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"The Displacement of Insufficiently 'Traditional' Communities: Local Fisheries in the Pantanal"

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The rise of community-based conservation (CBC) from the 1980s, heralded a paradigm shift in the global conservation and development agenda, increasing the engagement of conservationists towards the cause of the needs of Indigenous people. As a result, many international agreements were implemented, such as Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention (1989) and the Convention on Biological Diversity (1992). In Brazil, a National Policy for the Sustainable Development of Traditional Peoples and Communities (PNDSPCT) was introduced in 2007, which came to recognise the rights and existing sustainable use practices of "traditional communities." This paper uses data from a long-term ethnography of both the local people and the conservation agenda in the Pantanal wetland, Brazil, to discuss how environmentalists used the PNDSPCT to justify the displacement of local people by claiming they do not fit in any traditional community category, and instead should be called "rural poor." Interview-based evidence from these communities shows the contrary—pointing out a long history of occupation in the region, customary practices that guarantee sustainable use and self-recognition as a culturally differentiated group. The results are used to explore how narrow notions of indigenous identity have been used to oppress communities in Brazil and in other parts of the global south. The paper concludes that a flexible and fluid categorisation of traditional peoples or indigenous groups should be used in order to avoid reinforcing the already oppressive restrictions placed on local communities that are close to or part of conservation initiatives. (Text from author's abstract)

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