

# ***Global Visions, Local Landscapes: a Political Ecology of Conservation, Conflict, and Control in Northern Madagascar***

by **Lisa L. Gezon**. Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2005. xiii + 225 pp. Maps, illustrations, photographs, bibliography, index. \$26.95 (paper) and \$72.00 (cloth).

Book review by C. Kull

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A major trend in recent decades has been the proliferation of international conservation projects in biodiversity hotspots around Africa. This book is an excellent antidote to the all-too-common conceit that such projects are the dominant forces of change in the areas where they work. Through a rich ethnographic analysis of two villages adjacent to the limestone Ankarana massif in northwestern Madagascar, Lisa Gezon shows how global conservation efforts – embodied in the actions of local project agents – are just one force among many contesting access and control over territories and the natural resources they harbor.

The Antankarana are rice farmers and cattle herders sandwiched between conservation areas, shrimp farms, sugar cane plantations, and artisanal mines. Comprising both long-term residents and migrants, villages in this area recognize numerous layers of authority: clan elders, a traditional politico-religious leader, state administrative layers, and, newly, the conservation project. In Part I, Gezon places dense descriptions of two such Antankarana villages (land use, social structures, history) in the context of broader regional and national trends of social and political history.

The book’s strength lies in describing and analyzing the detailed dynamics of local politics. Part II highlights several specific events of conflict over access to natural resources: between farmers and herders, between the traditional leader and the conservation project, and between the traditional leader and different constituencies. In each case, Gezon shows, the outcomes reflect struggles over authority and jurisdiction, with participants calling on different ideological norms rooted in historical conflicts, kinship ties, identity claims, or modern day state structures. In her own words (p. 185), “visible landscapes result from many levels of deliberation – including contests by individuals over social position and the rights those positions entail.” The cogent analysis of these political factors in landscape formation, however, underplays the importance of underlying forces, like subsistence needs, export economies, or resource ecology, that create and shape the contested resource demands.

As Gezon chronicles the tensions between local residents, the traditional leader, and the WWF-sponsored park project, it becomes clear that conservation projects are far from all-powerful in disputes over resource access. Instead, conservationists must bring their global goals into the complex arenas of local politics, just as Antankarana villagers must react to

new ideological norms and material opportunities from outside. Gezon highlights this interpenetration of the categories ‘global’ and ‘local’, usually seen as separate, as a contribution to recent discussions on globalization and local places. She backs this theoretical discussion –on this and other topics like political ecology, the anthropology of conservation, and the conjunctural approach of social anthropology – with exhaustive reviews of the literature.

The book’s analytical contributions, together with its colorful ethnographic portrayal of a unique corner of the island, will make it useful to a variety of readers. Unfortunately, I was occasionally frustrated by the writing style, or by the presentation of certain unclear or incomplete details. For example, discussions of Madagascar’s history (folded into separate chapters on conservation, agricultural development, political change, and ethnic identity) are silent on the 1947 rebellion and on 1960s and 1970s conservation efforts. Such very minor details aside, *Global Visions and Local Landscapes* opens a much-needed window onto the local politics into which conservation projects unwittingly (or unwillingly) step.

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