

A review of the “Tourism- Environmental Conflict Signifier” logic as constructed by the Kenyan press in coverage of environmental conflicts.

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Abstract

For media publics in Kenya, the most vocalized environmental conflicts have occurred within situational contexts of tourism communities. However, the marked insignificance of environmental issues in determining conflicts makes it imperative to question how the Kenyan press covers this subject with specific reference to tourism. This analysis is guided by the assumption that interpretations of environmental conflicts should not be solely concerned with the key driving factors, but should also factor in the interplay of local and extra-local, social and ecological contexts. With a focus on biodiversity rows, our paper explores the issue of how the Kenyan press decenters the idea of environmental conflict to tourism, and accordingly equates tourism to a signifier of environmental conflicts. Research questions explore the (in)consistency of tourism associations to environmental conflict discourse, as well as the unarticulated issues when tourism is a master signifier of environmental conflicts. Study findings reveal that the relational angle of tourism development to environmental conflicts is a problematic one, positioning tourism as a causative factor in defining related conflicts. The paper additionally notes that in reporting biodiversity conflict, the Kenyan press legitimizes a position of human dominance over nature, through symbolic content in textual devices that tend toward egocentrism and render invisible the extra-human perspective. It does so in self-serving patterns to conceal traces of fatalities and harm to non-humans and nature. The authors recommend a way forward to achieve a balanced representation of stories from both the human and non-human sides in press reports on biodiversity conflicts.

Keywords: *tourism, environmental conflict, biodiversity, signifier, Kenyan media*

1.0 Tourism and environmental conflicts

Tourism in Kenya is integrated into overall contentious issues about the environment, and in considerable instances positioned as an initiator for ensuing environmental conflicts. Environmental conflict is an unfolding issue in Kenya's security sector. Pointers to tourism as a root cause as well as a router to the problem should be of great concern to well-being of the industry, moreover to sustainable resource use in the country's tourism destinations that are safeguarded by responsible tourism. Such conflicts are rampant in conservation areas, and defining the problem as signified by tourism in press publications has implications for choice of resolution strategies that could be detrimental to tourism development.

Changes in nature and environment only become environmental problems in a social process which defines them as problems (Rannikko, 1996). The case of environmental conflict in Kenya attests to this, as documentation of the problem by the media. Media depictions of environmental conflict legitimize certain perspectives of human relations with nature. Notable standpoints that feature this relation show the control humans exercise over nature (Doherty, 2015; Mutekwa and Musanga, 2013). Relating media to the construction of viewpoints in environmental crises, Hutchins and Lester (2015, p. 340) conceptualize the "mediatized environmental conflict", specifying that "environmental disasters are positioned as sites where dispersed publics form collective sentiments about conflicts and catastrophes in a globalized world". Tourism communities in Kenya present a good example of dispersed publics, owing to their fragmented groupings consisting of a mosaic of local land owners and a mix of other dwellers with diversified livelihoods, and both categories show variations in their views of the significance of tourism development to the community. According to Taylor et al (2000, p. 175), "the existence of such fragmented communities poses an important yet unanswered question about how news media function in covering the conflict of protracted environmental struggles". In this regard we question how the Kenyan press links symbolic content of biodiversity conflict to tourism in reporting incidences that occur amongst such communities, most of which are mapped as hotspots for biodiversity conflicts with varying intensities (see African Conservation Centre, 2015).

The signifier aspect in such situations shows that definitions of environmental conflict take an approach of pinning the problem meaning to causative factors. Apparently, this approach is also evident in scholarly reflections, with a number of authors hinting that environmental resource scarcity or depletion of supplies in nature are key triggers of environmental wars (Benjaminsen, 2008; Homer, 1994). Worth noting is that no conflict is sufficient to be termed purely as environmental conflict, as there may be causative factors other than the environment to the same. Urmilla et al (2014) argue that it is difficult to assign causality to any conflict, citing Flint & de Waal, (2006); and de Waal (2007) on an illustration of the polemic surrounding the war in South Sudan which is regarded as a climate war. However, in certain contexts it is worth dissecting the

conflict problem to environmental issues, for obvious reasons of relations to nature in given disputes.

For a long time, the environmental dimension in conflicts around the world has been largely ignored, with a preferential focus on political, economic and social aspects in conceptualizing wars. Salehyan (2008) and Theisen (2012) remark at the insignificance of environmental issues in determining conflict, noting the example of climate change incapacities in ascertaining wars. Sunga (2011) emphasizes that environmental aspects have negligible impact on wars. In instances where environmental issues are featured in conceptualizing conflicts, they are subordinate to other aspects. This has problematic implications for resolution plans, where the environment's interests also stand to be ignored. Actually, the problem begins with the central points in a discursive construction of conflict. As conflict redefinitions oscillate in meaning from political explanations to socially relevant terms, the environmental appeal in describing tension remains decentered.

Media reporting on conflicts covers diverse sub-categories including environmental conflicts. In this paper, we define environmental conflict as a situation of any disagreements or contentions involving human and non-human groups, that may result to habitat destruction, as well as loss of life of either, where environmentally related components are key references attributed to directly or indirectly. This type of conflict can occur anywhere, but presents a thought provoking case when it occurs in situational contexts of rangelands and ecotourism focal points, as the situation is for Kenya as highlighted by African Conservation Centre (2015). This is because such areas are keen on conservation principles, thus, biodiversity should have utmost assurance of protection from harm, yet questions still arise as to why in reality this does not cushion them from the offensive of environmental conflicts.

Perhaps, the most notable environmental conflict on Africa's map is the Darfur war in Sudan, which according to Ki Moon (2007) would equate to a climate war. With human lives lost and displacement of local population, the war had negative implications for Sudan's growth. The labeling of this crisis as a climate war has seen efforts on conflict sensitive adaptation to climate change impacts foregrounded as part of conflict resolution strategies in the warring zone. Elsewhere, the Rwandan genocide has also been linked to environmental causes (Brosha, 2006). This nexus between environment and conflict hints on impending risks of ecological disputes in Africa, given the expected high vulnerability rates to climate change impacts for the continent. Thus, environmental conflict is an urgent issue to be addressed by the continent, owing to the potential of climate change in escalating gravity of conflict situations.

Environmental conflicts are also apparent at the interstate level. For instance, the on-off disputes between Kenya and Uganda over ownership of the aquatic rich Mizingo Island at Lake Victoria have called for diplomatic steps in resolving the issue. Though a minor conflict at the moment, if untamed, the Mizingo row would escalate to a major war owing to its interstate nature. Skirmishes, like the Tana Clashes in Kenya's coast between the Pokomo and Orma communities

over grazing land (Ligawa, 2015), and minor conflicts witnessed among pastoral livelihoods in Kenya due to scarce natural resources (Adano, et al, 2012), would also equate to environmental conflicts.

Social costs of wars are imminent in environmental conflicts which take a violent turn. The 2007-2008 post-poll violence in Kenya is one such example, even though the environmental dimension remained hushed in initial talks about the conflict. Later on, it emerged that land was a major divisive factor among warring groups, in the chaos that resulted in deaths and internal displacement of populations. In most instances, the conflict is described as intercommunity / interethnic violence, linking social causations to the fights, and gun powder politics (Ligawa, 2015), linking the fight to political causes. Resolution strategies for this dispute factored in political, social and environmental angles. A team of eminent African persons led negotiation roundtables with political leaders in the country on a way forward to restore calm, and a power sharing deal was struck; the social angle was initiated through community reconciliation processes; and finally, the environmental aspect – touching on land – had to be emphasized as stated in the 2008 Waki report, that any Kenyan has the freedom to own land and settle in any part of the country they wish. This was based on evidence of eviction of perceived non-natives from some settlement areas, resulting in internal displacement of populations. The Waki report, a publication of a commission-led inquiry on 2008 post-poll violence, was chaired by Justice Philip Waki, who is judge of Kenya's court of appeal.

Looking back at the 2008 post-election violence, it is evident that land issues have had unmatched power in cropping out of conflict zones in Kenya. Land is an environmental resource, yet related conflicts are highly politicized and at times ignore the environmental aspect in resolution. The problems of environmental conflict are not confined to land disputes alone, but extend to conflicts with other entities in a natural ecosystem, with environmentally related resources as key references to points of contention, and notable examples abound in protests over community land set aside for biodiversity conservation, e.g in national parks and game reserves. Communal rangeland management in Kenya also faces challenges of conflict related to land use.

As earlier stated, intersections of discourses on environmental conflict have central subjects other than the environment e.g the politicization of tensions over terrestrial boundaries and disputes over environmental resources. There is the need to bring the subject of environment to the center of such discussions, and this has been facilitated by news reports that focus on environmental conflicts. However, a twist to this is that reports on environmental conflict exhibit a biased focus on the central idea which at times excludes crucial aspects of the environment. Even though a number of studies on environmental conflicts in Kenya have a subjective emphasis on disputes among pastoral communities over depleting resources (See Omolo 2010, for the case of gender and climate change conflict in Lake Turkana; UNDP 2011 on the issue of drought as a multiplier of conflict threat in northern Kenya; and Njiru 2011 for climate triggers

of tension among pastoral communities), in mainstream media as well as in the public sphere, the most vocalized conflicts have occurred in the situational context of tourism communities.

Using cases of human -- wildlife conflict, land tenure disputes in conservation areas, and development protests in tourism focal areas, the discursive pillars that make tourism a signifier of environmental conflict in Kenya are discussed as constructed by mainstream newspapers, as well as a subtext to the reported issues using a case of public reactions on social media via Twitter. This analysis is guided by the assumption that interpretations of environmental conflicts should not be solely concerned with the key driving factors, but should also factor in the interplay of local and extra-local, social and ecological contexts (Turner, 2004). Thus our research questions explore the (in)consistency of tourism associations in mentioned conflict discourse, as well as the unarticulated issues when tourism is a master signifier of environmental conflicts.

2.0 Methodology

There are many documented cases in Kenyan media for environmental conflicts, but the conflict events selected for this study have a situational context in tourism community areas and received substantial mention in print media. A total of 61 newspaper editions (articles and editorials categorized as news) from two mainstream newspapers (*Daily Nation* and *The Standard*), were analyzed. In addition, Twitter tweets were studied as subtexts through trending hash tags on related incidences. The main textual device analyzed in the selected newspapers was the headline and source element in story text. In analysis of news data, headlines are a form of quantitative dimension (Van Dijk, 1988). They additionally play a key role in positioning interpretation of the reader, as they are styled to inform and persuade (Kronrod & Engel, 2001), and are also “designed to optimize relevance of their stories” (Dor, 2003, p.695). In this sense headlines are best fit in the signification chain as lead signifiers for the environmental conflict scenario that unfolds in text. Sources used in a narration have varying potential in grounding the text to certain perspectives, owing to the frequency of appearance, their sequential relation as used with other sources, and position in a story structure, e.g a source statement in headline position.

The editions selected covered periods in 2015 and 2016. This is because of the fact that topical environmental disputes that had linkages to tourism were reignited in both print and social media owing to a prolonged dry spell in 2015 that worsened human wildlife conflicts in Kenya’s range lands. Additionally, there was the commissioning of Standard Gauge Railway construction in June 2015, which elicited controversial arguments of the project having to pass through Nairobi National Park, setting off fears of more shrinkage of wildlife territory, and this was envisaged to fuel biodiversity conflicts. During this period also, episodic instances of recurrent biodiversity conflicts in tourism communities in Kenya witnessed in 2015 caused push for a bill review on compensation terms for human-endured wildlife conflict injuries and fatalities.

This analysis provides contextual information in defining the environmental conflict problem in Kenya, with a focus on selected biodiversity conflict occurrences in rangelands and ecotourism focal points. The study drew attention to Nairobi National Park, Tsavo game reserve, Maasai Mara National Reserve and Amboseli Game Park among other environmental conflict areas. Figure 1 is a map showing protected areas for wildlife conservation in Kenya, most of which are considered hot spots for biodiversity conflicts (See Kiringe and Okello, 2007; Western et al, 2009 and Okech, 2010).



Figure 1: Map of Kenya showing protected areas for wildlife conservation. Source: www.africaguide.com

3.0 Signifiers and subtexts

A signifier is an aspect of a conversational position that directs meaning to a concept. Tourism as a signifier for environmental conflict implies that central frames of reference for defining this ideology mirror tourism. Kenya's tourism products are predominantly nature based, with wildlife tourism's core at the heart of our National Parks, a popular attraction. Each year, wildlife accounts for at least 70% of tourism earnings in the country. Kenya's wildlife tourism is famed for its big five, where lions are prided among key attractions in the country. Within this context, the common phrase "human wildlife conflict" as deliberated in academic as well as media circles is an instance where tourism anchors the claims within messages relayed on environmental conflict. In talking conflict, the war perspective dichotomizes engaging entities as the predator and the prey, or fatality versus fighter. So in this manner, the idea of human wildlife conflict already spells out engaging entities which consequently take a war standpoint to filter out who is the predator and who is the prey.

Human wildlife conflict has in past instances degenerated to the point of death for either/ both parties as in protected areas like Maasai Mara National Reserve with blame pointed at elephants (Sitati 2003), Tsavo National Park, and most recently at the Nairobi National Park. Categorized

as biodiversity conflicts, they are conflicts involving species (Redpath, et al 2013), as well as disputes between people about wildlife's perceived negative impacts on humans or other aspects of biodiversity (White et al, 2009). Maasai Mara Game Reserve in southwest Kenya has previous history of human elephant conflicts. An accusing finger oftentimes pointed to elephants raiding farmlands and destroying crops (Sitati *et. al* 2005).

In March 2016, a lion roaming outside Nairobi National Park was gunned down by a Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) ranger. The incident was covered by both local and international media, with issues in television, radio and print. Consequently, the news of felling the thirteen-year-old lion named Mohawk stirred uproar on social media, with Twitter hashtag #JusticeForMohawk trending. This quest for justice acknowledges territorial disputes between humans and wildlife at the park and criminalizes the fatal shooting of the feline with all blame directed at the KWS. Unfortunately, this online pursuit largely tailored to attack the KWS detaches itself from any genuine interest in justice for big cats as it stands to fuel public distrust in the body charged with wildlife protection. The pursuit further pushes for weakening of wildlife defense against crisis like poaching. Thus, there is possibility that #JusticeForMohawk conceals celebratory undertones at the invariable loss of wildlife in rivalry over space and resources in Kenya's capital.

Indeed, there have been other reported cases of game killing by local communities, and worth noting is that a few days after the Mohawk incident, another lion, Lemek, was killed by locals just south of the Nairobi National Park. A disturbing issue is that for these other incidences the twittersphere remained silent in seeking justice for Kenya's lions. This silence for Lemek and the social media rant for Mohawk are contrasts unified in a common conflict side – either that of the aggressor or victim – and just a matter of choice of which strategy best fits to communicate the public's stand. The disparity in position taken actually relates to the Jamal, et al. (2002) explanation on tokenism and genuine interest as the main motives for public participation in tourism planning as relates to destinations and natural resources. Unfortunately, the case displayed on Twitter was a case of public reaction befitting tokenism. From the silence for Lemek's death it is clear that loss of biodiversity is a non-issue and befits no articulation, whereas the same cannot be said for the hashtag quest for justice. Nonetheless, the hashtag rant (un)consciously aims to weaken the structures in place to protect our wildlife, implying a lack of care for the non-human side. A possible reason explaining the celebratory undertone is that the free-roaming of lions in the city, and their subsequent attacks to humans as documented by the press, are viewed as tourism's intrusion to habitual livelihood systems. A case in point for the attacks is captured in The Standard of 30th March 2016, with details of how a motorcyclist was attacked and injured by a stray lion at Isinya, South of the Nairobi National park.

At Maasai Mara National Reserve where conservancy projects have been launched in line with ecotourism development, disputes over land ownerships have featured. There are documented hostilities where local communities resented the idea of biodiversity conservation projects in land areas traditionally occupied by Maasai people. For a people who lived under communal

land management system, there was apprehension that the onset of such projects in the area would result to changes in land use patterns from agro pastoralism to tourism development. Fueling these conflicts are contradictory goals based on interests and values. On the part of economic interests, conservancy development promises economic gains for local communities and developers. However, land owners from the local community opposing the conservancy projects often base their arguments on their values of attachment to land which is substituted for tourism development. For instance, the Maasai Community at the Mara triangle is mostly pastoralists keeping large herds of cattle and in need for vast land for grazing. While The Game Reserve would allow human activity to some limits, Spence (1999) and Western (1994) are adamant that the creation of nature reserves and parks led to removal of local inhabitants from traditionally used resources. Thus, for the mentioned cases ecotourism strikingly stands out as a conflict trigger in territorial disputes witnessed in conservation areas in Kenya.

Disputes over environmental resource use also take the dimension of protests against proposed development projects that compromise environmental preservation. In a related incidence, there was a heated debate over whether or not the construction of the Standard Gauge Railway through the Nairobi National Park was a viable option for the city's development. Arguments were weighed on the benefits of tourism emanating from the park, as well as the possible detriments to tourism development from the same, *vis a vis* urban development.

3.1 Conflict voices in press titles and text

While most article headlines appear non-categorical on the issue of environmental conflict, title readings are indicative of the environment as central to conflict structure presented. Also, combat related verbs like *killing*, *shooting*, and *attacking* appeared in a number of titles, and some in a recurrent manner, thereby structuring a conflict scenario to the readership mind. The action in these verbs is often directed to/by an entity in the natural ecosystem, or triggered by forces related to environmental aspects. Some related statements as captured in headlines are ...*shooting of lions*, *killing of elephant*, and *attacks on humans*, which are consequently justified by causative clauses that are interwoven with territorial disputes for the case of conflicts between humans and wildlife. For instance, the “shooting of lions” is justified by their “straying” away from their defined boundaries; the same is explained for elephant’s intrusion into farms and for attacks on humans by wildlife. A perspective reinforced here is that of criminalizing wildlife, through labels that describe them as stray, invasive, and brutal.

It is possible that the aforementioned headline texts would have been different if they would have been narrated by an extra-human voice. The extra-human voice is basically an articulation of non-human voices and ultimately representative of the entire natural environment. Actually, the issue of environmental / non-human voices has had backing from notable scholars, like Merchant (1996), who advocates for trans-human dialogue with nature, Rogers (1998), who presents theoretical insights on overcoming objectification of nature in discourse, and Sandilands

& Erickson (2010), who discuss the subject of queer ecologies. These scholars question the relation between humans and nature that is based on an exploitation outlook, whilst the insubstantial position of nature aptly summed up by Eckersley, (1992) that “Non-human nature – the koala bear or brown rat, the field of tulips or tract of wilderness is simply a ‘storehouse of resources’ for the satisfaction of human ends” (p. 26). Actually, the bid to reclaim an ecocentric approach in human – nature relations is weighty in deconstructing discursive positions, for instance, rereading of literary texts that are grounded on assumptions that man was destined to control nature (Mutekwa and Musanga, 2013). If the same headlines were to be reported from the non- human perspective, it would dawn on us that humans’ consumptive use of nature is a key driver for reported environmental conflicts and threatens sustainability of the natural ecosystem. Perhaps then the realities that we are saying goodbye to ecological zones will be obvious.

Regarding human and non-human voice representation, a further analysis was done on story texts to identify sources used. Since sources used usually have a grounded position on the conflict issue at hand, it was possible to distinguish if they were arguing for the human or the extra-human side. Also, articles build up a continued discussion pegged on statements from sources, thereby portraying a story from a particular perspective. In instances where the bulk of a story revolves around source statements, the narration ends locked up in the source position.

The categories of sources that emerged in our analysis included political leaders, local witnesses, government officials, and conservation proponents. These sources mostly appeared in statements quoted in news reports relating to episodes of environmental conflict. A distinct favorite the press identified was the local witness, who would often detail conflict grievances of affected local community. For most articles, this source position came in first in a story structure as other sources took the subsequent positions. Political leaders also shaped key arguments in biodiversity conflict stories, emphasizing the victim status of local communities, and directing accusations to the KWS, as shown in this quote from one of the articles, “KWS values wildlife more than human beings. When a lion or elephant is killed, they rush to the scene with choppers but take no action when a person is killed.”(Daily Nation, 22nd September 2016). For these sources, it was also evident that conversations of conflict are highly politicized as the source opinion on an argument is interwoven throughout a text, binding an article to the source position.

The conservation proponent voice came in through the KWS, and other government authorities. This is the platform that articulates the extra-human voice. Our analysis revealed that when used with other sources in an article, its arguments mostly come in second place. Here, this source customarily comes in to defend accusations leveled against it for causing harm and destruction, e.g refute claims of rangers torturing residents, underscore commitment to compensating victims, and stress the measures in place to prevent more crisis. The peripheral positioning of statements from this source – in a way – marginalizes the extra-human voice at the triumph of human concerns. Ideally, there should be a balance of representation of stories from both the human and

non-human side in reporting biodiversity conflicts. The imbalance in presentation of the human and non-human perspectives in environmental conflict conversations is a sure way to live up to the prediction that “efficient solutions to environmental dilemmas are often missed in practice” (Morris and Su, 1999, p. 1322).

Statements in the headlines permit the reader to understand that the relationship between tourism and environmental conflict is a problematic one. Most headlines depart from a fixed assumption of human casualties and losses in environmental conflicts e.g. a heading statement that boldly reads “*Compensate victims of wild animals attack...*”. This is a total disregard to non-human injuries in the same conflict. Feasibly this focus on human subjects in headline captions is influenced by the journalistic norm of personalization, which Boykoff & Boykoff (2007) explain as foregrounding a human face in a story, a habitual practice in media reporting. Personalization is evident in headline phrases like “*Herders driven out of park...*”, “*...governor closes KWS office...*”, and “*Residents live in fear of wild animals....*”. The human referent in a story headline is an identity point that would generate persuasion through common ground created between readers and the events in the story. From the headlines, the majority of injuries, destruction, and deaths in reported conflicts resulted owing to tourism-related factors, and this had grave consequences for the human population depicted, forcing the humans to take retaliatory action. Wildlife were presented often as perpetrators of conflict, and in minimal cases as conflict victims. For some mentions of KWS, texts are biased on creating a negative impression of the body charged with wildlife conservation. In August 2016, articles on two separate incidences of elephants being killed were detailed in headlines. The Daily Nation of August 3rd and August 10th are explicit on elephant killings carried out by the KWS, the former act justified in the headline by the statement “*after a night of confrontation*” and the latter killing explained as prompted “*...after injuring a 50 year old man...*”. As much as the headlines acknowledge non-human victims, they are also specific that the killings carried out by KWS were occasioned by destructive behavior from the animal side.

Lastly, the headlines denote a concept of causality for conflicts. Sentences with a reason clause invoke a cause-effect interpretive template as relates to the conflict issue at hand. For some headlines the referential content takes a mono-causality approach to conceptualize the conflict problem. For example, “*herders driven out of park*” links cause to “*seven elephants killed*”: “*KWS shoots lion*” relates the shooting to an aftermath of the lion “*injuring a man*”; and “*KWS to pay*” proceeds to show that the compensation is as a result of “*wildlife injuries and death*.”. There are few with nil causation, and still others invoking a multiplicity of conflict causes. In showing the cause, there is the one privileged position that requires cushioning from the aggressor. For studied headlines with a causality structure, there would be either depiction of local populations as environmental conflict victims aggrieved by wild animals, or vice versa. Such headlines thus label conflict casualties as a consequence of environmental conflicts. The casualty tag in the headline is then validated in text by sources used. Story sources in studied

articles on environmental conflict have substantial input in defining the “conflict victim” who needs cushioning from the aggressor.

The scrutiny of the headings and text reveals an unpredicted connection between environmental conflicts and tourism. This connection is important as an insightful step on the many beginnings from which we can look at the issue of environmental conflict and biodiversity conservation in tourism, and devise tourism-sensitive resolution plans to environmental conflicts in Kenya’s range lands and ecotourism focal points. Apart from situational context of the headlines in tourism focal points like “Nairobi National Park, and Tsavo game reserve, the repeated mentions of the KWS across a number of headlines slips in the issue of tourism. This is because KWS principally conserves and manages Kenya’s wildlife for Kenya’s people who in turn benefit through robust associations of the wildlife to tourism. An urgent issue recommended by scholars in resolving biodiversity conflict in Kenya is addressing the exploitation of local communities by tourism investors (Ashenafi, 2001; Sitati, 2003).

3.2 (In) consistencies in tourism associations to environmental conflict in press reports

Headlines studied reveal a relationship between tourism and environmental conflict. This relation is, however, negligible, as most headlines present a non-specific central idea of dispute. The visibility of this relationship is evident in key words relating to wildlife, tourism communities, and mentions of popular destinations. Tourism is presented as a cause of conflict as well as a victim of environmental conflicts.

The headlines analyzed have mentions that can be categorized with reference to

1. Game and human fatalities
2. Terrestrial disputes with wild animals invading human settlement
3. Compensation for injured party in conflict
4. Human activity hurting tourism
5. Reports on confrontation

The headlines reinforce a war perspective of dichotomizing conflict aspects to predator versus prey. For instance, in mentioning game fatalities as story headline, an article positions wildlife as the victim of the conflict. Some headlines with mentions of game fatalities include an article in the Standard of 30th March 2016 with the title “*KWS shoots stray lion dead after injuring man in Isinya*”, and the Daily Nation of 10th June 2015 headlined “*Jumbo killed, tusks removed in Imenti forest.*” From the headlines studied, it emerges that game fatalities were a result of shooting from KWS officials, arrow poisoning from locals, and poaching activities. The affected here were lion and elephant. However, headline acknowledgements of wildlife victim status constantly added contradictory remarks that this victim status was called for owing to destructive behavior from the animal side. This is the point of guilt redemption from the human side to criminalize the non-human.

On the issue of terrestrial disputes, the topics have a one-sided view that it is only tourism communities or humans that suffer loss as victims. Wild animals are described as initiators of conflicts, with justifications in main texts accusing elephants of invading farms and destroying crops, or a big cat straying from its habitat into human settlement. An untouched question relating to the drivers of conflict in such contexts is whether it is wild animals that invade human settlements or it is humans who intrude upon wildlife habitat. Man's egocentric approach in relating to the surrounding ecosystem often leads to selfish recreation of boundaries in the environment in order to allow for consumptive use of nature. There is apprehension among conservationist groups in Kenya that wildlife habitat continues to shrink each day as we pave way for infrastructural developments and related human activities within protected areas, an issue which guarantees interference with migratory routes of wild animals. Few headlines analysed in this study captured the intrusion as initiated by humans. A July 6th 2015 article in the Daily Nation specifies the detriments of herding activity to tourism development in Isiolo, and weeks later on August 18th, the same newspaper reports on the loss of wildlife conservation to agrarian practice in Tsavo national park. Finally, the texts also addressed the issue of compensation for conflict injuries and fatalities, where KWS was to bear the costs. It is evident that the decision that KWS should pay was based on an assumption of predatory behavior from tourism, or rather its wildlife product component that would necessitate reimbursement from the body charged with overall protection of Kenya's wildlife. Informing the headline were the proposed amendments to the 2013 wildlife act. In this act, compensation rate for any human death arising from human-wildlife conflict is set at a minimum of 5 million Kenya Shillings. The inherent positioning of KWS firmly in a position to offer compensation has the following unarticulated implications;

1. Non-ecocentric approach in identifying casualties in biodiversity conflicts
2. Underpinning a depiction of tourism versus others in environmental conflicts in range lands

Overall, in reporting environmental conflict, the Kenyan press legitimizes human dominance over nature through symbolic content in textual devices that tend toward egocentrism and render invisible the extra-human perspective. The illustration of tourism as a signifier of environmental conflict exemplifies guilt redemption of environmental malpractices to non-human nature and consequently drawing vengeful reactions from the human side. The non-human stance in biodiversity disputes thus remains a repressed expression, with unarticulated issues on resource exhaustion, environmental destruction, adverse population impacts on wildlife, and loss of biological diversity.

While the need to protect humans from conflict harm is well articulated in studied environmental conflicts, that of other biodiversity is pushed to the background. For example, the issue of

ecological destruction is at a near complete exclusion in Kenyan mainstream press conversations of environmental conflict. Consequently, the healing needs of natural entities remain obscured, yet previous research has documented existing threat prevalence to biodiversity in tourism focal points in Kenya (see Table 1). Non-human fatalities e.g. the brutal alterations to ecosystems to pave way for infrastructural development at a Prevalence Threat Index of 53.3% (see table 1), and even loss of species are present in reality, and could be included in texts as well as titles in considerate terms to incite conversations towards their recovery. There is the assertion that from prehistory to the present time, human influence has been a constant factor in species extinction, and that a comparable fraction of the existing species are in danger of extermination (Nazarevich, 2015). Noted threats facing elephants which are at the flagship of biodiversity conservation efforts extend to habitat loss (through land-use change), habitat fragmentation, ivory poaching and persecution as crop raiders (Barnes, 1999; FFI, 2002; Nyhus *et al.*, 2000). On the contrary, readings in the analyzed news reports continue to marginalize the natural world's losses in reporting biodiversity disputes.

Table 1: Research summary on threat prevalence to biodiversity in Kenya's tourism focal points

	Threat factor identified by protected area officer	Number of protected area where the threat factor exists	Prevalence Threat Index (PTI)
1	Illegal killing of wildlife for their <i>bush meat</i> for the local or regional markets.	48 (96%)	78.5%
2	Danger to biodiversity arising from the nature and intensity of <i>human-wildlife conflicts</i> .	41 (82%)	58.0%
3	<i>Human encroachment</i> in terms of the density and distribution of the human population around protected areas	36 (72%)	54.0%
4	Loss, conversion and degradation of wildlife <i>migration and dispersal</i> corridors important for the protected area.	35 (70%)	53.3%

Source: Adapted from Okech, 2010.

Table 1 confirms that illegal killing of wildlife is a widespread threat factor in Kenya, with a high Prevalence Threat Index at 78.5 %. The fact that wildlife in Kenya actually faces this threat has been presented by media. Here, some articles are outright on the illegality of the animal killing act, spelling out punitive measures taken against perpetrators. Those involved in killing wildlife had been arrested awaiting charges at a court of law. Unfortunately, other press publications are evasive on the issue of illegality in killing of wild animals. Such reports justify

game killings as a necessitated reaction occasioned by threats of harm that the animals pose to human populations. In such reports, wild animals are killed by animal protectors as well as locals, after causing harm to humans. Whereas the threat of killing wild animals occurs in 96% of the protected areas in Kenya, press publications reinforce a logic of opposites in their sizeable attention to killings of humans by wildlife. The high percentages in occurrence and threat prevalence of wild animal killings shown in table 1, vary inversely with infrequent press reports on the same, as compared to frequent issues of threats to human populations caused by wild animals. Notable statements from headlines illustrating threat to humans caused by wild animals include; “*Elephant kills boy...*”, “*Italian trampled to death by elephant...*”, “*Stray elephant kills man...*”, “*Elephant kills farmer...*”, and “*Boy killed by elephant...*” In this sense, wild animals are portrayed to be the root cause of environmental conflict threat in Kenya’s protected areas which are the core for ecotourism projects.

Since the master signifier is taken as the truth, it is unfortunate that there is complete disregard for other aspects in environmental conflicts. In presenting tourism as a master signifier of reported environmental conflicts, the Kenyan press intuitively hides from the public knowledge on multi-faceted nature of environmental conflict, and further conceals possible leads to fair identification of environmental conflict casualties with a preoccupation in pinpointing culprits from the non-human side. Worse still, the real concerns of growing human populations with a Prevalence Threat Index of 54% (see table 1), competing priorities in environmental use, and sustainability focus remain a secret kept away from the public despite the knowledge platform created by media on environmental conflicts.

4.0 Conclusion

This paper concludes that environmental conflict reports in the Kenyan press are still far from interpretive readings which do not marginalize the natural world. In reporting on environmental conflict, news articles are carefully tailored for readership appeal, and the solemn expression of human victims in related reports as depicted by the Kenyan press creates an emotional public. The public outcry following Mohawk’s death exhibits a retaliatory tone directed to perceived aggressors who in multiple dimensions are signified by tourism in the textual life. An egocentric mood emerges in rereading this quest for justice for the lion, thereby implying a strong acknowledgement of human grievances in the rows. Likewise, the retaliation perspective concedes to an identified conflict cause whose signifiers stem from textual devices. It is unfortunate that the relating of tourism to signifiers of studied conflicts escalates the conflict scale to possible fresh fights that confront the identified cause along a signifier chain, be it wildlife, institutions, or conservation projects.

A biased centering of the conflict to causative factor serves interests other than fair resolution. This paper illustrates the case of centering biodiversity conflict roots to tourism in selected press reports for Kenya, where resolution plans prove to be more destructive than helpful. When signifiers are foregrounded as causative factors of conflict, their voices erased at the negotiation

table. This explains the conspicuous absence of extra-human voices and perspectives in press reports about environmental conflict. The case of tourism signifiers in the conflicts lets us destroy an industry that upholds values of environmental conservation. Coverage of environmental conflict has a focus of on an us and them rhetoric, more so in environmental conflicts explicitly illustrated in common concepts like humans versus wildlife, man and nature. Better press reporting would give a broader range of trans-human voices, and explore in depth possible short and long term solutions to the crisis.

We also reckon that conflict reports in the Kenyan press need consistency in zooming right on the issue of environmental conflicts. Reports on conflict are frequent in the media, but oftentimes the environmental angle is marginalized at the expense of political, social and economic implications.

A final remark is that press reports on this type of conflict are heavily reactive, covering warring factions of environmental fracas. Unfortunately, the press gives up on a conflict once it is through, at a near total disregard to the root matters that need to be resolved (the example of Mohawk and Lemek cases). They therefore fail to give information on post-conflict development. Publics are informed about a conflict, but news content lacks in depth analysis that would inform possible solutions to the crisis. The case of shooting Mohawk initiated a trending hashtag on Twitter, but it is clear that sections of the public were misguided on the most viable solution for the crisis, as evidenced from tweets which directed offensives toward the tourism industry. The more pressing question of a growing human population and competing priorities in the wake of environmental conflicts was not adequately captured in press reports, and the public picked this kind of war coverage to tweet about, focusing on the question of who killed Mohawk and ignoring the underlying causes of the conflict at hand.

We therefore recommend that the Kenyan press should present environmental conflict reports in thoughtful terms and encourage the exploration of backgrounds and contexts of environmental conflict formation. Environmental conflict should be decentered from popular politicized themes to address concerns of marginalized nature in tourism, agriculture, pastoralism etc. In this manner, the public will have a better understanding of resolution plans for environmental crises at hand. A better understanding of the situational context of tourism development in the case of the Mohawk shooting is a sure step in guaranteeing justice for the big cat. And probably the question of who killed Mohawk will have an answer other than the simplistic response of “a KWS ranger”, which prompted a Twitter reaction in a counter-attack fashion.

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