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Wildlife Conservation in East Africa: The Politics of Wildlife Conservation in Kenya and Tanzania: A Legacy of Western Influence

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WILDLIFE CONSERVATION IN EAST AFRICA

The Politics of Wildlife Conservation in Kenya and
Tanzania: A Legacy of Western Influence

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Abstract

This thesis examines the evolution of wildlife conservation policies in Kenya and Tanzania, underlying the profound impact of neocolonial and colonial influences. It advocates for reformed, decentralized conservation strategies that incorporate indigenous knowledge and participation. Analyzing the key works of Akama and Gissibl, the study highlights the legacy of Western conservation practices in contemporary East African conservation strategies. Case studies such as Save the Elephants and Ill Ngwesi illustrate the effectiveness of community-based conservation models. The thesis ultimately argues for a shift to local, community-based, and driven conservation efforts to benefit indigenous communities and sustainable wildlife conservation.

Introduction and Methodology

Kenya and Tanzania, as former colonies in East Africa, face ongoing challenges in wildlife conservation shaped by their colonial and neocolonial pasts. This thesis examines the transformation of their wildlife conservation policies, focusing on the significant yet often overlooked role of indigenous knowledge and practices. By building upon seminal works in the field, namely John Akama's *The Evolution of Wildlife Conservation Policies in Kenya* and Bernard Gissibl's *The Nature of German Imperialism: Conservation and the Politics of Wildlife in Colonial East Africa*, my research aims to offer insights and suggestions to policymakers, wildlife conservation practitioners, and future researchers in Kenya and Tanzania for the benefit of wildlife and humanity.

Four primary questions drove the research for this thesis. First, recognizing that pre-colonial Kenyan and Tanzanian communities had systems of indigenous wildlife management, how did colonial authorities impact wildlife management practices and create a system of wildlife conservation? Second, how has neocolonialism in the modern era perpetuated and reinforced lasting colonial impacts on wildlife conservation in these two nations? Third, with awareness of the connection between neocolonialism and colonialism, how has neocolonialism uniquely impacted wildlife conservation in the two nations? Finally, how can wildlife conservation policies and practices in Kenya and Tanzania best be evolved and decentralized to benefit indigenous communities, wildlife, and the environment?

This thesis narrows its focus on prominent fauna species, particularly those most visible and researched from a Western perspective, such as elephants and rhinos. Through both historical analysis and case studies, including community-driven initiatives like Save and Elephants and Ill Ngwesi Ecotourism Lodge, this thesis advocates for a shift towards conservation models that prioritize indigenous knowledge and local involvement in conservation practices while addressing the ecological and social needs of the most impacted, those in indigenous communities. In doing so, this thesis seeks to inform policymakers, conservation practitioners, and future researchers about creating more equitable and sustainable conservation frameworks in East Africa.

The thesis is divided into seven well-organized sections that flow smoothly from one to another. The first section, the Literature Review, will critically summarize and analyze seminal works in this field of study while identifying shortcomings in existing research and, therefore, the need for the research in this thesis. The second section, Background, provides helpful contextualization regarding the evolution of wildlife conservation practices in both Kenya and Tanzania from the era of pre-colonialism to post-colonialism, their impacts, and the continuation of these practices into the modern era due to the support of colonial legacy by neocolonial actors. The sixth section, Case Studies of Wildlife Conservation Models, dissects community-based and community-owned conservation practices and ventures in Kenya and Tanzania and their uniquely positive effects on indigenous communities and the ecosystem. The final section: Discussion and Analysis, examines the importance of this thesis in context with other seminal works on this issue and makes an argument for the decentralization of wildlife conservation practices in Kenya and Tanzania and the involvement of communities in contemporary wildlife conservation for the betterment of humans and wildlife.

The Development of Colonial Tourism

Critical Analysis of The Evolution of Wildlife Conservation Policies in Kenya

Dr. John S. Akama is a “senior lecturer of tourism studies... has teaching and research interest in Wildlife Management, Tourism Policy, and Environmental Planning,”¹ and the founding Vice Chancellor of Kisii University², is the author of *The Evolution of Wildlife Conservation Policies in Kenya*, a seminal work in this research field.

Dr. Akama’s article offers a comprehensive historical and political analysis of Kenya’s wildlife conservation policies from the pre-colonial to post-colonial period. It focuses on the country's socio-economic shifts in conservation policies, emphasizing the influence of the colonial administration and Western elitist influence and co-option of local wildlife conservation practices and authority. Overall, Dr. Akama provides a valuable examination of the chronological evolution of conservation policies, limited up until the developments in wildlife conservation in the region at the time of his writing, the late 1990s.

Dr. Akama begins by illustrating the pre-colonial era, where indigenous communities practiced various sustainable methods for wildlife and natural resource use rooted in their understanding and perception of the environment: “Indigenous natural resources use strategies included pastoralism, shifting cultivation, and hunting and gathering of wild flora and fauna.”³ Dr. Akama recognizes that pre-colonial rural Kenyan communities had governing regulations on wildlife management.⁴ However, Dr. Akama falls short of explicitly arguing that pre-colonial wildlife management practices were sufficient for protecting wildlife, enabling sustainable human-wildlife interactions, and providing an in-depth analysis of specific pre-colonial wildlife management practices and governing regulations.

Dr. Akama identifies the impetus for wildlife conservation policies implemented by the British colonial administration: “The arrival of European settlers, amateur and professional hunters and other trophy seekers led to the rapid decline of wildlife populations and the destruction of wildlife habitats.”⁵ This destruction drew concern from affluent Western conservationists who eventually lobbied their governments to enact wildlife conservation and nature protection policies, namely the establishment of national game parks and fortress conservation models in line with a Western perspective on wildlife conservation. These colonial administrative efforts saw the alienation of local communities from wildlife management and the shift of western blame for wildlife endangerment to indigenous communities whose wildlife management practices were deemed incompatible and often deficient or even counterproductive.⁶ Dr. Akama gives a good review and analysis of the evolution of wildlife conservation policies during the colonial era and the alienation of local community practices.

¹ Akama, John. “The Evolution of Wildlife Conservation Policies in Kenya.” *Journal of Third World Studies* 15 (1998): 103–17, p. 103.

² Bundi, Benson. “Prof John Akama Biography: First Kisii University Vice Chancellor, His Life Story.” *Whownskeny* (blog), August 1, 2023.

³ Akama, *Evolution of Wildlife Conservation Policies*, p. 104.

⁴ Akama, *Evolution of Wildlife Conservation Policies*, p. 104.

⁵ Akama, *Evolution of Wildlife Conservation Policies*, p. 104-105.

⁶ Akama, *Evolution of Wildlife Conservation Policies*, p. 104-108.

Examining the ramifications of colonial legacy and neocolonialism in the post-independence period, Dr. Akama explains that the transition from the colonial to the post-independence period saw the transfer of colonial wildlife conservation policies to the oversight of the new independence government, including four national parks and six reserves which have blossomed into a staggering “23 terrestrial National Parks, 28 terrestrial National Reserves, 4 marine National Parks, 6 marine National Reserves and 4 national sanctuaries.”⁷ The Kenyan government's embrace and expansion of the national park system reflects a fortress conservation model. This model prioritizes wildlife conservation over the conservation of the entire ecosystem and rejects indigenous land use rights. The continued influence of the Western wildlife conservation perspective is evident in this approach.⁸ Kenya has embraced national park and fortress wildlife conservation for its favorability to Kenya's primary foreign exchange and economic boost: tourism.⁹ Dr. Akama sufficiently examines the expansion and negative impact of the national park system on independence-era wildlife conservation efforts in Kenya, focusing on the legacy of colonialism and Western conservation practices on post-independence conservation strategies in the region.

In his conclusion, Dr. Akama advocates for wildlife conservation strategies that include and empower indigenous communities and their knowledge. In Dr. Akama's words, “in order to conserve wildlife resources, it is urgent to develop alternative conservation strategies which take into account the interests of rural peasants and pastoralists.”¹⁰ Local wildlife management rights were lost to the state, eliminating local communities' sense of wildlife resource ownership. Dr. Akama argues that a return to local wildlife conservation efforts and an emphasis on focusing wildlife conservation needs in the context of local communities' needs will restore that sense of ownership and prove ultimately beneficial. Dr. Akama makes a strong argument in his conclusion that this thesis will supplement with examinations of local wildlife conservation experiments in Kenya and Tanzania and a perspective into evolution towards Dr. Akama's proposed solution in the past two and a half decades since his article was published.

⁷ Akama, *Evolution of Wildlife Conservation Policies*, p. 109; “Overview | Kenya Wildlife Service.” Accessed November 13, 2023.

⁸ Akama, *Evolution of Wildlife Conservation Policies*, p. 110-111.

⁹ Akama, *Evolution of Wildlife Conservation Policies*, p. 109.

¹⁰ Akama, *Evolution of Wildlife Conservation Policies*, p. 112.

Critical Analysis of The Nature of German Imperialism: Conservation and the Politics of Wildlife in Colonial East Africa

Dr. Bernhard Gissibl is an academic with a research focus and expertise in “German and European history in global contexts” with a particular emphasis on “the history of nature conservation and European imperialism in general, particularly in its environmental dimensions.”¹¹ He is the author of the seminal work *The Nature of German Imperialism: Conservation and the Politics of Wildlife in Colonial East Africa*.

Dr. Gissibl’s work *The Nature of German Imperialism: Conservation and the Politics of Wildlife in Colonial East Africa* provides a detailed examination of the relationship between German colonialism and Tanzanian wildlife conservation practices. While the book is a seminal work in understanding the environmental history of German imperial rule and the legacy of German imperialism on post-independence wildlife conservation practices, Gissibl does not assess the era of British colonialism, post-WWI, in Tanzania and its effects on wildlife conservation.

Gissibl opens his book with an analysis of how German colonial rule transformed wildlife management in Tanzania, centrally how the treatment and hunting of elephants for ivory shifted the view of wildlife as a resource to an asset, fundamentally changed human-environment interactions in the country during the colonial era, because of colonial economic interests.¹²

Gissibl continues to examine the birth of wildlife conservation policies under German rule in the country, including the establishment of game reserves and hunting regulations, which were indicative of a shift towards a Western conservationist approach to wildlife.¹³ Gissibl describes how these colonial policies laid the groundwork for today's post-independence wildlife conservation practices in Tanzania. These wildlife conservation practices were inherently exclusionary to local communities whose wildlife management practices were labeled incompatible with wildlife conservation by Western colonial authorities.¹⁴ Ultimately, as Gissibl argues, the colonial government prioritized wildlife conservation practices and strategies over the rights, needs, and traditional practices of indigenous communities who were forced off traditional hunting grounds and banned from traditional hunting practices to allow for the establishment of game reserves and hunting regulations, which ultimately favored foreign sport hunting over indigenous hunting practices, leading to significant socio-economic impacts of local communities in Tanzania.¹⁵

Finally, Gissibl frames his analysis of Tanzanian wildlife conservation practices and German imperialism in the broader context of European imperialism. Colonial authority decrees and colonial wildlife conservation practices in Tanzania were a part of the European mission to civilize colonies, in this circumstance, to integrate Tanzania into a burgeoning global network of

¹¹ “IEG - Leibniz Institute of European History.” Accessed November 14, 2023.

¹² Bernhard Gissibl. *The Nature of German Imperialism : Conservation and the Politics of Wildlife in Colonial East Africa*. Environment in History: International Perspectives. [N.p.]: Berghahn Books, 2016, p. 10.

¹³ Gissibl, *The Nature of German Imperialism*, p. 87.

¹⁴ Gissibl, *The Nature of German Imperialism*, p. 191, 206.

¹⁵ Gissibl, *The Nature of German Imperialism*.

wildlife conservation and governance.¹⁶ This led to global cooperation in colonial wildlife conservation policies, although primarily influenced by European hunter-conservationists. Gissibl highlights the contextualization of Tanzanian wildlife conservation practices in the context of European imperialism and an analysis of European hunter-conservationists' influence on wildlife practices. This thesis will expand Gissibl's analysis of Tanzania's conservation practices by examining contemporary relics of colonialism and the impact of neocolonial influences on contemporary conservation practices and focuses in the region.

¹⁶ Gissibl, *The Nature of German Imperialism*, p. 158.

The History of Conservation

The Evolution of Wildlife Conservation Practices from Pre-Colonialism to Independence

“Put simply, the colonial era wildlife conservation and utilization in Tanzania were externally driven – with the main aim of satisfying the tastes and yearnings of a powerful European elite.”¹⁷

Pre-colonial Kenyan and Tanzania indigenous communities had wildlife management practices that supported thriving ecosystems and wildlife populations that did not align with western wildlife conservation practices that would be introduced in the era of colonialism. Indigenous communities practiced traditional indigenous wildlife and resource management strategies, including: “pastoralism, shifting cultivation, and hunting and gathering.”¹⁸

The Maasai, a socio-ethnic group of pastoralists who traditionally lived along the border of Kenya and Tanzania, do not, by traditional practice, hunt wildlife.¹⁹ According to Fernández-Llamazares and others, “use and consumption of bushmeat was forbidden and culturally unacceptable, except for periods under dire conditions of famine,” at which point the Maasai would target wildlife close to death.^{20 21} Instead, Maasai practice sustainable use of natural resources by traditionally nourishing themselves on the blood and milk of cows and the milk of sheep and goats from their herds.²² Maasai, traditionally practicing pastoralism, move their herds across large swaths of land, allowing grazed lands to be restored over time.²³ This Maasai practice is a sustainable use of wildlife as it allows non-bio-accessible flora energy to be converted by herd populations into bio-accessible energy for the Maasai and additionally demonstrates a tenant of the Maasai culture: a deep respect for wildlife and their value to a sustainable ecosystem. The Maasai are a single example, albeit an obvious and researched example, of the sustainability and intrinsically sustainable wildlife management practices of pre-colonial Tanzanian and Kenyan societies. Non-sustainable wildlife management practices are untenable, as colonial authorities would discover, especially when, as was the case for most pre-colonial indigenous communities, wildlife was a source of life. Furthermore, as asserted by

¹⁷ “The Evolution of Wildlife Conservation Policies in Tanzania during the Colonial and Post-Independence Periods.” Accessed November 9, 2023, p. 591.

¹⁸ Akama, John. “The Evolution of Wildlife Conservation Policies in Kenya.” *Journal of Third World Studies* 15 (1998): 103–17, p. 104.

¹⁹ Fernández-Llamazares, Álvaro, David Western, Kathleen A. Galvin, Pamela McElwee, and Mar Cabeza. “Historical Shifts in Local Attitudes towards Wildlife by Maasai Pastoralists of the Amboseli Ecosystem (Kenya): Insights from Three Conservation Psychology Theories.” *Journal for Nature Conservation* 53 (February 1, 2020): 125763, p. 4.

²⁰ Fernández-Llamazares, Álvaro, David Western, Kathleen A. Galvin, Pamela McElwee, and Mar Cabeza, “Historical Shifts in Local Attitudes”, p. 4.

²¹ Il Ngwesi Maasai Employee in discussion with the author, June 2021.

²² “Wildlife and the Maasai | Cultural Survival,” February 17, 2010.

²³ “Wildlife and the Maasai | Cultural Survival,” February 17, 2010.

Akama, “wildlife formed an integral part of the socio-cultural experience of pre-colonial Kenyan societies.”²⁴

The establishment of colonial authorities in Kenya and Tanzania set the stage for introducing and enforcing colonial wildlife conservation practices that were informed by a Western view of wildlife and conservation principles. The wildlife product economy, including tourist sport hunting, wildlife conservation sentiments in Europe, and innate discrimination against indigenous practices, contributed to constantly evolving wildlife conservation practices during the colonial era in Kenya and Tanzania.

The arrival of European sport and trade hunters in Tanzania, under German rule, accompanied the rise of the ivory trade as elephants were hunted for their highly sought-after wildlife product, namely ivory tusks.²⁵ This rise in elephant hunting and the hunting of other wildlife species, typically those viewed as exotic by elite European sport hunters, caused a massive decline in wildlife fauna populations in Tanzania.²⁶ The establishment of caravan trade routes and the commodification of ivory, and to a lesser extent, other wildlife products, established a culture of commodified wildlife hunting, which, facilitated by the spread of muzzle-loading guns throughout East Africa in the 19th century, spread to even indigenous hunter-gatherer groups.²⁷

Similarly, in Kenya, sport and commercial hunting of wildlife fauna by European tourists and commercial hunters created drastic adverse effects on wildlife populations. As succinctly stated by Akama, “The arrival of European settlers, amateur and professional hunters, and other trophy seekers led to the rapid decline of wildlife populations and the destruction of wildlife habitats.”²⁸

The disruption of sustainable wildlife conservation/management practices in Tanzania and Kenya, which existed prior to the imposition of colonial authority, and the massive resulting decrease in many wildlife populations did not go unnoticed by practitioners and followers of Western wildlife conservationism. Wildlife conservation activists in Europe and elite European tourist hunters recognized the drastic decrease in wildlife populations, which worried both groups.²⁹ Gissibl, in his seminal work on the impact of colonialism on Tanzanian wildlife management practices, notes that “conservation...became the concern of well-connected elite hunter-conservationists” who lobbied their European governments for “stricter conservation policies.”³⁰ It is important to note, however, that European conservationists were, like nearly all colonial interests, primarily concerned with the economic impact of declining wildlife populations rather than damaging ecological impact: “conservationists framed wildlife as a

²⁴ Akama, *Evolution of Wildlife Conservation Policies*, p. 104.

²⁵ Bernhard Gissibl. *The Nature of German Imperialism : Conservation and the Politics of Wildlife in Colonial East Africa*. Environment in History: International Perspectives. [N.p.]: Berghahn Books, 2016.

²⁶ Gissibl, *The Nature of German Imperialism*.

²⁷ Gissibl, *The Nature of German Imperialism*, p. 158.p. 50-51.

²⁸ Akama, *Evolution of Wildlife Conservation Policies*, p. 104-105.

²⁹ Akama, *Evolution of Wildlife Conservation Policies*, p. 105.

³⁰ Gissibl, *The Nature of German Imperialism*, p. 9.

valuable economic capital.”³¹ The decline of exotic wildlife populations and lobbying by affluent hunter-conservationists triggered a reaction from the colonial authorities in Kenya and Tanzania. Many species in East Africa’s landscape were considered exotic by Europeans for their departure from the wild-boar hunting that was commonplace in Europe.³² As a result, East African wildlife was often held in higher regard for species survival than other European and even less exotic East African wildlife species. The two countries' wildlife conservation policies enacted under colonial authorities consisted primarily of hunting regulations and the eventual establishment of game reserves, large swaths of land tied to highly restrictive wildlife management regulations.

In Tanzania, German colonization had led to the creation of an expansive, massively profitable ivory trade. As emphasized by Gissibl, until nearly WWI, “German wildlife policies in East Africa were governed by the political ecology of the ivory trade.”³³ Caravan trade routes and the commodification of ivory created the culture of wildlife hunting that led to the massive depopulation of many exotic East African wildlife species. The effect of hunting culture was easily recognizable. Thus, when colonial authorities were forced to face depopulated wildlife species, they turned to the most direct counter to overhunting: hunting regulations. These regulations were sporadically enforced and generally discriminatorily written against indigenous hunters.³⁴

Similarly, in Kenya, hunting regulations were enacted in response to environmental degradation, influencing lobbying by hunter-conservationists. In slight opposition to Gissibl, Akama argues that hunter-conservationists were primarily concerned with the extinction of wildlife populations and the excessive destruction of ecosystems due to their perceived “social and ecological value of nature conservation” instead of the purely economic interests that Gissibl arguably identifies. Nevertheless, the exclusion of indigenous communities from wildlife management and the underlying influence of racial and colonial superiority was as accurate in Kenya as it was in Tanzania.

“The underlying concept among the pioneer conservationists and government officials was that indigenous resource use methods were destructive to wildlife and other forms of natural resources. Officials were faced with different natural resources utilization methods, such as traditional subsistence hunting, pastoralism and shifting cultivation, and they had difficulties in evaluating and understanding these resource use practices. Most often, the conservationists and government officials classified African modes of natural resource use as at best “unprogressive” and at worst “barbaric” and to be eliminated.”³⁵

³¹ Gissibl, *The Nature of German Imperialism*, p. 158.

³² Fieldsports Journal. “Wild Boar Hunting in Europe - a Brief History,” July 15, 2020.

³³ Bernhard Gissibl. *The Nature of German Imperialism : Conservation and the Politics of Wildlife in Colonial East Africa*. Environment in History: International Perspectives. [N.p.]: Berghahn Books, 2016. p. 21.

³⁴ Gissibl, *The Nature of German Imperialism*.

³⁵ Akama, John. “The Evolution of Wildlife Conservation Policies in Kenya.” *Journal of Third World Studies* 15 (1998): 103–17, p. 107.

Hunting regulations, primarily in the form of expensive hunting licenses and designated game reserves, had a lackluster effect on the depopulation of elephants and other wildlife species due to the continued ecological impact of hunting, which was still accessible for wealthy Europeans. In Tanzania, according to Gissibl, “hunting and wildlife reserves... were as makeshift as colonial policies in general, often invisible on the ground, hard to police, and hardly policed.”³⁶

Following WWI and the transfer of colonial control of Tanzania to the British Empire, the British colonial governments of Kenya and Tanzania realized a need for revitalized wildlife conservation practices, which resulted in the fortress conservation movement. Fortress conservation is a model of conservation that supports the idea that creating exclusionary zones in which ecosystems can exist without human interference creates the most biodiversity. Fortress conservation causes indigenous communities to continue to face grave cultural and lifestyle impacts from the expansion of fortress conservation.

In the process of the British colonial government of Tanzania introducing fortress conservation, Maasai people in northeast Tanzania were pressured and persuaded to leave their ancestral lands to allow for the establishment of Serengeti National Park.³⁷ In exchange for their peaceful relocation, the Maasai were promised a seat at the table for future land management agreements on their new land: the Ngorongoro Conservation Area (NCA).³⁸ This promise never came to fruition as the Maasai have continuously been denied representation in the governance of NCA.³⁹ Similar examples of broken promises and relocated indigenous communities and tribes, including other local groups of Maasai, exist throughout history and throughout Kenya and Tanzania. For the Maasai, exclusion from ancestral lands and large swaths of grazing land for their cattle in general has threatened the continued existence of the traditional Maasai lifestyle. Many Maasai, especially newer generations, have been forced to pursue “modernized” lifestyles, often moving to cities, while those that continue to maintain cattle herds have either seen far reduced herds or, if wealthy, forced to pay for access to private grazing lands far from home and for herders to move their cattle across a large area of land to find suitable areas for grazing that have not been overgrazed or fenced off for wildlife conservation. This has furthermore been extenuated by the pressures of environmental change and devastating droughts, which have wiped out many cattle herd populations and reduced already limited suitable grazing lands, as elaborated by various Kenyan Maasai individuals in conversation with the author.

The impact of fortress conservation on indigenous communities can be seen outside of Kenya and Tanzania, one example being the Ik. In the neighboring country of Uganda, also a British colony, the Ik, a small, isolated tribe of indigenous Ugandans, were forcibly removed from their homes and banned from the land that was their communities’ own to establish Kidepo National Park.⁴⁰ The Ik’s lifestyle and sustainability on the wildlife present in the region of the

³⁶ Gissibl, *The Nature of German Imperialism*, p. 217.

³⁷ oaklandinstitute.org. “Indigenous Peoples Must Be at the Center of Global Conservation Efforts.” Accessed December 3, 2023.

³⁸ oaklandinstitute.org. “Indigenous Peoples Must Be at the Center of Global Conservation Efforts.” Accessed December 3, 2023.

³⁹ oaklandinstitute.org. “Indigenous Peoples Must Be at the Center of Global Conservation Efforts.” Accessed December 3, 2023.

⁴⁰ “Wildlife and the Maasai | Cultural Survival,” February 17, 2010.

national park from where they were forcibly removed was irreversibly disrupted, and the Ik were essentially victims of genocide; Colin Turnbull, a British anthropologist, found them starving and “told of the breakdown of their culture” in his book *The Mountain People*.^{41 42} According to Deihl Colin, “Nearly every park involves some interference with the rights of local people.”⁴³

The end of colonial rule in Kenya and Tanzania did not bring about the end of Western influence in these two countries' wildlife conservation practices and policies. Legacies of colonialism and the ever-present influence of neocolonial actors continue to hamper more decentralized and evolved, often community-based wildlife conservation practices in Kenya and Tanzania.

The transfer of fortress wildlife reserves and game parks in both countries from the British to the newly independent governments catalyzed the ecologically ill-informed and community-damaging wildlife conservation practices that continue today. Wildlife reserves and game parks simply offered and continue to offer a huge opportunity for tourism, which drives both Kenya's and Tanzania's economies. Nyerere, Tanzania's first independence president, once said: “I personally am not very interested in animals. I do not want to spend my holidays watching crocodiles. Nevertheless, I am entirely in favor of their survival. I believe that after diamonds and sisal, wildlife animals will provide Tanganyika with its greatest source of income.”⁴⁴ Tanzania and Kenya continue to have predominantly services-based economies, which include tourism, predominantly wildlife tourism, and industry.^{45 46} This reality exemplifies the economic control exerted over post-colonial states by former colonizing states under neo-colonialism. Kenya and Tanzania rely on European wildlife tourism to bolster their economies; many post-colonial states were left with undeveloped economies post-independence that rely on trade and aid from former colonizing states in Europe and the West.

Supporting the legacy of colonial wildlife conservation practices in these two countries are the influences of neocolonial actors in preserving the status quo. NGOs, foreign government aid organizations, and international institutions all overtly and sometimes subtly pressure the governments of Kenya and Tanzania to maintain fortress wildlife conservation models that exclude indigenous communities, consolidate wildlife conservation under the state and generally fit within the Western perspective of necessary wildlife conservation practices.

International non-governmental organizations operating and investing in the wildlife conservation politics of Kenya and Tanzania generally act in a hostile manner to sustainable wildlife conservation practices. Instead, these non-governmental organizations support fortress

⁴¹ “Wildlife and the Maasai | Cultural Survival,” February 17, 2010.

⁴² “Colin M. Turnbull.” Accessed December 3, 2023.

⁴³ <https://www.culturalsurvival.org/publications/cultural-survival-quarterly/wildlife-and-maasai>.

⁴⁴ “Wildlife and the Maasai | Cultural Survival,” February 17, 2010.

⁴⁴ Benjaminsen, Tor A., Mara J. Goldman, Maya Y. Minwary, and Faustin P. Maganga. “Wildlife Management in Tanzania: State Control, Rent Seeking and Community Resistance.” *Development and Change* 44, no. 5 (2013): 1087–1109, p. 1088.

⁴⁵ Statista. “Kenya - Share of Economic Sectors in the Gross Domestic Product 2022.” Accessed November 28, 2023.

⁴⁶ TanzaniaInvest. “Tanzania Economy Archives.” Accessed November 28, 2023.

conservation and ecotourism that benefits the state and Western actors. These non-governmental organizations often have Western-headed boards and directors, even if most workers are locals and are influenced by Western ideas.

Foreign government aid organizations target aid to influence policy; typically, aid is targeted at fortress wildlife conservation supporting organizations and National Parks and Game Reserves. The Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS), the state-owned and operated national park service in Kenya that predominantly sustains a fortress conservation national park model, receives support and funding from numerous international governmental and non-governmental organizations, including the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, USAID, The World Conservation Union, Parks Canada, French Development Agency, Flora and Fauna International and the International Fund for Wildlife Welfare amongst many others.⁴⁷ While KWS and USAID, in partnership, claim to support community conservation efforts, the reality of wildlife conservation practices in Kenya is an exclusionary legacy of fortress conservation and the marginalization of indigenous communities.⁴⁸

“While there is a growing tendency among international and national governmental and non-governmental organizations to promote increased community participation as part of a ‘win-win’ scenario for both conservation and development, there was also resistance from some of the same actors to carrying out this policy in practice.”⁴⁹

Despite an increase in conversation around community wildlife conservation practices and organizations, the reality in Kenya and Tanzania is that the economic incentive of maintaining fortress conservation and ecotourism models in the two countries far incentivizes the Kenyan and Tanzanian governments to maintain these models of wildlife conservation over the adoption of community conservation efforts. Community wildlife conservation models require “some degree of actual power transfer from the central government to local communities,” yet to the central governments of Kenya and Tanzania, wildlife is valuable economic capital accrued through tourism, hunting, and conservation.⁵⁰ Therefore, while these governments may be pressured into outwardly supporting community wildlife conservation efforts, which have often come into favor with Western organizations that influence wildlife conservation in East Africa, at their core, both governments' wildlife conservation practices are designed to maintain the status quo. Some so-called community wildlife conservation revitalization efforts have instead acted in opposing effect, reconsolidating wealth and control under the state.⁵¹

⁴⁷ “International Partners | Kenya Wildlife Service.” Accessed December 4, 2023.

⁴⁸ U.S. Agency for International Development. “Environment | Kenya,” October 3, 2023.

⁴⁹ Benjaminsen, Tor A., Mara J. Goldman, Maya Y. Minwary, and Faustin P. Maganga. “Wildlife Management in Tanzania: State Control, Rent Seeking and Community Resistance.” *Development and Change* 44, no. 5 (2013): 1087–1109.

⁵⁰ Benjaminsen, Tor A., Mara J. Goldman, Maya Y. Minwary, and Faustin P. Maganga. *Development and Change*.

⁵¹ Benjaminsen, Tor A., Mara J. Goldman, Maya Y. Minwary, and Faustin P. Maganga. *Development and Change*, p. 1089.

Conservation Today

Save the Elephants

A case study that demonstrates integrating indigenous knowledge in a community conservation effort is Save the Elephants, a community-informed conservation effort in Northern Kenya. Save the Elephants is a “UK registered charity headquartered in Nairobi with its principal research station in Samburu National Reserve in northern Kenya.”⁵² Save the Elephants works to ensure the conservation of elephants in the Samburu region of Northern Kenya.

The Samburu of Kenya are a tribe of Maa speakers in Northern Kenya that has owned and overseen the Samburu National Reserve since its establishment in 1962. More than 90% of revenue for the Samburu County Council comes from the Samburu National Reserve.

The Samburu have a historically unique relationship with elephants that they live alongside. Elephants, as with most wildlife that the Samburu interact with, provide both costs and benefits: there is the “occasional conflict over water and human or cattle deaths caused by elephants,” yet “the Samburu expressed that elephants benefit those who live among them since they create paths to water, dig dams and break branches that people can use for firewood.”⁵³

Beyond the direct effects that elephants have on the Samburu people, there is a cultural importance of the Samburu’s relationship with wildlife, especially these elephants. The Samburu see elephants as human-like with “a trunk that acts like a human arm, breasts similar to a woman, and skin that resembles human skin.”⁵⁴ A Samburu legend describes elephants as specific relatives of humans, having once lived in Samburu homes and worked alongside Samburu women, thereby demonstrating the significance of elephants to the Samburu people. This vital relationship with lasting traditions, such as the treatment of elephant graves by the Samburu, is similar to Samburu graves.

While Samburu tradition, legend, and historical practices regarding elephants demonstrate a close relationship between the two groups, the younger generations of Samburu have lost some of the Samburu traditional knowledge of the importance of wildlife: “They expressed the need for more conservation education for youth, as younger generations did not understand the importance of wildlife to the same degree as the older generations.”⁵⁵

Conservation efforts have been impacted by a decrease in the value of elephants by young Samburu generations due to “tribal clashes, insecurity in the Samburu area, and widespread poverty,” which has led to youth killing wildlife for quick profit.⁵⁶ The cultural significance of wildlife to the Samburu is being lost. This loss of significance is recognized by

⁵² “Our History.” *Save the Elephants*, <https://www.savetheelephants.org/about-ste/our-history/>. Accessed 28 Sept. 2023.

⁵³ Kuriyan, Renee. *Linking Local Perceptions of Elephants and Conservation: Samburu Pastoralists in Northern Kenya*. Mar. 2004.

⁵⁴ Kuriyan, Renee. *Linking Local Perceptions of Elephants*. Mar. 2004, p. 4

⁵⁵ Kuriyan, Renee. *Linking Local Perceptions of Elephants*. Mar. 2004, p. 3

⁵⁶ Kuriyan, Renee. *Linking Local Perceptions of Elephants*. Mar. 2004, p. 3

older Samburu generations who feel the issue threatens their culture. The older Samburu communicated these concerns to Save the Elephants along with suggestions for approaches to community conservation: “education initiatives for youth and support for cultural traditions.”⁵⁷

Save the Elephants incorporated indigenous knowledge and proposals into their conservation efforts by publishing a wildlife education program’s teacher’s guide to teachers in the Samburu community's education system. Additionally, Save the Elephants revitalized traditional Samburu beliefs about wildlife and elephants with publications handed out to the community through schools and directly to community members, reactivating oral traditions in writing in the Kenyan education system. Save the Elephants also produced the first Samburu language film to show the legend of elephants working with Samburu women in the kitchen; a film which “used local materials and Samburu actors to ignite an intellectual interest in elephants and promote a conservation message”⁵⁸

Beyond informing the community, Save the Elephants has additionally incorporated conservation practices that directly integrate the Samburu community, per Samburu input, to further wildlife conservation education, strengthen the connection between Samburu peoples and wildlife, and encourage youth to view financial opportunities with wildlife outside of poaching. A pristine example of this was Save the Elephant’s radio collaring event in conjunction with the Samburu people.

After a local education program to teach Samburu youth about the radio collaring process, Samburu youth expressed an interest in seeing the elephant collars resembling traditional Samburu beaded necklaces. In response, Save the Elephants organized a workshop that saw Samburu women “employed to decorate a radio collar with their traditional beadwork and patterns,” after which 30 Samburu community members attended a collaring event with the special radio collars.⁵⁹

Integrating the local Samburu community into wildlife conservation efforts had a demonstratable positive impact on the community. Women benefitted financially through the economic incentive of the radio collar workshop and “asserted their pride in having an elephant adorned in their beadwork.”⁶⁰ Other Samburu participants, beyond exhibiting a genuine interest in involving the community in the conservation practice, demonstrated lasting interest in the radio-collaring event and the “whereabouts of the elephant” while informing the researchers when the bull was spotted in the brush during their pastoralist activities.⁶¹

⁵⁷ Kuriyan, Renee. *Linking Local Perceptions of Elephants*. Mar. 2004, p. 3

⁵⁸ Kuriyan, Renee. *Linking Local Perceptions of Elephants*. Mar. 2004, p. 5

⁵⁹ Kuriyan, Renee. *Linking Local Perceptions of Elephants*. Mar. 2004, p. 5

⁶⁰ Kuriyan, Renee. *Linking Local Perceptions of Elephants*. Mar. 2004, p. 5

⁶¹ Kuriyan, Renee. *Linking Local Perceptions of Elephants*. Mar. 2004, p. 5

III Ngwesi

Ill Ngwesi is a community-owned and operated ecotourism outfit in Kenya. The enterprising ecotourism lodge is owned and operated by and on the land of six traditional pastoralist Maasai communities in Laikipia, Kenya. Created in collaboration with Ian Craig, the owner and operator of the nearby Lewa Wildlife Conservancy, and with funding from USAID through the Kenya Wildlife Service, the ecolodge, which sits on over eight thousand hectares of land, set aside for wildlife conservation and ecotourism.⁶²

This ecolodge is entirely staffed by individuals from the local Maasai communities, including the 16 rangers who patrol the land. Additionally, the board consists of “six local Maasai and one external member,” Kirstin Johnson, a British anthropologist and conservationist who works for the African Wildlife Foundation.^{63 64}

Revenue from the ecolodge goes directly to the community to both support the upkeep of the lodge and also to support numerous community projects such as “school fees... local school buildings, health personnel and buildings, and enabled the community to buy additional land to ease grazing pressures.”⁶⁵

The adoption of a low-impact ecotourism model, outside of the direct benefits to the local community due to direct ownership and buy-in from locals, saw “wildlife numbers steadily increase.”⁶⁶ Wildlife species facing endangerment in the area, including predators, all returned to safe population levels, and the lodge maintains a small fenced-in conservancy area for two endangered white rhinos, supervised 24/7 by the park rangers. In a far faster and more effective manner, Ill Ngwesi has revitalized the local ecosystem while supporting the local community.

Ill Ngwesi’s conservation model is not perfect. It still relies on restricting local use and access to certain areas of land and, in some instances, has struggled to equitably distribute the benefits of a community-owned ecotourism venture to all members of the community, especially women, as discussed by Philip Ileri, James Kung’u, and Joseph Muriithi in their work “Distribution of Benefits of Ngare Ndare Trust and Ill Ngwesi Group Ranch Ecotourism Enterprises in Kenya.”⁶⁷ Despite these challenges, Ill Ngwesi demonstrates the viability and benefit of community wildlife conservation practices and ventures.

⁶² “The Ill Ngwesi Story – Ill Ngwesi,” April 4, 2016. <http://ilngwesi.com/content/visit/2016/04/04/the-ill-ngwesi-story/>.

⁶³ “Meet the Team – Ill Ngwesi,” April 4, 2016. <https://ilngwesi.com/content/visit/2016/04/04/meet-the-team/>.

⁶⁴ Accessed December 4, 2023. <https://connect.afsic.net/widget/event/afsic-2023-investing-in-africa/person/RXZlbnRQZW9wbGVfMjQ0Njc1MDE=>.

⁶⁵ “Supporting Communities – Ill Ngwesi,” April 4, 2016. <https://ilngwesi.com/content/visit/2016/04/04/supporting-communities/>.

⁶⁶ “The Ill Ngwesi Story – Ill Ngwesi,” April 4, 2016. <http://ilngwesi.com/content/visit/2016/04/04/the-ill-ngwesi-story/>.

⁶⁷ “Kirstin Johnson - UK Director - African Wildlife Foundation | LinkedIn.” Accessed December 4, 2023. <https://uk.linkedin.com/in/kirstin-johnson-8873a121>.

Discussion and Analysis

The examination of the evolution of wildlife conservation practices in Kenya and Tanzania from pre-colonialism to post-independence reveals the profound transformation wildlife resource management and conservation underwent from pre-colonialism to the end of the colonial era due to the colonial governments of both countries. In the pre-colonial era, indigenous wildlife management practices were ecologically sustainable and supported local ecosystems and wildlife species. The introduction of colonial rule brought about disastrous ecological impacts often referenced through colonial records on so-viewed essential wildlife species, for example, the elephant in Tanzania under German rule, as it was a species of incredible economic importance for the regime with the ivory trade. These ecological impacts were disparaged by a new breed of European sport hunter, the hunter-conservationist, many of whom pressured the German and British governments to enact new wildlife conservation policies in their two respective colonies to protect these wildlife species, generally for their economic value. At first, wildlife conservation practices predominantly consisted of hunting regulations and game reserves, which evolved into fortress conservation models due to their ineffectiveness and were facilitated by the transfer of colonial control of Tanzania from Germany to the British Empire following WWI. During this transition, the exclusion of indigenous populations from their traditional natural resource use practices and the disregard for indigenous rights and needs increased.

This transformation from pre-colonialism to colonialism is well-examined in Gissibl and Akama's seminal works on Tanzania and Kenya, respectively. However, both authors failed in large part to examine in depth specific indigenous communities impacted by colonial wildlife conservation practices to fully expose the disastrous impacts of wildlife conservation practices introduced under colonialism on indigenous communities. Additionally, neither work effectively examined the impact of neocolonialism on supporting the legacy of colonial wildlife conservation practices to today.

This thesis addresses these two omissions. It examines the devastating impact of wildlife conservation policies introduced under colonialism on the Maasai of both Kenya and Tanzania. Furthermore, it delves into the influences of neocolonial actors such as international non-governmental organizations, foreign governmental organizations, and international institutions on sustaining unsustainable, ecologically damaging, and indigenously damaging wildlife conservation practices such as fortress conservation.

The legacy of colonialism, enforced post-independence through neocolonialism, continues to create negative impacts on local Kenyan and Tanzanian communities, which have been forced from their ancestral lands and ways of life to support an ecotourism industry that enriches the state at the expense of indigenous cultures, peoples, and often the ecosystem itself.

However, as seen in the case studies of Save the Elephants and Ill Ngwesi, limited community-based conservation efforts do exist, sometimes even with the support of traditionally colonial legacy organizations such as the Kenya Wildlife Service. These limited examples of community-based conservation ventures and practices demonstrate the viability and importance

of emphasizing community participation in wildlife conservation and decentralizing wildlife conservation efforts in Kenya and Tanzania to serve people and wildlife best.

Community-based conservation practices can improve the lives of indigenous communities and provide a positive ecological impact, as evident by the resurgence of wildlife populations following the establishment of the community conservation ecolodge and venture by local Maasai at Ill Ngwesi. Community-owned and operated wildlife conservation ventures provide direct financial assistance to the community, often directed to vulnerable groups such as women. Direct community involvement creates a sense of ownership over wildlife by the community that does not exist when the community is excluded from wildlife conservation and is instead forced to fight for access to land for natural resource use, which was once free both monetarily and in access. Furthermore, community-based conservation practices do not detract from eco-tourism. Community-based conservation practices can still generate tourism revenue for the governments of Kenya and Tanzania through fees on community-owned tourism practices while economically uplifting indigenous Kenyan and Tanzanian communities, strengthening both countries' economies. Decentralizing tourism operations and ownership in Kenya and Tanzania will diversify their economies and could contribute to modernization efforts.

Allowing the governments of Kenya and Tanzania to continue their wildlife conservation practices and ecotourism at the direct detriment of traditional indigenous communities such as the Maasai cannot continue. Wildlife conservation in these two countries must be decentralized from the state and incorporate indigenous knowledge and ownership over natural wildlife resources for the betterment of indigenous communities and ecosystems. The Kenyan and Tanzanian governments can enact regulations to protect wildlife fauna, such as Kenya's anti-poaching laws, and fulfill their international obligations and expectations. With or without regulation, the abolishment of fortress conservation and the embrace of community-based conservation

NGOs, foreign governmental organizations, and international institutions that support wildlife conservation in East Africa must not only push for the incorporation of indigenous knowledge and direct involvement and even ownership of wildlife conservation ventures and practices but also recognize their inherent bias toward western wildlife conservation ideas, which can only be countered through local ownership and decision making. Rather than taking the lead, international NGOs, foreign governmental organizations, and international institutions must follow the lead of those who know Kenya and Tanzanian wildlife and natural resources the best, as well as local communities and individuals. It is ultimately to the benefit of wildlife conservation, the mission of these organizations, that local knowledge is incorporated in the wildlife conservation practices in Kenya and Tanzania.

As seen in many examples across time and geography, local solutions are better informed and executed than external, foreign solutions. Local actors, in this case, indigenous Kenyan and Tanzanian communities, have traditional knowledge and understanding developed through experiences and generational wisdom that informs their actions and solutions to conservation. At its basic, an incorporation of indigenous knowledge has the potential to improve regional conservation efforts and practices drastically. Beyond incorporation, ownership and direction of conservation practices by indigenous communities have greater potential to not only improve

conservation practices for ecological betterment but also to improve local communities by providing a source of potential economic gain such as through ecotourism or increased equitability in land management by allowing indigenous communities to utilize land designated for conservation in ecologically sustainable and community beneficial ways. For example, allowing Maasai to graze their herds on land currently blocked off through Fortress conservation and encouraging Maasai communities to lead conservation efforts with the same practices and policies that sustained an ecologically sound status quo in the pre-colonial era. Less involvement by foreign actors and more ownership and actions by local actors is the key to a sustainable future and to empower and modernize Kenya and Tanzania's economies.

Recent changes in tone from many international actors, which have traditionally supported colonial-era wildlife conservation practices used by the Kenyan and Tanzanian wildlife conservation authorities, are an excellent first step towards a more equitable, just, and sustainable future. USAID, through the Kenya Wildlife Service, funded Ill Ngwesi Ecotourism Lodge. This type of targeted funding is progressive, but further progression and development are needed. Even Ill Ngwesi has hints of a colonial legacy with its exclusionary wildlife conservation model despite its overall benefit to the local Maasai communities. In all, grassroots, local efforts are the key to actual, lasting change.

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