

‘MANAGING’ WILDLIFE

Hunting and Conservation in the ‘White Highlands’ of Early Colonial
Kenya.

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ABSTRACT: European settlers in colonial Kenya in the beginning of the 20th century embodied a significant contradiction: While advocating vividly for the preservation of a ‘pristine nature’, the settlers hunting and agrobusiness activities are the single most important factor for a rapid decline of wildlife population in the area. This article investigates the meaning of hunting and conservation practices for the establishment and consolidation of a White settler elite in Laikipia, Kenya. The argumentation is based on episodic evidence from the biography of Lord Delamere, an influential first settler, hunter and conservationist, written by Elsbeth Huxley in 1935. It investigates the practices around ‘managing’ wildlife from an ideological and economical dimension. I argue that the transplantation of European aristocratic traditions of ‘The Hunt’ and the understanding of nature and society as separate spheres delegitimized pre-colonial modes of nature-use and reinforced a racist hierarchy of societies. The systematic dispossession of precolonial landholders, their forceful but selective inclusion in the settler economy and the eradication of wildlife for profitable agrobusiness irreversibly degraded the various forms of precolonial economies and consolidated the settler’s presence in Laikipia until today.

KEYWORDS: settler colonialism, nature-society dualism, Laikipia, conservation, hunting



Introduction

“The depredations of wild animals were among the hardest problems at Soysambu. Lions and leopards took a heavy toll of [cattle and sheep] stock. [...] Trapping and poisoning were resorted to, but these lions were wily beasts [...] In 1912 a **serious effort was made to reduce the lion population of Soysambu**. An American called Paul J. Rainey [...] at Delamere’s request [...] came on to [...] Soysambu for fifteen days and killed twelve lions and several leopards in the time.” (Huxley 1935: 306; author’s emphasis)

“Delamere was a keen observer of wild animals as well as a hunter. He was intensely interested in their habits and behaviour and did not indulge in senseless slaughter. He [...] eventually made his stock-farm [Soysambu] in East Africa into a **game sanctuary**.” (Huxley 1935: 22; author’s emphasis)

Soysambu in Laikipia, Kenya - once a large-scale cattle farm, today a game sanctuary - was established 1906 by one of Kenya’s first White settlers: Hughes Cholmondeley (1870-1931), known as Lord Delamere. Besides being an ambitious big-game hunter, Delamere’s efforts to turn his farmland into a profitable sheep and cattle farm resulted in the eradication of wildlife on his property. However, his reputation as life-long conservationist is established as far as that the official draft of history of the Kenyan National Parks 1949 acknowledges: “Due entirely to the foresight of Lord Delamere, two Game Reserves were established in British East Africa”¹. How can one person embody this contradiction?

The killing of big mammals for agro-economic and sporting reasons and the protection of the same through conservation policies and closed-off protectorates are two sides of the same coin: they both describe modes of wildlife management and are deeply rooted in a western dualist epistemology of separate nature spheres and human spheres. For the realization of a settler colonial state which evolves primarily around the territoriality and the access to land (Wolfe 2006), wildlife management in colonial Kenya materialized in hunting and conservation policy which delegitimized precolonial nature-society relations. This essay zooms in on the role of White European settlers who arrived in the first years of the 20th century in the area that became 1895 East Africa Protectorate under the British Empire, specifically

¹ Royal National Parks of Kenya, Kenya National Archives (KNA) KW/1/76 #224,6. in Steinhart, 2006, p. 95

in Laikipia, until the First World War. I interrogate the interplay of ideological foundations of hunting and conservation and the economic meaning of wildlife to explore the question: *What role played hunting and conservation for the establishment and consolidation of a White European settler elite in Laikipia, Kenya?*

My argumentation is based on episodes of the life of Lord Delamere from his two-volume biography published 1935: *White Man's Country: Lord Delamere and the Making of Kenya* by Elsbeth Huxley (1907-1997), an English writer who spent her youth as the child of a British settler family in Laikipia. Her books stand together with other popular Kenyan settler literature (e.g. *Out of Africa* by Isak Dinesen, 1935, and *The Green Hills of Africa* by Ernest Hemingway 1937) for the construction of a romantic Africa fantasy in the British public and beyond (Jackson 2011: 239). Her writing is anchored in a particular understanding of settler colonialism, described as 'Pioneer settlers' where "the presence and persistence of indigenous 'Others' is comprehensively disavowed" (Veracini 2013: 313).

Huxley's writing itself is an informative and relevant piece for analysis, because we see two meanings of biography at play: "to denote a life course and a genre of writing" (Lamber 2014: 31). Those two are hard to detangle because Huxley herself is child of a British settler family in Laikipia and the book was commissioned and financed by the widow, Lady Delamere. Huxley writes in defence of the rightfulness of White settlement in Kenya.² By considering, that Huxley is aware of voices opposing European settlement in Kenya, it is important to critically reflect which episodes of Delamere's life are purposefully selected and considered as narratable to the public by the author. Although biographies are often associated with celebratory accounts of colonial empire's achievements, if informed by postcolonial thinking, Huxley's book can serve as a base for a critical historic analysis (Lamber 2014: 26). It "can provide insight into all manner of trans-imperial ideas and practices" (Lamber 2014: 28). This approach is in line with other authors on hunting and conservation in colonial Kenya who use Huxley's work for

² Huxley (1935) defended the notion of 'empty land' from "recent discussions on the rights and wrongs of settlement" (p.71-74) by arguing with ideas of underdevelopment: a very low number of inhabitants per square mile, the pastoralist lifestyle as occupying more land than necessary for survival, questioning the rightfulness presence of others as just recently inhabited by local tribes (p.111-113). She refers to the Kenya Land commission 1934 which verified the justice of the colonial land claims in 1903-1904 (p.114). However, recent analysis show that this commission has been coopted by settler interests (see Ladekjaer Gravesen 2021).

their writing but carefully triangulate it with other sources (Adams 2002; Hughes 2006; Steinhart 2006; Jackson 2011, 2016).

Conservation and hunting in Kenya are unequivocally linked and historians in the field consistently connect these two practices. MacKenzie's work on the history of hunting and conservation in the British Empire "Empire of Nature" (1988) is anchored in the tradition of studies of imperialism. The book covers the period from nineteenth century hunting world until 1960s. He identifies three phases of European hunting (commercial ivory hunting, hunting as subsidy for the European establishment and 'The Hunt') where the third one is the most influential on the evolution of conservation. His work was inspirational to Steinhart's "White Hunters, Black Poachers" (2006) who analyses in a class-based study on the control over animals which has been overlooked by many historians analysing struggles over land in colonial Kenya. The author posits that African hunters were marginalized and denigrated due to class attitudes, prejudice against peasants, and a sense of entitlement that were brought over from rural British society. Although he further develops Mackenzie's attempt to incorporate African agency by utilizing oral testimony to narrate African hunting traditions, Hughes, who worked intensely on the history of the Maasai treaties in early twentieth century in Kenya, comments critically that "a paucity of written evidence of African hunting inevitably leads to an imbalance" (Hughes 2007: 2).

The remainder of this article is structured as follows. I set the scene by providing historical background on the production of available land for agriculture by incoming European settlers through state-led dispossession. I outline how the ideological foundation of hunting and conservation reinforced the racist idea of a 'benevolent occupation' by delegitimizing indigenous ways of living. In section 5 and 6, I argue that in line with the ideological reasoning, the destructive practices of eradication of wildlife as a form of hunting as well as conservation as spacial enclosure practice aided the economic survival of the settler farms. Finally, I present an outlook on persistence of this dualist nature-human understanding and land use in Laikipia.

Historical background

The 'Lunatic Express' and settler politics

The geographical area which is today demarked as Kenya was declared British Protectorate on June 15, 1895, taken over by the British Foreign Office from the Imperial British East Africa Company. With the desire “to opening up the untapped great estate of East Africa for the benefit of the world” (Jackson, 2016, p. 232), the British administration started to construct the Uganda Railway in 1896. Therefore, the Land Acquisition Act of India was extended to legal realm of British East Africa which enabled the British Foreign Office to appropriate all land surrounding the railway from Mombasa on the ocean coast to Kisumu at Lake Victoria (Koissaba 2016: 192).

The construction expenses of the railway exceeded the initial calculations by far. This sparked dismissal within the British Parliament where it got nicknamed as ‘Lunatic Express’ (Clemm 2019: 133). Because of the lack of support by the British metropole population, economic development through settlement became a prominent idea to refinance the railway. Settler influx into the area was constructed as necessary because the indigenous population was too small and not accustomed to produce for surplus. Agricultural production by British settlers ought to be ‘beneficial occupation’. (Huxley 1935: 77-79)

The British administration declared all land within the protectorate as Crown land under “The Crown Lands Ordinance” in 1902. This system made all present Africans in the protectorate effectively tenants of the crown and enabled the commissioners to sell freehold land to European settlers regardless of customary and indigenous land tenure systems (Koissaba 2016: 192). Within a short time, private land tenure dominated over communal land regimes and “white pastoralists had supplanted black ones in the country’s most productive, resource rich heartland of the Rift Valley and highlands” (Hughes 2006: 15).

In the struggle about power between the settlers aiming for autonomy and the interests of the colonial administration to ‘civilize’ colonized people and nations, “the great rhetorical myth espoused [...] that African and settler fortunes could be shown to be compatible” (Jackson 2016: 242). This resulted in different practises towards different communities living in Kenya colony. A groups’ way of living, culture and economy were judged by their compatibility with settler capitalist ways of land-use, or more concrete: To which extent could they be incorporated into profitable agriculture? While some, e.g. Kikuyu, were

identified and fixated by the British administration as agricultural people and incorporated as subordinate labour force into the settler economy, Maasai-speaking people on the other hand who practices a herding culture were positioned beyond civilisation and not suitable for settler economy. (Jackson, 2016)

Production of 'White Highlands' in Laikipia

Settlers applied for different parts of land. The Central Rift Valley and Highlands were of special interest and in Delamere's eyes the only regions climatically suitable for European settlement (Huxley 1935a: 71-74). This land was to a large part grazing grounds of Maasai cattle herds. But the colonial government reflected on pastoralism as "irrational, uneconomic and based on accumulation for its own sake" (Evans and Adams 2016: 217), in 1904 based on a treaty the Maasai population was forcefully moved out of the rift and divided into areas, north and south of the railway. Despite the agreement that the land of the reserve remains Maasai lands, and driven by a rising demand for land by arriving White settlers, by means of a new treaty in 1911 they were moved again to the southern reserve (Jackson 2016: 235). The displacement of 20,000 people and two and a half million livestock caused the death of many people and their cattle and had severe psychological, social and economic impacts (Evans and Adams 2016: 217; Koissaba 2016: 194). The two treaties exemplify that unoccupied land available for agriculture by British settlers was politically and violently produced through dispossession and eviction.

After Laikipia was emptied, the land was subdivided into large land units available for European settlers. This created a small, powerful, European elite holding almost all land in Laikipia (Evans and Adams 2016: 217). Nevertheless, what became known as 'White Highlands' describes only a 'visible minority' (Jackson 2011: 345). The practice of squatting by landless Africans (particularly Kikuyu), which describes the subsistence farming on small land portion on settler farms in exchange to their labour, led to that de facto three quarters of the land in the 'White Highlands' were cultivated by African squatters (Ladekjær Gravesen 2021: 53).

Delamere was the first unofficial leader of the small European community and later founder and chairman of the 'Planters' and Farmers' Association (later renamed to Colonists' Association). Delamere received a land lease of 100,000 acres in 1903 to establish his 'Equator Ranch'. After heavy losses of livestock and money they moved 1906 to a second farm of 50,000 acres, located in former Maasai land and named it

Soysambu (Soysambu Conservatory, no date). A statue of him erected in Nairobi honouring him with the words “who devoted his life to the service of East Africa” (Reuters Archive, no date) was removed in the aftermath of independence in 1963 but illustrated Delamere’s position in the White settler community. Historians discuss his role for the settler community differently. While for some, Delamere is “Kenya’s most notable settler” (MacKenzie 1988: 247), others question his reputation as hardly overstated and describe him as not more than a “lordly and lusty hunter” (Steinhart 2006: 96). Steinhart acknowledges that British East Africa was established and developed “very much in the image of this lordly and lusty hunter.” (2006: 96). Hughes challenges Huxley’s claim that Delamere was the man who ‘made Kenya’ but argues that he was “instrumental in pushing [...]for the White reservation of land” (2006, p. 28).

Hunting and ‘The Hunt’ as Marker of Class and ‘Race’

Hunting became an ideological cornerstone of White settler life and, as in history of European hunting, served as a marker of class and particular in the colonial setting, a marker of ‘race’.

In the Middle Age in northern and western Europe hunting shifted from subsistence hunting ‘for the pot’ to a “ritualized sport of gentlemen and nobles” (Steinhart 2006: 62). The prominent understanding was that wildlife is a form of property which must be regulated by law. The policies to accommodate a park for game hunting became so exclusive that only the wealthiest could afford to entertain such an area. As “central struggle for class hegemony within the English society” (Steinhart 2006: 63), ‘The Hunt’ was loaded with rituals and traditions. It was associated with military skills, leadership and superiority, with robust athleticism, honour and masculinity. All other hunting activities were more and more rendered as an attack on property rights and poaching. (MacKenzie 1988: 10)

In the 19th and 20th century, aristocratic British hunters went out of Europe to pursue their ‘sport’ in India, North America and Africa where the killing of big mammals sparked particular interest aligning with the imagination of superiority and the colonial gaze (Adams 2002: 36). With progressing formal colonialization of Africa by European nations, the colonial British apparatus transplanted and reinforced the noble understanding of the Hunt into their African territories, which translated centuries of aristocratic class barriers into a new racialized context (Adams 2002: 38). Traditional African hunting

methods were condemned by European hunters for its barbarity. In contrast to a clean, clinically, and carefully considered kill of the sporting rifles of a White hunter, other methods like traps, spears, bows and arrow or other home-made guns were constructed as cruel by the many reports, novels, and newspaper pieces reporting on hunting trips out of Europe. (Adams 2002, 37–38)

The role of permanent or occasional hunting for subsistence in many African societies was a mean for the European public to construct their imagined inferiority. According to prominent Social Darwinist interpretations, the role of hunting in a society was an indicator for an imagined economic evolution of a society, where hunting is transformed from the pre-modern necessity of the utilisation of the animal into a sporting and symbolic activity. Thereby hunting and gathering societies are considered at the lowest level, pastoral and agricultural on superior level of development and an industrialized society on top. Hunting did therefor not serve as a common ground to meet on eye-level, even if many White hunters arriving in Africa were reliant on the hunting knowledge of their African guides, but reinforced the colonial racist world order. (MacKenzie 1988: 7)

In the first thirty years of settlement in Kenya, there was a “disproportionate number of lords and ladies, dukes and earls” (Jackson 2011: 344) and Kenya was in this time the “most aristocratic of Britain’s outposts overseas” (ibid.). The main motive for many high-born aristocrats were the outlook of cheap land and cheap labour but their hunting fascination played a significant role. Steinhart argues that for some early settlers (namely Delamere, Lord Cranworth, Berkeley and Galbraith Cole) game hunting was the prior driver (2006: 97). The persona Lord Delamere exemplifies well the entanglement of aristocratic hunting fascination and emigration decision. According to Huxley (1935: 54), Delamere’s vision for Laikipia was economic development through permanent European settlement but Steinhart resumes that Delamere’s “decision to settle in Kenya had far more to do with his hunting avocation than with his interest in farming” (Steinhart 2006: 93). Huxley summarizes that as a young man, “Delamere had no interests but shooting and hunting. The English seasons were marked off for him [...] by the species of animal it was appropriate to kill” (Huxley 1935: 25). On multiple big-game hunting expeditions, reaching from India, Norway to Somalia (Huxley 1935: 24), Delamere followed in his imagination the footsteps of European discoverers (Huxley 1935: 23) and carried with him like other aristocratic hunters “not just the desire to hunt ‘big game’, but the banner of imperial conquest” (Steinhart 2006: 67).

There is some uncertainty to which extent hunting was the main motivation for numerous British aristocrats to resettle to Kenya. However, hunting served as a class marker, which was especially attractive to high-born or wealthy settlers in distinction to other poorer immigrants to the colony, particularly Boers migrating from South Africa, seen as White but lower class (Matheka 2008: 619). Moreover, the delegitimization of African hunting reinforced the imagination of an racist hierarchical order of societies and legitimized thereby the settlers presence through the concept of 'benevolent intervention' in which colonialization is projected as an urgent necessity (Shanguhya 2023: 166).

Dualist Conservation Policies and the Delegitimization of African Hunting

The distinguishing of legal and illegal, licit and illicit modes of hunting and nature-use along racist and classist divides, materializes in the conservation policies, in which Kenya's British settlers played a significant role. The conceptualization of different 'natural resources' and their plundering was a prominent feature of colonialization. During the second half of the 19th century the destructive power of human activities in a capitalist economy became prominent in North America and Europe where around that time a better-off social middle class emerged with concerns towards the rapid shrinking of pristine natural areas in frontier territories due to increasing settlement and uncontrolled hunting practices (Akama 1998: 105).

The urge to protect 'nature' from 'human influence' is grounded in a particular epistemology. Adams (2002) argues that the fundament of colonial understanding of nature was the European Enlightenment and its Cartesian dualism, which differentiated profoundly between humans and nature (ibid.: 22). The acquisition of colonies was motivated, and in part made possible, by a strong conviction that nature could be rearranged and restructured to better suit human wants and preferences. In the eyes of the Western world, the lands outside of Europe seemed underdeveloped and underexploited (ibid.). Along with an intensive exploitation of nature by capitalist and colonialist expansion, Western populations carried the idea that tropical regions were like Garden of Eden (ibid.: 29). Adams accurately describes the irony of this interplay as "what capitalism destroys, Western culture personifies as precious: romantic constructions of nature accompany its systematic plunder" (ibid.: 29).

Wolfe (2006) argues that the settler colonial project evolves primarily around the territoriality and the access to land. The erection of a new colonial society on expropriated land carries elimination of native societies as organizing principle (Wolfe 2006: 388). Conservation is a fundamentally spatial practice, and the establishment of protected areas was the prior mean of realizing conservationist ideas since the end of the 19th century (Evans and Adams 2016: 215). In that logic, indigenous presence in areas subscribed to be ‘preserved’ undermined the Western ideal of ‘non-human nature’ and therefor had to be restricted.

The development of game laws and conservation areas was a dialectal process between metropole and periphery as local conservationist were inspired by the international movement and vice versa.³ British conservationist alongside with the settler community identified the reason of a decline of wildlife population in the activities of African hunters and Boers, emigrating from South Africa, who were rendered as ‘meat butchers’ who hunt for the pot (Steinhart 2006: 169). Keith Caldwell, a British conservationist, commented in a letter of introduction to the Society for the Preservation of Fauna of the Empire (SPFE)⁴ that to be blamed are “the native hunters for the depletion of Kenya’s stock of elephant and rhino. [...] Another problem [...] is the Dutchman.” (Steinhart 2006: 176).

Additionally to the geographical demarcation of different spheres though establishment of reserves, e.g. Kenya’s first reserve Ukamba Game Reserve in 1899 (Adams 2002: 37), the Colonial Administration established a significant difference in the making of the game laws and its enforcement. Kenyan Game Ordinance was approved in 1900, essentially outlawing hunting without a license (ibid.:37). Stringent gun laws from the late 1890s prevented Africans from legally owning guns and the ban of precolonial African hunting techniques (nets, springs, traps, snares, gins, stick) in 1900 dislocated communities from sources of their livelihoods. While the British administration granted some few tribes whom they identified as reliant on game meat exemptions before the First World War, demands by other tribes who hunted occasionally to prevent famine were rejected (MacKenzie 1988: 209–215). Settlers on the other hand were permitted to hunt under licenses. A racist double standard in law enforcement was prevailing. When European hunters or settlers got caught by game wardens violating laws through shooting without

³ On the history of conservation policies in international forums and civil society engagement in Great Britain see Akama (1998), MacKenzie (1988), Steinhart (2006).

⁴ The SPEE founded in 1903 is an example for international forums in which influential individuals with organized to pressure their governments to enact protective policies in Africa (Steinhart 2006).

licenses they were often seen as ‘overzealous sportsmen’. However, the same case with African hunters were treated like “a violation of the natural order” (Steinhart 2006: 170). Besides all efforts to limit the hunting activities, most policies were due to the remoteness of many areas not effectively implemented in the early settlement period until the First World War (MacKenzie 1988: 218).

The notion that ‘nature’ and ‘resource’ have to be ‘managed’ meant to maximise its usefulness to humans, by ‘developing the land’ and on the other hand create an ‘wilderness’ with minimized human interference. The ideological foundation of conservation in a Western human-nature dualism justified the settler’s destructive presence because their mission was to ‘develop the land’ in what was meant to be a sphere for humans. The progressive separation of human and animal settlement created internal frontiers under the premisses of the colonial state and its consideration for settler interest (MacKenzie 1988: 222). By restricting their presence and modes of recreation, for indigenous communities, “the game reserve was a variant of the settler farm“ (Jackson 2016: 242). What conservationists perceived as wilderness and ‘pristine nature’ is a historical and cultural construct (Rashkow 2014: 819) and overlooks thereby the fact that Indigenous peoples existed deeply interwoven with the land and actively altered their environments (Murdock 2021: 242).

Hunting for the Economic Success of Settler Farms

Aligning with the construct of human-spheres and nature-spheres, most settlers and the colonial administration shared the opinion that wild animals are not supposed to threaten the economic success of the settler farms. Some animal species were declared as vermin which allowed eradication practises like culling the breeding population, the curbing of habitats, poisoning and shooting with machine guns (MacKenzie 1988: 201), although it stands in stark contrast to the public perception of the noble methods of ‘The Hunt’. Several episodes of Delamere biography underline the same attitude. In a 1903 published pamphlet, he argues that “the rigid game laws which penalise the killing of destructive vermin” (Huxley 1935: 89) are in the way to successful livestock farming and thereby an obstacle to attract more settlers from Great Britain. Contrary to the idea of clinically clean and ‘human’ hunting methods of the aristocratic ‘Hunt’, Delamere writes to his manager in order to establish a sheep farm, that “vermin have

to be killed down [...] before sheep can be allowed free run night and day. [...] As soon as vermin can be cleared off (by poison chiefly I expect) the bulk of the flocks will be given free run.”⁵

The active opposition to strict game laws by Delamere becomes clear as he provoked a court case against him in 1905 in Nairobi. Under the law, the settler farmers were only allowed to kill four antelopes or zebras a month. Huxley argues that “however excellent from the conservation point of view, were impossible if the country was to be settled. If zebra in their thousands ravaged his crops, he [the settler] could not destroy them” (Huxley 1935:161-162). Delamere despite the legal restrictions decided to have zebra shot entering his fields. Defending himself by arguing the loss of his economic activities through herds of zebras did not prevent him from losing the case and being charged with a fine for overshooting. But by securing publicity and the support by other white settlers the game laws were amended in favour of the farmers to protect their livestock and crops (Huxley 1935: 162). Those episodes illustrate the destructive impact of the settler’s crop and livestock farming activities which transformed the landscape making it uninhabitable for wildlife (Steinhart 2006: 98).

The settler’s interests were backed by the colonial administration. Their attempts for preservation of wildlife were clearly subordinated to the securitization of profitable agriculture in the ‘White Highlands’. Lieutenant-Governor of the East African Protectorate Frederik Jackson noted from a meeting with the Kenya Colonists Association in 1908, led by Lord Delamere, that “[t]he game reserves were to be recognized as sanctuaries in exchange for the principle ‘outside the reserve the presence of game cannot be allowed to interfere with the economic development of the country’” (MacKenzie 1988: 215). The administrative support to secure the economic success of the farming activities led to an institutionalization of vermin control, a task taken over by the Game Department, founded in 1906. This went as far as, that the government body employed full-time Game and Vermin Control Officers in 1929, with the task to kill animals that harmed agricultural progress, and appointed ‘Honorary Game Wardens’ which were almost exclusively members of the settler elite (Steinhart 2006: 162).

The settlers advocacy for the extermination of game was assisted by argumentation along the lines of ‘progress’ and ‘civilisation’ (Steinhart 2006: 164). But reflecting on the profit-driven logics of settler

⁵ Delamere to Jackson 10th August 1903, Huxley 1935: 102.

capitalism and the debt status of many settler farms, this can be not only questioned regarding the imperialistic and Eurocentric idea of progress, but also as pure economic self-interest. In contrast to the shared understanding of international conservationist, settler elite and colonial administration, Steinhart concludes that the habitat destruction by making land available for farming (practices like fencing, clearing, and burning) was “the single most important factor in the decline of game” (2006: 99) in the early-settlement period.

While certain practices of big game hunting served as identity marker and illustrated a version of wildlife encounter which dominated public perception in the metropole through books and novels and movies (Jackson 2011), the destructive impact of farming activities by settlers to secure economic success remain a less known part of colonialist wildlife management.

Economic Meaning of Conservation for Settlers

With the consolidation of the conservationist policies through the British colonial administration, there has been a change from the usage of game as direct economic resource by selling game products, towards indirect economic benefits by gaining revenue from hunting licences and tourism (MacKenzie 1988: 209). ‘Nature’ itself was turned into a profitable land use practice and the preservation of ‘wilderness’ became an “economic enterprise“ (Shanguhya 2023: 167). The conservationist policies on issuing hunting licences helped the Protectorate to reduce its budgetary deficits towards London’s Foreign Office. Kenya was overall as an exception from other British colonies making profit from fining convictions against the game laws (MacKenzie 1988: 219).

Particularly relevant for this development was the invention and popularization of hunting safaris, where notable and wealthy visitors came to Kenya for several month to enjoy the Hunt. Some authors argue that the big-game safaris became an important part of the settler economy and that European settlers benefitted substantially from hosting hunting safaris and selling their services as guides (see for example Middleton 2015: 1; Bersaglio 2018: 76). The hospitality of influential settlers provided to prominent guest, like the former president of the United States Theodore Roosevelt, were an expensive tradition within the safari experience. During his eight-month long hunting safari Roosevelt travelled with over 100 porters and staff, shot over 500 animals and enjoyed gratis accommodation for his entire entourage

at Delamere's farm for a week. Huxley writes in his biography that Roosevelt was a particular prominent but not the only guest enjoying the costly privilege: "Any prominent man who visited East Africa used to stay a day or two with Delamere" (Huxley 1935: 250).

Therefore, it remains questionable if the settler elite in their first decades were directly economically profiting from a rise in the popularity of Kenyan wildlife. But they benefited through restricted land user rights by Indigenous groups through the conservationist policies of the British colonial administration, because „African communities that were prior users of products from these environments virtually became subjects, and therefore dependents, of British monopolistic tendencies in environmental management“ (Shanguhya 2023: 164).

The creation of nature reserves and the prohibition of natural resource use by Africans, including the punishment of using forest resources such as firewood, disclosing grazing grounds and honey collection, dislocated African communities physically and culturally from their modes of reproduction and recreation. Shanguhya argues that "land alienation had the most far-reaching impact on African communities" (ibid.: 170). While rich White tourists travelled to Kenya to hunt big mammals for sport, communities like Kamba and Okiek, who were reliant of hunting as part of their livelihood, were excluded from hunting (ibid.: 172). The alienation produced landlessness for e.g. Kikuyu people, which turned them into 'restless squatters'(ibid.: 170) cultivating land for settler farms which was previously owned by them. The relation of settler farmers and their landless African workers was because of various interdependencies very complexed and nuanced (Hughes 2006: 152), but "violence on settler farms, as several historians have shown, was perennial and widespread."(Jackson 2016: 238)

By alienating indigenous societies from their lands and thereby stripping them of the means of sustenance and survival, the colonial state forced them to enter the capitalist mode of economy where the surplus of their labour benefitted the European settler farmers who have been granted lease for land and received cheap labour. This process, along with the British colonial administration's increased regulations on mobility and (cattle) trade, as well as taxes (Hughes 2006: 16), degraded the various forms of precolonial economies and consolidated the settlers presence in Laikipia.

Conclusion

Settlers like Delamere attempted to eradicate wildlife on their farms. At the same time, they were ambitious hunters and passionate conservationist in one person which earned them the title of ‘penitent butchers’ in the British public at that time (MacKenzie 1988: 211). A critical analysis of the ideological and economical foundations of this apparent contradiction shows its embeddedness in a dualist nature-society understanding which is aptly described by Adams (2002: 42), who writes: “In the colonial mind, nature was ‘out there’, never ‘in here’.” The practices of killing and protecting wild animals were forms of resource management which in the name of a ‘benevolent intervention’ (Shanguhya 2023: 166) were spatially materialized in the form of either nature reserves or large-scale, export-oriented farms. Both served the economic and recreational benefit of an incoming settler elite and both dispossessed traditional landholders.

In colonial Kenya, enabled though the support of the colonial administration, settler involvement in hunting and conservation practices reinforced a racist hierarchy of societies, solidified the dispossession of traditional landholders and irreversibly deteriorated pre-colonial modes of economic and cultural reproduction. Although this essay is focussed on a settler perspective as lens for analysis, it is important to highlight that the colonial dispossession of traditional landholders faced fierce resistance and became one of the major themes of the anti-colonial struggle in Kenya. This is most famously inscribed the slogan *ithaka na wiathi*, which can be translated as ‘land and freedom’ or ‘self-mastery through land’ (Miyonga 2023) by the Mau Mau Uprising in central Kenya, one of the most significant anti-colonial movements in African history. (see e.g. Maloba 1998)

Overall, the colonial wildlife management and its ‘fortress’ approach continued after the Kenya’s independence (Akama 1998: 109; Adams 2002: 42). While hunting was banned for everyone in 1977 (Hughes 2007: 167), conservation served as legitimization for the descendants of the first White settlers to keep their large land holdings until today. In Laikipia, a few dozen former settler families own over a million acres of land. Besides other large-scale land holders, like elite Africans, Asians and other expatriates, the settler descendants play a disproportionate role in conservation (Jackson 2016: 236). In the image of Delamere’s farm Soysambu, many cattle ranches, cleansed from wildlife ‘vermin’ in the past,

were transformed into wildlife sanctuaries between 1977 and 1997. Bersaglio argues that those fenced-off Safari resorts are “built on the cultural, economic, and legal bedrock of a racialized private property regime“ (2018: 77) and enabled by international support for conservation became “a source of staying power [...] in post-independence Kenya“ (2018: 83).



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