
Primitive Ideas: Protected Area Buffer Zones and the Politics of Land in Africa

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ABSTRACT

This article critically evaluates participatory, integrated conservation and development programmes in Africa, focusing on protected area buffer zones. I argue that, despite the emphasis on participation and benefit-sharing, many of the new projects replicate more coercive forms of conservation practice and often constitute an expansion of state authority into remote rural areas. I suggest that the reasons for this state of affairs can be traced in part to the persistence in conservation interventions of Western ideas and images of the Other. These stereotypes result in misguided assumptions in conservation programmes which have important implications for the politics of land in buffer zone communities.

INTRODUCTION

The objective of this article is to critically evaluate the conceptualization and implementation of participatory, integrated conservation and development programmes in Africa. The focus of the paper is directed specifically at the interventions of international NGOs into rural land use and access in communities bordering protected areas. These interventions are planned and implemented by conservation organizations such as the World Conservation Union (IUCN) and the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), headquartered in Europe and North America and operating on a global scale. The conservation programmes of these organizations are in turn increasingly funded by bi-lateral and multi-lateral donors like the World Bank, the European Community, and various national agencies from the First World. The geographic extent of protected areas alone would make an examination of international interventions crucial: nine African countries, including Namibia, Tanzania, the Central African Republic and Botswana, have 9 per cent or more of their land under strict protection in national parks and game reserves.¹ Tanzania's total of nearly 130,000 km² exceeds the combined territories of Holland, Slovakia and Switzerland.

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1. Percentages compiled from data in IUCN (1991).

It is not merely the size of the land area under question, however, that makes an analysis of conservation interventions important. Efforts by conservation NGOs to include the lands surrounding protected areas as buffer zones under the jurisdiction of the state have major implications for the politics of land. In the cases of the international conservation interventions under examination, land politics can be viewed as operating at two geographical scales. The first is global: it raises questions about the relations of power between rural communities in Africa and international conservation NGOs, and about how power relations between local communities and the state are affected by global environmental agendas. In their conceptualization, global conservation strategies tend to gloss over the magnitude of political changes involved (Redclift, 1984) and invest international conservation groups and allied states with increased authority to monitor and investigate rural communities (Luke, 1994). Recent studies indicate that programmes attempting to integrate conservation with development serve to extend state power into remote and formerly neglected rural areas (Hill, 1996; Hitchcock, 1995; Lance, 1995). The second scale at which land politics are affected is at the intra-community level. Many of the programmes and projects under review here emphasize land registration and tenure reform in general as key to stimulating the adoption of more resource-conserving land use in buffer zones. Research indicates that land conflict in rural Africa has often been heightened by land tenure reform and registration efforts (e.g. Bassett and Crummey, 1993; URT, 1992). Conservation interventions will therefore undoubtedly engage with and influence ongoing negotiations and struggles over land ownership and access within communities.

One of my aims in this article is to understand the conceptualization and political consequences of conservation and development programmes through an investigation of the discursive practices of their principal advocates. First, the analysis will lead us to examine the design and purposes of interventions described in the publications of several of the key organizations involved. Thus, in the first two sections I demonstrate that new forms of intervention, politically, tend to represent a continuity with rather than a cleavage from past practices. Second, the focus on conservation discourse requires an exploration of the development during the colonial period of Western ideas of non-Western peoples and their relationships with nature. The cultural influence of the 'age of empire' (Hobsbawm, 1987) continues to reverberate into the present (Said, 1994) to structure our understanding of the causes of environmental degradation and proposals for environmental conservation. The third section, then, shows how — like the imperial European interventions which preceded them — conservation interventions are impelled by powerful ideas about the Other. Nature conservation in Africa is deeply embedded in ambivalent western constructions of the Other and the places 'they' inhabit.

This is not to say simply that Western interventions are guided by western stereotypes. Rather, it is to recognize, as Said (1994) does, that the struggle

over geography, while central to the historical relationship of the West and the Third World, is not only about military conquest or economic dominance, 'but also about ideas, about forms, about images and imaginings' (Said, 1994: 7). Specifically, it is absolutely critical that we understand how images and stereotypes of the Other guide western prescriptions for biodiversity conservation, and show how these play out in very concrete struggles over land. Thus I examine the process through which conservationists alternately invoke images of the 'good native' (traditional, nature conserving) or the 'bad native' (modernized, nature destroying) and, by doing so, define 'legitimate' claims to land in protected area buffer zones. These images are part of what Torgovnick (1990) labelled 'primitivist discourse'. She suggests that 'conceptions of the primitive . . . drive the modern and the postmodern across a wide range of fields and levels of culture: anthropology, psychology, literature, and art' (Torgovnick, 1990: 21). To this list I would add environmental conservation and its international institutions.

I am not arguing that advocates of conservation interventions possess a 'false' idea of rural Africans for which we could substitute a 'correct' one. Instead I wish to demonstrate how older ideas and images of the Other can persist in modified form to shape programmes for biodiversity protection. The persistence of these images results in the formulation of projects which are based on misguided assumptions about land tenure systems in Africa and which are inherently contradictory. The fourth and penultimate section, therefore, illuminates some of the assumptions and contradictions within the new integrated conservation and development proposals. I conclude the paper by offering a set of modest suggestions for research and for reorienting conservation interventions toward more participatory and socially equitable approaches.

THE 'NEW' APPROACH TO CONSERVATION IN AFRICA

Calls to include 'local participation' and 'community development' as part of a comprehensive strategy for biodiversity protection in Africa are now ubiquitous, with organizations ranging from the World Bank to grassroots human rights activists offering endorsements (see Cleaver, 1993; KIPOC, 1992; Lusigi, 1992a; Oitesoi ole-Ngulay, 1993; World Bank, 1993). In outlining its lending policies, the World Bank (1993: 41) emphasized that it would seek to integrate 'forest conservation projects with . . . macroeconomic goals' and involve 'local people in forestry and conservation management'. Writing for the World Conservation Union (IUCN), Oldfield (1988: 1) asserted that 'new ideas are needed' in biodiversity conservation because '[l]ocal people all too often see parks as government-imposed restrictions on their traditional rights'. In short, the redistribution of the material benefits of conservation and the resolution of conflicts between conservationists and

local communities are central elements in a purported 'new approach' (see Baskin, 1994; Fletcher, 1990; Ramberg, 1992) to conservation in Africa.

The revamped conservation philosophy in Africa is manifested in the proliferation of integrated conservation-development projects (ICDPs, from Wells and Brandon, 1993). ICDPs take various forms, but all embody the idea that conservation and development are mutually interdependent and must be linked in conservation planning (see Kiss, 1990; McNeely and Miller, 1984; Miller, 1984). An important rationalization for these initiatives is that 'conservation policies will work only if local communities receive sufficient benefits to change their behavior from taking wildlife to conserving it' (Gibson and Marks, 1995: 944). In other words, 'the basic notion of an exchange of access for material consideration is central to ICDPs' (Barrett and Arcese, 1995). 'Benefits' to local communities include those directly related to wildlife management (wages, income, meat), social services and infrastructure (clinics, schools, roads), and political empowerment through institutional development and legal strengthening of local land tenure (Ghai, 1992; Gibson and Marks, 1995; Makombe, 1993). Additionally, ICDPs are often linked with cultural survival efforts and thus seek to incorporate indigenous knowledge and practices in conservation management (e.g. Alcorn, 1993; Colchester, 1994; Nepal and Weber, 1995; World Bank, 1993: 73–5). Indigenous peoples, so the argument goes, have been living sustainably in relatively undisturbed habitats for generations and can thus be active participants in implementing conservation policy (e.g. Cleaver, 1993; IUCN et al., 1991; Oldfield, 1988; Sayer, 1991).

The main features of ICDPs are embodied in protected area buffer zones, a particular land use designation that is gaining increasing currency within conservation circles in Africa. Government and non-government conservation officials support buffer zones as an ideal means to promote environmental protection while simultaneously improving socio-economic conditions on reserve boundaries. Buffer zones are now included in virtually all protected area plans (Wells and Brandon 1993: 159) and are viewed, along with other participatory ICDPs, as *the* key strategy for the future of biodiversity maintenance in Africa (Baskin, 1994; Cleaver, 1993; Omo-Fadaka, 1992; Wells and Brandon, 1992). The buffer zone idea is most directly traceable to UNESCO's 'Man and the Biosphere Programme' (MAB) biosphere reserve model, first proposed in 1968 (Batisse, 1982). There are now numerous published definitions for buffer zones (e.g. Bloch, 1991; Mackinnon et al., 1986; Oldfield, 1988; Sayer, 1991). Generally they are lands adjacent to parks and reserves where human activities are restricted to those which will maintain the ecological security of the protected area while providing benefits to local communities. Though ecological and biological concerns have typically driven conservationists' designs for buffer zones and related strategies, they are increasingly presented as a means to strengthen local land and resource claims (Makombe, 1993; Mbanjo et al., 1995; Newmark, 1993). The buffer zone idea originally entailed the legal demarcation of

boundaries which would separate land uses in transitional stages, though sometimes authors use the term less discriminately² (e.g. Mwalyosi, 1991; Mbano et al., 1995).

Much of the writing on buffer zones has been light on analysis and evaluation, tending to be more ‘philosophical and prescriptive’ (Bloch, 1993: 4). At the foundation of this ‘philosophy’ is the notion that conservation will not succeed unless local communities participate in management of and receive material benefits from protected areas. Participation in buffer zones can best be accomplished by first securing local people’s rights to land and resources (Bloch, 1991: 4, 1993: 6). Writing in a World Bank Technical Paper, Cleaver (1993: 94) argues that a ‘key to success in better forest management [in Africa] will be local people’s participation . . . This is best done through their ownership of land and of resources on the land . . .’. An additional rationale for supporting tenure reform as part of conservation planning is ‘that private investment in environmental protection increases with security of tenure’ (World Bank, 1993). Thus, many new conservation proposals seek to integrate land surveying, titling, and registration efforts to improve land tenure security for buffer zone residents.

The issue of local land tenure in buffer zones is also seen to converge with cultural survival/indigenous rights efforts among conservationists and development experts (see Colchester, 1994; Sayer, 1991). Writing for the IUCN, Oldfield (1988: 4) suggests that where ‘tribal and indigenous peoples’ have customary land and resource rights, ‘buffer zones should be established by vesting title to the lands with the local communities at the level of either the village or ethnic group’. Similarly, Cleaver (1993: 98) recommends that ‘[w]here traditional authority still exists, group land titles or secure long-term user rights should be provided’. Rather than individual titling, most proposals suggest group titling to communities, so that ‘[]and within the community can continue to be allocated according to customary practice’ (Cleaver, 1993: 100). In general, the policy rhetoric of institutions and organizations such as the IUCN and the World Bank presents indigenous land rights as complementing the goals of ICDPs (IUCN, quoted in Colchester, 1994: 30; World Bank, 1993: 73–5).

A KINDER, GENTLER CONSERVATION?

Despite the sympathetic treatment of local land rights and emphasis on benefit sharing by buffer zone proponents, land alienations and local impoverishment seemingly continue apace. Many of the projects sound

2. Bloch (1993) suggests that there has been a shift toward ‘buffering strategies’ rather than geographical zonation. Nevertheless, establishment of legally-designated and bounded buffer zones continues to increase across the continent.

alarmingly similar to the fortress-style approach to protected areas which they supposedly replace. There are more reports of forced relocations, curtailment of resource access, abuses of power by conservation authorities, and increased government surveillance, than of successful integrations of local people into conservation management (see Colchester, 1994; Ghimire, 1994; Gibson and Marks, 1995; Hitchcock, 1995). Rather than representing a new approach, many buffer zone projects and other ICDPs more closely resemble colonial conservation practices in their socio-economic and political consequences. In actuality, many buffer zones constitute a geographical *expansion* of state authority beyond the boundaries of protected areas and into rural communities. Given the already substantial proportion of land placed in protected areas across Africa, the potential for spatially extending the reach of the state is tremendous. A few examples will illustrate.

In Madagascar, proposals to integrate conservation with rural development in buffer zones in fact involve new forms of state intervention and restrictions on land use. The Madagascar Environmental Action Plan, developed with the assistance of the World Bank, aims: 'to help farmers to sedentarize and to incite them to invest in the medium term in soil conservation, agroforestry and reforestation . . . To discourage shifting cultivation and other forms of deforestation, via integrated development in the zones surrounding protected areas' (quoted in Bloch, 1993: 5). The rationale of the Bank and the Madagascar government is virtually identical to ill-fated colonial efforts across Africa to convert shifting cultivators into 'progressive farmers' (e.g. Moore and Vaughan, 1994). Paradoxically, current conservation advocates, like their colonial predecessors, conceive of *tavy* (the local term for shifting cultivation in Madagascar) not as 'indigenous knowledge' in practice, but as a 'long-lived habit' (Andriamampianina, 1985: 84, cited in Ghimire, 1994: 211) which must be eliminated. Increased monitoring of land use activities by the state is required to implement conservation agendas in buffer zones. In the country's Mananara Biosphere project, the state has substantially increased the number of forest guards, engaged the support of local police, and placed forestry extension agents with surveillance duties in buffer zone communities (Ghimire, 1994). In general, Madagascar's present conservation policies 'stress the need to remove villagers from within protected areas [and] to create larger buffer zones' (Ghimire, 1994: 212). At Montagne d'Ambre National Park, the government has recently added a buffer zone which has expanded the park authority's control over village lands and resources. In effect, park management has been 'encroaching upon local forest and land resources' (Ghimire, 1994: 220).

In Tanzania, too, several buffer zone projects have been proposed or implemented with similar ramifications for local land and resource control. For instance, a buffer zone project is underway at the Selous Game Reserve, already the largest protected area on the continent at 50,000 km². In the 1980s, the Selous Conservation Programme was implemented under the aegis of the German organization Deutsche Gesellschaft Für Technische

Zusammenarbeit (GTZ) in an attempt to address some of the conflicts between reserve authorities and local communities. A 1988 study produced for GTZ recommended that a buffer zone be established along the perimeter of the game reserve (Lerise and Schuler, 1988). The authors of the study recommended that within the buffer zone, '[t]he Game Authorities should have the final say. It should not be considered as part of village land' (Lerise and Schuler, 1988: 130). The government subsequently established a buffer zone encompassing 3630 km² of adjacent forest, grazing pasture, and settlement under the jurisdiction of the reserve authorities (Ghimire, 1994). Similarly, a proposed buffer zone at Lake Manyara National Park, Tanzania, would be managed by park authorities who would oversee land use (Mwalyosi, 1991). In this case, restrictions on adjacent land uses are seen as essential '[t]o minimize conflicts across boundaries between the Park and adjacent villages' (Mwalyosi, 1991: 176). As a final example, the Serengeti Regional Conservation strategy, on the boundaries of Serengeti National Park, was launched in 1985. The strategy includes three types of buffer zones including 'mandatory' buffer zones (Mbano et al., 1995). In these areas, the ultimate resolution for land use conflicts is 'the removal of land uses that are incompatible with conservation' (Mbano et al., 1995: 613).

A final case comes from Cameroon. Korup National Park and its 'support zone' encompass 4500 km² of tropical rainforest in southwest Cameroon (Lance, 1995). The implementation of the Korup project, though formulated as a participatory ICDP, has meant an increase in the policing capacity of the state. Consequently, the buffer zone now has a much higher concentration of law enforcement officials than any other nearby government lands (Lance, 1995). Once again, when compliance with conservation objectives is not forthcoming, eviction and relocation are the ultimate solution. As Colchester (1994: 16) points out, 'the same laws that made resettlement from [Korup National Park] necessary would also apply in the buffer zones to which the populations were relocated, making their presence there equally illegal'.

The above cases serve to reveal the relations of power between First World conservationists and rural African communities which are embodied within the new approach to conservation. As long as a 'tradition' of living 'in harmony with nature' is maintained in a manner suitable to buffer zone planners, local communities may remain on the land. However, it is the prerogative of First World conservationists (backed up by the power of the state) to determine whether land uses are compatible with their interests or suitable for the purposes of the buffer zones. A recent IUCN publication uses an example from Nigeria to describe how this works in practice. 'The SZDP [Support Zone Development Programme] and the Park Management Service will thus work closely together to monitor village behaviour, and to administer appropriate "rewards" and "punishments"' (Sayer, 1991: 32). Later in the document, the author elaborates a set of general procedures for park authorities.

The documentation and monitoring of traditional uses is an essential first step. Measures must be applied to ensure that harvests do not exceed sustainable levels. It is particularly important to regulate access to the resources to authorised individuals or communities. Distinctions have to be made between harvesting for subsistence use and commercial exploitation for distant markets (Sayer, 1991: 67).

In essence, these buffer zone management guidelines call for the geographical expansion of park authority to monitor and regulate the daily lives of local community members and to force compliance through systems of rewards and punishments.

In sum, though the documents of international conservation NGOs present ICDPs and buffer zones as participatory and locally empowering, the power to propose, design, and enforce buffer zones lies far distant from rural African communities. The concept of participation is severely limited and frequently based on an assumption that local indigenous communities live in harmony with their environment. In many proposals which suggest a place for people in buffer zones, the image of the Other as closer to nature is central. This image is best exemplified in an IUCN publication:

Traditional lifestyles of indigenous people have often evolved in harmony with the local environmental conditions ... Retaining the traditional lifestyles of indigenous people in buffer zones, where this is possible and appropriate, will encourage the long-term conservation of tropical forest protected areas. Protecting the rights of local communities ensures that they remain as guardians of the land and prevents the incursion of immigrants with less understanding of the local environment (Oldfield, 1988: 12).

‘They’ belong in buffer zones because they have co-evolved with the environment and will serve as protectors against the incursions of ‘outsiders’ who have lost that harmonious relationship with nature. Indigenous peoples thus bear a tremendous burden — to demonstrate to outsiders (i.e. Western conservationists) a conservative, even curative, relationship with nature while risking the loss of their land rights should they fail. As Stearman (1994: 5) observes, there is a growing danger that indigenous peoples ‘must demonstrate their stewardship qualities in order to “qualify” for land entitlements from their respective governments’. Their lifestyles must allow them to do what immigrants and, significantly, Westerners, cannot — produce and reproduce in an ecologically benign way. Conservationists’ ideas for indigenous participation in buffer zones are structured by a long history of western notions of the non-western ‘primitive’.

AMBIVALENT PRIMITIVISM AND PARTICIPATORY ICDPs

In her book, *Gone Primitive*, Torgovnick (1990) details how central the idea of the primitive Other is in the formulation of Western identity. She traces the use of the word primitive as a reference to non-European peoples to the late

eighteenth century, noting that while the meaning of primitive changed through the years, it always implied 'original', 'pure', 'simple' cultures. This conception is not only historical and evolutionist, but has a spatial dimension as well, places where the primitive can still be found. 'Otherwise we cannot get to it, cannot find the magical spot where differences dissolve and harmony and the rest prevail' (Torgovnick, 1990: 187). Our feelings about the present and ideas for the future, Torgovnick argues, are projected outward toward these primitive spaces and their inhabitants. In this way, the production of images of the non-Western Other and their places is integral to the formation of a contrasting identity of self (see also Lutz and Collins, 1993).

To a great degree today, the Third World, and particularly Africa, is constituted as primitive in the West. Western journalists and policy-makers evaluate contemporary social and political problems as evidence of a 'new Barbarism' in Africa (Richards, 1995), conditions that are inexplicable in rational, civilized terms. The nineteenth-century metaphor of Africa as the Dark Continent persists in reconstituted form to structure current western discussions of AIDs in Africa (Jaroz, 1992). The discursive construction of Africa as a place of danger, darkness, and irrationality 'legitimizes the status quo and perpetuates unequal relations of power' (Jaroz, 1992: 105). Moreover, images of Africa, or the Third World in general, as 'primitive' continue to have important political ramifications. For Torgovnick, demonstrating how cultural production and the production of knowledge continue to be guided by ideas of what is or is not primitive is critical for understanding First World interventions into the Third. She reminds us that western involvement in Vietnam and the Persian Gulf would have been 'less possible without operative notions of how groups or societies deemed primitive become available to "higher" cultures for conquest, exploitation, or extermination' (Torgovnick 1990: 13).

Today, ideas about the Other are produced and reproduced in our museums (Haraway, 1984), in popular magazines like *National Geographic* (Lutz and Collins, 1993) and in popular films (Gordon, 1992). Lutz's and Collins's (1993) study of *National Geographic* photographs show how the magazine consistently portrays peoples of the Third World 'as *exotic ... idealized ... naturalized* and taken out of all but a single historical narrative' (Lutz and Collins, 1993: 89, italics in the original). They found that in nearly one-third of the photos they analysed, non-Westerners are presented against a visual background that provides no social context at all. Often these photos are set against a purely natural background. In these representations, non-Western peoples appear socially undifferentiated and are thus unaffected by conflicts of interest between genders, generations, or classes. The controversial film, *The Gods Must Be Crazy*, provides another illustration. The film begins with a voice-over narration describing the Kalahari 'Bushmen' as 'pretty, dainty ... little people' whose society knows 'no crime, no punishment' and who 'live in complete isolation without knowledge of

outside people'. The film maker intended no irony despite Bushmen's long historical involvement in regional and global commodity circuits and horrific experience with the genocidal policies of colonial administrations (Gordon, 1992). The film, whose Bushman protagonist has never seen a soda bottle until one falls from the sky and strikes him on the head, presents an image of Bushmen which, in the context of the Namibian liberation war, had powerful political symbolism. Any society unable to recognize a soda bottle can hardly be capable of ruling themselves.

Nor, it would seem, are they capable of managing their natural resources. Western-initiated conservation interventions in Africa are structured by the same representations and tainted by the same stereotypes of the primitive as are other fields of knowledge and areas of cultural production. These perceptions likewise have significant political ramifications, especially for the politics of land. Primitivist discourse in land use interventions in Africa has a long history. During colonial rule, the 'primitive methods' of 'backward' African farmers were condemned for their 'inefficient' and 'destructive' agricultural practices, and massive state interventions for soil conservation were called for (Beinart, 1984; Feierman, 1990; Moore and Vaughan, 1994). Pastoralists were likewise targeted for 'development' (e.g. Hodgson, 1995a; Neumann, 1995b) and African hunting everywhere was characterized by wildlife conservation advocates as 'cruel and wasteful slaughter' (MacKenzie, 1987; Neumann, 1996). In all cases, correcting 'destructive' African society-environment interactions required expanding state power in rural areas through land use restrictions, hunting bans, destocking, evictions, and land alienations.

Then as now, however, primitivist discourse was ambivalent. There was also a more positive primitive stereotype, particularly in the area of wildlife conservation, which did not require such drastic sanctions and dislocations. Running counter to the image of the environmentally destructive native was the idea of the native living 'amicably amongst the game' (quoted in Neumann, 1995b: 160). From the early twentieth century into the 1980s, various proposals were put forth for including 'wild' Bushmen in Namibian game reserves where they could continue to live in ecologically benign 'primitive affluence' (Gordon, 1992). A colonial administrator in 1930s Tanganyika (now Tanzania) explained the aesthetic appeal of including 'primitives' in national parks.

[T]he pig-tailed [Maasai] 'morán' poised on one leg with a spear for a prop, standing sentinel over his father's cattle, is a picturesque sight, and it is fitting that this human anachronism should make his home in [Serengeti National Park] the same country as the rhinoceros and other survivors of a bygone age (Sayers, 1933: 441).

Here, pastoralists are quite literally equated with the fauna as part of the overall spectacle of 'wild' Africa, an analogy repeated by conservationists up until the decade of independence (see Neumann, 1995b). In this way, as Haraway notes, 'primitive' Africans were 'consigned to the Age of Mammals,

prior to the Age of Man. That was [their] only claim to protection, and of course the ultimate justification for domination' (Haraway, 1984: 41).

Since decolonialization, the language has changed markedly and conservation advocates increasingly see that the future of biodiversity protection in Africa lies in some form of alliance and co-operation between parks and nearby communities. As the following quote from a recent World Bank publication indicates, this new conceptualization includes a strong emphasis on securing local land tenure.

In many forest areas, traditional tenure mechanisms are still potentially operative, and governments can divest control of forest land and the trees on them to local communities, through allocation of group titles or secure user rights. This must be done with care, however, since many of these communities have broken down under the pressure of migration, logging, and government land ownership (Cleaver, 1993: 100).

Clearly, there has been a tremendous shift in the language of conservation since colonial rule when park administrators considered pastoralists 'as part of our fauna' (quoted in Neumann, 1995b: 160). Nevertheless, this passage and the previous quote from Sayers (1933) contain certain continuities. Both are embedded in and reflect the relations of power between the West and Africa. At their respective times of writing, Sayers was Assistant Chief Secretary for Tanganyika Territory and Cleaver was Agricultural Division Chief in the Africa Technical Department of the World Bank. More to the point, and perhaps less obviously in the contemporary quote, both reflect historically deep beliefs about and images of non-Western peoples. The caveat that Cleaver presents to his own suggestion of local empowerment is revealing. Forest communities are either 'traditional' or 'broken down', similar to the way that 'Africans were imagined as either "spoiled" or "unspoiled" ' by early twentieth century hunter-naturalists (Haraway, 1984: 50). Traditional communities, in the context of forest conservation, are entitled to respect for existing property claims. Communities that have 'broken down' are another matter. Once Africans modernize and become tainted by civilization, they have no place in the pre-cultural African landscape of parks, reserves, and buffer zones.

Conservationists' ambivalence over indigenous peoples as destroyers or protectors of nature³ is an extension into modern contemporary conservation thought of a conflicting, and historically deep, set of western stereotypes of the Other. This 'ambivalent primitivism' prevents the coherent conceptualization and implementation of protected area buffer zones. Ambivalent primitivism also reflects a reluctance among conservationists to confront the essential tension between local communities and protected areas — the question of who holds the power to control access to land and

3. See Redford and Stearman (1993) and Alcorn (1993) for a brief introduction to the debate conducted in *Conservation Biology*.

resources. As Alcorn (1993: 426) correctly notes, conservationists act 'as gatekeepers to a discussion table that does not have a place set for those whose homeland's future hangs in the balance'. Gatekeeping is to a significant degree a process of labelling. When we categorize rural African communities' land management systems as 'customary', 'traditional', or 'broken down', or label individuals as 'indigenous', 'landless', or 'recent immigrant', we are in essence exercising the power to assign land rights.

Typically in buffer zone projects, when local people have failed the sustainability test, they must be removed (Ghimire, 1994; Mbanjo et al., 1995: 613; see Colchester, 1994). As I pointed out earlier, most of the proposals for formally demarcated buffer zones vest control over land use in the state with the power to relocate. The Lake Manyara buffer zone and wildlife corridor proposal cited above (Mwalyosi, 1991) called for the relocation of existing settlements which interfered with conservation goals. Reporting on the situation in the support zone of Cross River National Park, Nigeria, Sayer predicts that traditional land uses 'will destroy the biological integrity of the park' and calls for 'radical changes in land use' (Sayer, 1991: 30). In other regions, such judgements on the sustainability of local land uses has provided 'a convenient excuse to divest [people] of their homelands' (Stearman, 1994: 4). Commonly, non-sustainable land use is explained by the 'incursion of immigrants' or the 'breakdown' of traditional society (Clever, 1993; Oldfield, 1988). In other cases, the very premiss of indigenous management has been challenged. Some conservation biologists have vigorously contested the idea that 'there can be harmony between wildlife and pastoral exploitation' (Prins, 1992: 117). Ultimately, the stereotypes and assumptions, both positive and negative, essentialize local people in such a way as to obscure the politics of land within buffer zones.

QUESTIONABLE ASSUMPTIONS AND CONTRADICTIONARY DESIGNS

Who Are the 'Local People'?

The conceptualization and design of new conservation interventions — because they are infused with essentialist notions of the primitive — are founded upon unsubstantiated assumptions and fraught with contradiction. To begin with, the idea of 'local people' is rarely rigorously examined, either in design or implementation. In most ICDPs, including buffer zones, 'local people' are generally treated as a homogeneous entity, with little attention to gender, class, or ethnic differentiation. Almost no socio-economic research has been conducted prior to implementation of projects (see Wells and Brandon, 1992: 13) and there is scant documentation of project impacts on different segments of society (Bloch, 1993; cf. Stocking and Perkin, 1992). When socio-economic research is conducted, it is typically based on survey questionnaires (e.g. Newmark, 1993) with little attention to qualitative

differences within communities. None of the various buffer zone proposals reviewed here recognize that rural communities are often politically fractured and socially differentiated in complex ways. Rather, people are categorized as 'indigenous', 'non-traditional', 'subsistence farmers', 'pastoralists', or any number of other labels which mask age, gender, class, and ethnic differences within communities.

Thus, while the notion of securing 'local' land rights as a basis for participation is a significant advance in conservation thought, buffer zone plans rarely make explicit which rights are secured for whom. For example, contested land and resource claims between men and women can be a major source of intra-community conflict. Across Africa, gender is one of the key factors in determining ownership of and access to land and resources (see Carney and Watts, 1990; Rocheleau, 1988; Schroeder, 1993; Sefa Dei, 1994). Lines of differential access and ownership between men and women may be drawn depending upon the type of activity, type of resource, the species, the location, or the intended use of the resource. Interventions for conservation and development may favour one group over another and exacerbate inter-gender conflicts (Carney and Watts, 1990; Schroeder, 1993). Schroeder, for example, has documented a case in the Gambia where the promotion of tree planting for environmental stabilization had the effect of usurping women's access rights in favour of men's (Schroeder, 1995).

Wealth differentiation is another process which may result in competing claims among community members. Pronounced socio-economic stratification within communities can lead to the formation of class interests which may conflict on the question of land and resource tenure. Land conflicts in Tanzania, for instance, often revolve around the improper transfer of property from poorer peasant farmers to well-connected local élites or wealthy outsiders (URT, 1992). Where resource exploitation for market sales is promoted in ICDPs, profits may flow to the wealthy who have the capital, knowledge, and status to mobilize labour and to transport products to market (see Dove, 1993). As Colchester (1994: 34) notes, local élites will rarely willingly make way for 'local people's' participation, but rather manipulate projects to advance their own political power. In Zambia, the Administrative Management Design for Game Management Areas (ADMADe) programme identified 'chiefs' as 'traditional rulers'. Subsequently, '[c]hiefs used these initiatives to secure more power for themselves rather than to facilitate local participation for wildlife' (Gibson and Marks, 1995: 947). In effect, where patron-client relations are strong, ICDPs can serve to perpetuate or reinforce those relations without substantially improving the livelihoods of the 'local people' or promoting conservation.

Closely related to the question of who are the 'local people' is the role of local institutions — particularly the rapidly-proliferating 'indigenous' NGOs — in defining and negotiating land tenure for rural communities. Locally-based NGOs have acquired a powerful cachet among international donors and development NGOs. While NGOs are undoubtedly now key

players in rural politics in Africa (Clark, 1991; Nyang'oro, 1992; Wellard and Copestake, 1993), questions remain about their capacity to promote democratic participation or to offer alternative models for conservation and development (Bonner, 1993; Ellis, 1994; Hanlon, 1991; Vivian, 1994). Neither can we assume that local NGOs, which often play a central role in the new ICDPs, represent 'local people's' interests for the purposes of regulating land use and access.⁴ As Hodgson points out for Tanzania, a handful of well-educated men have positioned themselves as *the* representatives of 'Maasai' interests to outside donors by virtue of their leadership of indigenous NGOs (Hodgson, 1995b). These NGOs, some of which are involved in ICDPs in Tanzania (Neumann, 1995a), marginalize the roles of women and usurp male elders' authority in project decision-making (Hodgson, 1995b). Too often NGOs demonstrate the same inefficiencies and lack of attention to local needs and aspirations that are characteristic of state-run projects (Korten, 1994; Vivian, 1994). Relating Murombedzi's (1992) study of an ICDP in Zimbabwe, Derman (1995: 207) points out 'that the creation of a local NGO funded by national and external donors serves as a new layer of bureaucracy between the communal land residents . . . and their rights to manage their own resource base rather than as an effective vehicle for articulating community interests'.

What is 'Customary Land Tenure'?

Another underlying assumption in many ICDPs is that there exists a locally agreed upon body of customary law regarding land access and ownership which can be documented and preserved through legal registration. Commonly, projects seek to incorporate the protection of 'indigenous' or 'customary' land and resource rights within their objectives. For instance, several buffer zone projects or proposals in Tanzania have a land titling component which overlaps with local (particularly, Maasai) efforts to secure customary land rights (AWF, 1989; KIPOC, 1992; Makombe, 1993: 24; Mbano et al., 1995; Neumann, 1995a; Newmark, 1993). These proposals are based upon the supposition that titling of land leads to greater security in property rights and greater security will create the conditions for conservation (Cleaver, 1993; Oldfield, 1988). Evidence from land titling and land tenure reform in general does not always support the first part of the hypothesis, and some findings support its converse — that land titling may threaten the security of many customary rights holders (Roth, 1993; URT, 1992; Vivian, 1994). In part, this is because land registration programmes are

4. According to a study by Thomas-Slayter (1994), the emergence of grassroots organizations has led, in some cases, to increased equity and democratization and, in others, to increased social stratification.

unlikely to address the complexity and flexibility of existing land and resource tenure. Research in the social relations of common property systems in Africa reveals a seemingly endless variety and complexity of rights, obligations, and rules, many of them ad hoc (Bassett and Crummey, 1993). Rights to a particular area of land may have multiple claims upon them, both group and individual, and can include rights to water, fuel, grazing, and cultivation plots, which in turn may vary according to season, species, or intended usage (Campbell, 1993; Fortmann and Bruce, 1988; Neumann, 1992a; Peters, 1987, 1994; Wilson, 1989).

Under such systems of land and resource tenure, questions of whose rights and which rights will be privatized become critical (Shipton and Goheen, 1992). Peters (1994: 177) has found that titling can be a way to legally protect groups or individuals *against* customary claims. In the case of Tanzania where village land titling has been underway since the late 1980s, land conflicts are increasing rather than decreasing (Coldham, 1995; van Donge, 1993; URT, 1992). In Kenya, land reform has eliminated established access rights to trees for households that had relatively weak cultivation rights within their communities (Deweese, 1995). In sum, customary land claims are not always readily identifiable nor consensually determined — the relative economic and political power of competing interest groups and individuals often determines which claims become documented in law.

The overarching problem with the conceptualization of the relationship between security of tenure and conservation goals in ICDPs is a critical lack of historical understanding of customary land law in Africa. Throughout much of British-ruled Africa, colonial administrators of the early twentieth century tolerated and often actively promoted the retention of 'customary land law' in areas of African settlement and occupation (Berry, 1992; Colson, 1971; Ranger, 1993). British colonial authorities across Africa researched, recorded, and legally recognized customary land law as part of the process of implementing indirect rule (Berry, 1992; Colson, 1971). Since African societies were often engaged in internal struggles over the power to control land, colonial authorities' efforts to record 'traditional' property relations resulted in conflicting testimony (Berry, 1992; Ranger, 1993). One consequence of this history is conflict over the meaning of tradition and the power to define customary land use and control (Shipton and Goheen, 1992). Consequently, colonial land policy generated 'unresolved debates over the interpretation of tradition' (Berry, 1992: 336) and local struggles over the power to assign meanings of land (Peters, 1987; Shipton and Goheen, 1992). Hence, the notion of 'traditional' land tenure is largely a result of colonial governance, rather than an ancient feature of African property relations (Bassett, 1993; Berry, 1992; Colson, 1971; Ranger, 1993).

This is not to say that claims are simply invented out of thin air. They are not. Customary claims, in varying degrees, are derived from social practice. Locally-derived and understood meanings attached to land and resources carry with them sets of obligations, responsibilities, and rights that apply

differentially according to social position. The issue of ‘invented tradition’ (Ranger, 1983) in land tenure arises over questions of power to designate categories and narrate history, which ultimately have the effect of assigning rights, responsibilities, and obligations (Shipton and Goheen, 1992). In other words, it is essential that we understand whose version of history is being narrated and who has the power to make their version the legally sanctioned one. In attempting to secure property rights for local communities, ICDPs are in danger of igniting similar internal power struggles and generating the same sorts of conflicting claims as did colonial interventions into African property relations.

Contradictions in Conception and Implementation

The ambivalent conceptualizations of local people and local land uses produce contradictions in the conceptualization and implementation of buffer zone projects. Perhaps the most problematic contradiction in buffer zone proposals concerns the relationship between ‘traditional’ land use practices and project goals for ‘community development’. Much of the rationale for encouraging local participation is based on the idea of ‘[r]etaining the traditional lifestyles of indigenous people in buffer zones’ (Oldfield, 1988: 12). Yet many projects, sometimes the same projects, promote increased wage labour, greater market integration, and the ‘modernization’ of land use practices as the way to spread the ‘benefits’ from conservation to local communities and relieve pressures on protected areas. In Guinea, for example, conservationists’ buffer zone proposals encourage ‘agricultural intensification and the provision of off-farm employment’ to reduce pressures on protected areas (Fairhead and Leach, 1994: 506). Often economic ‘benefits’ include training and employing local people as tour guides, game scouts, and protected area guards (e.g. Gibson and Marks, 1995). In other words, the objective is to convert segments of local communities — whether hunter-gatherers, pastoralists, or peasants — into wage labourers in a ‘modern’ cash economy.

A second contradiction arises between the conceptualization of buffer zones and their implementation. While the ICDP approach assumes that land use restrictions will be compatible with local economic development needs and be based upon local participation in management and decision making, this remains to be demonstrated (Barrett and Arcese, 1995; Bloch, 1993; Fairhead and Leach, 1994; Ghimire, 1994). In many ICDPs, the effects on local participation or the devolution of decision-making is far from evident. In virtually all of the proposals for formal demarcated buffer zones, control over land use (and thus over people) rests with conservation agencies or related ministries. For example, an IUCN publication (Oldfield, 1988) suggests that Zaire represents the ideal model, wherein the state is legally empowered to regulate land use in buffer zones as part of protected area

legislation. This particular legislation gave park authorities jurisdiction over 'human activities *within 50 kilometres of the boundary* of gazetted protected areas' (Oldfield, 1988: 3, emphasis added). Recently, a senior UNESCO scientist writing about core areas with buffer zones suggested that these units 'be managed as a single entity, with marked and patrolled boundaries and entry only through manned gates and access roads' (Lusigi, 1992b: 35). In other words, entire communities would be enclosed within a quasi-militarized boundary with land use activities closely monitored by central government authorities. Rather than improving security of tenure of buffer zone residents, projects often extend state authority over settlement and land use well beyond protected area boundaries, thereby heightening the insecurity of local land tenure.

CONCLUSION

The persistence of primitivist discourse in the 'new' conservation approach in Africa diminishes the possibilities for creative, socially just, and viable solutions to threats to biodiversity. Ideas of the primitive structure the implicit (and erroneous) assumptions of socially undifferentiated local communities whose land uses and access rights are ancient and internally uncontested. In the first instance, the persistent image of traditional society or indigenous peoples existing in harmony with nature precludes any analysis of social differentiation and agrarian change, or understanding of rural communities' linkages to a larger political-economy. These are 'the people without history' (Wolf, 1982) existing in some static pre-modern equilibrium. This conceptualization ignores the historical forces which link underdevelopment and environmental degradation in Africa. **Second, the meaning of traditional and the identification of traditional beliefs and practices related to land ownership and access is never straightforward. The process of identifying customary property rights is to a great degree a political one, because it involves questions of the power to narrate history, to define tradition, and in the process to make claims to land and resources. Third, and perhaps most importantly for the successful integration of conservation and development, the negative image of the backward and destructive African peasant or pastoralist justifies the continuation of the historical pattern of expanding state control over land and increasingly restrictive interventions. Many of the buffer zone proposals represent a tremendous territorial expansion of state power and sometimes outright land alienation in the name of conservation. The land area which might fall under the jurisdiction of state conservation authorities is potentially enormous.** Buffer zones typically entail a 2–10 km wide strip around protected area boundaries, and up to 50 km in the most extreme case of Zaire. Relocations and evictions, euphemistically referred to as the 'removal of incompatible land uses', are key

buffer zone management strategies, even as securing local land tenure is touted as an important benefit to adjacent communities.

In general, buffer zone proposals suffer from a failure to recognize, let alone analyse, unequal relations of power and how they relate to land and resource access and, ultimately, the efficacy of conservation policies. This is a dangerous oversight as these proposals remain subject to the same sorts of politically-charged questions — how is access controlled, to what degree is the institution of control seen as legitimate by the community, how is the range of uses determined, and who has authority for monitoring compliance — as the colonial interventions which preceded them. ICDP supporters talk of empowering, but as with advocates of incorporating indigenous knowledge into development plans, ‘seldom emphasize that significant shifts in existing power relationships are crucial to development’ (Agrawal, 1995: 416). Increasingly in contemporary cases, local groups, often through the formation of NGOs, are demanding autonomous control of land and resources which they view as customary property rights that have been usurped by the state. In this context, ‘it is often socio-political claims, not land pressure *per se*, which motivate encroachments into the reserve’ (Fairhead and Leach, 1994: 507). Local demands can be politically radical, and most conservationists and state authorities are reluctant to go so far as to grant sole control of forests and wildlife habitat to villages or other local political entities. Local participation and local benefit-sharing, however, are not the same as local power to control use and access, which, in the end, is what many communities seek.

It is thus quite likely that many of the proposals and projects reviewed here will result in increased conflicts over land and resources, both within communities and between local communities and the state. Given the historical antagonisms between local communities and protected area administrations, it would be reasonable to expect the same sort of conflicts and resistance tactics that have existed since the colonial period (see Neumann, 1992b). Residents adjacent to protected areas are well aware of the historical continuities of conservation policies and their effects on local livelihoods. For example, Hitchcock (1995: 193) recently reported that some Tyua in Botswana and Zimbabwe observed that the state ‘was being replaced by international institutions which were pursuing the same kinds of policies of control and dispossession’. These policies in buffer zone projects have been resisted through violent confrontations in Madagascar (Ghimire, 1994), and in Uganda and Cameroon people angrily protested their dislocations from buffer zones (Colchester, 1994).

Recognizing the persistence of notions of the primitive in buffer zone proposals offers an opening for reconceptualizing relations between conservation advocates and rural communities in Africa. The opportunity lies in breaking down the constructed boundary between modern and traditional, civilized and primitive, us and them. By abandoning these undifferentiated categories, we can see local indigenous societies as subject to some of the

same troubling politics of class, ethnicity, and gender that confront us. Avoiding the temptation to either romanticize or demonize rural peoples in Africa, perhaps we can build a dialogue which is truly mutual and initiate institutions and policies that actually empower people to control their lives and improve the conditions under which they live.

First, we need to recognize that past and present conservation policies are complicit in creating the climate of land tenure insecurity within which many rural African communities operate. The establishment of virtually every national park in sub-Saharan Africa required either the outright removal of rural communities or, at the very least, the curtailment of access to lands and resources. As a result buffer zones extend the authority of the park to monitor and restrict land and resource uses of populations already displaced by protected areas. Policies need to be reconceptualized as mechanisms for power-sharing between local communities and state and international institutions rather than as opportunities for extending state control. Research needs to be directed toward identifying and developing institutional mechanisms for controlling access and use of lands and resources that are seen as legitimate by affected communities and that have a detectable effect on conservation goals.

Second, research and policy needs to be directed toward identifying the lines of fracture in rural communities and how segments of the community are differentially and even adversely affected by conservation proposals. Specifically, we need to recognize that local communities are not homogeneous entities whose members share a common set of interests regarding land and resource rights and that conservation interventions, almost by definition, will produce winners and losers in struggles over access. Local politics in rural Africa often revolve around the competing land claims of men versus women or the poor versus more well-to-do peasants, within villages or even within households. Most importantly, we need to problematize the notion of traditional or customary land tenure as the product of years of intra-community struggle over rights, not a set of ancient laws frozen in time.

Finally, we need to understand how the development interventions in buffer zones relate to conservation. Many of the projects reviewed are designed not to improve livelihoods, but merely to defuse local opposition. This is a very short-sighted and short-lived 'solution' and simply 'buys' the support of (some segments of) local communities rather than integrating conservation with development. Whether the 'benefits' from conservation are reaching the people most directly involved in activities which threaten protected areas or, if they are, whether they have any marked effect on their land and resource decisions remains an open question. Research focused on the politics of land is needed to demonstrate the link between conservation and the improvement of local livelihoods. Moving in these directions will, I believe, lead us closer to a truly 'new approach' to biodiversity conservation.

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