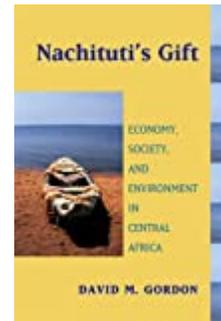




David M. Gordon. *Nachituti's Gift: Economy, Society, and Environment in Central Africa.* Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006. xiii + 304 pp. \$24.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-299-21364-0; \$60.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-299-21360-2.



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Fishing the Copperbelt

Nachituti's Gift is a political ecology of river and lake fisheries on the Zambia-Democratic Republic of the Congo borderlands, specifically Lake Mweru and the Lupula River. The author conducted his dissertation research in the study area from 1997 to 1998 and returned for three shorter field stays in 2000, 2001 and 2002. Research methods included conducting more than one hundred interviews in Bemba with the help of research assistants, and accessing archives in Zambia, Belgium, and the United Kingdom. The book explores three interconnected themes: tenure, wealth, and the environment. The introduction addresses the three themes and the ways in which common property resource theory and other key concepts relate to the case study. Cultural history, human uses of the environment, changing conceptions of wealth, and related topics are described in considerable detail for the locale, but there is less on how local fishing practices and concerns compare with other areas in the D. R. Congo, Zambia or beyond.

Gordon's book is quite readable. The introduction is followed by two sections and a brief conclusion. Section 1 consists of three chapters which offer different versions

of stories of conquest used by local people to explain present day social and political relationships. The second examines three fisheries, including that of a salmon-like fish which has largely disappeared from the region, bream fishing in shallow lagoons and on the open lake, and women's involvement in the capture, processing, and sale of small, schooling, sardine-like fish.

The main narrative, which emerged in the early nineteenth century to explain human relations and resource ownership, was that of Nachituti's Gift. The story describes Nachituti as queen of the Lunda people who ruled over the conquered Shila people. Her gifts included the head of her brother Nkuba (who she had killed to avenge the death of her son), a basket of earth representing the land, and a pot of water symbolic of the lakes and rivers. The author finds that the core of the narrative changes little over time, but that the agency, goodness, and other characteristics of key people in the story varies reflecting the contested nature of the extent to which each ethnic group had control over people, land, and water resources in the region.

Conquest by the Belgians and the British brings fairly

predictable change to the lives of the people of Mweru-Luapula. The colonizers use force and taxation to increase regional fish output to feed laborers working the copper mines. Ethnic background becomes more rigidly interpreted and more important to people's identity, women lose status, reciprocity decreases, chiefs become more powerful, people are forcefully relocated, and western notions of human-environment relations are championed. The post-World War II period brings advances in fishing technology, increasing wealth differentials, and decline in certain targeted fish stocks. Europeans from the colonizing countries as well as Greeks and Jews become involved in the fisheries and accumulate new forms of wealth disproportionate to their numbers. Local people accuse each other of engaging in witchcraft, join churches and employ a wide variety of additional approaches to challenge colonial authority or maintain access to power, wealth, and resources. Local people who demonstrate respect for traditional ways are more likely to have long-term business success than those who opt for individual advancement at the expense of community ties.

Although the author draws few parallels to other fishing communities, changes in the Mweru-Luapula fisheries were similar to those experienced in inland and marine fisheries throughout Africa. Belief in nature spirits which control fish populations wanes; declines in fish stocks are blamed on social disruptions brought about by colonization or the arrival of other foreigners; ceremonies designed to appease nature spirits, maintain fish stocks and protect fishers from drowning become in-

creasingly contested; fisher cooperatives and loans to fishers programs are formed; weir fishing declines as catch per unit effort decreases; capital inputs become increasingly important to fishing success; legislation for the conservation of fish stocks increases as does formal policing of the fisheries; and local people confront those enforcing fisheries regulation with increasing violence and challenge the neutrality of the science behind fisheries conservation measures. In recent decades regulators have taken on the rhetoric, but not the practice, of co-management; theft of fishing gear is an increasing problem; and international aid agencies have been unable to effectively address the multiple problems facing the fisheries.

Gordon encourages the reader to challenge conventional theories of development. He points out that the much-promoted notion of co-management should not be championed in instances where local communities would be partnering with corrupt or dysfunctional states. Also, there is no simple progression to a market economy or of over-fishing leading to resource decline. In the case of the sardine-like *chisense* lake fishery, Gordon notes that the increased nutrient inputs due to an increased human population's fertilizer use have contributed to rising plankton levels and a more robust fishery even though more people are fishing.

Nachituti's Gift is well researched and referenced. It has several high quality maps and historical photographs and will be of interest to those in a wide variety of disciplines including anthropology, African Studies, history, geography, and environmental studies.

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