

Politics of Climate Change, Conservation and Sustainable Development in Tanzania



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Introduction

When organizers of this magazine approached me to ask whether I can contribute to this issue, I accepted promptly primarily for one reason. As an indigenous person struggling to live between two opposing worlds, I have always considered fitting to speak or write about and from an indigenous perspective. Western paradigms and values have often dominated global and national debates on climate change, conservation, and sustainability, to the exclusion or active suppression of indigenous voices and needs. In effect, proposed interventions foster colonization, displacement, intimidation, and violence that has beset indigenous peoples for centuries. I seek to address this gap by taking a critical look at the intersection of climate change, conservation, and sustainable development in Tanzania. However, given the transnational character of the issues at hand this analysis will touch upon other countries and global actors. From my point of view, it is inadequate to talk of the colonial margins (meaning developing/poor countries) without relating to the imperial centre (developed/rich countries).

Setting the Context

As I write this article the Maasai of Ngorongoro, a pastoralist group I belong to are facing a threat of eviction from their ancestral lands in the name of conservation. Ironically, people who have sustained the health of the East African rangelands and wildlife for centuries are now seen as environmental villains. On April 6th, 2021, President Samia Suluhu Hassan warned that the Ngorongoro Conservation Area (NCA) is on the brink of extinction if the population there is allowed to rise beyond 100,000 people. She ordered the responsible authorities to see how they can relocate some of the pastoralists to other areas, insisting that Tanzania has only two choices: to limit human population and save NCA or allow human activities and say goodbye to conservation. Eviction notices were issued immediately after, but relocation was halted thanks to local opposition and heart-warming international solidarity. However, the threat of eviction is still looming.

Throughout Tanzania, pastoralists are under siege, their future is endangered by three forces: the Tanzanian state, the safari industry, and the wildlife conservation lobby. These actors often have both the economic means and the political clout to make their voices heard over the pastoralists.

All the crimes (evictions, displacement, harassment, imprisonment, violence and murder) against pastoralists are committed in the name of conservation, climate change and sustainability. In this contribution I unmask the lies, contradictions, and abuses in the three key areas under scrutiny. The language or tone might sound unforgiving for some readers, but I have no sweet language to describe the brutality of the state and the violent, dehumanising tendencies of capital. American feminist, Gloria Steinmen reminds us that “the truth will set you free, but first it will piss you off!”



“I am also beginning to look at activities that I want to do here: go in natural parks to see lions, giraffes and elephants, see the Kilimanjaro, diving in Zanzibar, **meet Masai people**, etc.” [says](#) Ewen le Clec’h, a French intern in Dar es Salaam. The images of proud Maasai adorn safari-camp brochures, postcards, T-shirts, coffee tables and hotel logos across East Africa and beyond. They are, however, not supposed to be something more than that, an image to lure tourists. This is the context within which I tweeted the above caption.

On February 22nd, 2022, the Country Rapporteur responsible for the Human Rights Situation in Tanzania, and the Chairperson of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations/Communities and Minorities in Africa of the African Commission on Human and People’s Rights (ACHPR), transmitted a Joint Letter of Urgent Appeal to Her Excellency Ms. Samia Suluhu Hassan, the President of Tanzania, regarding the impending evictions of the Maasai from a 1,500 km area in Loliondo.

Despite the fact to the contrary, political elites in Tanzania repeatedly paint pastoralists as a threat to the environment, as well as to the present and future generations. This discursive representation of pastoralists is meant but to create a particular narrative that serve to justify state’s violence against pastoralists.

I have addressed this somewhere else [“Stop Blaming Pastoralists for Climate Change”](#). This article was written following the Glasgow Climate Summit -COP26 and my argument is that since no political consensus on the key issues was reached in the summit, some people somewhere will be scapegoated to compensate for that failure. Either with their land, water, taxes, or their very dear lives, they will be made to pay for the failures and irresponsible lifestyles of others. Immediately, pastoralists were blamed for electricity and water rationing in the commercial City of Dar es Salaam. It was obvious that drought was the reason for the decrease of water volume in the major rivers that supply water to the inhabitants of the city, but authorities found it easier to blame it on the less fortunate pastoralists. Later, the rains came but the problem of power shortages persists. We are now told that the ongoing nationwide electricity rationing is due to [maintenance](#) work on power plants that have not been serviced for a while.

Some of the lawmakers were unsatisfied by inconsistent explanations given by the government regarding recurring electricity rationing. They said that the government's explanations are [baseless and utter nuisance](#) (*ubabaishaji*). The responsible Minister dismissed the lawmakers [alleging](#) that they have a problem with him and Samia being Minister and President respectively. Within a very short period of time, the problem of electricity rationing shifted from water shortages to a technical problem and finally to politics! The fact that the increase of water volume in the river basins following the rains and evictions of pastoralists did not end power shortages prove that pastoralists were never the cause in the first place.

[State violence and Othering of pastoralists](#) in Tanzania is a historical fact. From the advent of colonialism in the 19th century to contemporary times the pastoral people have faced marginalization, exclusion and dispossession that have made them [strangers in their own lands](#). In their book, *The Violence of Conservation in Africa*, South African Geographer Maano Ramutsindela and his colleagues argue that abuses of people in areas designated for the protection of nature is predicated on the assumption that they are subhuman. No other better way to explain the Maasai predicament except that they are relegated to the zone of non-existent. On February 15th, 2022, Alliance for Change and Transparency (ACT-Wazalendo) Party issued a five-point proposal which among other things urged the government to disregard all the recommendations made in the Multiple Land Use Report including the recommendation to evict people from the NCA. Then to the Maasai, the Opposition Party stated that:

We would like to take this opportunity, first, to apologize to the entire Maasai community, especially those living in the Ngorongoro Conservation Area for the foul language, ridicule, mockery, contempt, and humiliation, used during this saga. We have witnessed in Parliament, in the media and on social media platforms how the debate on this issue lacked respect for the Maasai. We strongly condemn that foul language and statements.

The sustained media campaign reiterated inherent stereotypes, prejudices, and anti-pastoralist attitudes [prevalent](#) in Tanzania. Some lawmakers suggested that the law governing the NCA be changed to legalize eviction. One even [recommended](#) a military operation right away. It is astonishing that the noble goal of conservation is thought of being only attainable through violence. The sense of [urgency](#) and securitization painted by these self-proclaimed ‘saviours’ calls for postponement of a democratic dialogue. For them there is no need to waste time on weighing competing opinions, narratives, and interests. Of course, since pastoralists are already othered as irrational sub-humans, there is no logic of engaging them respectfully or democratically. Lies, misrepresentations, mis/disinformation, spinning and Maasaiphobia dominated the floor of the House in the most terrifying manner.

For anyone familiar with the history and politics of the issue at hand will notice that most the claims made by these lawmakers were mere repetitions of what the NCAA and UNESCO have been trying to push through. Most of the arguments are inconsistent, comical, and clueless as far as conservation and pastoralism is concerned. For instance, one lawmaker [stated](#) categorically that one of the causes of environmental degradation in the area is the presence of sheep that sheep are very dangerous animals, they eat everything including roots. Unfortunately, this is a member of a parliamentary committee on lands, natural resources, and tourism. She acknowledges that as members of the committee they have been urging the government to enforce relocation since 2006. In fact, the plans for relocations pre-date that time but it is important that she reference that year because it was the time when we experienced one of the largest evictions of its kind in recent Tanzanian history. The government of Jakaya Kikwete carried out a nation-wide violent operation that aimed to protect the environment by harshly removing those who have always been custodians of the same (pastoralists).

Often media coverage constructs public opinion on environmental issues: when some problems are covered more frequently than others, they seem more important, urgent, and deserving immediate action. The conservation lobby has invested massively on propaganda that seeks to justify evictions of the Maasai pastoralists. There are allegations that millions of dollars are dished out to dupe, threaten, coerce or otherwise bribe the Maasai to give up their land. Below I provide a few examples of the reporting by one local daily that produced and circulated anti-pastoralist propaganda with much energy than any other local newspapers.



Translation

DISCUSSION IN PARLIAMENT ON NGORONGORO CONSERVATION AREA

LUSINDE: FOR THE CURRENT SITUATION CO-EXISTENCE BETWEEN PEOPLE AND CONSERVATION IS IMPOSSIBLE

- Advises the government to assist finding new areas for those who want to relocate voluntarily
- Those who do not want to relocate should wait for the law to be amended then they will relocate as per requirement of the [new] law.
- He refers to aid offered by the NCAA to such residents as the reason for the growing population
- He says the conditions of citizens residing in the conservation area are bad, they are at danger

Translation

MP: THE SITUATION IS DIRE IN NGORONGORO

- Salome Makamba reveals the great secret about the rich defending the Maasai
- They are the ones who own most of the livestock and not the Maasai
- The livestock population is over eight hundred thousand, but the Maasai own only 20%
- She says 60% of the Ngorongoro residents are illiterate because of they are enslaved to herding



Translation

MSIGWA: PRESIDENT SAMIA SAVE NGORONGORO

- He says if there is one important thing the President should do for Tanzanians is to save the conservancy
- Making sure that she saves that conservancy that is in danger of vanishing

He says let's decide to save Ngorongoro or leave it to be grazing land



Having followed the discussions in Parliament, news media and social media platforms I can identify three claims raised to justify eviction of the Maasai pastoralists:

- (i) Population increase (people & livestock) and affluence
- (ii) Poverty and illiteracy of the Ngorongoro residents
- (iii) Insecurity posed by wildlife

All the three claims are highly disputable, and some are simply unfounded. The first claim partly make sense that population increase ought to be considered. However, one would expect to see a unified national population policy instead of a selective focus on Ngorongoro. It is also surprising that its only pastoralists and their livestock that is being spotted. Are wildlife not increasing too? What about tourists? Is it not contradictory to evict pastoralists on allegation of population increase while at the same time campaigning for increased numbers of tourists to the same place? How comes that Maasai houses and health centres or schools for their children are a problem to wildlife but five-star hotels, tourist lodges and campsites are not? Can anyone tell when did grazing become inimical to wildlife?

On the second claim, it is not certain how relocation will eradicate poverty and illiteracy. How can dispossession bring prosperity? Instead of talking about the rationality of imposed restrictions on local resource use, hypothetical solutions are imposed. Perhaps those instigating this madness know well that their claims are illogical and baseless. That is why they dare not engage in honest discussions. This is a reason why they resort to deception, intimidation, and violence. In [Imposing Wilderness](#), Roderick Neumann draws parallels between the acts of enclosure (privatization and dispossession) via game laws, depriving local people of an important means of providing for their own survival. Creating tourism destinations frequently includes what Teresia Teaiwa calls [Militourism](#) – a phenomenon by which a military or paramilitary force ensures the running of a tourist industry, and that same tourism industry masks the military force behind it. In the case of my home country, Teklehaymanot G. Weldemichel aptly unpacks [Othering Pastoralists, State Violence, and the Remaking of Boundaries in Tanzania's Militarised Wildlife Conservation Sector](#).

The third claim that the Maasai pastoralists are in danger (insecurity posed by wildlife) is rather ridiculous because in the whole of Maasailand the Maasai coexist with wildlife, they are kins in the ecosystem. It is like relocating people from Mwanza, Mara and Kagera because of the recurring accidents in Lake Victoria! *Akutukanaye hakuchagulii tusi* goes a Swahili saying, meaning “the one who insults you does not choose insults” or as the English say give a dog a bad name and hang it.

The foregoing analysis shows that the concrete meaning and essence of what is called conservation and sustainability is disputed. That is why the title of this article is “the politics of”. In light of what we have discussed so far, it is perhaps appropriate to pose and reflect on the following three interrelated questions:

- **Climate change:** what/who is the cause?
- **Conservation:** what is conserved and by who?
- **Sustainability:** what is sustained and for who?

These are pertinent questions given that we are facing a multidimensional crisis of global propositions. The undeniable connections among different aspects of this crisis (climate change, biodiversity loss, inequalities, poverty, epistemological and existential distress) are calling for a radical rethinking and genuine actions for the wellbeing of all human and nonhuman beings on the planet.

Climate Change: What/Who is the Cause?

I have addressed the politics of climate change in Tanzania in two separate contributions to Udadisi ([here](#) and [here](#)). So, I will not say much about it here but perhaps just reiterate the main point I made there: it is morally wrong and indeed cruel that those far less responsible for global warming bear, not only the brunt of its costs, but also added victimization from those in privileged positions. The world’s poorest countries have contributed less than [1%](#) of the cumulative CO2 emissions since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution. According to UNCTAD, the world’s top 20 emitters account for [80%](#).

In his brilliant book, [Blaming the Victim](#), William Ryan shows how the needy, poor, and powerless are regularly characterized, stereotypically, as being lazy, ignorant, or even stupid and that their sorry conditions are their fault. Climate change has only exacerbated an already existing anti-pastoralist attitude. However, the question is which production and consumption systems are better for human beings and result in a lighter human impact on the environment? Is it the large-scale industrial production system that is promoted by the metaphysics of profit and culture of consumerism or localized small-scale labour-intensive production systems that seeks to sustain webs of life in respective ecosystems?

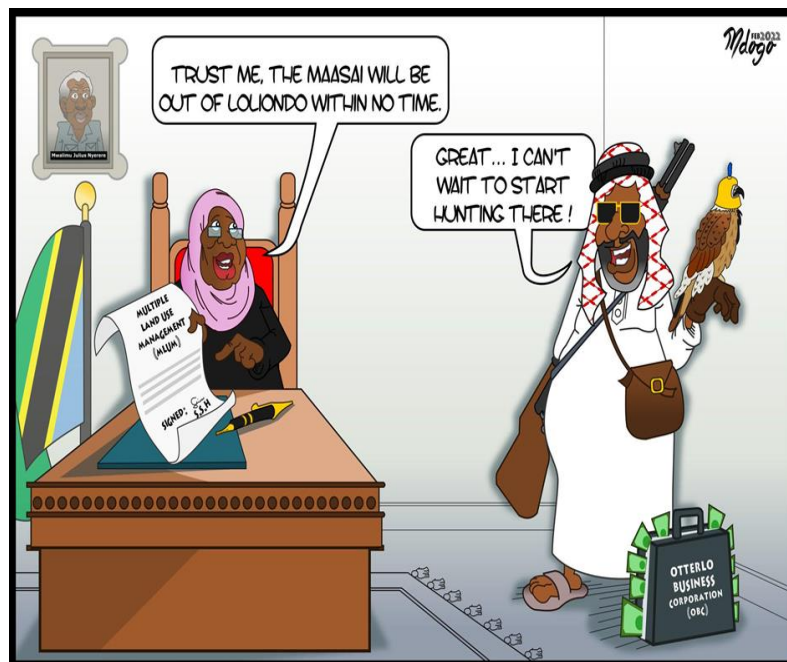
Politics of Conservation: what is being conserved and for who?

That material resources can be depleted or that animals and plants can become extinct is rather undisputable. The signs and warnings are everywhere around. In 2005, the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MEA) [report](#) noted with concern that:

Over the past 50 years, humans have changed ecosystems more rapidly and extensively than in any comparable period of time in human history, largely to meet rapidly growing demands for food, fresh water, timber, fibre, and fuel. This has resulted in a substantial and largely irreversible loss in the diversity of life on Earth.

Four years following the MEA report, American Chemist Will Steffen and his colleagues coined the concept of [Planetary Boundaries \(PB\)](#) which provides a science-based analysis of the risk that human activities will destabilize the ecosystems at the planetary scale. The planetary boundaries framework defines a safe operating space for humanity based on the intrinsic biophysical processes that regulate the stability of the Earth System (ES). Four of nine planetary boundaries i.e., climate change, loss of biosphere integrity have already been crossed over. Therefore, the ability of the planet's ecosystems to sustain future generations can no longer be taken for granted. The [post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework](#) is borne out of this reality. Right now, governments are preparing to agree on a 30x30 agenda that is a plan proposed by the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) to turn 30% of Earth into Protected Areas (PAs) by 2030. A noble goal? Not at all. This is just another [Big Conservation Lie](#). I will explain why.

Already, [40%](#) of Tanzania's land is under some forms of conservation. Majority of these lands which are actually militarized are taken by force from indigenous people. So, any global agenda to create more PAs will automatically lead to further violent evictions of indigenous people and destruction of their life-worlds. The contested lands in Ngorongoro and all over the Maasailand has very little to do with conservation but everything to do with profits. All the abuse, violence and trauma being visited upon the Maasai is meant to set aside the beautiful savannas for European and American holidaymakers. Their grazing lands are given to the Royal family of the United Arabs Emirates for trophy hunting.



Maasai lives are valueless in front of the almighty American Dollar and Arab Dirham. Do we really expect this form of conservation to save the planet and humanity? One must be foolish enough to even think that an alliance of authoritarian states, corrupt officials and violent colonial capital can in anyway save the planet and humanity. Capitalism cannot solve the mess it has created. The system is designed to seek profits not saving or healing lives. If it happens, it is only by coincidence.

The Arab Kingdom in the Heart of Maasailand

Since 1992 the United Arab Emirates (UAE)-based Ortello Business Corporation (OBC) has had an exclusive hunting license to 135,000 hectares of land in Loliondo, adjacent to the Serengeti National Park. Since then, they have built their own private airstrip, hunted, and trapped thousands of wild animals, and further restricted Maasai pastoralists from vital grazing lands and watering points. These restrictive land laws and violent recurring evictions have led to widespread hunger and starvation as well as constant fear among the Maasai. The media narrative describe above is not picking this side of the story when justifying unjustifiable relocation of the Maasai from their ancestral lands. Imagine your land of birth, your grazing grounds, being taken forcefully from you and given to foreigners for trophy hunting!

On the 27th, February 2022, the Burj Khalifa Tower displayed the Tanzanian flag. A debate ensued following allegations that the government has unjustifiably paid \$68,000 for placing a promotional advertisement on the world's tallest building. The cost to place a promotional advert or message on the façade of the Burj Khalifa starts from [AED250,000](#) (\$68,062) for a single three minute display, according to the marketing agency which manages the lighting displays. However, the Tanzanian government claims that it has not paid any money to place the advert. The Minister for Investment, Industries and Trade, Dr. Ashatu Kijaji said that Tanzania has not paid any money as claimed. She revealed that that is a gift given to the President of Tanzania due to cordial relations the country enjoys with the UAE.

Launching the Tanzania National Day at the 2020 Dubai Expo, President Samia assured investors that the business environment in Tanzania is more than conducive. She noted that the [country has opened doors to all investors from across the globe for business and leisure](#). Enticing the would-be investors, President Samia added that besides the conducive legal framework that enables smooth acquisition of lands, the Tanzanian people have *Raheem* (Merciful) souls and smiling faces so [“Tanzania is really ready to take off”](#). One would wonder whether the pastoralists are included here! They are constantly facing terror from the same Tanzanian state and the Arab OBC. Tanzania and the UAE committed to continue strengthening and promoting economic ties through investment and trade. The two parties signed a total of 36 Memorandums of Understanding (MoU) valued at \$7.49 billion.

Much of the contemporary debate around conservation science and practice has centred around the question of who has the [correct image or definition of nature](#). The West-dominated conservation lobby has tried to dominate the debate by presenting their image as *the* one and only objective and scientifically legitimate representation of nature. An ideal of a (white) settler is crafted as [“nature lover”](#) and the Other (Africans/Maasai) as lacking ecological consciousness. Historical marginalization and abuses of the Maasai in Kenya and Tanzania have largely resulted from alienation of their lands designated for protection of nature for exclusive *safari* (mainly for the whites). Is this not racism? The colonial model of conservation practiced in Africa is primarily meant to serve the interests of the West particularly rich individuals and many Western corporations. Local people lose their lands and end up serving as bearers, tour guides and security guards. It is estimated that as much as [70%](#) of tourism profits in Africa are designated for foreign pockets.

Pastoralism as practiced by the Maasai, and other indigenous people is not just another livelihood or/and land use system. It is another way of knowing and being with nature that embodies a strong sense of reciprocal connection to the land where one lives, mutuality and empathetic relationship to animals, self-restraint, custodial conservatism, deliberateness, balance, generosity, egalitarianism, conviviality, and respectful relations with other beings. These are the reasons why the Maasai ecosystem is home to the spectacular assemblages of the remaining African terrestrial wildlife populations. The area of Maasailand straddling the Kenya-Tanzania border is one of the [richest biodiversity regions](#) in Africa and [mammalian diversity centres](#) on Earth.

Even after losing Siringet (Serengeti), Emanyarai (Manyara), Tara-Engare (Tarangire), Alailelai le Mwasuni (Mkomazi National Park), Engare-Nanyokie/Oldonyo Orok (Arusha National Park), Empusel (Amboseli), Enkipai (Maasai Mara Game Reserve) and several other lands, the Maasai still sustained and carefully nurtured the marginal lands they are relocated to. The Maasai are, however, not even thought of when talking about who qualifies for Environmental or Wildlife Conservation Prize. Instead, they are constantly bemoaned and harassed. The Maasai are very disappointment seeing that this is what they are awarded with after centuries of custodianship of the East African rangelands. Feeling insecure and helpless before the powerful powers of the state and investors, the Maasai have turned to God for consolation. Out of precarity public prayers are organized across the district to seek divine intervention. A song by Mary Lemburis, summarizes the content of such prayers: it is appropriate to quote by way of translation:

*God save us, the remnant of the minority household of Maa,
We run unto you for refuge, shield us from oppression,
Defend and save us from oppressive hands, that are pressing us.
They are evicting us from our ancestral lands, the lands of our births,
The inheritance from our grandparents,
Behold we are made refugees!
It is we, the Maasai who safeguarded these lands for centuries for our livestock,
From the Serengeti to Masai Mara, Ngorongoro to Embusel,
Mkongonero in Kimotorok to Njapai and Kitwai, We the Maasai protected all of them,
in coexistence with wildlife from time immemorial.
The lions, giraffes, and zebras, but also elephants, buffalos, gazelles, and kudu
We have always been together on grazing lands, herding together in harmony
But we are now being separated.*

Mary sums up the terrain of pastoralist politics of belonging from historical, social, economic, ecological, and political contexts. That conservation has a history, and it must be considered. That the Maasai are significant knowers, but often ignored by planners and conservators. The author of [Narrating Nature: Wildlife Conservation and Maasai Ways of Knowing](#) convincingly argues that the future of wildlife conservation, which is the interest of many national and international stakeholders, depends on the local Maasai pastoralists and their knowledge practices. The Maasai usually differentiate between “education for life” and modern/formal education offered by government or private institutions. The latter is only seen as necessary process one must go through in expectation of some economic gains in the future (paid job). Education for life is a holistic communal life long-learning centred on a symbiotic relationship between local ecology, animals (livestock and wildlife) and people in resource-scarce landscapes. This education imprints on one’s consciousness values of *Alaramatañi* (loosely translated guardian or pastoralist) from early childhood.

In her melody, Mary expresses a special sense of affinity between Maasai and wildlife: “we have always been together on grazing lands, herding together in harmony but we are now being separated”. Maasai clans and moieties identify themselves with some wildlife and they have a duty to ensure that the animal is protected by the entire community. As a young boy I remember one widow in our neighbourhood who was constantly visited by a black snake. The snake was never stroke. Instead, it was given milk because it was believed that Ndoros (a prominent Maasai who had a lot of cattle) had returned from the dead to look after his children. Generally, harming of animals associated with one’s clan is tantamount to killing clan members and it has side effects as it may result to curse or bad luck. Mary also points out that herding extends to wildlife. Maasai believe that wildlife has inalienable rights to grazing lands as cattle.

What I have presented so far should suffice to dispels unfounded narratives by the discourse coalition that is seeking to unjustly accumulate profits from Maasailands under the guise of wildlife conservation. In the most articulate manner, Mordecai Ogada powerfully [opines](#) that “the perpetual colonial project has miseducated us that conservation is about wildlife, while it is actually about our land, our heritage, our culture, our languages, our beliefs...it is about US”. This observation is powerful enough to propel us to the last subsection on politics of sustainability.

Politics of Sustainability: What is sustained and for who?

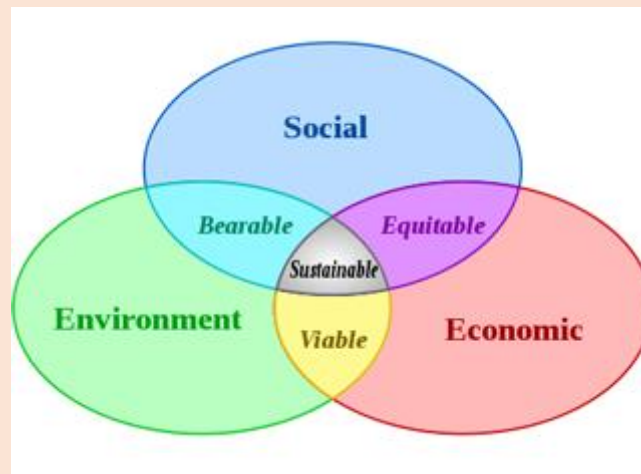
In the previous subsection I explained that the colonial racist conservation operates through a process of separating indigenous people from their lands and thus destroy values and relationships that hold them together as a people. Hence, the question what is sustained and for who? Without land there is no life and when there is no life sustainability becomes meaningless.

The concept of sustainable development coined by the 1987 Bruntland Commission Report and now popularized by the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) has actually achieved less. Described as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs, sustainable development remains highly contestable. The mainstream pathway towards a sustainable future has meant the denial of the humanity of others.

For instance, green transitions in the Global South, often imply various forms of modernization of the ways in which natural resources are managed, utilized, and controlled. In the process, ‘unmodern’ kinds of resource use, like mobile pastoralism, are criminalized. Land grabbing, livelihood destruction and knowledge marginalization is justified in the name of sustainability. Local communities are denied not only resource rights but their humanity and an opportunity to meaningfully take part in future-making. As such the future is hardly a future but the reproduction of uneven world order and its history of ignored oppression.

Three Pillars of Sustainable Development

- Social + Economic Sustainability = Equitable but not Bearable
- Social + Environmental Sustainability = Bearable but not Equitable
- Economic + Environmental Sustainability = Viable but not Equitable



- Social + Economic + Environmental Sustainability = Sustainable Development

source: thwink.org with modification by the author

Why is sustainable development not delivering to its expectations? A simple answer lies with the folly of trying to sustain what is obviously unsustainable. Greening or cleaning a socio-economic system that sustains capitalist consumer societies will not amount to any transformation. If the goal of the nine billion people is to live the American dream, then we will need another planet. Perhaps two or three more planets. In my contribution to *udadisi* titled [Tanzania kama Ulaya, Zanzibar kama Dubai](#) I critique a desire of wanting to turn Tanzania and Zanzibar into Europe and Dubai respectively. Political elites are fascinated by Dubai's artificial isles and of course the lifestyles of their Western counterparts. Alas, not all that glitters is gold!

I argue that although the people of Africa are entitled to a better life, there are historical, economic, and ecological reasons warning that emulating Western development and lifestyles is undesirable. I was only reiterating what the West Indian prominent decolonial voice, Frantz Fanon said about six decades ago. His [diagnosis](#) merits a long quotation:

Leave this Europe where they are never done talking of Man, yet murder men everywhere they find them, at the corner of every one of their own streets, in all the corners of the globe. For centuries they have stifled almost the whole of humanity in the name of a so-called spiritual experience... Europe undertook the leadership of the world with ardour, cynicism, and violence... Let us decide not to imitate Europe; let us combine our muscles and our brains in a new direction. Let us try to create the whole man, whom Europe has been incapable of bringing to triumphant birth... Let us not pay tribute to Europe by creating states, institutions, and societies which draw their inspiration from her. Humanity is waiting for something from us other than such an imitation, which would be almost an obscene caricature. If we wish to live up to our peoples' expectations, we must seek the response elsewhere than in Europe... For Europe, for ourselves, and for humanity, comrades, we must turn over a new leaf, we must work out new concepts, and try to set afoot a new man.

The above summarises the essence of Western Modernity/Coloniality [defined](#) here simply as the cultural project of ordering the world according to rational principles from the perspective of a male Eurocentric consciousness. Fanon was brutally honest in his criticism of the humanism proclaimed in the West where the human being, as a relation of each to another, is degraded into a dual system in which for one set of people there are selves and others, and for another set there is the nether-realm of non-selves and non-others. Where ethical relationships are granted to the former, it is outlawed for the others by virtue of them being reduced to beings without rights of appearance. For them, to appear is to violate the field of legitimate appearance. Modernity is characterized by certain institutions, order, and reason seen as the foundation for equality and freedom and enabled by the language of rights. However, there is [The Darker Side of Western Modernity](#): this terrible and hidden underside of Western Modernity which is inseparable from the logic of coloniality is the reality of the non-selves and no-others in the non-Western world. Here domination not emancipation, oppression not freedom, violence not peace prevails and accepted as inevitable reality.

Evictions of the Maasai from their indigenous lands, racist treatment of African students during the war in Ukraine and the pathologizing treatment of African countries at the different waves of the deadly virus (COVID19) only vindicate the arguments that I'm trying to bring to the fore. Addressing the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in November 2021, Mia Mottley, the first female Prime Minister of Barbados sounded the alarm that climate change is racially experienced. The non-selves and non-others (the poor, the blacks, the indigenous) are hit first and worst by the climate crisis in which they contribute less to: she [asked](#):

When will we, as world leaders across the world, address the pressing issues that are truly causing our people angst and worry, whether it is climate or whether it is

vaccines? Simply put when will leaders lead? How many more voices and how many more pictures of people must we see on these screens without being able to move or are we so blinded and hardened that we can no longer appreciate the cries of humanity? ...Do some leaders in this world believe that they can survive and thrive on their own? Have they not learned from the pandemic? Can there be peace and prosperity if one third of the world literally prospers and the other two thirds live under siege and face calamity threat to our being? A 2-degree Celsius rise in global temperature would be a “death sentence” for island and coastal communities. If our existence is to mean anything, then we must act in the interests of all of our people who are depending on us. And if we don’t, we will allow the path of greed and selfishness to sow the seeds of our common destruction.

All along indigenous people have opposed the path of greed and selfishness (read foolishness). Their opposition to so-called development (extension of the colonial civilizing mission) imposed on them is simply a fight for their right to exist with dignity as a people living on their own terms. The Maasai might not know Frantz Fanon or his writings, but they know his philosophy because it is their everyday reality. They reject what is central to European humanism, profit, and the reduction of the human to outputs in production. The murderous search for profits has disposed them of their lands, culture, dignity, humanity and yes, their very dear lives. If all this is taken from a people, what then remains of the empty slogan of sustainable development?

I have observed that the West is very concerned about the future. Of course, we in the global south, are also concerned about the future but we differ qualitatively, our fears are different. We are at the same time more concerned about the now and even the past that is shaping our present. How do you even start to imagine a better future when your present is already stolen from you! Colonialism disfigured our past and the wounds are taking long to heal. Rubbing salt in the wound, new policies that are supposed to promote conservation and sustainability are perpetuating the colonial logic and racist tendencies. They continually produce and sustain ways of being and thinking that are exclusionary, rendering conceptions of humanity, gender and race, knowledge, authority, and nature that reinforce colonial norms and capitalist futures.

Today, Frantz Fanon is more relevant than in 1960s. He was a thinker ahead of his time. The very final words in his classic [The Wretched of the Earth](#), are these ones; “for Europe, for ourselves, and for humanity... we must turn over a new leaf, we must work out new concepts, and try to set afoot a new man”. The socio-economic system invented and rationalized by “spurious science and economics” for the benefits of the few has brought socio-economic, political, ecological, and epistemological rupture. Will the current multidimensional crisis finally open the intellectual and political space for the big push beyond the established socio-economic order to Fanon’s new society and liberated person? Is it even possible or thinkable? Yes, it is. However, world-making is a political process: worlds are built, fought for, seized, maintained, or lost.

So which Worlds Should we Defend or Fight for?

Crises like climate breakdown present opportunities to reinvent the world by unsettling oppressive practices of capitalism and the associated colonizing cognitive paradigms as well as technologies and politics that sustains it. The world of the Maasai pastoralists that I grew up in shows that a different world predicated on the logics of communal solidarity, sharing, conviviality, ethics of care and harmony with the non-human world is possible. It is completely different from the modern world which I am sorry to say is unsocial or robotic. When I first arrived in Germany in 2019, I was astonished by the social life here: no morning greetings, people do not know their neighbours and are always in hurry. If you greet someone, they ask whether you know each other; you can't socialize with strangers? There are of course exceptions but the general setting quite different from the world I knew. In 2019 more than [9,000](#) suicide deaths which represents almost three times the number of road accident fatalities were registered in Germany. Excessive stress and social isolation are cited as some of the major triggers of suicidal thoughts and feelings.

I was equally startled by too much wanting and consumption I saw here. There is too much of everything that making a choice becomes very difficult. Too many varieties of tea, meat, wheat flour, milk etc. In addition, you have to consider whether something is bio (organic) or not. Shopping for groceries became uncomfortable exercise. Does all this have anything to do with our topic here? Of course, when considering that overconsumption here is related to underconsumption in other parts of the world and that the pollution generated here is transnational. People here consume mangoes from Peru and Costa Rica, avocados from Tanzania, and flowers from Kenya. They are also among the leading customers of Tanzania's tourism industry. In fact, the Germany government is a [generous](#) funder of Tanzania's development projects, and empowerment of the [private](#) sector. Substantial amount of German funds is directed to [wildlife conservation](#) which is basically alienation and militarization of Maasai lands.

In a recent book [The Nature of German Imperialism: Conservation and the Politics of Wildlife in Colonial East Africa](#), Bernhard Gissibl explores the history of hunting and wildlife conservation in colonial Tanganyika (Tanzania) as an ideologically charged political activity rife with contradictions and denials. He presents a story of two enterprising German brothers from the city of Hannover who went to Tanzania in the 1900s to engage in animal husbandry and hunting in the Maasai heartland. One Adolf Siedentopf erected a stone farmhouse in the northern part of the Ngorongoro caldera which he named "Soltau" after the small town near his home city of Hannover. The farm contained a stock of around 1,000 cattle, 2,500 sheep, 40 donkeys and 12 horses. His brother Friedrich Wilhelm established a separate farm at the south-eastern end of the caldera. Their advent triggered the first expulsion of the Maasai the area. In 1905, the German colonial administration moved the Maasai to a reserve south of the now Arusha-Moshi Road leaving the fertile highlands for white settlers. Establishment of a large modern farm on the land now presented as pristine nature reveals the hypocrisy of the Western conservation fraternity.

At the heart of any sustainability imaginary are ways of seeing nature, society, and the economy, that then allow particular ways of governing each other. In situations of capitalist modernity, nature is constructed as existing in particular ways so that it can be acted upon in particular ways for particular ends i.e. to protect, defend, commodify or (de)politicise it. This has resulted to a [politics of resources](#) embedded in a genealogy of technologies, imaginaries and narratives that largely have been coproduce along with modern nature conservation. Thousands of German owned cows were not thought as destructive to Ngorongoro's ecology, but the Maasai's are! Both the German and British colonialists after them, labelled the Maasai and their husbandry practices environmentally destructive in order to justify alienation of their lands. This colonial thinking continues to affect politics, policy, and public perception in Tanzania to the present as I have explained throughout this article.

The contestation between pastoralists and the modernizing Tanzanian state has always revolved around two opposing lifestyles and land uses: one based on nomadic livestock-keeping of drought-resistant livestock species, and the other on a variety of sedentary activities based in farms and permanent settlements. The development policies informed by the latter view the transformation of pastoral societies into sedentary agricultural communities as inevitable. Such policies rarely allow for the possibility that pastoralism and pastoral lifeways could exist in the modern world: they belong to the past, it is argued. However, As the impacts of climate change intensify, the desirability of large monoculture systems driven by the metaphysics of productivity and profitability are increasingly questioned. Instead, multiple-use systems that supports environmentally friendly and resource-light lifestyles like those of the indigenous pastoralists are encouraged.

A joint study by the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), [“Pastoralism and the Green Economy—a natural nexus?”](#) concludes that mobile pastoralism is “one of the most sustainable food systems on the planet and delivers a wide range of economic values”. This position is supported by a recent [study](#) by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), which makes clear how pastoralism, by farming with nature, can address the global challenge of producing food sustainably in a context of increasing variability from climate change. In a pastoral world we take everything we relate to with the seriousness that sacredness requires. The milk we drink, the grass that feeds our cows, the rains that brings life (green grass and water), the birds that warn us when there is a sign of danger, and so many other life-giving and healing beings are respected as agents, as people. This worldview stands in sharp contrast to the murderous civilization of industrial-colonial capitalism which is burning up the planet and threatening the sustainability of webs of life for the sake of only one thing, profit.

As individuals, citizens, or organizations we have an ethical responsibility to choose which worlds to embrace and which to discard. We can speak up and act against oppression and colonization of people and nature. Mainstream environmental politics are devoid of radical imagination and critical thought. We have a duty to actively withstand depoliticization and colonization of climate change, conservation, and sustainable development. It takes convivial conservation and economies of care to heal the planet and communities. But how do we do this?

Humble yourself and learn to live

A recent [report](#) by the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) warns that species extinction is accelerating with ecosystems deteriorating at rates unprecedented in human history. Doesn't this make 30x30 agenda even urgent? No, it doesn't. But why? Because even the so-called Protected Areas are not safe from climate change. How then can biodiversity and climate change crises be tackled together? By respecting cultural diversity and caring lifestyles. And that requires a critical questioning and rejection of the sciences, politics, philosophies, ideologies, and epistemologies that have been used to sustain lifestyles that are unbearable for the planet. Here indigenous peoples' philosophies of life and understanding of the world becomes vital. This is where we should turn to for healing after centuries of messing up with the planet making it inhabitable!

In living with nature, one finds the instructions for a proper path to follow as a human being. The worldview of many indigenous peoples is unfragmented: different webs of life are recognized and respected. These peoples occupy and nurture up to 22% of the global land area which is home to [80% of the world's biodiversity](#). In this regard, they hold undisputed special place in the conservation of wildlife and biodiversity. Thus, protecting indigenous peoples' lands is protecting the planet. However, this is not the case now. The dominant discourse put a misplaced sense of urgency on 'protecting' these lands by grabbing them from the natives/barbarians who are seen as environmental villains! Something is fundamentally wrong when guardians and healers are treated as criminals. This will only end up creating more problems and make sustainability a myth.

My experience as an indigenous person with outsiders (donors, NGOs, experts, missionaries, government officials etc.) is that most of them hold a substantial amount of intellectual arrogance. For that they are close-minded and biased towards indigenous people. The coloniality in which they are trained and socialized has blinded them and make them believe that they possess the true/objective/scientific knowledge. These miseducated educators and saviours repeatedly complain about pastoralists' lack of education. That local communities don't know how to live properly, and they don't know how to utilize their resources, be it land, rivers, or lakes and oceans. This thinking is colonial and racist. That is why it ends up producing hostile policies and interventions. So, I think a good start would be humility for all outsiders working with or intending to work with local communities. Have some humility and unlearn the prejudices and stereotypes about others and don't carry your cultural bias as a standard, the only truth or valid knowledge.

Development that disrespects local peoples' values, knowledges and interests is simply an extension of a colonial civilizing mission. A conservation model devised in the West for the interests of the West will only terrorize communities and wildlife in Africa. In my Maa language there is no vocabulary for development or conservation, but this doesn't mean that they don't exist. They do but they carry a different meaning which I think is more enriching. The utilization and conservation of the grazing commons to ensure herd productivity and resilience is deeply rooted in Maasai governance and husbandry practices known in Maa as

Eramatare. This concept can loosely be translated as caring for the welfare of livestock and family as well as flora and fauna. *Eramatare* is akin to a deeper take on the notion of [bio economy](#) which by combining the “bio” (meaning life) and the management of that which is needed to meet material needs – “the economy”, could mean an economy that is integrated with, and nurtures, webs of life. That is why the last line in Mary’s song (quoted above) reads “*we have always been together on grazing lands, herding together in harmony but we are now being separated*”. She agonizes the imposed separation of kins.

Indigenous peoples like pastoralists more than anyone else have the best knowledge of the specificities of human-nonhuman relations in the semi-arid and arid drylands they co-habit. Life there is mainly governed by seasons and collective choices about setting limits by accepting instability, variability, and non-equilibrium dynamics. Consciousness of limits and balances is based on local knowledges and embedded ethics of care that challenges the blind faith in techno-productivism and voracity of capitalism. By accepting such or like-minded values and practices that respect limits and socio-ecological balances, the challenges of uncertain, turbulent world can be addressed. In other words, shared liveable futures can be realized.

In [Fury in the Slaughter House](#), the Rock Band from Hannover, Germany, tells us that every generation has got its own disease. Frantz Fanon would add that every generation has got a mission to discover and fulfil or betray it. Our generation has a choice to either embrace the disease of Modernity or the mission of decolonization that brings healing and ethics of care, mutualistic conviviality, and egalitarian commitment.