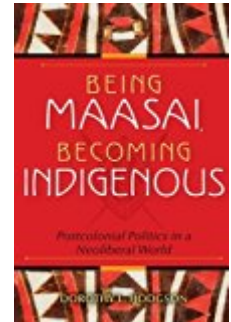


Dorothy Louise Hodgson. *Being Maasai, Becoming Indigenous: Postcolonial Politics in a Neoliberal World.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011. xix + 265 pp. \$24.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-253-22305-0.



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Dorothy Hodgson's *Being Maasai, Becoming Indigenous* is a comprehensive study of “indigenous” nongovernmental organizations among the Maasai of Tanzania. The book reflects the author’s extensive research among Maasai communities and offers important insights about civil society, the role of local NGOs and their international sponsors, and problems faced by local minority groups seeking economic and political justice vis-à-vis the larger national state. This book traces how Maasai organizations developed and transformed from groups that used the “indigenous” label based on their public recognition as “traditional pastoralists,” into active members of civil society seeking economic justice and political recognition from their national government. In so doing, the book describes tensions and personalities within and between various Maasai NGOs as they debated and practiced different strategies.

The Maasai are a superficially well-known people, particularly to American and European visitors to the game park areas of Tanzania and Kenya. Superficial in the sense that one is directed

(by tour groups and national governments) to look at Maasai’s “pastoral image,” as has been previously described by Dr. Hodgson, consisting of semi-naked warriors carrying spears and wearing long, braided, red-dyed hair. But the reality of Maasai life, brought to life in this book, is one of a relatively disempowered minority and marginalized group, whose political activities have included adopting the “indigenous people’s” mantle as a way to struggle for land rights and cultural autonomy. The book introduces us to a variety of players and constituencies within the Maasai community, including educated elites, women’s groups, and members of traditional Maasai society, presenting one of the very few “thick description” ethnographies of NGOs, of any type. Dr. Hodgson is not an invisible writer but an active participant in many of the discussions with the local organizers and activists; this owes to her own long experience as an anthropologist of Maasai and gender studies, and her work in development in Tanzania. Moreover, this study shows the range of strategies that indigenous and local NGOs must

adopt to achieve their goals vis-à-vis the Tanzanian state.

The introduction (“Positionings”) presents a useful overview of key theoretical issues in the study of NGOs and development. The author defines her framework of “political positioning and repositioning” in reference to Maasai activists and organizations. She reviews the literature on the indigenous rights movement, criticizing, for example, Arjun Appadurai, as she argues for salience of addressing the state. This is a point that the author returns to later in the book, and I appreciate it for combating the “failed states” orientation of African development issues.

Chapter 1, “Becoming Indigenous in Africa,” is a richly detailed account of Tanzanian Maasai, of whom Hodgson has written extensively (*Once Intrepid Warriors*, 2004; *Church of Women*, 2005). Here she recounts the development and history of an indigenous rights movement, particularly from the perspective of local activists interacting with international organizations and the UN community. The reader will find especially useful the section “From ‘First Peoples’ to Self Identification,” which describes the formation of indigenous peoples organizations among Maasai and how they underwent changes both in structure and purpose over time.

Chapter 2, “Maasai NGOs, The Tanzanian State, and the Politics of Indigeneity,” presents a sober and honest portrayal of Maasai organizations, particularly in its contrast of the aims and personal leadership of the organizations Kipoc and Inyuat e Maa. The author presents a concise history of Maasai relations with colonial and post-colonial regimes, including a critique of the post-Nyerere regime and the impact of World Bank neoliberal policies leading to the present time. The book describes how different Maasai organizations and leaders followed different paths. Some worked through international donors, such as Norwegian Aids, to lobby for indigenous land rights through the United Nations, while others

saw that this approach did not move national governments and altered their strategy to deal as constituents in the larger Tanzanian state. This really is a masterful encapsulation.

Chapter 3, “Precarious Alliances,” is the heart of the book, and tells us a great deal about the internal dynamics of Maasai indigenous organizations. This chapter explores in particular women’s roles and their relationship to the indigenous Maasai organizations. The author presents a very detailed and complex discussion of the challenges women face in political participation in African states. This may be even more pronounced in pastoral societies, which are notoriously patriarchal.

Chapter 4, “Re-Positionings: From Indigenous Rights to Pastoralist Livelihoods,” approaches problems encountered by Maasai and other East African pastoralists in terms of maintaining their pastoral economy, which requires mobility to feed and water livestock, in the face of increasing land restrictions. The Maasai of Tanzania and Kenya feel these pressures perhaps more acutely than any other pastoralist group in Africa, owing to their proximity to cities (Nairobi and Arusha) and national game parks which restrict Maasai movement. These factors have contributed to the transition to maize agriculture practiced by many Maasai today. In a very interesting section, Dr. Hodgson portrays the opposing strategies among several groups, some of whom have appealed to the United Nations via (largely) Scandinavian sponsors, while others pursued their objectives directly as an electoral constituency of the Tanzanian state. Here we learn of the national government’s reluctance to accept the “indigenous peoples” designation, fearing perhaps the unleashing of various ethnic groups in their country.

Chapter 5, “If We Had Our Cows,” presents community perspectives on change and development. It is a good summary of the book’s major themes and brings them directly into the present, giving voice to perceptions and anxieties about the future. It also places the Maasai example in

the larger context of African pastoralists (and other small and disenfranchised populations) in the global South. This chapter utilizes focus-group discussions, particularly among women's groups and ordinary, non-elite Maasai. The book concludes with a short chapter entitled, "What Do You Want?"

In summary, I found this a detailed, insightful, and accessible book. It challenges some of our core assumptions about development, political participation, and how "civil society" really works on the ground. It is also one of the very few ethnographies written about indigenous organizations, offering insights not generally found in works on development. This book would work well at both the undergraduate and graduate levels in a variety of disciplines, including anthropology, sociology, development studies, global studies, and African studies.

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