



Exploring the 'layeredness' of recurring natural resource conflicts: The role of Loita Maasai leadership in the Naimina Enkiyio Forest conflicts in Kenya



Angela Kronenburg García¹

African Studies Centre Leiden, Leiden University, Wassenaarseweg 52, 2333 AK Leiden, The Netherlands

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 28 April 2016

Received in revised form

18 November 2016

Accepted 25 March 2017

Available online 6 April 2017

Keywords:

Loita Maasai

Forest conflict

Leadership

Natural resource conflict

Political ecology

Kenya

ABSTRACT

This article examines two successive conflicts over the same forest in Kenya, which, when analysed separately, have led to interpretations that do not hold when the conflicts are studied in relation to each other. Inspired by political ecology, it employs a processual view of natural resource conflict, which recognizes that such conflicts may be 'layered' and composed of various struggles – or layers – at once, and that some of these struggles may not be discernible at first sight or when resource conflicts are studied in isolation. The conflicts presented in this article occurred between 1993 and 2005 and revolved around the Naimina Enkiyio Forest in south Kenya. They were initially triggered when a local authority, Narok County Council, and later the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), intended to implement plans and projects that would affect the way the forest was being used by the Loita Maasai. Rather than viewing the conflicts as being between a local community and powerful outsiders, I argue that they are best seen as different crystallizations of coalitions between local and outside actors running along a longstanding cleavage in the Loita's leadership. This article examines how opposing Loita leadership groups forged outside alliances and mobilized support and resistance in Loita and elsewhere. In doing so, it will demonstrate that a particular layer was overlooked or minimized in the various interpretations that have been posited for the separate conflicts, namely a longstanding struggle within the leadership of the Loita Maasai. In fact, this struggle has proved to be crucial for providing a valid and consistent explanation that holds for the two conflicts when they are considered together.

© 2017 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Political ecology has a strong tradition of analysing natural resource conflicts as struggles for access and control, but resource conflicts are often composed of different struggles or 'layers', and this 'layeredness' has hitherto remained understudied. *Recurring* resource conflicts in particular offer an excellent opportunity to explore their layered character, because studying successive conflicts over the same resource compels the researcher to find an interpretation that is valid for all conflicts considered (see e.g. Fortmann, 1990), and in so doing, may reveal layers that go unnoticed when conflicts are studied on their own. This article considers two successive forest conflicts in Kenya that, separately, have

already led to various interpretations that do not hold when the conflicts are studied in relation to each other.

The two conflicts examined in this article were structurally alike: they were both triggered by 'governmental interventions' (Li, 2007a,b) – one associated with the state and the other with an international environmental organization – and both targeted and proposed to change the way the Naimina Enkiyio Forest was being used and managed, particularly by the agropastoral Loita Maasai (Fig. 1).¹ The first forest conflict, which extended between 1993 and 2002 and that

¹ The Loita Maasai are one of the many 'sections' (socio-territorial units) in which the Maasai of East Africa are organized. 'Loita' is the anglicized version of *Iloitai* (sing. *Oloitai*) in Maa and is used here to refer to both the people and the area where they live, depending on the context. The Loita occupy land on both sides of the Kenya-Tanzania border in the highlands west of the Rift Valley. This article is based on research carried out among the Loita Maasai of Kenya. In the east of their land, on the highest peaks of the escarpment, but still within Narok County (formerly Narok District), lies the Naimina Enkiyio Forest. The forest is named after a Maasai legend; its full name in Maa is *Entim e Naimina Enkiyio*, lit. 'The Forest of the Lost Child'.

E-mail address: angela.kronenburg@uclouvain.be

¹ Present affiliation: Earth and Life Institute, University of Louvain, 3 Place Louis Pasteur, B-1348 Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium

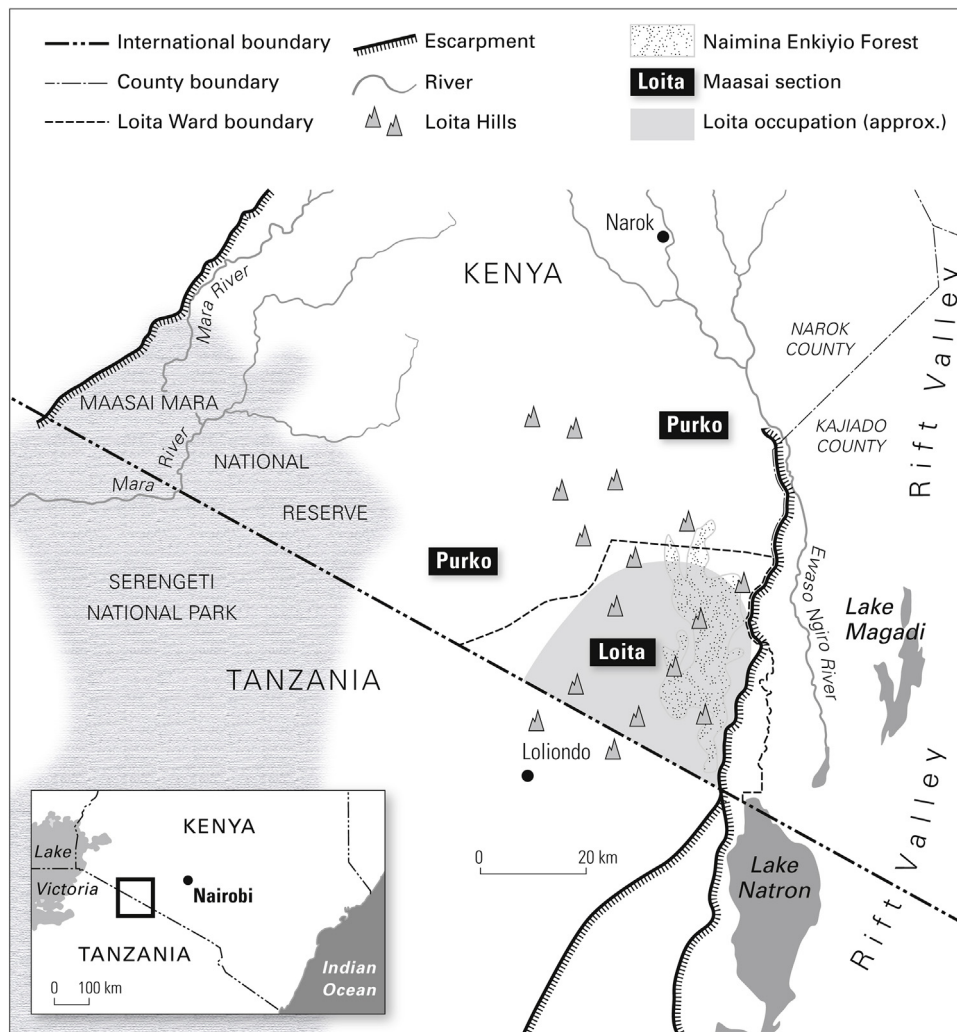


Fig. 1. Loita Maasailand in Kenya. Following the introduction of County Government in 2013, Narok District was renamed Narok County and Loita Division became Loita Ward.

I call the Narok County Council conflict, has received ample scholarly attention (Voshaar, 1998: pp. 113–114; Péron, 2000; Kantai, 2001; Karanja et al., 2002; Ole Siloma and Zaal, 2005; Zaal and ole Siloma, 2006; Ngece et al., 2007; Adano et al., 2012; Zaal and Adano, 2012; Kariuki et al., 2016). The concern with access and control is implicitly shared in these studies, even though they generally miss a sophisticated consideration of the micro-politics that usually comes with a political ecological analysis. Broadly speaking, these authors describe the conflict as one between the Loita Maasai, on the one hand, and the local government authority, i.e. Narok County Council, on the other hand, with the latter attempting to appropriate the forest by turning it into a nature reserve and the former opposing this because it threatened their long-held access to the forest. The fact that Narok County Council eventually shelved its forest plan has led academics, activists and the media to present this case as a success story of a local community prevailing over outsiders (in this case, state actors) wanting to dispossess them of their forest. The second conflict, here called the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) conflict, took place in 2004 and 2005. Though it is closely related to the first conflict and ended violently, it has been largely ignored in the academic

literature,² but has received some media coverage.³ This second conflict stems from local resistance to a community-based management project concerning the same forest and implemented by environmental organization IUCN. Like Narok County Council, IUCN eventually withdrew and the project never materialized and this outcome apparently confirms the success story of the Loita Maasai.

It is very tempting to interpret the Naimina Enkiyio Forest conflicts' denouement as the victory of a united indigenous community over powerful state and international outsiders wanting to appro-

² It is only briefly mentioned by ole Siloma and Zaal (2006: 11) and Ngece et al. (2007: p. 179).

³ 'Letter to the editor: IUCN & the Loita/Purko Naimina Enkiyio forest': <https://www.culturalsurvival.org/news/letter-editor-iucn-loitapurko-naimina-enkiyio-forest> accessed 13/10/15; 'Maasai reject IUCN project in Loita forest': <http://www.ogiek.org/indepth/break-one-killed.htm> accessed 14/10/15; 'Loita and Purko Maasai resist IUCN plans for the Naimina Enkiyio forest': <https://www.culturalsurvival.org/news/michael-ole-tiampati/loita-and-purko-maasai-resist-iucn-plans-naimina-enkiyio-forest> accessed 14/10/15; 'Kenya: The Maasai stand up to IUCN displacement attempts from their forest': <http://www.ogiek.org/indepth/break-one-killed.htm> accessed 14/10/15; 'One killed in fight for traditional forest of Maasai, implicating controversial IUCN Project with EU funding': <http://www.ogiek.org/indepth/break-one-killed.htm> accessed 14/10/15; 'Kenya: contentious forest plan halted': <http://allafrica.com/stories/200406250490.html> accessed 14/10/15.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/6461123>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/6461123>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)