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"Turbulent Terrains: The Contradictions and Politics of Decentralised Conservation"

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The most salient feature of conservation today is contradiction. Conservation is simultaneously characterized by decentralisation and recentralisation, deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation, deregulation and reregulation. At the heart of these contradictions are reconfigurations of state-society relations, provoking unprecedented risk but also opportunity for rural communities. Paramount to these processes is the threat of "recentralizing while decentralizing" (Ribot et al. 2006). Governments decentralise authority while simultaneously finding ways to retain central control and maintain their political and/or economic interests. Recentralising while decentralising especially defines Tanzania's most recent decentralisation scheme, Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs). This paper contributes to the debate about WMAs and the nature of decentralisation. The WMAs, I argue, represent risk but also opportunity for rural communities. Amidst the contradictions and conundrum of decentralising and recentralising, new political spaces invariably emerge, wherein novel alliances, political community, and resistance unfold. In cases like Enduimet and Lake Natron WMAs, this has translated into appropriating and redeploying WMAs in ways that privilege community interests. Notwithstanding the significant constraints that continue jeopardizing most WMAs, the cases reviewed in this paper offer some hope for WMAs' turbulent terrains. (Text from author's abstract)

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