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8 The new green grabbing frontier and participation

Conserving drylands with or without people

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Introduction

Drylands have been affected by so-called green grabbing—that is, the dispossession or displacement of local communities in order to expand areas devoted to conservation, as well as the significant curtailment of access to natural resources by non-displaced groups (Fairhead et al. 2012). Green grabbing can take different forms, such as the removal of people from officially protected areas (PAs), the concession of communal lands to outside investors that will develop conservation-related activities, and the negative side-effects of community conservation (CC) programmes.

Conservation schemes, reinforced by powerful institutional and media discourses that present them as necessary and inevitably beneficial, often contribute to heighten political, economic, and even ecological tensions. Even if framed as being done in co-management and in participation—which is often locally perceived as top-down policy implementation—they add further layers of contention in dryland areas already experiencing land conflicts, and they limit or altogether exclude local populations' access to some areas and related common-pool resources (e.g. pastures, fisheries, wildlife, veld products). Thus, they marginalize or neglect local pre-existing common-property management institutions. In many cases, conservation area expansion includes new forms of commoditization of natural resources (e.g. for tourism) and is part of an ongoing process of increasing state and private sector presence in drylands.

We use the concept of green grabbing, coined in the frame of political ecology analyses, as a way to emphasize the need to use this theoretical framework in order to explore how different actors involved in conservation initiatives interact, what their goals are, and especially how power and socioeconomic differences play out in the development of these initiatives. Dryland populations often belong to groups marginalized in terms of political power or socioeconomic status, a circumstance that may be reinforced by conservation policies. It is also relevant to pay attention to the new common-property management institutions that may appear as part of the conservation programmes, the so-called 'new commons'. In

addition to intended or unintended economic and environmental impacts, these institutions and local reactions to the new situation can sometimes reframe, at least partially, the results of conservation schemes to the advantage of dryland communities.

The aim of this chapter is to provide a general overview of green grabbing processes in drylands, including examples from different geographical areas such as Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East, and Central Asia. This will allow the authors to highlight the most significant global trends and the main impacts on the affected populations, while paying attention to local, specific circumstances and avoiding undue generalizations.

Expanding conservation

Significant areas of the drylands of Central Asia, the Middle East, and particularly Africa have been the site of conservation initiatives, ranging from the establishment of official PAs to the implementation of community-based conservation programmes on communal lands. Especially during the 1980s and 1990s, PAs experienced a remarkable expansion, also in regions where up to then they had covered only small territories, such as in the USSR (and later the newly independent ex-Soviet republics), China, and the Middle East (Brockington et al. 2008: 1–2, 29, 32–33, 38–39).

PAs and area-based ‘other effective conservation measures’ (OECM) cover 9.6% of the planet. In Africa, they represent slightly more than 14% of the total land area, while in West Asia the PAs cover 3.81%.¹ Some of the countries in the world with higher proportions of their land surface officially protected—and with significant areas in drylands—can be found in Africa: Botswana with 29.14%, Namibia with 37.89%, Tanzania with 38.24%, and Mozambique with 28.88%. In arid or semi-arid West Africa, PAs occupy a somewhat smaller percentage of land, with Burkina Faso 14.89%, Mali 8.23%, Chad 20.97%, Niger 18.2%, and Mauritania an insignificant 0.62%. In this region, political and security problems also imply a lower capacity for law enforcement than in East or Southern Africa. In the Middle East, although Israel has 24.49% of its land under protection, and Egypt 13.14%, many other countries show marginal percentages: Bahrain 6.62%, Jordan 4.47%, Oman 2.57%, and Saudi Arabia 4.76%. A somehow similar pattern emerges in Central Asia, with China protecting 15.62% of its land, Mongolia 19.8%, and Tajikistan 22.28%, but Kazakhstan only 3.31%, Kyrgyzstan 6.71%, and Turkmenistan 3.25%. However, looking at these quantitative data has to be done with some caution, as it is not obvious in all cases whether these are really enforced PAs or so-called paper parks (Di Minin and Toivonen 2015).

The expansion of areas under some sort of conservation status is a trend that seems likely to continue in the future, with recent private and public initiatives setting ever more ambitious territorial goals. The Half-Earth Project, initiated by the E.O. Wilson Biodiversity Foundation, for instance, calls for the protection of 50% of the global surface as a ‘solution’ to the extinction of species. The project’s

priority areas of intervention do not include many drylands, however, only the 'area between Kenya and Tanzania'.² The Convention on Biological Diversity is setting a target of 30% of land and sea areas to be officially protected or under OECM by 2030.³

This expansive conservation is part of an ongoing pattern of increasing state and private sector presence in drylands, which includes, among other processes, the appropriation of land for commercial agriculture or mineral exploitation.⁴ Indeed, drylands can be considered as new frontiers of investment for local and transnational actors, where land and resources previously on the periphery of market economies are now 'open' to commercialization (Igoe et al. 2009; Evers et al. 2013). New forms of commoditization of natural resources such as wildlife and indigenous plants are set in place (Fairhead et al. 2012: 244; Bollig 2016; Bollig and Lesorogol 2016).

These trends can be detected in many regions in the world, but they have a specific character in dryland areas. Drylands are affected by severe climatic variations between and within seasons, and the real or alleged impact of climate change on them is sometimes used as proof that conservation would be a better land-use option. They often are or have been economically peripheral in their respective countries, and it is still difficult to find salaried jobs or cash-generating activities in these areas. Finally, drylands are the home of marginalized peoples, sometimes considered by others or by themselves as being 'indigenous'. This has led to the intertwining of conservation and indigenous rights movements, both in cooperative and in confrontational form (Saugestad 2001; Chatty and Colchester 2002; Shetler 2007; Zips-Mairitsch 2013; Dieckmann et al. 2014).

The enlargement of conservation areas in this context has frequently been developed against the will of the dryland populations, neglecting—or at least side-lining—their views and opinions. In some cases, the establishment of PAs has led to the displacement of local residents (Neumann 1998; Gibson 1999; Brockington and Igoe 2006). In other instances, people have not been forced to move, but they have lost, totally or partially, access to some areas or to some natural resources (Gibson 1999). Exclusionary policies were often informed by views of communal pastoralism as 'unproductive' and harmful to an environment in rapid decline (Homewood et al. 2013: 240; Mortimore 2013: 118–120).

In the 1980s and 1990s, CC programmes were initiated, in drylands and other areas, as an attempt to break with previous more exclusionary policies. They advocated the devolution of powers over natural resources to local communities and the right of peasants and pastoralists to access and use them. Research shows that the effects of community-based schemes have been mixed. They include cases where communities have gained or retained some measure of control over natural resources and received economic benefits from conservation-related activities, but also many instances in which community-based natural resource management (CBNRM) has curtailed local autonomy and hampered agro-pastoral livelihoods (Taylor 2000; Dzingirai 2003; Hohmann 2003: 209–211; Nelson and Agrawal 2008; Rihoy et al. 2010; Hoon 2014).

In a recent evaluation of community-based conservation in Africa, Galvin et al. (2018) found variable results, with a majority of mixed or negative outcomes. It must be mentioned, however, that in East and Southern Africa evaluations were more positive, and higher levels of devolution and community involvement were detected there, than in West and Central Africa.

We provide below several case studies of conservation schemes—ranging from strict fortress conservation to relatively positive CBNRM initiatives—in order to briefly illustrate the diversity of actors and processes involved in conservation in drylands, as well as the differences in settings, approaches, and outcomes.

Oman

Grabbing land has become a common feature of the semi-arid and arid lands of the Middle East. Initially exemplified by the early to mid-20th century multinational petroleum industry ‘land grabs’ based on the notion of *terra nullius* (a land empty of people), this later became extended to include unrestricted conservation access to significant grazing lands occupied by pastoral herders for centuries. Focusing on the Harasiis tribe in the Jiddat-il-Harasiis, Sultanate of Oman, this case study explores the lived experiences of the Harasiis and the reintroduction of the Arabian oryx into their traditional territory by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) in the 1980s. It was the reintroduction of an animal that had been made extinct in the region a decade earlier owing to overhunting by sports enthusiasts. The project was based on the widely held 20th-century notion that animals and people could not share the same landscape. Thus, a significant sector of the traditional lands of the mobile pastoral Harasiis tribe in the Jiddat-il-Harasiis, which had been identified by Western conservation experts to receive the first few dozen Arabian oryx flown in from zoos around the world, was set aside without consultation with the local population.

For the first three years of the project, there were no conflicts between the Harasiis tribe and the growing expatriate conservation management team at Yalooni and other Omani employees. Gradually, however, difficulties began to appear. The first of these difficulties manifested itself in terms of competition over grazing between the herds of domestic goat and camel and the reintroduced oryx during prolonged drought (Stanley Price 1989: 212–213). Just a couple of years after the sanctuary had been set up, the lack of rainfall in other parts of the Jiddat drove a number of families into the area designated as protected. The Yalooni management informed the Harasiis families that they could no longer camp nearby. The Harasiis were bemused at first but then became annoyed and angered. ‘Grazing and browsing is very limited; why are our animals not as important as the oryx?’ they asked. This tension was never resolved. It was followed by conflicts between the Harasiis tribe over access to the limited employment positions as oryx trackers—and the special benefits that accrued, such as water to take back to their homesteads at the end of a work shift and occasional free petrol. This was then followed by arguments and threats between the Harasiis and the neighbouring Jeneba tribe, who shared a fuzzy and fluid border. The Jeneba were

outraged that they had been ignored in the conservation effort, even though they had little experience of life in the core desert area and were totally inexperienced at tracking.

Although the goodwill with which the project was initially accepted by the Harasiis remained evident among the older generation, who had grown up with the oryx, the younger generation began to express their lack of commitment to the reintroduction scheme by a silence that bordered on complicity. Although the young Harasiis recognized the appearance of poaching (first reported for gazelle in 1986) and its yearly increasing level by their rival tribesmen, they rarely reported it. Unlike their elders who had manned the 'gazelle patrols' in the 1960s and 1970s and brought individuals suspected of poaching gazelle to the attention of the police, the younger generation just sat by and watched the live capture and poaching of oryx occur. This change of attitude and support among the local people pointed to the flaws in planning, design, and implementation that top-down conservation projects all too often make.

The Harasiis had been greatly saddened by the extermination of the oryx. The animal had once graced the whole of the arid desert regions of south Arabia; it had been pursued and hunted until, by the middle of the 20th century, it was found only in the Jiddat (Stanley Price 1989: 37). The tribe had seen the progressive decline in numbers take place and had recognized the looming tragedy. Their stories and campfire tales spoke about this decline. But they had been unable to stop the motorized hunting parties that descended upon them in search of oryx herds. The idea of setting up an oryx sanctuary in their traditional territory had never been discussed with them, nor had they been consulted on the most suitable area to place such a sanctuary. The aims of the project, its goals, the implied restrictions on infrastructural development, and even the importance of their cooperation were never put forward to the tribal community. Once this internationally supported project had actually commenced, however, the Harasiis went along with the spirit of the enterprise; they could hardly stop it. They did feel a sense of pride in seeing the oryx returned to the Jiddat-il-Harasiis. And for a limited number of men, there was the opportunity of paid employment as 'oryx rangers' tracking and generally keeping an eye on the reintroduced animals.

As long as the Harasiis were perceived to have no aspirations of their own, no desire to see an improvement in their access to water, and no desire to have regular road grading or infrastructural development in their traditional homeland, relations with the oryx reintroduction project remained untroubled. But the Harasiis, like people everywhere, were opportunistic. They wished to improve their lives and had no special desire to remain in some sort of pristine traditional state just for the sake of such 'protectionist conservation'. Slowly at first, and later with greater urgency, the Harasiis came to realize what was being expected of them and the constraints they were under. They came to understand that, in drought conditions, they were expected not to camp within the vicinity of an oryx herd, even when all other grazing areas were depleted. At about the same time, the tribe's long-standing campaign to have a water well dug by the Ministry of Water and Electricity, in a promising area north of Yalooni, appeared to be blocked by the

advisor responsible for the oryx reintroduction project. Furthermore, the Harasiis felt that efforts to get the national petroleum company to regularly grade roads in this north-eastern quadrangle of the Jiddat where the oryx project was located were also being thwarted.

In 1986, a significant part of the Jiddat-il-Harasiis was identified for a national nature reserve as a preliminary step in turning the entire Jiddat into a UNESCO World Heritage Site. In 1994, the Jiddat was established, by royal decree, as the Arabian Oryx Sanctuary. Few, if any, Harasiis understood that the decree was the first step towards dividing the Jiddat into three land-use zones: a core area with the strictest environmental protection; a buffer zone, with a fairly strict protection, in which a limited number of activities would be permitted if they were compatible with conservation objectives; and a transition zone where most activities would be permitted unless clearly damaging to conservation objectives (Pretty et al. 1994).

Working quietly and consistently for the past 20 years, the Harasiis tribe have begun to challenge this conservation zoning system. They have succeeded in overcoming strong expatriate resistance to having a reverse osmosis water plant built by the government in an area that is considered a buffer zone of the sanctuary. This has created major difficulties for the oryx management team. A similar situation is likely to occur in respect to local roads. The management plan intends that a careful network of local roads be established 'in consultation with the stakeholders in the area'. These are, in the following order, wildlife conservation, tourist access, mobility of government staff, and finally the '*legitimate movements of the indigenous pastoralists*' (emphasis added). The Harasiis and Jeneba tribes are unlikely to allow themselves to be the last considered, as though only an afterthought. Quietly and persistently, as in the past, they will work to achieve what they feel is necessary for the needs of their communities.

Two representations of the desert landscape came to a head in the Jiddat-il-Harasiis: a Western conservation protectionist vision of a pristine landscape of plants and animals; and a local tribal vision of a landscape where there were sets of cultural and historical concepts relating people and domestic animals to desert spaces and places. When, between 1996 and 1998, poaching and illegal capture of the oryx by rival tribes resulted in the loss of more than 350 animals, the Harasiis could do little to stop this downward spiral. Other tribes were actively acting out their disaffection; the Harasiis youth had become alienated; and the Harasiis elders were no longer interested in the landscape transformed by the oryx project from which they had been displaced. In 2007, The Arabian Oryx Sanctuary became the first World Heritage site to ever be deleted from the UNESCO list of World Heritage Sites. The justification for this unprecedented step was the rapid decline in oryx number (from 450 to 65) and the supposed degradation of its grazing area.

Caucasus

In the Caucasus, grazing has been practised for centuries, including transhumance in local and regional systems. In the Vashlovani region, between Georgia and

Azerbaijan, under the influence of transhumance and traditional cross-border use of the dry steppes and badlands, interlocked like a mosaic with a pistachio savannah landscape, became a diverse cultural landscape. Another defining element of this case study is the influence of the Vashlovani National Park, in the very east of Georgia, directly on the border with Azerbaijan. Its area had been a large Soviet PA since 1935, and it was designated as a UNESCO nature and landscape protection area in the 2000s.

With the establishment of the Soviet regime at the beginning of the 1920s, pasture management was subject to a radical upheaval. The feudal system that prevailed before 1914, occasionally also interwoven with semi-nomadic forms of pastoralism (Gracheva et al. 2012; Aliyev 2015), was fully collectivized by the state during the twenties and thirties of the last century.

With this collectivization, large estates were nationalized and pasture *kolkhozes* (collective farms), later *sovkhazes* (state-owned large-scale farms), were established. From the 1940s onwards, the herd sizes reached as many as 10,000 animals, both in western Azerbaijan and in Kakheti (eastern Georgia) (personal communication from shepherds to Heino Meessen 1986, 2017). The transhumance systems were well organized, and the passage routes were kept free and supported by infrastructure for the shepherds, passage pastures, and water points. While the grazing of the high pastures—cross-border between Azerbaijan and Georgia—was organized by the state and agreed between the large farms, parallel to this there was some sort of communal use of the pastures near the village and the ‘alpine pastures’ of high mountain valley communities. Each family was allowed to use smaller areas independently for grazing, and the village soviet accepted small herds, consisting of the animals of the individual households, on the nearby high pastures—and thus a kind of tolerated commons existed.

Today an international border cuts through what used to be a more permeable region. Pastoral management, the intensity of use of winter pastures, and nature conservation as a conflict factor for pastoralism have developed very differently in Georgia and Azerbaijan. The basic elements for conflict in pasture management were already laid out by Stalin during the Soviet era through the demarcation of the border between the Soviet republics, dividing areas settled by common ethnic groups. Near the border and up to 50 km to the east in Azerbaijan, there are still ‘Georgian villages’. Conversely, there are also non-Georgian villages in East Kakheti on the Georgian side. Between these ethnically identical villages on both sides of the border, there still exist family and economic relationships, as well as informal (not state-recognized) regulations governing mutual access and cross-border ‘pasture management’.

However, this landscape is now under two distinct state regimes (Neudert et al. 2020): The state in Azerbaijan pursues a restrictive policy with regard to local pasture management, rendering any form of local management practically impossible. This applies above all to efforts in this direction on the part of local NGOs, but also to initiatives on the part of local state administrations—in particular to Belokan and Zakatolo districts, which are near the Georgia border. The state invests profits from oil and gas primarily in clearly visible infrastructure (e.g.

main transnational roads and city halls) along the main development axes. No investments are made in infrastructure for pasture management or in supporting small businesses. In Georgia, in contrast, local non-governmental institutions with a focus on sustainable pasture management have become possible or are even fostered since around 2012. The local administrations definitely want local interest groups (e.g. shepherds' committees) to take over and monitor pasture management. National legal bases and ordinances at the local level for an orderly pasture management are aimed for—and in some cases already in progress (REC Caucasus 2019). Nature and landscape protection are also better implemented in Georgia than in neighbouring Azerbaijan. This is particularly true due to the national park. Based on the UNESCO objectives for nature and landscape protection, the government aims for participatory sustainable regional development with the involvement of local shepherds and farmers for more than 50% of its total area.

Sheep farming in Azerbaijan (especially when run by small local farms, including their regional transhumance systems) is currently viewed as marginal structures that have remained from the Soviet era. It is perceived by the government as harmful rather than economically important, based on a perceived lack of pasture management. There is a conflict situation with the newly established large farms, which with 3,000–5,000 animals from faraway lowland districts are pushing onto the alpine summer pastures. Grazing by these large flocks, plus the rather minor grazing caused by local farmers, leads to overstocking of the summer pastures in some places (Ismayilov and Jabrayilov 2019). For the small, local livestock holder, however, sheep farming is living capital and it makes a substantial contribution to the food security of families in the Caucasus mountain area and to the revitalization of the local economy. The routes from winter to summer pastures are said to be heavily overgrazed. Locally, this has been confirmed in participatory workshops with local herders in both countries, conducted in 2014–2016 together with local researchers and government stakeholders (Maisuradze et al. 2016). Outside these transhumance axes at the southern foot of the Caucasus, extensive winter pastures stretch out. These border on the Georgian side on the Vashlovani National Park. On the Azerbaijani side, the adjacent area is not under nature protection, and it is also described as being rather overused as a winter grazing area. However, narratives of overuse in this area certainly require a closer look (see for example research in eastern Pamir: Kraudzun et al. 2014).

The effects of this splitting up of the pasture economy can therefore be described as negative because the condition of the transit routes in Georgia from summer to winter pastures and the conditions of the infrastructure (e.g. rest areas, watering points, and wells) for transhumance herders have significantly worsened over the past 20 years. Some routes in Georgia are completely blocked at key topographical points (e.g. on motorways or markets). Georgian pastoralists are often in conflict with regard to transit routes and transhumance. As a result, summer and winter pastures in the foothills of the Caucasus in Georgia are overgrazed, and the high pastures fall fallow because the earlier reciprocity and mobility regulations no longer apply.

At the national level, there are conflicts in both countries between pastoralists and arable farmers and also between large and small livestock farms. In both Azerbaijan and Georgia, the holdings in the Vashlovani region mostly have sheep and goats, with herds of 50–5,000 animals. Large companies are increasingly displacing the less well-organized but flexible small companies. The large ones produce for the export of live animals, increasingly to the Arab Emirates. Land that could be used also by smaller herders is ‘grabbed’ for export production by large livestock holders. Within the Vashlovani National Park on the Georgian side, disputes between shepherds and farmers and wine growers are the order of the day. Great damage can occur to valuable crops such as grapes, fruit, and tobacco, as the shepherds often do not come from the closer Vashlovani region and rarely show consideration for local producers.

A cross-border conflict between nature conservation and grazing has developed in the last 10–15 years owing to the introduction of a core zone of the national park, with a more stringent protection status. On the Georgian side, the national park and especially the strictly protected core zones are under strict supervision. Conversely, the Azeri side of the Vashlovani badlands does not have any protection status. Here, pasture management takes place on a large scale. Large numbers of animals and overgrazing make pasture management necessary but currently results in a great deal of pressure on the livestock owners. This pressure leads to informal cross-border cooperation in transhumance between the livestock owners on both sides. Informal regulations have now developed that have an ethnic character: The Azeri shepherds place their flocks of sheep near the border or even drive them across ‘without a passport’. A Georgian—but ethnically Azeri—shepherd then takes over the flock on the Georgian side. The informal agreement also means that the sheep can be driven back across the border to Azerbaijan at the end of the season. But when these Azeri sheep ‘without a passport’ have crossed the border, the rangers of the national park on the Georgian side can often no longer maintain the strict protection requirements. As a result, direct conflicts arise between the large, mostly Azeri, herders and the smaller, local Georgian herders. This situation paves the way for ethnic conflicts. Violence between the local Georgian and Azeri shepherds (living in Georgia), if they encounter each other, is said to have already occurred.

The solution to these conflicts would have to be pursued at various levels. One means of conflict mitigation would be the use of methods related to natural resource governance and participation as they have been developed by development agencies and NGOs. In this specific case, this would mean the systematic effort in the affected areas to involve shepherds, managers of large sheep-breeding farms from both countries, and the other smaller livestock holders and farmers mentioned above in a process of exchange and negotiation of possible solutions. However, the involvement of these actors in Azerbaijan is difficult due to a lack of governance structures and even to explicit bans on community-based organizations. In Georgia, on the other hand, the national NGOs are strongly involved in such efforts, also in cooperation with the ministries for infrastructure and regional rural development. International NGOs and donors endeavour to promote

such approaches in the border area between Azerbaijan and Georgia. Informal cooperation between the stakeholder groups, as is already practised in part, can form a basis, but communication and exchange across ethnic borders must also be improved.

Furthermore, bilateral governmental discussions at a higher level, through the agriculture ministries, are necessary; otherwise, natural resource conflicts can easily escalate and lead to violent conflicts. This is particularly evident in the Vashlovani region, given the described conflict between nature conservation and cross-border transhumance.

This example makes it clear in general how important the institutional dimension is within approaches for sustainable management of natural resources. In principle, the status of the national park as a UNESCO PA would certainly allow the use and participatory pasture management in large areas, but so far many conflicts remain unresolved.

Kenya

This case study explores the experiences of today's agropastoralists who live in close proximity to the Lewa Wildlife Conservancy (LWC) in Kenya's semi-arid to arid drylands north of the conservancy (Weissman 2017, 2019). Northern Kenya's agropastoralists have been faced with land grabbing since colonial intervention and to this day struggle with recognition of their former commons in an area that was for a long time considered 'empty land' by the colonial government. While the locals' fight for land rights has been constantly challenged by consecutive governments over the decades, new expanding conservation initiatives have added an additional, transnational dimension to the issue of land grabbing and can, in this case, be added to a particular instance of green grabbing where the valuation of species plays an important role in shifting bargaining power positions and institutional change.

It was not until the 1970s that people living near the northern boundary of the then Lewa Downs cattle ranch were acknowledged as inhabitants of this area. The narrative depicting people as having only recently appeared has persisted on the side of LWC's officials as well as in historical accounts and court documentation,⁵ albeit a very long presence of both nomadic hunter-gatherers and pastoralists contradicts it. The 1970s, however, are coincidentally the same time that permanent settlements started to appear where pastoralists began cultivating crops along seasonal and permanent streams close to the ranch, which from the 1980s onwards was turned into today's conservancy. Omitting a nomadic presence goes a long way in disproving an original peoples' presence, in the process of legitimizing one's own arrival as new settlers to a seemingly 'empty' land (McAuslan 2013; Weissman 2019).

This ranch at Lewa Downs in turn was established in the early 20th century with the soldier settlement scheme, under which fertile lands were allocated to British settlers after the First World War (see Morgan 1963; Duder 1993). Over time, this ranch at Lewa Downs came to be the property of the Craig family,

who in the 1980s established a rhino sanctuary and later in the 1990s expanded the entire farm to become the PA known today as the LWC. In 2004, another organization then grew out of efforts by the founder of the LWC and others that led to the establishment of the Northern Rangelands Trust (NRT), an umbrella overseeing the implementation and management of community-based conservation organizations. They have since grown to include roughly 43 communities and 49,000 sq km as of 2021. The area known as Leparua, one of these Communal Conservancies under the NRT, borders the LWC to the north and is mostly settled by a former pastoral group of Maasai now turned agro-pastoral. In addition, there are further semi-pastoral communities living close to Isiolo town that are part of the conservation committee. While they share some of the same spaces with the Maasai, their institutions and land-use practices differ greatly (Weissman 2019).

According to oral histories, the pastoralist groups in the area were continuously displaced from the early 20th century onwards. Not only were their rangelands not recognized as occupied, but the areas where they grazed their livestock were for a large part under quarantine (in today's southern part of Isiolo County), and their movements thereby restricted. These agropastoralists, who are today described as Ndorobo Maasai, only selectively identify with this rather derogatory ascription, since they trace their own belonging to early hunter-gatherer groups turned pastoralists, who speak the Maa language and who follow the Maasai age-set system, interacting closely with other Maasai in the region and to the south in Kenya. They have also recounted that they follow or followed an institutional arrangement that manages common-pool resources as a commons. These commons, however, no longer function as such, since today the restrictions on grazing are manifold and, in combination with conflicts with other pastoralist people, do not allow for rotational grazing. Land-use restrictions include numerous areas where land has become privatized, militarized, allocated to government agencies, or occupied by several groups of people practising other forms of pastoralism or resource use, and of course they also include new land-use strategies in conjunction with the expanding conservation agenda throughout the northern rangelands (Weissman 2019).⁶

The two valleys to the north of the LWC are known as Leparua and Ntalaban and in 2011 they joined the NRT as a CC. The 342 sq km area has two settlements of the 'Ndorobo Maasai' in the mentioned valleys close to LWC, and three other communities further north, close to Isiolo town. Although still young, the conservancy status has brought an additional institutional shift that carries novel land-use strategies that can be both beneficial as well as problematic.

On the one hand, the status as a CC relieves some pressure on conflict potential through the presence of an NRT-trained ranger team (Figure 8.1). This ensures heightened security where conflicts are mitigated by personnel that function both as wildlife protectors as well as mediators among rivalling groups. On the other hand, the interests and opportunities are redistributed towards an environmental ideology and practice, where individuals or communities are rewarded in one form or another for conservation-friendly behaviour (see Fletcher 2010). This



Figure 8.1 NRT rangers patrolling Leparua Community Conservancy (2016). Photo taken by Samuel Weissman.

is especially the case because rules and regulations within the formal institution as directed by the NRT are placed on a stage of global proportions, where various transnational interest groups have a say (Weissman 2019).

In essence, the case study shows how this has reduced the agropastoralists' bargaining power in matters of determining best land-use practices. In order for the Maasai community to reestablish their institutions or adapt them to current situations and gain legitimacy over land and resource management, it would first require actual land rights that are formally recognized under Kenyan law. Since the Maasai have not yet achieved this and the only quasi-security over land is through the conservation status, the regulations and rules about land use are predominantly set at the intermediate level of NRT's conservancy committee. The structure for creating revenue and income therein are therefore dependent on the same donor mechanisms, which lead to strong outside influence and oversight, leaving little bargaining power and control over processes by local institutions and in turn creating uncertainty in the bottom-up institution building, therefore, also weakening resilience. The mechanisms of neoliberal environmentality (Fletcher 2010) at play have thus created an award-based system where unifying under one institutional setting has proven difficult, creating an anti-politics machine (Ferguson 1990) and institution shopping (Haller 2019, 2020), in which the commons are no longer viable and various actors seek different opportunities by aligning along different

ideologies and identities throughout the value chain, from the Leparua CC to the international groups of donors scattered across the globe.

Namibia

In 1996, the Namibian government introduced the Nature Conservation Amendment Act, which permitted the establishment of CCs. On communal lands, CCs are granted the right to manage wildlife within their boundaries, as well as an annual quota of hunting for trophies and for consumption, and they can initiate communal tourism enterprises or joint ventures with private partners. Income from these activities goes to the CC, which then decides how to distribute it among the community. Jurisdiction over land, however, remains in the hands of Traditional Authorities (TAs), who allocate individual plots in the first instance, while regional Land Boards and the Ministry of Land Reform confirm and supervise the TAs' decisions and are in charge of leases of larger plots for commercial purposes. The number of registered CCs has grown rapidly since the late 1990s, and by 2017 there were 83, occupying, together with Community Forests, 53% of all Communal Areas (NACSO 2018).

Nyae Nyae Conservancy (NNC) was the first to be officially registered in 1998 and is the second-largest in the country, with an extension of 8.992 sq km. Located in Tsumkwe East district, in Otjozondjupa Region, its approximately 2,300 residents are mostly Ju/'hoan San. It consists of 'semi-arid tree and bush savanna', with very little water, being dependent on rainwater and boreholes tapping underground sources. Land is mostly flat, rainfall is irregular, and the soil has an 'extremely high evaporation' level. Nyae Nyae is very rich in game (Mosimane et al. 2007: 6; Biesele and Hitchcock 2011: 40–44; NACSO 2012: 5).

Ju/'hoan San have lived in this area of the Kalahari since ancient times, leading a hunter-gatherer way of life that did not mean a complete isolation from neighbouring communities or the absence of other economic strategies. Ju/'hoan traded with Herero, Tswana, and Owambo and took an active part in the expansion of commercial hunting promoted by both Europeans and Africans in the 19th century (Wilmsen 2003: 82–88).

The region was remote from government centres and white farming areas for most of the colonial period. In 1976, it became part of a new homeland, Bushmanland, established by the occupying South African administration as part of its plan of racially and ethnically segregated land distribution. It was the only territory of the country officially recognized as belonging to a San community. Wide areas of land historically occupied by Ju/'hoan, however, were transferred to the Hereroland homeland and to the new Kaudun National Park.

During the 1980s, different foundations and cooperatives, organized with the assistance of anthropologists and activists, helped the Ju/'hoansi to plant gardens and raise small herds of livestock. Scarcity of water, borehole breakdowns, and game depredations hampered these efforts. After independence, the Nyae Nyae Development Foundation of Namibia (NNDNF) was instrumental in preventing the conversion of Nyae Nyae to a game reserve and supported a model of CC that

secured the control of land and natural resources by the Ju/'hoansi, with ecotourism as an increasingly important source of income (Biesele and Hitchcock 2011: 9–12, 17, 82–84, 100–107, 156–158).

Ju/'hoan live in approximately 40 settlements scattered throughout the conservancy and currently practise a mixed economy that includes hunting, gathering, crop growing, livestock, working for neighbouring herders, and the reception of food aid from government and NGOs. Agriculture is hampered by water scarcity and elephant raids. It is mostly dryland cropping, although there is some irrigation of maize, mahangu (millet), sorghum, and vegetables (Biesele and Hitchcock 2011: 46–47, 217–218; NACSO 2012: 6).

The NNDFN is charged with the management of the conservancy funds. There are more than 20 full-time employees, and NNC's income amounts to approximately N\$7 million (€460,000) in 2017, about 75% of which was generated by trophy hunting (NACSO 2018: 70). These revenues, coupled with a small resident population, allow NNC to be one of the few conservancies that make cash payments to individual members every year.

Despite these considerable returns, dissatisfaction has been expressed by sectors of the community, and in 2012 and 2014 a diversity of opinions could be reported. Amid majority satisfaction, there were complaints that the 'conservancy's benefits were not increasing'.⁷ Coupled with that, controversies over the role that agriculture is expected to play in Nyae Nyae have also erupted. Some of the activists involved in agricultural projects in the 1980s, such as John Marshall, have remained heavily critical of the emphasis on tourism and advocated more investment in agriculture and livestock, and some people felt that the old cooperatives were more supportive of agro-pastoral initiatives. The NNDFN and the conservancy, though, believe that this is difficult owing to soil and climatic conditions. They have initiated several livestock projects, however.

Relationships between the Chief and the Conservancy have been generally good, and the TA has representatives in the Management Committee and receives yearly payments. Certainly, the process is not always so simple, and tensions over land-related decisions do exist. Some instances of disputes among the Conservancy and the TA regarding the use of Conservancy income have also been reported.

In terms of land, though, one of the main consequences of the Conservancy has been the provision of stronger legal and political claims by the Ju/'hoansi when it comes to deal with expansive neighbours. Herero's historical presence in Nyae Nyae has already been mentioned, and in the 1950s some groups brought some of their herds to G/am, a waterhole south of Nyae Nyae which traditionally belonged to the Ju/'hoan, which was later integrated into the Herero homeland. In 2009, Herero from G/am entered Nyae Nyae again, thus breaking both State veterinary rules and the NNC's constitution. Most of their cattle were eventually impounded by the government, but the number of Herero people in Tsumkwe town has continued to grow. They own horses, donkeys, and small stock, which are considered illegal to keep within the municipal lands. Violence against Ju/'hoan became common and clashes between the two communities erupted (Biesele and

Hitchcock 2011: 86, 223–224). As they stay within the approximately 30 kms² of Tsumkwe town, and therefore outside the Conservancy, they cannot be forced to leave. Pastures around town are already ‘overgrazed’, and they are using ‘water resources nobody is paying for’. They also bring their cattle to graze into NNC’s lands. Until now, ‘ministries have very little will’ to expel them. The Herero’s presence is clearly resented by all sectors of the Ju/’hoan population, and a history of conflicts is not forgotten.⁸

It is true that both the TA and the conservancy feel powerless to redress the situation, as NNC does not have direct jurisdiction over land, and the chief requires government action to actually remove people or livestock from the area. The Conservancy has failed to protect Ju/’hoansi lands fully. But, as already indicated, NNC and the neighbouring Na Jaqna area are the only lands in Namibia officially recognized as belonging to the San, and there is a clear understanding on the part of the community that conservancy status is their strongest legal weapon and that without it their position would be much weaker. This is confirmed by the dire situation of San communities living on communal lands under other groups’ authority and of those being settled on former commercial farms acquired by the State under the process of land reform.

Green grabbing and its complexities

The four cases that we have presented show the difficulties that conservation initiatives face in different settings. As a matter of fact, it is worth mentioning, in response to the problems involved in CBNRM schemes, that some countries have developed a certain reversion to ‘fortress conservation’ and a retrogression on the already feeble devolution mechanisms put in place (Wilshusen et al. 2003; Hutton et al. 2005; Hoon 2014).

Political ecology approaches, as illustrated in the foregoing case studies, have shown how environmental changes are not simply ‘natural’ processes but are crucially shaped by power structures and relations as well as by socioeconomic inequalities. Conservation policies, therefore, are not ‘technical’; they are closely interconnected with local and international politics and economics (Le Billon and Duffy 2018).

In this sense, it is important to keep in mind that green grabbing is not a linear process in which homogeneous ‘traditional’ communities are dispossessed by an alliance of monolithic States, companies, and conservation institutions. Communities are often marked by political, ethnic, social, economic, gender, and age division, and local actors have different interests and objectives, leading to complex interactions with outside State and private agents (Monjane 2010; Fairhead et al. 2012: 247–248, 253; Dekker et al. 2020). In Mara, for instance, landowning households near the reserve obtain significant benefits from conservation and tourism, while in many other places in East Africa, benefits do not compensate costs and restrictions (Homewood et al. 2013: 241–245). It is worth remembering as well that, as Greiner (2016) warned and our Kenyan case study shows, common management institutions may experience problems before conservation makes its

appearance and be perceived by locals as no longer capable of dealing with new circumstances and conflicts. In some cases, this may lead to local demands for individual land titles.

Similarly, 'States', 'investors', and 'NGOs' are far from sharing a common agenda, and each of these categories is at the same time divided. There is no agreement on the vision of conservation as a priority activity in drylands or on how to combine it with local agropastoralism and with private investments in other economic sectors (Kabiri 2010; Akker 2016; Gargallo 2020).

It is also necessary to highlight that conservation programmes may lead to the emergence of new common-property management institutions, the so-called new pastoral commons (Bollig and Lesorogol 2016). Especially relevant in East and Southern Africa, these new institutions are usually the fruit of a complex and unstable combination of local actors, State agencies, and NGOs. To a larger or lesser extent, they attempt to integrate old forms of communal management into the new patterns of natural resource use and commercialization.

These institutions—as well as intended or unintended economic and environmental impacts—and local reactions to the new situation can sometimes reframe, at least partially, the results of conservation schemes to the advantage of drylands communities (Haller et al. 2016). More frequently, however, top-down approaches and the dismantling of common resources management prevail (Nelson and Agrawal 2008; Haller and Van Dijk 2016; Dekker et al. 2020) and also undermine pastoral resilience in drylands (Haller 2020).

Conservation programmes are also having an impact on territorialization—that is, the division of land, the creation or reinforcement of territorial boundaries, and the power to distribute and manage it. This often leads to green grabbing and the reproduction of fortress conservation models, as we have seen, because through colonial and postcolonial processes common property of pastoralists and institutions of mobility were transformed into state property, and PAs were perceived not as previous cultural landscapes but as pure nature (see also cases discussed in Haller 2020). On the other hand, in some places, the development of new communal institutions charged with the implementation of conservation initiatives has been useful in curtailing attempts by states and local elites to advance towards greater individualization of land tenure and large-scale agricultural interventions and has provided communities with enhanced management rights over their lands (Humphries 2012; Bollig 2016: 775, 779–781; Gargallo 2020).

Conclusion

As this chapter has shown, green grabbing has been a growing trend in many dryland areas, amidst global processes of investment in previously marginal territories and the opening of new frontiers of investment. Conservation-related initiatives have often neglected the views, knowledge, and interests of local communities, or have been developed against their wishes. In many contexts, pre-existing conflicts—over land, natural resource access, economic opportunities, political power—are exacerbated.

It is an error, therefore, to view conservation as something intrinsically ‘good’ or ‘positive’, as well as approaching it as a ‘technical’ issue dealing with ‘natural’ processes. All conservation schemes imply political and economic choices, normally advocated by national and international elites and benefitting or marginalizing specific communities or individuals.

It is equally important, however, to retain a nuanced vision of conservation origins and impacts. All actors involved, from states, companies, local authorities, and communities, are divided and not homogeneous. The priority accorded to conservation over agriculture, livestock, mining, or any other economic sector is far from straightforward or consensual. Within communities, identity, economic, social, gender, and age divisions are often prevalent, and they lead to different views on conservation programmes. Finally, conservation has provided some benefits to dryland communities, or sections within them, be it in terms of increased income, enhanced land control, or support to identity claims.

Unfortunately, such positive outcomes are still in a minority, and some of the most expansionist and restrictive conservation plans being advocated do not augur well for the future, unless a clear commitment to give a leading role to dryland communities is made, and a critical revision of some of the paradigms directing conservation programmes is developed.

Notes

- 1 www.protectedplanet.net [Accessed 9 October 2020].
- 2 www.half-earthproject.org [Accessed 7 October 2020].
- 3 Zero Draft of the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework, CBD, January 2020.
- 4 See Chapters 5 and 6 of this volume.
- 5 The narrative was recorded in several interviews held with managers and officials in the LWC as well as in the Northern Rangelands Trust in 2015 and 2016. Additional, similar interpretations can be found in documents from early court cases where pastoralists appealed to their land rights (see Weissman 2017).
- 6 Taken from various interviews in 2015 and 2016. Historically it can also be gathered from the British foreign jurisdiction act of 1890 that rangelands were generally considered unoccupied and ungoverned (see Klopp 2000: 15).
- 7 Interviews with management committee members, residents, NNC, and NNDFN representatives, Windhoek, 2012 and 2014.
- 8 Interviews with management committee members, residents, TAs, NNC, and NNDFN representatives, Windhoek, 2012 and 2014.

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