



Maano Ramutsindela. *Parks and People in Postcolonial Societies: Experiences in Southern Africa.* Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publisher, 2004. viii +185 pp. \$89.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-4020-2842-7.

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A Humanistic Reflection on Southern African Parks

Maano Ramutsindela's new book analyzes fundamental issues related to Southern African national parks as living legacies of the old colonial system. The fact is that, today, people are still being removed from the land in different ways to create conservation areas. Do the post-colonial and post-apartheid dispensations then imply real changes to the very philosophy of nature conservation?

The book discusses three major issues for researchers: the instrumental dichotomy between society and nature, relayed by science and geography in particular; the definition of otherness linked to what Ramutsindela calls the human gradation—in other words, racial hierarchy; and the very capitalist nature of the parks. These questions are studied through a post-colonial paradigm. The author argues that there is a colonial presence in contemporary national and transfrontier parks. His argument is that the post-colony concept includes the old idea of colony, but dressed with new clothes. He shows that the power relations and stereotypes included in the original national park idea are a continuing reality. He deconstructs carefully the new nature conservation philosophy and the result is very convincing. Africans removed from the land for parks creation had to absorb Western conceptions of nature. Ramutsindela argues that they had in fact to experience relations between society and nature in ways that were, and still are, alien to them.

The book consists of ten chapters, each one being a clear and logical step in the whole demonstration. Chap-

ter 1, "Society-Nature Dualism and Human Gradation," is a very dense introduction presenting the main thesis of the book. Chapter 2, "The Imprint of Imparkation in Southern Africa," is very useful in understanding the territorial legacy of parks in Southern Africa. Chapter 3, "The Consequences of National Parks," looks at the interrelations between parks and people, trying to assess positive and negative outcomes. Chapter 4, "New Nations and Old Parks," analyzes the recycling of old parks through new nations' imperatives. Chapter 5, "(Dis)continuities: Property Regimes in Nature Conservation," offers a useful reflection on the links between landholding systems and national parks. Chapter 6, "Searching for a People-Nature Matrix," probably one of the best chapters, looks critically at notions of local communities and participation linked to new conservation principles. Chapter 7, "The Packaging of Community Benefits," demonstrates that local people are now trapped in demands for materialistic benefits without really recovering a 'lost spiritual relationship to nature' (p. 109) that is frequent in African traditional religions but which is too often seen as legitimate for Whites only. Chapter 8, "Transfrontier Parks: New Regimes and Old Practices," provides us with a change in the scale of reflection. It shows that, hidden behind new geopolitical principles that can appear acceptable, old ideas of White domination and natural supremacy are still at work. Chapter 9, "Science and (Trans)national Parks," is a conclusion which summarizes perfectly the answers to the questions announced in the introduction. Chapter 10, "Postscript:

The Durban Accord and the Next Ten Years,” tries to put in perspective the Fifth World Park Congress hosted by South Africa in 2003. South Africa is certainly a leader in nature conservation in the world and has become a model on its own, but also a model of post-modern contradictions!

This book will become a major reference for those scholars who adhere to a humanistic critique of nature conservation. This humanistic view could be characterized as decrying the common hypocrisy of the “nature first” supporters, who, in reality, secure their own enjoyment first. These critiques can be anthropocentric while recognizing the necessity of a holistic approach to the environment. Obviously, the contents of the book can be challenged, which is always good for the quality of scientific debate. One might regret that KwaZulu-Natal, a South African province important for nature conservation and the place where the British legacy is the most important, is not really used in the book. The Drakensberg and the Greater St Lucia Wetlands World Heritage Sites could have been cited as perfect illustrations of the political instrumentalisation of parks as opposed to examples of new community involvement. The present political use of parks, especially in South Africa, could have been more detailed and some contemporary significant environmental conflicts, such as the one in the Kosi Bay nature reserve or the one related to the current conservation process of the Wild Coast (Eastern Cape), more developed. The case studies presented in the book are in-

teresting and feed perfectly the whole argument. Rather than referring sometimes to one example detailed in different chapters, one could have imagined two or three developed case studies in special boxes outside the body of the main text. Personal narratives and interview extracts could have been used to give the reader an idea of grassroots perceptions of the described processes. Illustrations are scarce but good, for example, the cartoon on p. 134 showing “the portrayal of elephants and illegal immigrants.” A map of South Africa (p. 23), does not have a graphic scale and many parks, especially in KwaZulu-Natal, are not represented. The style of the book is very dense and conceptual, which limits its audience to graduate students and researchers.

This book examines all the contradictions inherent in the complex relationship between parks and people and gives a real and appreciable comparative approach. It provides a powerful framework of reflection that can be used to contextualize many ongoing studies. From my point of view, the whole explanation of parks as generators of human gradation is the most convincing: “Racism as a form of domination largely reveals a line of cleavage between Whites and non-Whites. Protected areas became the arena for racial exclusions and domination. Racial segregation in protected areas might appear to be historical, but the persistence of racial stereotypes in present perceptions suggests that contemporary nature conservation is not yet immune to those stereotypes” (p. 8).

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