



Full Length Article

Instrumentalizing pastoralism? Understanding hybrid tenure and governance in Ilkisongo Maasai land of southern Kenya

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A B S T R A C T

Throughout Kenya, new governance regimes that are designed to sustain habitat connectivity for wildlife populations outside of national parks have gained increasing prominence. Though these new regimes often center a discursive emphasis on the synergies between wildlife conservation and pastoralist land use, it often remains unclear how they have interacted with colonial and post-colonial legacies that influenced pastoralists' relationships with land. As an effort to gain an improved understanding of the practices that conservation governance regimes deploy, and their underlying rationales, I present an empirically-driven account drawn from ethnographic field work in Kenyan Ilkisongo Maasai land surrounding Amboseli National Park. I argue that to understand recent configurations of land, it is essential to consider the multiple types of interlocking practices deployed by international wildlife conservation NGOs and the Kenyan state. Under a range of pressures to subdivide collectively titled land, a new territorial and governance configuration is emerging where land tenure will retain characteristics of being both private and collective. I argue that a discursive emphasis that frames conservation interventions as producing welfare for populations of wildlife and pastoralists alike has created new potentials to center the concerns of politically marginalized pastoralists, but has also raised risks of an 'anti-politics' that can reproduce and reinforce multiple dimensions of power asymmetries.

1. Introduction

Drylands outside of protected areas in Kenya are increasingly recognized as vital for mammalian biodiversity conservation (Western, Russell, & Cuthill, 2009). Decentralization of national authority to county governments (Kanyinga, 2016), and delegation of authority over development initiatives and wildlife management to a mosaic of non-governmental organizations (NGOs; Western et al., 2015), have spurred the expansion of 'community-based conservation' (CBC) interventions to currently cover 11% of Kenyan land.¹ In a broad sense, CBC is an activity that is intended to simultaneously enhance human development and to conserve biodiversity (Galvin et al., 2018), and is seen as an alternative to 'fortress' wildlife conservation practices that have been widely criticized for dispossessing Indigenous peoples of their lands and promoting a dichotomy between nature and society (Adams & Hulme, 2001; Adams & Hutton, 2007; Brockington, 2002). However, CBC models in Kenya have come under heavy criticism, variously being described as neo-colonial (Mbaria & Ogada, 2016), and facilitating 'green grabbing' (Bersaglio & Cleaver, 2018). With striking inequalities and power asymmetries observed (Cavanagh et al., 2020; Homewood et al., 2012; Weldemichel & Lein, 2019), it remains unclear why these

governance models have proliferated in the specific forms that they have. Furthermore, it often remains unclear how these projects have reconfigured access to land, and how they relate to other recent social, political, and economic changes at multiple levels of organization (Fairhead et al., 2012; Gardner, 2012; Hall et al., 2015; Lund & Boone, 2013).

Wildlife conservation engagements with Kenyan Ilkisongo Maasai (hereafter Maasai), one section of the Maasai people as a whole (hereafter Maasai), provide an example of an early prototype of CBC that focused on the synergies between pastoralist livelihoods and wildlife conservation (Western, 1997). While the 'fortress' conservation model was closely associated with anti-pastoralist rhetoric that presupposed destructive land use practices (Brockington & Homewood, 1999; Hughes, 2006), conservation biologists who have spearheaded CBC in the area surrounding Amboseli National Park (ANP) have instead considered mobile pastoralism to be an integral ecological process that enhances biodiversity within semi-arid ecosystems (Western, 1982, 1994, 1997; Western & Gichohi, 1993). Their perspective generally resonates with wider understandings of pastoralism as a crucial livelihood practice in drylands that enables responses to stochastic, spatio-temporally variable rainfall and patchy key resources through

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¹ Kenyan Wildlife Conservancies Association Strategic Plan 2019-2023 <https://kwakenya.com/resources/careers/publications/>.

flexible animal husbandry and mobility (see Behnke et al., 1993; Ellis & Swift, 1988; Scoones, 1994; Turner, 2011; Vetter, 2005). Thus, the views of conservation biologists working in the areas surrounding ANP also generally resonate with a growing understanding of the vital importance of pastoralist practices for supporting both livelihoods and global rangeland biodiversity (see Homewood & Rodgers, 1991; Homewood & Rodgers, 1984; Notenbaert et al., 2012; Sala et al., 2017; Sayre et al., 2013). Research in Maasai land surrounding ANP has demonstrated negative impacts of increasingly sedentarized pastoralism on vegetation and wildlife populations (Groom & Western, 2013; Okello, 2012; Okello & Kioko, 2010), as well as shown how landscape fragmentation has concentrated wildlife within parks and caused sweeping changes in ecological dynamics (Western & Gichohi, 1993; Western & Maitumo, 2004). Social science research from the area has further emphasized the negative impacts of sedentarization on Ilkisongo livelihoods (BurnSilver, 2009; BurnSilver et al., 2008). As such, conservation biologists have emphasized sustaining both connectivity of vital wildlife habitat and a landscape that is open to mobility for Ilkisongo livestock in response to ongoing concerns of subdivision, farming, and fencing within collectively titled lands (Western, Groom, & Worden, 2009).

This emphasis on the overlapping mobility of wildlife and livestock in a UNESCO-recognized 'biosphere reserve' appears to mark a shift toward a new paradigm of intervention and a 'win-win' approach. CBC is framed as producing financial benefits for the Ilkisongo (Western & Thresher, 1973), as incorporating Ilkisongo culture and institutions into conservation governance and wildlife management (Western, 1994; Western et al., 2015), and as acknowledging the historical injustices of their exclusion from national parks (Groom & Western, 2013; Western, 1982, 1997). However, many have noted how in recent decades natural resource management projects focused on 'communities' have often neglected wider political and economic influences and been rooted in romanticized and essentialized notions of knowledge, culture, and 'traditional' practices, risking co-optation and instrumentalization of Indigenous institutions and knowledge systems, and contributing to deepening disenfranchisement (Agrawal & Gibson, 1999; Blaikie, 2006; Brosius, 1999; Brosius & Hitchner, 2010; Ferguson, 2006; Nadasdy, 2005; Saunders, 2014).

In what follows, I do not evaluate CBC interventions in Ilkisongo land on whether they have achieved their stated objectives.² Instead, I examine them in relation to multiple other interventions that have shaped Ilkisongo relations with land over time, and seek to understand how these interventions have produced and codified land as a resource partitioned into different uses (see Li, 2014b). I build on recent literature that emphasizes how diverse social mobilizations 'from below' have interacted with new national and international 'rushes' for land (Hall et al., 2015), and how relational social processes reconfigure notions of property, rights, and social contracts (Rasmussen & Lund, 2018). Drawing on eleven months of field work,³ I examine how a lineage of governance regimes have used different practices to attempt to mediate the Ilkisongo's relationships with land. I asked, how have a series of interventions beginning in the colonial era shaped the present configuration, use, and perception of land, and how are current governance regimes interacting with local political movements among the Ilkisongo? Answering this question showed how the different practices utilized in wildlife conservation governance have been structured around collective land tenure, new authority structures, and the unique subjectivities of a 'community', bounded by collective land title, that is increasingly under the influence of transnational NGOs. I show how understanding the process of ongoing reconfiguration of land requires

attention to the evolution of multiple types of interlocking practices deployed to shape Ilkisongo relations with land, and a recent discursive emphasis on what I refer to as the 'productive power' of rangeland CBC, where interventions are framed as producing welfare for populations of wildlife and pastoralists alike.

Drawing from the concepts of territorialization (Peluso & Lund, 2011) and a Foucauldian typology of power, I show how a series of colonial and post-colonial interventions have been used to constrain socio-ecological relationships in Ilkisongo land through 1) disciplinary practices that sought to create a 'governable' landscape 2) collectively titled land governance structures and authority structures 3) delegation of powers from the central authority of the Kenyan state to a heterogeneous mix of non-state actors, and 4) a proliferation of new regulatory and disciplinary practices. I argue that a particular understanding of how to foster the mutual welfare of both wildlife and pastoralists, and a fixed view of Maasai identity, has unified state, non-state, and a subset of Ilkisongo actors, around a logic of intervention. Building from this understanding, I consider the current, ongoing processes of subdivision of collective lands, and consider how these processes are being steered by state, NGO, and Ilkisongo representatives in response to local social movements. These processes are reconfiguring land into a hybrid type of property that retains qualities of being both collective and private.

2. Territorialization and a relational view of power

Literature on territorialization initially focused on actions by 'the state' that created new systems of access, claiming, and exclusion within spatial boundaries (Vandergest & Peluso, 1995). This conceptual lens has been expanded in recent years to include non-state actors involved in processes of resource frontier-making that overturn previous orders of access and authority through creation, discovery, and 'invention' of new resources (Corson, 2011; Corson & MacDonald, 2012; Peluso & Lund, 2011; Rasmussen & Lund, 2018). Recent literature has considered how processes of territorialization more broadly re-establish "property systems, political jurisdictions, rights, and social contracts" (Rasmussen & Lund, 2018, p. 388) through relational processes of enforcement, inclusion, and exclusion where spatial boundaries, legal systems, and authorities co-constitute a range of territorial configurations (Elden, 2013; Lund, 2016; Sikor & Lund, 2009). This attentiveness in literature on territorialization to unique subjectivities that accompany land tenure and property systems, spatial controls, and reconfigurations of resource frontiers (Rasmussen & Lund, 2018) has increasingly converged with anthropological understandings of land tenure, power relations, and development subjectivities (e.g. Li, 2014a; Li, 2010).

A typology of distinct 'sovereign', 'disciplinary', and 'biopolitical' forms of power relations that were developed amidst different historical contexts in Europe is commonly used by Foucauldian scholars (Dean, 2010). Repressive, coercive techniques, commonly referred to as 'sovereign' power, were key practices used against external and internal enemies by historical monarchical leaders who were seen as embodying 'the state' (Foucault, 1995). This contrasts with the liberal 'art of government' that later emerged and led to a proliferation of practices that were aimed at the 'conduct of conduct' (Foucault, 2003, 2008). Foucault distinguished sovereign power as the right to "to take life or to let live" from these liberal practices that instead sought "to make live and to let die", which he referred to under the umbrella terms of 'biopower' (Foucault, 2008). For Foucault, this 'productive' type of power emerged through a shift in government towards a focus on populations and economics, and through a range of practices that sought to optimize factors such as health, security, and wealth (Foucault, 2007). These practices were intended to direct thought and desire to 'produce' subjects who would internalize new ways of thinking and behaving (i.e. 'subjectivation' or 'subjectification'), and come to govern themselves, while at the same time drawing attention away from coercive practices of 'the state' (Foucault, 2007, 2008). Biopower includes two distinct types of practices that include 'disciplinary', 'intimate' practices aimed

² See recent comparative reviews of CBC in Africa by Galvin et al. (2018) and Galvin et al. (2020).

³ As part of a larger research project focused on understanding how changes in land use governance were impacting access to resources and what factors were motivating subdivision of collective lands.

at individuals, and regulatory, or 'biopolitical' practices aimed at populations (Foucault, 2007). While disciplinary practices have a long history in conducting, constraining, and facilitating different behaviors within different organizations (Foucault, 2007), 'biopolitics' as a 'technology' of governance takes a bureaucratic focus, relying on statistical representations, populations, and the 'administration of life' (Foucault, 2003, 2008). According to the 'governmentality', or logic that guides a 'regime of practices', various interventions are designed to shape the behaviors of a population (see Dean, 2010). Crucially, 'sovereign', 'disciplinary', and 'biopolitical' practices are not exclusive in this framing, but work together, and can be deployed selectively depending on the 'governmentality' underlying a regime of practice (Dean, 2010).

I argue that the regime of practices in Ilkisongo land, rather than having one central logic of control, has been stabilized by a discursive emphasis that frames interventions as producing mutual welfare for populations of wildlife and pastoralists (what I refer to as the 'productive power' of rangeland CBC). I highlight how different types of practices have evolved and diversified since the colonial era in Ilkisongo land, but have converged around constant interventions to sustain ecological connectivity within land that is neither fully collective nor private. By centering discourse on the mutual welfare of pastoralists and wildlife, an 'anti-politics' is enabled, where wildlife conservation interventions that play a central role in land politics are consistently interpreted in a neutral way (Ferguson, 1994; Li, 2007). I show how the use of force, circumscription, and law, alongside 'intimate' behavior change practices, have been deployed together with more distanced, landscape-level regulation of collectively titled land. Importantly, I do not imply that these practices have had a totalizing effect, or that attempts to create new subjectivities among the Ilkisongo have overridden their own agency. Rather, I emphasize these distinct types of practices to distinguish where liberal European forms of governance have gained prominence in wildlife conservation discourse and practices. Considering processes of territorialization and the subjectivities unique to these hybrid property regimes, I argue that interventions over time have been intended to 'produce' Ilkisongo as new types of subjects, and have ultimately shaped a unique, emerging configuration of land (see Li, 2014b).

3. Methodology

Research took place in three Ilkisongo group ranches (GRs) surrounding ANP in Kajiado county, southern Kenya: Mbirikani, Eselenkei, and Olgulului-Olororashi. These GRs are situated between the Chyulu hills to the east, subdivided former GRs to the north and west, and Tanzania to the south (Fig. 1). The climate is semi-arid, and rainfall follows a bimodal annual pattern, with March–May and November–December rainy seasons and frequent droughts (Altmann et al., 2002).

The analysis was based on eleven aggregate months of ethnographic field work conducted in 2018 and 2019. Interviews were completed with 132 GR residents, primarily in Maa, with three translators. Interviews were conducted under informed consent and recorded only if additional consent was granted. Interviews followed a semi-structured format with questions about historical changes in livelihoods, land use rules and norms, the impacts of wildlife conservation programs, and perceptions of land subdivision. Data collection was supplemented by informal interviews about decision-making processes, and participant observation in Ilkisongo people's homes, population centers, and in meetings within local settlements. In order to challenge my preliminary interpretations, I presented study findings and invited critical feedback at eight public meetings in the settlement locations where interviews had been completed. I also completed unstructured and semi-structured key-informant interviews with twenty wildlife conservation NGO

representatives, GR representatives, and Ilkisongo NGO employees on their views of changes in land use and Ilkisongo livelihoods. The analysis was further supplemented by informal interviews, archival research on historical land use at the Kenya National Archives, and analysis of both wildlife conservation grey literature and peer reviewed publications.

3.1. Brief history and description of the study site

The Maasai within Kenya were forced into signing treaties with the British colonial authority that limited them to current day Kajiado and Narok counties in 1914 (Hughes, 2006). Additional expropriations of Maasai lands for European ranches and colonial game reserves (Spear, 1993), the influx of non-Maasai to farm in the post-independence era, and granting of large individual ranches to influential Maasai all led to reduction of communal land (Campbell, 1981, 1993; Campbell, 1981; Galaty, 1992; Kituyi, 1990). Under the colonial authority, a series of changes in land use designations, boundaries, and authorities were recommended, based on pejorative assumptions that pastoralists were economically irrational and that livestock husbandry practices were static, inefficient, and driving land degradation (see Grandin, 1991; Rutten, 2008; Waller, 2012). These led to a series of colonial-era interventions that aimed to transform transhumant pastoralist livestock husbandry practices, to encourage individualistic thinking and undermine communal land management, and to promote cash crop farming (Fratkin, 2001; Rutten, 2008; Waller, 2012).

A series of colonial-era debates and land commissions informed the post-independence Lawrence Report, which recommended collective tenure for pastoralist lands to create tenure security, enable exclusion of outsiders, to reduce stocking rates, and to encourage commercialized livestock production (Mwangi, 2007). This led to the creation of GRs as a legal land tenure designation under the Land Adjudication Act of 1968, and establishment of GRs in Kajiado proceeded throughout the 1970's (Mwangi, 2007).⁴ Despite serving a key political purpose of both Maasai and Kenyan elite interests, and numerous concerns about governance structure and flexible access to variable resources, some claimed that GRs addressed concerns about tenure security, brought benefits of permanent water sources, and had veterinary advantages (Campbell, 1981; Coldham, 1982; Mwangi, 2007; Rutten, 1992, 2008). The majority of GRs in Kajiado had undergone subdivision into private holdings before the time of this study, motivated by concerns about tenure security, fears of appropriation of land by Maasai leaders, increasing inequality, and a mix of political and economic drivers that encouraged farming and other investments in land (BurnSilver et al., 2008; Galaty, 1992, 1994; Mwangi, 2007; Rutten, 1992).

Post-colonial wildlife conservation activities have had an increasing influence within Ilkisongo land. Until the mid-1970's wildlife and the Ilkisongo, with their livestock, congregated around swamps at the center of the Amboseli basin (now within ANP) during the dry season, and during the wet season migrated to areas now on collectively titled land (Western, 1982; Western & Gichohi, 1993). ANP (an area of 392 km²) was gazetted by the national government in 1974, and the Ilkisongo were subsequently prohibited from settling within the park in 1977, excluding them from crucial dry season livestock forage and water sources in swamps (Campbell, 1981). This exclusion, together along with exacerbated impacts of droughts, led to expansion of farming activity (Campbell, 1981; Campbell et al., 2000). While upland areas in the GRs immediately surrounding ANP remained collectively titled at the time of this study, partial subdivision had occurred in areas near to wetlands (Fig. 1), and the expansion of Ilkisongo farming and leasing of farm plots to non-Maasai within wetlands had led to increased human-wildlife conflict (Campbell, 1981, 1999; Campbell et al., 2000).

⁴ Supported by a number of international development organizations including United States Agency for International Development and the World Bank (Fratkin and Mearns, 2003).

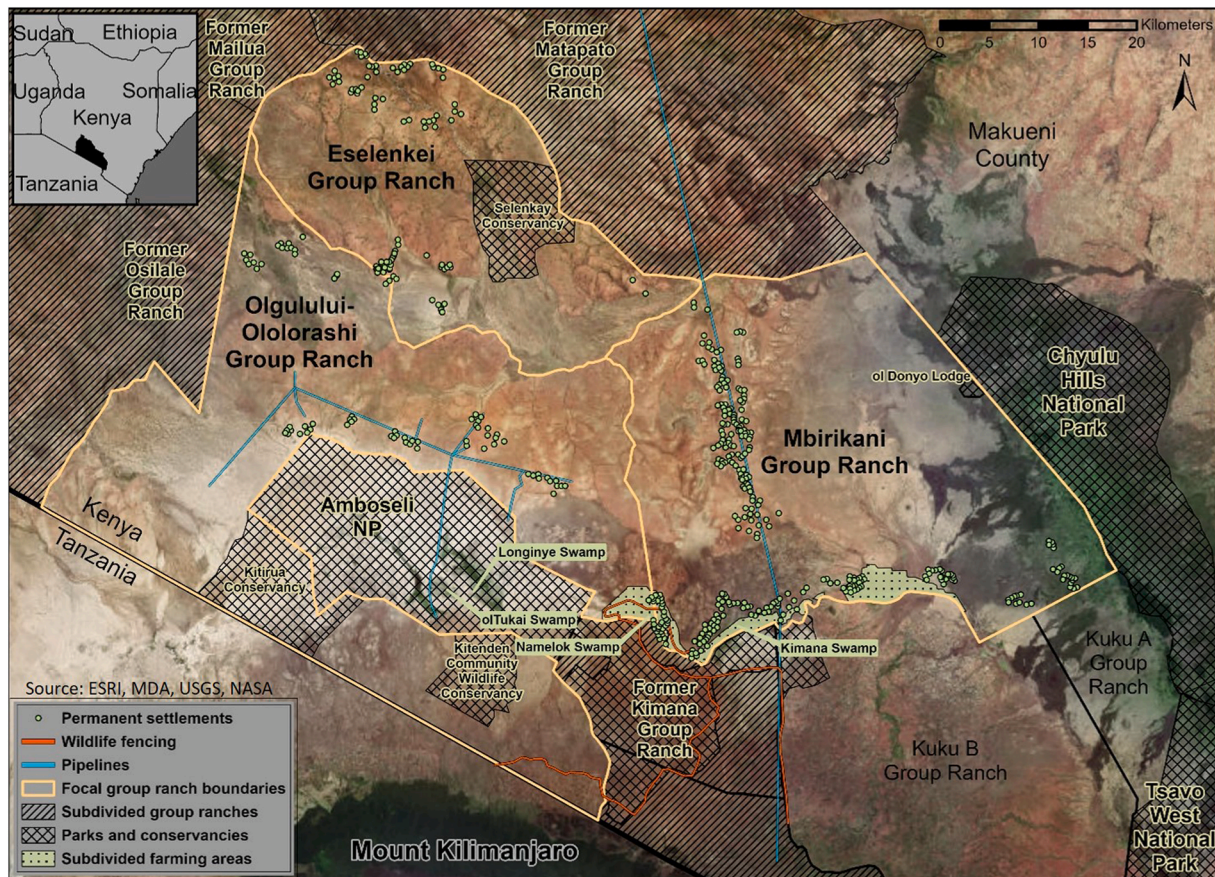


Fig. 1. Map of the study area, with the three group ranches focused on in bold.

At the time of writing, at least one international NGO and an ecotourism operator had each played a prominent role in wildlife conservation activities and maintained a conspicuous presence within each GR considered. Since the late 1990's, Gamewatchers Safaris (Formerly Porini Ecotourism) leased the ~5000 ha Selenkay Conservancy and constructed a luxury safari hotel and campsites within Eselenkei GR (Fig. 1; see Rutten, 2002; Zeppel, 2006). Mbirikani GR leased ~250 ha to Great Plains Conservation for the site of ol Donyo Lodge, an ecotourism enterprise begun in 1985. Two wildlife conservation organizations, Big Life, and Lion Guardians, leased land within Mbirikani and Olgulului-Olorashi, respectively, for their headquarters. Big Life, begun by a founder of Great Plains Conservation and formerly named Maasailand Preservation Trust, had a current or recent presence on all three GRs considered. The International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) leased 10,522 ha within a subdivided portion of Olgulului-Olorashi known as Kitenden Community Wildlife Conservancy, initially established by the African Wildlife Foundation in the late 2000's (Mbane et al., 2019). Similarly, Tortilis Camp leased a subdivided ~13,500 ha, known as Kitirua, within Olgulului-Olorashi GR. Following passage of the Wildlife Conservation and Management Act of 2013, rangers and scouts were given legal support to enforce wildlife conservancies on 'community' lands. At the time of the study Big Life, IFAW, and Lion Guardians all hired Ilkisongo GR residents in various positions such as scouts and rangers. Ilkisongo held positions at high

levels within organizations at Big Life, The African Conservation Center (ACC), and Amboseli Ecosystem Trust (AET), including one Ilkisongo man who at the time of writing had become the CEO of Big Life.

ACC and Big Life both had headquarters in Kenya, and related entities registered as charitable organizations in the United States that operated primarily to secure funding. These organizations operated under multi-million dollar budgets largely supported by grants from European and American government conservation and development agencies as well as private charitable organizations.⁵ While the main focus of Big Life had been on preventing hunting and 'human wildlife conflict', especially around farms, they also leveraged their authority to enforce 'habitat encroachment' violations including charcoal production, sand extraction,⁶ and 'illegal' grazing activities. ACC focused on ecosystem monitoring, planning, and coordinating activities of both the Amboseli Conservation Program and AET. Both Big Life and ACC sustained close partnerships with Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS), as well as IFAW and a complex network of other NGOs working in the areas

⁵ These included the United Nations Development Programme, the European Union, United States Department of the Interior, United States Agency for International Development, and the Disney Conservation Fund, among many others.

⁶ Increasingly in demand by cement manufacturers due to ongoing urban expansion.

surrounding ANP (see [Jacquet, 2017](#); [Mugo, 2020](#); for detailed descriptions of these organizations and their relationships).⁷

3.2. Historical interventions in Ilkisongo grazing management

First, I describe colonial and post-colonial state-led expropriation of lands, imposition of boundaries, and introduction of collective land use practices that were intended to mold pastoralist land management in the GRs studied. Interventions in land use were primarily implemented through ‘chiefs’ (ilaigwenak lenkiraoni), imposed through the British colonial system of indirect rule, who assumed many of the duties of age-set leaders called ilaigwenak lenkahe ([Waller, 1976](#)). Ilaigwenak lenkahe were selected based upon personal qualities such as fairness, generosity, and oratory skills as ‘spokesmen’ of different sections (oloshon, iloshon, pl.), the largest divisions among the Maasai as a whole that represent distinct linguistic and social groups ([Galaty, 1981](#); [Grandin, 1991](#)).

Boreholes constructed following World War II were widely used as a practice to try to contain Maasai peoples within reserves (see [Hodgson, 2000](#)), away from game reserves and areas of tourism ([Lovatt Smith, 1986](#); [Rutten, 2002](#)). Ilkisongo ‘chiefs’ were instructed to institute permanent settlements (emparnat) to sedentarize families near to boreholes, pipeline junctures, and other water points (see also [BurnSilver et al., 2008](#); [BurnSilver, 2009](#); [Fratkin, 2001](#)) ([Fig. 1](#)). As one male elder remarked, “the reason we are here is because of this borehole, they [the British] wanted to keep people away from parks, they put the borehole here and got us to settle here.” Junctures along a pipeline constructed during the creation of ANP that was intended to reduce the Ilkisongo’s use of swamps within the park ([Western, 1997](#)), determined locations of other permanent settlements ([Fig. 1](#)).

Though sometimes referred to as ‘traditional’ grazing management ([Grandin et al., 1991](#); [Peacock, 1987](#)), grazing practices developed at the time were described by male elders as introduced by chiefs following establishment of settlements (emparnat) within imurrua (singular, emurrua pl.) or divisions that contain designated wet season and dry season grazing areas (enkaron, inkaroni pl.) (as stated by [BurnSilver et al., 2008](#)). Settlements were designed to place all households at an equal distance from grazing resources and to limit daily grazing distance. A new system of regulation of grazing was also established by chiefs at this time where grass was first utilized within wet season grazing areas near to settlements before restrictions on reserve dry season grazing areas were lifted, and livestock enclosures and temporary homes were limited to specific areas within reserve grazing areas. This practice was described by male and female interlocutors over ~50 years of age (hereafter male and female elders) as intended to prevent the “destruction of grass”, which in turn “brings the grass closer for everyone” once restrictions from reserve areas were lifted. As one male elder stated: “it has been planned, getting people close to water areas, keeping them away from the grazing”. Two chiefs explained to me that these settlements and the regulation of the distances that herds could move in a day also held a dual purpose of preventing movement between sections, between GRs, and into ANP and Chyulu Hills National Park. Prior to these practices, as another male elder indicated, movements

⁷ Predator compensation schemes sponsored by different NGOs provided monetary payments directly to livestock owners when livestock were killed by predators ([Okello et al., 2014](#)). Big Life, IFAW, and KWS also provided educational bursaries, and salaries to teachers. A range of other activities NGOs engaged in included providing ‘improved’ predator enclosure fences ([Manoa & Mwaura, 2016](#)), fencing of farmed areas to attempt to exclude wildlife, creating drought reserve ‘grass banks’, and working together with state extension officers to introduce ‘improved’ breeds, livestock vaccinations, and disease treatments. Additionally, replica ‘traditional’ homesteads (known as cultural manyattas) have been constructed at the behest of NGOs and private tour operators for tourists to view Ilkisongo dances and to buy beadwork.

were much less regulated; “there wasn’t that program of saying you stay here, there were just Iturot [seasonal water points], they would go and live there while there was water”. However, these practices were generally viewed positively among male and female elders, though some lamented that restrictions corresponded to times when water was available in seasonal water points that were formerly used strategically to maximize use of these areas, while minimizing daily movements. Additionally, some male and female elders indicated this reduced use of wetland areas where dense grass grows (esanarua), which they had formerly been able to settle near to when the quality of grass was highest.

3.3. Shifting authorities and subjectivities

Numerous male and female elders I spoke with told me that in their view, chiefs had reduced legitimacy in comparison to age-set leaders due to their lack of transparency, susceptibility to corruption, and political party alliances (see also [Campbell, 1999](#)), but also because the government selected chiefs primarily due to their level of formal state education. However, male and female elders also regularly told me that they viewed past chiefs with more respect relative to those who served at the time of study, referencing charismatic individuals who had sought political consensus among different clans and established current grazing practices and settlement patterns. While legislature reduced chiefs’ authority in 1998,⁸ chiefs retained their ability to call on state support in their wide range of activities centered on conflict resolution, crime prevention, and natural resource management. Chiefs also had the ability to impose more severe punishments than elders applied, such as jail time. One chief described his position as “joining hands with the government”, illustrating the way his state authority hybridized with his local authority.

The Group Representatives Act of 1968 imposed another set of authorities within Maasai society, giving elected representatives responsibility for decisions about land use including range management, livestock husbandry, and commercial practices ([Mwangi & Ostrom, 2009](#)). Ilkisongo GR committee members (hereafter GR representatives) were described by most male and female elders as having greater influence and being more responsive to public interests than chiefs at the time of the study. While chiefs and GR representatives were formal authorities, they also themselves retained authority as elders, and decision-making processes that were likely dominated by chiefs and GR representatives were regularly described by male elders in both public speaking and initial responses in formal interviews as “we decide together”, “we all decided”, and the “elders decided”. Maasai social norms of polite, respectful, and gracious public speaking, and common goals of reaching consensus in public meetings and decision-making, had likely all shaped these common, shared narratives about land use history. However, in informal interviews, or after probing in formal interviews, male and female elders alike often referred to ‘mismanagement’ by GR representatives, and male elders commonly indicated that chiefs had asymmetric influence over grazing decisions. Additionally, both male and female elders sometimes expressed fears about contradicting or disputing chiefs, or about being seen as in opposition to GR representatives.

3.4. The ‘governmentality’ of wildlife conservation

A range of conservation biology literature from the area surrounding ANP has centered on a landscape approach to wildlife conservation ([Groom & Western, 2013](#); [Western, Groom, & Worden, 2009](#)) that has guided spatial planning and management plans produced through collaboration between NGOs, GR representatives, and various government representatives. Representatives of wildlife conservation NGOs had felt at odds with government policies that had previously advocated

⁸ GOK Chiefs’ Act Chapter 128.

privatization, subdivision, and farming (Jacquet, 2017) and had intervened to sustain collective tenure (see also Ntiati, 2002) and to prevent road and town construction around parks (Mugo et al., 2020). Group ranches were studied by NGOs over the previous decades to strategically plan how to 'manage' subdivision through interventions that optimized wildlife conservation priorities in anticipation of subdivision processes (Groom, 2007). Publications frequently cited in wildlife conservation project grey literature argued that increasing Ilkisongo homesteads were a threat to wildlife (Okello, 2012; Okello & Kioko, 2010) and that declining wildlife were driven by increases in livestock and human populations at the county level (Ogutu et al., 2016). In informal interviews, NGO representatives frequently referenced 'overgrazing', placed blame of human-wildlife conflict on farming or herding practices, and sustained views that they did not see Ilkisongo livelihood activities today as compatible with wildlife. Additionally, NGO representatives, in informal interviews and organization reports, often represented Ilkisongo as lacking sound decision-making,⁹ expressed a need to 'educate' them on farming practices, wildlife relations,¹⁰ and range management (Jacquet, 2017), and claimed that financial incentives were intended to create 'self-policing' around these activities.

NGOs working in Ilkisongo land had been described as in competition with each other (Jacquet, 2017; Mugo et al., 2020). However, most NGOs shared an emphasis on trying to encourage Ilkisongo to develop specific types of behaviors, and were aligned around intervening to optimize land use for wildlife, though each NGO had a slightly different focus on types of interventions. Some had argued for regulatory interventions to leverage instrumental values Ilkisongo are purported to have of wildlife, e.g. "Maasai had traditionally hunted wildlife during drought and regarded them as second cattle—a relationship that had been destroyed by the colonial government. Monetary and other benefits from wildlife, in other words, could be seen as a Maasai tradition in modern guise" (Western, 1994, p. 34). Following this regulatory logic, market-based practices were often recommended by NGO representatives to intervene in Ilkisongo livelihood practices, for example, to encourage adoption of 'improved' breeds of livestock and reduction of stocking rates.¹¹

However, despite rhetoric of 'participatory' and 'bottom-up' conservation, NGO representatives had intervened at multiple governance levels, including national and county levels, to shape regulation of land use. In particular, Ilkisongo GR representatives had an asymmetric ability to represent and make decisions on behalf of GR 'communities' through their private, exclusive negotiations with NGO representatives, and thus had played a central role in establishing and sustaining wildlife conservation projects (Jacquet, 2017; Rutten, 2002; Unks et al., 2021). These close relationships between GR representatives and NGOs were perhaps most conspicuously seen in the umbrella 'grass roots' organization of AET that was closely supported by ACC in partnership with IFAW and AWF, and whose chairman was also a GR representative of Olgulului-Olororashi GR at the time of the study. Interventions to sustain collective tenure were justified by an NGO representative, stating, "There is no way to control people in their own shambas [Kiswahili: farms]" (Jacquet, 2017, p. 75) and in proposed subdivision plans it was stated that NGOs "cannot control people because they have their title deeds".

In addition to these regulatory interventions, more direct behavior change was a shared focus of some NGOs. While some organizations

such as Lion Guardians had claimed to be making an effort to acknowledge Ilkisongo herding expertise and knowledge of wildlife (e.g. see Jablonski et al., 2020; Western et al., 2015), proposed land use management plans written by NGOs also explicitly encouraged instrumentalization of "useful Maasai cultural norms and practices"¹² to do so. Lion Guardians employs ilmuran (the age-set designation of young Maasai men who are responsible for defense and long-distance movements of cattle) as scouts to monitor lions and livestock, to persuade others not to initiate lion hunts, and to adopt 'care' of lions (Hazzah et al., 2014; Jablonski et al., 2020). This has served as a model for other organizations where "the well-structured hierarchies through which discipline and traditional knowledge are passed to Morans [ilmuran], are put to use in educating and conveying a different message about wildlife".¹³ Combining regulatory and disciplinary approaches, Big Life also organized an event called the 'Maasai Olympics' which granted awards to individual ilmuran who excel in 'traditional' skills, in an attempt to encourage these skills to 'replace' lion hunting.¹⁴

3.5. Intimacies of grazing management governance

NGO representatives had worked together to directly influence Ilkisongo grazing practices in the years before this study. Several chiefs explained to me the ways that KWS and Big Life had influenced grazing committee decisions and were able to implement a new rule introduced in 2014 that further limited households from moving their livestock to grazing areas until after a set time each day. Numerous male and female elders told me, using similar terms and phrasing, that by leaving homesteads later, this caused livestock to walk more quickly to specific grazing areas rather than grazing en route, but several male elders also explained that this concentrated livestock away from distant areas designated by NGOs and KWS as wildlife corridors (Fig. 1). Additionally, KWS and Big Life had been able to apply pressure to restrict opening of reserve grazing access (also often corresponding to designated wildlife corridors) until grass was completely exhausted near to settlements. Furthermore, following heavy rains in 2018 and grass being plentiful, and with all households returning to permanent settlements after the drought of 2017, this was taken as an opportunity by various authorities to enforce grazing regulations more strictly, with one chief emphasizing "we learned our lesson [from the drought]" and that AET had emphasized a "need to tighten their belt on grazing management". Numerous chiefs and male elders indicated this had led to an increasingly strict enforcement in practice. Many male and female elders stated that this was related to a pattern of increasing refusal of movement between different settlement's grazing areas and, as one said "now you are told to go to your place, [you are] refused in another place" Others indicated an increase in authorities identifying them with local settlement areas and being held responsible for the grass in 'their' place e.g. "you should not destroy your places".

Chiefs regularly stated that through these practices that "people are being taught of good land management", but also stated that NGO representatives were interested in these practices because of the benefits for wildlife, and sought to concentrate grazing away from designated wildlife corridors. Draft management plans echoed the need for increased regulation of grazing reserves and proposed restrictions on water transport into reserves to further restrict their use. NGO representatives and chiefs alike also repeatedly emphasized the need to formalize grazing rules via bylaws and management plans, with one chief emphasizing that this would make it the responsibility of the "whole community to take care of their grazing region". Wildlife rangers mirrored views of NGO representatives and chiefs, stating that these

⁹ GR representatives and Ilkisongo NGO employees, especially those who had been formally educated in Kenyan public schools, sometimes shared these pejorative views of current livestock husbandry, farming, and investment practices.

¹⁰ <https://atmos.earth/team-lioness-wildlife-conservation-kenya/>.

¹¹ Amboseli Ecosystem State of Conservancies Report 2020. <https://amboseliecosystem.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Amboseli-State-of-Conservancies-16062021.pdf>

¹² Mbirikani Group Ranch Land Use Management Plan; 2017-2027. Unapproved. Draft prepared by Dalvis Consulting.

¹³ <https://www.ifaw.org/journal/changing-mindsets-wildlife>.

¹⁴ <https://biglife.org/maasai-olympics/>.

regulations benefitted Ilkisongo and wildlife alike, e.g., “the management committee manages for all the people, and it is also good for the wildlife, both will have good grass when it is being protected” (see also Nelson, 2012).

3.6. Intimacies of wildlife conservation governance

Ilkisongo scouts and rangers frequently acted as intermediaries between NGOs, KWS, and their own home communities. As one conservancy employee remarked, “rangers are responsible for harmony between investors, community, and wildlife”. The activities of scouts and rangers also overlapped with those of chiefs and grazing committees, and scouts and rangers were often the authorities who approached people in violation of grazing rules, especially those staying in grazing reserves during times of restriction, or those who were present in other settlements’ areas when not permitted. Big Life and IFAW rangers both also coordinated closely with KWS, performing many wildlife security functions that KWS were previously responsible for. Some rangers confirmed that their employment for NGOs had changed their views of wildlife. As one ranger commented “now my family is eating and going to school, so I see the value of protecting wildlife in a way I didn’t when I was a normal person”. However, these rangers and scouts also sometimes lamented their relationships with their home communities, as one ranger commented, “it creates distance, the biggest part of the community sees us as enemies, and they only like or love us, when they have challenges and need help”. As another ranger added “they relate us mostly to wildlife, so when wildlife attack the livestock, they get angry because we want to protect the wildlife”. Some stated they had also sometimes become ostracized for sharing information with NGOs. As one commented, “they don’t quite see us as one of their own, sometimes they won’t share information”.

Ilkisongo wildlife rangers and scouts were sometimes referred to within their home communities as *ilchukuti loongwesi* (wildlife herders) and referred to as ‘managing’ for wildlife (*eramatare oo ilngwesi*). The concept of *eramatare* is also sometimes referred to by conservation biologists as a Maasai concept that includes wildlife more generally, implying that it translates in a way that is analogous to wildlife conservation (Western et al., 2020). To query this usage, and internalization of the specific values of wildlife that conservation NGOs claim to promote, I asked a subset of eighteen male and female elders about the different meanings of the Maasai concept of *eramatare*. *Eramatare* was primarily referenced as being about household management e.g. “*eramatare* is about the future, how I manage my homestead”, and with a positive connotation. When probing for additional uses, it was also expressed as *eramatare oo nkop* (‘management’ of land) and *eramatare oo engojet* (‘management’ of grass), and nearly universally, interlocutors emphasized that these uses of the concept had a positive connotation. However, several emphasized that how GR representatives were managing land was not *eramatare oo nkop* to them, e.g.: “As it is, they are just doing what they want”.

Responses were much more variable when referring to *eramatare* in reference to wildlife. Some considered this a benign framing, e.g. “it is all the same, everybody is doing their *eramatare*, and KWS is doing *eramatare oo ilngwesi*”. In particular, those that also felt they were gaining direct income from conservation held these views and agreed this was *eramatare* to them, as one GR representative said, “let the elephant drink first”. Some, however, explicitly contested this wording. As one female elder said “When people value wild animals more than people it is not *eramatare*. When you value people first, that is *eramatare*”. Another male elder contested this wording of *eramatare* as part of how “communities’ names and imagery are being used by organizations like Big Life to make money and pay for airplanes and helicopters”. Others agreed that the concept of *eramatare* could be applied to wildlife,

but emphasized that dimensions of inequality made this type of *eramatare* unfavorable, as one male elder stated, “people are employed, getting food, buying livestock, but on the other hand it is not evenly distributed, so it is causing more harm than good because *eramatare oo ilngwesi* [wildlife] has exceeded *eramatare oo ngishu* [cattle]”. Another elder emphasized how wildlife conservation was not producing a net benefit to the Ilkisongo in his view: “*eramatare oo ilngwesi* has brought a big loss for us”, and still another stated, “most of the benefit from wildlife goes to higher offices, their only benefit is from the bursary”. The overwhelming majority stated that this wording of *eramatare* in reference to wildlife, in their view, was only *eramatare* to those that were receiving significant benefits or were employed in wildlife conservation activities. As one female elder commented, “Because they are paid that is *eramatare* for them, but to those that do not benefit, that is not *eramatare*.”. As such, nine out of eighteen indicated that they did not consider wildlife to be part of their personal *eramatare*.

Beyond this subset of male and female elders, it was not uncommon for interlocutors to express positive views of NGOs, especially in association with incomes from leases and jobs, as well as infrastructure, bursaries, modest compensation for livestock predation, and reduction of negative interactions with wildlife around farms. Others mentioned support gained for women’s groups, and some emphasized positive relationships and close personal connections with certain NGOs. However, GR representatives and employees of conservation NGOs, especially those with influential positions, were much more likely overall to express positive views of wildlife conservation practices without reservation, and to assert that these activities, such as setting conservancies aside, could one day be more profitable than livestock or farming, and was mutually beneficial for livestock and wildlife alike. These views were contested by many others pointing to the largely individualized benefits (e.g. financial benefits to NGOs, KWS, various authorities, and Ilkisongo employees of NGOs) while the general population shared the burden of problems with wildlife (see also Unks et al., 2021). Suggestions of new conservancies were also seen by many as a loss of important grazing land, with many referencing how Selenkay Conservancy technically allowed grazing during drought, but did not permit overnight livestock enclosures, and thus accessing it required long distance daily movements (see also Rutten, 2002). Some added that the timing of the use of areas within conservancies was important to consider, as one male elder commented, referring to wetlands (*esanarua*) in the conservancy, “[we] just see a loss because they don’t graze there, we are allowed to graze at the worst times of the year, the grasses are not good at the times they can graze ... [in the past] they grazed there during the rainy season when water flowed there”. Numerous people also remarked resentfully that their livestock were often excluded and were told that conservancies needed to be kept free of livestock for tourists (see also Butt, 2014). Others frequently contested the conditions of leases for Kitenden Community Wildlife Conservancy on Olgulului-Olorashi (Fig. 1), claiming these leases had not been read by most GR members, and that the agreement had been manipulated by GR representatives. Similarly, on Mbirikani GR, a draft land use plan was rejected in 2018 after including maps with extensive areas marked as conservancies. A management plan for Eselenkei GR was similarly rejected. There was also widespread suspicion of GR representatives’ involvement in land use plans that designated additional areas as set aside for wildlife, with many viewing these as attempted land grabs that would restrict collective access. The term ‘corridors’ in particular represented something that many Ilkisongo contested (see also Goldman, 2011a), and views that their delineation in management plans would restrict subdivision processes were common.

3.7. Emergent hybrid land configuration

At the time of writing, the GRs studied had begun processes of subdivision.¹⁵ This was motivated by many Ilkisongo seeing subdivision as a means to achieve independence from collective land governance, mistrust of authorities,¹⁶ fears of tenure security, and inequality (see Unks et al., *In Review*). Previous research in Kajiado has documented high increases in inequality and highly uneven distribution of land following subdivision, with GR representatives and their political allies often being the main beneficiaries (BurnSilver et al., 2008; Campbell, 1993; Galaty, 1981, 1992; Mwangi, 2007; Rutten, 1992). Personal knowledge of processes of subdivision in neighboring Kimana GR provided a precautionary reference point to many Ilkisongo of this potential for loss of land. In response to patterns of increasing prominence of farmers from non-Maasai groups living and farming in subdivided areas,¹⁷ some stated their preference for laws that would prevent land sales after subdivision, specifically intended to prevent non-Maasai from obtaining land (see also Boone, 2019). This often was accompanied by narratives about the perceived negative impacts of non-Maasai living in the area (see also Markakis, 1999) and GR representatives frequently spoke about the possibility that people from non-Maasai ethnic groups would be able to claim Ilkisongo land if their land was registered under the Community Land Act (CLA) of 2016, arguing that they should subdivide before it came into effect. The CLA was enacted to address past injustices and abuses of power in land administration (Klopp, 2001), to secure land rights for groups lacking title to their lands, and to address the problems of alienation of land by GR representatives. However, due to unevenness in the level of influence of county governments following devolution (Josse-Durand, 2021), the CLA has been implemented with a high level of variability across counties, creating uncertainty about whether or not this land reform will achieve its goals (Alden Wily, 2018; Boone et al., 2019). Importantly, the CLA dissolved the Group Representatives act and mandated that land be registered as ‘community’ land, that a new governance structure be adopted, and that an alternative subdivision process would have to be adhered to. The registration deadline passed in 2019, and informal interviews implied that GR representatives may have intentionally spread misinformation about outsiders being able to appropriate land if the CLA were to take effect. Politicians, especially the county governor, also advocated strongly for subdivision leading up to the deadline to register under the CLA. Deepening patron-client relations have been observed between county level authorities and local politicians and various authorities throughout Kenya (Josse-Durand, 2021), and the county governor was poised to gain political favor by supporting subdivision. Thus, GR representatives, who had previously delayed subdivision due to the influence of NGOs following votes by GR members to subdivide, may have accelerated the subdivision process at this time to avoid registration under the CLA and to retain influence over the subdivision process. Inequalities in plot distribution, and widespread sales of titles were reported at the time of writing, and the county governor was rumored to have personally

¹⁵ Two court cases surrounding the subdivision process were pending at the time of writing: <http://kenyalaw.org/caselaw/cases/view/204163/>. <http://kenyalaw.org/caselaw/cases/view/217487/>.

¹⁶ Due to their perceived misappropriation of funds and their lack of transparency in dealings with conservation NGO representatives, tourism operators, and Simba Cement, who leases lands for a manufacturing center and for extraction of limestone within Mbirikani GR.

¹⁷ Maasai sharing land and living together with other ethnic groups has been common historically (Knowles and Collett, 1989). However, farming and export of cash crops to urban areas had expanded dramatically, and in-migration by non-Maasai groups increased followed subdivision in the former Kimana GR where they have leased areas to farm, worked as laborers on farms, and operated businesses in town centers (Campbell, 1999).

purchased hundreds of individual titles within two GRs.¹⁸

As part of the subdivision process, NGOs directed the drafting of plans focused on sustaining existing conservancies, securing additional areas that had been designated by KWS and NGOs as corridors (Fig. 2)¹⁹ and ‘buffer zones’ around ANP, and minimizing cultivated areas. In Olgulului-Olororashi, these proposed plans were heavily contested, including arson of an IFAW ranger station, in part due to the association of conservation projects with GR representatives.²⁰ The proposed plans, similar to other management plans,²¹ were based on an understanding of the need to protect wildlife corridors passing between settlements (e.g. see Okello & Kioko, 2010; Okello, 2012) and a spatial analysis of Minimum Viable Area (MVA) completed by the African Conservation Center based on seasonal wildlife distributions derived from aerial counts data²². While the stated goal of the MVA analysis was to “safeguard Amboseli’s wildlife and community livelihoods”,²³ these models incorporated data on wildlife populations, but did not explicitly consider current spatial patterns of livestock use. Further, the planning documents discussed above do not make reference to well-known aspects of current livelihoods such as socio-economically differentiated mobility patterns, the high reliance of many Ilkisongo on less mobile small stock, and the close relationship between livestock husbandry, farming, markets, and employment (BurnSilver, 2009; Campbell et al., 2000; Unks et al., *In Review*).

As currently planned, some conservancies will have a single title, such as on Mbirikani GR, which had designated ~47,750 ha as a conservancy (Fig. 2).²⁴ Others will follow the model of Kitenden Community Wildlife Conservancy, which provides direct payments (of 6000 KSH at the time of writing) per year to all GR members who hold a title (Mbane et al., 2019). An additional ~11,750 ha was being secured under group lease by IFAW, and two other group lease conservancies of ~7,250 ha and ~29,035 ha were in preparation within Olgulului-Olororashi GR²⁵ (Fig. 2). A group lease of ~13,300 ha, crossing Eselenkei in the areas of designated wildlife corridors, also had reportedly been secured by Big Life for twenty-one years.²⁶ Thus, these *de jure* privatized lands are likely to remain *de facto* collective in perpetuity through single leases or group leases of individual plots. Importantly, these formalizations were also facilitated by authorities who shifted away from narratives about “exclusive use zones” for wildlife and tourism, to narratives of privatized land, open to market forces and negotiation, that would accrue widespread benefits from wildlife conservation. However, if they follow existing models, these areas under individual title would instead be secured through long term group lease to one of several NGOs active in the area, and be facilitated through close relationships between NGOs, GR representatives, and chiefs.

NGOs and various state and local representatives were also working

¹⁸ Ironically, many had reportedly sold a portion of their land immediately to pay surveyor’s fees.

¹⁹ Some of which included language indicating that resettlement of Ilkisongo living within areas designated by NGOs and KWS as wildlife corridors would be necessary.

²⁰ <http://www.amboseliconservation.org/news-commentaries/the-subdivision-of-ogulului-group-ranch-does-it-spell-doom-for-amboselis-wildlife>.

²¹ Amboseli National Park Management Plan (2020–2030). <https://kws.go.ke/content/amboseli-national-park-management-plan-2020-2030>

²² Amboseli National Park Management Plan (2020–2030). <https://kws.go.ke/content/amboseli-national-park-management-plan-2020-2030>

²³ <http://www.amboseliconservation.org/news-commentaries/amboseli-eco-system-management-plan-2020-2030-ratified-and-adopted>.

²⁴ <https://amboseliecosystem.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Amboseli-State-of-Conservancies-16062021.pdf>.

²⁵ Following a model of being subdivided, but leased as a group conservancy, similar to Kitenden Community Wildlife Conservancy. <https://www.ifaw.org/p/press-releases/secure-space-wildlife-kenya>.

²⁶ <https://kajiado.co.ke/2022/03/23/new-dawn-in-eselenkei-as-big-life-opens-up-wildlife-corridor/>

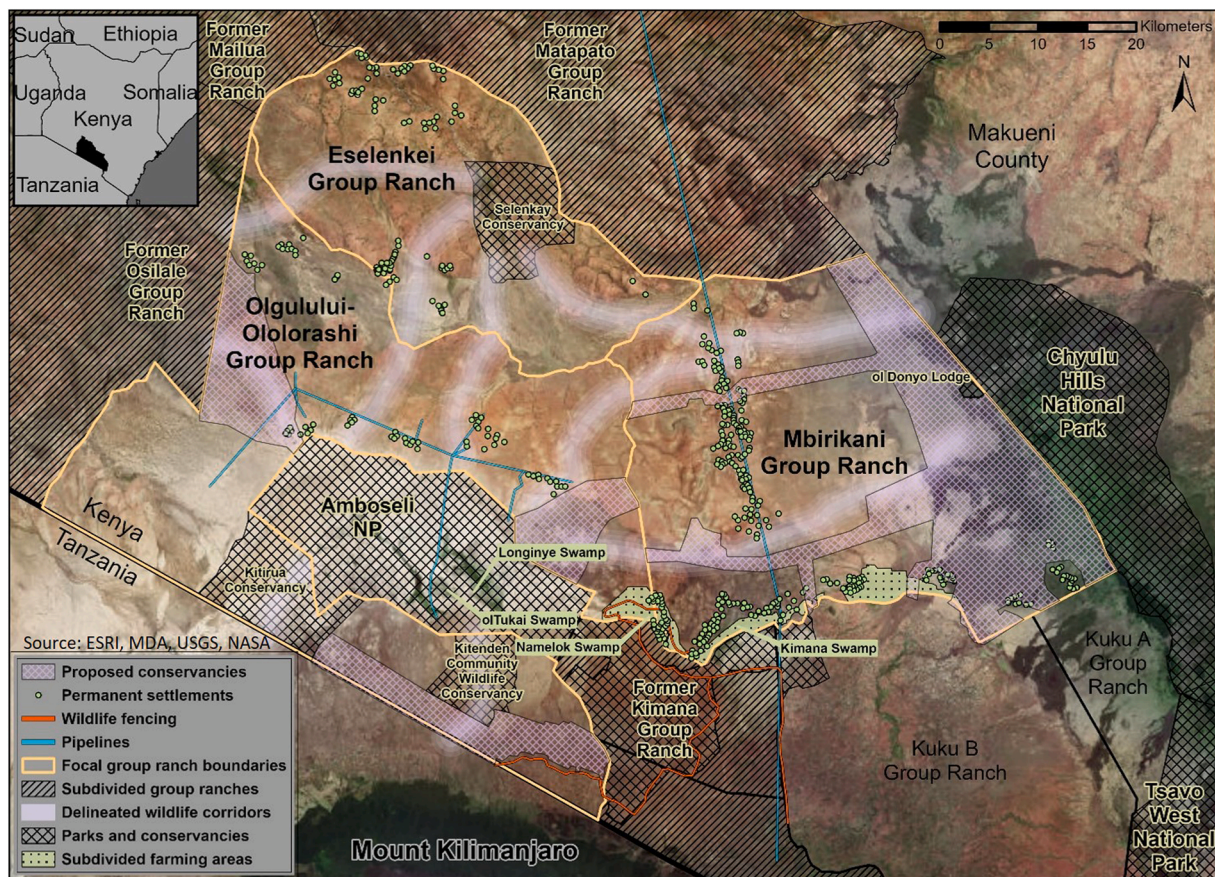


Fig. 2. Map of the study site showing approximation of wildlife corridors delineated in the Amboseli Ecosystem Management Plan (2020–2030), and the boundaries of conservancies in preparation according to the Amboseli Ecosystem State of Conservancies Report (2020).

at the time of writing to implement long term restrictions on fencing, construction of permanent houses, and establishment of permanent water sources in areas that are designated as grazing land.²⁷ These rules were likely intended to prevent fencing practices observed by Maasai on private land in other sections (see [Weldemichel & Lein, 2019](#)). While these rules were included in at least two subdivision plans and referenced in other management plans,²⁸ how these rules will be regulated, and their implications for Ilkisongo livelihoods remains unclear. However, these rules are clearly primarily intended to advance the landscape planning objectives of conservation NGOs, and informal interviews indicated that many GR members were unaware of these potential restrictions over subdivided land. At the same time, few safeguards were in place at the time of writing to protect against inequalities in distribution of land and looming threats of widespread dispossession and landlessness.

4. Discussion

'Community-based conservation' emerged within Ilkisongo land out of a concern with ecological connectivity outside of ANP, during a global wave of civil society demands for alternatives to state control over resources and the empowerment of local populations through decentralized management practices ([Agrawal & Gibson, 1999](#); [Brosius et al., 1998](#)). Grants provided by American and European conservation and

development agencies, and private charitable organizations, had financially supported a specific model of wildlife conservation implemented by a heterogeneous mix of international NGOs within Ilkisongo land. NGOs had, through delegation of Kenyan state authority to them, assumed much of the role of 'the state' through a new way of governing wildlife, land, and human populations. NGOs had sometimes operated as a 'rational consciousness' outside of 'the state' ([Mitchell, 2002](#)) working against efforts to open up collective lands to investment, mining, and cash crop agriculture. At other times, however, they had strategically aligned with other state actors (see also [Larsen & Brockington, 2018](#)), in particular extending state wildlife conservation practices onto collective land, often through security-focused, militarized NGO organizations that worked closely with KWS to assert sovereign power over wildlife, laws, and space (see also [Mbaria & Ogada, 2016](#); [Peluso, 1993](#); [Schetter et al., 2022](#); [Weldemichel, 2020](#)). As a new type of authority guided by a 'governmentality' of intervention, NGOs played a central role in negotiating the reconfiguration of land and governance (see [Ferguson & Gupta, 2002](#); [Li, 2007](#)). While individuals working for NGOs, including Ilkisongo employees, held diverse views, a discursive focus on optimizing the health and welfare of populations of both people and wildlife had fostered an alliance among these heterogeneous actors and guided logics of intervention. This led to a proliferation of new practices designed to modify behavior that, at the time of this study, were being implemented through the authority structures of GR representatives, chiefs who represented the Kenyan state, and Ilkisongo NGO employees acting within their local communities. Through coordination between these different authorities, and their entwined relationships with increasingly sedentarized Ilkisongo populations within collectively titled land, NGOs were at the center of a hybrid governance regime that enabled multiple interlocking practices to be applied to these

²⁷ <http://www.amboseliconservation.org/news-commentaries/the-subdivision-of-ogulului-group-ranch-does-it-spell-doom-for-amboseli-wildlife>.

²⁸ Amboseli Ecosystem Management Plan (2008–2018). <https://library.giraffeconservation.org/download/amboseli-ecosystem-management-plan-2008-2018/>

populations and their land (see also [Larsen & Brockington, 2018](#)).

The different regulating, disciplining, and enforcing practices applied in conservation governance had been in constant tension with both Ilkisongo agency and adaptation to changing constraints and uncertainties, shaping the way that different interventions had been combined. Some wildlife conservation interventions were intended to promote internalization of new norms of thinking about wildlife and land among the Ilkisongo (e.g. [Agrawal, 2005](#)). The practices had built on existing institutions, and elements of rules and norms of managing land that were originally introduced through Ilkisongo chiefs, grazing committees, and GR representatives. However, Ilkisongo views of increasingly restrictive mobility practices, imposed through these authorities, contrasted strongly with their views of practices that were explicitly designed to create areas to be set aside as conservancies. A focus on wildlife movements through corridors that connect protected areas had been central to NGO conservation strategies in the region (see also [Bluwstein & Lund, 2018](#); [Goldman, 2009, 2011a](#)). However, these spatial planning practices neglected consideration of changing pastoralist livelihood systems and increasingly differentiated mobility and benefits from land ([BurnSilver, 2009](#); [McCabe et al., 2010](#); [Lind, Sabates-Wheeler, et al., 2020](#); [Nkedianye et al., 2019](#); [Unks et al., In Review](#)). Ilkisongo perceptions of wildlife conservation continued to link recent interventions to historical practices of being drawn away from and excluded from protected areas ([BurnSilver, 2009](#); [Campbell et al., 2000](#)). Additionally, internalization of the specific types of values of wildlife that NGOs sought to promote appeared to be limited to those who directly received monetary income from wildlife conservation. These observations all point to the importance of how wildlife conservation practices had relied on patron-client relations, and are intertwined with local systems of inclusion and exclusion from benefits along lines of clan, wealth, authority, and gender ([Unks et al., 2021](#); [Unks et al., In Review](#)).

The 'governmentality' underlying wildlife conservation interventions also overlooked the agency and 'care' fostered in Ilkisongo's own daily practices in relation to non-humans (see also [Singh, 2013](#)). This 'governmentality' neglected Ilkisongo knowledge systems and land use practices that are closely related to the widely recognized abundance of wildlife within Maasai land ([Goldman, 2011b](#); [Homewood & Rodgers, 1991](#); [Parkipuny & Berger, 1993](#); [Thompson, 2002](#)) and practices that have been crucial for their long standing relations with wildlife ([Goldman et al., 2013](#); [Roque de Pinho, 2009](#)). While the 'productive power' of rangeland CBC may on its face appear to invert historical power relations and to enhance local agency in wildlife conservation projects, numerous practices, rather, appeared intended to 'fit' the Ilkisongo to a predetermined spatial land use model. NGO representatives instead focused on the way that Maasai institutions could be instrumentalized in wildlife conservation (e.g. the 'useful' institutions of 'customary' grazing management and 'Maasai knowledge'). This focus appears to have replicated historical colonial and postcolonial practices intended to 'improve' the Maasai ([Knowles & Collett, 1989](#); [Waller, 2012](#)). Reification of 'customary' institutions further neglected how many important grazing management institutions had been shaped by colonial and post-colonial interventions. Further, by considering only the elements of Ilkisongo rules and norms that align with wildlife, often times this instrumentalization closely echoed the essentialized, racialized views that were applied to 'fix' identities and subsistence activities to align with distinct territories and environments by colonial ethnographers and administrators ([Broch-Due, 2000](#); [Knowles & Collett, 1989](#)).

Based on the above, it is unsurprising that practices intended to produce mutual benefits for wildlife and pastoralism largely failed to convince many Ilkisongo of the 'productive' 'mentality' guiding logics of intervention. On the contrary, ongoing wildlife conservation interventions have had the ironic effect of decreasing the desire of many Ilkisongo to share their land with wildlife ([Unks et al., 2021](#)). Through an empirical focus on the interlocking types of practices deployed, and examination of how different interventions succeeded or failed, the 'productive power' of rangeland CBC appears to have mainly served as a

discursive tool to expand the influence of those outside Ilkisongo society in new ways, while giving the appearance of intervening in a neutral, beneficial way (i.e. it created an anti-politics, [Ferguson, 1994](#); [Li, 2007](#)). Importantly, this 'productive power' played a key role in the way NGOs had intervened to shape notions of property, rights, and social contracts around resource use and territorial formations (see also [Li, 2014b](#); [Rasmussen & Lund, 2018](#)). An emerging property and governance regime is being produced at the confluence of local political struggles surrounding collective land (see also [Boone, 2019](#); [Lund, 2016](#); [Lund & Boone, 2013](#)), changing national land laws, the interests of various Kenyan government representatives and businesses, and efforts of NGO representatives to secure land for wildlife conservation objectives. The strategy of individually leasing lands, classified as 'group conservancies' under the Wildlife Conservation and Management Act of 2013, was being steered primarily by the interests of politicians, GR representatives, and NGO representatives. Importantly, GR representatives, who have been able to enhance their own authority by being key decision makers, especially through their ability to make exclusive decisions about collective land, and their role in distributing conservation 'benefits' ([Unks et al., In Review](#); see ([Sikor & Lund, 2009](#)), appear to have leveraged subdivision processes to maximize their own individual interests *through* prioritizing the interests of wildlife conservation NGOs and political allies.

So-called CBC in Ilkisongo land shares similarities to wider trends in conservation, where recent 'neoliberal' governance reforms such as privatization, commodification, market-driven interventions, de/reregulation, and decentralized governance have reconfigured socio-ecological relations ([Castree, 2010](#); [Igoe & Brockington, 2007](#); [Sullivan, 2006](#)). These process were most conspicuous in how many Ilkisongo stated they viewed wildlife as increasingly 'owned' (i.e. transformed into a commodity that few benefit from), and how practices such as employment, predator compensation schemes, and other instrumental 'benefits' have attempted to 'produce' values of wildlife conservation (see also [Unks et al., 2021](#)). With drylands in Kenya experiencing historically unprecedented amounts of investment ([Lind, Okenwa, et al., 2020](#)), numerous studies have drawn attention to the long term influence of international flows of finance and processes of capital accumulation among ecotourism operators, local elites, and a range of local and national government actors in the region ([Cavanagh et al., 2020](#); [Garland, 2008](#); [Thompson & Homewood, 2002](#)). Indeed, 'green grabbing' ([Fairhead et al., 2012](#)) is an important conceptual lens to understand how access to resources has been reconfigured and relates to differential accumulation of benefits from land in different contexts. However, it is also vital to not overemphasize these recent processes of commodification, reregulation, market-influence, and capital accumulation to the detriment of understanding the much longer term evolution of a transnational conservation governance regime that has emerged (see [Ferguson, 2010](#), for a still relevant discussion). Further, focusing on 'neoliberal' logics alone risks overlooking how interventions such as the leasing of group conservancies are likely market-driven in public rhetoric only (see also [Dempsey & Suarez, 2016](#)). Leases, rather than serving as sites of capital accumulation for NGOs, primarily enable ongoing security of land for long term transnational wildlife conservation objectives, as well as stabilize the ability of NGOs to intervene with a regulatory logic in Ilkisongo land use (i.e. it facilitates 'biopolitics', see [Foucault, 2008](#)). Additionally, it is vital to consider how other practices, such as patron-client relationships between NGO and GR representatives, NGO practices of hiring Ilkisongo scouts and rangers, and the distribution of financial 'benefits' from wildlife conservation, have all worked to stabilize the influence of NGOs over Ilkisongo decision making and land use.

The future potential of Ilkisongo land to benefit both wildlife and people is contingent on vigilant attention to differential abilities to benefit from land and wildlife, and historically entrenched power asymmetries that guide the rationale of interventions, as well as approaches that emphasize collaborative wildlife conservation and center

Maasai agency and ways of knowing and being in the world (e.g. Goldman, 2020). Reciprocal access to grazing land has continued in the region following subdivision (Bollig & Lesorogol, 2016; BurnSilver & Mwangi, 2007), but is likely to be limited by a range of inequalities and structural relations within local communities (Jeppesen & Hassan, 2022). However, questions about whether or not the Ilkisongo will make long term choices to 'stay together' with wildlife (Roque de Pinho, 2009), as well as each other, should not only focus on distribution of conservation benefits and community-level governance processes (Unks et al., 2021), but the constraints posed on struggles to obtain secure land tenure due to transnational governmentality (Ferguson, 2006; Ferguson & Gupta, 2002), international conservation finance, and Kenyan political economy.

5. Conclusion

Kenyan state wildlife authorities, wildlife conservation NGOs, and various authorities representing the Ilkisongo Maasai have increasingly acted together to deploy different practices to constrain land use around Amboseli National Park. The regime of practices deployed has built upon a series of colonial and post-colonial interventions that created a new territorial configuration intended to constrain Ilkisongo land use in an ecologically variable and dynamic landscape. A 'governmentality' of intervention has unified a diverse group of actors around new disciplinary and regulatory practices through interventions that are purported to provide benefits for Ilkisongo livelihoods and wildlife alike. Empowered by recent governance reforms in Kenya, transnational NGOs and international development funders have assumed roles of securing wildlife and governing over Ilkisongo populations living within collectively titled land. Through an ahistorical understanding of pastoralism and a romanticized view of shared land, wildlife conservation interventions have primarily empowered authorities that represent the Ilkisongo. Through transnational efforts to secure land for wildlife, Ilkisongo efforts to increase control over their own land, the Kenyan state seeking to maximize profits from land use, and local politics of inclusion and exclusion, a new type of land is being produced. While an increasing discursive emphasis on the 'productive power' of rangeland CBC may on the one hand open up new potential for marginalized pastoralists, evidence from Ilkisongo land suggests that wildlife conservation governance regimes emerging throughout the region that deploy a similar discursive shift should be regarded skeptically. Earnest advocacy for both pastoralist livelihoods and wildlife conservation in Kenya requires increased focus on the interaction of the political economy of land, the politics of local mobilizations for greater autonomy, and the transnational governmentality of actors intervening to promote wildlife security.

Declaration of competing interest

None.

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