

DOROTHY L. HODGSON:

*Being Maasai, Becoming Indigenous: Postcolonial Politics in a Neoliberal World.*

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Dorothy Hodgson's latest book, *Being Maasai, Becoming Indigenous*, draws on over two decades of experience working and researching among the Maasai of Tanzania, to explore the rise and fall of their involvement with the international indigenous rights movement. Hodgson documents how the Maasai "became indigenous", a concept more commonly associated with "original inhabitants" or "first peoples" in the Americas and Australia, as a politically viable strategy to restate long-standing grievances against the Tanzanian state in a language that was internationally recognized.

In two respects this latest work expands on themes that Hodgson first explored in her debut book, *Once Intrepid Warriors: Gender, Ethnicity and the Cultural Politics of Maasai Development* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001). First, Hodgson continues to challenge the stereotype of the Maasai as the last vestige of a vanishing "traditional" Africa, culturally conservative and unwilling to change. In *Once Intrepid Warriors* this was achieved by showing how Maasai ethnic identity was influenced and changed by Western development, which was enacted by the colonial and post-colonial state, over the course of the twentieth century. This theme is further developed in *Being Maasai, Becoming Indigenous*, where the dynamism of Maasai identity is shown through the ways in which Maasai constantly debate and reformulate what it means to be not only Maasai, but pastoralist, citizen and subject at the local, national and global level.

Second, Hodgson continues to emphasize the importance of the state in the lives of Tanzanian Maasai, through the connections between development and the exercise of state power. The 2001 work focused on the colonial and post-colonial state through to the mid-1990s; this current work brings us up to date. We are given a glimpse into the prospects and limits of transnational advocacy in an age of economic liberalization and democratization, but are reminded that the nation-state continues to shape "political possibilities and positionings in transnational activism" (pp. 214–5). This is an important and significant part of Hodgson's work. Rather than accept a rhetoric that presupposes the demise of the nation-state in a globalized age (Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, Minneapolis, 1996), she demonstrates the continuing relevance of the state through the changing terms of Maasai political debate. The Maasai "became indigenous", attracting international support and finance for their cause, but failed to win national recognition. As Hodgson concedes, the absence of a contemporary colonial population, alongside long histories of conquest, assimilation, migration and movement in Africa, makes the criteria for claiming indigeneity politically problematic (p. 3). The Maasai claim to "indigenous rights" was then replaced with the desire to "secure pastoralist livelihoods", earning them a more productive, though still challenged, relationship with the state (p. 215). In light of these two common themes, it is somewhat surprising that there is not a stronger focus in this current work on gender, which pervades all of Hodgson's previous works (*Once Intrepid Warriors; The Church of Women: Gendered Encounters between Maasai and Missionaries*, Bloomington, 2005).

The book is divided into chapters that move spatially through Maasai advocacy over the last two decades. We start at the macro level, tracing the interaction between African groups, not just the Maasai, but also other pastoralist and hunter-gatherer communities from all over the continent, with the international indigenous rights movement, and their campaign for recognition as indigenous peoples at the United Nations (UN). In chapter 2 the focus narrows slightly, moving to consider two case studies of Maasai NGOs, comparing their strategies and agendas for advocacy in relation to their participation in the indigenous rights movement. Throughout the chapter there is a clear tension between the usefulness of “becoming indigenous” for securing outside funding from international donors, and its limits within Tanzania, where state hostility to indigenous rights prevented meaningful engagement between the government and Maasai activism. The Maasai come fully into focus in chapter 3, where there is an interesting discussion of the politics of representation between and among Maasai NGOs. This chapter clearly benefits from Hodgson’s interdisciplinary approach, where she combines historical and anthropological perspectives to produce an ethnography of Maasai political organizations, processes and movements. We see how the NGO sector is beset by issues of class, generation and gender, and how externally created developmental concepts, such as indigenous rights, interact with, and sometimes challenge existing ideas of community and development. In chapter 4 the stark reality of the failure of the Maasai claim to indigeneity is revealed, and we are shown how Maasai activists reframed the terms of their struggle in a language more acceptable to the Tanzanian government, scoring limited concessions from it.

In the final chapter, the focus of the work narrows even further, and brings individual Maasai men, women and children into the picture. Rather than NGOs and Maasai activists, we meet the people in whose name the claim to indigeneity was made, and Hodgson attempts to sum up the effects of twenty years of Maasai activism on the lives of everyday Maasai. While the discussion is interesting as an insight into the perception of NGOs amongst ordinary Maasai, it is also the most revealing of the possibilities and limits of transnational advocacy. While the informants of her work display an ambivalent attitude towards NGOs and the work they have done, it is clear that they have helped some Maasai diversify, secure and improve their livelihoods in some small ways (pp. 182–209). However, it is also clear that Maasai advocacy has failed to challenge the structural inequalities that they face within the Tanzanian state (pp. 179–80). Overall this serves as an important reminder of the ongoing struggle for political representation and recognition of rights and resources faced by marginalized pastoralist communities throughout Africa.

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