Forest and Labor in Madagascar: from colonial concession to global biosphere by Genese Marie Sodikoff (review)

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Africa: The Journal of the International African Institute, Volume 83, Number 4, November 2013, pp. 693-694 (Review)

Published by Cambridge University Press
DOI: *https://doi.org/10.1353/afr.2013.0060*

new ground recently in exploring the history of Sufi brotherhoods and mainland politics in Cabo Delgado and Nampula.

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GENESE MARIE SODIKOFF, *Forest and Labor in Madagascar: from colonial concession to global biosphere*. Bloomington and Indianapolis IN: Indiana University Press (pb $25.00 – 978 0 25300 584 7; hb $70.00 – 978 0 25300 309 6; ebook $21.99 – 978 0 25300 584 7). 2012, xix + 245 pp.

This book is an environmental ethnography of the impacts that a large biosphere reserve has had on the lives of mainly Malagasy conservation agents in north-eastern Madagascar. It should serve to inspire further ethnographies in Madagascar as well as in other locations where conservation and its incumbent ideologies and bureaucracies have reshaped – and will continue to have a role in the undoing of – how local people live with the land.

Sodikoff states her central thesis at the outset and develops it with clarity and force. She starts from the position that Betsimisaraka conservation labourers are caught in contradiction: they get paid to follow the conservation aim of stopping swidden horticulture (*tavy*) in the biologically diverse eastern tropical rainforests, yet their pay is so low that they find themselves needing to practise *tavy* to live and to keep their families from starving. She then traces the outlines of a phenomenology of walking within the colonial context of employing Malagasy men to carry burdens (mainly colonial passengers) by palanquin. This set the stage for a literature that undervalued manual labour and overvalued the foreigners' gaze and 'slow-motion translation of nature into text' (p. 30). She ties this to contemporary conservation perspectives on labour by introducing the readers to several walking guides/conservation agents in Mananara-Nord who resurface at various times in the book as her thesis develops. Sodikoff then considers the contributions of forest concessions and timber labour to 'acquiescence and moments of compromise' that have led to forest reductions (p. 52). In the middle sections of the book, she considers how the conservation bureaucracy projects its own rank and value structure among Betsimisaraka peasants. This is followed by ethnographic fieldwork that describes the poor performance of that scheme in the hands of smallholders in cash-crop production who find themselves at a disadvantage on an uneven playing field controlled by corrupt politicians. In the later stages of the book, Sodikoff argues that Malagasy conceptions of heritage function to create, among other things, bonds between people and the land of their ancestors (p. 149). Most Malagasy consider status based not on how much money and power one has but on one's position in the family order of ascendants and descendants. This creates a completely different value system to the one that has come to them through acculturation – another hand of cards stacked against them. She then finishes with an ethnographic *déguerpissement* of her own, by carefully sweeping a path for the reader through the contradictions and dual loyalties with which the conservation agents must live. She takes no prisoners.

There is much to recommend in this book. Sodikoff walks in the footprints of her mentor, Gillian Feeley-Harnik, who, in *A Green Estate* (1991), has written one of the great historical ethnographies of Madagascar. Yet the author

of *Forest and Labor in Madagascar* has her own contributions to make to the anthropological literature. She takes her readers on a wonderful tour along the underbelly of conservation work in order to give them a clear understanding of how labour plays out in a political economy ruled mainly by conservation stakeholders. Sodikoff uses theory to guide the empirical results of her field studies, rather than as an engine hammering down points. For example, she uses Marx's materialist theory as a touchstone to help her derive insights about the contradictions of conservation, thereby avoiding the reduction of history, societal relations, and labour into a flattened Marxist space of victims and victimizers. Instead she brings the lives of Malagasy, with their limited choices, closer to her readers. Sodikoff has a clear sense of her audience, nurturing our interest in their lives by changing the pace and tenor of the narrative, integrating masterful descriptions of on-the-ground experiences with ethnohistorical scholarship and ethnographic findings.

There are few faults worth noting. She might have strengthened her argument by discussing the attack in the conservation literature upon Malagasy loyalty to kin (*fihavanana*) in the form of contriving local societal rules (*dina*) against conservation transgressors. But, in her defence, conservation policy makers only appropriated local rules to serve a conservation master after the ICDP experiments proved untenable. Sodikoff's field study was done during the ICDP period.

It is worth noting that Sodikoff is caught in something of a contradiction herself: that she is a cultural anthropologist who has spent time labouring in the conservation sector, and yet has a deep regard and concern for the sustainability of Malagasy lives *vis-à-vis* crushing poverty. Too few cultural anthropologists embrace this contradiction and try, as Sodikoff does, to lift their voices above a murmured string of curses aimed at conservation projects. She offers no way out of the contradiction other than embracing it and enlivening the conversation that needs to take place about 'people and parks' in the light of the failures of the last conversation that ground to a halt with the inept ICDP projects.

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ALCINDA HONWANA, *The Time of Youth: work, social change, and politics in Africa*, Sterling, VA: Kumarian Press (pb $27.95 – 978 1 56549 472 5). 2012, 240 pp.

Moving away from her earlier studies of young people in war-torn African nations, Honwana focuses on youth from four contrasting countries (Mozambique, South Africa, Senegal and Tunisia) to conceptualize how this social group is an agent for political change. Using the term 'waithood' to describe a liminal period experienced by youth anticipating adulthood, Honwana contributes to the emerging literature on youth in waiting. In waithood, youth are not idly awaiting change; they are industrious social actors. But as African youth engage in diverse activities to survive in precarious times, they face many inequalities. Such inequalities, Honwana argues, are far from being geographically defined, and a theme running through the book is the global experience of youth.