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**Tourism, Power and Politics: The Challenges of  
Maasai Involvement in Tourism Development**

**A dissertation presented in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements for  
the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
in  
Social Anthropology  
at Massey University, Palmerston North,  
New Zealand.**

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**2010**

## **Abstract**

This study explored the broad issues of power and politics associated with Maasai involvement in conservation-oriented tourism development in Amboseli, Kenya. Central to the study was the analysis of the intricate power interrelationships arising from the dynamic economic and political interactions between local actors and external tourism stakeholders. The study specifically looked at how and on what terms the Maasai were involved in tourism development, the nature of their engagement with outsiders, the initiatives they have undertaken to gain closer control over the organisation and economics of tourism, and the opportunities and constraints associated with this development process. Two case studies were used to analyse the experiences of Maasai communities living around Amboseli National Park (from 2005 Game Reserve): community-based wildlife and cultural tourism. A political ecology framework was used as a lens to understand community conflicts and struggles for political control over tourism-related resources (natural and financial). A multi-sited ethnographic approach featuring participant observation, focus group discussions, textual analysis of documents, and in-depth interviews, was used to collect data over twelve months, with intermittent breaks, between November 2003 and August 2005.

The findings reveal that Maasai involvement in tourism development is a comparatively recent occurrence and is being promoted by the Kenyan government as a management tool to reconcile the interests of conservation and local communities. Despite the potential for tourism to bring benefits for local communities, stimulate local support for conservation efforts, and local development, the study found that due to competition and political rifts between clans, age-sets and on the basis of political allegiance, Maasai had not benefited as much as they should from the immense tourism potential in their area. Rather than empowering the Maasai to take control over tourism and their own development, tourism had facilitated the exploitation of the area's tourism potential by foreign tourism investors and tour operators, the government, and a few local elites. Insights from this study shed light on the wider issues of community power and politics in tourism development, in particular the difficulty of ensuring that indigenous communities are not undermined in the face of tourism's global reach. The study suggests that for the Maasai to realise tourism benefits and support conservation there is an urgent need for social and political justice issues such as equitable distribution of benefits, rights to land resources and livelihoods, and democratic decision-making processes, to be addressed.

## **Acknowledgments**

The long, lonely and challenging journey taken to quench my thirsty for more knowledge would have not been complete without the help and support of many people and organisations. I wish to convey my sincere gratitude and appreciation to each of them. My sincere thanks go to my supervisors Professor Regina Scheyvens and Associate Professor Jeff Sluka for their guidance and constructive comments on my drafts. I sincerely appreciate Professor Regina's tireless efforts in reading all the drafts of this dissertation and encouraging me to soldier on when I was almost giving up. Sincere thanks also to my earlier chief supervisors Professor Jeff Sissons and Dr. Keith Ridler and co-supervisor Professor John Overton for their perspectives and comments on my work.

I also wish to express my most sincere appreciation to my Kenyan supervisor, Prof. Evestus Irandu and Prof. Itaru Ohta, my host at Kyoto University where this research project was conceived. My thanks also go to the following organisations for their contributions to making this dissertation possible: The Deans Committee, University of Nairobi and the School of People, Environment and Planning, Massey University for research grants; Kenya Wildlife Services for waiver of entrance fees to Amboseli National Park, and Amboseli Serena Lodge for offering me free accommodation during the tenure of my fieldwork and the Japan Foundation for a fellowship in Japan where the proposal for this research was developed.

I am greatly indebted to the numerous people in Kenya who gave their time so generously thus enabling me to gather information and develop an understanding of their local situation and issues under investigation. I am sincerely grateful and thankful to Maasai communities in Amboseli for warmly welcoming me to their homes, offering me their valuable time, and sharing their experiences and perspectives, without which I would not have been able to successfully complete this study. I would also like to convey my deepest gratitude to all the people in Amboseli who warmly welcomed me their community and generously assisted me in the research.

My life, let alone academic career, would not be possible nor a fraction as fulfilling without the immense support, patience and love of my wife Linet, and children, Keith and Kimberly. I would also like to thank my dad, mom, brothers and sisters, for their unconditional warmth and support.

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## Glossary of Maa/Swahili Terms

Ormeek	Derogatory term for people who dress in Western clothes
Enturuj	Tradition prohibiting <i>morans</i> from eating in front of women
Ol murrani/ <i>moran</i>	Male warriors
Oligalata	Clan
Enkishomi	Sub-clan
<i>Manyatta</i>	Homestead for <i>morans</i>
Enkang	Homestead for married man and his family
Enkaji	Round huts
Iloshon	Territorial section
Enkutoto	Localities
Illiporori	Age-sets
Olyioni	Uncircumcised boy
<i>Mzungu</i>	Tourist

## **Glossary of Terms and Abbreviations**

ACC	African Conservation Centre
ACWTP	Amboseli community Wildlife Tourism Ltd
AFEW	African Fund for Endangered Species
ATGRCA	Amboseli/Tsavo Group Ranches Conservation Association
AWF	African wildlife Foundation
BCP	Biodiversity Conservation Programme
CDF	Constituency Development Fund
COBRA	Conservation of Bio diverse Resource Area Project
CORE	Conservation of Resources through Enterprises
ESOK	Ecotourism Society of Kenya
FOC	Friends of Conservation
GR	Group Ranch
GRC	GRC
KATO	Kenya Association of Tour Operators
KTB	Kenya Tourism Board
KTDC	Kenya Tourism Development Corporation
KWS	Kenya Wildlife Services
ILRI	International Laboratory for Research on Animal Diseases
KSh.	Kenya Shillings (US\$ 1= ca. Ksh 70/=; NZ\$ 1= ca. Ksh 47/=)
MTW	Ministry of Tourism and Wildlife
NMK	National Museum of Kenya
USAID	United States Agency for International Development