

## Rhetorics of Endangerment

### Cultural Difference and Development in International Ape Conservation Discourse

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The Great Ape Survival Project (GRASP)—a United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP) partnership that includes twenty-three Great Ape range states, donor countries, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and private sector organizations—unveiled its first educational exhibit at the Uganda National Museum in Kampala on 28 June 2006. As part of the exhibit, text and image displays prepared by UNESCO and France's Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle undertook two rhetorical strategies in promoting the conservation of Uganda's eastern chimpanzees and mountain gorillas. The first stressed the economic threats that hunting, disease, deforestation, and agricultural pest control pose to endangered apes, as well as the hope that GRASP's efforts to "sustainably develop" local communities could successfully remedy these threats. The second strategy summarized a body of anthropological research on great apes that stresses apes' capacity for "culture" via the shared use of tools and medicines. In particular, one exhibit showcase compared the use of medicinal plants by chimpanzees to indigenous Ugandan healing practices.<sup>1</sup>

As a conservation initiative developed through negotiations between governments, primatologists, business, and NGOs, GRASP aims to develop a human-centered approach to the conservation of gorillas, orangutans, chimpanzees, and bonobos that recognizes how war, poverty, and disease complicate conservation efforts. Because of the often antagonistic relationships between indigenous groups, national elites, and ape conservationists since the successes of African and Asian independence movements of the mid-twentieth century, GRASP's organizational operational documents focus intently on local solutions, enumerating a variety of ways in which "conservation initiatives . . . are of mutual benefit to [human] communities and great apes" (UNEP/GRASP, "Human Dimension"). As exemplified in the museum exhibition, the notions of sustainable development and the connection of

indigenous cultures to apes and their environments are central to constructing this human-centered approach to conservation.

Focusing on constructions of sustainable development and cultural difference, I locate the rhetoric of the Great Ape Survival Project within a genealogy of technocratic languages developed in internationally negotiated environmental treaties, conventions, and declarations over the past three decades. Such documents should be understood as important genres within what, in an era of neoliberal capitalism and global governance, constitutes a *literature of the global*. Rather than taking the "world literature" and area studies models that have predictably institutionalized new canons of "great works" in postcolonial literary studies, excavating the literature of the global opens criticism to a variety of types of texts—from journalism and novels to software, advertising, activist manifestos, and global legal instruments—that trace how neoliberal formations inscribe diverse and competing visions of the category of the global.<sup>2</sup> This is an important corrective not just for postcolonial studies, but also for ecocritical models that, as Cara Cilano and Elizabeth DeLoughrey argue, were compromised by the insularity of literary objects in the 1990s (75). Such a model ensures interdisciplinary linkages—linking culture to political economy, science and technology, and international law—in order to understand how changing conceptions of difference in translocal and global forums shape the ongoing obstacles to decolonization (Huggan and Tiffin 7).

Within the generic conventions of United Nations program documents and their related international legal instruments, the naming of those at risk and in need of redress by the expansion of various types of rights takes center stage. In the case of GRASP, however, organizational documents and operational statements that rhetorically figure indigenous peoples and apes as endangered by modernity reinforce neocolonial approaches to conservation even as they attempt to speak in the interests of those least privileged by international economic and political arrangements. The nexus of "development" and "culture" in the Uganda exhibit is indicative of larger trends attempting to incorporate the interests of indigenous groups and so-called developing nations in international environmental and development discourse. Responding in part to a new politics of biodiversity initiated by indigenous activists against internationally sponsored nature reserves, international law has essentialized the cultural difference of the indigene in an attempt to incorporate the interests of indigenous groups in global structures of conservation aid. GRASP is one of the many instances in which aid

continues to operate in a top-down structure, leaving Western NGOs, primatologists, national elites, and development experts to haphazardly attempt to enlist indigenous communities in global conservation structures.

### Global Conservation Models: From Environmentalist Universality to Sustainable Development

I situate the organizational and operational documents of GRASP within a larger international law literature of species conservation—which includes UN declarations and conventions, academic articles on international law and policy, agency directives, NGO proposals, and statements of national and international officials—that experienced a broad discursive shift in the 1990s. As I briefly sketch below, international instruments for conservation moved away from a model of “environmentalist universality” stressing universal human responsibility for conservation to a “sustainable development” discourse that emphasized cultural and economic difference.

In his work on black Columbian resistance to neoliberal environmental policy, Arturo Escobar outlines the four competing conservationist discourses during the 1990s. The perspectives of international governance institutions were represented largely in terms of “resource management,” viewing the environment in terms of global accounts of environmental crisis and economic need. States approached conservation in terms of “sovereignty,” attempting to safeguard ecological resources for national development purposes and to maintain control over land and economic activities within their borders. Southern NGOs adopted a discourse of “biodemocracy” or resistance to global standardization of conservation and economic development. Finally, social movements acted in terms of “cultural autonomy,” emphasizing heritage land claims and traditional cultures of land use (Escobar 53–82). Although different actors display different discursive emphases, it is also clear that there is significant interplay between these four perspectives, particularly as intergovernmental institutions and states are forced to account for the failures of earlier policies that relied on global resource management models. Under this understanding of international law, UN declarations and conventions do not simply enact preexisting views of conservation as a universal or a localized responsibility; instead, they emerge through political contestation in which local and global structures continuously reposition themselves.<sup>3</sup> The shift from an envi-

ronmental universalist to a sustainable development emphasis in environmental law, then, is the result of the transformation of the law as conservation policy is contested on local and global levels.

International environmental legal instruments of the 1980s stressed a universal responsibility for conservation. The 1982 World Charter for Nature begins with a statement of humanity’s universal dependence on “nature” (H. W. Wood 977–96). “Civilization,” according to the text, “is rooted in nature, which has shaped human culture and influenced all artistic and scientific achievement, and living in harmony with nature gives man the best opportunities for the development of his creativity, and for rest and recreation” (UN General Assembly, “World Charter”). This abstract vision of culture—rooted in an equally abstracted “nature,” defined by a linear concept of civilized refinement and undifferentiated by politics or location—sees human dependence on nature as universal. Difference is denounced as antithetical to the production of “civilized” culture and only measured here in economic terms: “failure to establish an appropriate economic order among peoples and among States, leads to the breakdown of the economic, social and political framework of civilization” (UN General Assembly, “World Charter”).

Debates over the World Charter became one of the first major international forums at which issues of power and difference threatened the adoption of environmental-universalist rhetoric.<sup>4</sup> One of the stumbling blocks to concrete implementation of the charter was its apparent justification of international interference in postcolonial state sovereignty. Brazil, Belize, Columbia, Ecuador, Peru, Guyana, and Suriname criticized provisions of the text and abstained from the charter vote over the possibility that it would trump national and regional plans for conservation and extractive economic development (Burhenne and Erwin 16). Future international environmental law instruments would have to confront southern elites’ interests in utilizing national resources in economic projects.

By the time of the 1992 Earth Summit at Rio de Janeiro, which followed lengthy UN Committee on the Environment and Development debates on the connection between conservation and development, a sustainability discourse emerged as the central tool for negotiating conflicts between environmental and economic priorities. As an undefined catchphrase of the Earth Summit, “sustainable development” implied that the sum of economic production on both global and local scales needed to meet the minimum standard of allowing for the survival of future generations of humans. Paul E. Little writes that in the final prod-

ucts, the Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Convention on Biodiversity, the understanding of “sustainable development” was laughably broad: “Just about every economic activity—agriculture, mining, forestry, fishing, nuclear energy, urban growth—could be sustainable. . . . In this regard [the Earth Summit] was a global magic act” (268).

In the sustainable development discourse, the politics of difference would become more central to international environmental law. Particularity of local cultures, development needs, and ecological solutions would enter into the law even as international legal instruments would attempt to develop a universal conservation framework based on industrial capitalist development in postcolonial states. Instead of representing difference only in terms of economic disparities, as in the World Charter, the specific interests of indigenous groups become a key concern. The Preamble to the Convention on Biological Diversity, negotiated at the Earth Summit after a number of high-profile cases of “bioprospecting” of indigenous genetic material and plant resources by Western scientists, makes a point of recognizing “the close and traditional dependence of many indigenous and local communities embodying traditional lifestyles on biological resources, and the desirability of sharing equitably benefits arising from the use of traditional knowledge, innovations and practices relevant to the conservation of biological diversity and the sustainable use of its components” (Multilateral Agreement 145). Responding further to resistance to appropriation of land and genetic material by pharmaceutical science and conservation strategies, the Rio Declaration attempts to assert the importance of “developing countries” to development and conservation, making special note of environmentally useful “knowledge and traditional practices” of indigenous peoples and calling upon states to “recognize and duly support their identity, culture, and interests and enable their effective participation in the achievement of sustainable development” (UN General Assembly, *Report*).

Since the Earth Summit, culture has become perhaps the key category of difference on the international scene, aligned as it often is with principles of self-determination and pluralism. Culture structures understandings of diversity and development in international law. The 2001 Declaration on Cultural Diversity, for example, states, “cultural diversity is as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for nature. In this sense, it is the common heritage of humanity and should be recognized and affirmed for the benefit of present and future generations” (UNESCO,

*Universal*). Extending Etienne Balibar’s work on “neo-racism,” which sees “culture” as a sort of substitute for race in contemporary conservative views on immigration, Denise Ferreira da Silva describes the emergence of “culture” as a key social descriptor in the current global politics of development. In her critique of the 2004 UN Human Development Report, she argues that “cultural difference now shares with racial difference the blame for the fracturing of humanity” (322). To counter this fracturing and ensure peace and stability, the UN report claims, the UN must pursue global multiculturalist policies. The promotion of cultural freedom—and the threat when cultures are transformed by economic processes—becomes central to the UN’s development mandate at the turn of the millennium.

### The Rhetorics of Endangerment: Bridging Biodiversity & Cultural Diversity

Building on over a decade of developments in international law, the Great Ape Survival Project deploys a “rhetoric of endangerment” to align the supposed interests of ape and indigene in conservation. GRASP’s partners—including African and Southeast Asian range states; donor countries including the United States, Belgium, the United Kingdom, France, and Germany; NGOs including the World Conservation Union, the World Wildlife Fund, and the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund; and representatives from a number of UN developmental, environmental, and cultural conservation initiatives—have highlighted threats to indigenous peoples in the formulation of a human-centered approach to conservation. Since GRASP’s launch in 2001, the concept of indigenous people’s cultural and economic dependency on particular ecological habitats has underwritten GRASP’s rhetoric of endangerment, implying that conservation of forest ape habitats will also conserve the knowledges, life practices, and livelihoods of indigenous communities.

This rhetoric draws heavily on the deployment of cultural difference I have outlined in international environmental and sustainable development discourse and is particularly noticeable in the wake of Western environmentalist attention to “indigenous knowledges” of sustainable forest use. Reversing a lengthy history of “environmental orientalism” that have identified indigenous peoples with environmental destruction, lack of scientific knowledge, and inability to utilize “biological resources” since the nineteenth century (Agarwal and Sawyer 71–108), proponents of indigenous knowledge valorize the supposed

links between indigenous people and nature. For example, J. Peter Brosius documents the ways in which U.S. media and environmental ethnography operated to “make a people narratable” by essentializing two groups of Penan peoples in Malaysia as “forest people.” The groups and their knowledge of sustainable forest use were represented as “endangered” (65). By situating indigenous peoples in a specific ecological context threatened by “development,” conservation rhetoric can represent indigenous peoples as intimately connected to nature and thus as endangered by processes of globalization as the nonhuman species targeted for conservation.

The rhetoric of endangerment emphasizes the particular dependency of indigenous peoples on their environments. The article “Human Dimension,” which explains GRASP’s human-centered approach to conservation, emphasizes the general oppression of indigenous communities and their dependence on the ecosystems GRASP claims to conserve: “Ape habitats are vital to humans and many other species as a source of food, water, medicine and timber and as a regulator to our changing climate. A reduction in ape numbers is a sure sign that the forests are being used unsustainably. Most communities living in the humid forests hosting the great apes are impoverished and more often than not are exploited by external forces interested in the natural resources found therein. The loss in the rich biodiversity found in these habitats will not only lead to the extinction of the great apes but also to the threat of the very survival of the local communities dependent on the great ape habitat” (UNEP/GRASP, “Human Dimension”). The statements of UN officials claim further that “GRASP has been rooted in a need not only to save the great apes but also their forest and mountain habitats, which provide livelihoods for many poor people in Africa and SE Asia. The need to link the welfare of humans and wildlife is a central objective of the Partnership” (Hepworth 3). Meanwhile, the Kinshasa Declaration of 2005, the first major intergovernmental statement produced on ape conservation, devotes one of its five resolutions for action to the issue of indigenous communities’ dependency on local ecosystems. The declaration calls on governments to develop “ecologically sustainable, local, poverty-reduction strategies which recognize and integrate the needs of local communities sharing great ape habitats, while securing the lasting health of the environmental resources upon which they depend” (UNEP/GRASP, “Kinshasa” 5).

As rhetorics of cultural difference structure the politics of the global, the cultural practices of *both* indigenous groups and nonhuman apes

are depicted as “endangered.” Primatological statements stressing apes’ capacity for different “cultural” forms of tool use and medicine abound in GRASP documents. In the foreword to GRASP’s 2005 *World Atlas of Great Apes and Their Conservation*, then-UN Secretary General Kofi A. Annan claims, “The great apes are our kin. Like us, they are self-aware and have cultures, tools, politics, and medicines; they can learn to use sign language, and have conversations with people and with each other. Sadly, however, we have not treated them with the respect they deserve” (1). In the initial organizational strategy outline for GRASP negotiated by its founding partners, the section “The Special Significance of Apes” (defining them as “flagship” or “charismatic” species useful for mobilizing sentiment for conservation) emphasizes that “great apes deploy a wide range of intelligent behaviour, including tool making and use, food selection and the use of plants for self-medication. . . . The beginnings of morality are evident in the way that excessive harassment of a subordinate by a dominant animal will evoke expressions of unease by other group members. Cultural differences, for instance in tool use, occur between different populations of the same species. . . . Given this, great apes form a unique bridge linking humans to the natural world. . . . If we were to lose any great ape species, many people would feel that we were destroying part of the bridge to our own origins, and with it a part of our own humanity (UNEP/GRASP, “Global Strategy”).

Verging on the type of “simian orientalism” that long racialized indigenous Africans, and that in the twentieth century became a central imperial discourse for eugenic projects to tame and uplift both humans and domesticated animals (Haraway, *Primate Visions* 7–10), the statement joins human and nonhuman in a celebration of cultural diversity and heritage.<sup>5</sup> One of the key points at which GRASP’s conservation discourse rhetorically links indigene and ape is when it stresses that *all* great apes—human and nonhuman—have a linked interest in cultural diversity for the preservation of their species. Thus both ape and indigene are endangered by the homogenizing and unsustainable forces of economic production. GRASP’s 2005 Kinshasa Declaration aims at “ensuring the integrity of those sites supporting the key wild populations that would conserve the genetic, ecological and cultural diversity of *all great apes* for all time” (UNEP/GRASP, “Kinshasa” 2–4).

GRASP initiatives to establish conservation law enforcement—which at times work hand-in-hand with establishing neocolonial parks or reserves—similarly thematize cultural difference. One of the main targets of law enforcement for GRASP is the hunting and sale of the

meat of wildlife (often called "bushmeat"). Spearheaded by GRASP's British activist partners at the Bristol Zoo Gardens and the London Zoological Society, GRASP educational campaigns in Cameroon attempt to educate indigenous peoples on the plight of animals hunted for food. As lumber roads open forests for hunting, and as poverty, climate change, and European overexploitation of African fish stocks increase the demand for meat, increasing numbers of animals are hunted in forests (although apes account for a minute percentage of the meat trade). In response, GRASP campaigns attempt to "build on cultural and religious taboos, which prohibit the consumption of ape meat" (Davies 2). The projects combine "awareness raising campaigns which explain the law and the plight of ape populations . . . [and] support [for] improved law enforcement for these rare species, and the national parks where they are found" (2). At the same time, the educational campaign in the Baka- and Bantu-occupied regions in and around the Dja Biodiversity Reserve in southeast Cameroon will conduct "'Knowledge, Attitude and Practices' surveys among local people to identify positive, community owned attitudes to sustainable use."

Culture is thus the basis for calls to link indigenous economic development to ape conservation. In economic terms, the Kinshasa Declaration ultimately seeks to draw indigenous communities into schemes for small-scale resource exploitation and ecotourism.<sup>6</sup> Ecotourism is already established in two of GRASP's conservation zones: one in Kalimantan, Indonesia, where palm oil is the source of deforestation, and another in Democratic Republic of Congo, where war and coltan (columbite-tantalite) mining for use in cell phones and other electronics have impinged on forest preserves. Furthermore, Klaus Toepfer, the former UNEP director who launched GRASP in 2001, links ape conservation to the harvesting and biotechnological appropriation of indigenous ecosystems: "Along with other ecosystems, such forests are also invaluable sources of genetic material. These are forming the basis of a new industrial revolution in areas from food and agriculture to pharmaceuticals and chemicals. It is a moral issue of the highest importance. By conserving the habitats of the great apes, we are helping to overcome poverty and to conserve the natural wealth upon which current and future human generations depend. It seems a small price to pay" (UNEP/GRASP, Press release 1). The Preamble to the Kinshasa Declaration recognizes that "securing further funding from donor States and international institutions is more likely if, where appropriate, great-ape conservation projects are proposed and formulated as part of a wider

poverty-reduction strategy, such as a durable rural-development project which recognizes that the sustainable development of rural communities depends in large part on the sustainable use of their environmental resources, including great-ape habitats." The action statements further encourage development initiatives such as "research projects" and "ecotourism" in order to ensure "the participation of relevant stakeholders" including "local and indigenous communities" (UNEP/GRASP, "Kinshasa" 2-3).

If the GRASP literature expresses interest in preserving the lands, lives, and cultures of indigenous people, it remains to be seen whether this goal can be effectively pursued alongside nonhuman ape conservation measures. GRASP has yet to complete a specific conservation initiative; currently, it has begun educational and conservation projects in five countries and is undertaking a global mapping project to determine areas in which agricultural expansion and other threats to forest habitats threaten ape populations. Yet resettlement and law enforcement schemes are important for GRASP's on-the-ground projects. The constitution of GRASP states that, in contrast to idealistic statements that conservation goals benefit both humans and nonhuman apes, indigenous communities may need to be resettled under conservation schemes: "where it becomes imperative to resettle indigenous people in conformity with United Nations guidelines," the constitution calls for "compensation . . . paid with international support" (UNEP/GRASP, "Rules" 4.1, vii.). GRASP's Southeast Asian unit—run entirely by Australian conservationists and primatologists—works with partner organizations that have recently resettled subsistence rice farmers in Kalimantan, Indonesia. And two of the four initial field projects include forest patrols to monitor human activities in Democratic Republic of Congo and Indonesia (UNEP/GRASP, "Activities"). The Cameroon project discussed above has proposed setting aside land for a biodiversity reserve and increasing conservation law enforcement around forest settlements (Carroll and Madison).

Marcus Colchester of the Forest Peoples Programme reports that despite the new sustainability standards that recognize indigenous land claims, conservation measures continue to displace people and violate indigenous rights, especially as state laws and enforcement procedures tend to follow colonial-era exclusionary conservation strategies. The result has been that, even in some of the most "innovative" cases of sustainable conservation in Latin America, incorporating indigenous peoples into conservation practices has failed to go further than

employing them as cooks, guards, and rangers. Colchester identifies the view of indigenous peoples as “stakeholders” (a term used regularly by GRASP) as the problem: it sees indigenous peoples as competing with other interests rather than seeing them as ecosystem administrators (Colchester, “Conservation” 149, 152).<sup>7</sup> In an extreme case, the World Bank/EU-sponsored Kibale Game Corridor for elephants resulted in violent forced resettlement of thousands of Ugandans.<sup>8</sup>

Given the early stage of implementation, GRASP is still subject to revision as partners work to launch its first initiatives. But indigenous activists remain absent from high-level decisionmaking, and major corporations that benefit from ecotourism—including DHL, Britannia Airways, and the Intercontinental Hotel Group—provide key funding. GRASP may ultimately encounter the types of resistance engendered by the top-down approach of the Human Genome Diversity Project, which faced vigorous protests from Southern NGOs opposing the appropriation of indigenous genetic material. Even transforming leadership structures, however, may not necessarily address the larger economic processes that buttress the neocolonial logics of the project.

Outside of environmental law, recent discourses of cultural difference at the global level have emphasized the “endangered” nature of indigenous groups. The UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and the UN Human Rights Council stress the possibility of “enforced disappearance” of indigenous peoples; the Declaration on Cultural Diversity affirms that “globalization, facilitated by the rapid development of new information and communication technologies,” represents “a challenge for cultural diversity” (UNEP/GRASP, “Kinshasa”). A number of NGOs and academic projects, from South Africa’s Endangered People Trust to the Audubon Society to the Endangered Language Resource Center apply conservation rhetoric to bring attention to the plight of “endangered” indigenous communities. Mary Louise Pratt notes that in the application of environmental discourse to the goal of maintaining and transmitting heritage languages, the idea of “dying” or “endangered” languages at once describes a situation in which globalization threatens linguistic diversity and participates in a performative act threatening indigenous culture by naming it “endangered” (Pratt, “Migrancy”). The Human Genome Diversity Project—an initiative to store samples of the DNA of indigenous peoples figured as genetic isolates—further demonstrates the ways in which indigenous peoples are constructed as “endangered” and their bodies can become objects

to collect as specimens of the diversity/difference they represent (Haraway, *Modest* 249–52; Reardon 38–65).

Although it is vital to acknowledge the continuing violences against indigenous peoples that are, in many instances, linked to environmental issues, critical postcolonial ecocriticism must also remain attentive to the ways in which rhetorically figuring the indigene as essentially culturally different and always-already endangered by modernity has a history of contributing to genocide.<sup>9</sup> Schemes at the international level that attempt to preserve artifacts of peoples who are presumed to die out, or that attempt to further integrate indigenous economies into global capital flows, may ultimately reinforce threats to the communities in whose name they speak.

### Locating Environmental Subalterns

The insertion of the category of “culture” into environmental law, and the concomitant depictions of indigenous people as dependent, endangered beings in need of conservation, represent an attempt to speak in the name of those indigenous populations least privileged by national or international economic arrangements. It also represents an attempt to speak in the name of the ape, the animal represented consistently in GRASP rhetoric as “our nearest relative.” By representing both indigene and ape as culturally distinct, threatened by economic resource extraction, and uniquely poised to mobilize conservation of their local ecosystems, international legal instruments seek to enlist both ape and indigene as public faces of conservation policy.

For postcolonial scholars, the question of whether schemes like GRASP can accurately represent those dispossessed by economic processes will no doubt conjure the theoretical debates around the concept of the “subaltern” that date to the mid-1980s.<sup>10</sup> Building on historical research on colonial India by the Subaltern Studies Collective, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak famously argued that the “subaltern” or oppressed subject of colonial power has little opportunity to present her or his point of view outside of the parameters set by the colonizing culture.<sup>11</sup> Spivak saw the case of the *sati*, the Indian woman who self-immolated on her husband’s funeral pyre, as emblematic of the heterogeneous forms of colonial repression. Although Spivak ultimately repudiated an unequivocal refusal of subaltern speech in the 1990s, scholars researching neocolonial power have continued to point to the ways in which

subaltern speech is radically narrowed and compromised in the context of governing institutions. In a classic essay, Leerom Medovoi, Benjamin Robinson, and Shankar Raman outline the limitations of viewing statist political forms of representation through the metaphor of speech. Analyzing the case of 1990 Nicaraguan elections, the authors demonstrate that media and left solidarity movements represented the vote as a moment when “the masses” spoke through a democratic process, failing to account for the ways in which the elections actually served to obscure economic and military inequity between the United States and Nicaragua (133–50). Similarly, international initiatives like GRASP that attempt to “represent” the subaltern through bureaucratic structures obscure power relations underlying international agreements.

In addition to indigenous peoples, GRASP often situates *the ape* as the ultimate subaltern—the one whose life is most endangered by extractive resource use. Stressing the extremely endangered status of some apes—with only hundreds of individuals remaining in their habitats—GRASP documents consistently refer to the closeness of nonhuman ape bodies, minds, and cultures to those of humans. This rhetoric seeks to humanize apes in order to bring apes into the sphere of ethical consideration. The chimpanzee is represented as having over 98 percent of the same DNA as humans (UNEP/GRASP, “Global Strategy” 10).<sup>12</sup> UN officials and GRASP publications claim that chimpanzees have similar brains, cultures, and molecular clocks to humans (GRASP Newsletter issue 5).<sup>13</sup> In 1997, political scientists Robert Goodin, Carole Pateman, and Roy Pateman made similar statements and argued for “Simian Sovereignty,” proposing GRASP-like international initiatives to protect the presumed interests of Great Apes, who are seen as genetic kin (821–49). The authors emphasize the humanlike qualities that entitle apes to protection—culture, social organization, genetics, reasoning, and language (831–33)—and indicate that apes appear to face the same exclusion from sovereignty as do indigenous peoples under (neo)colonialism: “Aboriginal peoples were judged to be in a ‘state of nature,’ not civilization, and on that basis, their territories were deemed open for seizure and development into proper modern states by European settlers” (828). Despite calling for the development of a global trusteeship system on the model of the League of Nations, which authorized imperial domination of U.S. and European possessions, and despite offering Western conservation NGOs power in administering land use, the authors repeat GRASP’s oft-stated claim that conservation would benefit both human and animal: “Living together with other

great apes as sovereigns in the homelands they have traditionally shared would, at the very least, preclude forcible resettlement of either group of traditional occupiers to nature reserves in one case or, for example, make way for national parks in the other. It would preclude intrusive agro-business and the felling of the forests on which the traditional lifestyles of both groups depend. . . . More often than not in the sorts of situations we would be looking at, what would be good for the other great apes would be good for humans as well, and simian sovereignty would lead to a marked improvement in the well-being and security of human populations who share the territory” (842). Perhaps the strangest moment in the essay is when the authors conjure images of humans attempting to study ape languages for negotiation: “Empathetic understandings and genuine compromises are obviously what pluralist post-modernism would prescribe. There may be severe limits to communication with the other apes on purely human terms. But the ‘politics of difference’ highlights questions of why the other apes should learn our language rather than we theirs” (841). Note the effortless use of the “we” and “our” when the humans who would have to do that translation live in Africa and Indonesia, not near major urban universities in the United States and Australia.

Although GRASP never calls for such utopian overtures to nonhuman apes, it is important to recognize the ways in which specific groups of humans and nonhumans continue to be representationally linked in conservation discourse. Arguments claiming that discrimination against animals buttresses racial hierarchies are common in animal advocacy constructions of race. Work by Cary Wolfe in the emerging field of critical species studies names “speciesism” as the “fundamental repression” underlying cultural studies approaches to social difference (1). Although works such as Wolfe’s take pains to describe relationships between discourses of race and species, they begin with the ahistorical presumption that hierarchies produced through species difference directly produce racial hierarchies. I would instead stress that animalization is one of many rhetorics of racialization linking humans and animals; it operates alongside other rhetorics that may compare socially privileged groups to animals or, for example, rhetorics that position white men and women as the saviors of animals from African men. The racial fragmentation of post-Enlightenment humanism made humanity itself an incomplete (and *temporal*) concept, one that situated certain humans as unfinished in the processes of civilization. The “uncultured” human was often still considered fully human, though in an earlier stage of develop-

ment. Statements that essentialize the subalternity of the animal—like ones that essentialize the indigene's close relation to nature—may miss subtle operations of power that coproduce discourses of race, culture, and species.

### Conclusions

To summarize, the GRASP literature demonstrates the emergence of rhetorics of cultural difference into sustainable development discourse in the international arena. Responding to the contentious debates surrounding the self-determination of indigenous peoples and the sovereignty of former colonies, international legal instruments have taken the particularization strategies used by indigenous ecological activists (denoting connections between indigenous cultural practices and localized ecological formations) and universalized them in the name of hierarchical global conservation schemes. Though such a move attempts to address past failures to incorporate issues of difference into the law, it ultimately essentializes indigenous peoples as close to nature and at times links them to apes in a rhetoric of endangerment that legitimizes neocolonial economic dependencies.

My critique of the discursive deployment of "culture" and "sustainable development" in GRASP rhetoric should not be viewed as an attack on conservationism or the UN as unsalvably neocolonial. It is aimed specifically at an environmental politics that I see as co-opting the agency and rhetorics of indigenous activism while maintaining older technocratic structures of conservation policy, primarily due to the continuing control over conservation by Western governments and NGOs. This is not to say that conservationism and indigenous peoples' activism cannot coincide, even across vast inequities in wealth and power. Leela Gandhi's important work on Victorian animal activists demonstrates that Indian and British vegetarians worked across the colonial divide to create provisional alliances against both animal slaughter and colonial hegemony (67–114). Since the 1999 World Trade Organization protests in Seattle, environmental, animal, labor, and indigenous rights activists have converged at international meetings throughout the globe to collectively protest the violence of global capitalist development. The activism of the Global Hunger Alliance, which works against the expansion of industrial agriculture as a "development" measure, has brought together U.S., European, African, and South Asian activists in a fruitful convergence of resistance to neocolonial appropriation of land. And

the activism of indigenous organizations including the Rural Advancement Foundation International (RAFI) and the International Alliance of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples of Tropical Forests at the international level has worked against biopiracy and the failures of national governments to meet international commitments on indigenous environmental rights.

Given successes of some indigenous groups and southern NGOs at transforming conservation, the political agency of indigenous groups is likely to be summoned more and more by international schemes. Transnational and extragovernmental activisms are likely to continue to challenge conservation initiatives from inside and out, reshaping the plane of political possibilities as international environmental agencies continue to revise their approaches. The success or failure of GRASP as both a conservation measure and a development scheme will rest largely on the ability of it to structurally and discursively transform, given such challenges.

### NOTES

1. Some exhibit materials are available online via the Woods Hole Research Center, <http://www.whrc.org/africa/index.htm>. Another GRASP-allied exhibit linking "biodiversity" and "cultural diversity" in the Congo was held at the Royal Museum for Central Africa, Belgium, during 2004–2006. *GRASP Newsletter*, issue 3 (May 2004): 3.
2. Amitava Kumar suggests such a move by rewriting "World Literature" as "World Bank Literature." See his editor's introduction to *World Bank Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), xviii–xii.
3. Timothy K. Choy argues that international environmental campaigns work through a complex interplay between "emergent universality and particularity" (5–18). On how global institutions reify bureaucratic structures and technical solutions to environmental problems, see Chatterjee and Finger and also Dalby (593–613).
4. Before the World Charter, a variety of national, NGO, and international actors had attempted to bring issues of economic inequity into international environmental law. The G77 countries have worked to make poverty a central theme of the environmental discussions since the 1970s and through the negotiations on the Stockholm Declaration, the precursor to and framework for the World Charter. NGOs had endorsed indigenous participation in conservation at least as early as the World Conservation Union's 1975 Kinshasa Resolution on the Protection of Indigenous Ways of Life.
5. Raymond Williams reminds us that pre-sixteenth-century definitions of "culture" referred to the cultivation of animal and plant species. This concept was then metaphorically applied to human groups to schematize human development on a linear road from savagery to primitivity to civilization. The neo-Romantic vision of cultural difference celebrated here by GRASP thus returns the fully "civilized" culture of humanity to its originary realm of nature. See Williams, *Keywords* (London: Fontana, 1988), 87–93.

6. On the relationship of tourism and colonialism, see Braziel.

7. See also Dawn Chatty and Marcus Colchester, eds. *Conservation and Mobile Indigenous Peoples: Displacement, Forced Settlement, and Sustainable Development* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2002).

8. See Tricia Feeney, "The Impact of a European Community Project on Peasant Families in Uganda," *Oxfam Briefing* 6 (July 1993): 1-7.

9. See, for example, Hinton.

10. For an excellent summary of the subaltern speech debate in the 1980s and 1990s, see Loomba, 231-45.

11. Spivak clarifies that "by being . . . the member of an ethnic minority, we are not 'subaltern.' That word is reserved for the sheer heterogeneity of decolonized space" (*Critique* 310). The concept of the subaltern carries a concept of difference. Subaltern space is the space in which multiple social differences are the basis for the exclusion of classes from hegemonic structures of national power. See also Spivak, "Subaltern," 271-313. Important revisions appear in chapter 3 of Spivak, *Critique*, 198-311.

12. Genetics plays increasing roles in biopolitics at the global level. See Nikolas Rose. For a critique of the 98 percent thesis, see Marks.

13. *GRASP Newsletter*, issue 5 (March 2006): 4; UNEP/GRASP, "Global Strategy," 10. See also above comments by Kofi Annan and UNESCO *World of Science* newsletters linked at the GRASP website, 19 Oct. 2007 ([http://www.unep.org/grasp/Information\\_Material/press\\_rl.asp](http://www.unep.org/grasp/Information_Material/press_rl.asp)).

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