show that the transformation of these meaningful relations is a common outcome of different conservation governmentalities. However, even among those that are enrolled in conservation, many of these transformations might not necessarily comply with the existing regulatory frames or oppose them. The relationship between conservation government and pro-environmental practices is not direct or straightforward since many other elements—such as interests, affects, and past forms of human-environment engagements—also mediate between them.

Our analysis of the changing practices of different individuals in three NPAs in Ecuador and Spain raises new

Table 2
Ambiguous experiences of different frames of practice

Frame of Practice	Ernesto (Agua Blanca)	Martín (Floreana)	Adrián (Hornillo)
Nature guardian		X	
Nature knower			
Nature user	X		X
Nature producer	X	X	
Nature consumer			
Nature destroyer	X		X

questions for the environmentality literature. At its core, this literature explores the deep and durable relationship between government, practice, and subjectivity in the conservation field. For authors like Agrawal (2005), caring about, acting in relation to, and thinking of one's own actions in terms of environmental protection is directly connected to taking part in the regulatory apparatus of conservation policies. In other words, certain regimes of participatory conservation governance create the conditions for the development of environmental subjectivities, whereby people use the environment as a category that structures their thinking and their actions.

Contrary to this idea, our work shows that people's agency mediates between conservation governmentalities and the formation of environmental subjects. The creative capacity of those subjected to adopt the frames of practice of conservation policies makes possible the reappearance of interests and consolidated habits in the new practices that are enacted by people living in conservation-targeted areas. In other words, by enacting a number of new practices that neither breach nor adhere to conservation regulations, people show their capacity to decide which kind of environmental subjects they become. These ideas align with one important criticism to the environmentality approach. Many authors raise doubts about the causal relation between governmental reason and subject formation, and question whether environmental awareness follows participation in conservation. These critics demand a closer examination of people's capacity to forge critical, self-aware, self-interested, and culturally framed perspectives on environmental protection (Cepek 2011; Jessop et al. 2012; Silva 2015; Faye 2016). This requires exploring the tensions between intentionality, self-interest, and consent (Forsyth and Walker 2014).

However, at the same time, our work also challenges these very important criticisms to the environmentality literature. Although material interests seem to play a key part in the formation of new practices, as Agrawal (2005) contends, our findings show that it is difficult to evaluate whether local stakeholders identify common interests with conservation or just manipulate these in a rather subtle way in order to pursue their own goals. In addition, disagreement with conservation plans among environmentalised subjects does not seem to convert local inhabitants of NPAs into some kind of alienated labour, as Cepek (2011) would argue. In the three case studies analysed here, people are able to find ways to seek their own interests while also playing by the rules of conservation.

Furthermore, lack of genuine commitment to conservation is usually seen as a sign that environmentality projects can be incomplete (Jessop et al. 2012). Some authors even talk of failed environmentality projects (Silva 2015). In this sense, these authors criticise the strong influence of Foucaultian notions within the environmentality approach because it weakens our capacity to study how governmental reason is incorporated and appropriated by different individuals (Cepek 2011). However, instead of rejecting Foucaultian approaches in environmentality studies, our analysis impels us to enrich

and complement it. As Rutherford (2007) argues, the work of Foucault is still useful for the study of different forms of governing nature, especially regarding the decentralisation of power. For example, it clearly helped us identify the different frames of practice that are defined by conservation regulations. Yet the study of what happens in the transition from governmental plans to the practices of everyday life needs different theoretical and methodological approaches (e.g., Singh 2013).

We suggest a phenomenological rethinking of environmentality to understand how, in the transition from governmental reasoning to the formation of new subjects, people can be brought into conservation discourses and practices while retaining their own environmental views and practices, even if some of these might seem incompatible with nature conservation. Through this phenomenological approach, which pays attention to the meaningful ways of relating to one's surroundings, we are also able to uncover the crucial role that the agency of people subjected to conservation plays in the reconfiguration of their everyday practices after the introduction of park regulations. It also helps explain the existence of ambiguities, partial assimilations, and negotiations of the regulatory frames of conservation. As Michel de Certeau (1984) argues about his critique of Foucault's analysis of power, in "the battles or games between the strong and the weak, [there are] 'actions' which remain possible for the latter, [but] it is less a matter of a liquid circulating in the interstices of a solid than of different movements making use of the elements of the terrain" (1984:34, emphasis in the original).

Making use of such phenomenological approach, our work shows that the formation of environmental subjects is in many cases an incomplete project that is manipulated and made messier by the capacity of people to negotiate, adapt, and combine different forms of practice, incorporating their own interests, affects, and habits. Rather than questioning the effectiveness of environmentality projects, the "apparent" failures to form environmental subjects might be linked to one key characteristic of environmentality—it represents well the operations of power, and the aims, gaze, and will of those with governmental responsibilities in conservation, but not so well the reactions of targeted subjects (Rutherford 2007). When detailed ethnographic research is applied to the ways of operating of those subjected to environmentality projects, it tends to reveal a much more complex picture, where, contrary to Agrawal (2005), beliefs do not follow action. Rather, actions and beliefs maintain an inextricable recursive relation and evolve together through meaningful everyday practices, creating original and unexpected new ways of practising nature.

Regarding the broader debates in environmental policy and social science, the reframing of the environmentality approach that we propose in this paper challenges and expands the analysis of how people's lives are transformed and impacted by the introduction of conservation policies. Many scholars argue that identifying and qualifying these impacts involve more than just an analysis of the distribution of costs and benefits

(Anderson and Berglund 2003; Brockington et al. 2008; Holmes and Cavannagh 2016). Our ethnographic study of changes in practices contributes to current debates on conservation social impacts and equity (Martin et al. 2015) by showing that in order to understand the full range of transformations that conservation generates we need to look beyond the activities that are either banned or permitted and pay attention to concrete practices whereby people develop these activities. These subtler transformations can have important outcomes as they might affect processes of community formation and the preservation of cultural identities (Cortes-Vazquez and Zedalis 2013) as well as alter environmental knowledges, views, and perspectives (Sletto 2002; West et al. 2006; Vivanco 2006; Ruiz-Ballesteros et al. 2009).

Our proposed approach to environmentality also speaks directly to the more general question of how local people can be enrolled in conservation initiatives. Different environmentality regimes seek this by using diverse strategies, such as force and rules (fortress conservation), disciplinary methods (participative conservation models) or economic incentives (neoliberal conservation; Fletcher 2010). Some authors argue that none of these are actually effective ways of involving people in nature protection. For example, Singh (2013) contends that, in the formation of environmental subjectivities, the rational participation in environmental management and the identification of common interests are less influential than the collection of affects, emotions, and embodied practices that are present in daily engagement in environmental care activities. In this sense, our paper shows that regardless of the regulatory strategy used by different environmentality regimes, all of them are contested and manipulated by people in rather creative ways. This shows human agency as a main factor for understanding the effects of environmentality. Thus, any possibility to enrol local inhabitants in the conservation of NPAs depends a great deal on knowing more about the specific practices that they carry out in the process of engaging and interacting with their surroundings within contexts that are regulated by conservation policies.

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NOTE

1. In this paper, we use the terms environment and nature interchangeably. The critical analysis of the history of conservation efforts in NPAs has revealed the persistence of dualist notions of nature as a realm separated from society, modernity, and civilisation (Adams 2004; West et al. 2006). This particular environmental view is used as the rationale for the frequent efforts to create islands of supposedly pristine nature that need to be preserved from human actions, which has often been a source of social conflicts (Adams and Hutton 2007). We refer, elsewhere, to this phenomenon as the naturalisation of the environment in protected areas (Ruiz-Ballesteros et al. 2009; Cortes-Vazquez 2014). These ideas of nature are constitutive elements of the environmental regulations introduced in the three parks examined in this paper.

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