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Africa, Africanists, and Wildlife Conservation

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African Studies Review, Volume 48, Number 1, April 2005, pp. 143-153
(Review)

Published by Cambridge University Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/arw.2005.0036>



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AFRICA, AFRICANISTS, AND WILDLIFE CONSERVATION

Rosaleen Duffy. *Killing for Conservation: Wildlife Policy in Zimbabwe.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000. Published in association with the International African Institute, London. xii + 209 pp. Bibliography. Index. \$19.95. Paper.

David Hulme and Marshall Murphree, eds. *African Wildlife and Livelihoods: The Promise and Performance of Community Conservation.* Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann, 2001. xvi + 336 pp. Figures. Tables. Maps. Bibliography. Index. \$26.95. Paper.

William Weber, Lee J. T. White, Amy Vedder, and Lisa Naughton-Treeves, eds. *African Rain Forest Ecology and Conservation.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001. xii + 588 pp. Figures. Tables. Maps. Bibliography. Index. \$65.00. Cloth.

The African studies community has generally been unsure how to think about the project of wildlife conservation in sub-Saharan Africa. It is almost as though we Africanists, with our social science and humanities focuses, are embarrassed by the importance of this part of the historical and contemporary African experience and the degree to which Africa is popularly and internationally associated with wildlife and wildlife habitat. We would rather portray a more human Africa, an Africa similar to the other continents of the world, not the Africa of the John Wayne film *Hatari!* or its more recent cousins shown daily on *Animal Planet* and other cable channels. While there have been some exceptions to this trend (e.g., Gibson 1999, Marks 1984, Neumann 1998, Showers 1994), research and writing on wildlife conservation in Africa have, for the most part, been dominated by natural scientists, international NGO staff, and journalists (e.g., Sinclair & Arcese 1995, Adams & McShane 1992, Bonner 1993).

This is unfortunate because of the spatial and economic importance of wildlife conservation, protected areas, and the associated tourism in many African countries. For example, in Tanzania, protected areas for wildlife and forests take up 27 percent of the country's land area (Brockington 2002:xxi), and wildlife-based tourism has become Tanzania's number one source of foreign exchange as well as being seen as an important engine for economic development (Africa Business 2003, CHL Consulting Group 1997:1). Clearly, the project of wildlife conservation in Africa is of major importance to biodiversity, its international protectors, African states, and, most important, to the African peoples who live in and around wildlife populations and protected areas.

The three books reviewed here provide a wide variety of perspectives on issues of biodiversity and wildlife conservation. In many ways, they help fill holes in our discussion of these issues and correct some of the problems noted above. At the same time, each in its own way reflects existing problems in the study and practice of biodiversity conservation and protected

area management. While each is a valuable contribution on its own terms, taken together they present a complementary whole that is greater than the sum of its parts.

The thirty-two essays in *African Rain Forest Ecology and Conservation (ARFEC)* make two important contributions. First, they cover a truly impressive amount of material on the moist tropical forests of western, central, eastern Africa, and Madagascar. Second, the authors represent a broad cross section of contemporary mainstream conservation, writing from the closely linked perspectives of academic research and applied conservation. *African Wildlife and Livelihoods (AWL)* is also valuable for two reasons. It offers extensive coverage of a wide variety of “community conservation” projects in eastern and southern Africa. Like *ARFEC*, *AWL* illustrates another broad trend in current thinking about wildlife and biodiversity conservation in Africa. Its emphases are more social than ecological and generally make more of a case for the economic dimensions of wildlife conservation. Duffy’s monograph, *Killing for Conservation (KFC)*, on the other hand, is a very different book from the first two. It focuses on a single case, Zimbabwe, and offers a much more explicitly political examination. *KFC* is the least applied of the three books, though it does offer clear support for a strategy of consumptive utilization of wildlife.

Here I will survey the books under review and then examine them as examples of interdisciplinary work in and between the fields of African studies and conservation studies.

Conservationists in the Rain Forest

ARFEC aspires to be the definitive text on its topic, similar to the *Serengeti* and *Serengeti II* collections (Sinclair & Norton-Griffiths 1979, Sinclair & Arcese 1995), and in many ways it succeeds. No one interested in the topic should begin working without consulting this volume. At the same time, it should not be the final stop on a reader’s tour of African rain forest conservation, particularly its social dimensions. *ARFEC* can be read profitably in two ways. It is a substantial source of information and ideas about the topic at hand. In addition, it can be seen as a fascinating cultural and political artifact reflecting the strengths and weaknesses of the international conservation establishment, both its African and non-African elements.

A particular strength for Africanists schooled in the social sciences and humanities is the book’s comprehensive and highly readable coverage of the ecological dimensions of African rain forests. Chapters such as “A Geological Perspective on the Conservation of African Forests,” “Hotspots in African Forests as Quaternary Refugia,” “The Impact of Arid Phases on the African Rain Forest through Geological History,” “Climatic Change and African Rain Forests in the Twenty-First Century” and others emphasize the dynamic and changing nature of these forest areas in the past and into the

future. There is also a tremendous volume of current information and overviews regarding many of the most important ecological dimensions of and issues facing the rain forests of Africa. Wilkie and Lapore provide a particularly interesting chapter entitled “Forest Areas and Deforestation in Central Africa,” in which they introduce a wide variety of data sources, honestly acknowledge the weakness of existing data sets, and provide two excellent appendixes introducing the novice to the arcane art of remote sensing.

ARFEC aims to be far more than a conventional ecological overview, however, and it advertises its goals in its subtitle, “An Interdisciplinary Perspective.” Two major sections of the volume take up this challenge: “Humans and the Forest” (six chapters) and “Applied Research and Management” (eight chapters). Case studies from the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Gabon, Uganda, and Ghana provide material for the “Humans and the Forest” section. They are for the most part very strong, well researched, and interesting micro-level studies of human ecology and local relationships with forest resources and protected areas. Nevertheless, they generally lack a sustained and critical investigation of national and international level “humans,” such as African states, international business, or non-African conservationists. The authors in this section warn correctly against romanticizing indigenous resource management institutions and point out the often fragile nature of local relationships with the environment. But they do not fully explore the external political and economic context in which local communities and non-human nature operate. An engagement with the ideas and literature of political ecology (e.g., Bryant & Bailey 1997, Zimmerer & Bassett 2003) would have been very helpful here.

The section entitled “Applied Research and Management” is disappointing but instructive, though perhaps not in the manner anticipated by the authors and editors. The essays examine applied conservation in Madagascar, gorilla conservation issues in central Africa, primates and logging in Gabon, forest management in Uganda and Ghana, and local communities and conservation in the DRC and Cameroon. Despite the volume’s promise of interdisciplinarity, the majority of these chapters are overwhelmingly ecological, with little or no consideration of social issues. When politics, economics, and culture are included, they are explored in a far less sophisticated and exhaustive manner than the ecological dimensions of applied conservation. For example, one can contrast the highly detailed model of primate and bird communities’ responses to forest disturbance in the chapter titled “The Effects of Selective Logging on African Fauna” with the thinness of theory and the complete lack of critical literature in the chapter titled “Politics, Negotiation, and Conservation: A View from Madagascar.”

One factor that may color the findings of *ARFEC* is its strong focus on the conflict-torn Great Lakes region. This is most explicitly seen in the epilogue, with its discussion of “conflict and conservation” in Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo. The sentiments shown in this chapter are

no doubt heartfelt, and the authors, both African and non-African, have been affected personally by the region's tragedies. To its credit, *ARFEC* does avoid simplistic Malthusian explanations of the Rwanda genocide and war in Congo such as those put forward by Kaplan (1994) (see Newbury 1999 and Uvin 1996 for two excellent critiques). However, it does not explore how projects of conservation, attempts to expand or defeat state power, and conflicts over resources have come together to play a role in the violence in the Great Lakes region (see Dunn 2003).

Contentious Communities

AWL should also be considered a "must have" volume for those interested in African biodiversity conservation, and it is also a valuable resource for students of African rural issues. This collection is part of the second generation of work on community-based conservation (CBC). The first generation (e.g., Adams & McShane 1992, International Institute for Environment and Development [IIED] 1994, Western & Wright 1994) introduced the concept of CBC to a broad audience and brought together various projects and ideas that had been developing in many parts of the world. In response to the sometimes overly optimistic visions of this generation, a literature soon appeared that often advocated a return to the strict protectionism of the past rather than risking biodiversity by placing it in the hands of local peoples (see Wilshusen et al. 2002 for a review and a critique of this protectionist critique).

AWL, along with other efforts such as the IIED's *Evaluating Eden* series (see Roe et al. 2000), seeks to address protectionist critiques of CBC and place the theories and empirical studies of CBC experiences on a sounder footing. In this, it succeeds admirably. The editors, David Hulme and Marshall Murphree, are two of the most knowledgeable and experienced scholars of CBC and also have extensive applied experience in this field. The first three chapters of the book provide a superb introduction to and review of wildlife conservation in Africa and the role local people have played in this project. In the second, Hulme and William Adams make excellent use of the theoretical idea of "narratives" to explore the approaches of "fortress conservation" and "community conservation" (see also Leach & Mearns 1996 for an extended use of the idea of narrative in exploring African environmental issues). Murphree and Edmund Barrow use the third chapter to examine the many dimensions of the concept of "community" and also the many forms of community conservation.

The remaining fifteen chapters are generally focused on specific local or national cases, but each chapter also has important points to make about more general CBC issues. For example, Ivan Bond uses his study of Zimbabwe's famous CAMPFIRE program as the starting point for a sophisticated discussion of institutional influences on the distribution of conser-

vation costs and benefits. Patrick Bergin explores processes of organizational change in the context of Tanzania National Park's creation of a Community Conservation Service, though he could have made better use of the theoretical literature available on his broader focus.

The most important common theme in *AWL*'s chapters is the necessity of knowing who wins and who loses from conservation initiatives, community or otherwise. The authors have a firm understanding that wildlife conservation is, from an African perspective, a strictly material enterprise. While North American and European conservationists may appreciate African wildlife and habitats for their esthetic and intrinsic values, this is not a luxury available to most Africans, particularly rural Africans living in close proximity to wildlife and protected areas. Conservation will not succeed in Africa unless Africans see it as being in their interest, and here, *AWL*'s contributors pull no punches and refuse to write with blinders on. For example, Lucy Emerton points out the complexity of assessing the economic costs and benefits of conservation, and the difficulty of generating revenue and resource flows that compensate local peoples for the land use restrictions placed on them by conservation projects.

The analyses presented in *AWL* seem to leave us with a cruel contradiction. On the one hand, wildlife and biodiversity conservation will not be successful without support from local peoples; on the other hand, such support requires a level of material benefits which conservation has generally not proved capable of providing. Hulme and Murphree acknowledge this tension in their concluding chapter but argue that such a negative perspective ignores the degree to which CBC is an evolving and developing long-term project. Weaknesses in CBC today do not necessarily lead to failure tomorrow, and today's difficulties can serve as the basis for tomorrow's successes if the reasons for CBC's weaknesses are correctly understood. Interestingly, they put a very limited emphasis on normative arguments in favor of CBC. Their primary position is that CBC is the best way to achieve conservation and development, not that CBC is ethically the right thing to do because it gives local people control over local resources.

Nonetheless, like *ARFEC*, *AWL* suffers from its somewhat limited geographic focus. The cases in *AWL* are drawn entirely from Anglophone eastern and southern Africa, along with Mozambique. This is not all that surprising, because the savannas of eastern and southern Africa have been the historical heartlands of wildlife conservation on the continent. In fact, one of the strengths of *AWL* is that it does draw attention to nonsavanna conservation such as Mgahinga Gorilla National Park in Uganda. However, it does continue the unfortunate trend of paying little attention to West Africa. Those interested in this area can turn to Oates (1999) and his more critical experiences with and evaluations of community-based conservation.

Also, the Zimbabwean experience with CAMPFIRE is overrepresented, as is common with studies of this sort. While the chapters on Zimbabwe do draw attention to CAMPFIRE's problems and avoid painting it as an unal-

loyed success (see Hess 1997 for an example of this sort of writing), recent events in Zimbabwe (see Wolmer, Chaumba, & Scoones 2003) do draw attention to one of the weaknesses of *AWL*. Although *AWL* is better than *ARFEC* in its coverage of macrolevel political processes—particularly with Adam and Hulme’s use of “narrative” as an analytical tool—state and international politics, economics, and culture are still given short shrift. Thus none of the material in *AWL* builds significantly on Hill’s (1994) work on the political logic of *CAMPFIRE* from the perspective of the Zimbabwean state and his chilling prediction of the political and economic crises of contemporary Zimbabwe.

The Politics of Conservation

Politics, both national and international, is the central focus of Rosaleen Duffy’s *Killing for Conservation: Wildlife Policy in Zimbabwe (KFC)*. Duffy’s theoretical focus is the role of ideas upon policy. She explores and describes the content of the various “environmental ideologies” that pledge allegiance to the broad idea of sustainable development, though each interprets sustainable development in a different manner. This leads to her primary research question: “What relevance do these environmental ideologies have to the practice of wildlife conservation in Africa?” (6). *KFC* then seeks to answer this question by exploring the role of ideology and material interest, and the interplay between the two, through an empirical study of wildlife conservation in Zimbabwe and at the international level. This blurring of the often too rigid analytical boundary between domestic and international politics is one of the major strengths of Duffy’s work, and her lens shifts easily between the game ranches and villages of rural Zimbabwe, on the one hand, and negotiating sessions of the Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), on the other.

Duffy’s analytical typology of environmental ideology is interesting but done without reference to the many similar analyses carried out by others (see, e.g., Dryzek 1997). Her distinction between more reformist “blue-green” environmentalists and more radical “red-greens” is useful, but the linking of both deep ecology and animal rights ideas in her category of “deep greens” is problematic. There are serious and substantial theoretical and practical differences between deep ecologists and animal rights advocates, as the former emphasize the holistic nature of ecosystems, while the latter tend to focus on individual animals with little or no awareness of ecological context and processes.

Duffy’s conflation of deep ecology and animal rights becomes even more troubling when she sets up an opposition between Zimbabwe’s “sustainable utilization” of wildlife ideology with the animal rights position of international conservation NGOs. There is, to be sure, a large kernel of truth to this view; nevertheless, it does overlook serious divisions at the

international level and does not explore how a popularized version of animal rights became so important in global debates over elephant and rhino conservation. While it is in some ways outside the scope of her work, the answer to this last question revolves around how international conservation experts and organizations and the Northern media have created a particular vision of Africa and its wildlife (see Adams & McShane 1992, Bonner 1993). Duffy's theoretical section would have benefited greatly from an incorporation of the idea of narrative used in *AWL*. It should be noted that she does later acknowledge that the situation of international conservation NGOs is in fact rather complex, and she illustrates this with a discussion of the tensions between the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF)-International and various national branches of the WWF.

Despite these concerns, *KFC* remains an excellent work when it comes to exploring the ins and outs of Zimbabwe's conservation experience. This is largely because Duffy keeps her eye firmly on the ball of politics. As she notes, the ideology of sustainable utilization has provided a way for various state and nonstate actors in Zimbabwe to agree on the broad contours of wildlife policy and present a united front to sometimes hostile international conservation interests. However, behind this veneer there exists a very wide variety of motivations and interests. Indeed, the tensions behind this apparent ideological unity have become much more apparent with Zimbabwe's chaotic "land reform" program in which privately owned game ranches have been targeted for redistribution and state-managed CAMP-FIRE schemes have been less affected.

Zimbabwean state institutions, powerful domestic political figures, local communities, private game ranchers, the tourist industry, poachers, and national-level NGOs are all represented and discussed in *KFC*. Conservation becomes yet another stage for the distribution and redistribution of various goods, both tangible and intangible, ranging from material wealth to state legitimacy. While conservation practitioners often acknowledge this dimension of their work in conversation and interviews, rarely is it faced head on in research and project planning.

One of the most important political moves of the conservation project is its effort to appear apolitical. Duffy is clearly aware of this, but she does not fully develop the potential argument. To the degree that claims for conservation and in favor of particular conservation strategies can be portrayed as purely technical and politically neutral, the political goals of conservation are in fact further advanced. Takacs (1996) has made this argument in his study of the intellectual history of the concept of biodiversity. Biodiversity is not just a scientific idea; it is also a powerful political and cultural idea, made more powerful by its scientific content. In a slightly different vein, Ferguson's (1994) study of development in Lesotho makes the same point about the political strength of ostensibly apolitical development discourses.

Another fascinating theme implied, but not fully developed, in *KFC* is the interplay between intangible ideological factors and material interests.

Duffy correctly avoids making an argument that dramatically privileges one of these over the other, but then she does not investigate the theoretical and empirical interactions between them to the degree that she could have. Ideology does play a role in creating material interest and individual preferences, but the reverse is also true. Material interests and preferences likewise shape ideologies. This is one of the puzzles being confronted by constructivist authors in comparative politics (see, e.g., Green 2002) and international relations (see, e.g., Checkel 1998), and *KFC* provides yet more evidence that there is no simple answer to this tension between explanation-based ideas and material interest.

Despite its many virtues, there is one major disappointment in Duffy's work. Wildlife and nonhuman nature have no analytical voice. *KFC* tells us nothing about Zimbabwe's environment and does not consider how it may play an active role in the politics of conservation. At various points, the book does discuss issues of elephant population numbers (130–31) and climatic suitability of the semi-arid portions of Zimbabwe for game ranching (79). However, these critical biological and ecological factors go largely unexplored. *KFC* is very much a book about the politics of conservation, not its political ecology. Nonhuman nature is seen as a passive prize contested by various social actors, not a dynamic force interacting with those who seek to control it (see Bryant & Bailey 1997:17).

Interdisciplinarity in African Conservation and African Studies

Both African studies and contemporary conservation aspire to interdisciplinarity, but both also fall short in some areas. More distressingly, these two fields of study seem to learn little from each other's successes and failures. In order to discuss interdisciplinarity, it is first necessary to define what this oft-used term means. Interdisciplinary work, even more than almost all other academic and applied activities, is a social process. No single researcher, consultant, or manager can be interdisciplinary. Interdisciplinarity arises out of the interaction of numerous individuals with a wide variety of skills and experiences. This vision of interdisciplinarity is supported by the work of Klein (1996), who sees interdisciplinarity in large part as "communicative action" (216–24). Language thus becomes a critical issue as various disciplines and fields create and utilize specialized words and terms. Effective interdisciplinarity requires the "creation of a common language and a shared sense of what is at stake" (217).

African studies has proven to be extraordinarily successful in integrating the various branches of the social sciences and the humanities. This has contributed not only to the study of Africa, but also to more disciplinary work in other parts of the world (see Bates, Mudimbe, & O'Barr 1993). Some branches have begun to incorporate insights from ecology and other natural sciences, though the success of these attempts at cross-fertilization

has been mixed. For example, Scoones (1999) discusses how various fields in the social sciences have made use of the so-called new ecology, which stresses complexity and variability in ecological processes. Environmental history has been most successful in linking ecological and social complexity, perhaps because of its necessary focus on change over time. Political studies, however, have been far less successful in their understanding and use of ecological concepts and data.

Of the three books reviewed here, *KFC* most clearly and strongly represents this African studies tradition. Duffy skillfully uses a wide variety of social data and integrates her argument across multiple political levels, from the local to the international. However, as noted above, there is little or no ecology in her work. At the very least, nonhuman nature and ecology are a critical context in which conservation politics operate. *AWL* goes further in its consideration of the natural world, but it is still primarily a social science work, not a broadly interdisciplinary one.

Research on conservation and a number of conservation initiatives has become increasingly interdisciplinary in recent years. *ARFEC* is clear evidence of this trend but also of its limitations. The biggest problem appears to be the legacy of conservation as an apolitical technical exercise. While this has been a successful strategy in promoting the goals of conservation in Africa, it has inhibited critical introspection. *KFC* and *AWL* both recognize that conservation is always and inevitably a political project and that conservationists, both African and non-African, are thus political actors. This awareness seems to be generally lacking in *ARFEC*. Conservation needs to learn that politics is not a dirty word and that the analytical costs of being apolitical are greater than the short-term benefits of policy influence.

On a more positive note, all three of these books are eminently readable and avoid excessive jargon which would restrict their audience to a small group of specialists. This provides a strong base for interdisciplinary conversations and more integrative future work. Each presents critical pieces of the conservation puzzle, and there is no obvious reason why their insights cannot be combined. Taken together, they do begin the “creation of a common language.” Ecologists can read *KFC* for an understanding of politics and *AWL* for a view of conservation economics and narrative history. Through the work in *ARFEC*, Africanists will learn much about the natural world which frames the social world we generally study.

The most significant difference between Africanists and conservationists concerns the lack of Klein’s “shared sense of what is at stake.” It has become common to say that Africanists care more about people, while conservationists are primarily concerned with the fate of biodiversity (e.g., Soulé 1995). However, this sort of binary opposition would be unfair to the diversity of opinions and views found in both the African studies and conservation communities. No one could read *ARFEC*’s epilogue and miss the authors’ awareness of the human costs of conflict in central Africa. Similarly, *AWL* is clearly interested in promoting more successful wildlife and

biodiversity conservation. Its promotion of CBC rests on pragmatic grounds, on the notion that CBC is necessary for successful conservation in an African political economic context.

So these three works do provide hope for a broader future engagement between African and conservation studies. Tentative steps toward a shared language and shared concerns are clearly in evidence. African studies programs are involving some natural scientists in their work, and conservation and environmental studies programs contain social scientists and, more rarely, humanists. There also appears to be a generational dimension to this process, as more and more students look to interdisciplinary programs and research projects. At a 2003 meeting between social scientists and ecologists at the University of Georgia, the graduate students in attendance were often those most committed to a broad project of interdisciplinarity that incorporates the theoretical, methodological, and normative dimensions of a broad range of disciplines.

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