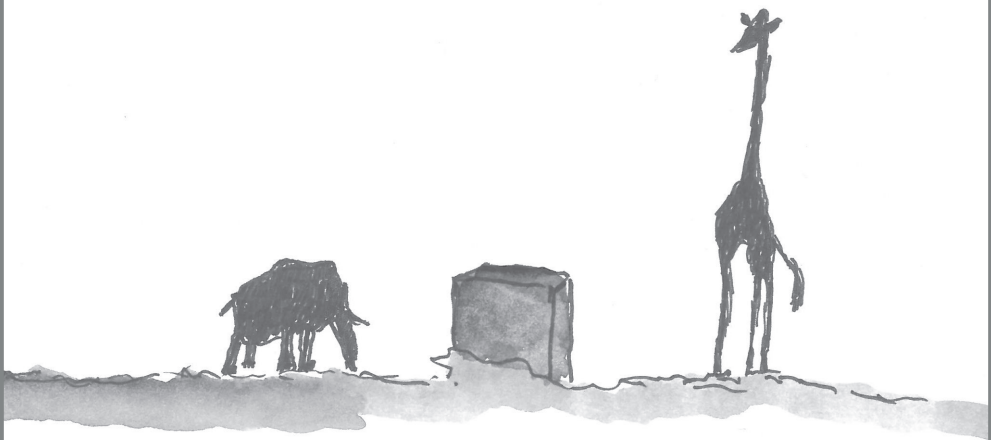# Conflicts Forever

Understanding the Role of Conflicts in Conservation Tourism

Arjaan Pellis

Propositions

1. Conflicts have a social life of their own.

   (this thesis)

2. Embracing conflicts is just as productive as avoiding them.

   (this thesis)

3. The rewilding of cultural landscapes necessitates ecological and social succession.

4. Behind every (scientific) question lies a hinterland of hidden politics and power relations.

5. Whether people care about climate change hinges on how they see their own future.

6. Massive Open Online Courses' (MOOCs) first and foremost function is to attract students for offline education.

7. A conflict a day keeps the violence away.

Propositions belonging to the thesis, entitled

Conflicts Forever - Understanding the Role of Conflicts in Conservation Tourism

Arjaan Pellis

Wageningen, 24 June 2019

Conflicts Forever

Understanding the Role of Conflicts in Conservation Tourism

Arjaan Pellis

Conflicts Forever

Understanding the Role of Conflicts in Conservation Tourism

Arjaan Pellis

Thesis

submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of doctor

at Wageningen University

by the authority of the Rector Magnificus

Prof. Dr A.P.J. Mol

in the presence of the

Thesis Committee appointed by the Academic Board

to be defended in public

on Monday 24 June 2019

at 4 p.m. in the Aula.

This thesis is dedicated to Lola,

forever absent and present,

forever with me.

SUMMARY

In this thesis I explore the role of conflicts in conservation tourism. Conservation tourism forms a commercial practice that intends to contribute to economic development and biodiversity conservation. Conflicts can be expected to play a role here considering the potentially contradicting objectives, practices and discourses. However, by scanning associated policy reports and literatures, I found that limited attention is being paid to conflicts. If mentioned at all, conflicts are predominantly seen as negative and temporary situations resulting from incompatible differences between actors. Consequently, academics and practitioners narrowly look for logical inputs (what causes conflicts to happen?) and outputs (how can we resolve the outcomes of conflict?). Yet what seems to be missing here is a more processual understanding of conflicts.

To contribute to a better understanding of conflicts in this aspect, conflicts are examined in this thesis as social systems, as suggested by German sociologist Niklas Luhmann. Using Luhmann as a core post-structural point of departure, I principally wondered whether conflicts can have a social life (whether conflicts endure as social systems, and if so, how?), and to what extent this social life plays a role in shaping the realities of conservation tourism (are these conflict systems performative?). Furthermore, and complemented by Evolutionary Governance Theory, I explored how conflicts evolve in relation to the many discursive and material events unfolding in their (in-) direct environment. To better understand and illustrate this evolution of conflicts, I empirically examined three related conservation tourism case studies in context of Namibian conservancies (chapter 2), Kenyan conservation enterprises (chapter 3) and Portuguese rewilding projects (chapter 4). Across these cases, I found that conflicts are typically subject to their own path dependencies, interdependencies and goal dependencies. Path dependencies illustrate how conflicts have their own genesis, rooted in those destinations where they develop over time. Interdependencies explain how conflicts are coupled with other discursive and/or material events in their environment. And goal dependencies describe how ideas or expectations of the future inform related actors as they anticipate conflicts and adapt their behaviour accordingly.

In chapter 2, the path dependency of conflicts is discussed in relation to the specific case of Anabeb Conservancy in Kunene in Namibia. In this case, I looked into ongoing community conflicts and their persistence over time. Conflicts have emerged and re-emerged here as a recognisable modes of ordering that have become all but normal to insiders of this community. In fact, the way in which conflicts play out in the wider Kunene region today is similar to previous conflict episodes of up to 30 or 40 years ago. However, the form in which these conflicts re-occur is somewhat different as they relate to changing discourses today. Prior to Namibia's independence, for instance,

conflicts may have been about pension fund distributions; today conflicts re-emerge in light of Community Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) and related opportunities offered by conservation tourism. To better understand the endurance of conflicts in this case, this chapter zooms in on the technologies that can irreversibly shape and maintain conflicts, namely through: reification, solidification, codification, naturalisation, objectification and institutionalisation.

In chapter 3, the interdependency of conflicts is studied in context of Loisaba Conservancy, a private conservancy situated in the northern County of Laikipia, Kenya. For a long time, Loisaba's management was focused on wildlife conservation, high-end tourism and commercial ranching. Developments and events at neighbouring ranches and community conservation areas shifted this focus. Decades of more or less peaceful regional co-existence has recently transformed into a situation full of conflicts and sometimes even violence. At first sight, these emerging conflicts seem related to recurrent droughts, scarce resources, national elections, and incitements by wealthy and influential politicians. For this study, however, I conceptualised conflicts as particular kinds of discourses that emerge, exist and change. This happens not only according to their internal logic, but also as a result of the dependencies between different conflict discourses. In this chapter, I characterise the relations between conflicts on a range from tight to loose couplings and introduce three related forms of coupling, namely: overpowering, resisting, and resonating.

In chapter 4, I explore the performative role of conflict avoidance in the rewilding and ecotourism discourse of one of the first European rewilding pilots situated in Western Iberia, Portugal. Conflict avoidance is delineated here as a process based on expectations of potentially enduring, mutually contradicting and heated interactions. As various actors have experienced such interactions, a natural response is to avoid (potential) conflicts. Various examples of conflict avoidance are correspondingly described as either a form of proactive anticipation to conflicts as risks or as a reactive adaptation to conflicts as dangers. The findings illustrate various forms of anticipations upon potential conflicts in terms of silence (non-communication or concealment of own practices/goals), materialisation (of potential conflicts in the construction of various ecotourism products), or co-optation (bringing problematic individuals on board). Adaptation is especially found in the ad hoc manoeuvring (reactive solutions to sudden and potentially dangerous conflict processes) by rewilding and ecotourism organisations. These anticipations/adaptations to conflict are each argued to be subject to different goal dependencies found in associated organisational visions of the future.

In chapter 5, I conclude by synthesising how conflicts evolve through the path dependencies, interdependencies, and goal dependencies found across the case studies. At the same time, I

emphasise how these dependencies are interrelated as conflicts not only function as parasitic systems, as Luhmann indicated, but also evolve as heated communications. Conflicts can have an aggressiveness similar to that of fire: once they burn — and if they are fuelled — they are very hard to extinguish. The resources that fuel conflicts are those recurrent contradictions found in conservation tourism, including ways in which self-proclaimed 'outsiders' perceive of conflicts as trivial events or avoid them where possible. However, as I have illustrated repeatedly throughout this thesis, conflicts themselves can generate reality effects, such as the distinction between in- and outsiders as conflicts can develop their own (and possibly new) subjects or objects; can marginalise or strengthen other communications; and can persist by parasitising on their environment (even if we decide to avoid them). Given these performative effects, and given their persistence as heated communications, this thesis ends with a discussion of implications leading to the recommendation for practitioners and researchers to have patience, to stay prudent, and to remain open to conflicts.

SAMENVATTING

In dit proefschrift onderzoek ik de rol die conflicten spelen in de nexus van toerisme, ontwikkeling en armoedebestrijding, beter bekend als 'conservation tourism' (natuurtoerisme). In dergelijke toerisme praktijken zou je geregeld conflicten verwachten gezien de vele potentiele tegenstrijdigheden qua doelen, praktijken en discoursen. In de literatuur en beleidsdocumenten vond ik echter maar een beperkte aandacht voor conflicten. En worden conflicten toch genoemd, dan worden ze hoofdzakelijk als negatieve en tijdelijke situaties gezien voortkomend uit onverenigbare verschillen tussen actoren. Als gevolg van deze veelvoorkomende benadering behouden wetenschappers en mensen uit de praktijk een beperkte blik op conflicten door gericht te blijven op de logische input (wat kunnen we aanwijzen als de oorzaken van een conflict?) en/of output (hoe kunnen we de uitkomsten van conflicten oplossen?). Op deze manier krijgen we echter geen inzicht in de conflicten zelf.

Om een bijdrage te leveren aan een beter begrip van conflicten, benader ik conflicten in dit proefschrift als sociale systemen. Deze benadering is gebaseerd op de 'Sociale Systeem Theorie' van Niklas Luhmann. Laatstgenoemde suggereert dat conflicten een eigen leven kunnen leiden. In lijn met zijn theorie heb ik mij vervolgens afgevraagd of conflicten in de loop van tijd kunnen evolueren en zo ja, hoe? Maar ook hoe een dergelijke evolutie tot potentiele realiteitseffecten zou kunnen leiden in context van natuurtoerisme? Om deze vragen te onderzoeken heb ik, mede ingegeven door 'Evolutionary Governance Theory', gekeken hoe conflicten evolueren in relatie tot de vele discursieve en materiele gebeurtenissen die zich afspelen in de omgeving van deze conflicten. Om deze evolutie en de effecten daarvan te bestuderen heb ik empirisch onderzoek gedaan naar drie gerelateerde casussen in context van een Namibische conservancy (hoofdstuk 2), Keniaanse private conservancy (hoofdstuk 3) en een Portugees verwilderingsproject (hoofdstuk 4).

In al deze casussen heb ik gevonden dat conflicten veelal subject zijn aan hun eigen pad-, inter- en doel-afhankelijkheden. Pad-afhankelijkheid illustreert hoe conflicten een eigen wordingsgeschiedenis meemaken, welke geworteld is in de plekken waar ze zich ontwikkelen in de loop van tijd. Inter-afhankelijkheid verklaart hoe een conflict breder gekoppeld kan worden aan andere discursieve en of materiele gebeurtenissen. En doel-afhankelijkheid beschrijft hoe ideeën en verwachtingen over de toekomst betrokken actoren aanzetten tot een bepaalde manier van anticiperen of aanpassen wanneer ze (potentiele) conflicten tegenkomen.

In hoofdstuk 2 wordt de pad-afhankelijkheid van conflicten behandeld in relatie tot de casus van Anabeb Conservancy in Kunene, Namibië. Hier heb ik gekeken naar hoe een lokaal conflict kan voortduren. Conflicten zijn hier ontstaan en her-ontstaan als herkenbare interacties die de

bewoners normaal zijn gaan vinden. Sterker nog, de manier waarop conflicten zich in de wijdere regio (Kunene) afspelen lijkt vergelijkbaar met hoe deze zich zo'n 30 à 40 jaar terug afspeelden. Deze conflicten hebben wel een andere vorm aangezien de conflicten ook mee veranderen met de veranderende discoursen waarbinnen ze afspelen. Om de voortgang van geobserveerde conflicten te begrijpen, zoomt dit hoofdstuk verder in op de verschillende wijzen waarop conflicten zich onomkeerbaar vormen en aanhouden, namelijk: reïficatie, solidificatie, codificatie, naturalisatie, object formatie en institutionalisering.

In hoofdstuk 3 wordt de inter-afhankelijkheid van conflicten nader bestudeerd in context van Loisaba Conservancy, een private conservancy in Laikipia, Kenia. Het management van Loisaba heeft lange tijd strategisch gefocust op natuurbehoud, exclusief toerisme en commerciële veeteelt. Een dergelijke focus staat echter onder druk door ontwikkelingen in nabijgelegen landgoederen en natuurbeschermingsprojecten met lokale gemeenschappen elders. Decennia van relatief vreedzaam samenleven zijn recentelijk omgeslagen in verscheidene conflicten en geweldsuitingen. Op het eerste gezicht lijken deze gerelateerd aan aanhoudende droogte, schaarste van natuurlijke hulpbronnen, nationale verkiezingen en uitspraken van invloedrijke en rijke politici in de media. In deze studie heb ik conflicten daarentegen juist bediscussieerd als typische discoursen die ontstaan, bestaan en veranderen in verloop van tijd. Dit gebeurt niet alleen door een interne logica in deze conflicten, maar kan ook het resultaat zijn van afhankelijkheden tussen verschillende conflictdiscoursen. In dit hoofdstuk heb ik de relaties tussen conflicten van nauwe tot losse koppelingen gekarakteriseerd, en heb ik vervolgens drie gerelateerde vormen van koppelingen geïntroduceerd, namelijk: overmeesteren, verzetten en resoneren.

In hoofdstuk 4 onderzoek ik de performatieve rol van conflict-vermijding in discoursen van verwildering en ecotoerisme welke geïntroduceerd worden in een van de eerste Europese 'rewilding' experimenten in Western Iberia, Portugal. Conflictvermijding wordt hier afgebakend als een proces dat gebaseerd is op verwachtingen die men heeft van mogelijke voortdurende, wederzijds tegenstrijdige en verhitte interacties. Wanneer verschillende actoren dergelijke interacties hebben meegemaakt, is vermijding van conflicten een voor de hand liggende reactie. Verschillende voorbeelden van conflictvermijding worden hier beschreven als ofwel vormen van proactieve anticipatie op conflicten als risico's, ofwel reactieve adaptatie naar aanleiding van conflicten als gevaren. De bevindingen illustreren daarnaast verschillende vormen van anticipaties op potentiele conflicten in termen van stiltes (het niet communiceren of verborgen houden van eigen praktijken/doelen), materialisatie (van potentiele conflicten in de constructie van verschillende ecotoerisme producten) of co-optatie (het aan boord nemen van problematische

individuen). Adaptatie is met name gevonden in de ad hoc manoeuvres (reactieve oplossingen voor plotselinge en mogelijkerwijs gevaarlijke conflictprocessen) door rewilding en ecotoerisme organisaties. Ik beargumenteer dat deze anticipaties/adaptaties ten opzichte van conflict onlosmakelijk verbonden zijn met de doel-afhankelijkheden die terug te vinden zijn in de toekomstvisies van laatstgenoemde organisaties.

In hoofdstuk 5 sluit ik dit proefschrift af met een synthese van conflictevolutie door stil te staan bij de pad-, inter- en doel-afhankelijkheden zoals gevonden in de verschillende casestudy's. Tegelijkertijd benadruk ik hier dat deze afhankelijkheden ook aan elkaar gerelateerd zijn, omdat conflicten niet alleen parasitair zijn, zoals eerder gesuggereerd door Luhmann, maar ook voortbestaan als verhitte communicaties. Conflicten kennen namelijk een agressiviteit die vergelijkbaar is met vuur: zodra ze branden – en gevoed worden – zijn ze maar moeilijk te doven. De bronnen die conflicten voeden zijn die terugkerende tegenstrijdigheden die we terugvinden in natuurbehoudstoerisme, inclusief de manieren waarop zelfbenoemde 'outsiders' conflicten blijven zien als onbeduidende gebeurtenissen of deze vermijden waar mogelijk. Maar, zoals herhaaldelijk geïllustreerd in dit proefschrift, kunnen conflicten zelf ook realiteitseffecten genereren. Een voorbeeld is het onderscheid tussen in- en outsiders: conflicten kunnen hun eigen (en mogelijk ook nieuwe) subjecten en objecten ontwikkelen. Conflicten kunnen daarnaast andere communicaties versterken of marginaliseren; en voortduren door te parasiteren op de eigen omgeving (zelfs als men besluit ze te vermijden). Gezien deze performatieve effecten, en gezien hun persistentie als verhitte communicaties, eindigt dit proefschrift met een discussie over de implicaties van dit onderzoek. Dit leidt tenslotte tot een reeks aanbevelingen voor de praktijk en wetenschap om vooral geduldig, voorzichtig en open te blijven ten opzichte van conflicten.

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TABLES & FIGURES

ACRONYMS

ASALs	Arid and Semi-Arid Lands
ATN	Associação Transumância e Natureza
AWF	African Wildlife Foundation
CBNRM	Community Based Natural Resource Management
CORE	Conservation of Resources through Enterprises programme
GR	Group Ranch
ICDN	Integrated Conservation and Development Namibia
ICNF	Instituto da Conservação da Natureza e das Florestas
Koija SL	Koija Starbeds Lodge
MET	Ministry of Environment and Tourism
NACSO	Namibian Association of CBNRM Support Organisations
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OL	Oryx Limited
PCPs	Private-Community-Partnerships
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WWF	World Wildlife Fund

Introduction:
The Role of Conflicts in
Conservation Tourism
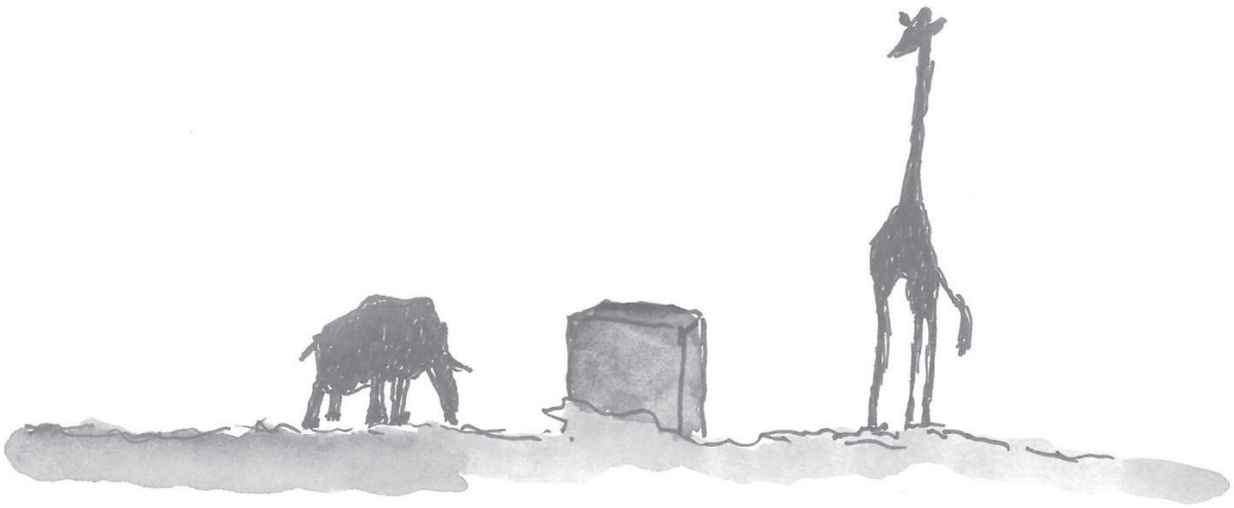
1.1 Prelude

We all have narratives about nature and landscapes in our minds. Some outsiders would say: Hey, I think it is great what you are doing here, let me start constructing a road to your reserve. Or, let me build a hotel on that mountaintop there. This is all possible, but it will lead to a confrontation, because... hold on, you might destroy what we have actually... what we see as the capital of this area...

So, you do choose to enter into confrontation at times?

We indeed have to sometimes, but there is always hope that this will not lead to a fracture. We want people to see alternatives; that they do not always have to go for their own gains, but that they can also take the wider community into account. It is just like in the Netherlands. There is never one ideal route... There will always be a few of these little hick-ups along the way.

Could you say a bit more about those hick-ups?

An important part of our work in this area will be the question of how we can get people on board. We are speaking here mostly of the informal land users, the real landowners are gone. But those herders and hunters do make use of all those thousands of properties, they hunt there, they take care of their sheep. They in fact manage the land. They also use poison, kill the wolves. They make sure that there is no wildlife at all. How can you provide them with an alternative? Maybe continue hunting, but in a different way. Stop herding sheep, but start looking after the ibex instead? We could think of ways for them to play a role that provides them with dignity; that they can be proud of, and that may be economically better than what they have now.

But wouldn't such a strategy nevertheless lead to further confrontations?

What do you want with this 'confrontation'? We are hardly ever involved in one. Is there a scientific agenda behind this question?[1] ...We will never opt for confrontation ourselves, it is always a local team that has to assess whether they have to deal with those interests and if so, how. We only try to facilitate people with the means that we have. Can we give, organise, or advise something? Provide a loan?

But do you also guide them in conflict situations?

Yes....

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[1] The interviewee has added the latter three sentences after reviewing the original transcript of the interview. The rest of this prelude is composed from exact fragments belonging to the same interview with a respondent involved with rewilding and conservation tourism experiments across Europe.

What is your policy then in such situations?

That is actually just our experience. In our team of ten people, we are all people who already have 20, 25, 30 years of experience with nature conservation. And we think that this is the best basis to judge how to deal with such conflicts in practical situations. We have been in hundreds of such situations, in the Netherlands or abroad. Our CEO has a lot of experience in Africa. This practical experience is the most useful for local organisations.

Could you describe which conflicts your organisation has dealt with in rewilding this region? Are there places where you met a lot of resistance?

Well, I think that... I don't think in terms of problems actually... Even the case we just discussed, I do not see that as a problem. It might just need some time, but in principle nothing is going wrong...

1.2 Introduction

Conflicts are of all ages and places. The previous conversation illustrates how conflicts can come and go, but also how they are observed and dealt with in ways that depend on the context and experience that one has with them. The interviewee represents a particular conservation Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) perspective in which conflicts are seen as necessary yet minor forms of evil. He shifted the conversation as soon as he wondered whether there was a scientific agenda behind all questions concerning 'confrontations' or 'conflicts'? But what is wrong with having a scientific agenda in a scientific interview? Perhaps I should have asked him whether there was any agenda behind the very questioning of my questions. By questioning these questions about conflicts, the interviewee seemed to make a discursive jump from one discourse concerning the necessity to deal with local differences through confrontation, towards another, a more defensive discourse that does not wish to address the potential presence of conflict. Interestingly, the interviewee acknowledged that there is both a necessity to confront contradictory practices and a necessity to be prudent in conflict processes to prevent these from becoming more painful and irreversible than they already are.

What I learned from this conversation is that the way people look at conflicts differs depending on the circumstances. The many field visits to various conservation tourism projects in Africa and Europe between 2014 and 2018 and the many other interviews I conducted here, nevertheless helped me realise that the described stance on, and response to, conflict is not unique. Conflicts and conflict avoidance could be found anywhere my research took me, from Namibia's internationally appraised community conservancies, to Kenya's dynamic tourism and conservation

practices, or to Portugal's rewilding and ecotourism pilots. During my case studies, I observed how extremely intense and heated conflicts can become. I saw how latent or seemingly absent conflicts can fuel other ones. And despite their prominent presence in and around conservation tourism and the fact that the interviewees were always aware of them, the people I spoke to rarely reflected on (or were aware of) their own role in these conflicts and the ways these evolve over time. This left me with a preliminary understanding of conflicts as social processes that, despite their everyday presence, we seem to know very little about or that we simply tend to 'leave all alone' (Mol, 2002).

But it seemed strange to me that the people I spoke to did not seem to care much about emerging conflicts. To understand this lack of attention better, I started to ask a number of seemingly mundane questions like: what are conflicts? What roles do conflicts play in the context of conservation tourism? How do such conflicts evolve over time? And how do these conflicts shape their surroundings? To contextualise these questions in the existing literatures, this introduction will first expand on the context of conservation tourism practices and the roles of conflicts therein. I will describe how different practitioners and scientists have aimed to understand and resolve conflicts by addressing their own agenda's, and their taken for granted assumptions about conflicts. I will then introduce a novel post-structuralist alternative to understand conflicts more thoroughly as crucial in the construction of conservation tourism practices. Next I will introduce the methodological design and provide more details about my case studies on conflicts in conservation tourism practices in Namibia, Kenya and Portugal.

1.2.1 The Context of Conservation Tourism

Conservation tourism is seen by many as an opportunity for both social and economic development of countries, regions and communities, while simultaneously benefitting biodiversity conservation. It is formally defined as "commercial tourism which makes an ecologically significant net positive contribution to the effective conservation of biological diversity" (Buckley, 2010, p. 2). As such, conservation tourism is a policy intervention that 'operates as a conservation tool' (Buckley, 2010) by using local economic development as an incentive for local people to take better care of their natural surroundings. Such incentives are typically governed by conservation oriented NGOs, international donors and governments in collaboration with private enterprises and local communities in places that are often characterised by limited livelihood alternatives and high biodiversity threats (Pellis, Lamers, & Van der Duim, 2015). A popular context for conservation tourism is found in a range of African destinations where ample conservation tourism arrangements have been experimented with since the 1980s (Van der Duim, Lamers, & Van Wijk, 2015; Van der Duim, Meyer, Saarinen, & Zellmer, 2011).

In the last decades, conservation tourism policies and practices have gradually materialised in par with changing discourses related to for instance community conservation, public-private partnerships, decentralisation, participation, or common pool resource management (Adams, 2004; Adams & Hulme, 2001; Dressler et al., 2010; Nthiga, 2014; Ostrom, 1990; Van der Duim et al., 2015). In these discourses, local communities are presented as the new 'custodians of nature', private enterprises as the most effective hospitality managers, and conservation NGOs as 'neutral' brokers in mediating the complexities of conservation tourism practices (see also Lewis & Mosse, 2006; Van der Duim et al., 2011; Van Wijk, Van der Duim, Lamers, & Sumba, 2014). As these discourses evolved across various national settings over time, various policy arrangements got institutionalised and materialised, think of: nationally orchestrated Community Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM), private and public game reserves, transfrontier conservation areas, private management of national parks, or conservation enterprises (for a more extensive discussion of these arrangements, see Van der Duim et al., 2015).

Although conservation tourism has developed as an irrefutably popular conservation tool for some (Buckley, 2010; Hunt, Durham, Driscoll, & Honey, 2015; Steven, Castley, & Buckley, 2013), it is also prone to various types of conflict in places where these arrangements are planned and implemented. The presence of conflicts in these contexts is nothing new. For example, since the 1960s (post)colonial and preservationist thinking has led to the controversial rearrangement of many African conservation landscapes by displacing people and fencing off national parks (Akama, Maingi, & Camargo, 2011; Nancy Lee Peluso, 1993). People were also seen as 'threats to wildlife', which led to further restrictions on their (consumptive) use of wildlife (Van der Duim et al., 2015). More recently however, these policy initiatives have (partly) shifted from seeing people as 'incompatible subjects' to important environmental subjects who can help re-establish human-wildlife relations outside protected areas (Bluwstein, 2017; Fletcher, 2010). Such a shifting policy discourse logically gained momentum in response to ineffective top-down preservation, increased attention for community participation in broader development discourses, and the limitations of preserving wildlife in relatively small and isolated parks (K. Brown, 2002; Büscher & Dietz, 2005; Dressler et al., 2010; Van der Duim et al., 2015; Zeppel, 2006).

In Europe, we can find similar processes, especially in rural places faced with depopulation. It is here that nature and tourism developers see opportunities for alternative land use futures, while local residents typically cherish traditional and familiar forms of land use, such as pastoralism and hunting (Krauß & Olwig, 2018). An interesting development in this regard is the role of rewilding and associated conservation tourism practices. Although widely contested as a concept, rewilding

is seen as an ecological drive to reverse natural processes in those landscapes that have historically been dominated by humans. As such, as Jørgensen underlines, "rewilding as currently practiced disavows human history and finds value only in historical ecologies prior to human habitation" (2014, p. 6). This 'ecological dream' offers interesting opportunities, as proponents suggest, such as lucrative socio-economic gains from rewilding in the 'Serengeti parks' they envision across Europe (Pellis & de Jong, 2016; Pellis, Felder, & Van der Duim, 2013). To stimulate such conservation tourism development, European rewilding proponents look at similar African conservation and tourism practices for important lessons learned. At the same time, these bold rewilding and conservation tourism propositions may trigger memories of past conservation conflicts (see for instance Van Assche, Bell, & Teampau, 2012), which undeniably forms a challenge conservationists face in practice.

Given the interrelations between longstanding African and European conservation tourism practices and ample experiences with conflicts, one would expect that the role of conflicts in these practices have been documented at length. However, conflicts are rather absent in the countless accounts of conservation tourism practices, that mainly report on ongoing conservation and tourism successes (AWF, 2013; NACSO, 2009, 2011, 2013; NRT, 2014; Rewilding Europe, 2015, 2016a). From the perspective of developers (i.e. networks of tourism entrepreneurs, conservation NGOs, conservation and tourism ministries, and local support in targeted communities) these successes often seem to stand apart from emerging conflicts (see also Pellis et al., 2015). As a consequence, conflicts may once again become hidden as a latent presence that is "not worth commenting on" (Becker, 2014, p. 26).

1.3 The Role of Conflicts in Literature

1.3.1 The Role of Conflicts in Ecotourism Literature

Given this lack of attention to, or interest in, conflicts in conservation tourism, I hoped to learn more about the role of conflicts in the ecotourism literature. In this relatively recent body of literature, ecotourism researchers predominantly explore the causes of conflicts with the, often explicit, aim to resolve related tensions where possible (Connell, Hall, & Shultis, 2017; Kuvan & Akan, 2012; Øian, et al., 2017): "A better understanding of these tensions may help to anticipate potential conflicts, improve communications, and, hopefully, mitigate conflicts." (Connell et al., 2017, p. 169)

Despite these noble intentions, there is little attention for the role of conflicts themselves (Connell et al., 2017). Conflicts are taken for granted without defining them or deepening the understanding

of them. Instead, the ecotourism literature often frames them as a problem and jumps to solutions to resolve them. This negligence resonates in the wider conservation literature, where conflict observations rarely move beyond assumed outcomes that are based on personal differences or incompatible (conservation) practices (Tindall, Robinson, & Stoddart, 2015; White et al., 2009). In general, conservation conflicts are defined as:

> situations that occur when two or more parties with strongly held opinions clash over conservation objectives and when one party is perceived to assert its interests at the expense of another. This definition recognises that conservation conflicts occur fundamentally between humans. (Redpath et al., 2013, p. 100)

In line with this definition, the ecotourism conflict literature focuses on the contradicting ideas that actors have about nature, the inclusion/exclusion of human or non-human beings, the ways in which resources ought to be managed or used, or the harm that tourists may inflict on the social and/or natural environment of destinations (Bosak, 2008; Brockington, 2002; Massé, 2016; Øian et al., 2017). Indeed, "the identification of incompatible goals and motives of various categories of stakeholders has for long been a dominant approach in research on these types of conflicts" (Øian et al., 2017, p. 1547). As a result, conflicts are abstracted as mere moments that result from conflicting interests, access or meanings *between* ecotourism actors.

Next to the anecdotal and actor-oriented conflict abstractions, there are also more critical understandings of conflicts. Political ecologists particularly argue that conservation conflicts are also subject to various structural problems. For instance, conservation tourism is discussed by political ecologists as a practice that undeniably comes with a range of necessary spatial, temporal and environmental fixes by which ecotourism places and subjects help sustain capitalism (Büscher & Davidov, 2013; Fletcher, 2010, 2011; Fletcher & Neves, 2012).

> Although the process of ecotourism development purports to reconcile a number of contradictions intrinsic to capitalist accumulation, the process is itself contradictory in many respects, not least in terms of its ambition to harness the same market mechanisms in large part responsible for many of our social and ecological problems to resolve the very same. (Fletcher & Neves, 2012, p. 72)

Discussions like these are relevant as they help us to understand broader structural incompatibilities in modern (Western) society and how these may underlie contemporary conflicts. As such political ecologists more generally seem to "point at the inherently exploitative nature of capitalism as the 'master' incompatibility" of our time (Demmers, 2012, p. 6). However, the object of these critical

discussions is not so much about the process of conflicts itself, but rather seems more concerned with the structural problems of capital(ism) underlying many problems in contemporary (Western) society.

1.3.2 The Role of Conflicts in Conflict Literature

The limited understanding of the role of conflicts in the ecotourism literature made me look for insights and answers in the wider field of conflict studies, a longstanding research field that accommodates a broad range of disciplinary approaches. Unfortunately, I soon realised, that this field, just like that of ecotourism literature, is predominantly focused on resolving conflicts (De Dreu & Gelfand, 2007; De Graaf, 2016; Kriesberg, 1998). This drive to resolve conflicts is not surprising given the many wars and non-violent conflicts that society has experienced throughout history (Sluka, 1992). In fact, as Sluka argues, in some places conflicts and violence have become a "permanent feature or 'way of life'" (Sluka, 1992, p. 19). Due to the seemingly inevitable and omnipresent nature of conflicts, most scientific traditions seek to understand underlying conditions/causes of conflicts with the aim to resolve them. This drive to resolve 'threatening' conflicts has led to a plethora of conflict studies around the world, and as a consequence we can see that: "Several hundred peace and conflict studies programs in colleges and universities appeared in the 1970s and 1980s. Ombudsman offices and mediation services have been created in thousands of universities, school systems, and communities." (Bartos & Wehr, 2002, p. 6)

To get a general idea of conflict approaches, Kriesberg (1998) explains that we can distinguish three longstanding traditions in conflict studies:

> One is the biological and evolutionary way, including the study of other animals, particularly those that are genetically close to humans. Another path is to research psychological and socio-psychological processes, ideally in a wide variety of societies. The third path is to study many different human societies, seeking commonalities between them. (p. 33)

Where biological understandings matter in understanding how humans, like animals, possibly engage in conflict through innate and instinctive tendencies (see for instance Ardrey, 1966; De Waal, 2000), a more socially constructed understanding of conflicts stems from how psychological, anthropological and sociological traditions have generally theorised conflicts.

In the psychology of conflicts, the object of research is generally the individual or psychological system. In the substantial body of literature following this approach, scholars generally try to understand how individuals experience conflicts as 'internally generated' phenomena (Demmers,

2012), for instance through common responses of fear towards conflicts. To illustrate, De Dreu (2005) explains the idea that individuals in conflicts tend to value their own interests, insights and opinions or interpretations above those of others. As people generally experience conflicts as unpleasant and stressful situations they also feel a need to change such situations by all means until one of the conflict parties clears the field, persuades the opposition or creatively looks for joint solutions that both parties can live with (Follett, 2011). These typically psychological explanations are part of further generalisations by which psychologists try to explain experiences with conflicts that "cut across, and shed light on, most or all conflicts" (Rubin, Pruitt, & Kim, 1994, p. 5) and are seen as universal responses separate from any cultural context whatsoever.

In the anthropological tradition, conflicts are seen as cultural products that cannot be considered apart from their cultural conditions. Anthropologists hence tend to see a conflict as: "institutionalised social interaction that is culturally defined, and that definition varies from one society to another. It varies not only in form and content but also in the very character and meaning, in subjective terms, that the participants in the conflict *themselves attach to it*." (idem, p. 24; emphasis added).

Through this tradition, anthropologists aim to contribute to a better understanding of conflicts as cultural rituals that, next to other and more 'accommodating' rituals, help define the cultural (dis)orders in social life. These rituals may take place explicitly, but also implicitly, as the "more subtle forms and dimensions of conflict" (idem, p. 22). In fact, most contemporary conflicts are not out in the open. To better understand how (c)overt conflicts are played out in cultures, it is important, as Tilly (2003) underlines, that we take a more relational approach to understand how conflicts and various other forms of social life become intertwined by means of various culturally specific mechanisms and processes.

Sociologists look for the structural conditions under which conflicts can emerge in societies as well as to ways in which societies socially construct conflicts at various scales: "Some sociologists might focus on interpersonal conflict between individuals, such as those focusing on conflict resolution among community members, while other sociologists might examine inter-state or inter-region conflict" (Tindall et al., 2015, p. 153). Whatever the scale, these sociological approaches focus on various social and material relations that seem to surround the examined conflicts. By exploring these relations, a sociologist of conflict thus aims to gain insights into how various members of a social group/network socially construct emerging conflicts and how they then "impel its members to act in ways that generate conflicts with other social units. These characteristics include conditions that foster emotions and cognitions driving members of social systems" (Kriesberg, 1998, p. 37).

Social constructivists tend to use discourse analysis to explore which norms, values or institutions contributed to a certain conflict (or may be altered to stimulate peace and order). As a consequence, conflicts are typically seen as *the result of a process* of historical contingencies, inter-subjectivities, genealogies and social constructions (Bauman, 1989; De Graaf, 2016).

Despite their major epistemological and ontological differences, these traditions in conflict studies have in common that conflicts are viewed as problematic. Most conflict researchers are also, as De Graaf (2016) argues, 'idealists' with a strong desire to resolve or mitigate conflicts. Acknowledging how conventional conflict theories have approached conflicts in distinct yet complementary ways, I would like to address three main assumptions in these literatures:

1. Conflicts are predominantly seen as highly undesirable, destructive, stressful and frustrating outcomes that require active approaches to manage/resolve them;

2. Conflicts are often approached from an actor-centred perspective that directs a search towards the causes of conflict found in the human psyche, cultural rituals, or society at large; and

3. Conflicts are undeniably modelled in reference to our own pursuits of (disciplinary) knowledge production. By recurrently sticking to our own observations, I and any other observer of conflict situations can only partially observe what I will next define as a conflict.

1.4 Towards a Conflict-Centred Approach

Some conflicts appear to take on a life of their own. They continue even though the issues that initially gave rise to them have long been forgotten or become irrelevant. Other conflicts are like malignant tumors; they grow out of control and enmesh the conflict participants in a web of hostile interactions and defensive manoeuvres that continuously worsen their situations, making them feel less secure, more vulnerable, and more burdened.

(Deutsch, 1994, p. 22/23)

In response to the predominantly negative, actor-oriented and disciplinary observations of conflicts, I will introduce a counterintuitive perspective that does not immediately look into the circumstances of conflicts, but instead sees conflicts as interesting social processes in their own regard. In this thesis, I therefore present a theoretical framework that concerns the social life of conflicts that is foremost based on lessons learned from Social Systems Theory (King & Thornhill, 2003; Luhmann, 1993, 1995, 2013; Seidl, 2004), Actor-Network Theory (Latour, 2004; Law, 1994, 2002; Law & Mol, 2002; Law & Singleton, 2005; Law & Urry, 2004) and Evolutionary Governance

Theory (Beunen, Van Assche, & Duineveld, 2015; de Vries & Aalvanger, 2015; Duineveld, Van Assche, & Beunen, 2017; Van Assche, Beunen, & Duineveld, 2014). A key point of departure and commonality in these theories is an epistemological stance that does not isolate or take conflicts for granted, nor holds any prior judgement about alleged negative or positive outcomes of conflicts. Instead, I aim to focus my attention more directly on the potential trajectories and performances of conflicts, by which we may observe any conflict as a dynamic 'ethnographic object' in its own regard (Tsing, 2005).

The latter suggestion resonates with the notion of friction as explained by Anna Tsing as "the awkward, unequal, unstable, and creative qualities of interconnection across difference" (Tsing, 2005, p. 4). Tsing argues that frictions (like conflicts) are found practically everywhere. And by taking them more seriously, a researcher like myself can explore how various universals engage with, mobilise and change different actors, objects and practices throughout their historical trajectories. Universals, as Tsing moves on, must always be seen as unfinished achievements (e.g. capitalism) that "must travel across distances and differences, and we can [indeed] take this travel as an ethnographic object" (2005, p. 7). The idea of traveling conflicts forms an interesting challenge to explore how conflicts can evolve spatially, as social entities that we may follow in their own regard, with their own set of social relations, and their own unique reality effects.

In this thesis, I focus on conflicts as nothing more or less than social interactions, and explore how these interactions emerge or persist in certain situations. By borrowing mostly from Niklas Luhmann's Social Systems Theory, in particular his chapter on 'Contradictions and Conflicts' (1995, pp. 357-404), I will specifically approach conflicts as *communications*. According to Luhmann, conflicts can be considered as communications by addressing them as particular kind of social systems. In a nutshell, a conflict can be seen as a social system if at least two corresponding communications mutually contradict one another over time (Luhmann, 1995, 2013). This implies that conflicts can arise easily; one party communicates something and another party interprets this and reacts with a contradictory response, the first party then interprets the response, et cetera, et cetera:

> ego assumes that alter (as alter ego) already employs the conflict model (with whatever care, concealment, or limitation) and draws consequences for himself from this. Alter observes this and draws the opposite consequences. Therefore, a conflict can arise almost without any objective. Even a vague expectation of an expectation's acceptance to be answered with the vaguest no will suffice. (Luhmann, 1995, p. 390).

While 'vague expectations' can trigger a counter-response in this explanation, doing nothing may arguably also become interpreted as an act of war by either ego or alter, hence possibly leading to further escalation of the conflict in question. In contrast, an explicit utterance or act that does not lead to any further interpretation and reaction may exist ontologically but cannot be called a conflict.

> Wherever a communication is rejected, there is a conflict, and whenever an expectation is communicated and remains unchallenged by a subsequent communication, there is not a conflict. Conflict, in other words, depends on someone saying 'no'. It is an outspoken opposition defined as a synthesis of two communications which contradict each other.
> (Malsch & Weiss, 2002, p. 119)

A conflict is thus never the sum of thoughts that exist independently among two or more people. If we study conflicts, we must observe the dynamics and course of action belonging to the communications themselves and not only on the assumed 'cause(r)s' or 'objects' of these communications as is often the case in conventional conflict research. And when we see conflicts as unities that reproduce themselves, we come to see them as continuous processes instead of outcomes. Furthermore, recognising that the conflict communications involved can be both explicit and implicit, we may technically start to speak of conflict as a *social system* according to Luhmann (1995, 2013) or as a *discourse* according to Foucault (1971, 1998). In this thesis, social system and discourse are considered as more or less synonymous, as descriptions of evolving communications that develop themselves more or less independently from the thoughts and intentions of actors.

1.5 Research Questions and Relevance

Using the conflict central approach I introduced above, I can now formulate the main (double) research question of this thesis more precisely:

How do conflicts evolve as social systems, and how do conflicts co-perform conservation tourism?

To answer this main question, three sub-questions will be addressed in this thesis:

A. *How do conflicts develop a life of their own, including a past, present and future?*

B. *How do conflicts relate to their social and material environment?*

C. *How do conflicts interrelate with conservation tourism discourses and practices?*

These sub-questions will help me to rethink the position of conflicts in conservation tourism and to explain how the latter partially becomes enacted by these conflicts (Law & Urry, 2004; Tsing, 2005). Seeing conflicts as dynamic interactions, as social systems, implies that they have a past, present and potentially a future too. As conflict dynamics are expected to be subject to continuous change, it is important to discuss to what extent this dynamic is subject to changes in the social and material environment of these conflicts. How do, for instance, droughts, political instability, oil prices or other conditions influence how past and/or present conflicts endure, (temporarily) fade away, or reignite? And, how do other discourses in conservation tourism react to the (latent) presence of conflicts, and how may any intervention help to increase/decrease the persistency of such conflicts over time?

By exploring these conflict dynamics in more detail, this thesis can make a range of scientific and societal contributions. Scientifically, this thesis will, first of all, contribute to the nascent discussions on conflicts in the field of tourism studies. Second, this thesis will shed light on how conservation tourism realities become co-performed by the presence/absence of conflicts. Third, whereas Luhmann has discussed the dynamic nature of conflicts in theory, he has left us without any description of how conflicts actually evolve in practice. With this thesis, I aim to fill this gap.

In terms of societal impact, this thesis is not meant as an attempt to resolve conflicts. By remaining insensitive to the dynamic nature of conflicts, conflict theorists and professionals have designed an abundance of conflict strategies based on assumed inter-actor differences. All these efforts may go at the expense of more thorough understandings of conflict dynamics that possibly require alternative yet research-intensive interventions, if any. By taking an open-minded and process-oriented perspective, I aim to document on lessons learned and to remain open to how conservation tourism practices evolve. These practices are undeniably subject to long-term trial-and-error experimentation that cannot escape from encounters with conflicts, which in themselves may offer opportunities for socio-material change (cf Callon, 2007; Hillier, 2015; MacKenzie, Muniesa, & Siu, 2007).

1.6 Methodological design: Follow the Conflict(s)

To understand the evolution of conflicts in conservation tourism, I will not delimit myself to focusing on actors alone, or to "following someone, then enrolling and allying, and, lastly, having something in common" (Latour, 2005, p. 6). Instead, as Actor Network Theorists also prescribe, I will approach conflicts in a way similar to how we can approach any other social entity. Indeed, as John Law explains, "to insist on [such] symmetry is to assert that everything deserves explanation and, more particularly, that everything that you seek to explain or describe should be approached

in the same way " (1994, pp. 9-10). In a similar fashion, in this thesis I assume a relational approach, deciding to 'follow the conflict'. For this I need to centre my observations on conflict communications and not a priori on the actors connected to a specific conflict. Again, this does not mean that social actors do not exist ontologically. Actors exist in the environment of a (conflict) discourse and as a product thereof. Nevertheless, conflicts communications, like any other communication, depend on these actors as 'interlocutors', meaning those human (or even non-human) entities that may carry out communications by selecting, uttering and receiving them in loops of communication (Luhmann, 1995; Serres, 1982). As such, (conflict) communications may bring together and shape interlocutors as either "best partners or bitter enemies" (Farias, 2013, p. 8), next to broader distinctions that never exist a priori. It however makes little sense to accept any simplification of a certain conflict by any actor involved (including the researcher), as the range of conflict communications delineates what a conflict is. Yet a conflict, like everything in the context of a conflict, is always subject to change. Whether a conflict is local/global, negative/positive, orderly/disorderly, peaceful/violent, et cetera, any such state must always be seen as a temporary construction (Blok, 2010; Law & Mol, 2002).

By diving into the role of conflicts, we can furthermore understand what conflicts mean to the social actors involved. Not just in terms of how actors make sense of them, but also how conflicts form dynamic and disruptive processes by which the social environment (including these actors) becomes recurrently reshaped (Luhmann, 1995). To clarify this performativity of conflict communications, my intention is not to study whether literal utterances of 'conflicts' simply make the realities that they signify or describe (cf Austin, 1975). Instead, I am more interested in how conflicts, and their responses, become systematic as recurrent and possibly persistent communications that leave "open the possibility of events that might refute, or even happen independently of, what humans believe or think" (Callon, 2007, p. 323). This may thus even mean that those intractable notions of conflict are inevitably subject to semi-independent change by which it becomes hard to explain who or what is able to influence this change. Is it the conflict itself that is able to drive change? The actors involved? The resources at stake?

An important methodological rule to consider here is Luhmann's plea to distinguish between so-called 'first' and 'second' order observations of any social system, including that of conflicts as social systems. A first order observation relates to how any social network observes the realities the members themselves perform (Fuchs, 2001). For instance, how conservation NGOs organise conservation tourism depends on how such organisations perceive and act upon environmental concerns and opportunities. As a consequence, such organisations make various distinctions to

identify what is natural/unnatural, legal/illegal, feasible/unfeasible, et cetera. These distinctions are typically unquestioned from the perspective of the first-order observer, but may contradict with the observations and distinctions made by other first-order observers. This is where a sociological observer can make second-order observations and identify what and how different observations are made by various first-order observers. However, such a second-order observation "cannot do without its own 'hows', being that which it takes for granted when it observes what it observes. These 'hows' remain invisible and taken for granted at this [second] level as well; they are its own common sense." (Fuchs, 2001, p. 27). In this thesis I will correspondingly aim to limit my own observations to second-order observations to explore how conflicts become differently recognized and explained by various networks. At the same time, I aim to understand how conflicts themselves relate to the presence of these networks in their environment.

1.6.1 Case Study Selection

To make second-order observations of conflicts in conservation tourism, I have selected three cases in which I came across a range of conflicts. I chose to explore more than one case study context to explore the "circulation of meanings, objects, and identities in diffuse time-space" (Marcus, 1995, p. 96). My intention is not to find universal conflicts across cases, but rather to explore how conflicts in any case expose interesting variables concerning the evolution and performativity of conflicts that could possibly be observed similarly/differently elsewhere. By conducting multiple case studies, this thesis "tries to do two things more or less simultaneously: understand the specific case well enough to know how it ended up happening the way it did, and at the same time find things to look for in other cases that resemble it in some ways, even though they differ in others" (Becker, 2014, p. 25).

The cases that have been selected for this thesis represent conflicts emerging in conservation tourism practices across three highly diverse geographical contexts. These cases took shape in context of:

a) Namibia and its nationally orchestrated community conservancies programme since the 1980s,

b) Kenya and its broad experimentation with various conservation tourism practices since the 1990s, and

c) Portugal and its uptake of African conservation tourism practices in the rewilding pilot of Western Iberia since 2011.

The selection of conflict cases in these contexts is based on the identification of various stages that these initiatives and associated conflicts have experienced over time. This enables a better understanding of how conflicts evolve in similar yet distinct stages of conservation tourism development. All cases represent typical conservation tourism interventions in regions with low population densities, arid land conditions, high biodiversity values, and livestock dominated rural economies. Interestingly, the observed conservation tourism (and emerging conflict) practices incorporate partially overlapping actor networks of donors, conservation NGOs and specialised safari operators (e.g. USAID, WWF, Conservation Capital, African Wildlife Foundation or Wilderness safaris) that are not only active in African contexts, but recently also in the development of more European Serengeti-type landscapes like Western Iberia (Pellis & de Jong, 2016; Pellis et al., 2013). Although these cases may be characterised by their own unique socio-historical contexts, they do have commonalities when it comes to related knowledge-power networks.

To further outline how these cases relate to one another, table 1.1 provides an overview of the context of each case. It also concludes with the three sub-questions that will be explored in each case. More specific details on the methods applied in each case are provided in subsequent chapters.

Table 1.1: Case Study Outline

	Namibian Conservancies (Chapter 2)	Kenyan Conservation Enterprises (Chapter 3)	Western Iberian Rewilding (Chapter 4)
Developmental status & conservation tourism approach	Maturing Nationally orchestrated CBNRM benefitting over 200,000 people directly since the 1980s/90s (NACSO, 2013, 2018). Conservancy rights regarding wildlife are granted to communities in contrast to former apartheid arrangements where communities had no formal access to income from wildlife or tourism. This CBNRM approach has been praised and visited by interested conservation organisations, including	Growing up Institutional void in Kenya led to important roles for various conservation NGOs, which has created an experimental environment for conservation tourism enterprise development (Van Wijk et al., 2014) across various arid and semi-arid landscapes. This gave rise to many overlapping organisational operations within Kenya's Arid and Semi-Arid landscapes (ASALs) that have not matured into a national	Nascent New wilderness and nature-based economies are envisioned in open-ended restoration ecology experiments (Lorimer & Driessen, 2014) where tourism is naturally incorporated as a solution to finance rewilding objectives. These recent rewilding ideas attract attention and opportunities for novel 'Serengeti' landscapes in Europe, yet are facing various potential conflicts (DeSilvey &

	those involved in Kenya's conservation of ASALs and more recent European rewilding initiatives.	model (yet), as has been the case in Namibia (see also Pellis et al., 2015).	Bartolini, 2018; Wynne-Jones, Strouts, & Holmes, 2018) by which involved actors may be forced to adapt or anticipate.
Leading actors	CBNRM support organisations (NACSO), strong community participation, and (non-) governmental control (de Vette, Kashululu, & Hebinck, 2012). Foreign experts typically manage tourism enterprises.	Multiple conservation NGOs take the lead, as state control beyond national park boundaries is lacking. Communities typically own tourism enterprises, whereas the management of these enterprises remains in private hands.	Rewilding Europe, a European rewilding initiative based in the Netherlands in collaboration with local conservation NGOs, wilderness entrepreneurs, and conservation tourism experts previously active in Africa.
Selected conflict case	Locally established community conflict in a conservancy named Anabeb, which seems to *endure* as community members consider it a *normal* part of life. Such conflicts are typically *ignored* by national conservation tourism practitioners who see this as a local issue that stands apart from their own practices in the region.	Various governance approaches in conservation tourism contribute to a complex *layering* of diverse underlying conflicts that seem to have some sort of *mutual influence* upon one another. This interdependency of conflicts seems to have implications for both the livelihoods of pastoral communities and conservation tourism practices in Laikipia.	Mismatch between 'radical rewilding' (Marris, 2011), local NGO practices, ecotourism entrepreneurs and traditional use of cultural landscapes in Eastern Portugal leads to a range of *potential conflicts* that actors respond to differently. Whereas conflicts in African cases appear to be manifest, these conflicts seem to be avoided or kept latent.
Conceptual contribution & *underlying question*	Persistence of conflicts: *How do conflicts develop a life of their own, including a past, present and future?*	Interrelations of conflicts: *How do conflicts relate to their social and material environment?*	Encounters with conflicts: *How do conflicts interrelate with conservation tourism discourses and practices?*

1.7 Outline of the Thesis

The discussion of conflict dynamics in each case provides theoretic and empirical building blocks that contribute to a more comprehensive explanation of the evolution and performativity of conflicts in conservation tourism. The following chapters each reflect on the role of conflicts in various stages of conservation tourism development. Furthermore, these chapters will discuss to what extent conflicts evolve as A) persisting social systems (indicating how conflicts become subject to their own path dependency), B) transformative social systems that interrelate with peers (indicating how conflicts become interdependent), and C) heated social systems feared by those who encounter them in relation to their own objectives (indicating a role for goal dependencies).

Chapter two will introduce the case of Anabeb Conservancy and its experiences with conflicts as enduring processes. In this chapter a first step is made to theorise on the persistent role of conflicts by examining conflicts as evolving discourses. This resonates with John Law's (1994) notion of a mode of ordering. Like modes of ordering, conflicts can become recognised as distinct discourses next to others that are interchangeably used by social networks to order everyday life.

Chapter three builds on the idea of a persistent conflict communication by inspecting how various local/regional conflicts interrelate and help to mutually sustain one another over time in the context of Loisaba in Laikipia, Kenya. This chapter explores how conflicts depend on more than a conflict-specific genesis, such as a dispute over resources, but rather also evolve parallel to wider conflict discourses found in their environment.

Chapter four then examines why prominent conflicts in previous African cases are not as easily found in the context of recent rewilding experiments across Europe. In this chapter it is argued that the typical avoidance of conflicts, including its consequences, by conservationists and ecotourism developers is subject to how they perceive the potential of these conflicts.

Chapter 5 concludes by combining various theoretical and empirical insights into a comprehensive theoretical framework and discusses how the evolution and performativity of conflicts in conservation tourism can be approached further in the future.

Conservation Tourism Conflicts and Path Dependency
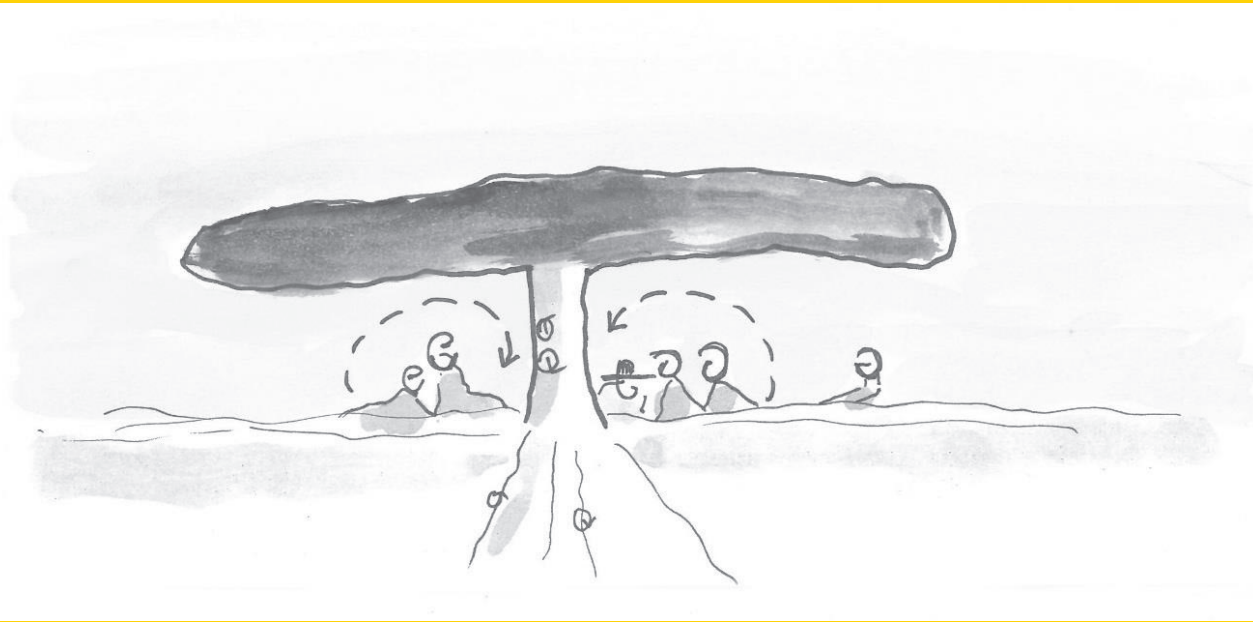
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Abstract

In this chapter, we explore the persistence of community conflict by seeking whether and how conflicts become subject to their own path dependency. The chapter starts by questioning how conflicts have predominantly been described in the tourism literature as taken for granted and problematic instances existing between actors. By taking distance from this actor centred predisposition, this chapter takes lessons from Actor Network Theory and Social Systems Theory to open our observation of conflicts as potentially enduring and self-referential modes of ordering. We argue that we need to explore how conflicts become subject to their own historical pathways by which they eventually emerge and irreversibly become sustained in the places they help to order. To illustrate this process, we show how the endurance of conflicts has dominated community relations and associated tourism developments in and beyond Anabeb Conservancy, Namibia. In this case study we zoom in on the technologies that can shape and maintain conflict, namely: reification, solidification, codification, naturalization, objectification and institutionalization. And finally, through this understanding of conflict paths, we stress that we as researchers or practitioners must be wary of how we run the risk of becoming part of the conflicts we approach.

Keywords: conflicts, autopoeiesis, modes of ordering, conservancies, Namibia

2.1 Introduction

In tourism studies attention is paid in a plethora books and articles to a wide variety of conflicts: human-wildlife conflicts, conflicts between tourists and hosts, conflicts related to destination management, conflicts on stewardship over tourism related resources, value conflicts, or conflicts over inequalities of economic development through tourism (e.g. Dahlberg, 2005; Hitchcock & Darma Putra, 2005; Okello, 2005; Porter & Salazar, 2005). A great deal of this literature has aimed to problematize conflicts and to find solutions for them, based on the taken for granted idea that conflicts ought to be dealt with in order to make sure they do not delay development or produce inefficiency for an industry with such a high net worth (Bennett, Neiland, Anang, Bannerman, Rahman, et al., 2001; Hitchcock & Darma Putra, 2005; Von Ruschkowski & Mayer, 2011). Conflicts are deemed to be in need of management solutions through 'joint collaborative arrangements between public-private partnerships', 'consensus making', 'local involvement', 'participatory community practices', 'good governance' and 'compensation deals' (cf Bramwell & Cox, 2009; Douglas & Lubbe, 2006; Porter & Salazar, 2005; Uddhammar, 2006).

Within tourism studies' work on conflicts, conflicts are conceptualised in large variety of ways, yet there seem to be some recurring features. *First,* conflicts are often seen as entities that exist between two or more actors, like people, classes, organizations or institutions (Ramsbotham, Woodhouse, & Miall, 2011; Robinson & Boniface, 1999). *Second,* conflicts are thought to result from differences between actors and these actors are often presented as fixed entities, pre-existing the conflict. Conflicts are conceptualised as the result of actors' distinctive and somehow oppositional ideas, world views, claims on their environment, ideas for the future, intentions, plans and so on (Domingo & Beunen, 2013; Dredge, 2010). *Third*, except from literatures (mostly outside the field of tourism studies) in which conflicts are conceptualised as productive (Bernshausen & Bonacker, 2011; Putnam, 1994; Van Assche & Duineveld, 2013), many works on conflicts in tourism studies frame them as problematic. Conflicts then should be avoided, resolved or overcome (Eagles, McCool, & Haynes, 2002; Marshall, White, & Fischer, 2007). Related to the latter, there are tourism scholars highlighting the persistent character of conflicts (Lee, Riley, & Hampton, 2010) and scholars that consider conflicts to be mouldable, resolvable or manageable (Bennett, Neiland, Anang, Bannerman, Atiq Rahman, et al., 2001).

Based on insights from ANT and systems theory (Van Assche et al., 2014), we seek to get beyond these actor-centred approaches. We understand conflicts as self-referential modes of ordering. Although, like any mode of ordering, conflicts can disappear or get resolved, yet they have a tendency to endure (Luhmann, 1995). If they endure, they can become (temporarily) stabilised. We will argue that conflicts can only be understood if one takes into account the history of their emergence, understanding them as subject to path dependencies (Duineveld, Van Assche, & Beunen, 2013; Van Assche, Beunen, & Duineveld, 2014). To study these dependencies in more detail we will focus on technologies that shape and maintain conflict, namely: reification, solidification, codification, naturalization, objectification and institutionalization. Furthermore, through our understanding of conflicts, we stress that we paradoxically become part of ongoing path dependencies of conflict.

To further develop our analytical framework we will mine several (ethnographic) studies of conflict in Anabeb Conservancy in North-west Namibia (Lipinge, 2010; Pellis, 2011a; Sullivan, 2003). The findings we present are based on a triangulation of: 1) fieldwork performed in and around Anabeb Conservancy (Pellis, 2011a, 2011b) 2) ethnographic findings of Sian Sullivan (2003) who observed related developments in the larger region of Sesfontein between 1992 and 2000, and 3) different scientific, professional and historical accounts (see for example Corbett & Daniels, 1996; IRDNC, 2011; Lipinge, 2010; MET, 2011; NACSO, 2013). Field notes were taken, 37 in-depth interviews

conducted, and participant observations aid in reconstructing how conflict in Anabeb has become manifested before and after the introduction of the prestigious policy model of Namibian community conservation.

We will first present the basic premises of our theoretical framework and related concepts. Then we will return to the case of Anabeb Conservancy to demonstrate the importance of often-underestimated path dependencies occurring at the background of tourism developments projects. Based on our analysis we will further develop our conceptual framework and critically discuss to what extent it is conceptually useful to consider and observe conflicts as self-referential entities.

2.2 Conflicts Forever: Theoretical Framework

2.2.1 Self-referential Conflicts

We compose our conceptual framework using inspiration from actor network theory (Latour & Woolgar, 1986; Latour, 2004; Law, 2004; Mol, 2002) and Niklas Luhmann's systems theory (Luhmann, 1987, 2000). The coalescence of ANT and systems theory, as beautifully demonstrated by Stephen Fuchs (2001, cf. Bryant, 2011; Teubner, 2006), provides us with theoretical and conceptual formulations of conflicts as entities with their own history of emergence. Conflicts have a life of their own, marked by different dependencies and different technologies that co-constitute them. Contrary to the latent assumption or overt hope that conflicts can be resolved – that they are temporary, non-static events – we argue that they have a propensity to endure (Luhmann, 1995) because they are self-referential modes of ordering. To mine these different theoretical foundations and construct a compatible theory we will first explicitly present our theoretical argument.

2.2.2 Self-referential Modes of Ordering

We align with ANT as a radical constructivist theory, in the sense that every element in a network (or in a mode of ordering) is constituted within that network. A priori the observation of a mode of ordering, we cannot presume persons, objects, concepts or any 'thing' else to be fixed entities, waiting patiently 'out there' for their discovery. They are the contingent outcome of particular mode of orderings.

According to ANT, some of the capacities of humans and non-humans should be treated equally: agency for example cannot be presumed for humans only; non-humans can have agency too (Sayes, 2014). For Luhmann humans and non-humans are also treated more or less equally, because agency is *absent* for both. They exist in the environment of a mode of ordering or they are constituted within it. They can 'irritate' a mode of ordering, but lack the agency to steer or control it. For

Luhmann, a social system consists of communications and only communications communicate, not humans, artifices, things, individuals, washing machines, animals or rocks.

These communicative modes of ordering, furthermore, are autopoietic or self-productive (Luhmann, 1995). The elements constituted within a mode of ordering are reproduced through a self-referential network of communications communicating with each other. Van Assche and Verschraegen illustrate the theory of autopoietic systems with the following example:

> For in order to circumscribe a particular class of systems, such as organic, psychic or social systems, one has to distinguish the recursive (or 'repeated') self-referential operation that ensures the production and reproduction of all the basic elements. Operations of this kind are, for example, thoughts, produced from previous thoughts and generating further thoughts: from their connection results the psychic system, that is, consciousness. There is no production of thoughts outside consciousness, and consciousness exists if and as long as it is able to continuously produce new thoughts that are only its thoughts. These thoughts are indissolubly linked to the chain of operations that produced it and cannot be exported into other consciousness; in other words: one cannot enter 'the head' of another individual (Van Assche & Verschraegen, 2008, p.267).

For Luhmann not only is the brain operationally closed, but all modes of ordering are. A mode of ordering produces itself and thereby delineates itself from its environment. Modes of ordering appear in each other's environment and observe each other based on their own internal dynamics. This implies that although they can influence each other, they never directly communicate, nor do they determine each other's reproduction (Luhmann, 1995). A scientific mode of ordering, for example, cannot determine or steer a political mode of ordering and vice versa. Likewise, labelling tourism entrepreneurs as sustainable does not necessarily imply any change within the economy related to tourism, and the chances are very limited it will directly affect the environment (Moeller, 2006). Although there are interdependencies between different modes of ordering, one mode of ordering can never communicate with another mode of ordering, or with an event in the environment of a mode of ordering. Observations of other modes of orderings, of events in the environment of one mode of ordering are always mediated by the internal dynamics of that mode of ordering. That is, modes of ordering in a Luhmannian perspective are ontologically distinct from their environment. If we add these insights of Luhmann to ANT, we can say that modes of ordering are self-referential and operationally closed.

But what about conflicts? Instead of observing conflicts as something in between actors, we follow Bernshausen and Bonacker (2011, p.24) who, following Luhmann, claim that:

As opposed to actor-centric approaches, systemic approaches – and especially approaches founded on systems theory – direct considerable attention to the self-selectivity and self-referentiality of conflicts. Based on this perspective, conflicts tend to escalate due to cumulative effects that the participants can often neither control or nor fully understand.

Conflicts, then, do not exist between modes of ordering. Difference between them can exist but conflicts are not the explicit and contested difference or contradiction between different actors or between modes of ordering (Luhmann, 1995, p. 389). Different modes of ordering may be observed to have totally different interests, yet this only implies that there are differences, not conflicts. A conflict is a conflict when it is an operationalized contradiction, not a latent one (Luhmann, 1995, p. 394). Conflicts as self-referential modes of ordering exist parasitically, meaning that they have the tendency to draw all the attention and resources to the conflict (Luhmann, 1995, p. 390). They also occur daily and randomly. They can emerge everywhere; any time and can easily disappear, yet often they can also make a "greater social career" (Luhmann, 1995, p. 392). In the words of Luhmann:

> *As social systems, conflicts are autopoietic, self*-reproducing unities. Once they are established, one can expect them to continue rather than to end. Their end cannot ensue from autopoiesis, but only from the system's environment as when one party in the conflict kills the other, who then cannot continue the social system of conflict. (Luhmann, 1995, p. 394)

Seemingly stable conflicts, embedded in and sustained by a variety of networks, discourses or institutions, are subject to constant change, whatever the perceived eternal meaning at any given point (Duineveld, Van Assche, & Beunen, 2013). The historical and contextual contingency of conflicts becomes visible when some observers (e.g. a scientific mode of ordering) start to observe how other modes of ordering observe (Fuchs, 2001) conflicts, or how they embody conflicts.

2.2.3 Conflict Formation

After coming into existence, conflicts are constantly evolving and although this is not determined by the context (the environment) in which they evolve, they cannot escape the impact of their history of emergence (Callon, 1991). Conflicts are therefore marked by path dependencies that enable and constrain their evolution (Van Assche et al., 2014). Here, one could think of the early formation of conflicts, laying grounds for the formal and informal institutions that naturalise an opposition (Van Assche, Beunen, Jacobs, & Teampau, 2011; Van Assche, Beunen, & Duineveld,

2014; North, 2005). Path dependency is shaping the course of a conflict at each step, marked by interdependence: the evolving relationship between involved actors. Path dependency creates limited possible progressions in the evolution of conflicts.

A path is a series of events and decisions within which a conflict is formed that can relate different sites (or contexts). Settings like conversations in the corridor or at parties can be sites; NGOs, bureaucratic organizations and academic contexts can be sites too. In different societies, times and contexts, different sites function as 'authorities', like universities in some or NGOs in others (Duineveld et al., 2013). These sites can be more influential to the formation and stabilisation of a conflict than others: they can formalise what is informal in other sites, make the conflict known to a wider audience, or put it under theoretical scrutiny (Foucault, 1972). Each site can have unique knowledge/power relations, influencing the formation of conflicts (Law, 2004). With each step on the path and within each site through which the conflict travels, the irreversibility of a conflict can be increased or decreased – it can stop or be fortified, with each subsequent decision, depending on the sequence that preceded it (Duineveld et al., 2013). *Reification*, *solidification* and *codification* (Duineveld et al., 2013; Van Assche et al., 2014) are techniques that enable us to understand the emergence of a conflict. These techniques can be supplemented by three techniques of conflict stabilisation that increase the likelihood of a conflict to persist: *naturalisation*, *objectification* and *institutionalisation*. Before detailing how these techniques might be realized, we turn towards the example at hand: the life of a particular conflict in Namibian community conservation.

2.3 The Case of Namibian Community Conservation

Namibian community-based conservation has an international reputation for its success, a success that is at odds given the general low success rate and critique of Community Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) projects around the world (Brockington, 2004; Büscher & Dietz, 2005; Dressler et al., 2010). According to the Namibian Ministry of Environment and Tourism (MET), its policy provides communities with "unprecedented incentives to manage and conserve their areas and wildlife" (MET, 2011). Such incentives, they claim, are enacted through local, regional and national property right arrangements that prescribe the management of unique wildlife resources on communal land (MET, 2011). Resources are managed by local custodians, supported by local organizations, and embedded in (inter)national community conservation frameworks. As the Namibian Association of Community Based Natural Resource Management Support Organizations (NACSO) states, these frameworks ought to enable rural communities to earn benefits from wildlife roaming over their land (NACSO, 2013). Where land formally remains in

the hands of the Namibian state, registered communities are given formal rights to benefit from what is claimed to be sustainable natural resource management.

A dominant philosophy within this Namibian conservancy discourse is the ideal of CBNRM that emphasizes a decentralized management of land use. A coalition of rural communities is said to be capable of managing common resources whereby both nature conservation and economic development are enhanced (Boudreaux & Nelson, 2011; MET, 1995):

> Conservancies are self-selecting social units or communities of people that choose to work together and become registered with the Ministry of Environment and Tourism (MET). In order to meet the conditions for registration a conservancy must have a legal constitution, and have clearly defined boundaries that are not in dispute with neighbouring communities. They must also have a defined membership and a committee representative of community members. Conservancies are also required to draw up a clear plan for the equitable distribution of conservancy benefits to members. (NACSO, 2013, p. 11)

Over the past twenty years Namibian conservancies have irrefutably become a showcase for community conservation in Southern Africa, with solid numbers indicating growing wildlife populations and economic benefits for the rural poor (Boudreaux & Nelson, 2011; NACSO, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2013; Weaver & Skyer, 2003). Conservancies are presented as unique in that they allow rural communities almost full ownership and management of local natural resources (Hulme & Murphree, 1999), making the Namibian CBNRM system "one of the most successful examples of legal empowerment of the poor of the past decade" (Boudreaux & Nelson, 2011, p. 17). Recently, NACSO (2013) reported that around 79 conservancies make about 50 million Namibian dollars per year for over 250,000 rural communities on nearly 150,000 square metres of land. Figure 2.1 illustrates how North-western (Kunene) and parts of Eastern Namibia (the Caprivi strip) have particularly embraced conservancy management. Much of Namibia's tourism itineraries are organised within these areas.
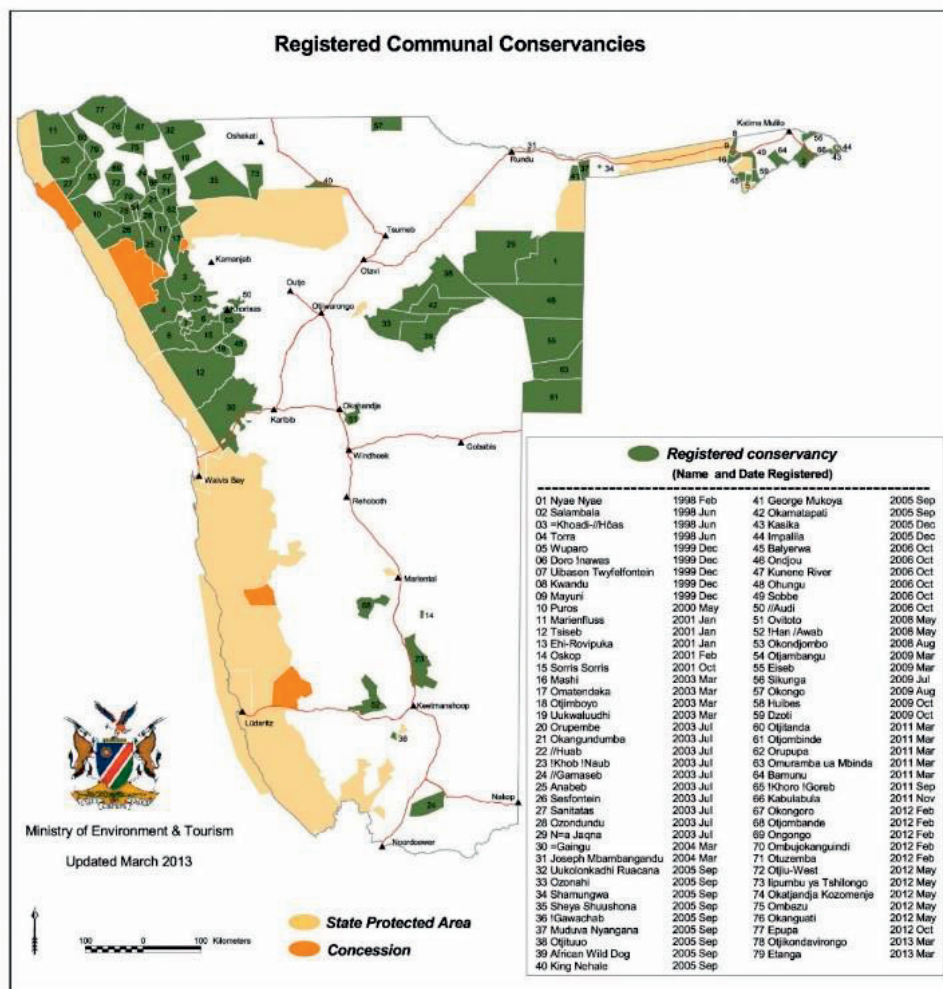
Registered Communal Conservancies

Registered conservancy
(Name and Date Registered)

01 Nyae Nyae	1998 Feb	41 George Mukoya	2005 Sep
02 Salambala	1998 Jun	42 Okamatapati	2005 Sep
03 =Khoadi-//Hôas	1998 Jun	43 Kasika	2005 Dec
04 Torra	1998 Jun	44 Impalila	2005 Dec
05 Wuparo	1999 Dec	45 Balyerwa	2006 Oct
06 Doro !nawas	1999 Dec	46 Ondjou	2006 Oct
07 Uibasen Twyfelfontein	1999 Dec	47 Kunene River	2006 Oct
08 Kwandu	1999 Dec	48 Ohungu	2006 Oct
09 Mayuni	1999 Dec	49 Sobbe	2006 Oct
10 Puros	2000 May	50 //Audi	2006 Oct
11 Marienfluss	2001 Jan	51 Ovitoto	2008 May
12 Tsiseb	2001 Jan	52 !Han /Awab	2008 May
13 Ehi-Rovipuka	2001 Jan	53 Okondjombo	2008 Aug
14 Oskop	2001 Feb	54 Otjambangu	2009 Mar
15 Sorris Sorris	2001 Oct	55 Eiseb	2009 Mar
16 Mashi	2003 Mar	56 Sikunga	2009 Jul
17 Omatendaka	2003 Mar	57 Okongo	2009 Aug
18 Otjimboyo	2003 Mar	58 Huibes	2009 Oct
19 Uukwaluudhi	2003 Mar	59 Dzoti	2009 Oct
20 Orupembe	2003 Jul	60 Otjitanda	2011 Mar
21 Okangundumba	2003 Jul	61 Otjombinde	2011 Mar
22 //Huab	2003 Jul	62 Orupupa	2011 Mar
23 !Khob !Naub	2003 Jul	63 Omuramba ua Mbinda	2011 Mar
24 //Gamaseb	2003 Jul	64 Bamunu	2011 Mar
25 Anabeb	2003 Jul	65 !Khoro !Goreb	2011 Sep
26 Sesfontein	2003 Jul	66 Kabulabula	2011 Nov
27 Sanitatas	2003 Jul	67 Okongoro	2012 Feb
28 Ozondundu	2003 Jul	68 Otjombande	2012 Feb
29 N=a Jaqna	2003 Jul	69 Ongongo	2012 Feb
30 =Gaingu	2004 Mar	70 Ombujokanguindi	2012 Feb
31 Joseph Mbambangandu	2004 Mar	71 Otuzemba	2012 Feb
32 Uukolonkadhi Ruacana	2005 Sep	72 Otjiu-West	2012 May
33 Ozonahi	2005 Sep	73 Iipumbu ya Tshilongo	2012 May
34 Shamungwa	2005 Sep	74 Okatjandja Kozomenje	2012 May
35 Sheya Shuushona	2005 Sep	75 Ombazu	2012 May
36 !Gawachab	2005 Sep	76 Okanguati	2012 May
37 Muduva Nyangana	2005 Sep	77 Epupa	2012 Oct
38 Otjituuo	2005 Sep	78 Otjikondavirongo	2013 Mar
39 African Wild Dog	2005 Sep	79 Etanga	2013 Mar
40 King Nehale	2005 Sep		

Ministry of Environment & Tourism

Updated March 2013

State Protected Area

Concession

Figure 2.1 Registered Communal Conservancies in Namibia (MET, 2013; cited in NACSO, 2013)

NACSO attributes the positive economic returns from rural community efforts mostly to gains derived from trophy hunting and joint venture tourism (NACSO, 2010, 2013). The functioning of community conservancies are, as such, a vital partner for the Namibian tourism industry, one of Namibia's priority sectors (Novelli & Gebhardt, 2007; WTTC, 2006).

Tracing a path dependency for this success, conservancy discourses attribute the source of the Namibian model to early developments in the North-western region of Kunene since the 1980s (IRDNC, 2011; Murphy, 2003). Informal community conservation was taking place well before conservationist discourses became popular in many parts of Africa. It was only after independence (since the 1990s) that an international discourse on community conservation started to reflect a

more utilitarian use of wilderness that was increasingly promoted by international networks in nature conservation and natural heritage protection (cf Barrow & Murphree, 2001).

2.3.1 Conservancy Conflict

Observations beyond these narratives of success, however, inform us that Namibian community conservation projects are definitely not without conflicts (Boudreaux & Nelson, 2011; Murphy, 2003; Pellis, 2011a; Sullivan, 2003). During the performance of our first stage of fieldwork amongst various group members in the birth place of Namibian community conservation in Kunene, our presence was met with suspicion to say the least (Pellis, 2011a). Where interviews demanded local

translation, our first translator accordingly belonged to a well-connected political faction of the so-called 'Kasaona family'. Questioning any other family related faction in either Anabeb or neighbouring conservancy of Sesfontein (see figure 2.2) required the use of different translators entrusted by respondents to represent their interests well.
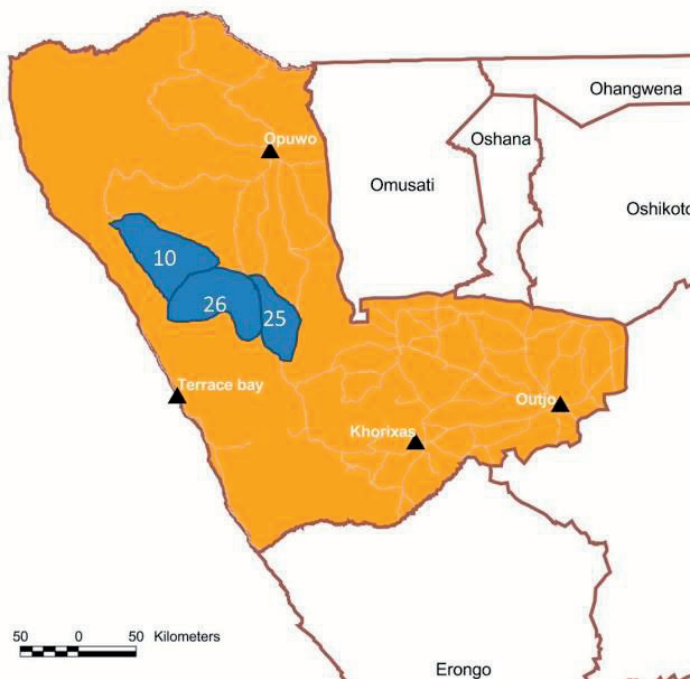
Figure 2.2: Anabeb (25), Sesfontein (26) and Puros (10) conservancies in North-western Namibia (based on IRDNC, 2014)

Initially, we researchers were branded as Kasaona affiliates by other family factions in the area of Anabeb. This changed when we started to hire different translators for each respondent. We were asked by community members to approach different factions with utmost care, as any question related to current disputes in Anabeb or Sesfontein would possible surface already tense interrelationships between factions. We experienced a multiplicity of tensions that seemed to have become established into an ever-present and unquestionable conflict to insiders in Anabeb. Controversially, this nebulous conflict was observed by external (public and private) networks as ever-present and ineradicable in 'communities': there has, according to proponents of Namibian

CBNRM, always been conflict in communities, yet this has, in their observation, nothing to do with the business of community conservation.

One frequently repeated complaint by community members of conservancies throughout Kunene concerned the mysterious disappearance of earnings from conservancy accounts. According to some community members the 'money was eaten' by powerful people with access to conservancy accounts. Others argued income was lost due to inefficient daily management of conservancy personnel. Often mentioned conflicts in the larger region of Kunene concerned the overall distribution of jobs, the lack of transparency in communication and the unequal use of conservancy assets (Murphy, 2003; Pellis, 2011a; Sullivan, 2003). Other conservancy tensions concerned the undermining of the autonomy of traditional leaders. Before the introduction of conservancies they had had an informal role in allocating land use. Hence for them conservancies competed with their traditional authority (Corbett & Daniels, 1996). These everyday events might be observed as ephemeral, but are often "anchored in more stable conflicts and dilemmas which help to characterize the texture of a more enduring political context" (Meadowcroft, 2002, p. 172).

How can we explain the stark contrast observed between Namibian CBNRM as an international success story and the many controversies occurring on the ground? In order to more fully understand the discrepancy between the success stories and conflicts observed, we expand our case study to neighborhood levels, to trace the emergence and endurance of conflict(s) within the context of Anabeb Conservancy.

2.3.2 The Emergence of a Conflict

Until 2000, Anabeb was embedded within Sesfontein conservancy. Various (escalating) conflicts dating back to early community conservation efforts in the 1980s resulted eventually in fracturing Sesfontein into three autonomous conservancies (see earlier figure 2.2): 1) *Puros conservancy* in the west of Sesfontein constituency (registered in 2000), 2) *Sesfontein conservancy* in central Sesfontein constituency (registered in 2003), and 3) *Anabeb conservancy* south-east of the Sesfontein constituency (registered in 2003). To exemplify how conflicts play a central role in these developments, we will continue to provide a brief version of historical context of recurring conflicts in this specific region of Kunene, eventually reflecting upon specific developments taking place in present-day Anabeb conservancy. One particular regional conflict is of major importance: originally enacted by two

dominant Herero families, this conflict is affecting and affected by discursive alliances in this region that includes connections to locally based NGOs funded by international donors.
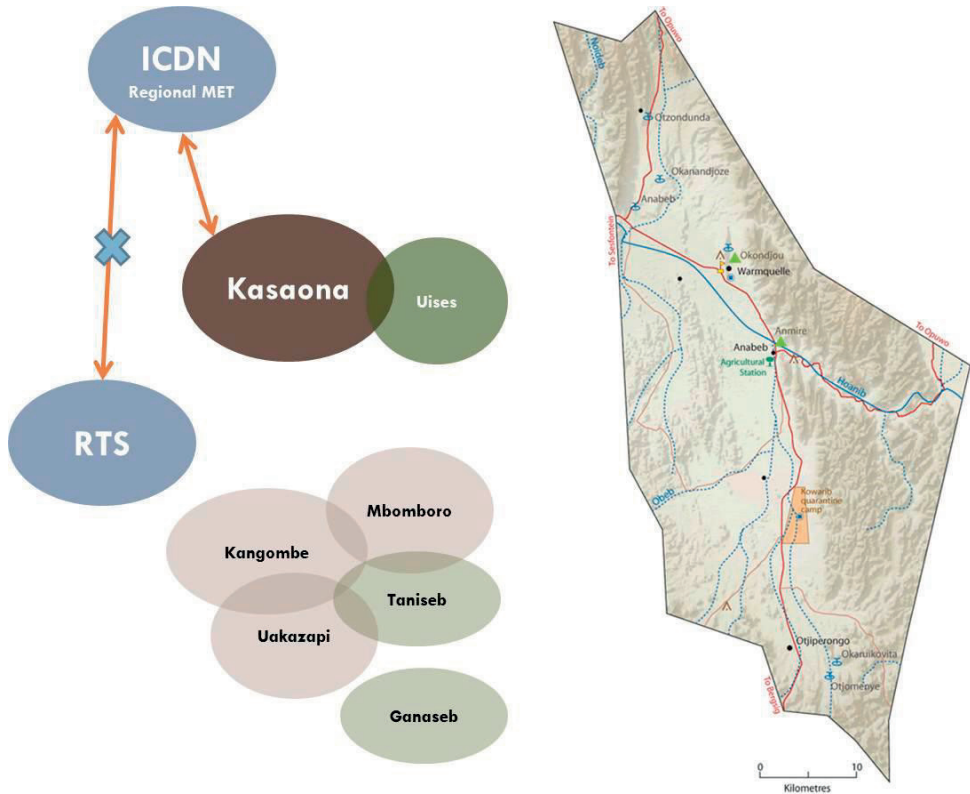
Figure 2.3: Communal factions in Anabeb & a detailed map of Anabeb Conservancy (NACSO, 2013)

Due to past ethnic migrations and displacements, Anabeb conservancy currently contains 7 traditional groups: 4 Herero (Kasaona, Kangombe, Uakazapi, Mbomboro) and 3 Damara (Uises, Taniseb, Ganaseb) family lines. These groups and relative coalitions are outlined in figure 2.3.

To constitute conservancy management, two regionally based conservation and development NGOs within Kunene (co-funded by international donors) have actively been organizing support with traditional leaders since the 1980s. Their formal aim was to protect highly valued wilderness resources such as desert lions, rhinoceros, desert adapted elephants, and other animals (Blaikie, 2006; S. Jones, 2006; Novelli & Gebhardt, 2007). Western managing partners of both NGOs

previously worked for one conservation organization in Kunene. Due to personal differences that we were unable to reconstruct, one of these Western partners decided to establish a second organization, which became active through a Community Game Guard programme in 1982 (Jones, 2001). The newly established NGO, that we call Integrating Conservation with Development in Namibia (ICDN; cf. Sullivan, 2003) was increasingly perceived by (marginalized) community members as a political force with strong ties to one particular Herero family: the Kasaona. It was the ICDN who formally introduced community conservation in cooperation with different village headmen in Kunene (personal correspondence with local game guard in Warmquelle). "The ICDN is the mother of the conservancy," and when its Western managing partner transferred management to one of the local Kasaona employees, "the ICDN became Kasaona" (headman in Warmquelle). In the contemporary organizational structure of the ICDN, we still find foremost Herero staff members named, or closely connected to, Kasaona (cf Pellis, 2011b).

Local reconstructed memories of first conservancy-related conflict date back to 1999/2000, when a former treasurer of Sesfontein conservancy was publicly accused of fraud related to missing financial accounts reserved for conservancy salaries. Not long after these accusations, the conservancy office in Sesfontein, interviewees reported, was shut down by armed Herero guards. A heated protest march organised by leaders of various communal groups feeling excluded from conservancy affairs followed shortly after. On 23 February 2000, at a community meeting in Sesfontein, protestors claimed that A) the accused treasurer should be given back his job, that B) armed Herero guards "must leave so that [Damara] gardens [situated near the conservancy office in Sesfontein] can be used in peace", and that C) it is difficult for people "to participate [in conservancy affairs] without access to NGO vehicles". According to a representative of the ICDN, this community meeting "was controlled by an aggressive and unrepresentative faction concerned to bolster their privileged access to resources" (all quoted in Sullivan, 2003, p. 75).

Another observation by Sullivan (2003) depicts former treasurer of Sesfontein conservancy as frequently communicating with a competing regional conservation NGO – which we will call RTS here – to establish tourism enterprises in the region. RTS and the ICDN were seen by community members as competitors for donor income, as both organizations had comparable developmental aims for Kunene. The role of both the ICDN and the RTS is well acknowledged by respondents as an important factor in establishing rivalry between different community factions in the larger Sesfontein constituency.

> If an elephant and an elephant fight, then the grass is suffering. The NGOs in the area
> are fighting. The grassroots, the poor members, are suffering from that because people

who can reach media, who can disperse information easily, are turning things to their wishes. The communities were fighting [in the larger region of Sesfontein]. One group was saying; conservancy from Puros to Palmwag [a concession area south of Anabeb]? We don't want such a conservancy, we want three different conservancies. (Sesfontein councillor)

Those factions in favour of three separate conservancies, including the RTS and the Damara councillor of Sesfontein himself, argued that the region was too large for one conservancy to be managed. One popular argument against the idea of a single conservancy was the wide dispersal of homes throughout the area, making access to central infrastructure – necessary to meet on a regular basis – a practical challenge. This discourse of distance is cited as the official reason why Puros conservancy was the first to split from Sesfontein in 2000 to continue operating as an independent conservancy.

In the end, two political camps emerged from these tensions in the larger area: 1) a resisting (and self-identified underrepresented) set of community groups (both damara and herero) , and 2) a dominant alliance between the Kasaona and the ICDN. The ICDN and Kasaona are seen by the first camp as the 'evil' of all conservancy related conflict in Kunene. These accusations and reactions have resulted into repeating blame games played out by different camps:

...there is always a problem [...] we were from other traditional leaders, traditional set up, I mean other traditional community, and we were the people who mostly involve with the [ICDN] [...] [other leaders] were never informed what was happening in the conservancy, the committee does not inform them well or involve them into decision making. So [these leaders] complain here and then. (headmen Kasaona in Warmquelle)

The problem comes from the people that work for [ICDN], the regional representatives of the Ministry of Environment and Tourism and the Kasaona group. These three groups are together, and that is just where the whole problem comes from (headman Kangombe in Warmquelle)

The heated escalation of 1999/2000 can hardly be explained as a simple fight between two regional NGOs. Instead, local observers dedicate its existence to old quarrel in the region. The Kangombe and Kasaona, both well-represented Herero families in Kunene, have been in dispute since time remembered. Sullivan argues that the 1999/2000 conflict "[plays] out their own dispute" (2003, p. 81). Asking diverse community members in Sesfontein/Anabeb why these two families are engaged in a vendetta, only vague memories, if any, are brought forth. For some it can be explained as

religious (different families practice different religions in and around their homesteads), for some as an old problem that started during apartheid:

> Can you see that big tree? Initially, the old people were getting money from the government. The [government] car was initially standing at the tree, and people would come there to collect. This was before independence, before 1990. It was the South African government who came to provide the elderly. The other headmen didn't want to collect money from this tree, since this tree is owned by me... There are 7 headmen, but the issue was initially just against one here. It was Goliath *Kasaona* [former Kasaona headman]. […]. The whole issue started in the 1980s. Because the government people said that we initially agreed to meet under this tree, and those people who do not want to come…we [the government] don't care, we just give out to those who come. (headman Kangombe based in Warmquelle)

For others the conflict between these two fronts is simply the way things have always been, persistently recurring on various occasions, in diverse appearances. There has always been conflict, it is a fact of life, and it is expected that it will endure forever. 'Why would you even bother researching it?'

2.3.3 Present-day Conflict in Anabeb

In 2010, similar tensions between Kangombe and Kasaona materialised, this time developing into slightly different alliances between communal groups in the south-eastern region of former Sesfontein conservancy (cf Pellis, 2011b). During elections in the village of Warmquelle, new committee members of the conservancy board (the main governing body) were to be elected in August 2010. This time the conservancy in question was Anabeb that once belonged to the larger Sesfontein conservancy.

During elections in Warmquelle, two alliances in Anabeb conservancy emerged in disagreement over the correct sequence of events that day. One group, an alliance related to the Kangombe, wanted to learn more about the functioning of the previous conservancy board before they could decide upon electing new board members. The other group, an alliance related to the Kasaona, held the opinion that the requested report should be due after the elections, since the presentation of last term's performance was not yet ready for public disclosure. Regional election facilitators from the Ministry of Environment and Tourism (MET) and the ICDN were present during the election process, and decided that the elections had to continue in line with the Kasaona argumentation. Facilitators stressed the importance of continuation for the sake of time (more

elections were already planned that day) and democratic principles: "if the majority votes to continue, we continue". The complete opposition, under leadership of Joseph Kangombe, was furious with this process and decided to withdraw entirely from the election, leaving only Kasaona members to vote for the future committee of the conservancy.

> People could not agree upon how the election process should be. And eventually like any other election you will agree upon the process, but at the end of the day if you lose, you start complaining, complaining, complaining…about the other party of breaking the election….this and this and this…people know that you are part of the whole election process. (headman Kasaona in Warmquelle)

Where present day conflict takes place within the context of an election event, it stages the typical recurrence of recognizable old quarrel between earlier mentioned families. This time, the oppositional Kangombe group disappeared from the election process believing that the previous conservancy committee had something to hide. Not addressing this issue became reason enough for this group to block local elections for the conservancy committee, consequently necessitating external interference by the national Ministry of Environment and Tourism (Lipinge, 2010). The Kasaona group argued in complete contrast, promoting democratic procedures and efficient time management. Nevertheless, this conflict is once again seen by all involved parties to frustrate conservancy (and tourism) affairs in the region – developments that, despite all controversy, are still valued as crucial for nature conservation and poverty alleviation to happen (cf Pellis, 2011b).

2.3.4 Understanding and Managing Conflicts

Conversations with policy makers and involved actors on regional, national or international levels revealed different conceptions about conflict in Anabeb Conservancy. These perspectives generally formulate local conflicts as, by definition, local. A spokesperson of a regional supporting NGO illustrates that conservancy conflict circles around trifling self-interest or envy:

> Most conservancies [are] about fighting who is going to be a manager, about income, why the money was spent in this way….[…] people here seem to mix politics with conservancy business...the real problem lies with the fact that there are too many headmen, and all of them want to be represented equally in the management of the conservancy.

Communal differences were also mentioned, especially by politicians on a national level. They argue that these differences were recognized and dealt with in post-apartheid Namibia. After Namibia's independence, a dominant discourse of black empowerment led to popular community participation to make up for past wrong-doings towards ethnic groups under apartheid (Büscher

& Dietz, 2005). One would argue that today only Namibians are living in Namibia, as all people are considered equal in terms of rights; disregarding race, colour, or political position. The Namibian Traditional Authorities Act however creates a contradictory role for 'recognition' of post-apartheid communities and communal leadership structures. Homogeneity of distinct communities is formally required to get conservancies and related communities recognized under contemporary Namibian law. The Act (GoN, 2000) states that a traditional community is:

> an indigenous, homogeneous, endogamous social grouping of persons comprising of families deriving from [...] clans which share a common ancestry, language, cultural heritage, customs and traditions, recognizes a common traditional authority and inhabits a common communal area.

Although traditional leaders are recognized in Namibia, they are occasionally remembered as former representatives of apartheid who "administer[ed] native areas" on behalf of the state (Werner, 1993). There is no longer formal space for traditional authorities to manage 'their' land which used to be a self-proclaimed task of local chiefs who after independence had to re-register themselves (Corbett & Daniels, 1996):

> I think that the chiefs see the conservancy as a person that is taking over their role. [...] The chiefs want to be the one allocating the land, and the one who is getting all the benefits. But the conservancies say no, we are having the right over land, and we are going to allocate this land. We in turn will give you the benefits, like we give to anybody else that is a member of the conservancy. (Spokesperson international conservation NGO)

To deal with the fuzziness of local leadership, conservancies are seen by support organizations as solutions to problems coming from communal conservation: "When the conservancy was coming in, they said let us stop this [conflict]. Let the conservancy take over [...] and we let somebody take over the management because of this conflict" (spokesperson international conservation NGO). The conservancy policy's mode of ordering does not typically recognize a role for local divisions in these conflicts, as illustrated by the approach of supporting organizations: "we didn't really work with groups, but rather on the products. Whoever was there, we were not interested in politics, we are not a political organization" (spokesperson NACSO). Nevertheless, some analysts repeat that strong local governance measures (e.g. clear tenure rights) are instrumental to ensure effective working relations with communities in order to keep developing profitable tourism enterprises (Boudreaux & Nelson, 2011; Murphy, 2003).

One proposed solution to deal with traditional community conflict led to an ongoing experiment to institutionalize the position of traditional authority (TA) representatives into formal conservancy committees. In Anabeb, the conservancy committee consists of ten elected community members (with voting power), and seven traditional authority representatives (without voting power). "Traditional Authorities complain here and there...if that is the case we decide [that] traditional authorities select their representative that is going to represent them on the management board" (ICDN officer).

Related more specifically to the Anabeb election in 2010, mediating officers from the Ministry of Environment and Tourism (MET) observed that most of the issues in Anabeb were related to differences between traditional authorities and more widespread political affiliations. The MET concluded that it is the continued influence of traditional authorities that need "to be clarified in the conservancy constitution" (Lipinge, 2010, p. 7). Traditional divides, in their view, existed already before the election process (cf Murphy, 2003). "You should be careful in arguing that a conservancy creates conflicts in community lands. If you look at the historical development, you see that these conflicts already existed in the past, the conservancy is merely surfacing them to the foreground" (NACSO – a national CBNRM umbrella organization - representative).

In retrospect, the Namibian Ministry of Environment and Tourism explains the entire Anabeb situation as follows: "It is observed that, the root cause of the conflict is a vague Conservancy Constitution with regards to the process of election of the Conservancy Committee" (Lipinge, 2010, p. 12). For the MET it is therefore a matter of improving the implementation of policies and streamlining democratic processes for conflicts to be resolved within the ongoing development of conservancies as a successful policy model.

2.3.5 Enacting Conflicts, Forever?

Our re-mining of a history of decision-making in Sesfontein and Anabeb has shown traces of interdependent conflicts. Old conflicts are partly reproduced in new conflicts. At different sites and at different stages in the development of conflict, old conflict was recalculated in various ways. Pre-conservancy history has illustrated particular mobilizations of communal actors into distinct spatial configurations that, after independence, are simultaneously hidden ("we are all Namibians in one democratic nation") and brought back to the fore (traditional structures and conflict are irrefutably connected to the development of modern communal conservation).

Unrepresented factions within Anabeb/Sesfontein conservancy, especially traditional authorities, cannot fully grasp the idea that 'their' access to land management, to a large extent, is taken over

by an 'apolitical' actor: the conservancy. Simultaneously, there seems to be a general blind trust by community members in the 'goodness' of community conservation as a historical correction for past oppression under apartheid law which would not allow communities to 'rightfully' take decisions on natural resource management (cf Pellis, 2011a). As a consequence, community members, as well as support organizations, continue to search for experimental solutions to 'local' conflicts, and thereby co-construct an ideal and internationally appraised future for Namibian CBNRM. These so-called solutions, such as the re-introduction of traditional authority in conservancy committees or the homogenisation of communities in democratic conservancy policies, do not necessarily solve old and new conflicts, but rather allow old conflict to become manifest. Every proposed change in the conservancy, no matter how good the proposal, is closely observed by opposing factions to a point where it no longer seems to matter what individuals have to say. What truly counts is affiliation to particular modes of ordering; the rest is irrelevant in the eyes of local observers.

2.4 Conflict Formation and Stabilisation

We return now to our theoretical approach towards conflict, to explore how the different techniques of conflict formation and stabilization can help us approach this scenario where conflict can be understood through its path dependency. The first of three techniques that increase the likelihood of conflict to endure is *naturalisation*, the process in which the conflict becomes part of the natural order of things (Barthes, 1957; Foucault, 2006; Fuchs, 2001), it becomes impossible to imagine a world without it. In this process the constructed character of the conflict is hidden, masked or forgotten (Latour & Woolgar, 1986). In this process of masking, conflicts solidify gradually and take up their final shape, the conflict becomes part of the 'warehouse of unquestioned commonplaces' (Duineveld 2011; cf. Fuchs, 2001). In Anabeb/Sesfontein conservancy, an old vendetta between two families has been around as long as people can remember. Members of two renowned families claim not to remember why they actually are in conflict. Over time it has slowly become a *natural* characteristic of this region. One of our translators illustrated this by asking: "why are you interested to learn about this conflict? We all know here that it exists, why bother to look further into it?"

Naturalisation is sometimes highly entangled with the process of *objectification*, which is the processes in which a conflict is constructed as an objective truth, as a fact, as something that seemingly exists independent of observation (Foucault, 1972; 1998). Science, law and bureaucracy are in many societies the dominant sites and sources of objectification. Different alliances in Sesfontein and Anabeb demonstrate how interrelations of conflict have become exceptionally

complicated over time. Encounters between NGO alliances, relationships with other traditional authorities or intermarriages, but also our own scientific inquiry, have contributed to sharpened distinctions between coalitions. We are not claiming that these distinctions are automatically leading to conflict; rather they are a mere result of it, perpetuated as an irreversible effect of already established conflict. Whatever 'solution' is brought in to resolve the situation, the central and historical conflict keeps re-emerging as a strong local immobilizer to desired communal development. We as outsiders might think that such hindrance is negative, and as such we keep on looking for ways to understand conflicts, in order to deal with them.

When conflict is recognised as a distinctive, 'natural kind', by a growing number of institutions, we can speak of *institutionalisation*. The cementing of conflict into organizations, policies, politics, regulations, techniques and plans (cf. Foucault, 1979; Foucault, 2007; North, 1990) increases its path dependency. This enables an increased irreversibility of conflict in a specific practice or discourse. Conservancies are known for its instrumentality to devolve decision making and resolve conflicts through locally established rules. It is within a complex web of national and local regulations that various contradictory traditional and modern practices are to be regulated; e.g. recognizing traditional authorities while ensuring decisive roles for democratically elected community conservancies. Allowing traditional representatives to attend communal conservancy committee meetings symbolises how past conflict between factions have become institutionalised. It might have temporarily satisfied traditional leaders, yet allows old conflict settings to endure.

Reification is the process in which a conflict emerges as more than just a couple of unrelated misunderstandings, utterances or loose assemblages of parts. It becomes a unity, more or less coherent and observable as 'this conflict, not that one'. In time this can lead to a process of solidification where internal connections within a conflict become so tight that they can delineate an existence of their own. Involved community members in Kunene, as well as support organizations, are all too well aware of locally manifested conflict. The fact that it exists, and that it hinders effective community conservation, is disputed by no one. And where conflict in Anabeb/Sesfontein increasingly became distinguishable as a separate entity, it has repeatedly been understood as a local vendetta. Furthermore, conflict was framed particularly in relation to discourses of inequality in benefit distribution coming from the conservancy, not in terms of ethnic or religious differences, which touches upon another (apartheid like) discussion that has not been addressed in this study.

Finally, *codification* is the simplification of conflict boundaries. It comes with the simple applicability of codes to decide on conceptual inclusion/exclusion: 'a conflict about the land not the water

resources', or 'an ideological conflict not a religious one'. Dominant local factions and national policy makers see conflict in Anabeb as a long-lived *local* issue inherent to rural communities, and not as a *national* problem
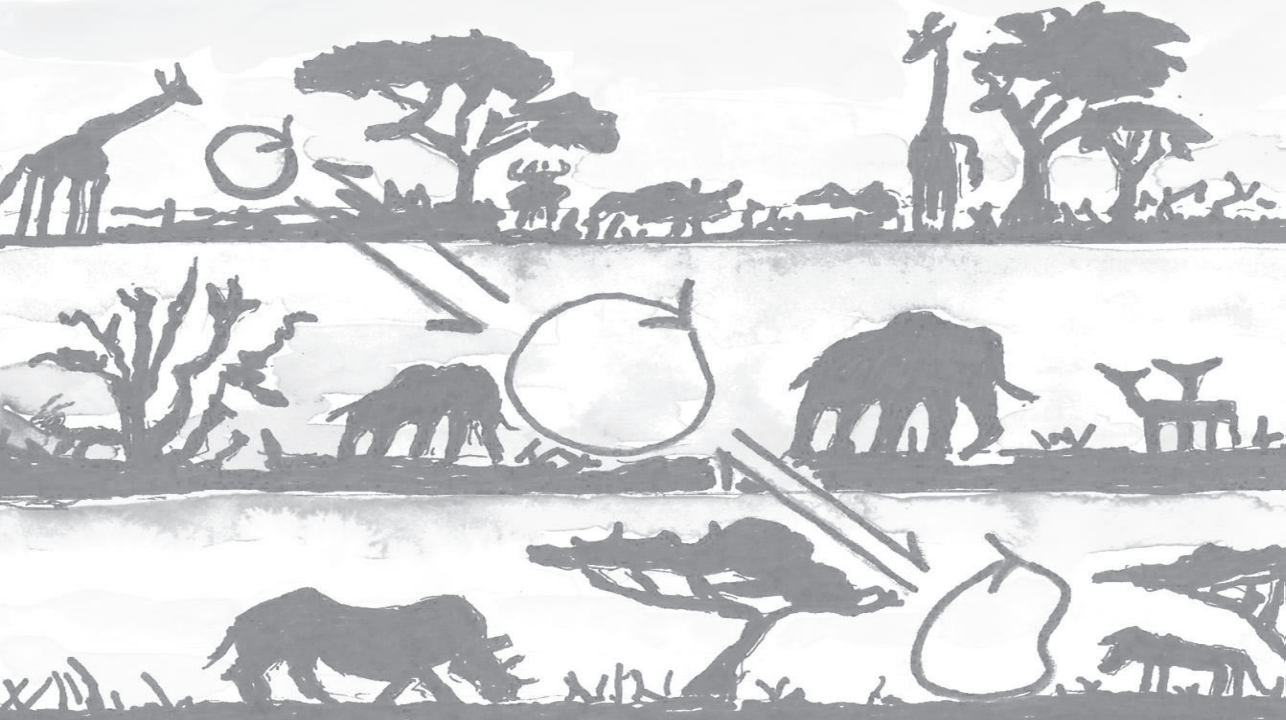
2.5 Conclusion

Much has been written about conflicts in tourism studies, in terms of how they could be managed and overcome. Yet the structural and persistent character of conflicts is often overlooked and the possibility to steer, manage and understand them overstated. We have argued and illustrated that conflicts can only be understood if one takes into account their histories of emergence and ways by which they become solidified, decreasing their possible pathways. When we understand conflicts as self-referential modes of ordering we should be able to observe conflicts through dependencies in conflict formation and stabilisation.

This approach to conflicts enables us to be more critical about the hope implied in the management approaches to tourism conflict. Not only do we argue that it is difficult to expect conflict management to resolve conflicts, we also argue that conflict management can have many other effects. It can temporarily tuck away conflicts, or spuriously stabilise a conflict by making it an object of managerial procedures. By institutionalising factions as oppositional, 'homogenous' groups, they can even perpetuate a state of conflict, making it part of official, institutionalised modes of ordering, which may then be reproduced by international voices that make conflict travel far beyond its local context.

Conservation Tourism Conflicts and Interdependency

Abstract

Contributing to the debate on the multidimensional nature of resource-based conflicts in political ecology, and building upon Niklas Luhmann's Social Systems Theory, we have studied the persistent and shifting nature of conflicts as well as their dependencies on other conflicts in and around Loisaba conservancy. This private conservancy is situated in northern Laikipia (Kenya). For a long time, its management was focused on wildlife conservation, high-end tourism and commercial ranching. Developments and events at neighbouring ranches and community conservation areas shifted this focus. Decades of more or less peaceful regional co-existence has recently transformed into conflictual, sometimes even violent situations. At first sight, these emergent conflicts seem related to recurrent droughts, competing resource dependencies, national elections, or incitements by wealthy and influential politicians. For this study, however, we conceptualise conflicts as particular kinds of discourses that emerge, exist and change. This happens not only according to their own internal logics, but also through their dependencies with other conflict discourses. In this paper, we characterise the relations between conflicts on a range from tight to loose couplings and introduce three related forms of coupling (overpowering, resisting, and resonating) to provide a more detailed understanding of how conflicts may interrelate.

Keywords: Conflict, Social Systems Theory; self-reference, structural couplings, Kenya

3.1 Introduction

In this paper we analyse the shifting yet persistent nature of conflicts as situated in northern Laikipia, Kenya. Recent violent incidents received much (inter-)national media attention in the spring of 2017 (Hastings, 2017; Mwangi, 2017; Wachira, 2017). These media mainly discussed potential causes for the outbursts of violence across northern Kenya. Related reports primarily focus on the role of powerful actors, material processes or recurrent violent events; and overlook the complex, discursive ways in which these conflicts evolve. Conflicts, as we argue in this paper, are not just discursive, but also recursive and dependent upon how other conflicts evolve in parallel and mutual coupling. An understanding of these couplings, or so-called interdependencies (Beunen et al., 2015; Van Assche et al., 2014), proves useful in understanding how conflicts may develop as persistent and (inter-) regional social processes.

To explore the interdependency of conflicts in more detail, we start our discussion with seemingly straightforward conflicts that took shape when Loisaba and neighbouring group ranches started collaborating. Loisaba is a private conservancy that borders different ranches and community conservancies with whom it aims to secure wildlife conservation, high-end tourism and commercial ranching. Decades of more or less 'peaceful' co-existence between different land users and uses,

has recently become highly uncertain. Neighbouring communities have gradually made different grazing arrangements with Loisaba to secure limited access to its grasslands. These arrangements were designed to resolve older land use conflicts (German, Unks, & King, 2016; Nthiga, Van der Duim, Visseren-Hamakers, & Lamers, 2015). However, socio-ecological change in the wider region of Laikipia, Samburu and Isiolo (Figure 3.1) added further layers of complexity to these arrangements and related conflicts over time.
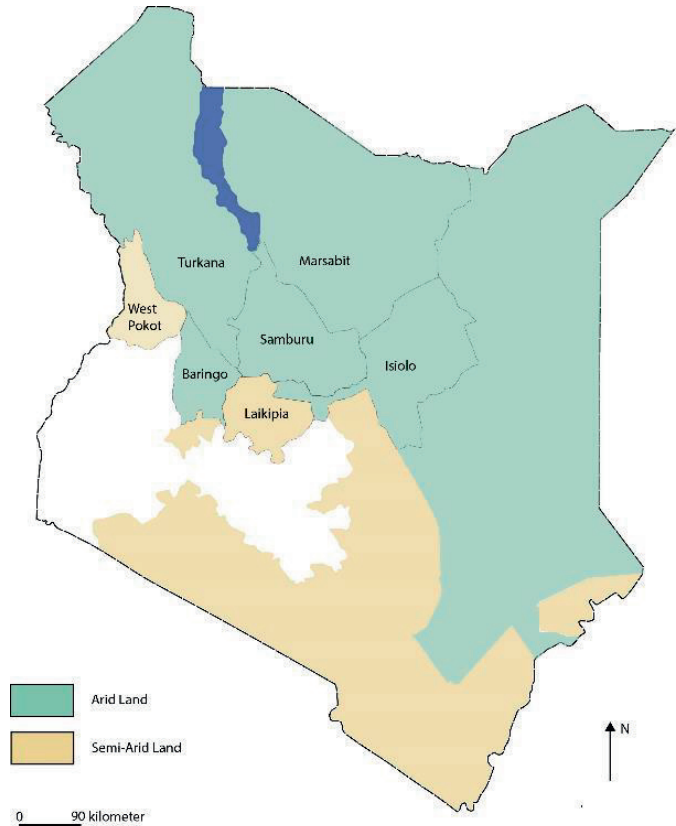
Figure 3.1 : Location of Laikipia, Samburu and Isiolo in Kenya

In- and outsiders tend to explain the re-emergence of conflicts around Loisaba in terms of its perceived causes, such as ordinary grazing tensions, human-wildlife conflicts, recurrent droughts, national elections, or racial inequalities between black and white residents in Laikipia. Powerful external observers (media, NGOs, private enterprises) furthermore describe these conflicts as localised issues triggered by powerful local individuals wanting to increase political control over the Laikipian plateau (Anonymous, 2017).

As an alternative to these predominant perceptions, our analysis is based on a perspective of 'conflict as discourse' (Demmers, 2012; Jabri, 1996), and is inspired, foremost, by Niklas Luhmann's Social Systems Theory. According to Luhmann, conflicts play an important function

in society as self-referential social systems (Luhmann, 1995, 2013). This implies that conflicts operate and reproduce themselves on the basis of their own discursive logics and selective couplings they make with their environment. This Luhmannian perspective not only centres our attention on the function of conflicts, it also helps to understand and reconceptualise how conflicts persist through their interdependencies with other conflicts or wider socio-material processes (cf Beunen et al., 2015; Van Assche et al., 2014).

To advance this perspective on 'conflict as discourse', we empirically explored a set of related mechanisms of conflict interdependencies as found in the context of Loisaba. We will now first expand on our conceptualisation of conflicts, starting with an examination of how conflicts are typically conceptualised in conservation and development contexts from predominant actor-centred perspectives. Secondly, we will discuss our Luhmannian approach as an alternative understanding to conflict as discourse. Thirdly, we will make a critical discourse analysis, as it is a useful methodology to recognise conflict interdependencies in practice. Fourthly, we will analyse empirical interdependencies of conflict on a continuum of tight to loose couplings. And finally, we will introduce three forms of couplings, namely: overpowering, resisting, and resonating.

3.2 Theorizing about Conflicts

Conceptually and theoretically, conflicts have been the subject of long discussions. In the vast literature on integrated conservation and development projects and in the broader field of conflict studies, conflicts are commonly understood, conceptualised and studied in terms of their causes, as the result of rivalries, different interests, or contradictions existing between actors, discourses or ideologies (De Dreu & Gelfand, 2007; Domingo & Beunen, 2013; Kriesberg, 1998; Vallacher et al., 2013). Such a general idea of conflicts focuses on understanding how conflicts started and the causes behind them. This understanding is believed to better equip us to resolve them in practice. Yet, as such, one runs the risk of black boxing the actual processes that constitute conflicts.

As a result, conflict conceptualisations are typically taken for granted. See for instance the discussions on clashes over different conceptualisations and uses of nature (Bosak, 2008; Pellis, 2011b); the exclusion of humans from protected areas (Brockington, 2002; D. M. Hughes, 2005); the rivalries over resources (Gillingham & Lee, 1999; Homer-Dixon, 1999); human-wildlife conflicts, or violent and militarised responses to wildlife crimes (Duffy, 2014, 2016; Lunstrum, 2014; Massé, 2016; Okello, 2005). In these conceptualisations, conflicts are generally seen as negative or unproductive (White et al., 2009; Young et al., 2005).

The difficulty of 'taking care' of conflicts, as we argue, is subject to their nature. Conflicts are generally acknowledged as complex, inevitable, recurrent, or even 'normal' in projects aiming to integrate biodiversity and development objectives (Idrissou, Aarts, Paassen, & Leeuwis, 2011; Le Billon, 2012; Redpath et al., 2013). To understand the complex nature of conflicts, political ecologists have established a longstanding academic exploration of the multi-layered natures of conflict and/or wider social, political and historic constitution of conflicts (Kronenburg García, 2017; Le Billon, 2012; Peluso & Watts, 2001; Sikor & Lund, 2009; Turner, 2004; Van Leeuwen & Van Der Haar, 2016). These explorations contribute to *how* we understand that conflicts may become embedded in wider social and environmental change, moving beyond agent or structure-based determinations that aim to answer *why* conflicts exist.

3.2.1 Conflicts as Discourses

In studying these wider socio-environmental changes and conflict transformations, one may focus on observing conflicts as discourses (Demmers, 2012; Jabri, 1996). Such a perspective, as Demmers explains, makes sense when the boundaries of 'new' conflicts and related forms of violence become increasingly difficult to trace: "war and violent conflict prevailed, but now predominantly on a local scale. Small wars turned out to have dynamics of their own... [and it seems that] they do not have precise beginnings and endings" (2012, p. 8).

To follow the dynamics of contemporary conflicts, scientific analysis may hence focus more on the "relations and interactions at different levels and between a variety of actors" (idem, p. 13). These actors may be individuals but may also become represented by organisations through which conflicts become institutionalised. By exploring conflicts as discourses, one looks at the ways in which conflicts are given meaning through a myriad of interactions at different scales. These interactions may primarily come in words and text, but as inscriptions they may be far from passive. They actually, as Jabri stressed, may have a capacity to "do things. And being active they have social and political implications" (1996, p. 95).

But how to define conflicts once we observe them as performative processes? In conservation contexts, we observe that conflicts are typically conceptualised as a situation "when two or more parties with strongly held opinions clash over conservation objectives and when one party is perceived to assert its interests at the expense of another" (Redpath et al., 2013, p. 100). Different opinions or interests nevertheless do not have to result in a conflict. A conflict is often an emotionally charged communication given shape by words, symbols, weapons, bureaucracies, et cetera (Luhmann, 1995, 2013). A conflict only occurs when a difference (e.g. of opinion or stakes) is expressed and leads to an emotional or heated response, which in return may lead to a counter

response, and so on (Luhmann, 1995; Malsch & Weiss, 2002). Strictly speaking, if nothing happens after a difference is expressed, there is no interaction, hence by definition no conflict (Luhmann, 1995).

3.2.2 Conflicts as Self-referential Discourses

Niklas Luhmann explains that conflicts can be observed as persistent communications that play their own role in how societal processes unfold. Society, as Luhmann (1995, 2013) theorises, consists of distinct yet evolving sets of communications, or so-called social systems. Social systems can be seen as self-referential discourses. This implies that conflicts may be considered as discourses that refer to coherent sets of communications that develop on the basis of previous and other related discourses (Foucault, 1971).

Where the term discourse is itself open to broader debate (Hajer & Versteeg, 2005; Sharp & Richardson, 2001), we follow a definition of discourse as a self-referential "ensemble of ideas, concepts and categories through which meaning is given to social and physical phenomena, and which is produced and reproduced through an identifiable set of practices" (Hajer & Versteeg 2005, p. 175). When we speak of a conflict as a discourse, we consequentially need to recognise that a conflict may emerge and persist semi-independently, yet always interrelated with its (re)'sources' or 'subjects' (Foucault, 1998). This does not mean that actors or practices are irrelevant, but rather, as Foucault would argue, that: "nothing has any meaning outside of discourse" (Hall, 1997, p. 45). Actors in this regard are likewise constituted in discourses; one does not pre-exist the other.

When one starts to observe conflicts as discursive unities, it is important to distinguish the presence of at least two contradicting discourses that mutually reject one another in their own persistent communications. "A conflict [then becomes] the operative autonomisation of a contradiction through communication" (Luhmann 1995, p. 388). Only if contradictions are communicated, we may observe conflicts and their subsequent reality effects. And further, as they become part of communication, conflicts gain the same properties as discourses. They emerge, have a history of their emergence, and hence have a present and a future (cf Pellis, Duineveld, & Wagner, 2015). This implies that they can constitute and reproduce themselves based on their former communications and discursive structuring (see also Turner, 2004).

3.2.3 Conflicts as Parasitical Discourses

When we recognise that conflicts function as discourses, we cannot claim that every discourse is a conflict. Instead, conflicts have several features that make them specific kinds of discourses. Luhmann explains that:

> ...as social systems, conflicts are autopoietic, selfreproducing unities. Once they are established, one can expect them to continue rather than to end. Their end cannot ensue from autopoiesis, but only from the system's environment as when one party in the conflict kills the other, who then cannot continue the social system of conflict. (Luhmann, 1995, p. 394)

Moreover, the persistency of conflicts is characterised by their 'parasitical' nature. In Luhmann's view, conflicts do not only have the capacity to consume resources and related attention by its hosts, conflicts possibly also constrain or enable the way these hosts attach meaning to their own environment (1995, 2013). Furthermore, while some conflicts may disappear over time, others can have a "greater social career" (Luhmann, 1995, p. 392). This depends on how related discourses become available as fuel for a conflict to endure.

3.2.4 The Openness or Closedness of Conflicts

Whether conflicts endure or not, depends on how other social and material processes develop in their environment (Duineveld et al., 2017). This implies that conflicts cannot function as entirely autonomous processes. At the same time external processes cannot entirely determine the evolution of conflicts.

Conflicts as Open and Closed Discourses

In principle, such openness or closed-ness can be explained in terms of so-called 'operational closure' and 'structural openness' (Felder, Duineveld, & Van Assche, 2014; Fuchs, 2001; Seidl, 2004). Operationally closed means that every event external to a conflict can only be understood or observed according to the internal logics of the on-going interactions in that conflict: "There are no operations entering the system from outside nor vice versa . . . [as] the system determines, when, what and through what channels energy or matter is exchanged with the environment" (Seidl, 2004, p. 3). In other words— conflicts are discourses that do not directly become affected by everything occurring in their environment. Conflict discourses are simultaneously 'structurally open', meaning that they would seize to exist when related bodies, materialities and other discourses in their environment disappear. Conflict discourses hence cannot exist without particular actors, resources, atmospheres, ideas, weapons or other relevant ingredients that 'feed' them. Other discourses, people, or events in the environment of a conflict may affect it, but, again, only if they resonate with the on-going internal logics of that conflict (see also Maturana & Varela, 1987; Seidl, 2005; Teubner, 1998).

Conflicts and Coupling

Luhmann finally describes that the internal logics of discursive unities may change nevertheless by influences of the environment. The environment of conflicts namely consists of 'irritations' that may, or may not, characterise the conflict as a discourse. Irritations can be "accidental or occur more regularly" (Van Assche et al., 2014, p. 19). In case of more frequent and mutual irritation we can speak of 'structural couplings', where specific mechanisms determine the duration, quality, intensity and institutionalisation of the link between different discourses (Luhmann, 2004; Teubner, 1989). Due to these structural couplings, events in one system may act as an irritation to another, and hence may set off "a whole series of new and unexpected events" (Teubner, 1998, p. 12). If the likelihood of making a certain difference to another discourse is low and infrequent, one may speak here of 'loose couplings'; if the likelihood of making a certain difference is high and frequent, one could speak of 'tight couplings' (Teubner, 1998).

3.3 Materials and Methods

To analyse and understand how conflicts persist through tight or loose couplings, we have explored how different conflict discourses emerged and submerged in context of Loisaba, Kenya. We observed various conflict couplings during three subsequent periods of ethnographic fieldwork conducted by Pellis and Pas between February-April 2014, February-May 2015 and August-December 2015.

The first fieldwork period focused on the role of multiple conservation arrangements in the Laikipia County, particularly Private-Community-Partnerships (PCPs) in and around Naibunga conservancy. This PCP is characterised by a dynamic landscape hosting exclusive wildlife tourism experiments as a tool to overcome on-going conflicts related to competing conservation objectives and local economic development (Pellis, Anyango-van Zwieten, Waterreus, Lamers, & Van der Duim, 2014; Pellis, Lamers, et al., 2015). Twenty-one semi-structured and in-depth interviews with different (non-)governmental experts revealed uncertainties related to the overlapping, and at times contradicting, institutional arrangements targeting the integration of conservation, development and tourism (Pellis et al., 2015).

One particular conflict development was identified in the context of the Loisaba ranch and its neighbouring Koija Group Ranch (Koija GR). Getting to understand past and present conflict discourses tied to these two ranches became gradually complicated in light of broader events unfolding elsewhere. This became evident in a second strand of fieldwork undertaken in the wider context of Laikipia, zooming in on different land use patterns of governmental and non-

governmental programmes, as well as actions of various pastoralist groups and tourism entrepreneurs. We conducted 35 in-depth interviews alongside four focus group discussions about current issues of pastoral migration, rules and regulations concerning resource sharing, and related conflicts.

A third fieldwork period took place in the more northern Isiolo and Samburu counties. Another 35 interviews and four focus group discussions were held to understand changing mobility patterns within the wider area, as well as relations to natural resources, historical pathways, and clan and family-based relations.

Our empirical observations were triangulated with other longitudinal studies on private-community conflicts and related partnerships developed in and around the Loisaba and Koija GRs since 2010 (Lamers, Van der Duim, Van Wijk, Nthiga, & Visseren-Hamakers, 2014; Nthiga et al., 2015), as well as parallel accounts of an upsurge in nature conservation alongside traditional pastoralism in the context of Laikipia (Akker, 2016; Evans & Adams, 2016; German et al., 2016; Greiner, 2013; Letai & Lind, 2013; Little, 2013). And finally, while writing this paper, we used an abundance of articles in national and international newspapers reporting on the increased and disruptive outbursts of violence throughout Laikipia in 2016-2017.

Our observations of conflicts were first identified as different conflict discourses constituted in different locales. We then looked into different ways multiple discourses interrelated, circulated and provided meaning to different actors using them. Besides interpreting their meaning, we were interested in studying the wider implications of found conflict discourses.

Finally, we have been wary of the use of sensitive, and at times, controversial statements made by individuals. Understanding the potential performativity of these statements and the role these may have in unleashing further conflicts, we have anonymised references to respondents in the following reconstructions of conflicts.

3.4 Context: Grazers and Pastoral Mobility in Kenya's ASALs

Under both colonial and post-colonial rule, pastoralists in Kenya's Arid and Semi-Arid Lands (ASALs) have been socially, politically and economically marginalised. As a result, their integration into national development programmes is limited and the Rift Valley has high poverty rates (Elmi & Birch, 2013; GoK, 2012). Although not all pastoralists are as mobile as they used to be in northern Kenya (Fratkin & Roth, 2006) and southern Kenya (Butt, 2011; Rutten, 1992), mobility is still one of the most important features of pastoral livelihoods and therefore demarcates a substantial form of land use in Kenyan ASALs (Butt, Shortridge, & WinklerPrins, 2009; Galaty,

2013). Pastoralists nevertheless face new challenges. These are, for instance, changes in land tenure and land use, rainfall variability, limited economic opportunities, food insecurity and landscape fragmentation (Butt, 2011; Galvin, 2009; Hobbs et al., 2008). They are also faced with violent conflicts amongst seminomadic groups within and beyond Kenya's national borders (Adano, Dietz, Witsenburg, & Zaal, 2012; Galaty, 2016; Greiner, 2013).

The conditions of ASALs in northern Kenya make pastoral mobility both necessary and highly complicated. The Laikipia County has presented itself as an increasingly important area that is attractive for migrating pastoralists in need of safer and greener pastures. It has a diverse and semi-arid landscape, and significantly differs in terms of ecology, politics, economy and society from the arid landscapes situated on its northern (Samburu County), western (Baringo County) and eastern (Isiolo County) borders. Partly resulting from different micro-climates characterising the 'wet' highlands and 'dry' lowlands, Laikipia is a complex mosaic of various land uses, land users and land tenure systems ranging from small-scale farming and horticulture in the sub-humid zones, to largescale ranching and private nature conservancies as well as semi-nomadic pastoralism in the semi-arid zones (Evans & Adams, 2016; Lamers et al., 2014; Lane, 2005).

The Laikipia County furthermore has an ill-reputed colonial past, including the large-scale relocation of the Maasai (a small group of Maa speaking people that traditionally live a nomadic lifestyle) in favour of European settlement. Treaties signed by the British Colonial Administration and the Maasai in 1904 and 1911 included a forced migration of Maasai people from the Central Rift Valley into Laikipia followed by their eviction to Native Reserves in the south of Kenya (L. Hughes, 2005; Letai & Lind, 2013). The colonial government intended to make Laikipia an economically important area and therefore cleared the Laikipian Plateau to make place for a European settlement. These large-scale properties were increasingly used for cattle ranching when the Europeans realised that the arid conditions were not ideal for farming (idem).

After Kenya's independence in 1963, a number of the European settlers in Laikipia left Kenya after selling their land to either the government, politicians or farming communities. Different plots of land often became abandoned, whereas other settlers stayed and continued ranching. Slowly, Maasai pastoralists from within Laikipia and Samburu pastoralists started to make use of Laikipian properties to allow their livestock to graze, and as such became increasingly reliant on Laikipia's grasslands (Evans & Adams, 2016; Lane, 2005).

During the 1970s and 1980s, when the beef industry collapsed and elephants demolished more and more fences, cattle ranching became less profitable in Laikipia. Instead, ranchers gradually

integrated cattle enterprises with forms of wildlife conservation and tourism as an alternative land use (Letai & Lind, 2013). This novel conservation logic in the Laikipian landscape included a further removal of fences, and more frequent human-wildlife conflicts (Akker, 2016; Evans & Adams, 2016). On the other hand, this development simultaneously facilitated easier access to private properties for migrating pastoralists and their livestock. Nowadays, pastoralists enter private ranches and conservation areas (Letai & Lind, 2013; LWF, 2012), at times using claims to seasonal grazing or ancestral rights that refer to historical injustices of the Anglo-Maasai treaties in 1904 and 1911. These claims are typically rejected by current property owners who call on the legally recognised institutional system of property rights and fixed boundaries in modern Kenya (Evans & Adams, 2016).

3.5 Results

3.5.1 Introduction

Before we describe how multiple conflicts became coupled in and around Loisaba, we will describe a range of selected conflicts used for our analysis, namely: an emerging grazing conflict in Loisaba and Koija; large-scale grazing invasions by upland pastoralists; and broader political claims to land found in relation to recent violence in Laikipia. In tracing interrelations between these conflicts, we identify that conflicts every so often have an effect on other conflicts, implying that if one conflict discourse changes, this may trigger parallel changes in another conflict through loose or tight coupling.

3.5.2 Grazing Conflict in Loisaba and Koija

Loisaba Conservancy, in the north-western parts of Laikipia (Figure 3.2) is a former cattle ranch

that has gradually developed into an integrated private conservancy including cattle ranching and exclusive high-end tourism. This conservancy does not operate in isolation but has gradually established multiple PCPs with surrounding communities. The Koija GR is one of the communal partners on Loisaba's eastern border and covers an area of 7,500 ha next to the 25,000 ha of Loisaba.
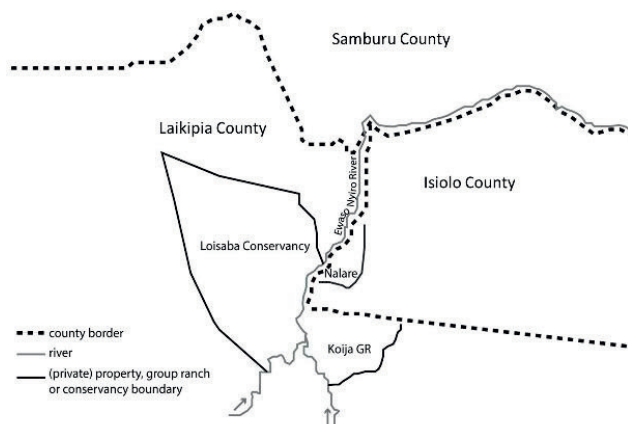

Figure 3.2 Loisaba as situated with neighbouring ranches, conservation areas and counties

The Maasai in this group ranch occasionally feel forced to 'trespass' the border to Loisaba to allow their cattle to graze on its pastures. This happens especially during seasonal droughts as group ranches are allotted a limited area, namely 7 per cent of Laikipia's total land surface, for grazing purposes (Evans & Adams, 2016). While trespassing became earmarked as a form of 'illegal grazing' by private ranch managers in Laikipia, the Maasai argue that they have little choice but to protect their herds.

This seemingly resource-based disagreement evolved into a set of related yet more complex conflict discourses over time. In the Loisaba case, an attempt to overcome conflicts over illegal trespassing became institutionalised by the establishment of a PCP between Oryx Ltd (OL), a private investor managing the tourism enterprise Starbeds® in Loisaba, and pastoralists residing in Koija GR. The partnership was signed in 1999 to establish a community-based tourism venture named Koija Starbeds Lodge (Koija SL). The Koija SL was run as a satellite enterprise of OL's Loisaba Starbeds with financial support from the Conservation of Resources through Enterprises programme (CORE) of USAID and further brokering support from the African Wildlife Foundation (AWF) (Nthiga et al., 2015).

However, although the Koija SL was initially designed as a financing mechanism to resolve 'past' grazing conflicts, its resolution formed a basis for the development of further conflict. When the PCP became commercially successful, new income led to cattle reinvestments for some pastoralists in Koija GR, paired with more frequent incursions into Loisaba's pastures.

3.5.3 Grazing Conflict and 'Invasions'

The PCP introduced novel land use zonings, including limited use of pastures. These pastures were not just of importance to pastoralism or wildlife tourism, they gradually also attracted more distant pastoralists who became aware of such lush pastures. This resulted in shifting grazing conflicts as pastoralists from nearby, particularly northern counties, began organising bigger cattle 'invasions'.

Large numbers of more than 10,000 heads of cattle, owned predominantly by Samburu pastoralists, were coming in by night at various sites along the northern and eastern borders of Loisaba conservancy. These numbers would at times add up to 40,000 heads of cattle. Although such 'invasions' did happen before in 1994, 2000 and 2004 (Akker, 2016; L. Hughes, 2005; Kariuki, 2004; Letai & Lind, 2013; Mkutu, 2001), Laikipian ranchers had never seen it happen at such a scale and intensity as between 2015 and 2017. This led to further fuelling of conflicts in the region:

> [The Samburu's] have overstocked, overgrazed and environmentally degraded millions of
> acres of Samburu County and Isiolo County, which has put a huge pressure on Laikipia,

which for many years has been traditionally and correctly ranched and managed, and we have got the grass and they don't. (Laikipian rancher 2015)

We really do know that it is prohibited to graze on Loisaba, but drought forces me to graze inside because I can really feel the heart of the cow when it is hungry, it seems [I] am also hungry. (Samburu pastoralist 2015).

3.5.4 Politically Incited Land Claims

This trespassing by pastoralists from Samburu and Isiolo, who we will henceforward refer to as 'upland pastoralists', is an interesting point of departure to further our understanding of the interplay between different conflicts. One particular discourse is related to a longstanding portrayal of Samburu pastoralists as 'backwards' by Laikipian pastoralists, ranchers, conservationists, and some local and national politicians.

Right now, the Samburu culture is very much in direct conflict with the modern world. And yes, the argument you'll hear from them is 'what else are we going to do, we can't keep goats, we can't grow crops, we don't have the rainfall, we can't be farmers'… they want to carry on with this lifestyle of having hundreds of cows, there is a lot of status involved in having hundreds of cows, so there is a lack of desire to change and there is a lack of mechanics that will allow that change to happen. (CEO private conservancy and cattle ranch, Laikipia, 2015).

Although Samburu pastoralists would generally agree that a large herd of cattle is of high socio-economic importance to them, they would reject the related belief that their way of pastoralism is relatively more destructive to rangelands than that of other ranchers/pastoralists in Laikipia. Furthermore, Laikipian ranchers, conservationists and outsiders (particularly voices in the media) increasingly speak of the presence of so-called 'cattle barons'. Conservancy managers and supporting conservation NGOs in Laikipia use this term to refer to the destructive presence of large herds of cattle (1000+ heads) owned by local Samburu politicians who are said to whitewash black market income through large-scale cattle investments.

In addition, it is stated that these large herds have limited access to grassland and therefore become forced to enter Laikipia. In an anonymous report this recently became referred to as politically driven 'Samburu expansionism' (Anonymous, 2017). Members of the Samburu County Executive Committee, however, reject this statement: "The reason why we are going to Laikipia and Isiolo is not because we are expanding. We just come to put our cattle out to pasture. The real issues are

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drought and the markets. Maybe some politician in Laikipia is taking advantage of that, but we are not expanding" (Samburu CEC member, 2015).

This politicisation of pastoralism is accompanied by a proliferation of arms (Greiner, 2013; Leshore, 2006). Laikipian ranchers frequently call on local and national police or politicians to intervene or stop this development. Insiders are not just anxious about the political nature of recent land grabbing of Laikipian properties, but are also aware that "illegal guns, mistrust between ranchers and local herders, and criminal elements are fuelling conflicts in Laikipia" (Waithaka & Kiplagat, 2017; emphasis added).

3.5.5 Conflicts that 'Overpower' Other Conflicts

On basis of these different conflict discourses, we now discuss how these conflicts were subjected to three forms of structural couplings. A first form is the overpowering of one conflict by another. Since one conflict may be given priority and increased attention and resources, it may (temporarily) push other conflict(s) out of its way. This became the case when tensions mounted due to upland invasions into Loisaba. Previously institutionalised conflicts related to Koija GR were, as such, temporarily set aside. This development came about in two ways:

First, the management of Loisaba decided to change their grazing arrangements with Koija GR, as Koija members were considered unable to stop the 'illegal' flow of upland pastoralists. Legal grazing of Koija-cows in Loisaba, from that moment onwards, would only be possible if Koija GR managed to keep Samburu cattle out of Loisaba property (German et al., 2016; Pas, forthcoming). Second, greater priority was given to the northern neighbour of Koija GR in Isiolo County, called Nalare. This community conservancy also borders Loisaba, but since it is mostly home to Samburu pastoralists, the management of Loisaba decided that the Nalare community would receive strategic priority in new community-grazing arrangements. This is also due to the idea that Nalare functions as an important geographic gateway through which upland pastoralists may head towards Laikipia. Where the Nalare community was pleased to be granted rights to legal grazing opportunities inside Loisaba for the first time in 2015, members of Koija GR felt overtaken by these new arrangements.

> Loisaba even decided to give Nalare some cows to graze in Loisaba [in 2015] . . . in the pretence that Nalare would prevent the Samburus from coming, to prevent them from coming to Loisaba. And denied Koija access and said that there was not enough grass. And Loisaba now even wants to work very closely with the Nalare conservancy, more than with the Koija group ranch. (Koija GR resident, 2016).

In light of these developments, we argue that the intensity and priority of an eminent conflict related to upland pastoral invasions dominated over other conflicts that were related to local land use conflicts. On closer inspection, it is not simply a conflict purely over resources that dominated conflicts in and around Loisaba, but rather a shifting attention to conflicts connected to upland invasions. As grazing arrangements with Koija GR were in part designed to overcome potential upland invasions, we can argue that a failure to succeed here led to a (temporary) decoupling of the Koija grazing conflict.

3.5.6 Conflicts that 'Resist' Other Conflicts

The domination, and related decoupling, of conflicts might also be reversed. A second specific and related coupling of conflicts illustrates a process where conflicts resist domination of other conflicts. This may imply a form of recoupling in which conflicts persist despite the influential and disruptive presence of alternative conflicts in their environment.

To illustrate, the resistance against the past coupling and decoupling of grazing conflicts in Koija led to interesting recoupling of this conflict over time. The preceding decoupling of conflict hampered longstanding multi-actor interests as institutionalised in previous and internationally praised PCPs such as the Koija arrangement. These PCPs depend heavily on international conservation and donor support (Pellis et al., 2014; Pellis, Lamers, et al., 2015).

Koija SL is argued to open a way for potential benefits for the wider community, such as primary education, bursaries, a healthcare centre, water infrastructure, and less tangible gains such as a sense of "pride, belonging and identity" (Nthiga et al., 2015, p. 415). This intense interrelatedness of Koija and Loisaba is typical for this conservation-oriented arrangement in comparison to wider social processes developing in the region of Naibunga, Laikipia and adjacent counties— "Vested interests of investors and group ranches prohibit [wider landscape interventions] from happening. They have created a feudal system that is challenging to get out of." (manager regional NGO in Samburu and Laikipia 2014)

These vested interests eventually forced the Loisaba management to reconsider formerly decoupled conflicts:

> With Koija . . . we have seen . . . that you win and then you lose again. There is no immediate solution; it will take a long time . . . When there is a crisis, change happens as a result, you always have to go all the way down to the bottom. (CEO private conservancy and cattle ranch, Laikipia, 2015)

Koija Starbeds is being put up again. They have [restored tourism infrastructure] and are planning for an electric fence so as to keep the Samburus out. This is paid for by the donor. (Koija GR resident, 2015)

Since conflicts related to upland invasions into Loisaba are, in part, connected to the way conflicts play out through interactions within the Koija PCP, we can describe their relation as a loose coupling. These events took place infrequently, and the effect of this recoupling has played a minor role in keeping the disruptive and gradually more persistent nature of upland invasions at bay.

3.5.7 Conflicts that 'Resonate' with Other Conflicts

The persistency of conflicts tied to upland invasions becomes clearer if we consider a third form of coupling, namely the ways in which one conflict may resonate with other or earlier conflicts. In this particular case, we observed resonance through the emergence of different conflicts related to fears from particularly people working in conservancies across Laikipia.

The increasingly frequent series of 'pastoralist invasions' in 2004, 2012, 2015, 2016 and 2017 are often categorised as events driven by political opportunism, followed by narratives of rangeland degradation and overpopulation of community land:

They were not invading here because it was the grass that they wanted… but it was the land they wanted, politics, et cetera. But they wanted land owned by white people . . . I don't actually think there is a huge drought out there and, actually, they also have too many heads of cattle out there. That's their business, that's their own life. (Laikipian private rancher, 2015)

Just as during the political tensions in Kenya in 2004, parallels are quickly drawn between farm invasions in Zimbabwe and the recent 'invasions' in Laikipia (cf Akker, 2016; Kariuki, 2004): "There were moments when I was worried, that this was like Zimbabwe. The government is not saying it is okay, but they are not doing anything about it either." (CEO private conservancy and cattle ranch, Laikipia, 2015).

This Zimbabwean postcolonial memory of racial conflict is a fear amongst some white farmers within Laikipia. This is strengthened by a wide belief that a Member of Parliament of Laikipia North, a Samburu politician from Isiolo County, frequently incited Samburu and Maasai pastoralists to enter private properties in Laikipia in return for political votes in the August 2017 elections. This MP argued the Anglo-Maasai treaties had expired in Laikipia and referred to historical injustices made in these treaties (L. Hughes, 2005; Kariuki, 2004; Letai & Lind, 2013).

Such incitement arguably played an important role in the recent violence in Laikipia North that is furthermore said to be fuelled by the national elections in 2017.

While such violence resonates with discourses of wider white dispossessions unfolding across Southern Africa, they also resonate with claims made during previous invasions into Laikipia in 2004. Maasai pastoralists organised these invasions among the Maa-community, including Samburu pastoralists. These events were mainly related to political discontent over the current property distribution in Laikipia where these communities feel that 'white people' unlawfully own the land.

To overcome potentially dramatic outcomes for private ranchers and related conservation interests in Laikipia, many resources have been invested in securing land ownership across Laikipia in 2017, often under the umbrella of biodiversity conservation.

3.6 Conclusion and Discussion

In this article we offered a different and more nuanced analysis of conflicts that differs from many mainstream and instrumental readings of, or interventions to solve, conflicts. We argued that conflicts are more than internal disputes between actors over resources. Instead, conflicts should be studied as interdependent discourses that emerge, develop and persist semi-independently of their 'sources' or 'subjects' (Foucault, 1998). Conflicts are not simply 'caused by' certain things. They are performative and trigger change in the places where they become performed over time. Methodologically, this paper is a plea to observe the 'social life of conflicts': how they are shaped and fed by means of multiple (conflict) discourses in their environment, so we can deepen our understanding of their dynamics and enactments over time.

We found that conflicts, when conditions for conflict in Loisaba changed, became both tightly and loosely coupled, decoupled and recoupled. We observed the presence of tight couplings where the dynamics of one conflict led to (counter-) reactions in the dynamics of another, and vice versa. But also, loose couplings in case of temporary decoupling and recoupling events. Based on both theoretical and empirical insights, we introduced a typology of three forms of coupling—1) 'overpowering' when one conflict temporarily becomes more manifest at the expense of other conflict(s); 2) 'resisting' when a conflict persists, and recouples, despite the influential presence of irritating alternative conflicts; or 3) 'resonating' when a notion of conflict resonates, and possibly becomes intensified, with other notions of conflict that are observed elsewhere or before.

These couplings support our call for more research on conflicts that is not centred around isolated and place-specific actor interactions only, but instead highlights the interrelatedness between conflict processes. In practice, conflict dynamics in northern Kenya are commonly addressed
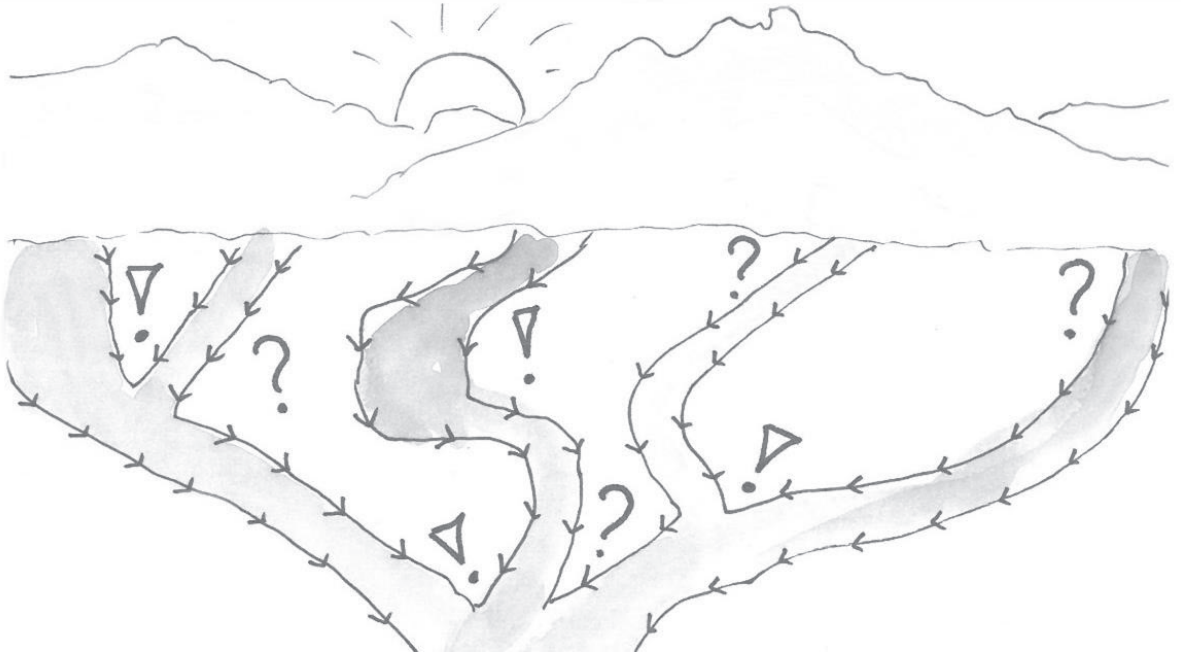
negatively in the media in terms of their potential causes such as climate change, overpopulation, landscape degradation, resource scarcity, lack of government, or national elections (Hastings, 2017; Mwangi, 2017; Wachira, 2017). By emphasising loose and tight couplings amongst conflicts, we counter-intuitively did not search for their causes or solutions, nor did we study their histories in great detail. Instead, we argue that the nature of conflicts, as parasitical discourses, makes them hard to manage or capture entirely. This once more suggests that no single actor has clear agency to steer its developments, nor can we trace a clear linear historical development given the complex triggering of irritations in the mutual couplings and communications of conflicts with other issues at stake (see also Van Leeuwen & Van Der Haar, 2016).

Acknowledging these findings, we may start to wonder why so much research, resources and time are invested in attempts to manage, mitigate or avoid conflicts, despite the widespread acknowledgements that conflicts are rather persistent in these situations or may paradoxically become persistent due to these attempts (Frerks, de Graaf, & Muller, 2016; Myerson & Rydin, 2014). In fact, at times it may make more sense to not act upon conflicts in an ad-hoc fashion. If one nevertheless desires to form strategies to cope with conflicts in practice, we instead advise a thorough understanding of the socio-material context in which these conflicts evolve. That includes a better understanding of how and under which conditions it has evolved over time, of its interdependencies (how does it relate to parallel developments in the present?), and how related actors/discourses anticipate future conflict developments (Beunen et al., 2015; Pellis, Duineveld, et al., 2015; Van Assche et al., 2014).

That conflicts relate to wider societal change is nothing new. Similar discussions are found in political ecology, particularly debates over the multi-layered character of conflicts. These debates show how conflicts are correspondingly conceptualised as spatial-temporal processes that are structured in wider social, economic and/or ecological change (Le Billon, 2012; Peluso & Watts, 2001, 2003; Turner, 2004). Our analysis differs nonetheless by emphasising the ways in which conflicts persist as parasitical entities that are able to form couplings with other conflict discourses found in their environments. By emphasising discursive interdependency, we contribute to a further understanding of how conflicts become structured by, or help structure, socio-material change (Peluso & Watts, 2001).

CONFLICT AVOIDANCE AND GOAL DEPENDENCY

Abstract

This paper explores the performative role of conflict avoidance in enabling rewilding and ecotourism visions in Western Iberia, one of the first European rewilding pilots situated in Northeast Portugal. Conflict avoidance is delineated here as a process based on expectations of potentially enduring, mutually contradicting and heated communications. In line with and contributing to a Social Systems Theory of conflicts, various examples of conflict avoidance are described as either a form of proactive anticipation to conflicts as risks or as a reactive adaptation to conflicts as dangers. The findings illustrate various forms of conflict avoidance in terms of silence, materialisation, co-optation, and ad hoc manoeuvring. These forms are subject to different goal dependencies of rewilding and ecotourism visions. Furthermore, these findings support a more critical discussion of the highly co-productive role of latent conflict processes in evolving rewilding and ecotourism practices in places like Western Iberia.

Keywords: conflict avoidance, rewilding, ecotourism, Western Iberia, Social Systems Theory

4.1 Introduction

Where rewilding is commonly known as a conservation discourse that aims at increasing or maintaining wilder landscapes, its recent introduction as an alternative and more progressive biodiversity conservation strategy has led to heated public and scientific discussions in Europe (Lorimer et al., 2015). These discussions are primarily based on (potential) contradictions that rewilding may present to other forms of land use like agriculture, pastoralism or hunting (Bulkens, Muzaini, & Minca, 2016; DeSilvey & Bartolini, 2018; Navarro & Pereira, 2012; Wynne-Jones et al., 2018). As proponents describe rewilding as a more 'progressive' biodiversity conservation discourse in Europe, rewilding is discussed as a form of 'kick-starting' restoration by which natural processes are selectively recovered to allow 'nature' to gain control again (Jørgensen, 2014; Keulartz, 2012; Monbiot, 2013). This establishes a kind of laissez-faire management or 'controlled decontrolling of ecological controls' (Keulartz, 2012, p. 60), as an intended move towards more natural/wilder landscapes in Europe. The proponents legitimise this primarily ecological motivation to rewild from the idea that:

> ...[t]he vast majority of the world's biodiversity occurs outside of parks. To save it, conservation has to protect entire ecosystems, reducing fragmentation and isolation,

which inevitably means rewilding across landscapes dotted with human populations and private property. (Fraser, 2009, p. 203)

With this proposal to transform cultural landscapes into more natural ones, proponents present rewilding as a bold alternative in comparison to more conservative biodiversity conservation policies in Europe (Jepson, 2015). However, on a local scale, rewilding may also fuel potential conflicts (DeSilvey & Bartolini, 2018; Lorimer et al., 2015), which are expected to emerge due to: competing claims between biodiversity conservation and other forms of development (Redpath et al., 2013; Young et al., 2016); tensions between progressive and conservative forms of conservation policies (Corlett, 2016; Jepson, 2015; Lorimer et al., 2015); or competition between reintroduced 'authentic' wildlife populations and locally established populations (Rubenstein, Rubenstein, Sherman, & Gavin, 2006). Furthermore, especially in Europe, rewilding is prone to clash with more 'traditional biocultural landscapes that are valued for both their cultural significance and the biodiversity they support' (Corlett, 2016, p. 130).

Likewise, one can argue that experiments with rewilding are not just about progressive ecological change. They also touch upon a broader co-existence of humans in these wilder imagined landscapes of the future. For instance, where rewilding proponents generally applaud the return of keystone species such as the wolf, beaver or bison, there is typically little consideration of how these will effect local populations living in, or close to, targeted rewilding landscapes (Hintz, 2007; Lorimer et al., 2015). As a result, rewilding proposals could face local opposition when people think these are imposed from the 'outside' (Lorimer et al., 2015). Anticipating on such potential resistance, European rewilding plans often incorporate a commercial component to stimulate nature-based economies, including a notable role for ecotourism as a means to finance related local rewilding pilots and provide promising local employment opportunities (Pellis & de Jong, 2016).

As promising as this may sound, ecotourism practices are not necessarily a panacea. In fact, the development of ecotourism is likely to experience a broad range of social tensions (Connell et al., 2017; Kothari & Arnall, 2017; Øian et al., 2017; Pellis, Pas, & Duineveld, 2018). It is surprising however how little attention has been paid in the ecotourism literature to notions of conflict and wider frictions or controversies (Connell et al., 2017). Where conflicts are addressed, they are commonly explained in terms of incompatible goals and motives found in manifestations of human-wildlife conflicts, rivalry over tourism benefit sharing in communities, contradicting depictions of human and non-human spaces, or other land-use practices existing competing with nature-based tourism (Hoefle, 2016; Kothari & Arnall, 2017; Øian et al., 2017). Resulting from a predominantly negative predisposition to conflict processes, a broad range of conflict resolution

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or mitigation attempts have been explored in places where conservation and ecotourism practices traverse beyond public or private park boundaries since the 1980s/90s (Plummer & Fennell, 2009; Van der Duim et al., 2015). To navigate in such often unfamiliar and 'messy' terrains, ecotourism developers and academics have extensively explored collaborative management strategies to deal with emerging conflicts up until today. Example strategies range from participatory decision-making to co-ownership, from management of the commons to public-private partnerships, from adaptive planning to landscape governance in ecotourism (Islam, Ruhanen, & Ritchie, 2019; Pellis, Lamers, et al., 2015; Plummer & Fennell, 2009; Tosun, 2000). Despite good intentions, underlying conflicts remain rather under-analysed in these strategies. Such negligence may be explained by how ecotourism studies/practices generally tend to have actor-centred orientations when it comes to conflicts, by which its *inputs*, being the many presumed differences existing between actors, are explored in relation to its *outputs*, namely conflict and/or the range of possible effects. And while various actors project their own input-output models in relation to conflict encounters, the process of conflicts remains untouched in our observations (Mol, 2002).

In this paper, conflicts are counterintuitively conceptualised differently as more enduring, heated yet possibly invisible processes to start with. This paper aims to document latent conflict processes and offer an insight into how involved networks learn and respond to such processes in a rewilding context (Wynne-Jones et al., 2018). The following question stands particularly central in this regard: What happens if potential conflicts are (un)consciously avoided while novel visions, such as rewilding and ecotourism, are planned to gain local support? If one examines the literature, conflict avoidance is generally conceptualised as a 'strategy' by which actors misrecognise, postpone, or avoid occasions where inter-personal/organisational differences (may) become enacted into manifest forms of conflict (Castro & Nielsen, 2003; Dalisay, 2012). Conflict avoidance is often explained then to occur due to: a lack of motivation to enter into a conflict if nothing is to be gained or something is to be protected (e.g. maintaining personal relationships); a form of oversight where older conflicts seem hidden yet occasionally resurface as "underlying conflicts [have a tendency to] remain" (Castro & Nielsen, 2003, p. 9); or a fear of conflicts due to a general lack of understanding about conflicts in the first place (De Dreu, 2005; Robbins & Moore, 2012).

To explore and illustrate what role conflict avoidance plays in practice, this paper describes the case of Western Iberia, a pioneering rewilding pilot situated in Northeast Portugal. This paper continues, *first,* with a short contextualisation of: Rewilding Europe as a pan-European rewilding movement; Western Iberia as one of its pilot projects; and contested projections of rewilding and ecotourism practices found in early stages of this pilot. *Second*, to better understand the role of

conflict avoidance in such practices, this paper uses Social Systems Theory (Luhmann, 1993, 1995) to explore what conflicts are, what conflict avoidance means to different cultural groups, and how subsequent practices can lead to particular reality effects. *Third*, corresponding methods are described after which various examples of conflict avoidance (silence, materialisation, co-optation, and ad hoc manoeuvring) are discussed in relation to how ecotourism practices have evolved in Western Iberia and what lessons one may take from these forms of conflict avoidance beyond an European context.

4.2 Context

4.2.1 Rewilding Europe and Western Iberia

Rewilding Europe is a Netherlands based initiative that takes rewilding as a general organisational principle to make Europe's mainland 'wilder again' (Rewilding Europe, 2016b). Rewilding Europe was launched in 2010 aiming to rewild at least one million hectares of land by 2022 by means of ten pilot projects established with the support of local conservation organisations across Europe. These pilots function as rewilding experiments envisaged as developing into the new 'Serengeti' parks of Europe. Related conservation enterprises are designed to help finance future rewilding projects. Ecotourism is considered critical in the new rewilding pilots, as 61 per cent of recent rewilding enterprise loans have been issued to support such enterprises across Europe (Pellis & de Jong, 2016; Rewilding Europe, 2015).

In 2011 one of the first rewilding pilots was launched in Western Iberia. This is a pilot area of approximately 100,000-120,000 hectares that is primarily managed locally by Associação Transumância e Natureza (ATN), a conservation NGO based in Figueira de Castelo Rodrigo, Northeast Portugal. Traditional local land-use practices, such as sheep herding and olive production, have been subject to changing economic conditions, land abandonment, seasonal wildfires, the UNESCO protection of regional rock engravings and changing demands for local products (Rewilding Europe, 2013). Since 2000, ATN has had a mission to "conserve, value, study and promote the natural heritage of Northeast Portugal, through sustainability and community participation, by managing and protecting natural areas" (Associação Transumância e Natureza, 2017). As envisioned in the collaboration of ATN and Rewilding Europe, Western Iberia presents a different wilderness future for 120,000 hectares of land. In their plans, Western Iberia is expected to experience spectacular wildlife returns, including Iberian Lynxes, various species of eagles and vultures, and the introduction of wild cows (Auroch) and horses (Tarpan) (Rewilding Europe, 2013). Additionally, this pilot aims to connect future wilderness areas at a scale that will allow the

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region to adopt an alternative wildlife-based economy attracting a range of potential ecotourism enterprises, particularly that of wildlife photography, dinners in the wild, and nature-based accommodation such as the recently established Starcamp.

4.2.2 First Projections of the Starcamp in Faia Brava

In April 2014, the author joined a site visit to Faia Brava, a private nature reserve included in this novel Portuguese rewilding pilot, to observe how local hoteliers, ATN staff members and ecotourism consultants working for Rewilding Europe thought tourism possibilities would materialise in this reserve. During this visit, these actors discussed how an exclusive tented camp could materialize in the middle of this special protected area. The design of this tented camp, or 'Starcamp', was inspired by pictures of similar ecolodges established in Eastern Africa (Lamers, Nthiga, Van der Duim, & Van Wijk, 2013; Pellis et al., 2018). The hoteliers received extensive advice from the present rewilding consultants who had longstanding experience with similar ecotourism projects in Africa. Their advice ranged from positioning the lodge in an international wilderness tourism segment, to locating and designing the camps in the future rewilding landscape. Whilst exploring different opportunities across multiple sites in Faia Brava, these consultants spelled out what a future tented camp needed to look like:

> ...imagine sitting amidst wild horses and cows while enjoying your breakfast. [...] One should look that way [pointing north-eastwards towards a natural landscape] instead of that way [pointing westwards to the remains of a former agricultural area] to avoid looking at the remains of that village [pointing towards the partly abandoned village of Cidadelhe] as your clients expect an exclusive and pristine wilderness experience. (ecotourism consultants of Rewilding Europe)

This example illustrates how rewilding and ecotourism expectations inform a high-end tourism vision for Faia Brava. What these consultants and entrepreneurs did not take into account is that their dreams of wildness would become subject to multiple potential conflicts in the near future. To start with, human presence would be minimised, narrowly allowing only high-end tourists and rewilding ecologists (see also Kothari & Arnall, 2017; Lorimer & Driessen, 2016). But how would other actors (potentially) respond to these dreams? Consider, for instance, how "rurals tend to associate rewilding areas not so much with 'real nature' but rather with 'neglect', chaos or even litter" (Drenthen, 2014, p. 156). At that time these developers were not aware of the many contradictory and dismissive ways in which other social groups, such as local hospitality entrepreneurs, herdsmen or private landowners, would react to their visions.

4.3 Conceptual framework

4.3.1 Conflicts as Heated Communications

The presence of contradictory reactions may feed into conflicts. Conflicts can generally be defined as heated, emotionally charged, destructive and long-lasting communications (Malsch & Weiss, 2002; Pellis, Duineveld, et al., 2015; Vallacher et al., 2013). Once a communication has become a conflict it has the tendency to heat up and endure. Emotional utterances may stimulate or provoke involved actors in a conflict situation to behave or communicate in ways beyond their self-control (Fuchs, 2001; Vallacher et al., 2013). This loss of control is characteristic of the social life of conflicts, as they have the potential to spread like wildfire (see also Law & Singleton, 2005). Once conflicts arise and are fuelled, they can burn until all its resources are consumed (Luhmann, 1995). A conflict furthermore has a tendency to develop *parasitically*, reinterpreting everything in its environment (other communications, policies, and so on) in terms of the conflict (idem). Everything in the environment of a conflict then has the potential to become fuel for that conflict. As a result, conflicts can develop rapidly in directions where it may leave further destructive traces. But when resources become scarce, and conflicts temporally seem to be resolved, such conflicts may nevertheless simmer under the surface and become (re-)fuelled again as someone says, or does, the 'wrong' things (Pellis, Duineveld, et al., 2015; Venturini, 2010).

Conflicts thus present specific kinds of persistent communications that tend to be perceived as (contagious) problems that are often considered 'too hot to handle'. By identifying related communications, including the wide range of contradictions expressed in conflicts and the many attempts to solve or mitigate them, one may recognise a range of social systems at play here (Luhmann, 1995, 2012). "A social system consists of communications and only communications communicate, not humans, artifices, things, individuals, washing machines, animals or rocks" (Pellis, Duineveld, et al., 2015, p. 117). To understand conflicts, one should correspondingly not commence with individuals but rather with conflict communications by which related entities, including conflicting individuals, are recurrently given shape. If we technically want to speak of conflicts, different communications need to mutually reject one another. Conflict may thus be recognised as an enduring and evolving unity of mutually rejecting communications that has a *past*, *present* and (possibly) a *future* too (Beunen et al., 2015; Van Assche et al., 2014).

4.3.2 Conflict Avoidance

Each social system depends on its own past legacies, future desires, and present operations in parallel with other social systems unfolding in its environment (Beunen et al., 2015; Luhmann,

1995). Conflict avoidance is similarly subject to discursive and recurrent operations that are dependent on previous or parallel communications. For instance, past observations of similar conflicts could inform present observations of (potential) conflicts (Hitchcock & Darma Putra, 2005; Van Assche et al., 2014).

What is recognised as a potential conflict by one social system does not necessarily have to be recognised as such by another. A pastoralist way of life, for instance, may clash with future rewilding and ecotourism proposals since the latter would typically restrict open access to land. Rewilding and ecotourism discourses, on the other hand, present more opportunist visions of nature-based economies that offer supplementary benefits to local communities including pastoralists. A potential conflict concerning access to land can hence be considered present in one social system (here: pastoral discourses), yet simultaneously absent in another (here: rewilding and ecotourism discourses).

Such diverse observations of potential conflicts contributes to the many attempts by which the social and material environment becomes aligned with system-specific objectives (Beunen et al., 2015; Fuchs, 2001). Conflict avoidances are as such undeniably part of goal dependencies in social systems. Goal dependency can be defined as "the influence of shared visions or plans on changes in the actor/institution configuration [that can have] real effects" (Van Assche et al., 2014, p. 31). These plans and visions can inform either *anticipations* or *adaptations* over time. Luhmann explains this distinction by how social systems differentiate between *risks* or *dangers*. By avoiding conflicts through calculated and anticipated action, potential conflicts become internalised as 'risks' (Luhmann, 1993; Renn, 2008). This internalisation only makes sense to the calculating social system, as "the outside world itself knows no risks, for it knows neither distinctions, nor expectations, nor evaluations, nor probabilities" (Luhmann, 1993, p. 6). On the other hand, a social system may also distinguish potential conflicts as dangers. Where "risks are in effect possibilities of future loss which the system is able to see and 'understand'" (King & Thornhill, 2003, p. 186), dangers stand for those unknown processes that lie beyond the control and/or language of the system, making it impossible to anticipate on the uncertain emergence of (unknown) conflicts (Luhmann, 1993). If these conflicts do emerge nevertheless, one may then adapt its practices to secure one's objectives.

4.3.3 Reality Effects of Conflict Avoidance

Conflict avoidance can have other effects than the realisation of social system objectives. By avoiding that a conflict interferes with, for instance, the realisation of ecotourism dreams, other (unanticipated) reality effects may emerge. For the act of avoidance means reacting to (an expected)

reality by which the latter simultaneously becomes co-constructed (Callon, 2010; Foucault, 1998; Law & Urry, 2004). As conflict avoidance anticipates or adapts to expected conflict, one can observe a 'generative' process as expectations:

> ...guide activities, provide structure and legitimation, attract interest and foster investment. They give definition to roles, clarify duties, offer some shared shape of what to expect and how to prepare for opportunities and risks. (Borup, Brown, Konrad, & Van Lente, 2006, pp. 285-286)

In theory, conflict avoidance helps to prevent expected conflict from escalating. Yet, in practice, actual avoidances can temporarily sustain such, or related, conflict processes that may escalate later nonetheless. Any conflict avoidance thereby contributes to an evolving and uncertain *process* of co-performances by which future conflicts may, or may not, (re-)emerge, aggravate, or disappear over time (Anderson, 2010; S. D. Brown, 2002; Laclau & Mouffe, 2001).

Furthermore, avoidance practices may be generative to a wider environment in terms of, for instance, its organisational, institutional or material effects. *Organisationally*, avoidance can correspond to an organisational culture and routine by which, for instance, opportunistic organisational behaviour is supported at the expense of more reflexivity (Law, 1994). *Institutionally*, conflict avoidance can require (in)formal rules to help prevent past conflicts from reoccurring (Van Assche et al., 2014). And *materially*, conflict avoidance can lead to physical changes to sustain certain operations. For instance, conservation practices build fences to stop human-wildlife conflicts and to preserve biodiversity. Nevertheless, what happens in conflict avoidance can often only be reflected upon in hindsight. "It is [namely] impossible for any system to predict accurately the outcome of its own activities beyond its own system boundaries since the consequences of these activities are co-determined by the actions of other systems" (Renn, 2008, p. 31).

4.4 Materials and Methods

For his case study participant observations were conducted in addition to follow-up interviews during five consecutive field visits to Western Iberia between 2011 and 2018. First observations were based on the facilitation of educational field workshops reflecting on new rewilding ideas and requirements for nature/tourism entrepreneurship (see further Jobse, Witteveen, Santegoets, & Stobbelaar, 2014). These workshops were organised with the support of Rewilding Europe, local conservation NGOs and residents, as well as an interdisciplinary group of students and scholars from different European universities. During these workshops, residents, politicians, conservationists and local entrepreneurs were invited to share their visions of a future Western

Goal Dependency

Iberia (see also Kok & Timmers, 2013). The contradictions observed in these early visions were further explored in two subsequent studies focusing on the social role and acceptability of rewilding and ecotourism in Western Iberia (Leuvenink, 2013; Walet, 2014), next to 20 supplementary in-depth interviews held between 2015-2018.

For these interviews, a topic list was used to encourage in-depth conversations about issues regarding the envisaged future development of the region; the participation and perceptions of local residents in/on these developments; the identification of controversial practices and discourses; the role of tourism development in new rewilding landscapes; and finally, how interviewees perceive and deal with an emerging potential for conflicts given the range of organisational goals and practices.

Interviews were audio recorded and translated verbatim. Transcripts were subsequently systematically coded with KODANI, an Excel-based coding tool that supports the conventional analysis of qualitative data through open, axial and selective coding (Boeije, 2009; Doorewaard, Kil, & Ven, 2015; Verschuren & Doorewaard, 2007). Finally, due to the political nature of the (potential) conflicts described in this paper, all references to respondents have been anonymised.

4.5 Results

The following discussion of conflict avoidances picks up on previous rewilding and ecotourism visions in Faia Brava that, over time, required a greater abundance of wildlife, an extension of the reserve, and the development of suitable accommodations. Four illustrative examples of conflict avoidance are described here in context of how rewilding and ecotourism practices deal with either expectations or emergences of early conflicts.

4.5.1 Conflict Avoidance by Silence

A first example of conflict avoidance can be found in how new rewilding and ecotourism practices in Western Iberia tend to operate in silence. Silences can be deliberate, as a risky strategy to anticipate on the (re)occurrence of heated, emotional and unproductive communications with others. Silence can take the form of literal absence of dialogue, but can also appear through the exclusion of opposition. These silences are however potentially "pregnant with every meaning" (Van Assche & Costaglioli, 2012, p. 130) as they invite surrounding social systems to make sense of these anomalous practices, often with distrust.

An interesting example here is the case of ecotourism development in Cidadelhe. Ecotourism developers working with Rewilding Europe often refer to this town as the 'Eagle's Nest' as it

overlooks the 'majestic cliffs' on which Faia Brava's protected bird species breed. Due to its unique location and UNESCO protection of adjacent rock engravings, great tourism potential is attributed to Cidadelhe. ATN and Rewilding Europe have hence supported interest from Dutch investors to transform ruins in Cidadelhe into ecotourism resorts. In bidding for these ruins, these investors were facilitated by a real estate broker who indirectly mediated the bidding through further intermediation by ATN.

Intermediation seemed necessary here due to the sensitivity of ATN's presence in Cidadelhe. ATN had previously experienced a longstanding conflict with its former mayor. Consequentially, ATN decided that the bidding needed to happen in secret: "That is easier, because we don't get seen in Cidadelhe, nobody really knows who is buying or is interested in buying what" (employee ATN). When they first arrived, Rewilding Europe staff was somewhat surprised by this complex history:

> The longer you are active in a region, the more complex and diverse reality seems to become. Each time you get more deeply entangled into how society works [...] and where you start evaluating abstract interests, you come across individual levels where people have begrudged others for generations. (ecologist Rewilding Europe)

For ATN this is different, as individual relationships have been of utmost importance in dealing with the necessary land-use changes for rewilding practices on properties outside protected areas. Some employees of ATN stress that "...it is not enough to just be here [...] in our office and go [to Cidadelhe] just when we need something" (employee ATN). Instead, several employees would argue for a more open and active communication about plans as they were used to in the past. Nevertheless, the current formal take of ATN's board is to approach community collaborations passively by upholding a 'live and let live' or 'no confrontation' policy (ATN staff and board members). However, the rewilding experiments in the region have been frowned upon by many local residents who commonly distrust these ecological experiments as forms of landscape 'littering', unproductive land management, or an attractor of feared predators (e.g. wolfs) who may return to the region (Leuvenink, 2013; Walet, 2014). In response to any potential conflict with residents, ATN staff largely avoided the term rewilding in their interactions with residents (Leuvenink, 2013).

4.5.2 Conflict Avoidance by Materialisation

Conflict avoidance also led to interesting materialisations of potential conflict in the ongoing development of ecotourism in Faia Brava. To start with, Starcamp hoteliers and ATN foresaw that the intended design of an ecotourism enterprise in Faia Brava would not be completely in line with

Natura 2000 regulations. Instead of consulting the Portuguese nature conservation authority (ICNF) overseeing Natura 2000 sites, Starcamp owners decided to construct their tented camps as semi-permanent and flexible structures that could be removed from the site within a matter of days. This decision was a deliberate anticipation to ICNF's expected rejection of this initiative and the conflicts that could spring from it. Nevertheless, just before the formal launch of the Starcamp in the summer of 2015, ATN and Starcamp owners decided to discuss their initiative with the ICNF, as they feared that it would be rejected during the launch event:

> We passed by and briefly mentioned that there was this new enterprise. [Yet] there was not much of a reaction. They said: 'oh, nice' and so we moved on. (employee ATN)

The reaction of ICNF surprised the hoteliers and ATN, particularly considering previous experiences where the ICNF, for instance, objected the presence of a previous ATN tree nursery in Faia Brava. Yet, in this case, the ICNF argued that the Starcamp has the potential to inspire and help finance nature conservation across Portugal.

This example of materialised conflict avoidance is not unique as ATN similarly faced potentially conflicting demands from local municipalities whom ATN depends on to develop rewilding on a regional scale. The envisioned rewilding in Western Iberia spans from Vila Nova de Foz Coa past Faia Brava along the Coa valley and ends in Malcata. Along this Coa valley, ATN recently established a 'Grand Route' ('Grande Rota') to allow visitors 'to explore the natural beauty of the region'. This recreational corridor was a first endeavour to establish a regional brand in which multiple landowners, businesses and municipalities could, in theory, collaborate and benefit. Beforehand, ATN staff members explored 200 km of the future route to find the best views and experiences from an ecotourism perspective. However, this route traversed various municipalities, and local mayors demanded that the route would pass important sites for their own municipalities. As such, each municipality operated as an island unable to look across its own administrative borders. This, according to an employee of ATN, is a common problem in a region where land is fractioned into many small plots and related self-interests. ATN, on the other hand, depends on the same municipalities for multiple conservation initiatives they work on in the region.

> You have to manage that relationship, and [...] they are not used to hear 'no', they are the power, the local power. We had to move some [parts of the track]. Some of them [...] are clearly not the right option for the people that are going to use it. They are too hard, they pass by not very interesting landscapes, plantations, windmills, and the whole objective of the project was to stay close to the river, whenever possible. (employee ATN)

The Grand Route eventually materialised through 'surprising' bends near municipal boundaries along the route.

4.5.3 Conflict Avoidance by Co-optation

A third example of conflict avoidance is found in the co-optation of potentially undesirable subjects. This process occurs when 'risky' others are invited to support intended visions. In Western Iberia, traditional herding and hunting practices tend to be a mismatch with the desire to rewild. Instead of actively confronting herders/hunters, Rewilding Europe, ATN and supportive ecotourism developers are inclined to approach a few key herders or hunters to invite them to adapt their practices in favour of rewilding and tourism objectives. However, such an approach is challenging in practice. If we take traditional pastoralism, its transformation towards a rewilding alternative is complex if we consider how livestock remains a key asset for many residents in Western Iberia, particularly extensive cattle farmers and traditional sheep herders. These typically migrate through the region and use slash and burn methods to improve grasslands.

Such contradictory practices are common in places like Cidadelhe. Founders of ATN came across multiple occasions wherein they describe how local residents engage in 'illegal' practices.

> [For decades] it was really the complete use of the entire system; people killed otters, badgers, eagles, owls, rabbits. They killed everything they could [...]. [Nowadays], you cannot use poison, you cannot kill raptors or otters. You cannot detonate bombs in the river because everything is protected right now. (board member ATN)

The tensions between ATN and residents of Cidadelhe peaked when ATN began its operations in the region and bought its first pieces of land for the protection of what Faia Brava is today. One of these pieces had an ancestral connection to the same (former) mayor of Cidadelhe who recently grazed his sheep on this land. ATN, as the new landowner, granted the mayor grazing access on one condition: "don't use fire, [...] four days later he burnt the place" (board member ATN). Even though ATN felt it was necessary to take immediate legal action against the mayor, they regret such a decision as this eventually worsened wider relationships between ATN and Cidadelhe.

Whereas this illustrates a clear example of a past conflict, it is an important event to understand how ATN shifted its approach towards contradictory practices by either turning a blind eye and (again) opt to operate in silence: "If a hunting party uses a part of Faia Brava, as they are allowed to hunt wild boar several times a year, and they accidentally kill a horse, then ATN does nothing" (employee ATN). Or by strategically proposing alternative strategies, such as selectively employing

those residents who go against rewilding and related ecotourism visions. In the case of the former mayor, a job with ATN was eventually offered to combine sheep herding with the monitoring of 'illegal' practices found around Faia Brava.

4.5.4 Conflict Avoidance by Ad Hoc Manoeuvring

A fourth illustration of conflict avoidance is found in relation to the ad hoc manoeuvring through which potentially emerging conflicts may be outwitted. Such avoidance generally occurs where a social system is forced to react to unpredictable developments that suddenly appear as a threat to its goals. The introduction of wild grazers in Faia Brava by ATN and Rewilding Europe during the official opening of the Starcamp in 2015 is illustrative here. ATN was given the opportunity by Rewilding Europe to expand its existing herd of Garrano horses in Faia Brava on the condition that it would expand the size of this reserve. Land property in these parts of Portugal is complexly organised and cadastral data are limited. In practice this leaves developers in the dark when it comes to sorting out who owns what part of land. Taking these conditions, as well as the timing of the Starcamp opening, into consideration, ATN choose to take a risk by replacing the fences on the northern edges of Faia Brava without the full approval of affected landowners:

> ATN makes a move first and then just waits how the village reacts, and will then start to solve any off the conflicts that emerge, in the trust that this will sort itself out. It is a bit of a game that is played these weeks. (employee ATN)

A few landowners were not amused with this sudden relocation of the fence, as they suddenly found their land included in an extended rewilding reserve. In their response, protesting landowners demanded that their land would be bought or that the fence be replaced again by ATN. Rewilding Europe reacted to such local concerns by framing these as 'unavoidable' (ecologist Rewilding Europe), whereas ATN staff started to panic as they instantly felt a need to look for solutions to overcome these rejections and restore personal relationships that they had built up in nearby villages over the past 15 years (communication advisor ATN). Eventually, ATN decided to partially relocate the fence in combination with a call for additional funds to buy remaining gaps of land in the future. Again, such ad hoc measures resonate with previous examples of how potential conflicts may materialise over time nevertheless.

4.6 Conclusion and Discussion

In this paper conflict avoidance is conceptually and empirically described as a performative process in which multiple social systems face the potential of enduring and heated conflict communications in their environment. This potential has been explored in context of rewilding and ecotourism

visions in Western Iberia. These visions cannot materialise through well-intended blueprints alone, including top-down reintroduction of species; extension of fences; construction of eco-lodges; or land appropriation (see also Lorimer et al., 2015). Instead, such visions depend on the co-performance of (potential) conflict processes through which these visions percolate over time (Tsing, 2005). This is especially the case when new visions are caught up in other discourses, including ambiguous roles and rules, as well as a fierce competition for different futures (Borup et al., 2006; Krauß & Olwig, 2018).

Examining the various examples of conflict avoidance found in Western Iberia, it is argued here that these examples relate to *anticipation to* and/or *adaptation of* (potential) conflicts. Anticipation has been illustrated in terms of recurrent *silences* (towards unwanted practices or concealing own practices/goals), *materialisation* of potential conflicts in the construction of various ecotourism practices, or *co-optation* (bringing problematic individuals on board). Adaptation is especially found in *ad hoc manoeuvring* (reactive solutions to sudden and potentially dangerous conflict processes). Where anticipations can be interpreted as a calculated approach by which the potential for conflict is internalised as a risk, adaptations may be considered as a more reactive approach to overcome unpredictable situations in which conflicts suddenly emerge in front of us (Luhmann, 1993; Renn, 2008).

In practice, the avoidance of potential conflicts has contributed to a unique social and material organisation of ecotourism practices in Western Iberia, such as: the construction of special rewilding lodges, ecotourism tours, and conservation fences; and the co-optation of rewilding subjects (Bluwstein, 2017; Fletcher, 2010); as well as recurrent uses of silence (S. D. Brown, 2002; Venturini, 2010). Silent conflict avoidance may however paradoxically trigger louder and more heated conflict interactions at times of which some are obvious and predictable, as clear risks of resurfacing old conflicts (Hitchcock & Darma Putra, 2005; Luhmann, 1993), and others need to be explored as unforeseeable dangers, and adapted to in anticipation to their future potential.

Given this distinction of potential conflicts as risks and/or dangers, this paper contributes to the underexposed social organisation and contested nature of rewilding and related ecotourism practices in Europe. The recurrent and at times deliberate use of silences in practices of rewilding and ecotourism, reflects the rather closed social operations aiming to control day-to-day practices in light of rigid internalised plans and visions. This social rigidity of rewilding practices paradoxically contradicts with how rewilding proponents advocate ecological indeterminate and uncertain ecological change (see also Lorimer & Driessen, 2014). However, various examples in this paper explain that such controlled and rationalised operations cannot guarantee that plans unfold

smoothly (e.g. bended fences, peculiar walking routes or growing distrust), since any social system depends on the many (un)foreseeable co-determinations by other systems in its environment (Law, 2004; Renn, 2008; Venturini, 2010).

And finally, one must question to what extent these findings are unique for the case of Western Iberia, European rewilding or ecotourism practices? Given the longstanding experience with conflict encounters by involved ecotourism developers in an African context, we can argue that diminutive collective learning has taken place when it comes to taking (potential) conflicts in ecotourism and conservation practices seriously (Connell et al., 2017). In fact, the many resolution, mitigation or avoidance attempts in African and European ecotourism arrangements have not necessarily resolved conflicts, but also run the risk of becoming counterproductive to these arrangements in the long run (Pellis, Duineveld, et al., 2015; Pellis, Lamers, et al., 2015; Pellis et al., 2018). And given these encounters with dynamic conflicts and our predominant avoidances of them, future research should explore further how and to what extent conflict avoidances play a role in contemporary society at large.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION
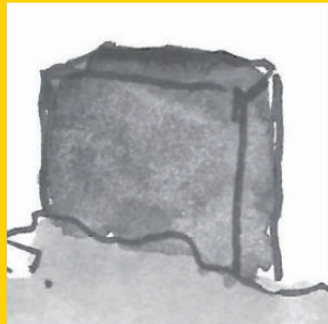
5.1 Introduction

In this thesis I examined how conflicts evolve, have a tendency to endure, are coupled with and shaped by their environment, and how they co-shape reality in the context of conservation tourism in Namibia, Kenya and Portugal. I explored how evolving conflicts are enabled and limited by their own history (*path dependency – chapter 2*) and their dependencies on conflicts in their environment (*interdependency – chapter 3*). I have furthermore explored and analysed how actors adapt their behaviour to potential conflicts (*goal dependency – chapter 4*).

My interest in the evolution of conflicts was triggered when I saw how conservation tourism academics and practitioners, like policy-makers, ecotourism entrepreneurs, and conservation NGOs, have a tendency to neglect, isolate and downplay conflicts and how they try to manage conflicts in all kinds of unfruitful ways (see also chapter 1). In this final chapter, I will present an evolutionary conflict theory based on my initial theoretical explorations and fine-tuned through my empirical work. I will depart from Luhmann's theory of social systems to observe conflicts as such (Luhmann, 1995), and I will discuss a range of theoretical, methodological and practical implications that follow from this approach, in response to the prevailing academic and practical observations of conflict.

The central question that will be answered in this chapter is:

How do conflicts evolve as social systems, and how do conflicts co-perform conservation tourism?

To answer this central question, I will reflect on the following sub-questions:

A.   How do conflicts develop a life of their own, including a past, present and future?

B.   How do conflicts relate to their social and material environment?

C.   How do conflicts interrelate with conservation tourism discourses and practices?

To explore these questions in detail, I started my research by acknowledging that conflicts are practically found everywhere and anytime (Baynham-Herd, Redpath, Bunnefeld, Molony, & Keane, 2018; De Graaf, 2016; Sluka, 1992). Given their nature as messy and dynamic processes and given the fact that they are often seen as undesirable events, a general societal response to (potential) conflicts is to eliminate, suppress or avoid them (chapter 1, 2, 3 and 4). Conflicts in conservation tourism are not just common, they also showed to last 'forever' and are hard if not impossible to resolve (chapter 2, 3 and 4). These conflicts evolve as communications that tend to couple with

their environment, with other (conflict) communications (chapter 3 and 4) and materiality (chapter 2 and 3). Even an anticipated potential conflict can have serious ramifications (chapter 4).

Conflicts are furthermore self-referential and operationally closed communications, and at the same time they are structurally open to their environment. Being self-referential and operationally closed means that conflicts reproduce themselves on the basis of previous conflict communications (Luhmann, 1995). In this sense conflicts are *closed* communications, as nothing but the previous communication leads to the next communication. Everything else (other communications in the environment of a conflict) cannot speak to these communications. For instance, as I showed in chapter 2, neighbours may share a beer as friends in one setting while watching a football match, but can become eternal enemies in another setting when interactions shift towards to a discussion over the (re-)distribution of tourism benefits in conservancy meetings. Such shifting conflict interactions emerge as soon as everyday conversations shift towards more formal and heated interactions concerning the highly valued distribution of tourism income in this community. Interestingly, both interactions seem to exist independently from one another, and so do the reality effects of both interactions (Law, 1994). In other words: we can observe how the same actors can be drinking a beer together as friendly neighbours in situation 1, but continue to fight over conservancy income in situation 2, and drink a beer once again in situation 3, et cetera. Situation 2 is observed here as a conflict process that operates independently from a non-conflict process in situation 1 and 3.

However, conflicts do not only evolve as fully closed social systems. At the same time conflicts are structurally open. Just like any other social system, they cannot survive without relating to their environment. As conflicts frequently change through their relation to their environment (interdependency, see especially chapter 3), previous communications are not the only ones to provide fuel for present conflict communications; other communications in the environment of a conflict do this too. Other communications can be observed and included in a conflict communication, but always in terms of that conflict communication as delimited by its operational closure. For example, when community conservation practices were introduced in Namibian Conservancies (see chapter 2), former governance systems based on traditional chieftainship were replaced by more hybrid forms of community-based natural resource management (CBNRM). The latter arrangement did not only offer a forum for community conflicts, it also tied traditional local structures to (inter-)national ecological concerns and popular common pool management discourses since the 1990s. In due course, older rivalries between various community factions/traditional leaders did not disappear, but managed to reappear in novel CBNRM

arrangements (Pellis, 2011b; see also chapter 2). Whereas the object of conflict once concerned the distribution of pension funds in the community, today the object of conflict is about the 'equal' distribution of conservancy income in the community. In other words: a distributive conflict evolved here on basis of itself (repeating past communications about an ongoing conflict) and as a novel communication (repeating past operations by simultaneously changing its structure) over time. The given reasons, or the objects of discussion, of the conflict may have changed indeed, yet the conflict continuous to operate in ways that are recognisable in past operations of this conflict.

To explain the endurance of any conflict, Niklas Luhmann (1995) argues that the social life of conflicts metaphorically resembles that of a *parasite*. Conflicts have a tendency to absorb a great deal of attention and resources from their environment to sustain themselves at the expense of their hosts (being mutually contradicting communications). Such a parasitic tendency can affect the environment of conflicts, making conflicts not just 'structured' but also potentially 'structuring' (Le Billon, 2001; Peluso & Watts, 2001), or re-structuring processes (Luhmann, 1995, 2012). For example, the way in which contradicting actors interact may potentially feed a conflict. If we observe this from the perspective of a conflict process, these, and possible other, communications in the environment of this conflict can be observed by, and translated in terms of the conflict we observe. That implies that even the best intentions to resolve a conflict can be transformed into further fuel for this conflict to persist. At the same time, this parasitic feeding of a conflict does not necessarily need to depend on all available communications in the environment of this conflict. For instance, the relaxed conversations in a café do not necessarily have any effect on the heated conflict interactions in the conservancy as discussed earlier. Both interactions, but also the people and their opinions, can live next to one another. However, as soon as interactions shift towards conflict communications, there is a chance that other interactions become lured into the heat of the conflict. As such a conflict does more than consuming contradictions found in its environment, it also has the power to contaminate other situations that previously seemed to have no relationship with the conflict. As I found in chapter 3, for instance, older and distant conflicts in Zimbabwe resonated with recent conflicts and violence in northern Kenya.

Although it remains impossible to predict exactly why, when and where conflicts will emerge in relation to near or distant, covert or overt, actual or potential events, or whether their emergence is benevolent or malevolent, I have contributed here to a more situated understanding of how conflicts evolve in response to themselves (their self-referentiality/operational closure) and their environment (structural openness). What matters here is to acknowledge how conflicts function as both delineated and delineating communications in conservation tourism. As such, conflicts attract

and feed upon an environment of hosting communications, including associated resources, people, and institutions. However, conflicts have a tendency to position themselves as "inconsiderate of their environment" (Luhmann, 1995, p. 391) as what matters most to the evolution of conflicts is not the environment per se, but the 'internal elasticity' by which a conflict manages to endure as a communication.

To further explain how this conflict-environment distinction works in the context of conservation tourism discourses and practices, I will now reflect on how conflicts typically develop a life of their own by referring to their genealogy (path dependency), their relation to other communications (interdependency) and the ways in which their future emergence is continuously anticipated/adapted upon in relation to surrounding personal/organisational objectives (goal dependency). After discussing these dependencies, I will further discuss how these dependencies interrelate, what the social and material reality effects of conflicts are, and what the implications of this evolutionary and Luhmannian perspective are for the ongoing theoretical and practical encounters with conflict in conservation tourism.

5.2 Conflict and Path Dependency

Path dependency explains how conflicts become engrained by both internal and external mechanisms through which their evolution becomes both enabled and constrained (Van Assche, Beunen and Duineveld, 2014). Internal mechanisms refer to those mechanisms by which conflicts become self-referential and operationally closed communications. For instance, as found in chapter 2, enduring conflict communication in communities such as Anabeb were reproduced as conflicts based on similar and eternal contradictions belonging to similar community factions as long as one can remember. External mechanisms refer to those mechanisms happening in the environment of conflicts that can indirectly (and possibly unintentionally) help to form these conflicts over time. For instance, as found in the same chapter 2, while multiple 'external' actors, like the Ministry of Tourism and Environment, tourism entrepreneurs, regional conservation NGOs were not interested in addressing the ongoing conflict in Anabeb, their organisational discourses and practices have nevertheless offered new podia for this enduring conflict to take shape once again. In the process, this conflict simultaneously became contaminated with more contemporary discourses of community development and wildlife conservation instead of former discourses focusing on, in this case, past colonial pension fund distributions across the region.

This change in appearance of conflict is arguably due to the structural openness of conflict communications. Indeed, a conflict can change in appearance since the object of conflict communications as well as the composition of involved actors shift over time. Nevertheless, such

changes have a limited effect on the evolution of conflicts, as they are inconsiderate of their environment due their operational closure. In this case, changing conflict appearances are indeed temporary. The pattern of its recurrence and related inter-community factions however, shows to be more enduring.

The extent to which a conflict becomes subject to its own (temporary and enduring) path dependency can only be reconstructed in hindsight. In fact, any reconstruction of a path dependency requires that we start to map the multiplicity and complexity of different actors and discourses that make up different truths about what is considered to be 'the conflict'. The diversity of problems and solutions about the presence/absence of conflict can help delineate what I, as a researcher, can observe as 'a conflict' over time. This implies that the analysis of a conflict requires second-order observations (see again chapter 1); a *constructivist* observation of how multiple other observers make their first-hand *realist* observations of, in this case, a conflicting situation (Fuchs, 2001).

In mapping the path dependency of conflicts, we can further observe how conflicts are constituted through various mechanisms. There are, to start with, many formal and informal institutions that address and are shaped by former conflicts and that have an influence on how one may presently deal with them (North, 1993; Pellis, 2011b). Such 'rule wrapping' of conflicts is what one may refer to as the *institutionalisation* of conflicts. For instance, to prevent human-wildlife conflicts from taking place again, we can introduce anti-poaching laws and related compensation arrangements or fines. Next to such institutionalisation, conflicts can further become subject to *objectification*, *reification* and *naturalisation* by which they become ever more constructed as seemingly 'irreversible' and 'given' objects or outcomes (Callon, 1991; Duineveld et al., 2013). The case of Anabeb (chapter 2) is an excellent example of these processes as various insiders (community members) in this conflict acknowledged that this conflict formed a *natural* part of their everyday life. Conflict seemed to exist here as an *objective* truth according to community members that did not necessarily require any analysis ("why bother asking questions about this conflict?"). And even as members acknowledged that this conflict stood in the way of the wellbeing of their community, they accepted its presence as a common *reiterated* instance of similar conflicts found across the wider (Kunene) region.

Interestingly however, while some community members would speak in detail of an enduring conflict that continued to frustrate conservancy developments, others would disregard its presence and rather speak of the opportunities that conservancy arrangements offer. In fact, some factions in the community of Anabeb disregarded or denied conflicts yet emphasised the beauty of novel and democratically organised community-based natural resource management. What is observed

as a conflict in a second-order observation is thus once again different from how situations are observed in a first-order observation. However, different first-order observations of a conflict situation can inform what I, as a second-order observer, observe as enduring contradictions that can fuel a conflict over time.

5.3 Conflict and Interdependency

A second dependency in the evolution of conflicts is found in the interdependency of conflicts. As I have shown in chapter 3, in Laikipia (Kenya), different conflict communications were interrelated, which had sincere impacts on the dynamics of the conflicts observed. These 'discursive' interdependencies of conflicts are often overseen in tourism studies (Hall, 2010; Hitchcock & Darma Putra, 2005; Øian et al., 2017). Due to this, conflicts "and their potential solutions – seem destined to be repeated" (Hall, 2010, p. 409). The point here is not to observe conflicts in isolation, but rather explore how it is that they become coupled with other discursive and material events in their environment (see also Duineveld et al., 2017).

When the development of one conflict communication is directly connected with the development of another communication, we can technically speak of a *structural coupling* (Teubner, 1998). As discussed in the context of Laikipia, Kenya, a relation can then evolve between, for instance, national elections and recurring land grabbing conflicts. As national elections in 2017 escalated existing conflicts, this now violent conflict also became more layered due to its relations with other conflict communications in its *direct* and *in-direct* environment (for similar observations of layered conflicts, see also Kronenburg García, 2017; Turner, 2004). Direct, by means of close and familiar incidents concerning land use grazing conflicts between neighbouring local Maasai and large conservation estates' managers in Laikipia. And in-direct, by means of how this conflict *resonated* with previous conflict communications established during former and similar land-grabbing practices in Laikipia's past or those instances remembered in the context of the black empowerment in Zimbabwe since 2000.

We can technically speak of *tight couplings* when it is highly likely that one conflict communication has a strong influence on another. Where one communication seems to respond to another in a more ad-hoc fashion, we can better speak of *loose couplings* (Teubner, 1998). For instance, an ecological approach to conservation conflicts can in theory trigger occasional critical responses from social science approaches (and vice versa) when these approaches become open to an interdisciplinary debate. But if these debates remain rare, it is more likely that both approaches will not react to each other (Fuchs, 2001).

Insiders in a conflict are only partially aware of the many and dynamic conflict interdependencies. For instance, as shown in chapter 3 and 4, biodiversity conservation and ecotourism practitioners can never be fully aware of all the potential adversaries that emerge as soon as they expand their conservation and/or ecotourism activities beyond familiar private reserves or public parks. A rapid shifting of social relations can follow from their entrance into new territories, which results in a 'social minefield' in which multiple disputes may lie hidden (chapter 3 and 4). When conservation and/or ecotourism organisations eventually do encounter (potential) conflicts, it is questionable whether and to what extent these organisations are able to (fully) see and understand these conflicts since such understanding remains limited to the self-referential nature of associated organisational discourses (Beunen et al., 2015; Van Assche et al., 2014).

5.4 Conflict and Goal Dependency

A third dependency in the evolution of conflicts is found in the goal dependency of social systems (for instance: conservation organisations and their logics) that encounter conflicts. Goal dependencies refer to the influence of future ideas or plans on how social systems configure their present social and material environment (Beunen et al., 2015; Van Assche et al., 2014). Simply put: images of the future matter for present day actions. If we, as shown in chapter 4, observe how organisations respond to potential conflicts, we can explore how such expectations influence contemporary practices. As I showed in this thesis, these organisations typically responded to potential conflicts in three ways: 1) acceptance, 2) avoidance, or 3) engagement.

As illustrated by the ongoing conflict in Anabeb, Namibia, conflicts can form normal and *accepted* conditions by which one simply grows up and expects to live with them as it seems impossible to imagine a world without them (chapter 2). For others, encounters with (new) conflicts can lead to more uneasy reactions, followed by a decision to *avoid* conflicts in the future (see chapter 4). Yet a (potential) conflict situation can counter-intuitively also present an opportunity for some, as illustrated in other cases. Indeed, *engaging* in conflict may help to create a future with less poverty, less poaching, or more equal and local decision-making power (see especially chapter 2 and 3). The latter option only makes sense if there seems to be more to gain than to lose, or if engagement forms a last resort to survive a situation that is considered unbearable (Luhmann, 1995).

Whatever future becomes incorporated in (potential) conflict encounters, involved organisations have to decide whether to adapt their practices in light of these encounters. As emphasised in chapter 4, the future anticipations or adaptations of conflicts by rewilding and ecotourism organisations often translated in forms of *conflict avoidance*. At times such avoidance contributed to the future goals of rewilding organisations, but in other occasions they also led to undesirable

and/or unanticipated effects. Anticipations and adaptations to future conflict encounters were observed here in different forms. For instance, anticipations materialised as ecotourism entrepreneurs decided to alter their design of an eco-lodge to allow for a more flexible structure that could be adapted in case of future conflicts with protected area authorities. Anticipations can also translate into *silences* to conceal potentially undesirable practices or avoid the use of sensitive words to outsiders. For instance, surrounding communities were suspicious about new nature-based experiments on land that they remembered as having productive value for agricultural and pastoral practices. Or, organizations displayed anticipatory behaviour through *co-optation* after seeing, for instance, how rewilding organisations allowed 'problematic others' on board by hiring them as game guards in emerging rewilding landscapes. Adaptations were found when rewilding organisations *outmanoeuvred* emerging conflict situations that could seriously threaten future rewilding ideas.

According to Luhmann, potential encounters with conflicts demand a dual codification by its observers of such encounters in terms of *risks* or *dangers* (King & Thornhill, 2003; Luhmann, 1993; Renn, 2008). Risks refer to those future possibilities that one can make sense of and anticipate upon. For instance, previous experiences with conflicts in similar contexts can inform the reactions of rewilding and ecotourism organisations to present conflicts (see chapter 1 and 4). Conflict avoidance then most often becomes an example of calculated action. Dangers on the other hand refer to those other possibilities that one cannot foresee (as blind spots) and that are hence impossible to anticipate. This explains why rewilding organisations are often forced to adapt their practices in an ad hoc fashion.

5.5 How Conflict Dependencies Interrelate

From the many examples from this thesis, it became clear that the evolution of conflicts in conservation tourism is always subject to their path, inter- and goal dependencies. Whereas each dependency helps to explain parts of this evolution, I would like to reiterate that these dependencies are interrelated. As path dependencies explain how the genealogy of conflicts is formed by both inside and outside mechanisms, we can explore how the many potential couplings with material and discursive events in the environment of conflicts (interdependencies) support the ongoing formation of persisting conflicts. The discussion of goal dependencies adds another layer to this external formation, as the formation of conflicts seems to be mutually coupled with how bystanders deal with them.

To better explain the interconnected nature of these dependencies in conflict communications, I would like to expand the previous *parasitic* metaphor for conflicts with that of *fire* (see also chapter

4). Fire is essentially a natural process that depends on a complex combination of factors by which it may, or may not, keep growing (Law & Singleton, 2005). Like fire, the development of a conflict does not necessarily continue on the basis of its initial causes, but rather depends on wider social and material processes from which it receives its fuel and form – as heated and manifest or cooled down and simmering – over time. Conflicts can indeed be characterised as having an aggressiveness similar to that of fire: once they burn, if they are given sufficient resources, they are very hard to extinguish. They may indeed appear to last 'forever' as illustrated by ongoing inter-community conflicts in Anabeb (chapter 2) and have complex interdependencies with other conflicts (chapter 3). However, conflicts have shown to be even more inflammable than fire, as practically any event could form a resource for the examined conflicts to persist. A discussion about the use of tourism income for a local health clinic (see chapter 2), for instance, could suddenly transform into a conflict that changed the topic of the discussion to the unequal distribution of jobs in a community-based eco-lodge next door, the constant seeping of income to powerful clans, or the fact that 'your daughter' was granted a scholarship at the expense of 'my son'.

Where the previous example illustrates the interrelatedness of events in a local setting, we can further observe interrelations of seemingly 'external' events that can have serious effects on how conflicts and these events become coupled over time. In the Namibian case of Anabeb (chapter 2), the emphasis of intermediating conservation NGOs undeniably lies on the development of well-performing conservancy products, and not on conflicts as these would reveal failures of an internationally praised conservation project. In the Kenyan case of Laikipia (chapter 3), various NGOs do not mention or necessarily recognise conflicts, but instead focus on what they see as a-political and commercially successful conservation enterprises that depend on international donor support. Reports of these NGOs logically do not mention relations with overlapping conservation tourism interventions or the development of conflicts. These developments and relations instead seem to be trivial for these organisations in relation to their self-referential ambitions to develop 'their' African nature-based landscapes. And as these organisations even self-report to be unaware of how other conservation organisations develop similar conservation tourism projects in the same landscapes with the same communities, their practices also contribute to how local conflicts evolve (Pellis, Lamers, et al., 2015) as different community factions become related to different organisations and their discourses (see also chapter 2 and 3). This, in the end, demands that we remain critical of who arguably operates on the in- or outside of a conflict, as this distinction is continuously defined by the process of that conflict.

5.6 How Conflicts Co-perform Conservation Tourism

Finally, like fire produces heat, conflicts influence the development of conservation tourism. Across the different cases I have recurrently observed how conflicts co-perform the very environments in which they directly evolve, or even have the potential to indirectly co-perform other conflicts in other contexts (see chapter 3). To conclude that conflicts are performative is not new, as any communication, depending on the context in which they become communicated, has the potential to sort reality effects (Austin, 1975; Callon, 2010; Law & Urry, 2004). In a similar trend, conflicts have produced particular social and material effects in the context of conservation tourism. From my research I found that:

- Conflicts can *develop* their own (and possibly new) subjects or objects. Actors are formed, empowered or marginalised by conflicts (e.g. victims, enemies, or mediators). At the same time, conflicts help to establish material effects, such as barbed wire, the relocation of entire villages, but also the design of eco-lodges (Duineveld & Van Assche, 2011; Rijke & Minca, 2018; chapter 4).

- Conflicts can *marginalise* or *strengthen* other communications. As conflicts attract a great deal of resources and attention, they can simultaneously overshadow other communications. For instance, where conflicts are picked up by the media, other aspects of social life are given less attention and will (temporarily) be considered unimportant (Ottolini, 2018; chapter 2). At the same time, any attention given to conflicts may simultaneously also legitimise a need for certain other discourses: local conflicts may, for instance, support more 'orderly' organisational discourses that direct towards reconciliation, development, bottom-up conservation, landscape approaches, et cetera (Pellis, Lamers, et al., 2015).

- Conflicts can *parasitise* their environment. Conflicts can dominate other communications, get hold of entire organisations, put community projects on hold, stir up new (or old) ideologies, et cetera. This process occurs when a conflict attracts other communications and starts to interpret these in terms of itself. For instance, as shown by the example of Anabeb Conservancy, certain – initially non-conflicting and naive inquiries into local community relations – interactions may suddenly become lured in a conflict. Conflict outsiders can then (temporarily) become insiders.

5.7 Implications: Patience, Prudence and Openness

Given the highly dynamic nature of conflict evolutions in conservation tourism, I have kept away from the typical assumptions about conflicts as found in the ecotourism or wider conflict

literatures. Such literatures predominantly assume that conflicts are negative, destructive and possibly dangerous. As a result there is a tendency to study them from a distance, meaning that we typically approach conflicts in light of our own (disciplinary) dependencies by which conflicts then logically become simplified. In chapter 1 I highlighted how conflicts partly inform how our psyche works, how societal structures are explained in light of conflicts, and how the way we describe cultures is influenced by our 'ritual dances' around conflicts. In each of these descriptions and explanations, conflicts are not the central focus, but rather are explained in light of given differences existing between individuals, organisations, discourses or cultures. These descriptions may help to advance our own fields of inquiry, but they certainly do not provide a thorough understanding of conflicts as interesting and dynamic processes in their own regard.

I therefore put conflicts at the centre of my analysis. Indeed, and in contrast to what some have already called an 'anxiety disorder' in conflict studies (see further De Dreu, 2005), I did not study conflicts as essentially obscure and shady outcomes of differences, but instead opted to embrace conflicts as social processes that we, whether we like it or not, have somehow created ourselves and hence need to take responsibility for (Latour, 2011). To embrace conflicts, we need to first acknowledge what conflicts do and how they do what they do. I have shown how hard it is to tame conflicts, and that they cannot be resolved in their entirety as a result of their complex path-, inter- and goal dependencies. Even though it still remains theoretically possible to end a conflict that is performed by two actors by eliminating one of the actors in due course, contemporary conflicts are typically characterised and sustained by complex and wide relations to conflicts which are hardly, if ever, stable (Demmers, 2012).

Given the many dependencies of conflicts, I finally ask the question of what happens if we decide to embrace conflicts by acknowledging that they function as dynamic, self-referential and parasitical communications. What implications does such an alternative understanding have for conservation tourism practices? To answer these questions, I suggest six practical implications (including recommendations) that can be taken into consideration in the future:

- A *first* and obvious implication is that there is little use in searching for unambiguous source(s) of 'the conflict'. If we acknowledge that conflicts are formed by multiple contradictory communications and related dependencies over time, then there is no point in speaking of 'the conflict'. My advice is to focus instead on a process-oriented approach that requires a thick analysis of the context in which any seemingly distinct conflict communication has developed; how it may persist as a communication today; how it interrelates with its environment through various couplings; or how various social actors perceive and react in reference to how they

observe this or that conflict. In such an analysis, it should become clear how different organisations or individuals: have an interest in sustaining, or bowing out of, a conflict as they (fore-)see multiple benefits and obstacles (Luhmann, 1995; Mol, 2002); observe a conflict in relation to other available discourses; and/or how they become subject to the life histories of the conflicts they live with.

- A *second* implication is to have patience in the analysis of conflicts. As conflicts develop as heated and self-referential communications, research may prove problematic if we resort to fast conclusions. To identify conflicts, it is critical that we start by tracing contradicting reactions upon reactions upon reactions, et cetera. We should thus follow the (potential) conflict, and not necessarily its actors. For instance, if we decide to construct a fence along an entire eco-system to protect it from undesirable poaching or potential human-wildlife conflict, we cannot predict how different actors will respond in anticipation. Any anticipation in itself cannot (yet) be named a conflict. Only by mapping future (counter-)reactions we may gradually trace how a conflict comes into being as more responses (re-)surface and unite around what seems contested. This indeed raises questions concerning the analysis of conflicts, as at times a conflict process may immediately be recognised by some as an emotional and negative instance, while on other occasions it may be considered a disagreement or incident that attracts little (emotional) attention or reaction in tourism contexts (Cohen & Neal, 2010; Hall, 2010; Hitchcock & Darma Putra, 2005). A patient researcher or practitioner should thus take sufficient time to understand conflict processes by exploring various responses and how these furthermore relate to past instances, to associated parallel events found elsewhere, et cetera. In other words, it is critical that we indeed engage with conflicts by "slowing down, staying open, alert and attentive" so we allow ourselves to stay "with our data" (Ren, Van der Duim, & Johannesson, 2015, p. 241), in this case the conflicts we come across in conservation tourism.

- A *third* implication is that one needs to become more prudent with any attempt to manage or mediate a conflict. I do not argue that there is no point in making these attempts, but that these attempts may often also paradoxically help to sustain these conflicts. For example, in this thesis I showed how conflict avoidance may eventually lead to more tensions over ecotourism developments (chapter 4), or how tourism governance arrangements may temporarily solve a minor conflict in one community while stimulating the intensification of another conflict elsewhere (chapter 3). In fact, such management attempts can make conflicts more persistent as an increasing number of organisations come up with different solutions that fit their version

of a conflict problem. At best, I instead propose a more passive approach to conflicts in conservation tourism that starts first of all with the mere acceptance of conflicts as important co-performative processes that one could consider living with in co-existence. Conflicts do not simply come and go, they instead seem to persist and influence our practices, so why not consider giving ourselves a chance to become familiar with such powerful processes before we decide to get rid of them?

- A *fourth* implication is openness to unanticipated effects of conflicts. By engaging with conflicts, we do not just become more familiar with their processes, we do also take part in embracing potentially innovative or dangerous outcomes. In fact, being open to differences may in theory help to bend (potential) heated interactions into rather "unexpected connections" between discourses, groups or things (Tsing & Pollman, 2005). An interesting example in this regard has been the construction of the Starcamp in Portugal (see chapter 4): former conflict interactions have stimulated ecotourism developers to develop flexible tourism enterprises in the middle of a special protected area (SPA) where human settlement is normally out of the question. Instead of stopping any further development, developers of the Starcamp persisted and in the process surprised bystanders with what is seen now as an innovative nature-based enterprise and an example for other nature parks in Portugal or elsewhere.

- A *fifth* implication of perceiving conflicts as social systems suggests that conflicts may have a goal dependency in their own regard. As shown in chapter 2, 3 and 4, conflicts have been presented as typically uncertain and parasitical social systems that live on, and influence, the taken-for-granted boundaries of things, people, organisations or ideas (Abbott, 1995; Luhmann, 1995, 2012). If we take conflicts seriously, then there is a likelihood that conflicts produce images of the future that not only matter to surrounding organisations (as explored in chapter 4), but possibly also to conflicts themselves. Future research should explore what expectations conflicts produce about their own future, but also what expectations conflicts produce in the hosting communications that continue to fuel these conflicts and their expectations.

- A *sixth* and final implication relates to the transferability of a Luhmannian perspective to conflicts. This discussion on the evolutionary and performative nature of conflicts is based on a translation of Luhmann's abstract and descriptive theory of conflicts in the context of conservation tourism practices. Whereas the findings of this thesis indicate similarities in how

conflicts have a capacity to evolve and perform in their environment, further research using a Luhmannian perspective should explore to what extent and in which ways conflicts develop in other situations or contexts. All examples in this thesis have focused on conflicts between people. A logical next research step is to apply a Luhmannian approach at similar, obvious and everyday encounters with conflict processes in conservation (tourism) situations, namely that of human-wildlife conflicts (Baynham-Herd et al., 2018; Ottolini, 2018). And if we move beyond conservation tourism situations, how may we then, for instance, look alternatively at ongoing conflicts situated in the Koreas, Israel-Palestine, Syria, or maybe at those more ordinary household conflicts, conflicts about the inheritance of family fortunes, or conflicts with our neighbours concerning our own backyards? Do these conflicts develop according to similar principles as explained in this thesis? In other words: there is still much work to do.

Conclusion and Discussion

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LIST OF PUBLICATIONS (RELATED TO THIS PHD)

Pellis, A., Duineveld, M., & Van der Duim, R. (submitted) Conservation Tourism Conflicts: Embracing their Evolution and Performativity as Social Systems, *Annals of Tourism Research*.

Pellis, A, Duineveld, M.. de Vries, J. & Kil, A.J. (in press) Heet en niet te blussen. Conflicten als performatieve communicatie systemen, een Luhmaniaans perspectief, *Tijdschrift voor Communicatiewetenschap*.

Pellis, A. (2019). Reality Effects of Conflict Avoidance in Rewilding and Tourism Practices - the case of Western Iberia. *Journal of Ecotourism*, DOI:10.1080/14724049.2019.1579824.

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Arjaan Pellis

Wageningen School of Social Sciences (WASS)

COMPLETED TRAINING AND SUPERVISION PLAN

Name of the learning activity	Department/Institute	Year	ECTS*
A) Project related competences			
PhD research proposal writing	WASS/GEO	2014-2015	6
"The socio-political development of Serengeti landscapes in Europe: the case of Western-Iberia"	international conference WILD10, Salamanca, Spain	2013	1
"Rewilding Europe: the case of Western – Iberia"	ESG lunch meeting, Wageningen	2013	1
"Productive Conflict Avoidance in the Making of Western Iberia"	ATLAS Europe conference, Lisbon	2015	1
"Eco-colonialism, Conflicts and the Rewilding of Western Iberia in Portugal and Spain"	Landscape conversation, GEO, Wageningen	2015	1
"The Making of Western Iberia – Introduction"	WASS/FNP, Summerschool Governing Landscape Restoration	2015	1
"Anticipating a Tsunami of Cows - on Environmental Conflict and Interdependency with Socio-Material Events - the Case of Loisaba, Kenya"	Political Ecologies of Conflict, Capitalism and Contestation (PE-3C), Wageningen	2016	1
B) General research related competences			
WASS introduction course	WASS	2015	1
MSc thesis supervision	GEO	2012-2019	4
Considering Case Studies: Positioning in methods and reflecting on practices	WASS	2014	0.5
Scientific Writing	Wageningen in'to Languages	2015	1.8
Political Ecologies of Conflict, Capitalism, and Contestation (PE-3C)	WASS	2016	3
C) Career related competences/personal development			
PhD discussions @ GEO / Initiator East-African Tourism Writing Team	GEO/ESG	2011-2014	1
Wageningen Geography Lectures	GEO	2011-2019	1
Lead organizer symposium KIGO European Nature Entrepreneurship	GEO/VHL/WNF/Rewilding Europe/AWF	2012	2
Lead organizer/facilitator European Wilderness Entrepreneurship (Erasmus Intensive Program), in Western Spain and Eastern Portugal	ERASMUS Intensive Programme	2013-2014	4
Co-organizer final symposium KIGO European Nature Entrepreneurship	GEO/VHL/Rewilding Europe	2014	2
Present research findings during Dutch Holiday Fair – Changes in Tourism symposium: *"Wildernistoerisme voor ontwikkeling"*	Changes in Tourism / Holiday Fair (Utrecht)	2015	1
Total			**33.3**

*One credit according to ECTS is on average equivalent to 28 hours of study load

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Doing a PhD feels like a rollercoaster ride. It is rich with (potentially) contradicting personal, institutional, friends and family interests that you creatively need to work with (and around). The ride is also surprisingly repetitive: the first paper submission is nerve-racking, as are the review loops and rebuttal letters, and then you just start over again with a next paper, equally nerve-racking, followed by another conference visit, a next course you start teaching in, meetings with the promotion team and responding to the many people asking you: "when are you going to finish your PhD?" As it turns out, you are never really finished, as while you dig into your research you keep finding new dimensions and mechanisms that could further contribute to a better understanding of what you wanted to find out in the first place. Knowing that there is a lot more work to be done still, I have to admit I am glad that this particular rollercoaster ride is over, and I could not have made it to the finish line without the valuable support of many people in my professional and personal environment.

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Thinking of and writing your PhD does not happen in isolation with just your promotion team. One critical aspect is the academic environment in which I could work. For this I want to thank

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