

RESOLUTIONS **3**

Global Networks of Video

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13 To Touch, Plot, and Dream the Il Ngwesi Maasai Landscape

Beverly R. Singer

The following Facebook status report was for friends who did not know I was in Africa in August 2009:

August 8, 2009: From Nairobi . . . I found a spirit home at Il Ngwesi in north central Kenya . . . my Maasai hosts being completely welcoming are woven into their most exquisite lands living among elephants, water buffalo, giraffes, rhinos, warthogs, monkeys, eland and hundreds of other species on the savannah while herding cattle and goats for subsistence. I'll be returning to NM and Kenya soon. Photos to follow upon return to U.S.

My host and friend, Ole Shuel from Il Ngwesi, posted the following response:

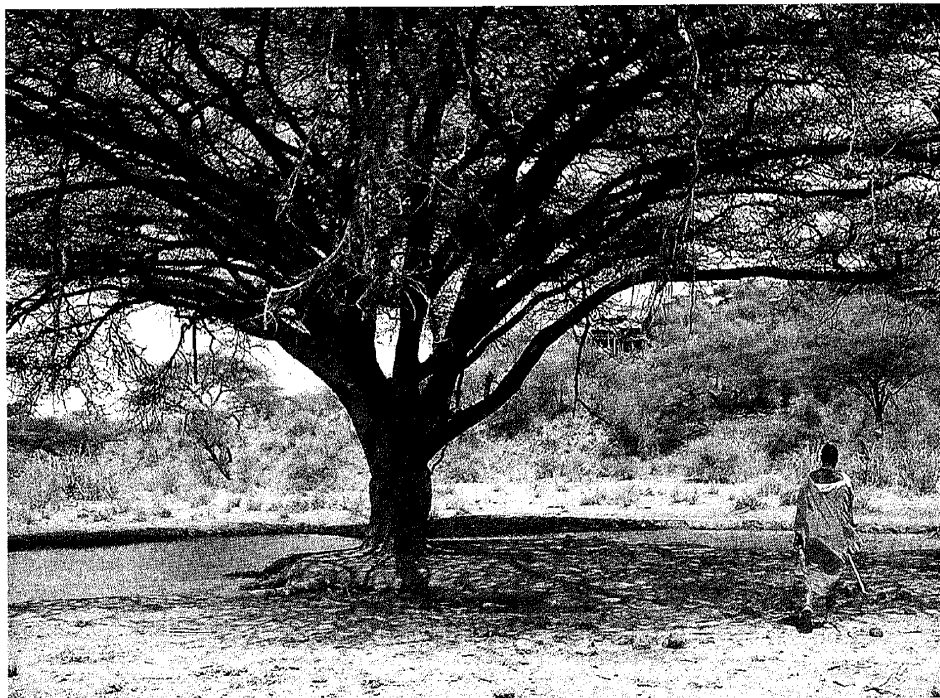
August 8, 2009: Yes, it is an amazing and such a humbling experience hosting Beverly in our space. The rains have approached since her arrival and indication of the great respect the land has for her gentle dealing with it.¹

How We Met

In 2006 I received an invitation to share my work as an Indigenous filmmaker at a UNESCO-sponsored information and communication technologies (ICT) workshop in Spain and Andorra, where Indigenous people representing communities from Bolivia, Kenya, Peru, and Russia were taking part in a program initiative to enhance the communication capacities of Indigenous peoples.² The intent of the ICTs outlined by UNESCO was to foster “the creation and dissemination of local content that reflects the values, experiences and insights of the world of indigenous peoples’ communities and cultures.”³ I prepared my presentation thinking about the multiple uses to be made of video production in developing Indigenous capacity for intercultural dialogue across continents and



Singer and Torque. Photograph by Beverly Singer.



Ole Shuel of Ol Donyo Keri Safaris. Photograph by Beverly Singer.

among Indigenous communities on themes and experiences they believed to be significant. This, my first encounter with UNESCO, was formal and instructive.

At the break between sessions that followed my presentation, Yvonne Owuor, an award-winning writer from Nairobi, and Ole Joseph Shuel Nijalis, an Il Ngwesi Maasai and a former director of Il Ngwesi Lodge, introduced themselves.⁴ Their enthusiasm about my presentation was energizing. As we talked about the appropriation and the perpetuation of stereotypes of Indigenous peoples in the global public mindset Yvonne said, “We want to work with you!” I said, “Yes, of course, let’s talk more later.” A friendship was born between myself, a Tewa woman from Khapo Owingeh (Santa Clara Pueblo) in New Mexico, and two African natives from Kenya: Shuel, from Il Ngwesi Maasai territory in north-central Kenya, and Yvonne, from Nairobi, her ancestors originally from the Lake Victoria region. Our friendship was, in part, the outcome of that fateful UNESCO-sponsored workshop.⁵ The alliance established following that gathering is conveyed in this essay based on my experiences and on my reflections on the use of video as a means of connecting Indigenous lives and producing knowledge and truth-inspired communication.

Reorientation: Indigenous-to-Indigenous Thinking about Media and the Use of Video to Document Their History/My Experience

According to UNESCO, enhancing the communication capacities of Indigenous peoples is needed in the twenty-first century in order to help them present and document their stories. Such potential has implications for re-visioning Indigenous peoples as vital participants who contribute solutions to dilemmas affecting humankind. Indigenous prophecy provides lessons on how and why this friendship happened with Ole Shuel Nijalis and Yvonne Owuor (my mentor and wilderness guardian).⁶ From a historical lens our relations with the earth as Indigenous Africans and as Indigenous Americans are aligned with similar thoughts concerning the big questions of survival, and our values rest with the spirit of our ancestors, who connected us in the countries of Spain and Andorra.

The sum of our communication, following three years of e-mails among Shuel, Yvonne, and myself, came to rest naturally upon cocreating voices-in-video narratives from Il Ngwesi Maasai. These narratives, being completely independent of UNESCO, were supported solely by our individual efforts. The UNESCO initiative was a demonstration of and a step toward opening Indigenous communities to participating in sharing their stories through video projects. After watching the UNESCO-sponsored ICT Kenya video *Without Boundaries: The Quest of Pastoralist People*, however, I thought it odd that the people featured did not really tell their own stories. The filmmaker assigned to train them seems to have told the story for them. For over twenty-five years, I have

participated in and weighed in on film methodology and filmmaking by Indigenous peoples. Oftentimes, incorporating too many ingredients—history, politics, symbols, and/or cultural apology, all parts of documenting—can easily sidetrack the producer. The camera can be unwieldy, making it difficult to capture movement seamlessly or document a complete scene unfolding. It is something I've experienced in my own documentary work. The camera is usually not the issue; it is letting go of trying to force a story and just allowing the story to tell itself.

Shuel, Yvonne, and I moved forward with our plan to integrate a collective vision for intercultural dialogue among Indigenous peoples. The work of producing a video typically can find its significance within predictable statements about teaching and about public education as a contribution to the field. My reasons for participating in this project were more personal, however. The desire to share and spend time with Indigenous peoples was planted in me as a child by my parents—in particular, by my father, James Singer, who loved sharing Pueblo stories. He believed Indigenous people were sent out on the earth to help one another and share in each other's lives. An instinctive knowing that I was being introduced to Shuel and Yvonne by our ancestors gave power to this experience. And so what we were shouldering was rooted in the lands that we came from and in our mutual interest in each other as people from different places with similar connections and intentions for sharing our experiences and thoughts with one another, particularly about the many things possible for Shuel's community, a community that was also in transitional vulnerability.⁷ For Shuel Nijalis the meeting in Andorra was important for Il Ngwesi not only in terms of contact made with other Indigenous groups grappling with survival and continuity but also in terms of Shuel recognizing and building on opportunities to utilize ICT processes and UNESCO support structures to ensure that the larger community vision, which included the creation of a globally accessible cultural knowledge and experience repository with sound, image, and narrative archives, could be developed.⁸

Video projects identified as intercultural dialogue with Indigenous peoples, such as UNESCO's ICT initiative, have appeared on the international horizon with limited critical attention or appeal. The factors for their relative anonymity intersect with the intent and the implementation of the productions, resulting in a mixed message in the videos produced. Rising to the surface are broader tensions that question what intercultural dialogue actually intends and how the deployment of video can actually facilitate communication, bridge distances, develop relationships, share perspective differences, and promote understanding of Indigenous peoples and issues. Current research among Indigenous scholars is focused on decolonizing methodologies based on the critical work by Māori educator Linda Tuhiwai Smith.⁹ Her outline of a corollary relationship between colonial experiments and Western research that was used to displace,

subjugate, and supplant Indigenous peoples' livelihoods and appropriate Indigenous knowledge and practices strongly advocates for change. Her essay is a full-on discussion of the impacts of research, including the need for a kind of video decolonization as Indigenous peoples remain at the forefront of global crises on all fronts, including the climate, economics, and politics. I view my participation with and observations of UNESCO and my work as a producer of Indigenous video as jumping-off points for highlighting a particular example of Indigenous video pragmatism.

My travel to Kenya and brief stay at the Il Ngwesi Lodge in August 2009 was largely due to the faculty-supported research allocations grant that I received from the University of New Mexico. My visit to Shuel's homeland began our work on the Il Ngwesi narratives featuring his people, also known as the Laikipiak Maasai, and the managing owners of the award-winning ecotourism lodge Il Ngwesi Lodge. Ole Joseph Shuel Nijalis was the first manager of the lodge and since our first meeting has become the director of their tourism company, Ol Donyo Keri Safaris, based in Nanyuki, Kenya, several hours' drive from Il Ngwesi. Shuel's confidence in my ability to relate to his people as an Indigenous person with tribal ties was immediate when I arrived at Il Ngwesi. The same energy was apparent in Nairobi, where Yvonne and her colleagues at the Aga Khan University welcomed me into their multicultural community of scholars and artists, producing effervescent conversation with regard to our visceral connections to each other, as though old friendships were being reacquainted.

The challenge we set for ourselves, to produce voice-in-video narratives from the Il Ngwesi Maasai community of 6,000 members, relied upon the tension between their pastoral lifestyle and their creatively seeking a path to a different destiny by building a lodge and providing a space for ecotourism. Prior to their building the Il Ngwesi Lodge, they had no knowledge of ecolodge management or safari tourism, living as subsistence pastoralists dependent on cattle and goats and confined to a conservation area with migrating African wildlife in the remote northern savannah of Kenya. In 1996, with the assistance of the Lewa Wildlife Conservancy, USAID, and several other grants from nonprofits, the community designed, planned, and opened the Il Ngwesi Lodge, which caters to tourists interested in efforts to protect wildlife and Maasai culture.¹⁰ Supplanting the history of safari poaching and more recent ecotourism in Kenya, the Il Ngwesi Maasai became the first Indigenous people in Africa to open a community-owned tourism business. A cluster of Maasai villages in the Laikipia District are within the national wildlife conservation area designated by the Kenya government, and the Il Ngwesi Maasai have title to their lands, which has allowed them to pursue ecotourism.¹¹

The success of the Il Ngwesi Lodge is based on their use of ecotourism principles, coupled with symbolic and ancestral forms of welcome and hospitality

inherent to Maasai.¹² The lodge's staff greets guests at the entrance path, singing about the landscape and the wildlife that welcome the guests back. This practice is typical in African communities, having experienced it myself throughout southern African villages. When I arrived at Il Ngwesi and was welcomed by some fifteen staff members dressed in the red cloth worn by Maasai, I was finally home with Shuel's people. Since its opening, they have hosted thousands of international guests at the lodge, which is built on a hilly outcrop overlooking the savannah. The lodge is able to comfortably accommodate up to sixteen people in six separate *bandas*. The *bandas* are open-air cottages built with stilt-like construction and with large verandas facing an animal migration trail. Locally gathered insect-resistant hardwood and raffia from the Lewa Swamp a hundred miles away were used to build Il Ngwesi Lodge, which is aesthetically African. The *bandas* have adjoining open-air showers and a gorgeous elliptical swimming pool that is fed from a spring. In recent years the lodge has added a full-menu service to their host offerings, as well as safari walks and sunset drives to watch evening migrations.

The significance of such a venture can be seen in light of the inevitable changes in their lives, including droughts and exposure to outside influences, especially among their youth, who continue to live in the manner of their elders and ancestors as pastoralists. According to Shuel, his elders know that the upcoming generations are in need of education to help develop their livelihoods as the land base reaches maximum levels of sustainability. At the time of my visit in August 2009, a severe drought was devastating their livestock.¹³ The lodge itself employs some thirty to forty Maasai as safari tour guides, wildlife conservation workers, drivers, chefs, housekeepers, wildlife guards, and lodge management, privileging wage income over subsistence pastoral living. The lodge staff employees all receive time off to return to their villages for short periods. Some if not all of these particulars about the lodge and staff were informative aspects that made for varying and constructive narratives, despite sounding like a commercial for Il Ngwesi Lodge.¹⁴

Africa the Continent, Kenya the Country: Context for the Maasai Voices

The vastness of the African continent became apparent to me after traveling in southern Africa some years ago and, now, in Kenya. It is obvious that Indigenous societies are imperceptible and not taking part in the major dialogues on issues directly impacting their longevity. The Il Ngwesi Group Ranch lands are located in the Laikipia District, which comprises 16,500 hectares (about 7,000 acres) and is due north of Mt. Kenya. Group ranch conservation areas were established by the Kenyan government for Indigenous populations through the Kenyan Land Act of

1968 and allow for communal land ownership, and the Il Ngwesi are one of the few Indigenous peoples in Kenya to have this arrangement. The current population of Il Ngwesi Maasai is 6,000, and they occupy 634 village households, each having an average of ten people per household. Two or more families typically occupy one homestead with their livestock. The African savannah is a dusty, almost desert-like landscape (not unlike the Southwest near Tucson, Arizona) that is home to wild herds of elephants, giraffes, baboons, monkeys, water buffalo, elands, lions, dik-diks, warthogs, zebras, and other game, along with bird species that migrate daily through Il Ngwesi territory. Huge, thorny scrub-bush trees are ubiquitous and a major water source for game, especially during droughts, and the flattop African acacia trees provide a wispy covering for the reddish soil. The Mukogodo forest, covered with Olmaroroi (the tree that grows on the mountain), is to the west of Il Ngwesi Lodge, providing contour to a feral land.

Listening to Shuel share over a meal with friends in Nairobi his passion about issues impacting Kenya at large reminded me of conversations during family dinners about the U.S. government's role in dictating policies that our community had to follow or in controlling access to creating jobs on the reservation:

Because, in development work it means getting into the mud to do the work for ourselves, even now our government [needs to] make people feel like working using their own culture and using their ways to work things out and make the country prosper; it's not waiting for the dollar, money, sitting and saying, "OK, we're going to elect you so you can go and talk to the Zulus and bring money." . . . That is a notion we should run away from. . . . How can we make things better using our own Indigenous ways, make our country move forward, our communities move forward?¹⁵

Shuel was the first manager of the Il Ngwesi Lodge. He received a college education and hotel management training in Nairobi through the support of his community. He recalls at least fifteen films being made in and about his community with no benefit to them. His concern is with the primitive context in which Maasai are conveyed to the public, exclusively for commercial purposes and with little respect for them as people with unique lives. The creation of a globally accessible library of video and films produced by Indigenous peoples and that features contemporary Maasai images are relevant ideas for Shuel in helping to promote their ecotourism. One of the more complex questions to come out of our conversation was, How does ecotourism contribute to cultural preservation? When Shuel says, "We are not in control of our destiny," he is referring to countries outside of Kenya and Africa itself that have invested in corporate tourism that strips and erases Indigenous Africans' ability to share their natural

ways of being with the land and the wildlife. His claim is supported in the Kenya NGO Earth Summit 2002 Forum's report on sustainable tourism, produced by Jane Kahata and Judy Imbanga, who state:

The Government of Kenya recognized the need to involve local people in the industry and established the Kenya Tourist Development Corporation with one of its objectives being to encourage local investment in the industry. There has been some local participation but the bulk of the industry is still in the hands of non-Kenyans. The structure of the Kenyan tourism industry is that most of the visits are package tours that are organized from outside the country and most of the goods and services are also paid for out there. This is not healthy if Kenya is to have a sustainable industry and these anomalies can only be rectified if there is more participation in the industry from Kenyans.¹⁶

Multiple layers of memories of an integrated life system remain from my time at Il Ngwesi, where I experienced daily peace and joy emanating from the animals and the people—an extrasensorially heightened experience of reconnecting with a natural rhythm where man and fauna quietly breathe together within a land physically remote from town or city, where at nightfall there are no artificially powered lights to distract the eye or thought, only the brilliance of starlight making me aware of my own separation from the fissures of the unnatural world from which I arrived and in which I live. Kenya's abundant wildlife has only recently been protected by the Kenya Wildlife Service, the custodian of all wildlife resources in Kenya, who has direct management authority in the parks, while the local authorities manage the reserves, with the exception of those that are managed by county councils and local communities like Il Ngwesi, which is part of a protected area.

Kenya itself, which was governed by British imperialist rule until 1968, when it gained independence and began self-rule as an African country, continues to struggle with government corruption and a need for infrastructure. Poverty in Africa is identified as the greatest source of environmental degradation, especially in the developing countries, and Kenya is no exception. African scholar Ali A. Mazrui provides the following explanation:

From Africa's point of view, the first danger of the depletion of resources is tied up with problems of dependency and underdevelopment. Africa is not in adequate control of its own resources . . . the net beneficiaries of Africa's resources lie outside of the African continent . . . many of its mineral resources help to industrialize the rest of the world without necessarily improving the African condition itself.¹⁷

Il Ngwesi: Land, Silence, Animals, Lodge Staff, and Meeting Oshen

To reiterate, Il Ngwesi (translated as People of Wildlife) is the name given to their award-winning ecotourism lodge, located in Laikipia East in northern Kenya. The lodge was established to enhance the livelihoods of the Il Ngwesi. From my perspective Maasai society is characterized by an imminent awareness of experience, knowledge, and belief in the lands they have inherited. A legendary people named Il Laikipiak occupied (and owned) Laikipia lands farther south, according to Il Ngwesi Lodge guide Keshine Lawrence, a young Moran who shared the story of the migration of the original peoples from present-day Sudan into Kenya and continued on to present-day land disputes, abrogated rights, and foreigners from abroad who have forced them into the confinement in which they now reside. Yvonne Owuor, mentor for myself and Shuel, offers the following view of Shuel's people: "Their sense of life—under siege—is linked to pastoralism and they have a strong and intrinsic link to the wholeness of life . . . the idea of the commodification and partitioning of existence into saleable parts is still a cause of bewilderment especially among the elders."¹⁸

Keshine Lawrence and I became friends in part because he was assigned to serve as my guide during my stay at the lodge. I never asked him how old he was, because it didn't matter, and even now, I hesitate to guess, since he wore his Moran braided headdress and beaded adornment. I took close notice of his gentle, quiet nature and classic Maasai stature, which I attempted to break at times with my senseless joking. He had a perfect attention to detail when he observed things on our walks, as when he pointed out the go-away-bird's nest that was constructed with two holes so that the bird could quickly escape. A bird in the turaco family, its common name derives from its loud call, which it makes when predators are near. As we stood looking up at the nest it occurred to us that our focus had been on one single nest, and we both realized that the tree we were underneath was filled with go-away-bird nests. We both smiled, recognizing our tunnel vision.

Describing a place—as in de-scribing, or taking apart to write about—is a strange way for me to think. I can tell people what I did while at the Il Ngwesi Lodge, but it has taken a longer time to realize how deeply it touched me. Actually, it took nearly a month after my visit before I told people about where I had been and what took place. Yvonne describes my feelings perfectly in an e-mailed response, titled "20 days," regarding my postvisit reminiscences:

I wondered if the soul of Il Ngwesi was sharing your dreams as it does mine for a while; peering into our illusions and where possible nudging them away. I read the wistfulness in-between the lines of your words, all

those pauses of silence . . . and I smile with a twinge of the heart knowing a little of the nostalgia for an old land that feels like home, all its familiar archetypes and the certainty that there is a story about belonging here. I smile, because Kenya—the witch—has a way of summoning her children. Those she does not want she will ensure will have a most terrible, soul wrenching time of it. I should warn you about this land; how she will infuse herself into your soul if she wants you. How she changes you, strips you off so much, tears you down and then rebuilds you in her image and likeness after you have cried like you have never cried before, laughed from the belly of your soul and discovered that love has a trillion other angles. Love, Yvonne.

My original e-mail to Yvonne on September 3, 2009, titled “late evening here,” is as follows:

It’s been twenty some days since I was in your territory and at Il Ngwesi.

I had the most wonder filled time during my brief visit. It was so special to see you in person again. It was strange for me to see Shuel again when he and the lodge staff picked me up at the Lewa airstrip. I returned to New Mexico very very joyous and actually, the entire experience of leaving the U.S. and spending the time at Il Ngwesi gave me a renewed sense of the earth and my place in it. You know all too well what Il Ngwesi does to one’s senses and sensibilities, I was rocketed into a fourth dimension of timelessness with the land and I recall telling Ochen that finally being at Il Ngwesi made complete indigenous sense. What now? I ask myself.

I began the project with Shuel and Il Ngwesi and know I am committed to seeing it flourish and become what the ancestors want it to be. Every day since my return home I’ve had a thought or two about my time in Kenya, of the people, the land, animals, and feel of the place in me. Beverly.

Stories told from lived experience are also lessons in helping one become whole, and this is what happens at Il Ngwesi. There is so much more and are so many personas to introduce, and they shall be the video-in-voice narrators. Inscribing the voice of current Il Ngwesi Lodge manager Ochen Sakita Miyani calls forth his charm, reserve, and intelligent, regal presence. He is the lodge’s second manager chosen by the Il Ngwesi community following Shuel’s move to the position operating Ol Donyo Keri Safaris. Ochen says he came to work for “the community as a steward who looks after his people.” He started in 2002, after previously working for the Lewa Conservancy as a guard and after further

training at another lodge near Mt. Kenya. He says he came back to work for his “people, to give back in a way to the community.” The Kenya NGO Earth Summit 2002 Forum’s report on sustainable tourism in Kenya outlines fundamental challenges for tourism to continue, suggesting:

Conservation of tourism resources (wildlife, cultural, historical and the marine) that attract tourists to Kenya. In the absence of a comprehensive land-use policy, this may be practically impossible in the long-term especially for wildlife. Provision of an adequate and well-maintained infrastructure that will facilitate the growth and expansion of the tourism industry. The Government of Kenya views wildlife as a vehicle for rural development but this can only happen if certain amenities are provided. Increase Kenyan participation in the sector. The Kenyanization loans provided in the 1960’s and 1970’s by the Kenya Tourist Development Corporation have been on the decline and the high cost of borrowing credit has hampered the participation of Kenyans. A report by Sinclair (1990) indicates that approximately 78% of the major hotels in the coastal area, 67% of hotels in Nairobi and 66% of lodges in national parks have some foreign investment. The participation of local communities that live and interact with wildlife should also be increased with the aim of helping them establish economically viable and sustainable tourism enterprises.¹⁹

This report further encourages Kenyan government officials to recognize the wealth in the country’s diverse cultural identities.

Similar ignorance in the United States exists in regard to federal Indian protections intended to support Indigenous sustainable development on federally protected Indian reservations, as get-rich development results in the devastating extraction of gas, oil, minerals, forests, and rocks for highway construction. The peculiar phenomenon among America’s Indigenous tribes is the recent historical trend in economic development that has tribes competing with each other’s casino-style gaming enterprises, an altered form of Indigenous tourism, but with the same issues of foreign investment, including borrowing credit with no thought as to what it does to the will of the people themselves.

Camera Work and iPhone Demonstration at Il Ngwesi: What We Imaged and How It Happened

As I unpacked my bags at Il Ngwesi Lodge, two female staff members, Benadetta and Grace, helped carry my bags to my *banda*. I briefly spoke with them, asking their names and thanking them for their help. It was a warm afternoon as the

scent of difference filled my nostrils—wood, earth, and fresh air. I had with me two still digital cameras and two HD video cameras, so the day after my arrival, I awoke just before sunrise and took the still camera out to the great room at the front of the lodge. Standing there were five or six of the lodge’s staff, looking east toward distant mountains, perhaps a hundred miles away, where the sun would rise. Their silhouettes were striking as I clicked the camera. James Kin-yaga heard me as he held his cup of coffee, and smiling, he said, “Good morning, would you like some coffee or tea?” After the first night under the stars, having that coffee and standing at the edge of the overlook of the great room, the expectation of sunrise over the savannah was heightened by the calls made by birds and some other creatures. This was the scene I witnessed each morning during my stay at Il Ngwesi Lodge.

Getting the cameras out meant sharing and giving a camera to whomever I was with at Il Ngwesi, usually Keshine, Shuel, Henry, or Robert. I simply allowed a process to unfold within each moment, in lieu of workshopping. I’d demonstrate the buttons, adjust the viewfinder, mention things about what I was doing, and ask a few questions when they first got hold of the camera—for example, to see if what they were seeing was focused. I relied on instinct to facilitate documentation until, by themselves, they would take the camera out. As we ventured out into the land a digital audio recorder was used to collect stories told by whomever was sharing. Shuel, Ochen, and myself had more formal discussions about the documentation and set aside some time for formal interviews with staff so as not to impede upon their regular duties at the lodge. The Il Ngwesi villages were some distance away from the lodge, taking us about forty-five minutes by vehicle. My two visits to a village proved invaluable. Their homes were square in shape and made from the mud, grass, and wood poles so familiar in Indigenous construction. A tour of the village by one of the elders was provided as the lodge staff prepared a meal of barbecued goat. The village itself was not large, consisting of eight entrances that symbolically represented the eight elders who resided at that village. Several large acacia trees towered over the village plaza. The village’s center space was reserved for the goat and cattle livestock pens, which were constructed of the scrub tree limbs and had large, spiked thorns for protection against predators at night. The livestock was taken daily to pasture, from sunrise to sunset. The village itself was surrounded for protection, as well, with a fence of more scrub brush.

One long and lazy afternoon, I pulled out my iPhone in the lodge’s great room. Several of the staff noticed the object in my hand, and young Moran Robert inquired about it. They knew about computers and cell phones, as Ochen had one, as did Shuel. Out of character, I began demonstrating features of the iPhone, feeling afterward like I was in a commercial. Robert was intrigued with the Internet feature, though I had already tried it and could not connect with a satellite.



Sunrise at Il Ngwesi. Photograph by Beverly Singer.

I showed them the global clock and how to dial a call with the touch of a finger. When I began playing music, they stepped back and started moving to something I had chosen from South Africa. The spell was broken when one of them was called back to work. In hindsight the ease with which they accepted this new technological gadget produced another cultural shift from exposure to the world outside of Il Ngwesi. I asked myself about my own intervening role.

These and many other stories, alongside dense and animated images, are continuing to be collected at Il Ngwesi, as I left two cameras with them. What Shuel, Yvonne, and I share with Il Ngwesi is a lifelong bond. In order to strengthen it, Yvonne recently asked me the following:

Is there room for a more dramatic exchange that involves experiential travel and discovery, a way for the young of your landscape to meet the rituals of the Il Ngwesi's landscape? That way you can come often, and I can join the journeys of discovery and meaning. A meeting of elders?
A space of knowledge exchange?

My resolve is to host Shuel and Yvonne in my homeland of New Mexico. I will introduce them to my people, and together, we shall work on editing part one of our video-in-voices production on behalf of Il Ngwesi. Our mutual and delicate bonds with the land at Il Ngwesi reveal more than stories. For us it contains

important lessons for successive generations in retrieving knowledge on how to survive and attain balance with the land and with each other.

NOTES

I dedicate this essay to my beloved aunt Catherine Amy Singer, who passed to Spirit on November 15, 2009. On August 12, 2009, our village, Khapogeh, celebrated its annual harvest feast, and for the first time in many years, I was not home to help Aunt Amy. I was in Kenya. Auntie told me, "Go, enjoy yourself, when you come back, tell us all about it." Special thanks go to Yvonne Owuor and Ole Shuel Nijalis for helping with this essay and sharing their words and to the people at Il Ngwesi for their support. *Wo wa tsi* (blessings). Edward Kennedy, Aunt Amy's widowed husband, deserves mention for asking after my writing and if I wanted to go out for breakfast. Yes, uncle, let's go.

1. "The early part of 2006 witnessed one of the worst droughts in recent years and it has a serious impact on Indigenous peoples. Some people lost all their livestock, although the majority were left with herds that were too few to sustain families. Pastoralists moved long distances in search of pasture and water. In the districts south of the capital, Nairobi, a lot of land is no longer in the hands of pastoralists, and private farms have put up fences all along the road. In the northern districts of Laikipia and Samburu, the government ordered pastoralists out who had sought grazing in the Mount Kenya areas following the severe drought." International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA), *The Indigenous World 2007* (North America: Transaction Publishers, 2007), 473.

2. The project ICTs for Intercultural Dialogue: Developing Communication Capacities of Indigenous Peoples (ICT4ID), approved by UNESCO's general conference in 2003 and extended to continue until 2007, aimed at using ICTs to preserve and regenerate Indigenous cultures and identity and to promote their dissemination locally, nationally, and internationally, thus contributing to narrowing the digital divide, a major development challenge. *UNESCO Report of Annual Meeting of Inter-Agency Support Group on Indigenous Issues*, (Rome: UNESCO, 2006), 9–10.

3. *Ibid.*, 10

4. Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor is a fiction writer, conservationist, cultural activist, and past executive director of the Zanzibar International Film Festival who won the 2003 Caine Prize for African Writing for *Weight of Whispers*. The Caine Prize is often referred to as the African Booker.

5. Thanks go to Suzanne Schnuttgen at UNESCO, whose search on the Internet identified me as an Indigenous filmmaker and scholar.

6. Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor currently is project coordinator for academic planning at the Aga Kahn University in Nairobi.

7. "Indigenous communities in Kenya suffer from very similar problems, such as: dependency on natural resources for their livelihoods; a lack of security of tenure; a lack of infrastructure, including schools, health facilities; communication, roads, etc.; and generally a denial of their economic, social, political and cultural rights. Neither do they have the same economic strengths, organizational structures and technical capability necessary to seek protection from human rights violations." IWGIA, *The Indigenous World 2007*, 468.

8. Yvonne Owuor, e-mail message to author, May 2007, concerning completion of the ICT in Kenya.

9. Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (London: Zed Books, 1990).

10. The Lewa Wildlife Conservancy is a privately owned wildlife sanctuary in Kenya.

11. "There is no specific legislation governing Indigenous peoples in Kenya. Some Kenyan laws, such as the Trust Land Act Cap 288, Forest Act Cap 285 and Government Lands Act Cap 280 work against human rights of Indigenous peoples in a number of ways as, through evictions or restriction of movement, they deny Indigenous peoples access to their resources and primary sources of livelihood. The new draft land policy was published toward the end of 2006 so that the public could raise any issues they might have in this regard. . . . While some issues are sensitive towards issues relating to land and resources (issues touching directly on the livelihoods of Indigenous peoples), it falls short of recognizing collective rights . . . there is a strong move to individualize land titles and insufficient examples and precedents as to how security of tenure and development can be achieved when resources are held collectively." IWGIA, *The Indigenous World 2007*, 469–70.

12. Ecotourism emphasizes low impact on the environment and equitable distribution of benefits to the local communities. Kenya has been a mass-tourism destination for a long time, and it is slowly shifting toward embracing principles and practices associated with ecotourism.

13. In an e-mail message, Yvonne Owuor wrote, "The rains are so late Beverly and our people are hurting. The animals are dying and the Il Ngwesi people are also in anguish over the prolonged drought. It has never been so bad. If you have your rain people there, if they can, ask them to intercede for us, or if not for us, for the innocent animals at least. Shuel must be worried about his cows."

14. See www.ilngwesi.com.

15. Ole Shuel, videotaped conversation, Nairobi, Kenya, August 8, 2009.

16. Jane Kahata and Judy Imbanga, *Sustainable Tourism: A Report on the Civil Society Review of the Implementation of Agenda 21 in Kenya* (Kenya NGO Earth Summit 2002 Forum, February 2002), 7.

17. Ali A. Mazrui, *The African Condition: A Political Diagnosis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 114.

18. Yvonne Owuor, e-mail message to author, May 2007.

19. Kahata and Imbanga, *Sustainable Tourism*, 32.