



Creating ecotourism territories: Environmentalities in Tanzania's community-based conservation

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores territorial struggles around ecotourism in community-based conservation in wildlife rich Northern Tanzania. At the centre of analysis are two emblematic and distinctly different ecotourism business models that rely on a particular territorialization of property relations and resource control: one model is based on land sharing with local communities and villages, while the other relies on the appropriation of large parts of village land for exclusive access and control. Conceptually engaging critical geography debates on internal territorialization with a poststructuralist political ecology inspired by the framework of multiple environmentalities, the paper shows how ecotourism companies employ different techniques of government to secure business-friendly environments and territories in neoliberal conservation. Different business models underpin different processes of territorialization that in turn produce different modes of engagements and regimes of rule and authority. While the case of ecotourism through land sharing reinforces village land rights through a neoliberal environmentality, ecotourism through land appropriation illustrates how neoliberal, sovereign and truth environmentalities are put to work to facilitate the re-territorialization of property relations and resource control to undermine land rights of an entire village or an ethnic minority.

1. Introduction

There is something inherently territorial about ecotourism, although the work that it takes to create ecotourism territories is not always obvious. The widely promoted definition of ecotourism as “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people” (International Ecotourism Society¹) suggests that ‘natural areas’ are already out there, ready to be discovered by tourists. Yet the territorial ambition implicit in references to nature and the environment can be well illustrated through the case of wildlife-based ecotourism. Ecotourism investors rely on the presence of wildlife in a particular area so that tourists can experience non-human nature, and sometimes wildlife needs to be actively protected so that it can be accessed. Protection is of course the main purpose of national parks or reserves, also known as conservation fortresses (Brockington, 2002). Ecotourism in the context of community-based conservation (Dressler et al., 2010; Goldman, 2003)² complicates the task at hand as the necessary territorial interventions to secure the presence of wildlife take place amidst human settlements. This can lead to trade-offs between rural livelihoods and tourism needs (Adams and Hulme, 2001).

These trade-offs receive little attention in public discourse and perception. The definition of ecotourism suggests that it is inherently good; being a win-win approach to both the environment and local people. However, a nuanced perspective on promises and perils of ecotourism is needed. This paper explores two different ecotourism interventions to illustrate under what conditions rural livelihoods and community-based conservation are at odds with each other and how this trade-off may be avoided. As will be shown, the variegated effects of ecotourism in community-based conservation can be well understood through attention to ecotourism business models that shape their territorial interventions.

Ecotourism enterprises operating in the global South through community-based conservation face a set of political and economic constraints that structure their business models and their engagement with people and the environment. Ecotourism investors operate in an increasingly competitive market, have to calculate and hedge investment risks, deal with social and political unrest, commodify the environment in order to sell it, and above all generate profits. In response to these risks and uncertainties, ecotourism interventions rely upon partnerships and coalitions between state- and non-state actors

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¹ www.ecotourism.org.

² Community-based conservation (CBC) is also called community-based natural resource management (CBNRM), and is an alternative policy approach to fortress conservation. CBC/CBNRM is an attempt to extend biodiversity conservation into communal lands through the active enrolment of local people, their knowledge and practices in conservation interventions.

(Fletcher and Neves, 2012; Igoe and Brockington, 2007; West and Carrier, 2004). These partnerships tend to further strengthen state power (Gregory and Vaccaro, 2015; Gardner, 2016; Devine, 2014) as they enable ecotourism investors and conservation NGOs to regulate rural livelihoods by integrating conservation into people's lives (Holmes and Cavanagh, 2016; Green, 2016; Bassett and Gautier, 2014; Adams et al., 2014). In short, community-based conservation initiatives become neoliberalized through ecotourism.

For-profit wildlife-based ecotourism requires secure property rights to operate successfully under market-based conditions. This needs to be negotiated with land owners or land rights holders. In sub-Saharan Africa, ecotourism investors can attract clients to sell the African 'safari' experience for USD 100–1000 or more per person per night after a favourable property regime has been established. Underpinned by the logics of competition and profitability, many investors strive to manufacture a recreational 'wilderness' experience by disconnecting tourists from the local context, to transform the locally lived reality into a fetishized virtual nature (Cronon, 1996; West and Carrier, 2004). Such interventions can be spectacularized by creating a sense of urgency and the need for timely solutions to save nature (Igoe, 2010; Marijnen and Verweijen, 2016). Yet, safari destinations are not simply timeless areas of Africa's wilderness devoid of human interaction, but need to be meticulously carved out from agro-pastoral territories with cultural and economic value. Hence, ecotourism generally rests on the implementation of a carefully curated spatial conservation regime of access rules and regulations with the goal of preserving the space in question as a wilderness territory. What is often called 'wilderness' in conservation terminology is thus a territory that has been produced in a process of 'internal territorialization' through 'establishing control over natural resources and the people who use them' (Vandergaest and Peluso, 1995).

Different processes of territorialization produce different regimes of rule and authority over people, wildlife and land. While territorialization by fortress conservation constitutes a predominantly state-driven separation of wildlife habitats from human interaction, in community-based conservation partnerships of state and non-state actors work towards active engagement of local people in conservation in order to transform communal territories into protected areas for wildlife tourism, despite continuing human presence in the area. Building on a growing body of literature on the nexus of conservation, tourism and green grabbing (Gardner, 2016; Massé and Lunstrum, 2015; Fletcher and Neves, 2012; Benjaminsen and Bryceson, 2012), this paper sheds more light on entanglements between ecotourism business models, processes of territorialization of property relations and resource control, and engagements of rural people with community-based conservation. As will be demonstrated here, neoliberal conservation through ecotourism can promote cooperation between communities and investors, and it can also render an entire village or an ethnic minority into unauthorized trespassers on their lands.

The empirical data for this paper was collected during 9 months of qualitative fieldwork conducted between 2014 and 2016 in the villages³ of Burunge Wildlife Management Area (WMA) and in Babati town (District and Regional centre) in Northern Tanzania.⁴ Multiple

³ Many Tanzanian villages are a legacy of villagization policies of the 1970s and represent spatial, political and administrative units (Greco, 2016). Villages and communities do not always overlap spatially (Hodgson, 2001). Communities are loosely organized groups of people, often around a shared ethnic identity. A community is in itself not a homogenous unit; showing considerable differences pertaining to wealth, class, age, gender or even resident status (see Agrawal and Gibson, 1999). With 'local people' I signify people's permanent or temporary residence in the study area.

⁴ I conducted 159 semi- and unstructured interviews with ordinary people and representatives of local pastoralist associations, members of community-based organizations, village and traditional leaders, village game scouts; district and regional land surveyors, land officers, game and natural resource officers; conservation NGO representatives, investors, Tanzania National Park Authority and Ministerial Wildlife Division representatives; lawyers and local police. In the villages I was assisted by two interpreters who are both fluent in Kiswahili and Maa.

stays in Arusha and Dar es Salaam (national hubs for governmental conservation agencies and conservation NGOs) contributed to data collection beyond the study site. Financial and operational records of Burunge WMA, investor contracts, legal court judgements, high-resolution satellite images and historical aerial photographs, continuous attention to local and regional events and conflicts through web-based media provided additional layers of data collection.

2. Governing through ecotourism in community-based conservation

Conceptually, different forms of conservation interventions can be linked to different processes of territorialization through the lens of biopolitics and governmentality. As suggested by Foucault, the sovereign rule over a territory was historically replaced by a more rational form of government over populations, also called biopower (Foucault, 2007). Building on this proposition, geographers have suggested that the rule over a territory is closely intertwined with the rule over a population (Elden, 2013; Rose-Redwood, 2012; Rutherford, 2007). As Elden puts it, '[t]o control territory requires the subjugation of the people; to govern the population requires command of the land' (Elden, 2013:17). Applied to the age of neoliberalism in the post-colonial world, Hansen and Stepputat (2006:309) point out that the 'control over territory and bodies that marked the nation-state model of sovereignty is now supplemented by a powerful drive to control the "legal contract" – the modern-day concession that empowers private companies to carry out state functions'.

Community-based conservation in sub-Saharan Africa represents a prominent example of such a shift in the control of territory and people from the state towards private actors. The associated interventions rely on active engagement of local people. In such engagements, that are often mediated by ecotourism interventions, rural 'backwardness', poverty and environmental destruction ought to give way to new rural subjectivities of conservation and 'sustainable' livelihoods. Tourists are also actively engaged in conservation of particular sorts, being invited to participate in colonial imaginaries surrounding game viewing, hunting, lodging, and cultural exchange (Salazar and Graburn, 2014; Salazar, 2013; Garland, 2008). Subjectification of both tourists and local people to ideas and practices of conservation becomes a key strategy in the implementation of ecotourism in community-based conservation, rendering it a project of green governmentality (Wang, 2015; Rutherford, 2007). In this light then, conservation is a regime of authority over land and people, 'constructed through a series of practices and programmes aimed at the conduct of conduct' (Wang, 2015:324; also see Li, 2007a; West, 2006).

This paper follows Fletcher's framework of multiple environmentalities (Fletcher, 2010) to understand how exactly the ambition of governing through ecotourism in community-based conservation is planned and implemented on the ground. Environmentalities are poststructuralist conceptualizations of modes of environmental governance aiming at the regulation and control of the conduct of individuals and groups to make them act in a way that is in line with goals to protect and manage the material environment (Fletcher, 2010; Luke, 1995; Agrawal, 2005). Importantly, the analytics of governmentality decentres the state as the seat of power, instead situating it across multiple sites, actors and institutions (Rutherford, 2007). Drawing on Foucault's work ([1978] 1991; 2003; 2008), Fletcher (2010) suggests a framework of four different techniques of government at work in the context of conservation: disciplinary, neoliberal, sovereign, and truth environmentalities. Applied to community-based conservation in Tanzania, these techniques are employed by conservation actors to claim space in order to transform agro-pastoral lands into conservation territories by regulating local people's behaviour, their subjectivities, their access to land and resources within this space. Hence, environmentalities territorialize conservation interventions. Multiple environmentalities can be applied in concert to exercise power in pursuit of

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