

The Tanzanite Fence: Mineral Enclosures, Local Rights and Livelihoods in Tanzania

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Abstract

The 'tanzanite fence' was constructed purportedly to establish legal boundaries for the tanzanite mineral deposits at Mirerani in Arusha, Tanzania, and hence ensure the security of the area. The 'tanzanite fence' is used in this article as a metaphor to demonstrate how legal and policy reform processes in the extractive sector construct (in)accessibility. Conceptually, the article draws insights from the space production literature to argue that, across Africa, natural resource policy and legal reforms are designed to produce space for powerful actors, mostly private multinational organisations, while limiting the access and ownership rights of already powerless communities, thereby affecting local livelihoods. In the context of this article, the physical fence is a manifestation of reforms supported since the 1990s by different actors whose intentions were to secure and protect their tanzanite business interests. Yet, neither these actors (who represent multinational firms and businesses) nor the government accepts responsibility for the livelihood insecurities caused by the denial of access to pasture and water for the Maasai pastoralists. The article concludes that although mineral-sector reforms facilitated the government's increase in revenue collection, measures such as fencing have exacerbated the marginalisation of the local people in those areas. It also contributes to the literature on the marginalisation of local communities living in resource-rich areas, which has paid insufficient attention to fence-making and space production as agents of exclusion. The article further recommends that, given the complexities of such practices imposed on its citizens, the government should take due diligence, provide compensation for the loss of land and other resources to local communities removed from certain areas for development projects, and ensure the public has sufficient information about their land rights.

Keywords: *fence construction, mineral rights, marginalisation, tanzanite, Tanzania*

1. Introduction

The world's only tanzanite gemstone is found in a small area of Mirerani in Northern Tanzania. This article analyses the process that created a physical fence around the deposits, referred to here as the '*tanzanite fence*'. While the fence is physically present, the tanzanite fence is also used as a metaphor to demonstrate how policy and legal reforms create space for large-scale multinational companies by weakening local people's customary land rights. The article interrogates the fence-making process by engaging with the literature on space

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production (Lefebvre, 1991). It further analyses Tanzania's legal and policy reform processes since the 1990s and their contribution to the construction of resource (in)accessibility by different actors.

Despite its uniqueness to Tanzania and increasing demand worldwide, tanzanite has not made enough contribution to local development (Poncian, 2019a; Huggins, 2021). Corruption, environmental destruction, marginalisation, and the relocation of local citizens: all have continued to fuel conflicts between small- and large-scale miners (Schroeder, 2010; Huggins et al., 2024). In 2001, the US State Department labelled tanzanite as a 'conflict gem', especially when the *Wall Street Journal* published allegations that al-Qaeda was purchasing tanzanite to fund its terrorist activities (Schroeder, 2010; Donahue, 2018). The effects of this international anti-terrorism rhetoric were met with reforms that supported the privatisation of tanzanite mining, transforming the gemstone into a more commercialised resource (Schroeder, 2010; Huggins & Kinyondo, 2019). Subsequently, improved marketing strategies increased profits for gemstone brokers and dealers, and raised government revenue; thereby increasing the fame of tanzanite regionally and globally (Kahyarara, 2024; Donahue, 2018). The TanzaniteOne Mining Limited company, which bought and sold tanzanite, was accused of torturing employees and small-scale miners, even causing deaths with frequent mine flash flooding (Huggins & Kinyondo, 2019; Donahue, 2018). Thus, tanzanite evolved into a popular resource for some actors, but a source of displeasure and exclusion for local communities.

This article seeks to interrogate the tanzanite fence-making process that characterises the mining sector in Tanzania. By engaging with literature on space production (Lefebvre, 1991), the article demonstrates how the World Bank's liberalisation policies, including the 1992 Strategy for African Mining, made mining reforms mandatory. Such reforms targeted scaling down the mining monopoly and of the state, and creating a supportive environment for the private sector. It was envisaged that reforms would improve revenue collection, citizen participation, and local development (Shao, 2019; Maliganya & Bengesi, 2018). However, their impacts were felt more in the promotion and creation of a supportive atmosphere for foreign investment; thereupon raising concerns among the public, academia, and even the state (Poncian, 2019a; Pedersen, 2012; Muhanga, 2019).

When the fifth-phase government of President John Pombe Magufuli came into power in 2015, it responded differently to the challenges facing the mining sector by echoing Julius Nyerere's nationalistic approach, which emphasised the state's sovereignty over natural resources. As the First President of the United Republic of Tanzania, Julius Nyerere – popularly known as Mwalimu, the father of the nation, and a nationalist leader – believed in the state's control over critical resources, such as land and minerals (Theodory, 2015; Haussler, 2005; Chachage & Cassam, 2010).

His ideology of socialism and self-reliance was adopted by President Magufuli, who implemented it through the resource nationalisation agenda, which, among other measures, reinforced the redrafting of mining laws and the construction of a brick fence around tanzanite mining sites. Thus, Magufuli's decision to intervene in the governance of mineral resources – by redrafting the country's mining laws, and taking actions such as erecting the tanzanite fence to reduce smuggling, secure government control over the resource, and maximise national benefits – reflects a continuation of Nyerere's nationalist ideology.

Empirically, this article reviews Tanzania's actions to regain control of tanzanite, culminating in the fencing of the Mirerani tanzanite mining site and its designation as a controlled area under the Mining Regulation of 2019 (URT, 2019). It uses Naisinyai-Kati and Mirerani villages in Simanjiro District to provide the best case for examining governance dynamics in the extractive sector and their impact on local livelihoods; especially those of the Maasai pastoralists who migrated into the area since the mid-19th century following their pastoral movements from Kenya; and of other ethnic groups who came into the area from within and outside the country to engage in various mining-related activities (Vincent et al., 2021; Smith, 2016; Americolo, 2013; Altingoz et al., 2019). Although the law is said to guarantee greater resource security, effective governance of extractive activities, and stronger environmental protection within and beyond the enclosed area, it has, in practice, reinforced (in)accessibility, which, in reality, bisects the once-pastoral land to form a mining-protected area.

The article is organised into seven sections. Following this first section, which provides an overview of the issues surrounding the construction of the tanzanite fence, the second section provides the context for the research from which this article originates, and the methods used for data collection and analysis. The third section conceptualises space construction in general; and its relationship to enclosures, rights, and local livelihoods. The fourth section analyses mineral governance reforms as the tanzanite fence-making process, which marks the government's efforts to regain control over the country's mineral wealth. The fifth section presents fence contestations and impacts, while the sixth section discusses the tanzanite fence reflection. The last section provides the conclusion.

2. Context and Methods

This article stems from a PhD research that began in November 2019 to explore the context of the entire legal and policy reform processes in Tanzania's extractive sector that shape resource (in)accessibility. It examines the dynamics existing in the mineral sector since the 1990s, when reforms were driven by neoliberal policy prescriptions and foreign direct investment imperatives (Szablowski & Campbell, 2019; Nshala, 2012; McMahan, 2010; Ambe-Uva, 2017), which transformed land and mineral rights, embedding communal resources and state control.

It also examines the commitment of Tanzania's fifth-phase government to regain control over the extractive industry, particularly after the 1990s policy reforms that created an enabling environment for multinational corporations to control it (Poncian, 2019b; Jacob, 2020; Jacob & Pedersen, 2018). Among others, the government formed a presidential committee to investigate mineral revenue losses and legal flaws in the auditing framework to enable the implementation of control measures (Schoneveld et al., 2018; Nellist, 2017). These interventions not only redefined the state's return to mineral wealth by increasing protection of its national economic assets, but also necessitated spatial enclosures that reconfigured access to land, ownership, and local livelihoods. Such enclosures reflect a broader trend in Tanzania and across Africa, where natural resource borders are increasingly being redefined by legal, physical, and military systems that prioritise capital accumulation over customary land and livelihood rights. The fence-making process is central to this article, as it not only encircles the mining area but also officially extends the border redefinition; and cements a historical process of ordering local spaces to be accessed and controlled by a few powerful actors, while significantly affecting the livelihoods of many people. Thus, the article is conceived and developed against this backdrop, as well as the need to understand the implications of legal and policy reforms in the extractive sector for local livelihoods, which have provided impetus for thinking about the production of space.

Methodologically, the data were collected using qualitative techniques, particularly in-depth interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs). To meet the objectives of the study, in-depth interviews were conducted with thirteen (13) key informants who either influenced or were influenced by the changes in mineral governance, the construction of the fence around the tanzanite deposits, and the implementation of decisions that designated Mirerani as a controlled area. The informants included two government officials from the Resident Mineral Office, two village executive officers (one from each village), two experts/consultants on policy reform, one former Commissioner of Minerals, two village elders (one from each study village), two representatives from non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and two mine owners (one a successful miner, and the other a member of the Miners' Association): all to help gather first-hand accounts from beneficiaries or those affected by the reform process. The questions were mainly intended to elicit informants' meanings ascribed to mineral resource governance reforms, the process of constructing the fence, the actors involved, their roles and interests in the reform process; and their perceptions, preconceptions and assumptions about the impact on land rights and local livelihoods. They were designed to capture real-life experiences and local interpretations of Mirerani's space creation, land rights, and pastoral livelihoods rather than their numerical patterns. Each interview session lasted almost an hour, and all sessions were recorded.

As mentioned earlier, the study used FGDs to collect primary data. Four FGDs were organised: two in each study village. In Naisinyai Kati, the first FGD included seven village members, while the second FGD included seven village council officials. In Mirerani, the first FGD included seven artisanal miners, and the second FGD included seven female mineral sorters. The discussions were carefully designed to elicit the perspectives, opinions, interpretations, and attitudes of local leaders and other community members regarding their involvement in the reform process, and in mineral resource governance. Data coding was conducted to identify key themes, meanings, and concepts from the opinions of the informants and participants on the fence construction process. A review of various documentary sources—including working papers, articles, government records, and mining reports—was also part of the methods used to collect secondary data. According to Yin (2018), documentary review is critical, especially when used to validate information from other sources. The reviewed documents addressed mineral resource governance dynamics, actors, their roles and interests in reforms, enclosures, space production, marginalisation of ordinary people, and reforms that have shaped local practices. As such, qualitative data are presented in this article as textual extracts used to support the main arguments.

3. Conceptualising Space Construction

Research undertaken across the disciplines of human geography, political ecology, law, land, and mineral governance has confirmed that space is not a neutral container in which social life occurs (Rwegasira, 2012; Rasmussen & Lund, 2018; Massey, 2001, 2005; Lawton, 1983). Instead, space is socially constructed through a combination of political, economic, cultural, and symbolic practices (Paasi, 2009; Mels, 2014; Massey, 2000; Bourdieu, 1989). The conventional understanding is that space is created rather than given. Above all, Lefebvre (1991) sheds light on the dynamic process by which physical and social spaces are actively constructed, shaped, and transformed through power relations, governance structures, and cultural practices. Thus, how space is constructed and reconstructed reflects the political ecology of natural resources, and particularly who controls their access and use (Ramutsindela, 2017).

Lefebvre (1991) conceptualises the production of space in a three-part dialectic involving social practices and perceptions, representations, and the spatial-temporal fictitious. In Lefebvre's view, social practices construct social space at different levels—including the lived (representational) space, the discursive (representation) space, and the real (physical) space—through social interaction. To create a physical or abstract space in modern society, the kings, lords, or architects—literally actors such as governments, policymakers, developers, international financial institutions, donor agencies, and investors—often engage in designing and redesigning governance regimes (Barnard-Wills & Ashenden, 2012). Accordingly, space—as a social product (grounded in the production of value and social meaning)—influences social practices and perceptions.

As space is continually created, contested, and redefined, physical borders are linked to legal, economic, and symbolic enclosures (Noe & Kuboja, 2025; Massey, 2005). This is to say that as space is produced, new lines of separation emerge to control access and support the existing—and often parallel—institutions that govern it (Ramutsindela & Noe, 2012). As such, Haikola and Anshelm (2016) suggest that the reproduction of geographic and political space in a multicultural context result from actors' competition over resource ownership. Ramutsindela and Noe (2015) indicate that space is transformed in both abstract and physical terms as actors compete for access to, control over, and ownership of resources. As such, space becomes highly politicised, transforming rights in favour of powerful actors. That is why, in a social space, actors compete for access, control, and ownership rights; and in the process, three spatial dimensions (the perceived, conceived, and lived spaces) are constituted.

Going by Lefebvre's (1991) logic, the fence is not just a barrier encircling a mining site. Rather, the process by which legal and policy frameworks redefine land and mining interests, and access and ownership rights create new borders to local livelihoods, which determine how communities respond to the transformed space. Thus, actions such as those that construct the fence become part of the space-production process, in which competition occurs between those creating it and those it is intended to control. Those creating it engage in politically restructuring decisions that produce frontiers to determine access to defined spaces (Noe, 2009, 2010; Nauman, 2021).

As seen in other natural resource sectors—such as wildlife, forestry, and fisheries—the increasing global demand for mineral resources creates a need for new orders that necessitate the production of space (Barnard-Wills & Ashenden, 2012). As Nauman (2021) suggests, the construction of a new space sows the seeds of contestation among actors, which in turn erodes and restructures local boundaries. According to Elden (2007), space is a political instrument that is both constituted by, and constitutive of, security discourses and practices. It necessitates the reorganisation of institutions: empowering some actors, while disempowering others. The main argument here is that the construction of various types of fences creates space: the space of socio-economic inequalities.

Since space is, in itself, a product of socio-political processes (Massey, 2000), a fence is likewise a part of the space-production process, allowing some actors and disallowing others. Going by this logic, a fence is more than a physical construct: it is carried out by rules, traditions, language, and emotions; and it is subject to change. This means that land, boundaries, and fences are more than just physical enclosures: they represent ideologies of power, control, and access. Lefebvre (1991) suggests that a fence is more than just a barrier: it is a socio-political process that creates new geographies of control, transforming livelihoods, and fuelling

struggles over rights. As such, the liberalised and resource nationalism policies (the socio-political processes) have created a landscape of control, thereby redefining who has – or does not – have the legitimacy to access natural resources, which, in turn, led to competition amongst actors. Conceptually, as actors compete for access, control, and ownership of fenced resources, space is transformed into both abstract and physical forms (Swyngedouw, 1992; Stanek, 2011; Elden, 2007).

Based on this logic, this article views the tanzanite fence as a byproduct and representation of a space created within and around the mining sites. It physically sets limits for informal miners, pastoral grazing land, and communities close to the mining areas. In other words, the tanzanite fence reshapes livelihoods by restricting pastoralists' movement, reducing opportunities for small-scale miners, and redistributing mineral wealth to a few powerful actors, including the government and private investors. Its construction and designation process represent the state's return to power over mineral wealth (Lugongo, 2017; Jacob, 2020; Jacob et al., 2016); while it signifies land dispossession and a loss of livelihood security for the Maasai and other local actors. Therefore, the narratives of national development, resource nationalism, and security contrast with those of marginalisation and exclusion in the production of space, because the fence represents the enclosure of common-pool resources, the reallocation of rights, and the displacement of local communities from their customary land rights.

Lefebvre's (1991) conception of the production of space is relevant to this article as it provides insights into how legal and policy changes since the 1990s have transformed pastureland into mining sites. It helps to understand how pastoralists have lost their land due to these policies. Also, it demonstrates how reforms (fence and space production processes) restrict artisanal mining by reinforcing the formalisation of their activities and strengthening public-private partnerships in the mining sector, thereby manifesting the unequal redistribution of wealth and the marginalisation of local miners. Thus, artisanal miners, local communities, mining corporations, pastoral groups, and political elites: all compete for control over the tanzanite mining site.

4. Mineral Governance Reforms: The Tanzanite Fence-making

Tanzania's mineral resource governance has undergone a broader trajectory, transitioning from a liberal economy to a more powerful form of resource nationalism under the fifth-phase government. Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, the country under the third- and fourth-phase governments implemented various legal and policy reforms in response to global pressures from the IMF and the World Bank (Pedersen, 2012; Muhanga, 2022; Helliessen, 2012). The study findings reveal that the past and present reforms follow a top-down process, with externally produced policy models – *the World Bank-IMF-led extractive sector reform model under structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) in Africa* – that emphasise liberalisation, privatisation,

deregulation, centralised decision-making, and inadequate involvement of local actors. The World Bank appears in this context as an institution fully involved in creating, promoting, supporting, and influencing reform processes throughout the period of liberalism. Notably, the World Bank (1992) stated:

The role of government is to create an enabling environment for the private sector, including a stable and competitive legal and fiscal framework, rather than directly engaging in mining production (World Bank, 1992: 10).

In this remark, the WB compelled resource-rich African states (including Tanzania) to engage in sectoral reforms. Its Mining Strategy for Africa (1992) called for reforms in the mineral sector, claiming that artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM) was responsible for challenges such as the loss of potential government revenue, public order, safety, and environmental destruction in many resource-rich states. Foreign direct investment was seen as a solution to the challenges in mineral governance, making reforms a defining feature of African politics in the 1990s and 2000s; with Tanzania focusing primarily on oil, gas, and minerals (Helliesen, 2012). Driven by the logic of attracting private investors in the mineral sector, Tanzania reviewed its 1979 Mining Act and paved the way for the establishment of the National Investment Act 1997, Mineral Policy 1997, and the Mining Act 1998 (Schoneveld et al., 2018; Ambe-Uva, 2017). As stated in Section 4.1 of the 1997 Mineral Policy, the government was committed to introducing and strengthening conducive climates for foreign direct investment in the mineral sector. It states:

The policy will promote and facilitate increased foreign investment in the mining sector by providing conducive investment conditions, including security of tenure, stable fiscal policies, and guarantees against nationalisation (URT, 1997).

This sentiment, which is reflected in Tanzania's Mining Policy of 1997, prioritises attracting international investment by making investor protection a significant goal of mineral governance. This section of the policy positioned the state as a promoter and regulator rather than a primary producer, offering considerable incentives to foreign investors; including 5-year tax exemptions, low royalty rates, transportation of unprocessed mineral concentrates, and tenure security (Pedersen et al., 2019; Ambe-Uva, 2017). This is echoed in the policy's clear commitment to tenure security, stable fiscal regimes, and anti-nationalisation guarantees: all of which are basic assurances required by foreign investors and multinational mining corporations to reduce political and economic risk.

Moreover, the policy indicates a neoliberal extractive governance system in which minerals are managed mainly as investment assets rather than as socio-economic resources for community development. This commitment refocused governmental authority on preserving capital interests by ensuring long-term tenure and isolating investors from policy swings or state interference. Such assurance limited the state's

regulatory flexibility, and reduced the possibility of redistributive or corrective measures; particularly when mining activities incur social, environmental, or livelihood costs. Also, the policy guaranteed spatial enclosures that permitted mining areas to become legally and physically protected, and to exclude artisanal miners and local people. This means that although the laws promised to ensure the country's mineral resources benefit a large number of citizens through government revenue collection, public participation in mining activities, and improved community livelihoods, they ended up creating forms of access and spatial configurations (Arthur-Holmes & Mengba, 2025; Andrews, 2018). Given their top-down nature, these reforms led to a surge in foreign investment in gold and gemstone mining, with multinational mining companies securing substantial concessions, and serving as vehicles for legitimising foreign monopoly in the sector.

While the changes were lauded for successfully attracting foreign investment into the Geita, Bulyanhulu, North Mara, and Mirerani mining projects (Kafumu, 2004), they also redefined the state's role in the extractive sector, shifting ownership rights to non-state actors and establishing limits on local actors. Critics – such as Campbell and Hatcher (2019) – argue that this shift in power was the driving force behind the currently contested model of space production, with both internal and external implications. Going back to the Maasai pastoralists of Naisinyai Kati and Mirerani villages in Simanjiro District, the shift in power led them to lose their customary rights to access their grazing land and the corridors they used for mobility. In this case, earlier reforms served as a genesis for fence construction, introducing complex conditions regarding access, control, and ownership rights that enabled multinational companies to obtain exclusive rights to land and the resources beneath it. Indeed, the liberal reforms laid the groundwork for spatial contestation over land and minerals throughout the 2000s, leading to public outcry, particularly over access, control, ownership, revenue loss, and inadequate local community participation in the sector, stemming from the 1997 mining and investment regimes.

As such, in 2009 and 2010, the government introduced a new mining policy and Act, respectively. These new laws encouraged local beneficiation by adjusting royalty rates to increase state revenue, enhancing small-scale mining (SSM) activities while also tightening licensing requirements (Nshala, 2012; Lange, 2011; Besada & Martin, 2015). For the SSM sector, Section 5.6 of the 2009 Mining Policy indicates that the government is committed to supporting SSM through the provision of extension services, and the establishment of mechanisms for accessing capital (URT, 2009). In this regard, it states:

- (i) The Government will create and implement programmes to transform and change SSM into organised and modernised mining; (ii) it will collaborate with stakeholders to make it easier for small-scale miners to access markets for minerals, geological data, and technical and financial services; and (iii) it will also keep working with stakeholders to make sure small-scale miners protect the environment (URT, 2009).

While this section of the law shows the government's commitment to formalising the ASM sector into a more structured, rationalised sector, it made no significant changes to the existing power relations among various actors; particularly between local communities, the state, and foreign investors. In fact, the commitment to formalise small-scale mining led to exclusion because it required licensing, fees, and compliance costs that many artisanal miners and community members could not afford. Similarly, the law failed to recognise the mobility demands of local people, such as pastoral groups, whose grazing pastures often overlapped with mining zones. Hence, the de facto exclusion of resource-rich lands from customary use persisted, despite the law's provisions acknowledging the SSM sector's contribution to the economy, and the need for local community participation. The questions of land dispossession, inadequate compensation, and local communities' access, rights, and control continued to be a familiar chorus in the mineral sector.

In 2015, resource conflicts dominated the country's election politics, and presidential candidates used them as key points of contention. The political parties included in their manifestos the need to return control of resources to the country, thereby promising a nationalist approach to the country's resources (CCM, 2015; CCM, 2020). Indeed, President Magufuli marked a significant turn towards resource nationalism, actively addressing governance challenges by reviewing the extractive sector contracts—commonly known as Mining Development Agreements (MDAs)—which granted superpowers to a few foreign actors (Poncian, 2019b; Norbrook, 2019). In this attempt, the government reviewed three pieces of legislation: the Natural Wealth and Resources Contracts (Review and Renegotiations of Unconscionable Terms) Act No. 6 of 2017; Natural Wealth and Resources (Permanent Sovereignty) Act No. 5 of 2017 (URT, 2017a), and the Written Laws (Miscellaneous Amendment) No. 4 of 2017 that amends the 2010 Mining Act (URT, 2017b). These laws (revised or freshly drafted) were designed to enhance the state's power in the protection and control of the country's resources (Norbrook, 2019; Noe, 2020; Jacob & Pedersen, 2018).

President Magufuli's nationalist approach led to further reforms in the mineral sector, which served as the basis for the construction of the 24.5-kilometre-long brick fence in Mirerani under the supervision of the Tanzania People's Defence Force (TPDF) (Shao, 2019). The construction of the fence was preceded by various measures, including legal and policy reforms in 2017, the cancellation of large-scale mining rights elsewhere in Shinyanga that had led to the displacement of local communities and small-scale miners (ASMs), and the halting of fraudulent sale of mineral resources. These measures led to high-profile clashes with multinational companies, such as Acacia Mining (formerly Barrick Gold), over alleged under-declaration of exports. As such, in March 2017, hundreds of ready-to-export sand containers of mineral concentrates belonging to the Acacia Gold Mining Public

Limited Company were seized at the Dar es Salaam Port (Norbrook, 2019; Jacob & Pedersen, 2018). The seizure sparked broader public discourse portraying the President as a nationalist, thereby gaining popular support for further actions against the exploitation of national resources by multinational mining companies (Paget, 2020; Kidanka & Olingo, 2018).

A brand-new mining regulation was enacted in 2019 to designate Mirerani as a Controlled Area. Sections 1 and 6 (1) of the regulation recognise the area as 'protected', while Sections 6 (2-4) vest access, ownership, and control of tanzanite under the state, through the Commissioner of Minerals (URT, 2019). In practice, this regulation is used to support the army's supervision during and after the construction of the fence. Szablowski and Campbell (2019), Rjoub et al. (2021), and Duit and Galaz (2008) have concluded that the World Bank and some donor agencies endorsed the framework for mining regimes, which gave rise to the current socio-economic tragedy linked to local marginalisation. They influenced decisions on resource governance, as manifested in the neoliberal reforms and in resource nationalism, which is a continuation of power recentralization by disempowering some actors. As such, resource nationalism initiatives evolving within the new rules and practices are still under the control of the international system: i.e., interactions that occur over time through negotiated initiatives, investments, agreements, and shifting arrangements between states and international players determine the legal rights that states must exercise their authority, rather than the reverse.

Thus, governance reforms in Tanzania's extractive sector – which transitioned from the era of liberalism to a more powerful form of resource nationalism – have implicitly created resource (in)accessibility for some actors while increasing rural communities' livelihood insecurity. This study found that different groups of actors have not fully understood the goals behind the 2017 legal and policy reforms and their upshot, leading to the construction project at Mirerani. The government's stance towards artisanal miners, mining companies, and local communities appears unclear. This is due, in part, to the rapid introduction and implementation of these reforms without adequate stakeholder consultation (Huggins & Kinyondo, 2019), which in turn led to the over-centralisation of the sector's governance.

5. The Fence Contestations and Impacts

The fence, in both abstract and physical forms, has had economic and social implications for the government and the local communities in Simanjiro District, Tanzania. The construction of the fence has not only demonstrated a shift in power from a scaled-down to a more centralised form of governance under resource nationalism, but also created space for contestation, with both negative and positive implications. The KIIs and FGD participants associated the fence-making with President Magufuli's populist leadership in regaining control over

resources. From the government's perspective, the fence is an essential tool for enhancing control over resources. One of the key informants made the following comment:

We took this decision in the government after assessing the amount of money we had lost due to tax evasion and smuggling. Annually, revenue losses amounted to 2.7 billion Tanzanian shillings. But now with this fence, things are under control; the government is now harvesting (KII₁, Mirerani, 25th August 2021).

Another informant also added:

We oversee production and the daily valuation of tanzanite. As we talk, smuggling is curbed, and tax payments are no longer evaded. We are proud of this fence and entry conditions because they have enabled the government to benefit from tanzanite. Surely, before we intervened in this sector, only powerful investors and a few political elites, dealers, and brokers generated income. Artisanal miners, sorters, or the government could not do so by themselves (KII₂, Mirerani, 25th August 2021).

The informant's narratives echo the view of many, including that of the late President Magufuli himself, who complained that, for many years, tanzanite had enriched only a few powerful private actors, leaving the government and its citizens impoverished. Thus, fencing was seen to have rejuvenated the state's scaled-down power, and enabled it to capture the lost benefits. According to the informant's account, Mirerani is observed as a landscape for tax extraction and regulatory control, revealing a state-oriented socio-economic construction of space. From a critical perspective, the narrative reflects a broader logic of resource nationalism and securitised accumulation; in which efficiency, revenue loss recovery, and fiscal control are used to support the enclosure of the Mirerani mining site. The state justifies transforming an open, socially embedded landscape into a bounded, securitised, and exclusive economic zone by presenting the fence as an appropriate response to estimated annual losses of TZS2.7bn (USD 1,259,483) (URT, 2017d).

The researcher's observations – which also included visits to the mining site, governance processes, and security structures – confirmed that the fence-making has reshaped access, control and ownership of the tanzanite wealth. It is evident that the government installed not only a physical fence encircling the tanzanite mining area, but also established military apparatuses and checkpoints to oversee and estimate production and sales trends. According to Kahyarara (2024), the government interventions increased tanzanite production, sales, and exports, thereby raising royalty collections. Statistics from the Ministry of Finance show that the total value of tanzanite has been growing year after year, especially since the introduction of the new governance mechanisms. As Figure 1 shows, the value increased from TZS 2.38bn (USD 952,000) in June 2016/17, to a peak of TZS 32.60bn (USD 13,040,000) in 2019/20 (URT, 2022).

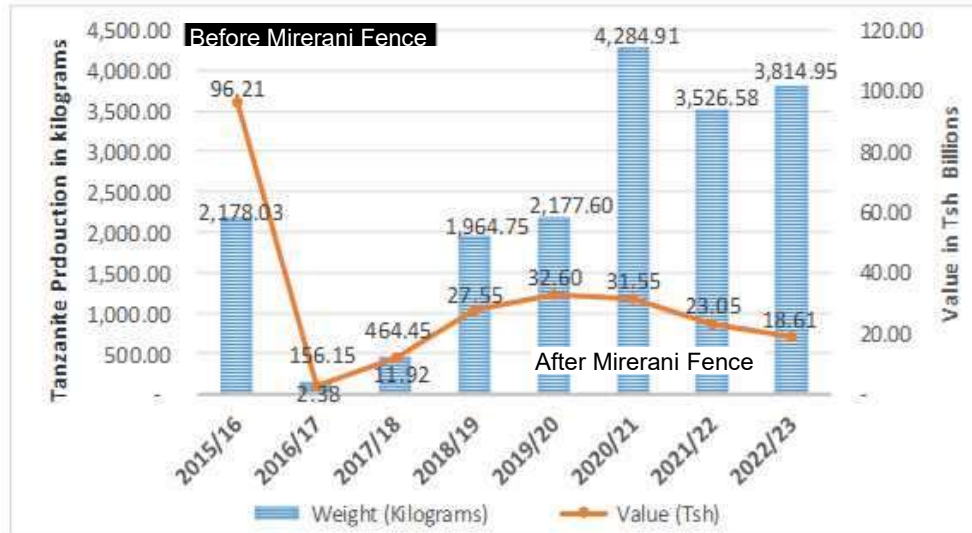


Figure 1: Tanzanite Production and Value Trends Before and After Fence Construction

Source: Ministry of Minerals (2022)

Based on the data given in Figure 1, production and value trends before and after the fencing have improved over time. The fence has enabled the government to conduct frequent audits of mineral production, sales, and exports, thereby facilitating tax collection. Before these initiatives were put in place, mining companies used to hide what they produced, and their exports never matched what they reported. The new mining regime facilitated traceability and transparency in tanzanite production, exports, and sales. Although Shao (2019) suggests that production and revenue growth are attributed to technological advancements, innovative exploration, international mineral prices, and new mineral discoveries, this study finds that changes in the country’s tax regime and the commitment of the government to oversee and control the production, valuation processes and sales: all have played a significant role in the increase in tanzanite production and revenue.

While fluctuations in monetary value have depended on the global market, tanzanite production over the past five years has been reported to grow consistently, thereby justifying the effectiveness of the fence in controlling smuggling. This is also supported by Paget (2020), who contends that the fence marked the tipping point for liberalisation policies and the inception of resource nationalism, which manifest in the return of the state to the governance of minerals. Paget’s (2020) argument reflects what Section 22(h, i, and j) of the Written Laws (Miscellaneous Amendments) Act of 2017 states. The section reads:

The commission shall be committed to: (h) counteract minerals smuggling and minerals royalty evasion in collaboration with relevant government authorities; (i) advise the government on all matters relating to the administration of the mineral sector with primary focus on monitoring and auditing of mining operations to maximise government revenue; (j) promote and conduct research and development in the mineral sector that will lead to increased government revenue (URT, 2017c).

In this case, government interventions in the tanzanite subsector have facilitated the government's recovery of control over the resource. The initiatives helped to increase tanzanite production and revenue. As Vincent et al. (2021) suggest, by constructing the fence and changing the mining regime, the government addressed revenue losses, ongoing conflicts, and smuggling; thereby creating a more responsible framework for the proper development and governance of the tanzanite trade, and improving tanzanite production and sales. It should be noted that these initiatives not only enabled the government to control the sector and extract wealth from it, but also enabled mine owners to generate income they had not had before. However, this study also established that the fencing has raised the income levels of those engaged in tanzanite mining more than those involved in livestock keeping and farming. Saniniu Ole Laizer, a key informant who identified himself as a small-scale miner and a pastoralist, and who is also known as a tanzanite billionaire, had this to say in this regard:

I have kept livestock and engaged in mining activities for many years, and through mining, I have been able to build my own house (while pointing to his compound), a school, and a church. If I relied solely on livestock, I could do nothing. Just imagine, only a tiny gemstone could be sold for millions (KII3, Naisinyai Kati, 8th March 2022).

This quote describes a significant shift in local livelihood practices in the Mirerani area. It demonstrates a shifting political ecology of Maasai livelihoods, where pastoralism has increasingly been intersected with the extractive industry. It portrays mining as a transformative and superior livelihood option capable of generating riches while also enabling noticeable socio-economic mobility, as demonstrated by the construction of better houses, a school, a church, among other things. The narrative aligns with a broader discourse that views mining as a means of economic advancement, in contrast to the perceived constraints of livestock-based economies (Brunet & Longboat, 2023).

On the other hand, this narrative discloses a reconsideration of pastoralism with cattle husbandry—which has historically been essential to Maasai identity, resilience, and socio-cultural landscape—being discursively degraded as economically imperfect. Thus, artisanal mining has evolved into an economically significant activity and, in some cases, an alternative to pastoralism among the Maasai and other local populations. Far from showing a simple abandoning of livestock farming, the narrative emphasises livelihood diversification as an option for the changing economic, environmental, and political situations.

While land fragmentation, climate variability, population growth, and transportation restrictions affect livestock-based livelihoods, engagement in small-scale tanzanite mining has enabled forms of local capital accumulation and social investment that pastoralism alone is increasingly struggling to sustain. The logic here is that mining emerged as a high-risk but potentially high-reward economic prospect, with even a small gemstone yielding big rewards in conventional pastoral economies. Even though the informant was not ready to disclose the exact amount of cash he gained from the tanzanite business, he is portrayed as a local miner who became a billionaire in 2020 after selling his two rough tanzanite stones, weighing 9.2 and 5.8 kilogrammes each: the most significant amount ever recorded in the country. The sale of the tanzanite enabled him to accumulate USD3.4m (equivalent to TZS7.7bn) during a trading event in Manyara Region (Mpehongwa, 2023; Lamtey, 2022). In this study, Saniniu Ole Laizer represents the few small-scale miners who have benefited from the mineral reforms, enabling them to improve their livelihoods.

Although changes in governance structures have had some positive economic impacts on the government and a few participants in the tanzanite subsector, they also have had negative implications for local livelihoods overall. Since Simanjiro is historically known to serve as a critical grazing hinterland and a mobility corridor for pastoralists that links Naisinyai Kati and Mirerani with other parts of the country's northern regions (Yanda & William, 2010; Sachedina & Trench, 2009), the fence has thus been more than just a localised security measure to symbolise a broader reconfiguration of pastoral space and livelihoods in Tanzania. Practically, it has become a contentious line between state-corporate mining control and customary pastoral land rights. In the FGDs, one of the participants gave the following comment:

This brick fence has changed everything for us. It is as if we are lawbreakers, forcefully separated from our daily lives and our relatives. We are no longer permitted to enter the area without proper identification, and we also do not qualify for the access card. The fact is that the wall has taken our pastureland, water points for our livestock, and pathways to our relatives (FGDs, Naisinyai Kati, 8th February 2022).

This extract captures local sentiments about what the fence has meant for local livelihoods on the ground. Community members, especially the Maasai pastoralists, claimed they had been denied access to areas they had formerly used. The study findings article revealed that the fencing has altered migratory patterns by impeding traditional grazing routes, restricting access to water points near the mining zone, and criminalising movements within or outside the fenced area. These restrictions have sparked new contestation over land rights and pastoral mobility, affecting the livelihoods of local communities, particularly the Maasai pastoralists, who heavily rely on seasonal mobility across vast rangelands, including areas currently protected by mining regulations. These

restrictions are supported by Section 11 of the 2019 Mining Regulations, which clearly state that, "... human activities on the surface or underground of the Controlled Area shall not be conducted at 200 metres inside or outside the wall" (URT, 2019). The section imposes restrictions on the access to, and the conduct of certain activities (including mining and non-mining activities), within a controlled area. Since the fence runs about 24.5km that encircle the tanzanite mining area, and the area of about 200m outside the fence, this equates to a loss of about 9.6km² of land, full of woodland and scrub, that could support pastoral and other livelihood activities. The key fact here is that the fence has reduced the size of pastoral land and excluded local communities from participating in the mining sector, thereby affecting local livelihoods.

This kind of enclosure raises new controversies over livelihood exclusion for the inhabitants of Naisinyai Kati and Mirerani, who previously pursued livelihoods through pastoralism, peripheral mining activities, gemstone dealing, transport services, and informal labour across the Simanjiro District and in the northern regions. These controversies are common across natural resource governance. They are closely related to the ongoing crisis in Ngorongoro, which is framed in the context of wildlife conservation but shares similar patterns of enclosure. As Noe and Kuboja (2025) and Huggins and Kinyondo (2024) argue, the tanzanite fence, like the Ngorongoro case, reflects similar spatial and political dynamics in modern Tanzania; despite one being framed around the security of mineral wealth, and the other around wildlife protection. These two cases operate in different spectrums, but they both transform space from a lived landscape into a more controlled one that serves both domestic and international interests, but excludes the rights of local communities (Noe & Kuboja, 2025; Ndimbo & Haulle, 2025; Huggins & Kinyondo, 2024).

The fencing has intensified pastoral vulnerability by reducing available grazing land and increasing demand on the remaining rangeland; thereby leading to overgrazing in unfenced areas, higher cattle mortality during droughts, and greater food insecurities. While minerals are mined for national profit, the costs are borne spatially by local communities. Physical fencing, as well as the legal requirement to formalise mining activities, have restricted access to mining spaces to licensed actors, sparking hatred among community members who perceive it as a mechanism for protecting elite and foreign interests by converting minerals into exclusive commodities, and preventing local participation in a resource located within their socio-cultural landscape.

6. Discussion: The Tanzanite Fence Reflections

Tanzania is not the only resource-rich state in Africa that has undergone several phases of reforms to impose separation between people and their land. Many African resource-rich states have followed a similar governance trajectory from

neoliberal approaches driven by the World Bank, to more complex forms of resource nationalism. Whether earlier or recent, attempts to shape the governance of the extractive sector were top-down processes largely shaped by the interests of powerful actors that created resource (in)accessibility for various actors (Lange, 2011; Campbell, 2010; Ambe-Uva, 2017). Across the continent, new resource policies have altered power relations among states and foreign companies, as well as between governments and their citizens (Lange, 2011).

In Tanzania, the government—which essentially serves as a decision-making agency—appears to operate in a politically charged atmosphere driven by resource nationalism, fiscal pressures, legal fragmentation, and development goals that emphasise revenue collection and state control. Despite the government's promises during and after the fencing, and the designation of Mirerani as a controlled area, the interests of local communities—particularly the Maasai pastoralists—have been overlooked in favour of tanzanite wealth. The government and its agencies have created complex socio-spatial realities to govern land and minerals, while disregarding the interests/rights of other land users (Noe & Kuboja, 2025; Noe, 2020). Pastoral land-use systems—characterised by mobility, seasonality, and communal tenure—have been susceptible to such restricted access to land.

It is worth noting that land and mineral ownership in Tanzania are governed by different legislations, including the Land Act (1999), Village Land Act (1999), and the Written Laws (Miscellaneous Amendments) (No. 4) Act 2017. These laws affirm that every individual has the right to own land, and the President is the trustee of the resources associated with it on behalf of the citizens. Part II, Section 3 (1b) of the Land Act No. 5 of 1999 states that “...all land is vested in the President as trustee on behalf of all citizens...” Additionally, the law in the same section states that “...existing occupations and customary rights must be recognised and secured, with equal access to land by all citizens... and that the land must be used productively... the interest in land must have a value and be subject to fair rules of compensation” (URT, 1999). This law gives the state the power to decide which land use is more valuable for broader national interests.

In this case, however, the implementation of the law ignored the fact that relations of power determine broader national interests and the distribution of tanzanite wealth. The enclosure of the land not only reduced grazing and water sources, but also infringed the local people's rights to move, including the right to visit relatives across the area. With numerous interconnected villages around the tanzanite mining area, the fence has particularly affected the interconnectedness between the Losoito and Naisinyai Kati villages. Currently, villagers have to move with their livestock for about 47–50km in search for pasture and water. Others (particularly those involved in small-scale mining

activities) have to travel about 20–30km each day to the main gate. All these are associated with a space production process that reallocated local people's land rights to powerful actors for mining concessions.

Within the context of the study findings, the tanzanite fence represents a broader struggle for power over who has the right to use land and its resources, whose livelihoods are important for 'national development', and how extractive wealth is spatially reconfigured. This is evidenced by the Maasai pastoralists' experience of multiple exclusionary measures that foreclose opportunities to sustain their pastoral livelihoods. Indeed, since the construction of the physical fence in 2017 and the consequent scaling up of its security, mining concessions and new governing institutions have also emerged (Huggins & Kinyondo, 2024), as evidenced by the full-time presence of the Tanzania People's Defence Force in the area. This illustrates how a fence can push away less powerful people while creating opportunities for more powerful actors. Thus, while the government's decision to implement piecemeal controls – ranging from legal to the creation of an anti-smuggling fence – was motivated by the country's interests to facilitate a fair distribution of the wealth generated from minerals, it has instead displaced, restricted, and marginalised access by local communities to the livelihood options they once enjoyed. In fact, the reforms have reconfigured social relations to land and minerals by restricting artisanal miners, pastoralists, and the surrounding communities from areas that have historically been critical to their livelihoods.

While government actions in the physical construction of the tanzanite fence supported President Magufuli's project of resource nationalisation, these actions have been contradictory in two ways. First, efforts to reform the sector were undertaken by various actors (including the government), but mainly to create a supportive environment for private-sector involvement in mineral resource development. Second, the fence foreclosed livelihood options for local communities and created a barrier for movement and access to areas that had once been sources for water and pasture. This demonstrates how African governments enact laws in the interest of foreign parties that foster displacement, thus making them responsible for increased poverty in their nations. In contrast, powerful national and global actors who create such conditions continue to benefit from African countries' own resources.

7. Conclusion

This article has captured a dominant governmental narrative that prioritises control, security, and revenue maximisation through policy frameworks. It has also provided deeper scrutiny, revealing the denied access to local spaces in Mirerani, where state-led enclosure clashes with pastoralist livelihoods. Its study findings have theoretical and conceptual implications for how legal and regulatory reforms in the mining sector since the 1990s have led to a fence-and-

space construction surrounding Mirerani's tanzanite resources. As a fence-and-space production process, the tanzanite fence's context confirms the logic that mining sites across Africa are arenas for contestation and renegotiation for local rights. This is because changes in mineral governance often involve the construction or reinforcement of metaphorical lines of separation that rarely leave mining areas uncontested, with various actors having overlapping claims and interests. While governments seek revenue and economic growth, mining companies are after profits and secure concessions. At the same time, local communities lose land rights and livelihoods, while artisanal miners' access to mineral deposits remains constrained. As a result, mining sites become battlegrounds for disputes over land ownership, resource access, compensation, and benefit sharing. Although some changes represent resource nationalism, they have caused unintended exclusion of ordinary citizens from accessing, controlling, and owning land and natural resources.

From a liberal economy to a more powerful form of resource nationalism, the construction and reconstruction of lines of separation between insiders and outsiders reveals a recurring logic of spatial exclusion, extractive wealth accumulation, and racialised governance in Tanzania. While each phase—from neoliberal governance driven by the World Bank and other donor agencies, to a more centralised form of governance that manifests the return of the state in the extractive sector—has used different strategies and rationales, the result has largely been the redefinition of local land tenure and ownership, which disempowers local communities. It is widely agreed that the recent increase in controlled areas is closely related to the process of redefining land rights from customary and communal ownership to a more protected asset, supported by legal recognition of such spaces.

This kind of spatial representation hides the social, cultural and economic rights that result from mineral enclosures. Both abstract and physical space marginalise local communities' land rights, especially of the Maasai pastoralists in this case, whose livelihoods depend on mobility and flexible land use; while simultaneously signalling a shift from shared or negotiated access to space towards exclusive state control that celebrates its newfound ability to 'harvest'. Therefore, the barrier does more than stop smuggling; it also reorganises property relations and access rights, giving formalised, profitable land uses precedence over traditional, subsistence-focused practices. In this way, the narratives of the state constitute what critical academics refer to as the creation of abstract space, in which administrative order and economic logic take precedence over lived, relational, and culturally rooted conceptions of space.

The Tanzanite fence metaphor, conceptualised in this article, illustrates how space is produced or enclosed for some actors and how relations of power exist within it,

even after many years of policy and legal reforms. It helps demonstrate how different kinds of exclusions (fence-making process) in the extractive sector contribute to the marginalisation of local resource owners. Drawing on the literature on space production, the article demonstrates how different states in Africa protect and secure mineral wealth by enclosing space, restricting alternative land uses, and opening it for others. The mining reforms since the 1990s have clashed with local territoriality, creating further complexities for the Maasai pastoralists, who subsequently lost customary rights to pasture and water sources, leading to contestations that are not only economic but also highly political and cultural.

As part of the fence-and-space construction process, reforms accompanied by securitisation through surveillance and military patrols have facilitated the dispossession of local people's land and mineral rights, while also limiting their movements with livestock within and outside the enclosed area. However, neither the government nor the fence actors (representing multinational corporations, private investors, and businesses) accept responsibility for the livelihood insecurities they cause on the ground. The article recommends that the government should exercise utmost attention and diligence, given the complexities it imposes on its citizens. It also recommends that the decision to relocate local communities from their ancestral lands for development projects must align with compensation for the loss of land and other resources, and ensure the public has sufficient information about their land rights.

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