

BOOK REVIEW

Mara J. Goldman. *Narrating Nature: Wildlife Conservation and Maasai Ways of Knowing*. Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 2020. xxi +272 pp. Maps. Illustrations. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$35.00 Paper. ISBN: 978-0-8165-4696-1.

Conservation practice and thought in Africa has tended to erase complexity—in narrative, in data, in power dynamics, and in mechanisms for deliberation and policy formation. This is Mara J. Goldman’s central premise in *Narrating Nature: Wildlife Conservation and Maasai Ways of Knowing*. To reintroduce complexity, Goldman takes readers on a territorial and conceptual tour of Maasailand in Tanzania and Kenya. Goldman’s work is based on decades of work in the region, and relies on participant observation, interviews, surveys, and the critical collection of ecological data.

In the service of this goal, Goldman experiments with writing three chapters as *inkiguenat* (singular *enkiguena*)—Maasai meetings. The book therefore alternates between chapters that seek to emulate an *enkiguena* in form and style, and only slightly more conventional chapters that guide readers through Maasailand to trouble historic and contemporary attempts by conservationists, scientists, and others to map, delineate, and explain the space and the people and animal in it.

The chapters written as *inkiguenat* are designed to “engage the reader in decolonial possibilities for knowing and being with nature” (21). They situate and describe—speaker by speaker—gatherings that never occurred in their totality, but that incorporate things said or written in and insights gleaned from, a variety of other contexts, as well as imagined contributions and dialogue that Goldman argues could only emerge if the power dynamics and assumptions currently shaping conservation discourse were at least partially dismantled or disturbed—as her work seeks to do. These imagined *inkiguenat*, Goldman contends, create new space for diverse actors to discuss a series of dilemmas or questions. These actors include Maasai of diverse statuses (based on age, gender, wealth, generation, education), state agents, ranch managers, and scientists.

Goldman contextualizes the social space occupied by each speaker in an *enkiguena*, and the result is an intriguing and illuminating set of discussions that readily allow readers to grasp the different ways of knowing and articulating around conservation questions, as well as the hierarchies and apprehensions that—even in this imagined space—permit some voices to enter more readily than others. In each constructed *enkiguena* Goldman demonstrates how across all of these dividing lines, Maasai can nonetheless correct, redirect, and redefine the claims of their interlocutors.

For example, in Chapter One “*Enkiguena* Agenda I, Where Are the Animals?,” researchers’ attempts to discuss seasonal spatial movements of cattle and livestock—coexistence of which is a central tension—run up against more refined, specific, and historically contingent vocabulary that Maasai participants deploy. Goldman maps some of this out in tables and figures, which also offer Maasai assessments of how and where animals move, and their cultural and social valuation by Massai communities (96–97, 221–24).


Similarly, in Chapter Three “*Enkiguena* Agenda II, Managing the Range for Wildlife and Livestock,” the lengthy meeting dialogue challenged what initially seemed to be consensus about dam construction. Although the meeting concluded with some reconvergence, the accountability that community members demanded through their interventions introduced a comparatively and imaginatively expansive number of factors for defining success when evaluating coexistence of wildlife and stock. The third *enkiguena* (Chapter Five) breaks down the seemingly straightforward concept of a corridor, interrogating its purpose, legal force, jurisdiction, and even spatial conception.

The intervening chapters further the work of the partially imagined dialogues. Chapter Two begins by taking readers on a calculatedly disorienting tour of one corner of Maasailand, and then offering a second account of the same landscape that is more conventional, reflecting administrative logics and formal structures. Chapter Four does something similar for the boundaries of Maasailand, showing the complex and changing Maasai delineations of space that themselves reflect the history of violent encounters with the colonial and national states, with all the resulting dispossession. The introduction and Chapter Six offer readers an insight into the diverse theoretical and methodological frameworks that inform Goldman’s work.

Narrating Nature is a delightful as well as disorienting book—indeed, much of the delight is induced by the deliberate methodological and narrative destabilization Goldman aims to achieve. The use of Maasai terms can be daunting, but productively so, in that they ask the reader to do more of the work than is usually demanded to begin to center as legitimate a different body of thought and practice.

In Chapter Six, Goldman discusses the principles of *enkiguena* (I found myself thinking these might have more helpfully appeared earlier in the text). These include beginning a conversation by only naming the problem, and not articulating possible solutions—rather, allowing a meandering discussion to unearth consensus. *Narrating Nature* is clearly written in this spirit. At times it feels that Goldman’s narrative and analytical hand is too light across the choppy set of narratives. These possess a certain aesthetic and counter-logic for the committed, but might deter others. Nonetheless, readers across a range of disciplines with interests in the environment and its history, conservation thought and practice, knowledge systems and indigeneity, and resource management in Africa, will gain much from Goldman’s distillation of two decades of investment in and thinking about a place and its people. *Narrating Nature* is a

challenging book, but immensely fruitful because of the possibilities it highlights and its gentle gestures toward alternative frameworks for work, thought, and dialogue.

Jeff Schauer 
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
Las Vegas, NV, USA,
Jeff.schauer@unlv.edu

doi:10.1017/asr.2024.152