

Gaps between the Innovativeness of the Maasai Olympics and the Positionings of Maasai Warriors

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Today, the governance and representation of local communities is one of the point at issue in the realm of wildlife conservation, but the relationships between local agencies and external initiatives have so far not been well studied. This article examines the details and outcomes of 'the Maasai Olympics', a recently initiated community-based conservation (CBC) programme in southern Kenya. It is an athletic competition for Maasai warriors, intended to provide an alternative to their lion hunting tradition. The Maasai Olympics are said to be 'an innovative conservation strategy'. On the one hand, this event is similar to other CBC projects that provide local people with economic benefits and environmental education, while emphasizing respect for local traditions, but on the other hand, it is different and 'innovative' in that it mentions an unpleasant local custom and tries to change it. Maasai warriors pretend that they are traditional animal lovers and that they approve of the idea of the Maasai Olympics. This reactive behaviour of the Maasai warriors is their 'positionings', and corresponds to the 'African potential'. However, as their positionings are based on the 'function of interface' but without de-romanticization, it results in the reinforcement of outsiders' stereotypical views and values, leaving the local people's biggest problem unpublicized and unsolved.

Key words: Maasai, Maasai Olympics, conservation, positionings, African potential, Kenya

1. INTRODUCTION

The paradigm of wildlife conservation changed in Africa in the 1990s (Hulme & Murphree 2001). The old paradigm was characterized by protectionism, a top-down approach, and an attitude of coercion towards local people (Adams & Hulme 2001: 10–11). In contrast, new approaches have emerged with various names such as 'community-based conservation' (CBC) (Western & Wright 1994), 'community-based natural resource management' (Child 2004), and 'community conservation' (Hulme & Murphree 2001). Different in several respects, they are alike in advocating local communities.

In the 21st century, the globally dominant conservation approach has become more neoliberal (Igoe & Brockington 2007), and the governance and representation of local communities is one of the points at issue (Büscher et al., 2014). Since the inclusion of local people in decision making is a pre-requisite for today's conservation (Barnes & Child 2014), there are various forms of 'environmentality' that make local people and communities think and act subjectively in accordance with external values (Fletcher 2010). At the same time, whether environmentalism produces the intended results or not, those who run conservation projects represent local situations as being successful, so as to gain applause and secure global support (Büscher 2010; Igoe 2010).

These discussions are important, because they disclose the fact that the current neoliberal conservation trend is not without criticism. However, while many of them pay attention to macro scales, and demonstrate how national, international, and global actors govern and misrepresent local environments, little attention is given to the micro scale. It is pointed out that each society has its own historical context, and to understand its locality is important when examining the outcomes of exogenous projects from the local people's perspective (Ahearne 2016; Carswell 2007). Nonetheless, the involvement of local agencies in external conservation initiatives has not been well examined, and local people are viewed as passive subjects at the mercy of outsiders.

2. SUBJECT AND METHOD

2.1. Subject of this article

This article examines the Maasai Olympics, a newly-initiated programme in the Amboseli area in southern Kenya. It is one of the two components of the Menye Layiok Project, which was implemented by a conservation NGO called Big Life Foundation in 2012. The Maasai Olympics are an athletic competition for Maasai warriors. The goal of this event is to put an end to lion hunting, by providing Maasai warriors with an alternative activity.

The idea of CBC originated in the Amboseli area. In the late 1960s, a white ecologist launched the pioneering CBC initiative, and since then, many conservation efforts have been made by various organizations (Meguro 2014; Western 1994). The Maasai Olympics have attracted more attention than the Menye Layiok Project, and no other CBC project in the Amboseli area has received broader public notice than the Maasai Olympics. The subject of this article is to disclose the details of the Maasai Olympics, and examine its outcomes.

2.2. Method of analysis and information gathering

The Maasai Olympics command considerable attention, and the Big Life Foundation says that it is 'an innovative conservation strategy'. The first objective of this article is to clarify the 'innovativeness' of the Maasai Olympics in comparison with other projects.

The attitudes of the local Maasai warriors—the targets of the Maasai Olympics—are also examined. The Maasai Olympics aim to 'innovate' or make changes in the thoughts and behaviours of the warriors, and it is said that this idea came from a local community. Stated differently, through the Maasai Olympics, the Big Life Foundation (and its supporters) try to govern the Maasai warriors, and promote their images as conservationists.

However, the Maasai people are not passive subjects governed and represented by outsiders at will. In an ethnographic study of the Tanzanian Maasai indigenous people's movement, Hodgson (2011: 10–11) writes that they 'intentionally manipulate, project, and homogenize their public images and identities to accord with "Western" stereotypes in order to seek recognition and demand rights ... within complex, potent, shifting fields of power, including not just the nation-state, but international NGOs, the United Nations, and transnational advocacy networks' as 'positionings'. By describing this concept, Hodgson (2011) demonstrates the agency of local people in this globalized world.

After Hodgson (2011), Meguro (2014) applies this concept to the context of wildlife conservation, and describes how the Maasai people in the Amboseli area have shifted their own representation strategically, as the outsiders changed their approaches over time. This study is an extension of these articles, and the recent argument on 'African potential' is introduced in order to consider the limitations of the Maasai's positionings.

The idea of the African potential is based on a belief that African people and societies have devised knowledge and institutions to solve the problems they confront (Matsuda 2014). The nucleus of the African potential is 'the function of interface', which refers to a practice of interfacing different ideas and updating an ability to negotiate with outsiders and deal with difficulties without adhering to the essentialistic dualism of 'Africa/West' or 'tradition/modern'.

Positionings are regarded as acts of interfacing, but the argument of African potential differs from that of positionings in rejecting the romanticization of African people and the technicization of African tradition, because they both ignore local contexts. Based on this argument, this article examines the potential of Maasai warriors' positionings in relation to the Maasai Olympics.

Apart from a literature review, the information presented in this paper was collected in two ways. One was checking the official website of the Maasai Olympics.⁽¹⁾ The Big Life Foundation created this site, and uses it to discuss its objectives, history, programmes, and sponsors. The other way was field research, conducted in December 2014 and February and March 2015, for a total of about 2 months. In addition to observing the second Maasai Olympics on 13 December 2014, semi-structured interviews were conducted with *ol-aiguenani*, a customary leader of Maasai warriors. He was regarded as the local warriors' representative, and he provided most of the descriptive information on the opinions and behaviours of local warriors in this article.

3. OUTLINE OF STUDY SITE

3.1. Maasai society

Maasai are Eastern Nilotic people who speak the Maa language. Today, about 150,000 square kilometres of the arid and semi-arid land, from the southern part of Kenya to the northern part of Tanzania, is recognized as Maasailand. The major subsistence activity has been semi-nomadic pastoralism of cattle, goats, and sheep, and of these, cattle have had a culturally and socially higher value than the others. However, people's livelihoods are diverse today, and include agriculture, tourism, and other off-farm activities (Homewood et al., 2009).

Historically, Maasai society has had no centralistic political structure. Divided into about twenty sections (*il-oshon*, singular form is *ol-osbo*),⁽²⁾ each section has its own territory, and communally practiced livelihood activities and rites of passage. While each section has autonomy, they share the age system and conduct rites of passage in the same period, in approximately-15-year cycles.

Maasai men are divided broadly into three age-grades: boys, youths, and elders. Boys become youths when they are circumcised and pass through certain other rituals. Youths (*il-murran*, singular form is *ol-murrani*), or warriors,⁽³⁾ typically shoulder the responsibility of battling external enemies and hunting dangerous wildlife in order to have peace. While boys live in their mothers' houses, youths build their village, *e-manyata* (its plural form is *i-manayat*), and live together with their peers. Lion hunting has been the primary activity for proving their manliness. However, because of harsh crackdowns and environmental education provided by the government and other organizations, the culture of hunting is crumbling away.

3.2. Amboseli ecosystem

In this article, the Amboseli area refers to the Kajiado South Constituency in Kajiado County, which is approximately equivalent to the customary territory of the Loitokitok section.⁽⁴⁾ The area is 6356.3 square kilometres in size, and the population in 2009 was about 137,000 (KNBS 2009). The southern central portion is at the foot of Mount Kilimanjaro, but the rest is savannah plain, with an average annual rainfall of less than 400 millimetres (Altmann et al., 2002). However, the underground water comes from Mount Kilimanjaro, and creates many water sources in this otherwise dry area.

Due to a diversity of wildlife and scenic views of Mount Kilimanjaro, the Amboseli area became a famous tourism destination in the early 20th century (Smith 2008). In parallel with tourism development, wildlife conservation was implemented in the colonial period, and the pioneering CBC project was launched in the late 1960s (Western 1994). However, since most of the wildlife roam outside the national park and cause human-wildlife conflicts (e.g. livestock depredation, crop raiding, human injuries, and death), most of the local people think that the compensation they receive for the conflicts they experience is insufficient, and they do not accept the current situation.

A ranching system was introduced in Kenya's Maasailand in the 1950s, with the intention of

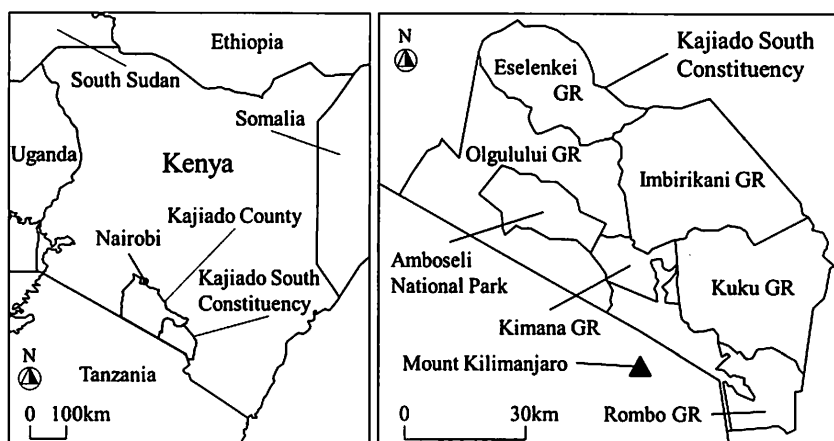


Figure 1. Map of study site (GR: group ranch)

changing the mode of livestock management from nomadic and non-commercial 'traditional' pastoralism to more sedentary and commercial 'modern' beef production (Galaty 1980). In the Amboseli area, six group ranches were formed on the plain area, apart from small individual ranches at the foot of Mount Kilimanjaro. Originally, the Maasai whom the government had registered owned the group's ranchland collectively, but later, some parts of the land were subdivided into privately-owned plots. After independence in 1963, agricultural peoples immigrated into this area and started farming the land, and even now, both the Maasai and other peoples are expanding the area used for irrigated cultivation (BurnSilver 2009; Meguro 2014).

4. HISTORY OF WILDLIFE CONSERVATION

4.1. *Impact of colonization*

In this section, the changing strategies of conservation initiatives and local Maasai people's attitudes in the Amboseli area are summarized, based on earlier studies (Meguro 2014; Western 1994).

Historically, the Maasai people and wild animals lived nomadic lives. Since rainfall is uncertain in terms of time, place, and volume, the people and animals need to move from one place to another in search of resources. In such an environment, encounters are unavoidable, and risks for conflicts ensue. The Maasai warriors hunt problematic animals to ensure the security of their communities. However, at the same time, the Maasai people make efforts to avoid meeting harmful wildlife in their daily lives. Thus, the Maasai people and the wildlife, and especially the big and carnivorous species, have coexisted by keeping their distance, and by attacking and/or avoiding each other.

Kenya became a British protectorate in 1895. Hunting by indigenous peoples was prohibited, and the Amboseli area became part of a protected area under the colonial government. However, hunting regulations at that time were not as strict as they subsequently became, and the conservation efforts had limited impacts on the lives of the Maasai people.

4.2. *Introduction of national park system*

The conservation approach changed dramatically when the colonial government introduced the US-originated national park system in 1945. It is regarded as a typical example of the old conservation paradigm, because it aims to preserve the wilderness by removing local people and prohibiting anyone from living there and using the resources inside the park. In 1974, the Amboseli National Park (390.26 square kilometres) was established around the Amboseli swamp. Since the swamp was an important watering place not only for wildlife, but also for the Maasai people and their livestock, the

park's establishment precipitated fierce criticism and continuous resistance from the local people, and also implanted deep distrust toward the government and those who insist on wildlife conservation.

Beginning in the 1940s, the local people objected to the idea of establishing the Amboseli National Park. In order to support them, a white ecologist started an initiative in 1967 that was later regarded as the origin of CBC (community-based conservation). The goal of this initiative was to balance local livelihoods and environmental conservation, and create a situation in which local people and wildlife could coexist harmoniously. However, the local people were so distrustful of conservation that they did not trust the good intentions inherent in that initiative, and rejected it without any discussion. They received some benefits from wildlife in the 1970s and the 1980s, but their ill-feeling towards conservationists continued to the 1990s.

4.3. Formalization of CBC

In 1990, Kenya renewed its conservation policy, and CBC was placed at the centre of the amendment. The goal of CBC was 'to empower the person on the ground to benefit from wildlife and therefore take the initiative in conserving it' (KWS 1996: 37). The newly-formed Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) launched a number of projects. The Amboseli area was one of the major project sites, and the KWS attached great importance to offering tangible benefits to local people as an incentive for participating in conservation efforts.⁽⁵⁾

At first, the local people hesitated to accept CBC projects, because they suspected that they were likely excuses to rob them of more land. However, as they continued negotiations and received tangible benefits, their attitudes became more positive. By the 2000s, not only did they attend meetings without hesitation, but they also demanded benefits aggressively, saying that because wildlife uses their land and causes problems, they have a right to receive more of the benefits generated by wildlife. In other words, they started to justify their demands by representing themselves as landowners and victims. Nonetheless, this behaviour did not mean that the idea of CBC was totally shared by the local people. They welcomed all projects, but they never approved of having dangerous wild animals roaming across their living space.

4.4. Expansion of NGOs

In the middle of the 1990s, the owners of luxury eco-lodges in the Amboseli area—all of them are white people—established NGOs and inaugurated CBC initiatives.⁽⁶⁾ As they expanded their activities, a new representation of the Maasai people became apparent. When the NGOs publicize their achievements, they stress that the projects suit and encourage local traditions. The typical discourse is that Maasai people are traditional pastoralists, and thus they neither kill wildlife as traditional hunters do, nor do they destroy wildlife habitat (by converting rangeland into crop fields) as traditional farmers do. It is implied that they are traditional conservationists who have coexisted harmoniously with wildlife for centuries.

However, this story is not historically correct. First, Maasai warriors used to hunt many dangerous wild animals besides lions. Second, while the majority of Maasai people admit that they have coexisted with wildlife, they complain about human-wildlife conflicts. Many elders said that after giving up hunting, the wildlife stopped fearing the people, and became more aggressive. However, the NGOs ignore the fact that the local people never tolerated the damage caused by wildlife, and represent them as traditional conservationists who have historically been friends of wildlife. To be more precise, while Kenya is under the strong influence of the animal welfare movement (Martin 2012), the Maasai people are represented as traditional animal lovers who hate to kill animals. Because this image conforms to the ideal of animal welfare sentiments, it has the effect of confirming the NGO's reputation for protecting animals from harm and engendering support for its activities.

4.5. Positionings by local people

In the 2010s NGOs assumed responsibility for the CBC initiatives in the Amboseli area, and disseminated their representation of the Maasai as being traditional animal lovers through the global

media. The Maasai people, on the other hand, adopted a new strategy that was reactive to the NGO's misrepresentation of them. Some local elders described the traditional culture of the Maasai people in the same way the NGOs did. They had practiced hunting in their youth, and knew that their explanations were not true. Nonetheless, they did so, because they understood that if they embodied the ideals of outside donors, there was a greater possibility of receiving external aid.

Still, this does not mean that they accepted the current situation and the values of outsiders. In July 2012, when a buffalo killed a local Maasai youth, government staff blamed the Maasai people, rather than the wildlife, for wrong behaviour. As a result, hundreds of warriors were mobilized to kill several animals, thereby demonstrating their anger and expressing their discontent with the government. Just a few months after this affair, the first Maasai Olympics were held, and the NGOs and media reported that they had been successful. Details of the Maasai Olympics are provided in the next section.

5. DETAILS OF THE MAASAI OLYMPICS

5.1. *Aim of the Maasai Olympics*

The first Maasai Olympics were held on 22 December 2012, and the second on 13 December 2014. The venue was the Sidai Olong Wildlife Sanctuary (formerly the Kimana Wildlife Sanctuary) on the Kimana Group Ranch. The main sponsor was the Big Life Foundation, an NGO that had been co-founded in 2010 by the white owner of a luxury eco-lodge in the Amboseli area and a famous wildlife photographer. Today, the Big Life Foundation is spearheading the CBC initiative in the area. It employs more than 300 game rangers, has built more than 30 ranger posts, paid compensation for livestock depredation, and conducted several other community projects.

The Maasai Olympics are a part of the Menye Layiok Project, but the Big Life Foundation established a website for the Maasai Olympics, not the Menye Layiok Project, suggesting its earnest desire to draw attention to the Maasai Olympics. Using this website, the history and subject of the Maasai Olympics are explained below.

A number of Maasai boys in the Amboseli area had been circumcised, and become new warriors in the late 2000s. In order to educate them, some elders were chosen as *menye layiok*, 'cultural fathers', who gave the new generation of warriors lessons on the Maasai culture. These elders visited an office of the Big Life Foundation in 2008, and requested its cooperation in removing lion hunting from their culture. According to the website, this was the beginning of the Maasai Olympics. Some elders said that the idea of the Maasai Olympics came from the Big Life Foundation. After they had agreed to have a sporting event, the Big Life Foundation began fundraising in 2011, to launch the Menye Layiok Project.

Officially initiated in 2012, the Menye Layiok Project is composed of two programmes: environmental education and an athletic competition (the Maasai Olympics). With regard to environmental education, the Big Life Foundation has two messages, 'lion killing is no longer culturally acceptable and must stop now', and 'failure to follow the "path of conservation" and reap its economic benefits will result in an unsustainable future for the Maasai people'. They state that if the Maasai people do not follow 'the path of conservation, their noble way of life, traditional land, and ancient culture will be lost'.

On the website, the catchphrase for the Maasai Olympics is 'conservation through sport', and it is explained as 'an organised Maasai sports competition based upon traditional warrior skills'. The basic concept is that 'for centuries the Maasai have practiced a traditional rite of passage to manhood, hunting and killing lions. There are now too many people and too few lions. Things needed to change. So we created an innovative conservation strategy, including the Maasai Olympics. THIS IS THE HUNT FOR MEDALS, NOT LIONS'.

Traditionally, Maasai warriors hunt lions to prove their manliness and win fame in their society. The Maasai Olympics are designed as a modern alternative to this practice. That the intention is well understood and agreed to by the local warriors is implied by quoting the words of one participant: 'In

truth, this program is very successful and we are now doing something honourable. We used to celebrate lion hunting but this program has shown us a better celebration⁷.

5.2. Programme of the Maasai Olympics

The Maasai Olympics is an athletic competition for Maasai warriors. The contestants are divided into four groups, and they compete with one another in six events in one day. The top-three players in each event, and the winning team of the six events, receive prizes.

The four teams are formed on the basis of the warriors' traditional villages (*i-manyat*). In the Amboseli area, four villages have been constructed, based on the clans. One is in the north-eastern Imbirikani area, another is in the eastern Kuku area, and the others are in south-western Olgulului and south-eastern Rombo areas. Before the Maasai Olympics, selection matches are held in each village. In the case of the second Maasai Olympics, one team had 40 members, and a total of 160 people participated in the events.

The six events of the Maasai Olympics are a 200-metre run, an 800-metre run, a 5000-metre run, a javelin throw, a club throw, and a high jumping event. The three runs are around a 500-metre track, whose lines were drawn using lime on the rangelands. In the javelin throw, contestants vie with one another to see who can throw a sport javelin the longest distance. The club throw involves throwing a *rung*, a club that the many Maasai males carry, to a target in the distance. High jumping in the Maasai Olympics is different from that typically used for athletic sports. Contestants jump on the spot, try to touch a rope stretched over their heads, and as they touch the rope with the head, it is raised higher and higher.

The top-three players received a gold medal and KSh 20,000, a silver medal and KSh 15,000, and a bronze medal and KSh 10,000, respectively (US\$ 1 was around KSh 88 in 2014). In addition, the winners of the 800-metre run and the 5000-metre run were invited to the New York City Marathon the following year. In the second Maasai Olympics, these two persons received KSh 67,500 as a supplementary prize. Also, teams to which the top-three players belong obtain three, two, and one point severally. The team that accumulates the most total points over the six events wins the championship, and receives a trophy and improved bulls.

Table 1 provides the schedule of the second Maasai Olympics. The programme proceeded almost on time. Its main target was male youths, but as exhibitions, a women's 100-metre run and a women's 1500-metre run were also staged. The top-three female players were also given prizes, but their teams

Table 1. Time schedule of the second Maasai Olympics

Time	Programme
9:00am	Team gather and prayer
9:30am	1st heat of 200 meters
9:40am	2nd heat of 200 meters
9:50am	1st heat of 800 meters
10:00am	2nd heat of 800 meters
10:15am	Javelin and rungu events
11:45am	Finals of 5000 meters
12:15pm	Finals of Girls 1500 meters
12:30pm	Finals of Girls 100 meters
12:45pm	Finals of 800 meters
1:00pm	Finals of 200 meters
1:15pm	High jump
2:15pm	Awards and speeches

Source: The Maasai Olympics 2014 Programme

Table 2. Results of the six events in the second Maasai Olympics

Team	Points						Total	Overall rankings
	200-meter run	800-meter run	5000-meter run	Javelin throw	Club throw	High jumping		
Imbirikani	4	2	3	1	5	1.5	16.5	1
Kuku	0	0	3	3	1	0	7	3
Olgulului	0	4	0	2	0	1.5	7.5	2
Rombo	2	0	0	0	0	3	5	4

Note: Since two individuals in the high jumping event achieved the same score for second-place, their teams, Imbirikani and Olgulului, each received half of the total points for the second and third positions.

Source: Author

Table 3. Top records from the second Maasai Olympics and world records for each of the events

Event	Record	
	Second Maasai Olympics	World records
200-meter run	24"31	19"19
800-meter run	2'10	1'40"91
5000-meter run	16'12	12'37"35
Javelin throw	52.90 m	98.48 m
High jumping (Maasai Olympics)	2.74 m	—
High jumping (Athletics)	—	2.45 m

Source: Author

did not receive any points. As Table 2 shows, the Imbirikani team won successive championships. Table 3 summarizes the top records for each event, with the exception of the club throw, together with their world records.

5.3. *The way things were in the second Maasai Olympics*

It was estimated that more than 600 spectators, including local Maasai people, Maasai people from other areas, people from Nairobi, tourists, and media people, came to watch the second Maasai Olympics. As far as I was able to confirm, Reuters, AP (Associated Press), AFP (Agence France-Presse), and KK Kyodo News distributed the news, and reporters from CNN (Cable News Networks), BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation), CCTV (China Central Television), and journalists from the Asahi and Mainichi Newspapers in Japan attended and gathered live information.

On the day of the event, many contestants wore colourful beads and accessories, and attracted the attention of the audience. Those who ran in a race dressed more plainly, but many participants wore beads on their arms, ankles, necks, and heads. Maasai people do not usually allow foreigners and tourists to take their pictures. However, in the Maasai Olympics, one could take pictures (and make movies). Consequently, some foreigners stood very close to the subjects and took pictures without asking, and even many Kenyans, including local Maasai people, enthusiastically took pictures using mobile phones.

While the spectators were enjoying the events, the contestants were seriously competing with one another, and exerting all their energies. Many runners collapsed to the ground as they crossed the finish line, and some were carried away and cared for by their teammates and the staff. Local Maasai spectators cheered the contestants who came from the same area. After a representative for their area placed first, supporters surged onto the track and started parading with the athletes.

In this way, each team demonstrated an upsurge in the participants' emotions, and at the same time,

Table 4. Sponsors of the second Maasai Olympics

Name	Outline	Category*
National Geographic Society	An organization publishing <i>National Geographic</i> , one of the most famous science journals in the world.	Lead Sponsor
Chester Zoo	One of the largest zoological garden in UK famous for conservation activities, researches and educations.	Major Sponsor
African Wildlife Foundation	An NGO implementing conservation projects in various parts of Africa. Its headquarter is in Nairobi, Kenya.	Sponsor
Maasai Wilderness Preservation Trust	An NGO established by an Italian who run a luxury eco-lodge in the Amboseli area.	Sponsor
Interaction and Solidarity	An NGO implementing water development projects in the Amboseli area. Its headquarter is in Monaco.	Sponsor
Amboseli Elephant Trust	A Nairobi-based NGO established by an American elephant researcher working in the Amboseli area.	Contributor
Grate Plane Foundation	A South Africa NGO supporting several organizations and projects working for wildlife conservation in Africa.	Contributor
Olive Branch Mission	A missionary organization working in Africa. Its headquarter is in Chicago, USA.	Contributor
East Africa Portland Cement	One of the major cement companies in Kenya.	Contributor

* In the website, sponsorship categories (the amount of donation required to each category) are explained as below. A corporate sponsor is more than US\$75000, a lead sponsor is more than US\$50000, a major sponsor is more than US\$25000, a sponsor is more than US\$10000, and a contributor is US\$5000 or less.

Source: Author

the warriors exhibited a sense of unity across the teams. Once the attempt at high jumping began, the contestants that surrounded the place shouted in unison and made sounds of encouragement, in the same way they usually do in their villages, regardless of which team was involved. Also, when a participant performed well in the javelin throw, the club throw, and the high jumping event, the other teams also applauded him. As many warriors said later, the Maasai Olympics was a place to compete, and an opportunity to mingle.

A commendation ceremony was held after all the events had been concluded. In this ceremony, the sponsors' representatives (see Table 4) and guests made speeches. The co-founder of the Big Life Foundation—the chief executive of the event—praised the local society highly, saying that it was not academicians but a local community that had devised the strategy of hosting the Maasai Olympics as a way of solving the problem. He also emphasized that local people were taking an initiative in wildlife conservation for the good of the ecosystem. Other speakers also praised the warriors for recognizing the importance of conservation and agreeing to stop hunting. These speeches were consistent with the objectives of the Maasai Olympics, and when they were called over, the Maasai people exhibited positive reactions by applauding.

6. MAASAI OLYMPICS AND MAASAI'S POSITIONINGS

6.1. Innovativeness of the Maasai Olympics

The Big Life Foundation describes the Maasai Olympics is 'an innovative conservation strategy'. However, this event has some points in common with other CBC projects. First, the Maasai Olympics give monetary rewards to the participants, and in other projects too, it is necessary to offer economic benefits to local people. Secondly, as the Menye Layiok Project is composed of the Maasai Olympics

and an environmental education programme, when other projects provide local people with tangible benefits, the need for local conservation initiatives is instilled. Also, the Maasai Olympics are similar to recent other projects in stating that they respect and follow the traditions of the Maasai people. On these points, the Maasai Olympics are similar to the other CBC projects.

Nonetheless, the Maasai Olympics are also unique. Almost all CBC projects include the commercialization of 'traditional' matters for foreigners and tourists—such as songs and dances, accessories, and houses. Or, many NGOs state that the Maasai people are 'traditional' conservationists, and their knowledge is utilized in the projects. In these cases, however, the outsiders refer only to the acceptable aspects of 'tradition'. If a local community has customs that are counter to the conservation goal, they are not mentioned, and the local people are just represented as conservationists without unpleasant 'traditions'.

The Maasai Olympics are different in mentioning the unapproved 'tradition', and trying to be 'innovative'. On one hand, the Big Life Foundation considers lion hunting 'no longer culturally acceptable', and on the other hand, it observes that the Maasai Olympics are based on 'traditional warrior skills'. In addition, it emphasizes that the idea of the Maasai Olympics came from the local community. These comments lead to the conclusion that the 'traditional' Maasai warriors 'innovate' their culture of their own will, and continue to demonstrate their manliness by changing the demonstration from 'unacceptable' lion hunting to the 'honourable' Maasai Olympics.

Although they are 'innovative', the Maasai Olympics do not give due consideration to all local opinions. The Big Life Foundation publicizes the success of the Maasai Olympics, but ignores such facts as that the majority of local people complain about human-wildlife conflicts, demand that wildlife be confined inside protected areas, and comment that the skills needed to win the Maasai Olympics are different from the skills needed to hunt lions.⁽⁷⁾ Or, in the name of 'tradition', the Maasai Olympics limit women's participation only to two exhibition events, allowing gender difference in the Maasai society. Thus, the Maasai Olympics are similar to other CBC projects in that outsiders use the term 'tradition' for their own convenience.

6.2. Opinions of local Maasai warriors

In the second Maasai Olympics, the Maasai warriors enjoyed the events and reacted as if they were giving it their total approval. However, the fact is that they did not acknowledge the Maasai Olympics as an alternative to, and worth as much as, lion hunting. This section discloses the warriors' attitudes based on the information provided by their leader S.

S was born on the Olgulului Group Ranch in 1991, and was selected as *ol-aiguenani*, a customary leader of an age-group, in 2013. This leader traditionally lives in the village (*e-manyata*), but as he attends a school, he is usually absent from it. He was the first leader to go to school in the Amboseli area, and was elected by his colleagues and elders because they thought their society needed an educated and modern leader.

When I interviewed him before the second Maasai Olympics, he was very positive about them. He said that he learned about the importance of wildlife in school, and argued that because wildlife was an important national resource for tourism, there was no reason to continue hunting. In his opinion, the warriors used to hunt wildlife because they were idle, and the Maasai Olympics were good because they kept them busy practicing and they stopped hunting.

On March 2015, three months after the second Maasai Olympics, he was invited to a symposium held at Nairobi, and made a speech about the Maasai Olympics. He had prepared an English manuscript with his colleagues. His speech was similar to the comments made by the Big Life Foundation, namely that the Maasai people are traditional conservationists who have coexisted with wildlife without hunting for meat, and the Maasai Olympics are fully supported by the local community as a great idea.

Half a year after the symposium, I visited his village. Before doing so, I heard that after the Imbirikani team had won the successive championship, they went to the office of a sponsoring NGO and asked them to buy the trophy, saying that, 'We can't drink tea with this. This is useless'. When

asked about the value of the medals, S replied that the warriors attributed no value to them. He approved the Maasai Olympics as a place for the competition and mingling, but he also said that the primary reason the warriors joined the event was the prize money, and they would be happier if the money were increased instead of receiving a medal. The way in which the Maasai warriors handle the trophies and the medals demonstrates that despite their positive reactions to the sponsors and the media personnel, they do not attribute the values expected by outsiders to these activities.

6.3. Limitations of positionings

Meguro (2014) reports that in the 2010s, Maasai elders in the Amboseli area began to conduct positionings, or ‘intentionally manipulate, project, and homogenize their public images and identities to accord with “Western” stereotypes [the representation of the Maasai people as traditional animal lovers] in order to seek recognition [and aid]’. This study reveals that Maasai youths also adopt a strategy of positionings against the NGO’s ‘innovative’ approach to the Maasai Olympics.

Both the elders and the youths distinguish between ‘acceptable’ and ‘unacceptable’ traditions, and emphasize only the former in public. In doing so, they defer to the outsiders’ values and preferences, rather than the historical correctness of their explanation, and do not hesitate to jumble local reality and global images. Such an attitude has developed in response to their previous confrontations and negotiations with outsiders. In this respect, their positionings seem to correspond to the African potential. However, there are limitations in their positionings.

Besides the function of interface, Matsuda (2014: 9) raises de-technicization and de-romanticization as two fundamental conditions for the African potential. On the one hand, the technicization of African cultures means an abstraction of specific knowledge and techniques apart from a local context, which may result in the disregard and ruin of local cultures. On the other hand, the romanticization of African societies means foisting idealized and unrealistic external images on local societies, and not acknowledging the fact that local societies and indigenous cultures are changing as they interface with various global flaws.

As a result of the Big Life Foundation’s novel approach and the Maasai warriors’ positive attitudes, the Maasai Olympics received global recognition and support. However, the positionings of the Maasai people are aligned with the romantic Maasai image, which is mostly created and globally circulated by the outsiders. Consequently, although the Maasai Olympics emphasize a change to the Maasai ‘tradition’, it leaves the biggest issue for the local Maasai people—worsening human-wildlife conflicts and unsatisfactory countermeasures—unnoticed. Thus, it is not clear whether their positionings bring about the improvements to the local human-wildlife relations they intend to achieve.

7. CONCLUSION

This article considers the Maasai Olympics and investigates this event’s characteristics and outcomes. Compared with other CBC projects, the Maasai Olympics have commonalities in terms of local benefits, environmental education, and tradition-mindedness. With regard to the traditions of the Maasai people, it is uniquely ‘innovative’. However, this does not mean that it is being fully endorsed. Rather, the Maasai Olympics are similar to other projects in sorting an ‘acceptable’ tradition from an ‘unacceptable’ one, and leaving the locally worsening problems unchanged.

In the eyes of the spectators, the second Maasai Olympics would appear to have been successful, as all the warriors were actively involved in the events, and reacted positively to the outsiders. It seems that the objective of the Maasai Olympics was fully achieved. However, the fact is that neither did the warriors approve of the ideal of the animal welfare nor did they recognize any cultural value in the Maasai Olympics as the sponsors expected and the media reported. The reason the warriors pretended to be traditional animal lovers and deliberately echoed the story portrayed by the Big Life Foundation was because they understood that the Maasai Olympics attracted extensive global attention, and their approving attitudes might result in more benefits.

This reactive behaviour of the Maasai warriors is similar to the recent strategy used by the local elders, that is, positionings. However, with reference to the argument of the African potential, this article reaches the conclusion that if the positionings are based on the function of interface but without de-romanticization, the results reinforce outsiders' stereotypical views and values. In the case of the Amboseli area, this means that the biggest problem for the local people is not publicized, and thus there is no global movement to address it directly. Therefore, the future task is to work out a new story for the Maasai Olympics, one that covers the issue of human-wildlife conflicts and the agency of Maasai people, and thus leads to improvements in the current situation.

NOTES

- (1) The URL of the Maasai Olympic website is <http://www.maasaiolympics.com/>.
- (2) While the Maasai society consists of six clans, each locality includes members of more than one clan and has a social bond. A locality's border has greater significance than the commonness of a clan.
- (3) Youths are often regarded as 'warriors', because they used to be regarded as guardians of the sections.
- (4) The Amboseli area is a territory of the Kisongo section, but since it is far from its main territory in northern Tanzania, those who live in the Amboseli area are distinguished from the main body using the name of the Loitokitok (sub)section.
- (5) Supported by various organizations, the KWS started the programmes of revenue sharing (return of tourism income to local communities), community sanctuaries (establishment of protected areas on communal land), community scouts (employment and training of local people as game rangers), environmental education, and others.
- (6) The projects of NGOs include the formation of protected areas on communal land, the recruitment of local people as game rangers, the support for women to sell cultural handicrafts, the construction of schools, the payment of scholarships, and compensation for livestock depredation.
- (7) While the former includes the skills needed to run fast on a track, throw a javelin, and jump as high as possible, the latter refers to the ability to observe the marks of prey animals, approach prey without being noticed, and throw a spear to strike a prey's vital spot.

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