

BOOK REVIEW

Andrew Heffernan. *The Global Politics of Local Conservation: Climate Change and Resource Governance in Namibia*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2024. xix + 250 pp. Maps. Illustrations. Appendix. Bibliography. Index. \$139.99. Paper. ISBN: 9783031241796.

The central premise of *The Global Politics of Local Conservation: Climate Change and Resource Governance in Namibia* is that analysis of Community-Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) must be situated in global power relations. CBNRM is mostly studied in the existing literature as a domestic policy. In *The Global Politics of Local Conservation*, Andrew Heffernan reframes it as an iteration of global environmental governance by using the global assemblage approach from international relations (IR). He adeptly argues that this is an apt framing for unpacking the complex, multi-scalar, and multi-sited processes enfolded in Namibia—dynamics often overlooked in more state-centric theories in IR. The book troubles the notion that CBNRM can produce self-sustaining civil society organizations with autonomy over decision-making. Additionally, Heffernan seeks to empirically evaluate climate change’s impacts on CBNRM programming in Namibia, thereby addressing a key gap heretofore understudied in the literature concerning community-based conservation in Southern Africa.

Chapter One is the introduction and overview of the text. Chapter Two synthesizes the existing literature on CBNRM, and identifies a dearth of attention to climate change in this body of work, the gap Heffernan addresses with his book. Chapter Three describes the book’s use of the global assemblage literature from international relations as its theoretical framework, and connects the “flattened” ontology of global assemblages to the project’s methodology that “led me [Heffernan] to what awaited in the field rather than finding what I expected there to be” (65). The author adopted a standard qualitative research protocol, with data collected from 75 semi-structured interviews, four focus groups, participant observation, and policy and document analysis. His research sites were located in the often-studied Kunene region in Namibia, and encompass a wide swathe of participants, though with a noted English-language bias among these respondents.

Chapter Four is the first of Heffernan’s three empirical chapters, and explores the genesis of CBNRM in Namibia by tracing the program’s political and legal structures into the present day. The most notable contribution of this chapter is the characterization of CBNRM and its attendant conservancies as forms of local governance that fill gaps left vacant by the state, playing an important role outside of conservation alone. Chapter Five examines the empirical impacts of climate change in Namibia, with particular attention to its effects on CBNRM.

Heffernan finds that local people are well aware that climate change is impacting their lives, livelihoods, and landscapes. That they are motivated “to both adapt to and mitigate further harmful effects” (129) is intuitive but nonetheless useful to establish empirically.

Chapter Six is the book’s final empirical chapter and is the most novel and compelling of the three. In the chapter, Heffernan works through what can be glossed as his “global fashions” argument, which problematizes the “community” in community-based natural resources management. He notes that over the life of CBNRM programs, conservancies have never become self-sufficient, but are dependent on NGOs, international donors, and foreign governments. This dependency leaves them vulnerable to the vagaries of “shifting fashions” (189) in global biodiversity conservation, with the priorities of donors elevated above preferences on the ground in conservancies. The empirical example of trophy hunting policy is emblematic here. Though in Namibia trophy hunting is largely accepted, and even desirable, it is increasingly controversial internationally. As the policy “fashion” changes, the asymmetry in donor-grantee relations is revealed; organizations are hesitant to fund conservancies linked to trophy hunting, thus the policy decisions they prefer prevail. Despite local enthusiasm, conservancies increasingly abandon the practice to ensure continued funding. Finally, Chapter Seven reiterates the findings and outlines the book’s conclusions.

This book’s strengths lie in 1) addressing the climate change gap in CBNRM literature and 2) the argument that CBNRM should more appropriately be understood as International Community-Based Natural Resource Governance, in recognition of the essential way these programs are global assemblages informed by transnational policy desires. This is a novel contribution to our knowledge of so-called community-based conservation, though Heffernan is perhaps a bit too timid in describing what this reframing could mean for critical conservation studies, if it gains traction in the literature. His new conceptualization has the potential to reorient the field, and this could be articulated more forcefully.

While a thoughtful text overall, there are notable lapses. It is worth questioning the continued use of the term “ecotourism” throughout the book. Though Heffernan skillfully unpacks the ways in which “ecotourism” and “ecotourist” depoliticize the impacts of these behaviors, he never offers an alternative that is descriptive without engaging in greenwashing. “Ecotourism” allows for the glossing over the resource- and emissions-intensity of this sector—why use this framing at all? Similarly, though the book repeatedly gestures to their importance throughout, there is a lack of robust discussion of either the race or gender dynamics in CBNRM in Namibia.

The Global Politics of Local Conservation is a neatly organized and easily digestible book. The prose is straightforward and not bogged down in too much academic language beyond what is vital for the theoretical foundation of the text. This is in keeping with Heffernan’s stated goal of his audience being both academics and policy practitioners. His generous use of direct quotes centers respondent voices. This is to be commended for providing novel insights and elevating his co-producers of knowledge. Furthermore, the use of many maps, charts, and

other visual aids is helpful overall and makes the book accessible beyond Namibia experts. This is a useful, empirically focused text for readers interested in critical climate/conservation studies, global environmental governance, and international development.

Annette A. LaRocco 
Florida Atlantic University
Boca Raton, FL, USA
laroccoa@fau.edu
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