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Sudden Leap into Darkness: The case of Maasai Exclusion and marginalisation in Ngorongoro, Northern Tanzania

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Ngorongoro, a World Heritage Site, Man and Biosphere Reserve, Global Geopark by UNESCO, and home for over 80,000 Maasai is under siege. The Maasai, a Nilotic ethnic group, have moved around the Ngorongoro and Serengeti areas while conserving the land and wildlife for approximately 500 years. Over the centuries the Maasai have developed a finely honed symbiotic relationship with the local environment, which has allowed the domestication of livestock and people to coexist in a dryland and therefore a resource-scarce environment. In addition, their local knowledge has allowed the large mammal population as well as ecological diversity to grow under their stewardship. However currently they are being accused by the government, international conservation lobbyists, and wildlife hunting firms, of threatening what they have kept safely over centuries. As history demonstrates, nothing could be further from the truth. As this article will demonstrate, the ongoing pressure against the Maasai is largely influenced by the potential financial gain resting with the land, wildlife, and ecological biodiversity, rather than their own role in threatening nature and wildlife.

Dating back from establishment of Tanzania's protected areas, there is proof of acts rooted in racism and colonial superiority. The key architect of African wild sanctuaries such as in the Serengeti focused solely on the protection of large parcels of land without regard for the grievous cost to the

communities who preserved them for the centuries prior. The chief relevant conservation lobbyist^[2] include the Fauna Conservation Society and Kenya Wildlife Society led by Simon and Dr Leakey[—]; the Frankfurt Zoological society led by Bernhard Grzimek, its founder and the longest president; Professor Pearsall and Dr Worthington^[4] of the Conservancy; and Lee Talbot of International Union Conservation of Nature (IUCN).[—] The Ngorongoro Multiple Land Use Model is therefore a compromise between the Maasai resistance against Serengeti eviction and conservationist lobbyists poised to dispossess them of both Serengeti and Ngorongoro. It was the fear of colonial governments that attempts to dispossess the Maasai in both areas will be a point for retaliation by future African post independency governments^[6]. There were also sentiments that the colonial government should keep its pledge to the Maasai[—] that they will not be disturbed again following the Serengeti eviction. On the peak of Serengeti eviction, the Maasai population was around ten thousand in the whole of Serengeti and Ngorongoro.

In many of his speeches, Mr. Grzimek was quoted as saying he can find many ways and reasons to work with Joseph Stalin of the former Soviet Union and Idd Amin of Uganda[—] as it is easier to work with dictators on matters of conservation than within standard democratic parameters. His logic was that it is easier to work without the constraints of parliament. He preferred ending his letters related African conservation with the Latin phrase *ceterum censeo progeniem hominum esse diminuendam*.^[8] This may fairly translate to as 'Incidentally; I am of the opinion that the offspring of people must be reduced.'

In 1959 Ngorongoro Conservation Area (NCA) was established but unlike Serengeti, Maasai rights were part of its founding objectives in multiple land use models founded on three key purposes[—] (i) to recognize and promote the interest of the Maasai pastoralist, (ii) to promote ecological and wildlife conservation, and (iii) tourism. As part of the resettlement "agreement" imposed by the British colonial state, the Maasai were promised not only the right to continue to use and occupy the NCA, but to also play a key role in the management and governance[—] of the area as well as to partake in tourism and hotel investment proceeds via the establishment of a Maasai treasury^[10]. The first Management of the NCAA was composed of five Maasai and five department[—] officials.

Now, the NCA is also home for Datooga and numerous Hadzabe families who live on the edge of Lake Eyasi. The life, livelihoods, and culture of the three indigenous groups are dependent on this land as a foundation of culture and spirituality.

World Heritage status excepting the Maasai

In 1979 Ngorongoro was accorded the status of a World Heritage Site by the UNESCO World Heritage Conventions (WHC) natural criteria. Ngorongoro was further declared a Man and Biosphere Reserve, Cultural site[—], and Global Geo-Park^[13] in 1981, 2010, and 2018 respectively. All this was done without prior consultation and approval of the Maasai, its primary right holders. Such inscriptions have led to strict conservation policies that undermine right to livelihood for the community. Despite being the only UN agency with the mandate for all aspects of education, UNESCO policies have forced the Maasai of Ngorongoro to unprecedented illiteracy that stands at a staggering 64 percent[—] of Maasai in the NCA. These policies mirror those of other neo-colonial powers and have led to persistent hunger and starvation along with the erosion of traditional livelihoods, and spiritual and cultural practices.

Weaponizing poverty and social services

Sixty years after independence, nothing has changed in Tanzanian conservation policy. In fact, fears of the colonial government over African self-rule undoing colonial legacy is not the case in Ngorongoro. Continuing the colonial regime's pursuit to evict Maasai from the Ngorongoro crater

and the marsh areas depended upon for water, the post-independence government has disposed of them without consultation.

In April of this year, Tanzanian President Suluhu ran a systematic media campaign^[15] that echoed the former statements made by Mr. Grzimek. For fear of public criticism, the President publicly warned against allowing the NCA Maasai access to media.^[16] It is therefore fair to argue, the old colonial prejudices^[17] still exist in the form of black elites, a continuation of the former white colonialists' attitudes. In February some members of parliament urged the government not to engage the Maasai, but rather to deploy tanks^[18] to force them out. Three months later, the military^[19] was deployed to dispossess the Maasai of 1500 square kilometers in Loliondo from behind the barrel of guns.

When the President publicly made an open case^[20] last year, the government responded six days later, in the form of public notice.^[21] Government primary schools, dispensaries, a police station, churches, and a mosque were labelled as red-listed for demolition; allegedly for being built without a permit. In March 2022, the government issued a letter targeting several key life-saving services as well as withdrawing funds from NCA coffers. It appears that government targeting of NCA services, as well as a transfer from a NCA relief fund secured^[22] from the International Monetary Funds to other districts^[23], is the result of stakeholder pressure^[24] to make life unbearable for the Maasai in Ngorongoro. Subsequently, the government suspended the operation of Flying Medical Doctors, a not-for-profit organization that was operating small flights to provide medical emergency services throughout Maasailand since the 1970's.

False narratives

To justify its eviction plan, the government has indulged in unprecedented conspiracies^[24] and propaganda designed around carefully fabricated false^[25] narratives. Initially, the government was blaming the Maasai for a rise in the human and livestock populations, and rampant settlement which they argue have surpassed the carrying capacity of the area and therefore threaten biodiversity and tourism. However, it appears that the government exaggerated the data as Ngorongoro remains with a population density of ten persons per square kilometer, far below the national profile with an average of 71 persons per kilometer square from over sixty millions inhabitant. Ngorongoro also attracts 70 percent of all tourists visiting Tanzania. The government further claims that the Maasai have no ancestral land in Tanzania similar to any other^[26] Tanzanian tribes. It also frames the eviction narrative in humanitarian rhetoric claiming that it will^[27] save the Maasai from undignified living conditions^[28], the fact which is entirely manmade and functions with government complicity.

Loliondo

Like Ngorongoro and Serengeti, Loliondo was inhabited from time immemorial by the Maasai community. They remain through colonial and post-independence Tanzania its sole occupants. When Loliondo was made a Game Controlled Area in the 1950's thousands of Maasai continued living without restriction throughout 4000 square kilometers. Within the former Game Controlled Area, the government established the headquarter of the Ngorongoro District as there were no legal restrictions for settlement within the former Game Controlled Area. Under law then, hunting lease may be entered within Game-Controlled Area without affecting community land holding.

In 1978, following villagization programs, several villages in the area were registered and issued with Village Land Certificates. In 1993, the government entered a hunting concession lease^[29] for the land with an Emirate Royal Family. The hunting concession was secured contrary to law^[30] and Otterlo Business Corporation, an entity established to oversee the interest of the Emirate Royal family, has enjoyed close relationship with powerful figures^[31] in successive governments and has been publicly accused^[32] of bad dealings. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bqCiTvTiWfl>)

In 2009, a new law was enacted that formally separated human settlements from the Game Controlled Area. The law forbids the continuation or commencement of game control areas existing on village land. By the spirit of the new law, in case of an intersection between a Game Controlled Area and the village land, then the latter shall prevail. The government sought to qualify Loliondo as a land devoid of people to qualify as a Game Control Area under the new law by evicting Maasai. The law required the minister to review former forty-eight Game Controlled Areas to assess if any qualify under the new law and this should be made within twelve months of the law's enactment, otherwise, they would hitherto be deemed as repealed. On repeated occasions in 2009, 2014, and 2017 there were attempts for resettlement over a swath of 1500 square kilometers. Not a single Game Controlled has been reviewed as required by the law for the last thirteen years making the purported Pololeti Game Controlled Areas that affected 1500 square kilometers in Loliondo wholly illegal.

In early June 2022, without prior notice to village authorities and their occupants, the government deployed the military^[32] to enforce annexation of the village land to establish a game-controlled area forcefully^[33]. Before the commencement of the operation, political leaders were allegedly summoned for consultative^[34] purposes as a rouse for abduction, detention, and ultimately, the issuance of fabricated charges.

Thereafter, a violent operation led by the Inspector General^[35] of Police^[34] and immigration department left many people homeless, livestock killed^[36], and hundreds of people arrested for allegedly being Kenyan. Thousands of Maasai, all of whom were Tanzanian citizens^[37] were forced to flee the country^[37] amid insecurity. Still, thousands of the Maasai who fled the country that day fear to returning home^[38] amid threats of arrest^[38] for crossing the border to Kenya illegally.

Subsequently, the government declared the contested land a Game Controlled Area in violation of the Wildlife Conservation Area Act and in contempt of an East Africa Court of Justice Ruling^[39] in 2018. Indeed, the government annexed the land before the final verdict of the Court was issued, initially set for judgment on 22 June before being postponed to September 2022.^[40]

Why all the fuss?

The hunting business is very beneficial to the public officers responsible for issuing concession licenses. As there are no rules clearly defining the process for granting licenses, the process is ripe with potential for misuse and outside (frequently nefarious) influence. Therefore, claiming a threat against conservation efforts is often a quick means to securing public support.

The now protected areas in East Africa, such as Serengeti, Maasai Mara, Mkomazi, Manyara, Tarangire, and many others were historically home to the Maasai. They have great potential for conservation and boast a healthy abundance of wildlife species. This was only possible because the Maasai will not feed on the wild meat, and they have established moral rules against wildlife killings. According to their rules, one may only collect dry tree pieces or cut a few branches for medicine or other usages. This emphasis on maintaining the natural state has assisted in a great deal of ecological preservation and protection of wildlife. The Maasai do not protect nature or wildlife for the sake of financial gain as the government appears to pursue, but they do so as a moral obligation imposed on them by their deity, Enkai (God).

While propaganda is currently directed against the alleged Maasai threat to wildlife, it is important to take a longer view and recognize that perhaps the larger threat is the enormous impact that forced evictions and commercial hunting have on the ecosystem.

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[2] <https://www.uvm.edu/rsenr/wfb175/bonner%20chapter%203.pdf>
(<https://www.uvm.edu/rsenr/wfb175/bonner%20chapter%203.pdf>).

[3] The Nature Conservancy (1956-1959) Conservation Problem oversees, Serengeti National Park in Tanganyika https://drive.google.com/file/d/1eM_KMUrFFb4UcVJ192-TfGRb2o5cU2bZ/view?usp=sharing (https://drive.google.com/file/d/1eM_KMUrFFb4UcVJ192-TfGRb2o5cU2bZ/view?usp=sharing). see page 7, 14-17, 39-40

[4] The Nature Conservancy (1956-1959) Ibid see page 12-13

[5] Tribute to Lee Talbot <https://www.iucn.org/news/secretariat/202105/a-tribute-lee-merriam-talbot-1930-2021> (<https://www.iucn.org/news/secretariat/202105/a-tribute-lee-merriam-talbot-1930-2021>).

[6] The Nature Conservancy (1956-1959)
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1JUIIjRkFSiJCKZfWhyTQ33KWYBRJWELW/view?usp=sharing>
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see page 19-20 and 29

[7] Dowie Chapter 3 <https://www.uvm.edu/rsenr/rm230/Dowie%20Chapter%203%20Maasai.pdf>
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[8] <https://www.merkur.de/lokales/leserbriefe/weltspiegel/toedliche-bedrohung-247211.html>
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[10] The Nature conservancy (1956-1959) Conservation problem oversees
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see page 2, 5, 9-11, 19-20 and 29

[11] The Nature conservancy (1956-1959) Conservation problem oversees
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see Governor Statement to Orkiam Maasai council at page 9-11

[12] <https://whc.unesco.org/en/news/641> (<https://whc.unesco.org/en/news/641>).

[13] <https://en.unesco.org/global-geoparks/ngorongoro-lengai> (<https://en.unesco.org/global-geoparks/ngorongoro-lengai>).

[14] <https://www.oaklandinstitute.org/sites/oaklandinstitute.org/files/pdfpreview/got-mlum-review-clean.pdf>
(<https://www.oaklandinstitute.org/sites/oaklandinstitute.org/files/pdfpreview/got-mlum-review-clean.pdf>).

[15] President Samia led Royal Tour <https://youtu.be/Xe0VmTtryFc> (<https://youtu.be/Xe0VmTtryFc>).

[16] President Samia warning to media and Civil Societies from allowing Ngorongoro Maasai access to media <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wuixR2cTg6Y> (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wuixR2cTg6Y>).

[17] <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2022/05/16/mission-creep-at-the-ritz-with-the-president-of-tanzania> (<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2022/05/16/mission-creep-at-the-ritz-with-the-president-of-tanzania>).

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[26] Deputy Minister Marry Masanja claims Maasai relocation to Handeni <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vHY6Q16U3cs&t=112s> (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vHY6Q16U3cs&t=112s>).

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[32] Militia group deployed in Loliondo meeting Prime Minister kassim Majaliwa <https://youtu.be/P0eh7BsO9Sc> (<https://youtu.be/P0eh7BsO9Sc>).

[33] Prime Minister Kassim Majaliwa on 10th June 2022 stated in parliament that Maasai leaders were summoned for consultation and that no serious dispute in Loliondo. The same Maasai were later charged in Court for offence allegedly committed when all of them were being detained incommunicado <https://youtu.be/QNOI65MD4IU> (<https://youtu.be/QNOI65MD4IU>).

[34] Simon Siro, former Inspector General of police ordered for use of force against Maasai not supporting annexation of the village land as game Controlled Area <https://youtu.be/AWFC3yOINrw> (<https://youtu.be/AWFC3yOINrw>).

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