

## BOOK REVIEWS

## Contested Nature: Promoting International Biodiversity with Social Justice in the Twenty-First Century

STEVEN BRECHIN, PETER WILSHUSEN,  
CRYSTAL FORTWANGLER, AND PATRICK  
WEST (EDITORS)  
STATE UNIVERSITY PRESS OF NEW YORK,  
ALBANY, 2003  
321 PP. \$59.50 HARDCOVER, \$19.95  
PAPERBACK

REVIEWED BY DAN BROCKINGTON

In 1991 West and Brechin published *Resident People and National Parks* in the hope it would “stimulate and mobilize a more deeply felt concern, a conversion of thinking from blind ecological imperative to more honest recognition of painful moral dilemma, and a sincere desire to rectify the injustice of the past.” *Contested Nature* is a fitting successor to this book, addressing these same issues in a more comprehensive and systematic fashion with four theoretical chapters and case studies from around the world. It touches upon diverse aspects of current conservation dilemmas including exclusion and eviction, the institutional difficulties of complex conservation organizations, private conservation areas, ecotourism, the reification of communities, community level conflicts, deforestation, bio-prospecting and more. As its title suggests, the works in the volume are geared towards identifying the shortcomings of international conservation, while seeking to influence policy and practice in ways that promote biodiversity with social justice. A chapter on complex organizations and governance regimes suggests specific strategies for achieving this vision.

*Contested Nature* is an authoritative statement of the current position of writings on social science and conservation and I strongly recommend it to researchers, practitioners and students. Written in an accessible and engaging style it is full of new ideas and accounts of the latest practices and problems that will form a valuable compendium for people wrestling with these problems. If *Resident People and National Parks* was a ‘bible’ for some activists (to quote a consultant working with the IUCN) then perhaps they now have an old and new testament.

But, with apologies to its authors, I wish to use the opportunity of this review to make some wider reflections on the field as a whole. *Contested Nature*, as the current state of the art, prompts a number of ideas as to where we can go from here. The first concerns engagement. I fear that the ideas presented in *Contested Nature* will not influence the policy and practice of international conservation as much as it ought to. In part this is because it does not engage with natural science literature. With less than 3% of its citations in serious scientific journals it characterizes the field by preaching an engagement with conservation scientists it does not itself practice.<sup>1</sup> This lack of integration works in other ways. The editors’ major contributions which came out in *Society and Natural Resources* in 2002 have no citations on the Web of Science, which means they have not yet been noted by natural scientists. That sort of material is too good not to come out in natural science journals.

The second concerns analysis. The book clearly argues that devolution is a necessary but insufficient step for locally rooted conservation. So now we need to ask for whom does devolution ‘work’ and what does it achieve? Indeed perhaps the real question here is how does democracy work/operate at different scales? Democratization is generally thought to be a good thing, but the practice of democracy is remarkably varied, it covers a plethora of forms of government. We require, in our writings about conservation and society, a greater awareness of the variety of forms democracy can take, and is expected to take, in the societies in which it is being encouraged.

The third concerns systematic understanding of aspects of conservation’s impact on society. As the conclusion of *Contested Nature* points out, “the

conservation literature is rapidly growing but lacks systematic analysis" (page 264). One of the main gaps here is the failure systematically to examine social and economic impacts of protected areas around the world. On what basis, for example, can we extrapolate findings about the impacts of individual reserves or parks to the rest of the nation? Few studies, if any, are based on randomly selected sites. Similarly we do not know how or why the studies in *Contested Nature* were selected, or what brought the collection together (this is a significant flaw). Perhaps all we can say for sure is that they are representative of the interests of a community of researchers at a particular time. We cannot say whether they are representative of a country or region's conservation policy. We could be more systematic. Databases outlining the number and location of protected areas provide a sampling frame and a means by which we could compare that which we have written about, to that which exists and find out where the islands of knowledge are, and where the oceans of ignorance are. This could become incorporated into the current world database so that it made more mention of the social consequences of conservation. We could also examine the broad relationships between protected areas and indices of poverty and well being at national and international levels.

Finally *Contested Nature* repeats a persistent error in social science writings about conservation which is also particularly prevalent in sustainable development writings generally: that unjust conservation does not work. This oft repeated mantra conflates social justice as end in itself and as a pragmatic means of achieving conservation goals. This can lead to fine sounding, but ultimately confused, statements such as Brechin's assertion in the introduction to *Contested Nature* that "conservation will not succeed in the long run if it is built on the backs of the poor. It must maintain the moral high ground or it will lose its soul." (pp. xi-xii). This is a worthy ideological position, but not a particularly sound empirical one. Oppression and injustice have been sustained repeatedly for centuries, and continue to be sustained. Asserting that inequitable states of affairs cannot last stops us from asking when they might be changed or how. What we need to ask now is

under what circumstances oppression is effectively maintained, and in what circumstances the rural poor can effectively oppose unjust conservation.

I hope that these ideas will promote conservation with social justice, as *Contested Nature* will itself do. Knowledge by itself will not be enough however. We must find the common ground, the innovative spirit, and the political will to help rural people become effective partners in conservation that provides them with equitable benefits while effectively protecting biodiversity.

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Dan Brockington, School of Geography and Environmental Studies, St. Hughes College, Oxford

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> I counted the following papers: *Conservation Biology* 7; *Science* 3; *Bioscience* 2; *Environmental Conservation* 2; *Oryx* 2; *Nature* 1; *Annual Review of Ecology and Systematics* 1. Zerner's *People, plants and justice* has similar proportions from natural science journals.

## Lost Landscapes and Failed Economies: The Search for a Value of Place

THOMAS POWER

ISLAND PRESS, WASHINGTON, DC, 1996  
295 pp. \$35.00 HARDCOVER

REVIEWED BY BARBARA J. DILLY

While this book is firmly based in the rhetoric of academic economics, Power's local economies and popular folklore makes it an excellent text for economic anthropology. Specifically he focuses on the ways in which folklore expresses local economic decision making wisdom with regards to environmental resources. These issues are brought to life through descriptive ethnography of the diversity of political and economic interests in American extractive industries.

But this work is not merely descriptive. Power advocates the demystification of two competing modes of thought in local economic behavior. One is the ideological bias of academic economic science that assumes absolute truth. The other is the uncritical bias of naïve folk economics that mistrusts expertise external to local communities. This demystification is motivated by his objective of helping local people better understand how they make their decisions so that local economic policies are neither misled nor distorted.

Three basic assumptions inform his arguments in the body of the book: 1) popular folk economics that assume natural resource extraction industries are critical to economic development are incomplete and misleading; 2) contrary to popular belief, people seek high-quality residential environments over economic opportunities; and 3) business development follows labor, not vice versa.

Environmental economic issues (i.e., agriculture, ranching, fishing, mining, and logging) are primarily rural in context, where folk wisdom persists in political and economic decision-making. These extractive activities are centers of economic and environmental conflicts. Power argues that it may be more productive to view these conflicts from the perspective of scientific vs. folk economics rather than as political interest group conflicts. This new perspective, I think, is his main contribution to economic anthropology and environmental scholarship.

According to Power, the various interests representing extractive industries and environmental protection are often deadlocked. He proposes a different framework for engaging in civil discourse to examine local realities. Scientific economics can be employed to demystify the significance of the role of extractive industries at local levels. In most cases, argues Power, that role is not as significant as many locals assume. Scientific economics can also identify the significance of protected landscapes on local economies. In most cases protected areas and ecotourism contribute much more to economic vitality than is locally believed.

Power argues that it is people's commitment to local environments that influences local economic agendas. Therefore, environmental protection is not

only central to economic decision making, but the most central resources in the local economic base. When local people begin to see the protection and preservation of their natural landscapes as essential to economic development, and not in opposition to it, acrimonious conflicts are transformed into opportunities for collaboration.

He states that "there is little evidence to support the idea that vigorous protection of environmental quality limits economic opportunity" (p. 22). It does mean economic transition, however, which is often disruptive to local economies without public policies to enable and energize adaptations. He identifies the local factors that reveal the instability of income from extractive industries. He also shows the relative stability of the service industry in providing sources of employment in the U.S. economy. Power is not just touting low paying service jobs as the solution to rural unemployment. His focus is on the kind of service goods and services that offer entrepreneurial opportunities. He provides a "bootstrap economic development" model that contributes to greater local self-sufficiency and attracts nonemployment income flow to the local economy.

Power supports these arguments with economic models that non-economists can read and understand. In each of his chapters, he reviews basic academic models of economic behavior and applies them to local economic activities. By building an environmental model of the local economy, Power includes an aesthetic value of social and natural resources. He creates a broader vision of a total economy that includes noncommercial resources that contribute to and support the local economic base. Through these more comprehensive models of economic activity, he shows that the vitality of local economics is a better goal than just measures of quantitative growth.

Working as an applied economic anthropologist in an agricultural community in northeast Iowa, I've organized local stakeholders to read Power's book. Economic opportunities in this community have diminished steadily, but local efforts to develop ecotourism have been met with cynicism in this community. If Power is correct, however, the stable residential environment and the high quality of natural environment amenities in this community

suggest that the cultural and intellectual inertia that exists can be overcome by glimpsing a new vision. Rather than fearing that things will get worse, people can learn to gain confidence in their communities and nurture their commitments to them as active economic development strategies at the grass roots.

I recommend this book for all economic anthropologists engaged in economic development issues in rural communities. Power thinks more like an anthropologist than an economist, but his academic economic science rhetoric brings a much needed perspective to rural economic development and environmental preservation from the grass roots.

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Barbara J. Dilly, Department of Anthropology,  
Creighton University

## Material Culture and Sacred Landscape: The Anthropology of the Siberian Khanty

PETER JORDAN

ALTA MIRA PRESS, WALNUT CREEK, CA,  
2003

308 PP. \$80 HARDCOVER, \$29.95 PAPERBACK

REVIEWED BY THOMAS J. PLUCKHAHN

It seems safe to assume that I am not the only archaeologist who experiences something akin to a pang of longing when I have occasion to pick up an older ethnography. Many of the ethnographers of the early and middle twentieth century devoted almost as much attention to the material culture and environment of the people they studied as the people themselves. For all their shortcomings, these early ethnographies presented a richness of detail that is too often missing in contemporary works of cultural anthropology: settlement maps, illustrations of house patterns, accounts of subsistence techniques, and descriptions of everyday material objects. I was thus perhaps predisposed to have a favorable opinion of

Jordan's book and its close attention to Khanty material culture. But this is not a work of vulgar materialism, nor is it a return to the simple descriptive style of many past ethnographies. His primary concern is describing how the Khanty material culture, including landscapes, is 'enculturated' (i.e., given symbolic meaning) through physical transformation or incorporation into the symbolism of social practices.

Jordan draws from a number of theoretical strands in an effort to find a middle ground between cultural materialist ("socioecological") and interpretive ("semiotic") approaches to hunter-gatherer studies. By his own admission, however, the middle ground he proposes leans heavily toward interpretive theories of material culture, which he sees as a corrective to the materialist approaches that have traditionally dominated this field (p. 22). While the terms he uses may be unfamiliar to some readers, his theoretical discussion is clear (free of much of the jargon inherent in the primary works) and even-handed (pointing out some of the limitations and criticisms of these approaches).

Jordan contextualizes his ethnographic material in broad temporal and spatial scales, placing the Khanty in a macro-regional, *longue durée* historical context. This history is phrased in the language and perspective of world systems theory, while extending discussion and credence to its many critiques. While readers anxious to get into the details of the ethnography may wonder why this wasn't incorporated into his earlier theoretical discussion, as an archaeologist I appreciated the inclusion of an extended historical context. World systems theory is appropriate for understanding this history, given that the Khanty paid fur in tribute to the Tatar Khans during the medieval period, were later incorporated into fur tax systems of the Russian and Soviet empires, and today occupy a landscape valued for its mineral resources.

Having dispensed with the historical context, Jordan turns to the heart of the ethnography. In addition to material from a 10-month field study of communities on one tributary of the River Ob', he makes good use of other scholarly works and ethno-historic data. He reviews many of the fundamental aspects of Khanty society, including gender roles, kinship, settlement patterns, and subsistence practices.

The bulk of his ethnographic material, however, focuses on the significance of animals and landscapes in Khanty cosmology and ritual. These discussions nicely illustrate the role that human agents play in the regeneration of nature through ritual practices. More specifically, he demonstrates that the creation and use of material artifacts within the landscape plays an integral part in the continual renegotiation of the relationship between people and animals.

The final part of his discussion describes the enculturation of place and space, respectively. By the former, Jordan refers to how individuals are socialized within the material spaces inhabited by the community, as well as how specific places in the landscape are enculturated by the transformation or deposition of artifacts and by the construction of structures. He traces the history of one community through four generations of visits to ritual sites. Jordan uses the phrase “enculturation of space” to mean the wider appropriation of the landscape through patterns of land tenure and territoriality.

His concluding chapter is short and somewhat redundant with the shorter summaries presented at the end of each of the other chapters. I would have preferred a longer synthesis that integrated the theoretical discussion in the early chapters with data presented later. However, my main complaint is with the quality of the text, which at times appeared as if it was printed on a poor quality desktop printer. I was also distracted by the frequent use of bulleted text, but many readers will no doubt appreciate having key points highlighted.

Aside from these few minor problems, Peter Jordan’s book is a major accomplishment. By integrating the study of material culture into an ethnographic analysis of a contemporary society, Jordan has produced a work that should be of interest to a broad array of social scientists and theorists. Ethnographers will appreciate this account of a little-studied society in a portion of the world that is relatively poorly documented. Scholars of hunting and gathering societies may enjoy the book for its purely descriptive value, but they—as well as researchers with an interest in environmental studies and religion—will no doubt be impressed by the attention Jordan devotes to the manner in which the Khanty give meaning

to the landscape. Social theorists will be interested to read an example of how abstract concepts like “structuration” and “praxis” can be made concrete. Finally, archaeologists will find an ethnography that not only pays attention to material culture, but does so in a theoretically sophisticated manner. In short, this is a book that I highly recommend.

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Thomas J. Pluckhahn, Department of Anthropology,  
University of Oklahoma

## **The Hot and the Cold: Ills of Humans and Maize in Native Mexico**

J. M. CHEVALIER AND A. SÁNCHEZ BAIN  
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO PRESS, TORONTO,  
2002

344 PP. \$65.00 HARDCOVER

REVIEWED BY CAMERON ADAMS

In *The Hot and the Cold* the authors enter an ongoing debate regarding the “humoral system” in Latin American ethnomedical systems championed by Foster (e.g., 1994) and López Austin (e.g., 1980 and 1986) respectively. The central thesis of this work is that George Foster’s theory of the humoral origin of the Latin American hot/cold system is incorrect. In addition, they argue that the basic hot/cold system should be modified to include a heliotropic model. This shifting focus plagues the book and weakens the authors’ argument throughout.

Chevalier and Sánchez Bain, following López Austin, take the position that the hot/cold system in Latin America is of pre-Columbian origin, not a Spanish colonial artifact. The claims against the Spanish humoral source are threefold. First, the authors argue, the humoral system has no “humors.” Because there is no reference to blood, phlegm and

the biles, nor to air, earth, wind and fire, the system must not be humoral. They then argue that, furthermore, there is no wet/dry continuum to consider alongside the hot/cold and that this is of prime importance. Foster's (1994) position is that the system has been reduced over time via transmission from colonizers to colonized and from individual to individual. Chevalier and Sánchez Bain categorically do not accept this possibility and suggest that the acceptance of this position is racist because it denies New Worlders the ability to perform abstract and complex thought. Instead, they assume that the humoral system would have been transferred carefully from specialist to specialist. In Foster's model, the system was transferred from the Spanish to the general population, with the specialists holding on to their traditional system, while the secular masses picked up a bit here and there.

Second, the authors contest Foster's argument that the medical system is empirically based. They claim that if the humoral categories of medicinals and illnesses are learned, the system can not be empirical. Thus, they argue, Foster is wrong. It seems that the authors' faulty logic misses the point—while one may label diarrhea, for example, as a "cold" illness, this has no effect on the empirical observation that a particular plant cures it. Furthermore, they ignore the work of Matthews (1983) who demonstrates how inconsistent the ethnomedical system is, which allows it to conform to disjunctures between empirical observations and theories. This suggests that the system is a recent adoption as a theoretical framework to explain observed results.

Third, it is suggested by Chevalier and Sánchez Bain that according to Foster's model, there is one perfect and rarely attained thermal value for health and that any activity is risky "to the point that a stable health condition becomes painfully rare (Foster 33-35)" (p. 17). In fact, on the pages cited here from Foster's work, he discusses how hot and cold insults to body equilibrium usually do not precipitate illness unless they are extreme. I will further discuss this issue below.

One of the goals of this book consists of developing a "heliotropic," as opposed to the basic humoral, model of health. By heliotropic the authors refer to

a cyclical model that not only varies in the course of the day, as the term suggests, but also over the lifetime of the entity in question. Here lies the book's strong point. Rich ethnographic data is explored in the realms of health and illness, agricultural beliefs and practices, and mythology. Health and agricultural practice are shown to be interrelated in very direct ways while the inclusion of multiple versions of the corn myth adds to the ethnographic documentation and helps support facets of the heliotropic model. Also included are a series of related graphic models that are informative, easy to understand, and distill the text quite nicely.

However, the authors conflate two distinct realms of illnesses, naturalistic and personalistic, in stating, "the Nahuas and Popolucas do not make a clear distinction between health, milpa production, and considerations of morality and spirituality" (pp. xv-xvi). While this may be the case, no evidence is given to support this statement for all health-related issues. The reader must accept this on faith, while distinctions between secular medicine with a naturalistic focus and specialist medicine with a personalistic focus have been well explained for other regions of Mesoamerica (e.g., Berlin and Berlin 1996).

It is the denial of these two distinct facets of medical etiology that is the source of disagreement between Foster and the authors of this text. Naturalistic illnesses, the ones Foster addresses with the humoral hypothesis, are cured according to secular models as practiced by the secular public. These etiologies and cures rarely call upon mythological models. It is simply known or believed that this or that medicine cures this or that disease. Only when asked to explain how a cure works, is the humoral system invoked (Berlin and Berlin 1996; Casagrande 2002). However, by drawing in agricultural and moral motifs the authors focus on personalistic illness and causation; ultimately, they are arguing around Foster, not with him.

Regardless, the heliotropic model is presented as "health as moving equilibrium" (p. xvi) and based on a "threefold law of balance, cyclic motion and growth" (p. 80). The claim is that over the course of a day, and one's life, there exists a moving ideal thermal point that can be achieved through the normal

heating and cooling aspects of regular life activities. It is only when one makes a distinct change from the moving ideal that illness befalls an individual. It is argued that this is fundamentally different than the humoral model of an ideal thermal point. However, as noted above there are accepted normal variations from the ideal in the humoral model that do not precipitate illness. The heliotropic model, instead of an alternate to the humoral, is merely a more fine-grained explanation of the differing heat qualities of an individual over the course of a day and throughout their lifetime.

As mentioned above, the authors present as damning to the humoral model its lack of a wet/dry component. They then proceed to spill a lot of ink building an argument for the strong salience and ubiquity of a hydrological aspect of traditional concepts of health. It is fundamental to the heliotropic model as stated and is well documented. Instead of hitting the target of "Foster as straw man," this salvo lands at the authors' own feet. Moreover, much of the ethnographic data presented is irrelevant to the argument regarding the hot/cold or wet/dry systems. Jabs are taken at cognition-focused classificatory systems, yet not a single author is cited and Foster is cited out of context or in misleading ways. Finally, little relevant data is brought to bear on whether the humoral health system is pre-Columbian or of colonial influence.

In conclusion, this book's point is shifting, its scope not unified and its logic peccable. If you are interested in compelling ethnographic descriptions of the Gulf Nahuas and Popolucas, I suggest reading the middle chapters of this book. If you are interested in entering the debate about the hot/cold health system in Latin America, I suggest reading Foster and López Austin.

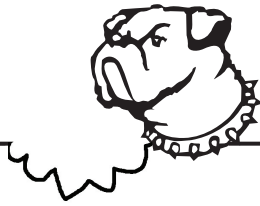
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Cameron Adams, Department of Anthropology,  
University of Georgia

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LAST BITE



## No Fish Oil No Footnotes

You know how the juiciest information was always in the footnotes? The reflection that brought the author's point into focus? The digression that stimulated a vital idea? Footnotes add a third dimension of thought to the 2-D page—the original 'hot link'. Sadly, we rarely see our footnote friends on the page any more.

Figure 1. Frequency of footnotes in published articles (guesstimated)

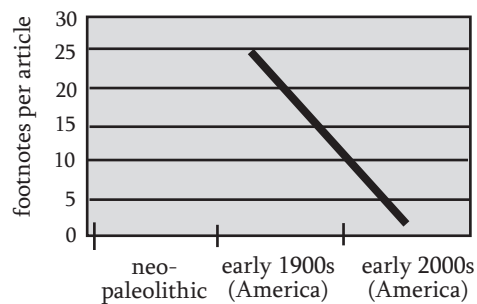
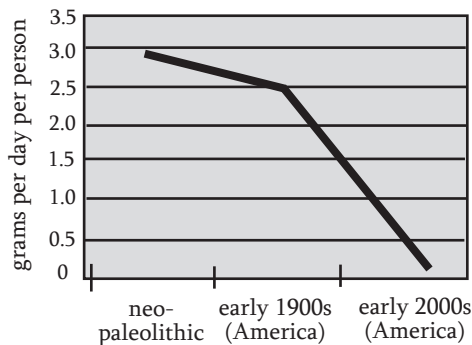


Figure 2. Daily consumption of fish oil



You may have thought that the demise of the footnote was due to laziness, to declining holism or lack of philosophism. But the graphic depictions recently unearthed and reproduced here (Figures 1 and 2) reveal the UNDERLYING CAUSE.<sup>1</sup>

Act now to  
**Save Our  
 Intellectual  
 Environments**<sup>2</sup>



*Drink your cod liver oil girls and boys!*

<sup>1</sup> For a discussion of avoiding type II errors, see Ecological Understanding by Pickett, Kolasa and Jones (1994: 45).

<sup>2</sup> Donations to the Revive The Footnote, Eat More Fish Oil fund may be mailed to Felice S. Wyndham, c/o The Journal of Ecological Anthropology.

