

Mara J. Goldman, *Narrating Nature: Wildlife Conservation and Maasai Ways of Knowing*, Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2020. ISBN: 9780816546961 (paper); ISBN: 9780816539673 (cloth); ISBN: 9780816541942 (ebook)

Isn't this just another book about the Maasai, the people so much have been written about? Because the Maasai, the people I am a part of, have a long record of misrepresentation and romanticisation, I was kind of dreading reading yet another book about them/us. Thankfully, this book offers the possibility of thinking about "Maasainess" and doing conservation otherwise. It neither romanticises the Maasai nor does it simplify their reality. Instead, the book highlights the "complex multiplicities involved in knowing, being with, and planning for nature" (p.10). The geographical focus of the book is Tanzania's Maasailand, though it also draws from neighbouring Kenya where a majority of Maasai also calls home. The recent evictions of the Maasai from the Ngorongoro Conservation Area on conservation grounds make the review of this book even timely.

The author convincingly argues that the future of wildlife conservation, which is the interest of many national and international stakeholders, depends on the local Maasai pastoralists and their knowledge practices. Despite being the custodians of the East African rangelands for centuries, the Maasai have been disenfranchised and historically marginalised by governments that have alienated their lands for fortress conservation. The author argues that there cannot be any meaningful conservation "without talking to the very people who use the landscape in question and providing the space for them to talk about wildlife and livestock on their terms" (p.143). Thus, as the title suggests the book seeks to decolonise the processes of debating conservation plans by disrupting existing power dynamics that privilege Western ways of knowing, being, and narrating nature–society relations, and instead privilege a Maasai framework. As we follow Goldman through the pages of the book, we are constantly reminded that "How things are said matter. Words matter. Tone matters. Storytelling matters" (p.212), meaning that she is at the same time humanising researchers to be sensitive to world-making practices because we constantly reproduce particular worlds while suppressing or invisibilising others.

To achieve her ontological and epistemological goals, the author structures the book creatively by mimicking an active Maasai *Engigwana*—storytelling in the performative sense, that is open and non-linear. This oral forum and discussion process is the primary institution

for decision-making within Maasai society. The author translates the form and logic of *Engigwana* into a book with knowledge performances diffracted as a dialogue and the researcher's own voice presented as one among many. In particular, the ideals and primary principles underlying the *Engigwana* are identified: first, the discussion is opened by naming only the problem at hand. There is no mention of possible solutions within the problem statement itself or by the person who opens the meeting. Second, everyone at an *Engigwana* has the freedom to speak and to be listened to; there are no rules constraining his/her contribution. Third, a meeting is finished when, and *only* when, a consensus (an ending that is sufficient to stifle further protest) has been reached (p.199); while the final agreement may not necessarily reflect the wishes of all, it is acceptable to all. The author suggests that this set of guiding principles can form the basis for building decolonial conservation dialogues. For Goldman, knowing and being with nature otherwise means accepting multiple ways of knowing and being in the world, including those "historically Othered, ignored, or rejected as invalid" (p.212).

The book is organised into six chapters with three interludes between them. The preface and introduction provide the background of this ethnographic study and set out the work's intellectual and political goals: a rich history of Maasai's exclusion, starting from their eviction from the Serengeti in the 1950s to the current threats facing the Maasai residents of Ngorongoro, is provided here. Some chapters (1, 3 and 5) take *Engigwana*'s format: stories and contrasting narratives and knowledge production practices, interview data, reports and published material are presented side-by-side in the format of a dialogue. Chapter 1 documents wildlife movements in time and space. It complicates a simplified landscape that is bounded into places for people and places for wildlife, arguing that such a landscape does not exist in practice since the savanna landscape where the Maasai live is co-habited by people, livestock, and wildlife. In Chapter 2, the author introduces us to the specific geographies of the study site, which is two villages in Monduli District of Arusha Region and not the whole Maasailand. To give readers a sense of the area under study, the details are supplemented by charts, photographs of the landscape, people, livestock, and wildlife, and place names which are linked to stories and knowledge. Place names illustrate one way in which Maasai "know, talk about, and live within their landscape" (p.92).

Chapter 3 is on managing the range for wildlife and livestock. However, it is far more than just the coexistence of wildlife and livestock and pasture management. It is about Maasai

(people) and wildlife coexistence, Indigenous knowledge, the politics of land grabs and knowledge production. In this chapter, views of different groups are presented in the form of a dialogue (as they occurred at the meetings) where two competing narratives are brought to the fore. One which is reproduced by development specialists, planners, and game scouts says that pastoralists destroy the landscape by overgrazing and keeping more animals than the range can withstand. Another narrative, held by the Maasai pastoralists and supported by nonequilibrium ecology, says that arid and semi-arid rangelands are not so much impacted by grazing as they are by rainfall. With the intent to privilege voices and knowledges that are often ignored in conservation science and practice, Goldman teases out sophisticated local understandings of history and ecology, supporting them with evidence from the literature.

The fourth and fifth chapters address the imposition of boundaries and the Maasai response to them—a topic well discussed in the pages of this journal (e.g. Neumann 1995; Sachedina 2010; Weldemichel 2020). The author reviews the contested ways through which different forms of boundary-making, such as for conservation and administrative purposes, seeking to separate “nature” from “people” and portraying Maasai pastoralists as misusing the environment, have been enacted, challenged, and appropriated. Apart from highlighting the legal-scapes that have enabled dispossession, Goldman historically situates the boundary-making processes of conservation, in contrast to Maasai orderings of space, people, and nature. “Just as the German (1884-1919) and then the British (1919-61) colonial powers sought to contain and control Maasai in reserves, so they sought to contain nature—by bounding it in space—at first for controlled exploitation through hunting and later for conservation and tourism” (p.154). Maasai continue to be subjected to ongoing attempts by the government to restrict their access to land for international elite tourism and hunting as conservation agencies and the Tanzanian state are continually finding new ways to capture more of Maasai land on the periphery of protected areas—through the drawing of new boundaries. Despite the rhetoric of participatory planning, “rarely are ... [Maasai] boundary-making processes acknowledged or taken seriously by conservation agencies and land-use planners” (p.99). The last chapter discusses the *Enkiguena* in theory and practice.

Finally, having digested the message that the book carries, let me offer a brief reflection as someone who identifies as an indigenous scholar. I must say that the author, being a non-Maasai, has done a wonderful job at reconstructing Maasai ways of knowing and being with nature. However, following the fact-fiction style used to construct *Engigwana*

chapters might be difficult for some readers. Missing the meaning of some concepts and local/national discourse, hence missing a richer conceptualisation, is, of course, a disadvantage of being an outsider to a particular society. For instance, the word *Osero* (p.152) means more than places filled with bush/scrub: a city like Dar es Salaam or Nairobi can equally be referred as *Osero* (a wild place). The role of clan politics is somehow exaggerated and confused with the responsibilities of an age-set: “clans unite Maasai across space—helping a stranger find a place to stay in a faraway *olosho/enkutoto* [land]” (p.23). This is truer of an age-set than of a clan.

In Chapter 4, the author notes that “Maasai will often say that wildlife are of the bush, but so are they” (p.153). I doubt that this should be taken at face value: some perceptions that the Maasai hold of themselves should be situated in a proper context. The national (mainstream) discourse in Kenya and Tanzania depicts the Maasai as *Maliasili* (“natural wealth”)—a discursive representation that is used to objectify them and create a particular narrative that serves to justify their Othering. One only need to be aware of the TV presentations and everyday experiences of a Maasai in an urban setting to be able to grasp this troubling reality, which I address in my contribution to *Udadisi* (Singo 2021). Goldman would also argue that the Maasai have come to realise, through participation in her research and interactions with other researchers, that “their knowledge regarding wildlife is valuable” (p.10). There is nothing novel about this revelation if we disconnect from the assumed knowledge that inscribes the West as the “Seeing Eye” (Said 1989). “Who should learn from whom?” remains an open-ended question.

Having provided the above observations, this book is a valuable contribution to debates about indigeneity (e.g. Chilisa 2012; Radcliffe 2017) and development and socio-climatic futures (e.g. Chilisa 2017; Death 2022). The author has tried to address questions pertaining to geopolitics of knowledge in a commendable way. Goldman concludes the book by challenging policy makers and researchers alike to do or think of “ethical change, social and ecological justice, and conservation otherwise” (p.220), that is, in ways that do justice to the marginalised and their worlds.

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