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Conservation and Globalization: A Study of National Parks and Indigenous Communities from East Africa to South Dakota

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Conservation and Globalization: A Study of National Parks and Indigenous Communities from East Africa to South Dakota.

Jim Igoe
Wadsworth/Thomson Learning,
Belmont, CA, 2004.
xii + 183 pp. $26.95 Paperback

Reviewed by Jennifer Coffman

The front cover of anthropologist Jim Igoe's book shows a jubilant and matronly woman, perhaps from South Dakota given the book title, with one hand clutching the hand of a Maasai warrior, and her other hand firmly wrapped around a beaded rungu, the quintessential symbol of Maasai manhood. The woman and warrior dance in front of other Maasai warriors, as well as other jubilant, matronly non-Maasai women. What's wrong with this picture? Everything and nothing. Maasai warriors don't hold hands with women, let alone older women. But the book cover clearly shows that they do. Women of any age do not carry rungus in Maasailand. Yet, the photo tells another story. The book's cover succinctly conveys the simultaneous normalcy and absurdity that is the intersection of conservation and globalization. How do protected areas attract tourists and their dollars? How do locals make a living? Who gets to design and manage the multiple types of conservation and ecotourism schemes? And most importantly, what has and hasn't worked, according to whose standards? These are the basic, complicated questions that enhance the author's research. He undertakes the challenge of responding to them in this chatty book directed to a young, American audience. With the use of analogies and popular culture references, the author attempts to make controversial issues surrounding conservation accessible and interesting. Though a worthwhile read for practitioners and academics working in East Africa, this book is best suited for undergraduates or high school students, especially in courses dedicated to environmental studies, anthropology, sociology or cultural geography.

Drawing mostly on ethnographic research beginning in 1992 in Tanzania, East Africa, the author launches the book with some basic explanations of and contexts for the terms conservation, globalization, ecotourism, and Maasai. This first chapter summarizes the author's experiences with how those four terms–and the ideas they represent–have become complexly intertwined in the Tarangire National Park and Simanjiro District, Tanzania. Although some initial passages are inelegantly rendered, the author draws the readers into his narrative through personal anecdotes. Starting with his own trials as a budding cultural anthropologist and tracing the outline of his research over time, he demonstrates the challenges (e.g., gaining entry, accessing authoritative informants, negotiating hostilities among informants) and rewards (e.g., comparative studies based on multiple locales to help determine patterns, as well as aberrations) of multi-sited ethnographic research.

Conservation and Globalization finds its stride in the author's passionate critiques of the rise and fall of Maasai non-governmental organizations, discussions of which also lead to examinations of the various ways in which "conservation" has been deployed. These are the threads that run throughout the book. Chapter 2 presents how "Maasai resource management"—open-access and multiple-use systems that flexibly exploit various ecological niches—clashes with the fixed locales and restricted access of national parks. The author notes that although

both systems promote anthropogenic landscapes, the ways in which those landscapes are managed and who manages and benefits from them vary greatly. To illustrate this point, the author offers the striking example of the many Simanjiro residents who began to treat with great suspicion the very words "conservation" and "good neighborliness" because of their association with Western conservationists and exclusionary national parks.

Chapter 3 provides an overview of why the national park model became dominant as a means to protect indigenous flora and fauna by excluding people. From the English enclosure movement burgeoning in the 18th century and overlapping with 19th century U.S. westward expansion (and its repercussions), to the expansion of the British empire's "landscapes of control" (p. 91) and fortress conservation in 20th century East Africa, the author traces the momentum of Western conservation and relates it to the useful case study of Tarangire National Park. Chapter 4 ties together the preceding three chapters by describing attempts to transition from fortress conservation to community-based conservation on the borders of Tanzanian national parks. Here, the author blasts the commoditization of communities and the often Byzantine bureaucracies that surround "community-based conservation" schemes funded by non-governmental organizations. Sympathetic to the entrepreneurial inclinations of some formally educated Maasai trying to make a living in these circumstances, the author nonetheless catalogs abuses of power in non-governmental organizations that ultimately led to the fragile state of individual projects, as well as to the fragmentation of the very ideals of "good neighborliness" supported by institutions like the African Wildlife Foundation.

In an effort to provide comparative case studies and some hope, the fifth and final chapter provides summaries of how indigenous communities and national parks interact in other parts of the world. The author organizes this chapter into four types of cases: the traditional exclusionary model, indigenous people as endangered species, co-management and indigenous protected areas. In addition to encouraging the reader to visit Ute Mountain Tribal Park, this chapter provides a good overview of several other significant attempts to confront pressing issues of ecological soundness and the complicated ideologies of conservation. The reported moderate successes, failures and/or survival of these varied examples are indeed instructive.

Igoe notes in his preface that *Conservation and Globalization* resulted from his experiences teaching *about* political ecology in undergraduate classrooms. Engaging students in political ecology, he suggests, may best be accomplished by cultivating an interest in relevant subject matter, getting them invested in the drama of particular case studies, and encouraging them to launch their own initial critiques about conservation models or community-based conservation schemes. From there, perhaps the author and the next generation of policy planners—which would, we imagine, include grassroots, genuinely democratic representation from the targeted populations—can be part of collaborative endeavors that more closely approach some of the ideals the author sketches for us in the book.

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