Protest, middlemen and everyday meanings of place: reconceptualising the scramble for East Africa’s drylands

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**ABSTRACT**
Kenya’s drylands have experienced a recent rise in large-scale land acquisitions, including energy extraction and infrastructure projects. The “scramble” for land and resources involves a range of actors, including pastoralists, many of whom have attempted to secure rights over land in anticipation of new opportunities associated with future investments. Such “economies of anticipation” among communities are transforming investor and state visions. This article adds to discussions of economies of anticipation; it argues that different types of middlemen are central to rural communities’ struggles to gain a stake in energy and infrastructure investments, and the precarity they face due to land tenure change. The article argues for the importance of incorporating a temporal dimension into discussions of economies of anticipation and community-middlemen interactions. It charts how one pastoralist community’s past experiences of negotiating their inclusion in the Lake Turkana Wind Power investment and other land deals shaped subsequent desires to demarcate land in anticipation of future investments. Alleged nepotism and inequitable inclusion of communities by investment gatekeepers sparked community claims of rightful inclusion based around contested meanings of land and an everyday sense of place. Social stratifications and narratives of belonging that emerged from protests for inclusion determined citizens’ subsequent attempts to gain a stake in future investment projects.

Large-scale land acquisitions in Africa have significantly increased over the past 20 years. The drylands of northern Kenya have been at the forefront of this; the region has experienced a recent surge in energy extraction and infrastructure projects.\textsuperscript{1} Prior to 2016 and the implementation of the Community Land Act, much of northern Kenya was trust land – held in trust by the government for the people. Despite protection of customary rights under the Trust Land Act, illegal appropriation of trust land for investments has been
This article adds to anthropological discussions of economies of anticipation by arguing that middlemen are pivotal to rural communities’ struggles to gain a stake in energy and infrastructure investments in Kenya’s drylands and the precarity they face due to land tenure change.

Hall et al. and Lind et al. encourage caution at simple narratives of large-scale investment projects in Africa being purely driven by the interests of powerful government elites and investors, while rural communities are dispossessed and resist. These stories do not capture the more complex dynamics of interests that anticipate and pursue large-scale investments. Individuals and groups variously comply, resist and anticipate to determine the terms of their incorporation. In East Africa, Mosley and Watson describe a “scramble” taking place, not just between investors wanting to lease land but between a range of actors, including citizens, based on anxieties to have a “stake” before it is all taken by others.

Brokers emerge in rapid economic and political transitions in African contexts. Okenwa and Lind reveal that oil exploration in Turkana County depends on mediation figures – often politicians. People seek connections with these politician-mediators to influence decisions on investor benefit distribution. However, accusations of “elite capture”: exploiting communities to grab opportunity and wealth instead of helping them – are often made towards these mediators. This article aligns with Okenwa and Lind, arguing that brokerage is central to northern Kenyan rural community struggles for inclusion in large-scale investments and precarity of land rights associated with land acquisitions. I bring complexity to discussions of community-middlemen interactions by highlighting the multiple forms of brokerage and networks of relationships between various middlemen and communities.

By putting community-middlemen interactions at the centre of analysis, the article adds a new dimension to discussions of economies of anticipation. Cross popularised the phenomenon to characterise the diverse ways that anticipatory actions of people shape the trajectory of development and modernisation. Economies of anticipation are occurring among people in northern Kenya; individuals and groups are scrambling to secure rights over land in anticipation of new opportunities associated with future investments. As such, visions of the state and companies are being transformed to fit local realities.

To properly understand economies of anticipation in the context of the drylands of northern Kenya, this article argues for a more temporal view of how scrambles for land and resources, and community-middlemen interactions unfold. The ways in which economies of anticipation play out within communities are deeply shaped by those communities’ past experiences of investments and land deals. This more temporal view can only be achieved through long-term fieldwork that spans different rounds of development and incorporates historical and genealogical data alongside ethnographic research. As a result, this article draws on 22 months of ethnographic fieldwork conducted in 2014 and 2015 with a community of northern Kenyan Samburu pastoralists, which I shall name Lorropili for the sake of anonymity, combined with a subsequent round of research carried out in 2019 with the same community. It was only by returning to the Lorropili community that I was able to appreciate the complex ways in which previous struggles for inclusion and precarity of land tenure are shaping their anticipation and preparation for future development projects in the region.
The article foregrounds the diversity and pervasiveness of middlemen who exert a strong influence over communities’ struggles for inclusion in large-scale investments and land deals. In my research, middlemen were a specifically male figure who positioned themselves between local communities, investors and state administration. Focusing on the Lake Turkana Wind Power (LTWP) investment and other land deals, the article demonstrates how opposition to a type of middleman I call “investment gatekeepers” becomes a focal point for Lorropili grievances against perceived nepotism and inequitable inclusion in LTWP benefits and negotiations over land deals. One investment gatekeeper – Eunice – dominates the discussion. He was the main mediator between LTWP and communities. Other investment gatekeepers include politicians and businesspeople. Another type of middleman that I call “protest patrons” were pivotal in Lorropili residents’ capacity to protest against investment gatekeepers and negotiate their inclusion. Social stratifications along axes of age, gender and kinship surfaced within and between communities through struggles for inclusion and efforts by investment gatekeepers to quash protests. Experiences of interactions with middlemen in struggles for inclusion and the community divisions that ensued influenced economies of anticipation surrounding future investments. Middlemen continued to be pivotal; separate cohorts in a freshly divided community sought their own, more favourable networks of patronage.

This article argues that Lorropili residents’ perceived rights to their community’s inclusion in LTWP and negotiations surrounding land deals were underpinned by ideas of belonging and related customary rights over land. Rights were negotiated and performed by Lorropili protestors to counter their perceived disregard by investment gatekeepers. Protest patrons inflated community rights-based narratives and performances. These narratives were then re-deployed in attempts to gain a stake in future investment projects.

Performances of community and associated rights have a long legacy among pastoralists of northern Kenya. Identities are constructed, (re-)negotiated and contingent upon the immediate political and economic contexts. Since multi-party politics in 1992, northern Kenyan ethnic identities have become increasingly contested. Manipulations of ethnicity by politicians and public have become more openly aligned with belonging to administrative areas and rights to benefits from state resources within these areas. Such polarised politics of belonging and political patronage has heightened since devolved politics in 2013. Politically and economically driven manipulations of identity and belonging in Kenya take place within the context of legal and institutional pluralism concerning land rights. Competing normative orders are used to legitimise specific claims to land. Truths surrounding these norms are not fixed but undergo re-definition through the process of legitimisation.

Long-standing tensions concerning rights to land and claims to entitlement to state benefits have been replayed and amplified through Lorropili residents’ interactions with middlemen in their struggles for inclusion in LTWP and other land deals. Portrayals of community and attempts to legitimise belonging and associated rights involved meanings, rights, moral and legal institutions governing land – being contested, combined and re-worked. By dwelling on the deeply felt, everyday nature of people’s relationships with place, the analysis adds important context and new insights to discussions surrounding performances of community in rural citizens’ relationships with middlemen and struggles for inclusion in investments. This has been hitherto underplayed in the
literature. Contested meanings of community and land that emerged from protests for inclusion and divisions and alliances created within and between communities influenced subsequent anticipations of future investments. New relationships with patrons were central to these economies of anticipation.

The first part of the article focuses on Lorropili community members’ experiences of negotiating their inclusion in the LWTP investment and other land deals. The analysis centres on community interactions with investment gatekeepers and protest patrons. The discussion then moves on to analyse how these experiences influenced subsequent economies of anticipation in relation to possible future investments.

**Investments, land deals and protests: the role of middlemen**

This section introduces the Lake Turkana Wind Power project and other land deals that impacted the residents of Lorropili. It argues that interactions with middlemen were integral to local-level struggles and contestations for inclusion that ensued. I analyse how Lorropili residents variously negotiated the terms of their inclusion in LTWP and other land deals via protest. Contested definitions of community and suppression of protests by investment gatekeepers depended on old and created new social stratifications, divisions and alliances, to determine avenues of inclusion and exclusion. Community relationships with protest patrons and the ways patrons influenced protestors are forwarded and contextualised within regional political and historical contexts.

The LTWP project is Africa’s largest wind farm and became the largest public–private investment in Kenya’s history. The windfarm site covers 40,000 hectares of Marsabit County with LTWP leasing a further 110,000 hectares surrounding the site. The majority of the leased area is low-lying, arid land that is sparsely populated with communities who identify as Samburu, Rendille and Turkana. Most communities follow pastoralist lifestyles of cattle, goat, sheep and camel herding. Construction of the LTWP site and surrounding infrastructure began in 2014. By 2019, this was complete, and the wind farm was transmitting electricity to the national grid. In 2014, subcontractor jobs and forms of compensation for communities were beginning to occur, placing the development firmly on people’s radar. LTWP portray themselves as involving people of the area in the project – through consultation and benefits, such as employment, compensation and development projects. Within the context of large-scale investments in the global south, demarcating “community” – those entitled to consultation and participation – is central to company–community relations. It is a process involving the company, community liaison officers (CLOs) and the public. Rather than being dictated by international and company protocols, the terms of community engagement are negotiated and contested through interactions between a company and communities. The discussion here exemplifies the importance of middlemen in mediating company–community relations; middlemen play an important role in determining those included and allocating resources. Community capacity to affect engagement with LTWP was through protests against one middleman, the dynamics of which were contingent on local histories of patronage and wider political dynamics. Protest was a means to form connections and leverage inclusion.

Lorropili is located on the fringes of the LTWP catchment area. Like other communities, many Lorropili residents felt excluded from the project by investment gatekeepers
in terms of access to information and economic benefits, including subcontractor jobs.\textsuperscript{18} Blame was focused on the main CLO, Eunice – a Samburu man from the area. He was perceived as the key mediator in company–community relations – the face of LTWP – who oversaw all other community engagement employees from the area and had the power to determine the parameters of the “community” included. People thought Eunice – and Human Resources employees, CLOs and area chiefs beneath him – were directing benefits, especially subcontractor jobs, towards his clan and family.\textsuperscript{19} Many people from the area wanted jobs to be distributed equitably between sub-locations. There was a feeling that Eunice was not abiding by LTWP community engagement protocol and people made alternative cases for their rightful inclusion based on belonging, as later sections discuss.

To protest their exclusion and lobby for inclusion, male youth from Lorropili united under the leadership of one of their peers (Losira)\textsuperscript{20} and carried out multiple roadblocks in late 2014 and early 2015 to force Eunice and other investment gatekeepers to come and speak with them.\textsuperscript{21} The group voiced their concerns of exclusion and requested a greater share of subcontractor jobs and community compensation for aggregate unearthed nearby. They also wanted information and compensation for the electricity pylon wayleave in “their area” (\textit{nkop ang}), part of the route south to be taken by the electricity line.

Exclusion from the LTWP project was part of Lorropili’s wider disenfranchisement from investments and land deals. Land around Lorropili, like most of the region, was classified as trust land until 2016, when the Community Land Act was applied. As Alden Wiley discusses, trust land in northern Kenya has historically been viewed as un-owned or government property; open access for investors, who acquire sections and convert it to more secure private tenure.\textsuperscript{22} Pastoralists’ customary rights under the Trust Land Act (TLA) have often been flouted in the process. Rumours abound in towns across the region of local businesspeople and politicians who have covertly secured land titles across the area. However, until recently Lorropili was unaffected.

In late 2014, some politicians leaked information to the community via Losira about a land concession near Lorropili on which Samburu County Government and the National Government had allegedly agreed with an investor to construct an energy project called Marti Energy.\textsuperscript{23} The acquisition typifies the concerns of many educated people of the area: politicians and elites taking advantage of rural communities’ lack of knowledge of their legal rights, which they disregard in the process of annexing trust (now community) land and acquiring land titles. Multiple Lorropili protestors claimed that their community were purposively kept in the dark by investment gatekeepers (mediating between Marti Energy, the government and the community) because they knew they were contravening customary land rights. A group of women and young men joined Losira in a demonstration to protest the covert way their land was allegedly annexed and leased without open discussions and consultation – a legal requirement under the TLA. As with the LTWP investment, anger was directed at local investment gatekeepers, in this case Samburu County politicians and businesspeople working with the company. Suspicion and anger also focused on the area chief for Lorropili and a few community members for allegedly assisting the investment gatekeepers.

Lorropili residents’ feelings of exclusion from investments in the area, and the insecure status of trust land, were compounded by the knowledge that a place called Loshepa was given to an outside investor.\textsuperscript{24} People became aware of this transaction
in 2014, around the same time as Marti Energy. Unlike Marti Energy, the investor engaged with the public in – what he deemed – a comprehensive consultation process. However, as is later discussed, Lorropili informants did not agree. They blamed Eunice, acting as the middleman, for determining the scope of community inclusion, which was inadequate. He was blamed by people from the area for using a few elders from his Samburu clan to legitimise the land acquisition, whilst ignoring the wider community.25 As with protests for inclusion in LTWP, Lorropili residents contested their rightful inclusion based on rights over land.

Suspicious business practices were nothing new. County government power struggles involving protests and allegations of corruption and embezzlement were becoming commonplace in 2014. Protests and accusations were often mounted to leverage those accused. In a world where protest for inclusion was common and access to political power and resources involves individual navigation and allegiance with patrons, it was no surprise that Lorropili residents engaged in protests and that the dynamics of these followed norms of patronage. Their protests involved public roadblocks and demonstrations, and negotiations away from the public domain. LTWP roadblocks, the Marti Energy demonstration, and disquiet regarding the Loshepa land deal were supported and sponsored by elites, whom I call “protest patrons”. A few Samburu County politicians and a successful businessman originally from Lorropili used Losira to enlighten the community about the alleged actions of the various investment gatekeepers. They empowered Losira with information concerning community rights and provided economic and strategic support to protests and holding the alleged perpetrators to account using legal apparatus.

The protests were somewhat successful in securing benefits for Lorropili as a whole. Eunice allocated them more LTWP subcontractor jobs, and compensation for aggregate and wayleave cut trees, and Marti Energy disappeared. But, throughout 2015 the distribution of jobs and compensation continued to be contested with renewed accusations of favouritism. Despite their initial success, Losira and his team of protestors lost momentum. By mid-2015, their patrons had disappeared; Losira suspected that they had used the Lorropili community to leverage their own access to investment benefits, which for politicians was part of county government power struggles. Losira lamented, ‘those who were defending me vanished … They were given what they wanted; they now have money and very big houses’. The disappearance of protest patrons left the community less able to affect their inclusion in LTWP and protect their rights over land.

The protests also dissipated due to their suppression by investment gatekeepers. In response to the roadblocks and climate of unrest surrounding LTWP and Marti Energy project, Eunice and the area chief for Lorropili worked hard to reduce the incidences of public protests by causing fragmentation of the protesting cohort, discrediting their discourse and silencing them. They took advantage of protestors’ desires for employment and readiness to seek an individual deal in private. They targeted, among others, Losira’s most influential allies by allocating or promising jobs in exchange for them ceasing protesting and persuading their peers not to protest. Although accentuated by struggles for LTWP benefits, securing individual patronage away from public space is a common way to access resources.

The area chief for Lorropili used allies within the community to discredit the protestors’ discourse concerning the inequitable distribution of LTWP benefits. He relied on his
inner circle containing influential elders to frame Losira and youth as greedy and protests as counterproductive: protests would scare off the investors and thus there would be no jobs. Middlemen mediating Marti Energy investment feared Losira and his patrons challenging the land lease and enlightening the community. They also used community allies to quash rumours of the land deal; to ‘keep people in the dark’, according to Losira. The practice of using allies to act as moles and surrogate mouthpieces within communities is a common political tactic. But the extent to which this tactic was used in Lorropili increased with the investments.

The Lorropili chief and other middlemen maintained the loyalty of their allies, and other elders within the community, via money. The chief also secured loyalty from his inner circle and exerted influence over the wider population by exploiting his various positions within the community, social bonds he shares and associated moral obligations. People found themselves in difficult moral positions, torn between generational, clan, family and other social obligations. This caused some elders to remain silent and pressure their sons to stop protesting. Some sons adhered to these demands; others – compelled by the moral cause of fighting injustice and the anticipation of benefits either distributed publicly or through private deals – continued their protest, albeit in a less unified manner.

The divide that emerged between elders and youth and women during the height of the protest fragmented. However, protest suppression by middlemen caused multiple divides (both old and new) along, and cutting across, generation, gender and kinship group, some of which persisted. For example, people accused the chief of favouring those from his clan (particularly his family) with jobs and compensation pay-outs. Because people of the same clan and family often stick together, the chief’s kin may have expected preferential patronage from his newfound power. People not related to the chief accused him of using patronage to reduce his kin’s resistance against him. Rumours circulated of the chief’s history of embezzling funds and favouring his clan and family. Past tensions between his clan and family, and other sections of the community (partially healed) were reopened in light of these recent accusations.

In sum, Lorropili residents’ capacity to shape investor–community relations emerged through contestations and protests against investment gatekeepers over the perceived inequitable distribution of LTWP benefits and the covert and alleged illegal nature of land deals. Struggles for LTWP benefits and capacity to exert rights over land were dependent on protest patrons and intertwined with regional (political) struggles for wealth and power. Protests contested, and manifested along, norms of patronage, which has become increasingly based on clan and family with the actions of investment gatekeepers and since devolved governance. Attempts by Eunice and the chief to suppress protests involved the exploitation and accentuation of divides and alliances within and between communities along old and new social stratifications. People’s experiences of exclusion, protests and insecure land tenure, along with the divisions and alliances that formed through protests and their suppression, shaped subsequent anticipations of future investments.

Our place (nkop ang’)

Investor–community relations involve negotiating and delineating the notion of community, which is often performed by people to present their case as rightful beneficiaries.
Contested meanings of land and belonging to place have been part of these performances among people of northern Kenya scrambling for a stake in investments. Long-standing tensions, fuelled by regional politics, over land rights and access to resources have been amplified as people seek to claim land in anticipation of investments.²⁸

By focusing on community relationships with middlemen, this section offers new insights into discussions of inter-linkages between politics of belonging and scrambles for inclusion in investments. It discusses how people manipulated and combined different meanings of land to position themselves as rightful beneficiaries of investments and land deals. These narratives of land and performances of community emerged in protests against investment gatekeepers and were facilitated by protest patrons. Through interactions with these middlemen, the heightening of identity politics intertwined with wider political contexts from the recent and distant past. The section argues that performances and negotiations of community, and concepts of place and belonging depend on ways people and place are inter-connected through everyday lives and identities relating to ancestry, herding and ceremonies.

A businessman born in Lorropili who was present at one of the roadblocks revealed to the protestors that Lorropili had few people employed by LTWP subcontractors because they were residents of Samburu County and the rightful beneficiaries of the LTWP project were those residing within the LTWP catchment area, which is Laisamis Constituency, Marsabit County. There was a consensus among protestors that the investment gatekeeper (Eunice) controlled LWTP-community relations and distribution of benefits. And the revelation acted to confirm rumours that Eunice was ensuring most of the jobs were given to his Samburu family, clan and others living within a sublocation in Laisamis Constituency.

Such a revelation questioned and challenged the livelihoods and identities of Lorropili protestors, who considered this area to be theirs. A common reaction was to dismiss the relevance of administrative rights to land. Instead, people attempted to legitimise their belonging to, and rights over, parts of the LTWP catchment area based on ancestry, living and herding, and defending land.

In response to their perceived exclusion from LTWP benefits, many people of Lorropili expressed that a large area of Marsabit County is within Samburu ancestral land. Nkop ang’ (our land) can variously mean land for all Samburu, those living in the area, or land for certain phratries, clans, sub-clans or families. Custodianship and rights over land correspond with these conceptions. Anger was directed at Eunice and other investment gatekeepers for not abiding by these rights when mediating between LTWP and communities and when distributing benefits. By excluding the rightful custodians, Eunice had acted immorally. Being a Samburu person from the area, Eunice was aware of the correct custodians and chose to act immorally by excluding them, which goes a long way to explain why anger was directed at him, not LTWP per se.

A key aspect of nkop ang’ is current and past access to resources through custodianship and the authority this affords. For many Lorropili residents, their identities and status as Samburu pastoralists and a person of Lorropili are connected to their phratriy, clan and family’s custodianship over, and belonging to, sections of the mountain next to their settlement. Nowadays, people talk of a “Lorropili community nkop ang’” in which the whole community are the custodians of grazing and watering at wells. The area stretches across Samburu and Marsabit Counties and includes all clan and family places.
claimed by the Lorropili community. No one can be excluded from accessing resources and everyone should respect the wishes of the custodians. Lack of emphasis on mountain clan and family land and a fixed representation of a large “Lorropili community territory” reflect the coming together of people to live in a permanent settlement in the late 1990s to access food aid, educate their children at newly constructed nursery and primary schools and access permanent water at a new water pump. Prior to this, people lived more dispersed lifestyles and often migrated away from the mountain; today only livestock camps are mobile.

Family, clan, community and a greater Samburu land continually develop meaning for Lorropili residents as a part of their current lives and identities through herding livestock, migrating, performing ceremonies and living across the area. Their land is a part of, and a product of, relationships between people, livestock, places and Nkai (divinity). People, livestock and Nkai are co-agents in influencing the goodness of a place, including the presence of water points and the fertility of land. People’s claims to nkop ang’ depend upon their – and stories of their ancestors’ – relational engagement and familiarity with these places through living, herding and performing ceremonies, among other things. Straight et al. outline the Samburu idiom – ntoror, which, similarly to nkop ang’, encapsulates people’s interactions with an agentive landscape. Through ntoror, histories of collective identities and ethnogenesis evoke connections to place that are “emotionally palpable”.

Loshepa is a place on a mountain in Marsabit County; it is claimed by different Lorropili families of Lesinkir clan, and by the clan as a whole, as their ancestral land, where they have custodianship rights over wells and grazing. Meanings associated with such ancestral claims emerge from the way they are a part of people’s lives and their identities as herders and members of those families and clan. As one Lesinkir elder described, ‘I have lived in [Loshepa] during my childhood, as a lmurran, as an elder, up to now. I still migrate there … I know under every tree; I know all the pathways’. He evoked the story of a nineteenth century ancestor to legitimise his claims.

Unbeknown to Lorropili residents, the investor acquired a land title for Loshepa. He insisted that he had adequately consulted the community. The community reaction suggested otherwise and reaffirmed the precarity of trust land rights. The focus of the Lesinkir elder’s (and other Lorropili residents’) anger was at Eunice, who allegedly used a few of his relatives to sanction the land deal.

What happened with [Loshepa] was like theft. Thieves came from somewhere and joined hands with existing thieves on the ground. They should have met with and consulted the people, especially the owners of the place [Lesinkir]. But they left us out. I’m not happy. In my mind it doesn’t exist that he [the investor] is living there.

A member of Eunice’s clan (Lendaa), some of whom were used by him to secure the land deal, opposed Lesinkir’s claims over Loshepa. He gave a version of history that positioned his Lendaa clan as the original Samburu custodians of Loshepa and the rest of the mountain. To reinforce this claim of seniority, the elder described how Lendaa plays a lead role in ceremonies on the mountain. Roles and the order of participation in Samburu ceremonies depend on relative clan, sub-clan and family seniority, which depends in part on the custodians of the place in which the ceremony occurs. To question the correct order of things would be disrespectful and invite sin. The Lendaa elder
expressed his concern regarding the morality of the Lesinkir clan in claiming Loshepa. ‘We [Lendaa] share our places with [Lesinkir], but now they are claiming these places … We cannot refuse them, we will take them as brothers and live together, but we will remind them that [Loshepa] is for [Lendaa]’.

An elder of Lesinkir clan saw Lendaa claims to land as an attempt to enhance their clan’s societal status by seeking positions and places not “rightfully” theirs. In an unequal world of kinship, seniority and associated places, “truths” are up for negotiation; a negotiation that is underlain by people’s embodied conceptions of nkop ang’ and kinship group seniority through their own experiences and/or recollections of their ancestors’ experiences.

Most feeling pain over the alleged Loshepa land grab focused their ire on Eunice for not including the wider population, and especially Lesinkir, in discussions surrounding the land deal. Such exclusion of the owners of Loshepa and the assumption of seniority is immoral and goes against nkanyit (a sense of respect and honour), and “badness” will follow the culprits. Accusations against Eunice and his clan for acting immorally in assuming ownership and seniority over land claimed by Lorropili underpinned protestors’ anger at being excluded from LTWP benefits. Protest patrons sponsoring LTWP roadblocks and Lesinkir claims over Loshepa fuelled this anger by emphasising Lorropili rights for inclusion based on nkop ang’.

Despite protestors dismissing its relevance to meanings of land and people’s identities, administrative jurisdiction was important to discussions of ancestral rights over nkop ang’. In Lorropili and northern Kenya in general, people’s consciousness of ancestral-administrative territories related to ethnicity and associated rights to state resources has heightened and become increasingly overt since multi-party politics in the 1990s. But accessing state resources through patronage associated with administrative jurisdiction has a longer history, which emerged during colonial rule.33

A commonly held belief of people of the area claims that a section of Marsabit County, which includes part of the LTWP catchment area and Loshepa, is part of an original Samburu District. When demarcating this original district, the colonial administration allegedly followed local advice to encompass Samburu ancestral land, which incorporates the Lorropili community area and clan land, mountains and lowlands. Rendille and Samburu chiefs conspired to surrender this section of the original Samburu District to the Marsabit administration and Rendille herders.34 Based on this version of history, the designation of the original Samburu district legitimised (or formalised) the ancestral aspects of nkop ang’ and added weight to Lorropili claims of belonging and rights to inclusion in LTWP and the Loshepa land deal.

An alternative reading of history suggests that norms and truths associated with ancestral and administrative rights were negotiable, and a sense of belonging to, and rights over, an ancestral land has been enabled by a history of political patronage. Oral and archival histories suggest that it was the colonial demarcation of districts aligned with ethnicity that encouraged Lorropili residents’ concept of a coherent Samburu territory and Lorropili community ancestral area. In fact, oral histories from Lorropili elders and those compiled by Sobania from the region detail how it was the arrival of the colonial administration, their patronage and the formation of districts that enabled Samburu herders, including successive generations from Lorropili, to peacefully inhabit and enact custodianship over, and accumulate a sense of belonging to an ancestral land.35 Prior to
this, at the turn of the twentieth century a combination of human and animal diseases, droughts and attacks from a variety of groups caused livestock and human loss of life and forced many Samburu herders to seek refuge in a variety of forms. They abandoned land they once lived and herded across.

In summary, claims and experiences of belonging, meanings of land and norms associated with ancestral and administrative rights are not fixed. They were portrayed to position Lorropili residents as rightful beneficiaries of investments and land deals. Identities and statuses were renegotiated alongside land rights, which were legitimised. Performances of belonging, and claims of customary rights over land, which were dependent on relationships with middlemen, have always been in the process of construction and contingent on a history of political patronage. By dwelling on the way politics of belonging is grounded in everyday life, the discussion has shed light on the strength of claims and anger at Eunice for alleged immorality, and added fresh insights into performances of “community” and protests for inclusion.

*Nkop ang’ and defending land*

The dynamics of inter-ethnic pastoral conflict in northern Kenya have altered since multipartyism. Violence, including livestock raiding, has become increasingly associated with ideas of exclusive rights to grazing and state resources in one’s ethnic homeland. Colonially introduced ideas of ethnic rights over administrative areas are manipulated and propagated by politicians and public in search of access to political power and state resources through ethnic alliances. Since devolution in 2013, ‘county posts have become battlegrounds in the ethnicised contest for control of territory and economy’.

Lorropili protestors’ performances of community and claims of rights to inclusion in LTWP depended on politicised meanings of land as exclusive ethnic territories that need defending from Turkana. Identities as land defenders were important in interactions with middlemen. For many Lorropili residents and protestors, their anger at the investment gatekeeper Eunice for allegedly excluding them from LTWP subcontractor jobs while those of Marsabit County benefitted, especially Eunice’s clan, emanated from their bravery in defending this area from Turkana enemies. A Lorropili protester at one of the roadblocks told me, ‘[Eunice] is saying [Lorropili] isn’t here … that only Marsabit people should benefit [from LTWP]. It is wrong to leave out [Lorropili] people because we have defended all this land [from Turkana] up to now’.

Like many communities across the region, in the past Lorropili consisted of Samburu and Turkana living and herding together. According to current residents, Turkana were welcomed guests on Samburu land, allowed to live and graze. During periods when livestock raiding between Samburu and Turkana herders in the region intensified, the community separated along ethnic lines. But once peace was restored, they came back to live together.

Lorropili residents said that in the 1990s Turkana changed the dynamics of conflict from being about stealing livestock to chasing Samburu from their land. As such, *nkop ang’* needs protecting from Turkana because they have repeatedly proved that they cannot live peacefully. In the 1990s and 2000s, deteriorating relations between Samburu and Turkana across the region caused Lorropili Turkana to move away
permanently. To begin to understand how meanings and rights over land depend on its defence one must appreciate that ongoing tensions and fear of Turkana attacks are part of everyday lives and routines for the Samburu community. Men take pride in their reputation as brave fighters.39

Turkana informants from the area, including those who once lived in Lorropili, told a different story of changing conflict dynamics that focused on political dimensions. As has been the case across the region since 1992 and multi-party politics and again since devolution in 2013, increasingly divisive politics of belonging have caused a heightened sense of a Samburu ancestral land and administrative territory, which is under threat from Turkana who are a minority in Samburu County and neighbouring Marsabit County.40 Stereotypes of Turkana as aggressive and expansionist guests in a Samburu land was institutionalised by colonial government policy measures, which included sponsoring Samburu in punitive livestock raids against Turkana. Samburu continue to raid with impunity through protection and patronage from an ethnically Samburu-dominated Samburu County Government and Samburu MPs. Turkana informants felt victims of a political plot to expel them from Samburu County and neighbouring parts of Marsabit County including the LTWP site. Politicians sanction and incite a host–guest narrative and violence to gain votes from the majority Samburu public, who gain preferential access to state resources. A Turkana informant living in Samburu County lamented, ‘the county government are taking advantage of the majority of the population being Samburu… they are dividing us from Samburu… pushing us out [of the County]’.

In sum, for many protestors, anger at investment gatekeepers for excluding them from LTWP stemmed from the disregard for the sacrifices Lorropili residents have made in defending the land for Samburu to live and graze on. Performances of rights to inclusion based on competency in “holding the line” against aggressive Turkana invaders are contingent on a long history of politics of exclusion and patronage where Samburu are hosts and rightful recipients of state resources, and Turkana unwelcomed guests.

**Anticipating future investment and seeking development: land demarcation, formalisation and patronage**

Economies of anticipation are occurring among citizens of northern Kenya as they negotiate their inclusion in proposed investments and (re-)shape the nature of development and modernisation. This frequently manifests through scrambles to demarcate and secure rights over land.41 By centring the discussion on community–middlemen interactions, this section adds to understandings of economies of anticipation. The economies of anticipation that engulfed Lorropili in 2019 stemmed from residents not only wanting to reduce their vulnerability to land acquisitions by increasing the security of their land tenure, but desires to shape the dynamics of future investments and development on their land. New middlemen–patrons, including politicians, businessmen and other educated-elites were seen by Lorropili residents as pivotal in the community’s capacity to affect inclusion in future investments and land deals. People sought and welcomed patrons to act as mediators between their community and state administration to facilitate formal land demarcation. These patrons were also needed to liaise with future investors on their demarcated land.
Communities’ anticipations of, and capacity to affect, future investments through new networks of patrons were shaped by past interactions with investment gatekeepers and protest patrons in struggles for inclusion in the LTWP investment and other land deals. Everyday meanings of land and contested politics of belonging, which underpinned these past struggles were re-deployed in scrambles to seek patrons and demarcate land. Past experiences of insecure land tenure motivated the formalisation of land rights.

During my visit to Lorropili in 2019, there were rumours of future investments in the region including conservancies, phase two of the wind farm, oil, geothermal and solar developments. After recent experiences of exclusion from investments by investment gatekeepers, people of Lorropili wanted to ensure their inclusion in decision making and benefit distribution regarding any future investments and land deals. In particular, the alleged disregard of Lorropili land rights by investment gatekeepers highlighted the insecurity of their tenure under the TLA. To rectify this and increase their capacity to affect future investments, people were seeking new alliances with patrons. Patrons were needed to mediate between the community and administrative institutions to demarcate and formalise their land rights. With the help of patrons, Lorropili residents sought to register land under the newly passed Community Land Act (CLA); they were also building new settlements and demarcating private plots. The different types of land demarcation and scope of inclusion reflected ongoing contestations over the nature of “community” and rights over land. Family and clan claims jostled with wider community claims and rights. These contestations were a legacy of divisions that emerged in prior scrambles for inclusion in LTWP and land deals.

The nepotism allegedly exhibited by investment gatekeepers with past investment benefit distribution, and rising incidences of Samburu “clannism”42 and “familyism” occurring in county politics, made establishing networks of patronage along lines of kinship urgent and essential for securing inclusion in future land deals. In 2019, families living in Lorropili sought to forge networks of patronage with educated kin (elites) such as politicians or businesspeople working in the region or “down-country”. Alternatively, people sought patronage with any powerful patron who would secure their community and kinship group state resources and fight for their interests regarding land rights.

A family acting unilaterally to fulfil their own interests in terms of accessing government resources is not new in Lorropili. For example, a family who identify as being of Lorropili have lived in a separate settlement for many years and sought their own development funds via a patron working in local government who is related to them. Allegiance to Samburu clan and family is strong; it is important for identities, well-being and prosperity. Such segregation reflects latent tensions that exist between clans and families of Lorropili due to past incidences of alleged corruption and nepotism, and contested seniority and land ownership. Eunice’s and the Lorropili chief’s alleged displays of clan and family favouritism and embezzlement when distributing LTWP investment benefits and electricity wayleave compensation were unprecedented and caused latent divides to surface. Losira accused the chief and his clan of becoming more corrupt because of LTWP and causing divides between Lorropili kinship groups. ‘We just take them [the chief’s clan] as our brothers, but I don’t know what they are thinking. When the bread comes, they do not share, they do not consider us [Losira’s family] well’.

Some, such as Losira’s family, who felt left out of LTWP jobs and wayleave compensation saw their only access to future investments and state resources through emulating...
the chief and forging relationships with their own patron, ideally someone related. In 2019, Losira’s family separated from Lorropili, and formed their own settlement, to control their development. Having their own settlement was a way to attract state funds for amenities and infrastructure in their settlement, where they are the main benefactors. It was also a way to informally secure rights over land for the family in the scramble for future investments, which was a continuation of previous protests for inclusion and contested politics of belonging. Because having a patron in a position of power was key for this process, the family were hoping and campaigning for one of their kin to secure a national or county government role.

Alongside new settlements, since 2018, meanings of land as a commodity have taken hold in the form of individual plots and permanent structures, as individuals have sought to formalise land rights and develop the area. One local speculator said, ‘the government respect those that have built permanent structures and recognise your right to be there’. Past allocation of LTWP electricity wayleave compensation also demonstrated the land rights afforded to plots and permanent structures. Educated sons of Lorropili working down-country started the trend and locals with disposable income followed suit. Many justified their right to annex plots based on ancestral land claims. One man visiting from Nairobi said, ‘This is my home, my land, it belonged to my great grandfather; I can build a plot anywhere here’. The aim of this man’s family (both rural folk and their elite relatives) is to build a modern town to provide state-funded amenities and infrastructure, and business opportunities for locals.

People were also engaging with land formalisation on a much larger scale. The CLA, which came into effect in 2016 and replaced the TLA, aims to increase the security of communal land, giving it the same legal standing as private land. As legal owners, communities will be able to govern their own land, including negotiation of transactions with investors. The CLA requires communities to define their membership, the extent of their land and their customary means of governance, which will all acquire legal status. In 2019, members of Lorropili community were engaged in discussions with other Samburu communities in the area (including people from Eunice’s Lendaa clan) over plans to register community land in both Samburu and Marsabit Counties. Some were optimistic that different settlements, phratries and clans would collaborate to register land together. However, contestations over community land rights were resurfacing and some feared that overlapping claims could lead to conflict. In a scramble to claim their rights and future prosperity before others, many Lorropili residents, now well-rehearsed in making claims of rightful inclusion, expressed clan and family claims over ancestral land to legitimise land demarcation.

Educated-elites from down-country and local businesspeople descended from families in the area were driving and guiding communities with the process of land registration, mediating between them and the government. Eunice and an educated son from Lorropili who had demarcated a plot of land were two such patrons. They were important in the process of deciding who should be included and excluded when registering land. Rumours abound that some patrons were lobbying for their clan and family ancestral areas to be registered. Some people from the area expressed concern that such actions could cause a repeat of recent exclusion from investments and land deals. Fearing this, a Lorropili elder conveyed the need to register their clan land before Eunice registers it for his. Alden Wiley warns that rather than increasing
land security, the CLA could be another means through which people are excluded from governing their land.\textsuperscript{45}

In 2019, economies of anticipation were taking hold around Lorropili in expectation of future investments and people were increasingly valuing land as a commodity. Rural communities were endeavouring to shape the prospect of future land deals and access to state resources by demarcating and securing their land rights. Alliances with patrons were sought to facilitate this dream. The envisioned dynamics of these new alliances and people’s aspirations to dictate the nature of future investment and development intertwine with longer-term processes of commodification and politics. In particular, accusations of nepotism and contested politics of belonging that surfaced in interactions with investment gatekeepers and protest patrons in protests for inclusion in LTWP and land deals, determined the need for, and dynamics of, subsequent scrambles to demarcate land.

Conclusion

Simple narratives of top-down land acquisitions, energy extraction and infrastructure projects in East Africa’s drylands have been challenged by recent scholarly work.\textsuperscript{46} These scholars emphasise the complex dynamics of interests that anticipate and pursue large-scale investments. A range of actors resist, comply and anticipate to determine the terms of their inclusion.\textsuperscript{47} Following Lind and Okenwa, this article has argued that middlemen are important in northern Kenyan rural community struggles for inclusion in large-scale investments and precarity of land rights associated with land acquisitions.\textsuperscript{48} By analysing the multiple forms of brokerage and networks of relationships between various middlemen and the Lorropili community, the article has brought complexity to discussions of community–middlemen interactions.

Economies of anticipation have taken hold in the region; people are increasingly seeking to secure rights over land in anticipation of new opportunities associated with future investments.\textsuperscript{49} By focusing analysis on community–middlemen interactions, the article contributes a new dimension to these discussions. The article has also added a much-needed temporal scale to discussions of economies of anticipation among pastoralists of northern Kenya. A long-term lens on community–middlemen interactions and scrambles for inclusion in investments and land deals has enhanced understandings of these phenomena. By analysing Lorropili residents’ previous struggles for inclusion and precarity of land tenure, new insights have been offered into ways economies of anticipation and desires to gain a stake in future investment projects intertwine with past changes in land use, social stratifications and political contexts.

This article has argued that interactions with middlemen are instrumental in northern Kenyan pastoralists’ performances of community in their negotiations for rightful inclusion in investments and land deals. These performances and negotiations involved contested meanings of land and belonging to place, which has amplified long-standing tensions concerning rights to land and claims to entitlement to state benefits. Meanings of land and institutional norms associated with ancestral and administrative rights were contested and portrayed by people to position themselves and their cohort as rightful beneficiaries of investments and land deals. Lorropili protesters forwarded narratives of community and belonging as a counterpoint to the immorality and nepotism they perceived to have been applied by investment gatekeepers in excluding them from LTWP
benefits and land deals. Supported by protest patrons, Lorropili residents manipulated and combined different meanings of community–land relations to position themselves as the custodians of place and rightful beneficiaries of investment deals therein. Categories of clan and family were at the forefront of contested narratives. Emphasis on kinship was in no small part a reaction to the alleged favouritism exhibited by Eunice and the chief. Rising incidences of clannism and familyism occurring in Samburu County Government politics also encouraged this behaviour.

The article has demonstrated that the dynamics of identity politics and relationships between people and place take meaning from the ways they are a part of everyday lives. Dwelling on everyday aspects of people–place interactions has provided new understandings of northern Kenyan pastoralists’ relationships with middlemen in their struggles for inclusion in investments.

In 2019, economies of anticipation were on the rise in Lorropili. Land was increasingly valued by Lorropili residents as a commodity and people were engaging in land demarcation in attempts to secure rights over land, inclusion in future land deals and access to state resources. Societal divisions within and between communities that emerged through struggles for inclusion in LTWP and other land deals, and efforts by investment gatekeepers to quash protests, determined the dynamics of these new struggles for inclusion; narratives of community and land rights from prior protests against middlemen were replayed.

Middlemen were central to Lorropili residents’ anticipations of future investors and development; people sought new networks of patronage to assist in land formalisation, contact with future investors and access to development funds more generally. Accusations of nepotism in previous land deals and fears of similar exclusion from future investments at the hands of middlemen, alongside trends of clannism and familyism within county governance, compelled people to align as kinship groups when claiming and demarcating land, and forming networks of patronage. These economies of anticipation and the changes to land tenure will influence the dynamics of community inclusion in future large-scale investments.

Notes

1. See Lind et al., Land Investment and Politics; Catley et al., “Development at the Margins”; Hall et al., Africa’s Land Rush; Nunow, “Land Deals”; Galaty, “Land Grabbing in the Eastern African Rangelands”; and Mosley and Watson, “Frontier Transformations”.
2. Alden Wiley, “The Community Land Act”; Republic of Kenya, Community Land Act.
3. Hall et al., Africa’s Land Rush; Lind et al., “The Politics of Land”.
4. Mosley and Watson, “Frontier Transformations.”
5. See James, “The Return of the Broker”; Lind, Governing Black Gold; and Okenwa, “Impermanent Development”.
6. Cross, “The Economy of Anticipation”.
7. See Mosley and Watson, “Frontier Transformations”; Chome, “Local Transformations of LAPSSET”; Elliott, “Planning, Property and Plots”; and Greiner, “Land Use Change”, “Negotiating Access to Land”.
8. In the text below, names have been replaced to maintain anonymity, this is indicted in an endnote.
9. A pseudonym.
10. Lynch, “Negotiating Ethnicity”.
11. Schlee and Shongolo, *Pastoralism and Politics*.
12. Carrier and Kochore, “Navigating Ethnicity”.
13. Sikor and Lund, “Access and Property”.
14. The LTWP consortium consists of four private companies – Aldwych International (now part of the Anergi Group), KP&P Africa, Vestas Wind Systems and Sandpiper; and Danish, Norwegian and Finnish governmental development funds.
15. LTWP, *Lake Turkana Wind Power Project*.
16. Dolan and Rajak, “Towards the Anthropology of CSR”.
17. Ibid.
18. See Voller et al., *A People in the Way of Progress*; Cormack and Kurewa, “The Changing Value of Land”; and Drew, *Pastoralism in the Shadow of a Windfarm*.
19. As part of the wider Samburu community, Lorropili residents divide themselves into patriarchal kinship groups that reflect different levels of descent. The KiSamburu and English names for each level of descent can vary between informants. The terms used here were provided by a man from Lorropili who is very knowledgeable about “Samburu culture”. Such a man is known in KiSamburu as a kursa. Accordingly, the largest level of Samburu descent is moiety (*lmarei* in KiSamburu) and consists of two groups. The next level of descent consists of nine phratries (*ndapan*). Each phratry is divided into clans (*nkajijik*). Clans are divided into sub-clans (*ntaloshin*), which are divided into families (*nkang’*). (The level of descent known as family is not a “nucleur family”; it comprises multiple households who share a common ancestor). For Lorropili informants, clan and family were particularly important in expressions of identity. Spencer in “The Samburu”, 71–80 provides a detailed account of the Samburu segmentary descent system. The classifications of Spencer and Lorropili align in terms of moiety, phratry and clan. Below the level of clan, they differ. This may be because, as Spencer notes, ‘there is a certain local variation […] in the way in which segments combine to form clans’. Spencer, “The Samburu”, 75.
20. A pseudonym.
21. The youth included males of *Lmeoli* and *Lmetili* (or *Lkishami*) Samburu age-sets. An age-set is composed of a cohort of men who have been initiated in youth during a specific period of time. A new age-set is initiated every 12–15 years. *Lmeoli* are the Samburu age-set whose initiation started in 1990. *Lmetili* are the Samburu age-set whose initiation started in 2005.
22. Alden Wiley, “The Community Land Act in Kenya.”
23. A pseudonym.
24. A pseudonym.
25. Elders included men belonging to *Lkiroro, Lkishili* and *Lkimaniki* Samburu age-sets, whose initiations started in 1976, 1962 and 1948, respectively.
26. Various social and moral obligations unite people of the same phratry, clan and family. These include contributions to bride wealth and education funds.
27. Okenwa, “Impermanent Development.”
28. See Elliot, “Planning, Property and Plots”; Chome, “Local Transformations of LAPSSET”.
29. Straight et al., “Dust People,” 178.
30. A pseudonym.
31. The elder described the three main age grades through which Samburu men pass during their life: boyhood, moranhood and elderhood. Every 12–15 years a cohort of males transition from boyhood into moranhood and become *lmurrani* (moran or warriors). This initiation process involves a circumcision ceremony and creates a new age-set. At the end of the period of moranhood, all men in the age-set graduate to junior–elderhood. See Spencer “The Samburu” for details on age grades and the age-set system.
32. A pseudonym.
33. See Schlee and Shongolo, *Pastoralism & Politics*; Broch-Due, *Violence and Belonging*.
34. A Lorropili elder dated the event to *Lmerisho* moranhood (1912–1921). In 1921, districts within the Northern Frontier District were restructured; this included the creation of a Samburu District – a renewed attempt to separate Samburu people’s grazing lands from those of other ethnic groups. Prior to being administered within one district, people of
Samburu ethnicity were partly under the control of Marsabit (or Rendille and Northern Samburu) District and partly under that of Archer’s Post (or Uaso Nyiro and Southern Samburu) District. Lorropili and the area of Marsabit County that it’s residents now claim - was part of the Rendille and Northern Samburu administrative area. An original Samburu District referred to by my informants may reflect this pre-1921 administrative arrangement. Colonial administration correspondence after 1921 refers to Samburu and Marsabit Districts with the more familiar morphologies of today’s counties. (Sobania, “The Historical Tradition”; “Instructions – A.D.C. Marsabit and Northern Samburu”, 1915, KNA/DC/MBT/2/1; “Special Districts Ordinance: The Rendille – Samburu line”, KNA/DC/MRL/1/5/4). The commonly held idea of an original Samburu District extending into Marsabit may also reflect the permissive policy applied towards the Samburu-Marsabit boundary by colonial and post-colonial administrations, which enabled Samburu people to graze livestock and – in a few concession areas – live permanently in Marsabit District. (Spencer, “Nomads in Alliance”; KNA/DC/MRL/1/5/4).

35. Sobania, “The Historical Tradition”.
36. Lynch, “Negotiating Ethnicity”; Sikor and Lund, “Access and Property”.
37. See Schlee and Shongolo, Pastoralism and Politics.
38. Carrier and Kochore, “Navigating Ethnicity,” 147.
39. Drew, Pastoralism in the Shadow of a Windfarm.
40. See Schlee and Shongolo, Pastoralism and Politics; Carrier and Kochore, “Navigating Ethnicity”.
41. See Mosley and Watson, “Frontier Transformations”; Greiner, “Land-use Change”, “Negotiating Access to Land”; Elliot, “Planning, Property and Plots”; and Chome, “Local Transformations of LAPSET”.
42. “Clannism” refers to favouritism in terms of phratry and clan.
43. Alden Wiley, “The Community Land Act in Kenya.”
44. Alden Wiley, “The Community Land Act in Kenya”; Republic of Kenya, Community Land Act.
45. Alden Wiley, “The Community Land Act in Kenya”.
46. See Lind et al., Land Investment and Politics; Hall et al., Africa’s Land Rush; and Mosley and Watson, “Frontier Transformations”.
47. Ibid.
48. See Lind, Governing Black Gold; Okenwa, “Impermanent Development”; and James, “The Return of the Broker”.
49. See Mosley and Watson, “Frontier Transformations”; Chome, “Local Transformations of LAPSET”; Elliott, “Planning, Property and Plots”; and Greiner, “Land use change”, “Negotiating Access to Land”.

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