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Monument of nature? An ethnography of the world heritage of Mt. Kenya

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WHITE PERILS

Racial struggles over Land in Mt. Kenya's Shadow

In the course of the 2000s a group of stakeholders began to call upon UNESCO to revise Mt. Kenya's World Heritage status, and in 2013 the boundaries of the site changed. Before I discuss this in detail in the next chapter I first deal with an issue that was paramount in these developments, namely Laikipia's racialized land debate.

Laikipia is a highland plateau located east and northeast of Mt. Kenya. Under colonial rule it became the exclusive territory of white settlers, whose status and authority were protected by colonialism's institutionalized racism and the colour bar. I argue that the colour bar is still prevalent in Laikipia, but that its significance has reversed: whereas in the past it served to protect white privileges, today it calls into question and challenges the ongoing presence of white communities. I will demonstrate that this manifests itself, among other things, in criticism on Laikipia's wildlife conservation industry, in incidental property invasions, and in recent legislative changes.

Laikipia's colour bar is not the sole driving force in Laikipia's land debate, and tribal competition over land rights between different African groups is at least as important. Nevertheless, colour bar politics do have important repercussions for the position of white landowners because the colour bar gives way to heated debates over legal tenant rights, legitimate proprietorship, and adequate land use, and as such it fuels white anxieties over land loss and expulsion. As the next chapter reveals, it was these anxieties that brought about the modification of Mt. Kenya World Heritage Site.

Below, I examine Laikipia's particular colonial history, I trace how this history installed a narrative that continues to pit the area's white inhabitants against its black inhabitants, and I problematize the ways in which contemporary colour bar politics obscure the complicatedness of Kenya's land question. In doing so, I largely draw on conversations with roughly a dozen white landowners and white conservationists who, due to the sensitivity of the topic, typically demanded anonymity. This means that it often remains unclear how, when and where I obtained my data. In light of the issues at stake I have tried to be discreet – I hope that even critical readers will respect this.

White Highlands

In the early 1860s, the German explorer Baron Karl Klau von der Drecken made a first attempt to travel into the interior of what would become the East African Protectorate. His expedition led him to an area called Masai Land where his journey ended, allegedly because it had run into several thousands of Masai warriors (Thomson 1968 [1887]: 4). A handful of adventurers followed Von der Drecken, including a missionary called New and a German explorer-cum-collector called Johannes Hildebrandt (*Ibid.*). But not long after Von der Drecken's misfortunes the imperial interest in the area died down. Expeditions into Masai Land were considered too dangerous and too expensive, and between the late 1860s and early 1880s only native traders dared to visit the region (*Ibid.*: 4-5).

The situation changed in 1883 when, in anticipation of the 1884-1885 Berlin Conference, the area again attracted attention. In particular, the British Royal Geographical Society (RGS) wanted to examine whether it was feasible to establish a direct route from Kenya's coast to Lake Victoria through Masai Land, and meant to ascertain whether Masai Land could be prepared for white settlement (Thomson 1968 [1887]: 6). In light of these considerations, the RGS's African Committee invited the Scottish geologist Joseph Thomson to organize another expedition into Masai Land. Thomson accepted the job. According to his own journals, he primarily did so because he was fascinated with the possible existence of Mt. Kenya: the missionary Johan Ludwig Krapf claimed he had spotted the mountain in 1849 when he travelled from a district east of Nairobi called Kitui to Mombasa, but ever since no one had been able to confirm his claim. In fact, geologists widely ridiculed Krapf's so-called discovery because they had no scientific explanation for the presence of a snow-capped mountain in the tropics. Contrary to earlier expeditions, Thomson's journey succeeded – he reached Lake Victoria and, much to his delight, caught a glimpse of Mt. Kenya on his way up (*Ibid.* chapter ix).⁴⁶

After returning from Masai Land, Joseph Thomson subscribed to Von der Drecken's image of Maasai warriors as a bloodthirsty and ferocious people. This had serious implications for how the British colonial administration set about disciplining the tribe (Kantai 2007: 108), and shortly after Thomson's expedition it began to subject the Maasai to internal relocation policies. These policies hit

the Maasai at a time when they were already vulnerable for a number of reasons. Firstly, from the 1880s, African peasants had begun to take possession of Masai Land's border areas. Secondly, some Maasai communities had disintegrated and fought amongst themselves (Waller 1976: 533-535). Thirdly, different outbreaks of bovine pleuro-pneumonia had reduced Maasai herds, which in turn fuelled aggressive cattle raids. And in 1891 the plight of the Maasai deteriorated further when rinderpest broke out: the disease practically wiped out all herds, and according to oral tradition Maasai only survived because they ate donkeys and cattle hides (*Ibid.*: 530).

The unfortunate condition of Maasai communities in the late 1880s and early 1890s made different Maasai leaders susceptible to British calls for an alliance. Among these leaders was a *laibon* (a ritual expert) who was called Olonana. Olonana had fallen out with his brother Senteu, who was based in German territory in present-day Tanzania, and Olonana hoped that with British support he stood a better chance of defeating his sibling. Olonana moreover realized that his position as a *laibon* was vulnerable, and he employed all the resources at his disposal to secure his standing among his peers. By 1896, the British colonial administration largely had Olonana under command (Waller 1976: 540), yet it still feared the potential outbreak of Maasai revolt against colonial rule. Consequently, it let the battles between Olonana and Senteu take their course in anticipation that the fights would weaken Olonana's troops, and would keep Olonana concentrated on other things (*Ibid.*: 540-543).

Roughly from 1900 onwards, the nature of the alliance between the colonial administration and Olonana changed. By that time, Olonana had beaten his brother and had lost interest in a British partnership, not least because his covenant with colonial administrators had damaged his reputation amongst his own people. The British, in turn, had also lost interest in cooperation with Olonana. Since the late 1880s, the colonial administration had strengthened its grip on the protectorate and it was no longer dependent on the goodwill of Maasai leaders (Waller 1976: 548-549).

In the early twentieth century, the plight of Maasai communities changed drastically. The British administration had invested a great deal of money in the construction of the Mombasa-Uganda railroad, which had turned out to be extremely expensive and, in an attempt to earn back some of its investments, it began to encourage European settlement in Masai Land (Morgan 1963: 144, see also chapter two). Yet, to enable such settlement, the Maasai first had to leave the area. The colonial administration therefore concluded a treaty with Olonana in 1904 that compelled the Maasai to leave the Central Rift Valley, as the British had come to call the larger part of Masai Land, and forced them to take up residency in two Maasai reserves. One was located north of the Mombasa-Uganda railroad in an area called Laikipia, and one was located in the south. This agreement was unique to British East Africa for it granted the Maasai control over both reserves 'for so long as the Masai as race shall exist' (Hughes 2000: 224).

The 1904 treaty brought about a major exodus: some 11,200 Maasai and more than two million heads of cattle left the Central Rift Valley. Only forty-eight Europeans replaced them (Klopp 2001: 487). These Europeans shunned the areas that were already densely populated by African farmers, and

instead ventured into regions that were not yet cultivated due to low fertility. Aided by innovations such as the ox-drawn plough and boreholes, pioneer settlers nevertheless managed to till these barren lands (Morgan 1963: 146) – especially Hugh Cholmondeley, 3rd Baron Delamere, who had come to the area in 1905, spent vast amounts of money trying to work out how to farm efficiently (*Ibid.*: 150).

The successes of Lord Delamere and other farmers attracted more Europeans, and the protectorate's white settler community grew steadily. In response, the colonial administration revoked the 1904 Maasai treaty. It needed more land to accommodate the increasing number of white settlers, and in 1911 it instructed the Maasai communities that had migrated to Laikipia to move to yet another reserve further south (Kantai 2007; Hughes 2005). The grazing grounds here were inferior to those in Laikipia and the Rift Valley, and the Maasai were bitter about this second forced relocation. In 1913, they sued the colonial administration, but the case was dismissed on technical grounds and the British government refused to offer compensation for pastoralist grievances (Hughes 2006). In the meantime, European settlers established farms all over Laikipia. They soon found that Laikipia's soil was even less fertile than in other parts of the Rift Valley, and they turned en masse to livestock farming.

By the late 1910s, European settlement in the Rift Valley and Laikipia had expanded significantly. Especially after the First World War many Europeans came to Laikipia, and to the area around the town of Nanyuki more specifically (Ochieng' & Maxon 1992: 139). This was a result of the Ex-Soldier Settlement Scheme, which granted demobilized British army officers land in exchange for the services they had delivered between 1914 and 1918. The British government had come up with the scheme to solve two problems at once. First, it meant to strengthen Kenya's white minority in the face of upcoming African unrest, which had resulted from the battles between German and allied armies on African territory. Second, Britain suddenly had to shelter large numbers of demilitarized men for whom it had little room, and it gladly sent a proportion of them to the protectorate (Duder 1993: 70). From the perspective of ex-soldiers, the settlement scheme also offered benefits: it provided them an opportunity to farm, which had become increasingly difficult in Britain (Hodge 2010: 29); it offered them a possibility to escape Britain's high inflation and unemployment rates (Duder 1993); and it gave them a chance to retain at least a middle-class standard of living, which their superior racial status guaranteed them on colonial territory (*Ibid.*: 86). In the end, many participants in the Ex-Soldier Settlement Scheme lingered in Nairobi and they never claimed their plots. Many sold out, thus enabling better-off farmers in Laikipia to build ever-larger estates.

By the 1920s, former Masai Land had become one large European reserve, popularly referred to as the White Highlands, which roughly stretched from Machakos and Athi Plains in the south to Trans-Nzoia in the north (Morgan 1963). For decades, only people of European origin were allowed to settle in the White Highlands,⁴⁷ and the region attracted various aristocrats who quickly gained the reputation of doing little else but hunting, partying and playing polo. These aristocrats largely settled on the slopes of the Aberdares mountain range and they became known as the Happy Valley jet set, which included prominent figures such as Lord Delamere, Denys Finch Hatton and Josslyn Hay, also

known as Lord Erroll. Happy Valley was associated with promiscuity, adultery, and widespread drug abuse – this reputation further consolidated when, in 1941, the noted lady-killer Lord Erroll was murdered by a single shot in the head and rumours on who had killed him captivated the public for quite some time.⁴⁸

The conditions of the average highland farmer or rancher were far less glamorous than those of the Happy Valley jet set, and many found themselves caught in the ambivalences of the imperial project. For one thing, farming was only profitable if it exploited African labour and White Highland farmers therefore offered African wage labourers tenant contracts. At the same time, they feared that such tenant contracts would foster class awareness, and as such inspire otherwise fragmented and isolated African tribes to challenge colonial rule together. For that reason, White Highland farmers imposed strict control over their African work forces, and supervised them closely (Berman & Lonsdale 1992). This estranged them from the colonial administration, which publicly defended African labour interests and claimed that White Highland farmers mistreated their staff (*Ibid.*).

The colonial administration's critique on White Highland farmers intensified in the 1950s, when African nationalist sentiments were on the rise. These sentiments created unrest among the African tenants in the White Highlands, but rather than waiting for colonial officers to intervene, farmers typically penalized disobedient employees themselves. Already from the beginning of the twentieth century farmers had been discontent with colonial legislation: they claimed it was ill-suited to tackling their situation, amongst other things because it failed to discipline Africans effectively and as such played into increased African criminality (Shadle 2010: 516). By the 1950s, such discontent had made way for defiance, and most White Highland farmers had simply begun to take the law into their own hands. Berman & Lonsdale (1992) suggest that this was more of an immediate threat to white hegemony than African nationalist movements, as the friction between farmers and administrators demonstrated that white rulers were not a strong, united block but rather divided on issues of authority and control.

After 1963, thousands of European settlers left the White Highlands on 'willing buyer, willing seller' principle (McIntosh 2015: 256). The lands that thus became vacant soon fell prey to the struggles between Kikuyu and Kalenjin communities and politicians that I described in the previous chapter. The situation was somewhat different for Laikipia though, which mainly consisted of ranches that required far less manpower than farms. As such, Laikipia had not attracted as many African labourers as the Rift Valley had (see Duder & Youé 1994: 265), and because the region was relatively infertile it largely failed to attract the interest of Africans seeking land. But there was one group that did lay claim to Laikipia: the Maasai. Shortly before independence, Maasai leaders gathered in Thomson Falls and called upon the forthcoming government to give them back Laikipia, Nanyuki and an area further north called Samburu. These leaders stressed that the 1904 treaty had promised them the reserve for as long as they lived, and they threatened to take the land by force if the new government ignored their demands (Anderson 2005^B: 559).

Despite these warnings, Jomo Kenyatta's government did not redress Maasai grievances. Rather, it subjected Laikipia's vacant lands to a variety of other purposes. The least infertile properties were included in the Million Acre Settlement Scheme and were largely bought by Kikuyu land-buying companies (see for instance Carey Jones 1965). Land not suited for agriculture was sometimes divided into small African ranches, which soon failed to be productive and later typically turned into informal grazing grounds (Graham 2012: 5). On other occasions, such lands were sold again to Europeans, who moved to Kenya in the course of the late 1960s and the early 1970s (Sundaesan & Riginos 2010: 18).

After independence, then, Laikipia turned into a patchwork hosting small-scale African farming and pastoral communities on the one hand, and massive privately owned ranches on the other. These ranches are mostly white-owned but not exclusively, for different members of Kenya's post-independent political elite confiscated parts of the former White Highlands – until recently, for instance, Daniel Arap Moi owned a ranch in the heart of Laikipia, and Mwai Kibaki continues to possess a large track of land just outside the town of Naro Moru. Nevertheless, Laikipia's colonial history installed an image of the area as the land of 'Kenyan cowboys', the colonial nickname for white rangers. This image sustains a narrative that pits Laikipia's white residents against Laikipia's black residents, which obscures the fact that after independence the bigger part of Laikipia turned into African smallholder ranches, group ranches or government land (Graham 2012: 15). In short, the history of the White Highlands put in place colour bar politics that continue to this day. Amongst others, these politics find expression in white landowners' recent conversion to wildlife conservation.

From ranches to wildlife sanctuaries

In the course of the 1990s, Laikipia's white ranchers massively cut back on their cattle ranching activities, and some of them left ranching all together. This was a result of the collapse of Kenya's livestock industry in the late 1980s, which was due to a number of developments. Among others, the input costs for cattle farming increased; Kenya lost access to important export markets because of revised import regulations and hygiene requirements; and in the mid-1980s the Kenya Meat Commission dissolved, which was the country's main outlet to export markets and the most important customer of many ranchers (Heath 2001; Sundaesan & Riginos 2010). Consequently, by the 1990s, Laikipia's white landowners began to look for alternative ways to make their land profitable.

The options of these landowners were limited because much of Laikipia's land was infertile. But wildlife offered them a prospect. For decades, landowners had fought Kenya's large mammals because they interfered with their businesses, and in chapter two I already indicated that the colonial Game Department, later the WCMD, considered it one of its prime tasks to protect white settler properties against destructive and dangerous wild animals. But when the ranching industry collapsed some pioneers, one of which I discuss in full detail in the next chapter, began to realize that Laikipia's

wildlife was one of the few resources that the area had to offer and that it could be turned into an asset: it could attract international conservation funds and it could sustain a game viewing wildlife industry. Slowly, some landowners began to welcome wildlife into their properties, and turned former ranches into wildlife sanctuaries.

The KWS was not particularly fond of these developments, different wardens and rangers told me. From its foundation in 1990, the KWS had sole authority over Kenya's wildlife. When more and more private conservancies popped up in Laikipia, roughly from the late 1990s and early 2000s onwards, the KWS retained its position of sole lawful supervisor but in practice the organization increasingly experienced difficulties in enforcing its rule: some private conservancies attracted large sums of donor money, and as such became more powerful than the underfinanced and understaffed KWS. Among other things, this resulted in the KWS becoming extra strict about its mandate – the organization continuously stressed that, since the Kenyan state was the sole lawful owner of all of Kenya's wildlife, only the KWS was licensed to manage it, and it typically accused white landowners of illegally dealing with a state resource over which they had no rights. Both rangers and landowners told me that this caused serious friction with those who had founded wildlife conservancies. Conservancy owners, in turn, maintained that the KWS was an amateurish organization that lacked the skills and funds to manage Kenya's wildlife effectively. There was one issue that bothered them specifically: the KWS's imposition of a hunting ban.

In 1977, Jomo Kenyatta initiated a nationwide ban on hunting. According to Gibson (1999: 74), Kenyatta had been under pressure from the World Bank, which at the time tried to implement a programme to develop Kenya's tourist sector. Indeed, various observers believe that Kenyatta never had any intention to banish hunting for a prolonged period of time. But shortly after the introduction of the restriction Kenyatta passed away – his successor Daniel Arap Moi left the ban intact, and even expanded it with a ban on the sale of wildlife products (*Ibid.*). The 1989 Wildlife Act, which was drafted under the supervision of Richard Leakey after he had become WCMD's director, adopted both prohibitions and further consolidated restrictions regarding the use of wildlife.

Laikipia's white landowners, who were still ranching in the late 1970s, opposed the hunting ban from the beginning. Prior to 1977, different forms of wildlife killing had been permitted, including sports hunting, bird shooting, cropping and culling. After 1977, all of this was prohibited and, for instance, ranchers were no longer allowed to shoot the lions that killed their cattle or the elephants that fed on their crops. To Kenya's black population such limitations were nothing new, it should be noted: their hunting activities had been criminalized ever since colonial game laws had come into force in the early twentieth century, and their crops and animals had never received any form of legal protection (see for instance Steinhart 2006).

When Laikipia's white landowners eventually left ranching and turned to wildlife conservation the ban proved problematic for yet another reason, different conservationists told me: it stripped wildlife of economic value because it could not be used or sold, and this, in turn, deprived conservation of a

commercial incentive. In other African countries, such as Namibia, Zambia, Mozambique and South Africa, hunting and the sale of hides and tusks finances conservation programmes (see for instance Snijders 2014), or pays for community projects in the hope that this will make people more agreeable to conservation efforts. The latter is based on the presumption that when people benefit from wildlife economically, they will have a greater stake in safeguarding it (but see Van der Ploeg 2013 chapter 3; Zia et al. 2011) – Büscher (2011) sees this as one of the effects of what he has labelled ‘the neoliberalization of nature’. Yet, in Kenya, the ban on hunting and selling wildlife products largely prevents wildlife from bringing in money. The only income it can generate here is through game-viewing tourism, and in recent years numerous luxury game lodges have appeared on Laikipia’s former ranches. But tourism is a shaky industry, Laikipia’s white landowners emphasized to me, for it depends in large measure on the country’s economic and political conditions.

In 1992, the Kenyan government briefly experimented with the reintroduction of legal hunting and it launched a cropping programme in a few selected regions (Sundaresan & Riginos 2010), of which Laikipia was one. Jonathan Moss,⁴⁹ an ecologist and conservationist living in the area, had been involved in the Laikipia cropping programme, and had allocated cropping quota among farmers and ranchers. He told me that he believed that the programme was quite effective. At the same time, however, it suffered from hunting’s association with rich white men, which undermined its acceptance as a sound conservation method. Eventually, the cropping programme was called off again in 2003, due to, among other things, serious criticism from the international animal rights lobby.

The animal rights lobby, which finds its origins in the United States, has long been present in Kenya and became a powerful actor in the country’s conservation scene. It vehemently opposes all forms of killing wildlife and it maintains that each and every individual animal has a right to live. It thus extends human ethics to animals, and draws the latter into a moral community where all members have equal rights to life and liberty (Neumann 2004: 820) – in doing so, it discredits nature-culture dichotomies (Haraway 1991). Desmond Morris has traced the rise of the animal rights movement to a prominent Kenyan couple called George and Joy Adamson (Martin 2012: 24). George Adamson worked for the Kenya Game Department as a senior warden, and together with his wife raised three orphaned lion cubs. The couple took the cubs into their home, and Joy Adamson wrote a book on their escapades called *Born Free: A Lioness of Two Worlds* (1960) that was made into a movie in 1966. Both the book and the film were a huge success, and fundamentally changed the way in which an entire generation looked at wildlife: before the Adamsons, wildlife conservation was an issue for the mind, but with *Born Free* it became an issue of the heart. (Martin 2012: 24). The work of George and Joy Adamson resonated with ethologists and zoologists such as Jane Goodall, Dian Fossey and Iain Douglas-Hamilton, who further anthropomorphized animal habits and used their research results to underscore the sentient capacities of, in this case, chimpanzees, gorillas and elephants. To this day, the animal rights movement uses the outcomes of this and similar research to underscore the cruelty and immorality of hunting (*Ibid.*: 91).

Different conservationists and white landowners told me that over the years the animal rights movements largely came to control the KWS, as the little international funding the organization received came from animal rights organizations. The International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW), perhaps the most vocal animal rights movement in Kenya, for instance, sponsored a number of KWS patrol cars and formed a partnership with the organization to jointly manage two National Parks (IFAW n.d.). White landowners indicated to me that the animal rights lobby's grip on, among others, the KWS manifested itself in how the organization dealt with problem animals that had destroyed properties, or that had injured or killed people. In the past, such animals were simply shot, but the hunting ban made the KWS turn to relocation projects instead. Landowners and conservationists stressed that such operations are very costly and largely ineffective, for problem animals usually continue to create problems after they are moved elsewhere. Also, the bureaucratic hoops that landowners need to leap through to get such relocations organized are time-consuming, and to some seem never-ending (see also Martin 2012: 185). In exceptional cases, for instance when wildlife causes havoc to entire villages, the KWS does shoot animals. But according to a young white landowner who has a property close to Mt. Kenya such shoots are appalling, for untrained KWS rangers do not know how to do the job and cause unnecessary harm and suffering to animals. His statement echoed an old colonial sportsmen's attitude (see Steinhart 2006: 69), but also resembled the animal rights movement in the sense that it likewise applied ethic standards to the handling of wildlife.

In sum, the various ranchers-turned-conservationists whom I spoke to all considered the 1989 Wildlife Act to be outdated and inappropriate for the various conservation dilemmas that the country faced – their dissatisfaction with Kenya's legislation is slightly reminiscent of how White Highland settlers had opposed the colonial administration's legislation in the 1950s that I discussed earlier. On many occasions, Laikipia's white landowners and conservationists told me that the government should reintroduce hunting, for Kenya could then adopt conservation models that also worked in South Africa and Namibia. Again and again they juxtaposed Kenya's rampant poaching with the prosperity of wildlife in these countries, and they argued that Kenya's steady decline in wildlife numbers could only be halted if the 1989 Wildlife Act was revised. Yet, the animal rights movement's hold on the KWS hindered this.

In the mid-2000s, the 1989 Wildlife Act was subjected to a review process. Norton-Griffiths (2007) suggests that Kenya's politicians were not necessarily opposed to legal changes that would allow for certain forms of hunting, but that they were continuously restrained by NGOs like IFAW, Born Free, Action Aid and Humane Society, which funded the larger part of Kenya's conservation programmes. In 2004, an amendment to the 1989 Wildlife Act passed, but the president refused to sign it – according to Norton-Griffiths this was again due to NGOs threatening to withdraw their funds. In September 2006, the review process continued, but by that time animal rights organizations had had ample opportunity to think up a strategy and IFAW launched a nationwide anti-hunting campaign that proved quite effective. Norton-Griffiths further suggests that large animal rights organizations paid

local activists to disturb seminars and meetings (2010: 30), and established undercover branches that pretended to be grassroots NGOs (*Ibid.*). One of these NGOs was particularly aggressive, and its members threatened to shoot hunters if the government dropped the ban (*Ibid.*).

In 2007, the government finally announced it would vote on a bill that meant to revise the 1989 Wildlife Act. Yet, the bill was almost entirely drafted by one IFAW consultant (Norton-Griffiths 2010: 30) and it left the hunting ban untouched. It did not pass parliament and, although other bills were drafted in subsequent years, nothing effectively changed: the hunting ban continued to pit pro-hunting conservationists and landowners against animal rights organizations and the KWS. Anthony King,⁵⁰ the former director of a conservation platform called the Laikipia Wildlife Forum that intends to bring together Laikipia's various inhabitants on the theme of wildlife conservation, to whom I have spoken on several occasions, was once quoted by Martin (2012) as saying that IFAW's presence in Kenya is highly problematic because it experiences little resistance from counter groups. 'Though it is small potatoes in Washington or London, IFAW is very big in Nairobi' he said (Martin 2012: 83), and stressed that organizations like IFAW managed to secure their position in Kenya through buying the support of politicians. Another conservationist told me that there are organizations in the country that do not support the agenda of the animal rights movement, but that they keep a low profile out of fear that incumbent politicians or animal rights defenders might otherwise sabotage their work. He added that he knew quite a number of frontmen of such organizations – in private, these frontmen agreed with his own pro-hunting attitude, but in public they defended the ban on hunting.

Due to a number of developments, which I will discuss in the next chapter, the alliance between animal rights organizations and the KWS weakened after 2010. One effect was that the KWS sought closer cooperation with private conservancy owners, and the former hostility between them was partially replaced by an increasing number of private-public partnerships. At the same time, the unease between the KWS and Laikipian conservancy owners continued. The latter, for instance, typically quote sources that suggest that about 60 to 70 percent of Kenya's wildlife is currently found on privately owned lands (see for instance Martin 2012: 32; or Norton-Griffiths n.d.) – according to the KWS officials I spoke to, such statistics are flawed, and exaggerate the proportion of wildlife that exists outside national parks and reserves. They added that private landowners deliberately dramatize numbers to make themselves look more important and to attract more funding from international donor organizations. Whoever is right in this discussion, at present all but two of Laikipia's former ranches have converted to wildlife conservation. Today, most white landowners host game viewing lodges, organize safari tours, or provide for conservation and research programmes. Some, such as Ol Pejeta Conservancy and Lewa Wildlife Conservancy, have even managed to establish high-profile wildlife reserves that operate on a budget of a few million dollars (see for instance Lewa Wildlife Conservancy's 2011 annual report).

Today, wildlife conservation enables Laikipia's white landowners to make their lands productive in the wake of the collapse of the ranching industry. But from a government perspective it is not clear

what all these private conservancies bring to the table, Anthony King once explained to me. He stressed that in the main private conservancies do not offer much jobs, and also fail to generate much revenue – on the contrary, many struggle to survive. He added moreover that a few conservancies are located on land that is just fertile enough to cultivate, which gives way to the question whether one should aspire to keep wildlife when one could also grow crops and contribute to the national food supply. Jonathan Moss further stressed how controversial this matter is and explained that, in a country that experiences recurrent droughts and famine, a landowner can hardly justify giving up arable land for tourist recreation. Such an argument was not only made for farming but also for ranching and Jackie Kenyon, one of the two landowners who thus far refuses to participate in Laikipia's wildlife conservation industry, applied exactly the same rhetoric in an interview with an environmental reporter:

Wildlife is not the issue of primary concern. What is primary concern? Food. People are growing hungry in Kenya. A thousand sacks of grain were distributed for famine relief in Nanyuki alone last week, and conditions are much worse in the north. [...] We can't afford to turn all the rangelands into conservancies. Even with multiple-use management – cattle production as well as wildlife preservation [...] – you simply can't produce enough meat to satisfy domestic needs. Feeding the nation has to be paramount.

Martin (2012: 182-183)

Such a moral rejection of Laikipia's near-total conversion to wildlife conservation resonated with the fact that, for a long time, private conservancies had no legal foundation.⁵¹ 'Private conservation' was an informal type of land use not acknowledged in any law. In the late 1990s, the government adopted an act that could endow private land with an environmental easement,⁵² which stated:

The object of an environmental easement is to further the principals of environmental management set out in this Act by facilitating the conservation and enhancement of the environment, in this Act referred to as the benefited environment, through the imposition of one or more obligations in respect of the use of land, in this Act referred to as the burdened land, being the land in the vicinity of the benefited environment.

Environmental Management and Coordination Act Kenya (1999: section 1112)

But the landowners I talked to had been especially wary of the 'imposition of one or more obligations in respect of the use of land', and no one had dared to apply for an environmental easement for it was not at all obvious how such an easement could inhibit future land use changes if, at a certain point, wildlife conservation proved no longer feasible or possible. As such, Laikipia's conservancy owners found themselves in an ambivalent position: on the one hand, different international conservation organizations supported and funded their work; on the other hand, there was always a risk that the government would intervene since their activities were technically illegal.

In addition to such legal uncertainties, Laikipia's wildlife conservancies were also criticized by neighbouring African communities that had never opted to be surrounded by more wildlife, but which

nevertheless had to deal with it. Most importantly, once ranchers en bloc turned to wildlife conservation many nearby community settlements were increasingly affected by human-wildlife conflicts – from the perspective of a subsistence farmer whose crops got smashed by elephants, or from the perspective of a pastoralist whose cows were killed by large predators, Laikipia’s transformation into one big wildlife plain was hardly an improvement. Small-scale African farmers in particular expressed their dissatisfaction to me numerous times, and the typical complaint was that white landowners cared more for wildlife than for the well-being of their African neighbours. Besides, people soon realized that Laikipia’s conservation industry benefited lodge owners and conservancy owners, but left the majority of the region’s residents empty-handed. All this reinforced the colonial stereotype of wildlife protection being only a white men’s affair.

Some conservancy owners tried to ameliorate such a reputation, and over the years different initiatives were implemented designed to enthruse Laikipia’s African communities for wildlife conservation. Amongst these initiatives was the construction of a fence, called the Laikipia West Fence, which stretched over more than 160 kilometres and which was meant to keep wildlife away from villages. There were also projects that tried to encourage pastoralists to build *bomas*, predator-proof livestock enclosures, in order to keep cattle safe at night. But sooner or later these initiatives ran into trouble for a variety of reasons, including lack of funding, technical difficulties, or an overall lack of community support. In recent years, conservancy owners have taken a different approach and began to implement corporate social responsibility (CSR) programmes. In 2011 and 2012, when I lived in Nanyuki, CSR and the variant ‘community work’ had become the buzzwords of Laikipia’s conservation scene.

Because Kenya’s wildlife is a state-owned asset and due to the hunting ban, different conservancy owners and conservationists stressed the importance of CSR programmes to me: it offers one of the few opportunities to let local communities experience the benefits of conservation and, as such, it can motivate them not to fight against but sympathize with Laikipia’s conservation industry. Charlie Wheeler,⁵³ chairman of a trust that looks after a patch of forest located close to Mt. Kenya, explained to me that conservancy owners who sit back and watch people around them grow discontent will inevitably run into trouble. ‘A poor neighbour is a bad neighbour,’ he indicated, and he called for a proactive attitude towards building community credit. This could be done, for instance, through opening clinics and schools, or proving for micro-credit, which all had the potential to cultivate goodwill and hence improve the relation between Laikipia’s black and white inhabitants. Yet, only the most successful conservancies, such as Ol Pejeta Conservancy and Lewa Wildlife Conservancy, had the budgets to make any significant contributions to community work – others typically already struggled to cover operational costs alone, and as such CSR further reinforced the separation of flourishing and affluent conservancies on the one hand and the less fortunate on the other.

Laikipia’s CSR programmes turned several of Laikipia’s conservancies into powerful development agents and some, such as Ol Pejeta Conservancy, came to invest millions of dollars in

community development programmes (Ol Pejeta Conservancy n.d.). But contrary to what the websites of this and other conservancies suggest, Laikipia's CSR programmes do not have a straightforward positive effect and they certainly do not make communities more appreciative of nature conservation per se. Ben Wandago⁵⁴ from the African Wildlife Foundation (AWF), an organization that sponsored Ol Pejeta's transition from ranching to conservation, told me that communities often realize very well that CSR programmes reinforce power inequalities – the 'gifts' that communities receive come with strings attached (see also Rajak 2011, especially chapter one) and aim to manipulate recipients into becoming environmentally-friendly subjects (see also Agrawal 2005 on environmentality). AWF's employee added that there is a paradox in Laikipia's CSR projects. Communities do need funding to establish schools, clinics and so forth, he maintained, but they would arguably be better off if they received such funding directly, rather than through wildlife conservancies that, ironically, are themselves dependent on donor money – when wildlife conservancies carry out community work, they add an unnecessary level of administration to an already complicated affair.

Different people offered me examples of situations in which CSR programmes had backfired. Someone who himself participated in community work for instance claimed that the huge amounts of money that some conservancies spend on CSR raise expectations among communities. He said that some of these communities had become quite demanding, and sometimes even bullied conservancy owners until they were promised further financial support. He underscored that this was particularly troublesome for conservancies that operated on a small budget and struggled to survive economically – large and successful conservancies like Lewa Wildlife Conservancy or Ol Pejeta Conservancy had the funds to meet community demands, but many others had not.

In sum, CSR is an ambivalent yet indispensable tool for conservancy owners who intend to remain on good terms with their neighbours. Yet, there are a few white landowners with such a bad reputation that community work cannot redeem them. Among them is Kuki Gallmann, an Italian-born who came to Laikipia in 1972. She wrote different novels on her emigration to Kenya⁵⁵ that became instant bestsellers, one of which was turned into a movie. Gallmann is the owner of a property called Ol Ari Nyiro, which used to be a cattle ranch, but was converted into a wildlife reserve known today as the Laikipia Nature Conservancy. By 2012, many Laikipian landowners and conservationists had come to conceive of Gallmann as the epitome of conservation gone wrong. Apparently, Gallmann lacked the tact and diplomatic skills necessary to win over communities and politicians, and she crossed swords with one particular Member of Parliament called Mwangi Kiunjuri. The recounting of Gallmann's precarious situation that follows below is a compilation of the various pieces of the story told to me by a dozen landowners, conservancy managers and conservationists working in the area.

In 2012, elections were again pending. After these elections, Kenya's government system would decentralize and the country would be divided into forty-seven counties, all headed by a governor who would be given a certain degree of decision-making power. Mwangi Kiunjuri aspired to become the governor of Laikipia County, and already in early 2012 he began campaigning for votes. He knew that

most votes could be won from Laikipia's African communities, as they far outnumbered white landowners, and so he tried to appeal to these communities by openly sympathizing with their grievances about human-wildlife conflict. Conservancy owners had expected Kiunjuri to do this, because he had long been known as a fierce opponent of wildlife conservation: in 2007, for instance, he allegedly instigated communities to invade Ol Jogi, a conservancy in the heart of Laikipia owned by a billionaire family from New York.

To buttress his governorship campaign, Mwangi Kiunjuri singled out Kuki Gallmann and used her as a 'punch bag', as one of my informants put it. It was no secret that Gallmann had a particularly troublesome relationship with her neighbours. On different occasions, animals coming from the Laikipia Nature Conservancy had attacked villagers, and some victims had died of their injuries. The villagers living in the vicinity of Laikipia Nature Conservancy accused Gallmann of not taking responsibility for her animals, and demanded that she put up a fence. For a long time Gallmann refused to do so – when a fence was eventually constructed Gallmann failed to maintain it properly and the wildlife on Laikipia Nature Conservancy continued to stray outside the property. A geographer from Cambridge, who did research on Laikipia's fence network, told me that this had encouraged villagers to collect funding themselves and build a second fence. Yet, this fence was also not maintained and similarly failed to solve the problem.

Kiunjuri capitalized on the existing tensions between Kuki Gallmann and her neighbours, and used Laikipia Nature Conservancy to illustrate the harm that wildlife conservation did to Africans. At a certain point, Kiunjuri even threatened to sue Gallmann for failing to address the issue and for causing human suffering, and he told her and other former ranchers to keep *their* wildlife on *their* properties. Meanwhile, newspapers regularly published articles with headlines such as 'Kiunjuri Strengthens Case Against Ranchers' (*The Star*, 22 February 2012) and 'Elephant Raid Victim Buried in Laikipia' (*The Star*, 2 January 2012), pouring further oil on the fire.

Mwangi Kiunjuri's hostility towards Laikipian conservancies in general and towards Kuki Gallmann in particular paid off, and it gave him widespread popular support. Mordecai Ogada,⁵⁶ who directed the Laikipia Wildlife Forum after Anthony King, explained that Kiunjuri realized very well that the vast majority of Kenya is rather poor and looks for someone to blame its poverty on. 'He decided to offer them a scapegoat', Ogada pointed out. Gallmann, in the meantime, used the events to demonstrate to her fans and her donors the hardships of her condition, and promoted an image of herself as a tenacious fighter who would not succumb to bullying and intimidation. Contrary to private conservancy owners who try to cultivate relations of dependency through CSR projects, Gallmann explicitly took a position against her African neighbours. Ogada summarized her plight as follows:

Her fame, her acclaim, is like the movie about her. It's all about a single white woman, surrounded by enemies. The problems she faces serve her image well, it suits her narrative. [...] People [abroad] admire

her. They admire that she doesn't go back to Italy. This all feeds into the hype, and the story about her is now bigger than herself.

In the course of 2012, Mwangi Kiunjuri's initially harsh tone softened. He continued to demonize Kuki Gallmann, but he also became more amiable to other white conservancy owners. Max Graham,⁵⁷ a British environmentalist and founder of a local conservation organization, interpreted this change as an indication that Kiunjuri had realized that Laikipia's conservancies could be of service to him after all, for instance because he could impose high taxes and expensive permit systems on them once he was Laikipia county governor. Besides, the manager of Ol Pejeta Conservancy told me, Kiunjuri was made to understand that if white landowners were forced to leave Laikipia then their manifold CSR programmes would also come to an end. Ol Pejeta Conservancy had explained this carefully to the neighbouring communities that it supported, and had told villagers that a vote for Kiunjuri could mean the end of their schools and hospitals. As soon as Kiunjuri got wind of this he sought an alliance with Ol Pejeta Conservancy, and the manager concluded: 'Kiunjuri will not attack us, for if he would he would lose the votes of all the communities that we have invested in'.

In the end, Mwangi Kiunjuri did not win the elections. Nevertheless, the events around his campaign tour had once again exposed the vulnerable and uncertain position of conservancies, related to, among other things, the lack of an adequate legal framework, the difficulty of encouraging communities for wildlife preservation, and the image of the conservation industry as a white man's concern. Different conservationists and landowners underscored to me that the political capital and goodwill that Laikipia's conservancy owners will be able to cultivate in the near future is going to be decisive for their individual prospects: Max Graham indicated that although Kuki Gallmann's conservancy is one of the most interesting properties from an ecological perspective, it is also the least likely to survive. If political opposition against Laikipia's conservationists revives she will be amongst the first to leave, he said, for 'those that don't engage will definitely be immediate targets'.

Mwangi Kiunjuri's rhetoric, which portrayed Laikipia's conservation industry as an area of conflict that pits white beneficiaries against African victims, was not exceptional. I encountered it in the offices of conservation NGOs, during community meetings, and in KWS quarters – even conservancy owners themselves employed a similar logic in their promotion of CSR projects. This illustrates how Laikipia's relatively recent transformation from cattle ranching to wildlife conservation reinforced and consolidated old frictions between the region's black and white residents. At the same time, the racial politics that came to characterize Laikipia's conservation industry were not confined to the topic of wildlife and, as the next section discusses, there have been other events that illustrate how the colour bar continues to complicate the coexistence of Laikipia's diverse residents.

Maasai grievances and legislative changes

In mid-August 2004, precisely one hundred years after the British government and Olonana had agreed that the Maasai would leave Masai Land and settle in two Maasai reserves, there was a Maasai protest in Nairobi. Participants had dressed up in the red and blue *mashuka* (loincloths) that are considered typical Maasai dress, and marched on the streets of the capital towards the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Land. They carried with them a petition, in which they stated that Olonana had signed an agreement that lasted ninety-nine years and that, anno 2004, the land rights of Laikipia's white residents had expired. The demand of the demonstrators was simple: they wanted the Kibaki government to expel Laikipia's white landowners, and give the Maasai back the plains that once had been promised to them (Kantai 2007).

It was suggested that the protest was the brainchild of a group of prominent Maasai lawyers, journalists and NGO activists who pragmatically capitalized on the upcoming worldwide attention for the rights of indigenous peoples (Hughes 2005: 216). Among them were Elijah Marima ole Sempeta, a human rights attorney who had hit the headlines the year before when he had sued a mining firm called Magadi Soda Company demanding compensation for the people whose land it had destroyed, and Johnson ole Kaunga,⁵⁸ founding father of the Indigenous Movement for Peace Advancement and Conflict Transformation (IMPACT) (Kantai 2007: 113). The latter also had a track record in indigenous rights affairs, and became known for his provocative methods, his extremist ideology, and his primordialist understanding of Maasai culture (see for instance ole Kaunga 2001). The figureheads behind the protest carefully and deliberately staged contemporary Maasai grievances as being a direct result of colonial land dispossession, and newspapers that reported on the event showed pictures of Maasai protesters carrying placards with texts such as '*we demand our land back from the British!*' and '*100 years is enough!*' (Kantai 2007: 110).

A week after the Nairobi protest, a group of Maasai herdsmen cut the fence of a white-owned Laikipian estate called Lolldaiga to let their cattle graze. The past few months had been extremely dry and grazing land was scarce – as such, pastoralists from Kenya's northern most regions had come down to Laikipia to prevent their animals from starving, just like they usually did during dry spells (see Heath 2001). In the event of such extreme weather conditions, landowners generally condoned pastoralists' trespassing. But on this particular occasion Lolldaiga's staff reacted aggressively and opened fire once they spotted the intruders, perhaps because the Nairobi protest had made them wary of further Maasai rebellion. They killed one herdsman on the spot, and left three others severely injured (Kantai 2007: 115-116).

After the incident, tensions between pastoralists, Laikipia's white landowners, and the Kenyan government escalated. More invasions occurred, after which the government raised the level of security: it organized ground patrols, initiated helicopter surveillances, and arrested more than a

hundred pastoralists for violating white landowners' private property rights (Kantai 2007: 116). Politicians such as William ole Ntimama, in turn, defended the pastoralists and scolded the police (Hughes 2005: 219). In the meantime, international media picked up on the situation. These media put anti-white sentiments at the centre of attention and drew parallels with Zimbabwe, where, in 2000, land reforms had largely resulted in the end of white landownership. They produced headlines such as 'Tribe, Claiming Whites' Land, Confronts Kenya's Government' (*The New York Times*, 25 August 2004) and 'Masai Invaders Target Last White Farmers' (*The Daily Telegraph*, 13 September 2004).

In light of these developments, the group of prominent Maasai figures that had been behind the mid-August Maasai march organized another demonstration at the end of the month. During this second protest demonstrators again set out for the Ministry of Land, to get hold of minister Amos Kimunya who had been out of office the first time they had tried to deliver the petition. The protesters never reached their destination as soon after they took off police forces intervened and arrested them in a brutal manner. Camera crews were again present and the police's violent actions were broadcast all over the country. That same evening, minister Amos Kimunya held a press conference, during which he discarded the demands that the protesters made. He stated that the 1904 treaty had not been signed for a period of ninety-nine years but for a period of nine-*hundred*-ninety-nine years, and he stressed that the Maasai encroachment of white lands was illegal and criminal. In hindsight, some observers added that the entire affair had rested on yet another misunderstanding: in 1904 Laikipia was given to the Maasai not taken from them, and protesters had confused the 1904 treaty with the events of 1911 (see for instance Hughes 2005). But in the heat of the moment the parties involved in the conflict had little attention for the historical accuracy of the Maasai activists' claims, and instead had concentrated on defending their interests (*Ibid.*: 221).

After Amos Kimunya's television appearance the farm invasions stopped, and the agitation that plagued Laikipia for several weeks died down. Nevertheless, the damage had been done: the incidents had reinforced Laikipia's image as neo-colonial territory where black fights white and vice versa. Such an image oversimplifies the complexity of the Maasai land debate, and it has been suggested that contemporary Maasai resentments are not only the effect of colonial land displacement policies, but also relate to how successive post-colonial governments have shown little interest in redressing the colonial injustices done to Maasai groups (Hughes 2005; Kantai 2007). After all, the 1962 meeting at Thomson Falls had not convinced Jomo Kenyatta of the need to attend to Maasai hardships, and since then Maasai groups have largely been denied the political space to make their grievances heard (Kantai 2007: 109). But the colour bar politics that came to characterize the 2004 Maasai campaign effectively obscured this.

Although Kibaki's government managed to abate the Maasai uprisings in 2004, there continued to be rumours about Africans organizing themselves to reclaim white-owned lands in 2011 and 2012. One afternoon, for instance, I chatted with a Kikuyu friend in front of the house that I rented, who told me she had just overheard people talking about confiscating white properties during the *matatu*

(minivan) ride home. Such talk was arguably boosted by a set of legislative changes that hung over white landowners' property rights at the time, and which followed the adoption of a new constitution in 2010.

As mentioned earlier, during its 2002 electoral campaign, NaRC had promised to review the existing constitution. Yet almost immediately after he was appointed, Mwai Kibaki largely lost interest in changing legislation. Nevertheless, in 2005 there was a national referendum on a draft constitution that had been drawn up by the Attorney-General Amos Wako, and which became known as the Wako Bill (see also Berman et al. 2009; Lynch 2006^B). Although it was expected that the Wako Bill would decentralize the central government's authority, it continued to vest decision-making power largely in the presidential seat. Different NaRC politicians who had fallen out with Kibaki, among whom Raila Odinga, therefore claimed that the bill had no intention of changing anything at all, and that it only further consolidated Kikuyu power. These politicians organized a provocative and powerful campaign against the Wako Bill (Lynch 2006^B), and during the referendum the majority of Kenyans indeed voted against. After that, the constitutional reform process again came to a standstill.

The situation changed in the aftermath of the 2007 elections. At the time, Mwai Kibaki had formed an alliance with several parties that supported his re-election, called the Party of National Unity (PNU). PNU's main opponent was Raila Odinga, who after the 2005 constitutional referendum had founded his own party called the Orange Democratic Party (ODM).⁵⁹ Immediately after the votes had been counted Kibaki announced that PNU had won, and he immediately took the presidential oath. ODM found Kibaki's hurried inauguration suspicious and accused PNU of election fraud. Violent riots broke out, primarily in certain neighbourhoods of Nairobi and the Rift Valley, during which PNU's Kikuyu followers and ODM's Kalenjin and Luo followers came to blows. These riots were not so much a reaction to the election outcome itself, it has been suggested, but to how PNU and ODM election campaigns had again appealed to tribal unity and solidarity, and had again revived decades-old Kalenjin frustrations over the Million Acre Settlement Scheme (Anderson & Lochery 2008).

The riots between PNU and ODM followers continued for weeks. Eventually, former United Nations' Secretary-General Kofi Annan intervened and mediated between Mwai Kibaki and Raila Odinga. At the end of February 2008, when more than a thousand citizens had been killed and hundreds of thousands of people were fleeing the violence, Kibaki and Odinga finally signed an agreement to form a coalition government. Within this coalition Kibaki continued to be president, but Odinga was given the post of prime minister that did not yet exist in Kenya but was created for the purpose. The UN demanded that this coalition government would at last carry through the legislative changes that politicians had promised the Kenyan public, ever since the late 1990s. This eventually resulted in a number of reforms, including the adoption of a new constitution in 2010 and the revision of the Land Act in 2012.

Both the 2010 Constitution and the 2012 Land Act engender a set of problems for Laikipia's white landowners. Firstly, the constitution prescribes that one can purchase land and obtain title deeds over it, but that the government is at all times entitled to cancel property rights. It reads:

The state may regulate the use of any land, or any interest in or right over land, in the interest of defence, public safety, public order, public morality, public health, or land use planning.

The Constitution of Kenya (2010, article 66)

This is not a new arrangement, and regulations similar to this one have existed ever since British colonial occupation. Kenyatta's government left them intact, and state control over land rights has complicated white proprietorship from 1963 onwards. One second-generation landowner offered me a telling example in this regard, and recounted the following story to me.

In 1966, his parents had come to Kenya and had bought a cattle farm located west of Mt. Kenya and east of the Aberdares mountain range. They intended to ranch but there was too much wildlife on the property, which restricted the possibilities of livestock farming. After some deliberation his parents had decided to cut the ranch in two: all the wildlife would be brought to one part, which would be turned into a game park, so that the other part could be used for cattle farming. He stressed that his parents had not been conservation idealists, but had merely acted out of a business interest – without finding a solution for the abundance of wildlife, the ranch could simply not become operational. A few years later, at the height of Kenya's 1970s poaching crisis, the Kenyatta government approached his parents and told them it wanted to bring rhinos to their game park. His parents initially refused for they feared that these rhinos would attract criminal poaching syndicates, and they anticipated that their game park-cum-ranch would turn into a combat zone. But the government's response to their objections was simple: either his parents accepted the decision and receive the animals, or the title deeds of their property would be repealed and they would be told to leave the country. They chose the first option, and later their game park developed into one of Laikipia's largest rhino breeding grounds.

Although white landowners' property rights have long since been subjected to the vagaries of incumbent politicians, the 2010 Constitution and the 2012 Land Act made white anxieties over the possible loss of title deeds more urgent for a number of reasons. Firstly, like the former constitution the new constitution defines two types of properties rights: freehold tenure and leasehold tenure. The first entails an 'unlimited right to use and dispose of land in perpetuity subject to the rights of others and the regulatory powers of national government, country government and other relevant state organs' (Land Act 2012, article 2), while the second entails 'the grant, with or without consideration, by the proprietor of land of the right to the exclusive possession of his or her land, and includes the right so granted and the instrument granting it, and also includes a sublease but does not include an agreement for lease' (*Ibid.*). Put simply, freehold tenure is an infinite right to land that includes use

and sale, while leasehold tenure grants one the right of access and use but does not give one legal ownership entitlements.

In the past, Kenya's white landowners were eligible for both freehold and leasehold tenure but the 2010 Constitution changed this. It restricts freehold to Kenyan citizens, which some white landowners are but others are not, and it states:

A person who is not a citizen may hold land on the basis of leasehold tenure only, and any such lease, however granted, shall not exceed ninety-nine years.

The Constitution of Kenya, article 65

For landowners who do not have a Kenyan passport this provision is highly problematic, because it may imply a conversion of former freehold title deeds into leasehold title deeds with an end date. One of the consequences would be that their properties would become unsaleable, and therefore without economic value (see also Norton-Griffiths 2010: 31). But also, white landowners who do have a Kenyan passport have explained this as an intimidating development, for it could be indicative of a changing political landscape – taking into account that today Kenya hosts a population that exceeds forty-five million, and in the context of an ever-growing hunger for land throughout country, these legislative changes could be the first steps towards intensified control over white land use, or even the abolishment of large white estates.

To this day, the Kenyan government has not challenged white landownership rights on the basis of these two pieces of legislation, but different landowners have told me that they have been holding their breath ever since 2010. One afternoon, for instance, I discussed the situation with a second-generation landowner who inherited his father's ranch. He tried to explain to me just how uncomfortable he felt, and discussed his options with me. One of the things he could do is become a full Kenyan citizen, but he anticipated problems in relation to obtaining a travel visa for Europe or the United States. He could also acquire dual citizenship and appeal to either his parents' nationality or his Kenyan nationality depending on the circumstances, yet he foresaw that this would also be problematic: he owned business ventures registered abroad and expected that, in case of dual citizenship, two countries would make tax demands. His last option was to lie low, follow the developments closely, and endure the consequences when they presented themselves. This is what he had done thus far, but especially the maximum lease term of ninety-nine years continued to bother him. He explained to me that the constitution mentions a maximum lease period but not a minimum lease period and he feared that, in the end, white leases would only cover a few years. Besides, he doubted whether leases would begin on their date of issue, or whether they would be given out with retrospective effect – in case of the latter, one's title deed could already have expired before one actually obtained it.

On another occasion I drove out to one of Laikipia's few large-scale agricultural farms,⁶⁰ located on Mt. Kenya's northern slopes in an area called Timau. The owner, a young man in his thirties, had

inherited the land from his grandparents, who had come to Kenya in the early 1920s. He drove me around his property in his pickup truck while pointing out all the different activities he engaged in, which included cattle ranching, the cultivation of canola and the pressing of canola oil, and the cultivation of peas and wheat. He continuously stressed how efficient he was, and how well he managed to make the most out of every acre he possessed. At the time, one of Kenya's infamous maize diseases had just broken out and African farmers subsequently suffered great food losses – this added a sense of urgency to his statements. In the eyes of this landowner, efficient management offered the best protection against land seizure and he said: 'If someone [from the government] comes they can compare my productivity with other landowners. If I am producing less I will go, but if I am producing more than let me stay and do my work'. He knew that the colonial roots of his presence compromised the moral credibility of his land rights (McIntosh 2015: 252), but by underscoring his attempts to feed the nation in the context of recurrent food shortages his proprietorship turned from an ethical dilemma of the past into an ethical dilemma of the present. Just before I left, I asked him whether he thought he would still be in Kenya in ten years time. 'I don't know' he responded, and after a short silence added: 'actually, it depends on how I get up in the morning'.

One may, or may not, empathize with the plight of either of these two landowners. But what is important for my argument is that their fears, uncertainties, and ways of dealing with these uncertainties illustrate a mode of living that is ingrained in a sense of unpredictability, and that revolves around colour bar politics. This sense of unpredictability affects landowners in Laikipia as well as elsewhere in the country, and it underscores their ambivalent and dubious position. This position is partly the result of particular legislative arrangements; at the same time, it also pertains to a black majority that continues to denounce their presence – even though this same majority blames the impoverishment of a large part of society at least as much on the greed and corruption of post-colonial politicians as on the history of white domination. The public reception of the 'Malcolm Bell case' is exemplary in this regard. In 2012, Malcolm Bell, a white farmer from Nakuru in the Rift Valley, won a court case against former president Daniel Arap Moi over land rights. Moi was never popular and he was widely associated with the repression, torture and murder of political opponents as well as with the accumulation of excessive wealth that impeded national progress. But in spite of this, McIntosh (2015: 261-262) suggests, the general public displayed more dismay over a white man winning land from a black man than over Moi's former crimes and offences.

Ever since independence, white landowners have employed a variety of strategies to minimize the risk of expulsion: some bowed to government authority and kept in step with national regulations; some counted on the support and political capital of donor organizations or private investors; and some deliberately sought alliances with high-ranking politicians. All these strategies have one thing in common: they highlight that owning land in Kenya is primarily a political matter. Often, I have heard landowners or other observers drawing parallels between white landowners in Kenya and white landowners in Zimbabwe, just as journalists did when they had reported on the 2004 Maasai

campaign. On the one hand, the land reforms that the Zimbabwean government implemented in 2000, which caused a rampant storming of white farms (see for instance Wolmer 2007), did not precisely reassure Laikipia's white landowners. On the other hand, a certain degree of resignation seemed prevalent, stemming from the fact that, although white land rights have been at stake for over five decades, a large-scale eviction thus far has not taken place. In the end, many deemed it unlikely that a 'Zimbabwe-thing' would happen in Kenya, especially because the expulsion of white farmers and ranchers would scare off foreign investments. The depth of these comments only sank in after I had returned from my fieldwork. In September 2013, the Westgate Shopping Mall in Nairobi became the target of a terrorist attack that eventually lasted several days – immediately after news on the raid spread, the president held a press conference in which he reassured the safety of all tourists and investors.

Still, in the face of looming uncertainties some white landowners have indicated to me that they are prepared to take drastic measures if need be. 'I don't think that a Zimbabwe-thing will happen here' a third-generation landowner for instance told me, 'but if it would I will fight it with my life'. Contained in this statement is the idea that land is a non-transferable family asset that merits the utmost protection, and this landowner's strong reaction suggests that his property is crucial for his identity and his place in Kenyan society.⁶¹ While Boer groups in South Africa already in the 1990s claimed that, after so many generations of settlement, they are as indigenous to South Africa as the country's black population (Kuper 2003: 389), the historical presence of the descendants of White Highland settlers still seems too frail to make a convincing case for autochthony. Nevertheless, some, like the landowner above, are drawing on arguments that link rights to soil to historical occupation and kinship relations (see also McIntosh 2015). As such, the contemporary opponents of continued white presence are beginning to be fought with their own weapons.

A spectrum of white

So far I have concentrated on how Laikipia's colonial history engendered colour bar politics, and I have discussed a variety of ways in which the colour bar continues to divide black and white. Here and there I have argued that the colour bar oversimplifies the complexity of Kenya's political arena – among other things I have drawn attention to Mwangi Kiunjuri's alliance with Ol Pejeta, and I have pointed out that contemporary Maasai grievances are partially but not exclusively the result of colonial relocation policies. In this section, I continue to focus on something that colour bar politics obscure: namely, that Laikipia's white landowners are not a homogeneous, undifferentiated group. Rather, they are divided on a range of topics, and individual endeavours to be accepted as legitimate residents have come to alienate some landowners from others.

Firstly, Laikipia's recent transformation to wildlife conservation gave way to upcoming tourism, and the number of Laikipian lodges and camps grew steadily over the years – according to Mordecai Ogada, by 2012, approximately 90% of Laikipia's former ranches offered some sort of tourist shelter. But tourism is an unpredictable and fickle source of income. After the political violence of 2007 and 2008, for instance, the country's entire tourist industry collapsed and took years to recover. Besides, in comparison with other Kenyan safari destinations, such as Masai Mara or Amboseli, tourism in Laikipia is still in its infancy. The region is not, or at least not yet, the type of visitor hotspot that these two areas came to be. Due to these circumstances, there is competition over clients, and in mid-2012 Ogada offered me an example of how this affected relations between white neighbours. He told me of a landowner who had pitched a camp that could be seen from the lodge on the property of an adjacent landowner. The latter, whom had been in business first, felt disadvantaged because the camp had spoiled the view from his lodge, which he could no longer advertise as located in a 'wild' and 'pristine' area. I was told he was determined to recover the estimated financial losses from his neighbour.

Because tourism does not offer a reliable income, most white-owned lands are also subjected to other activities. For instance, a small number of landowners continues to ranch. Critical observers ridicule this and maintain that cattle breeding and wildlife conservation are two irreconcilable activities, due to, among other things, the transmission of diseases and competition over grazing lands (see also Martin 2012: 182). But those who do combine the two, such as Ol Pejeta Conservancy, maintain that the activities can go hand in hand – the manager of Ol Pejeta Conservancy even indicated that more and more landowners are considering a reintroduction of cattle, primarily because the presence of livestock seems to decrease thick infections amongst certain wildlife species. In areas that receive relatively much rainfall, typically those located close to Mt. Kenya, landowners have converted to flower farming or have handed out flower farming leases to third parties – especially the northwestern and southwestern side of the mountain witnessed an influx of flower farming businesses in recent years. Today, there are many disputes over whether or not these flower farms should be allowed to make use of the region's constrained water sources and each dry season, when the water surface of rivers falls dramatically and some rivers dry up entirely, flower farmers are castigated by both black and white water-deprived residents. In response, flower farmers now play up the results of water offtake studies⁶² that suggest that it is not they, but small-scale African farmers who use inefficient and irresponsible irrigation methods that deplete Laikipia's water sources.

The presence of British Army training troops is another issue that complicates the relationship between white landowners. The British Army Training Unit Kenya (BATUK) has long had a base camp in Nanyuki, as well as several training camps located further north where it prepares soldiers for war zones such as Afghanistan and Iraq. As a result, the area permanently hosts a large number of British soldiers: according to the wife of a former BATUK officer, groups of approximately one

thousand trainees rotate every six weeks; in addition, there is a training crew that stays for six months as well as a small permanent staff on two-year contracts that usually come with families.

Traditionally, BATUK trained its soldiers in a camp in the vicinity of Archer's Post in Samburu region, and in a camp close to Dol Dol in northern Laikipia. But between 2001 and 2011 these camps got caught up in two controversial court cases. In the first, Maasai communities living in the area claimed that BATUK had been reckless with its ammunition and had left unused explosives in the field. Pastoralists maintained that this had caused severe injuries to more than two hundred people over the past decades, and that it had killed another fifty. In the second, Maasai women claimed that BATUK soldiers had raped them for years, and they pointed to their half-blood children as evidence.

In both court cases Johnson ole Kaunga, who also played a pivotal role in the 2004 Maasai campaign, took a leading role and he presented himself as the spokesman of all Maasai victims. He formed a partnership with a London-based solicitor called Martyn Day, who came from a law firm with a track record in handling international scandals: his company, for instance, sued Anglo American South Africa Ltd. for the bad working conditions of South African miners, and it represented Guantanamo Bay prisoners. Martyn Day pressed charges against the British government for the misbehavior of its soldiers, but the latter denied responsibility. In the end, the case on the injuries was settled in 2002, and about thirteen hundred pastoralists received compensation that amounted to £4.500.000 (LeighDay n.d.). The case on the sexual abuses lasted much longer, and was eventually dropped due to lack of evidence in 2011.

In Nanyuki, people seemed uncertain about how to judge the situation. Many felt ambivalent about the fact that only Maasai groups had complained about BATUK's ill practices, and there was considerable talk about how the compensation money that the British government had paid in 2002 had primarily been spent on alcohol. Some indicated that army discipline ensures that ammunition stocks are recorded with the greatest precision, and these people did not believe that BATUK had been sloppy. A wife of an ex-army officer told me that it is no secret that BATUK busses in prostitutes from Nairobi and Mombasa, in order to prevent its men from harassing women. She did not believe the rape claims and attributed the half-blood children to a nearby catholic mission, where it was alleged that the pastors were perhaps not as celibate as they claimed to be.

Whether or not the court cases against BATUK were justified, they at least gave the two training camps bad reputations and the continued presence of British soldiers in Dol Dol and Archer's Post became a sensitive issue. Both camps are still in use today, but after the Martyn Day affair BATUK also began looking for other training grounds. Different landowners offered them leases, and BATUK soldiers subsequently moved to various parts of Laikipia. But a side effect emerged: the noise of explosives and shootings scared wildlife that typically bolted to neighbouring properties, trampling the surroundings in the process. This for instance happened to Enasoit, a property not too far from Dol Dol, which was crushed by wildlife after a neighbouring property called Lolldaiga had invited BATUK. Enasoit was not pleased and sued the owners of Lolldaiga. Ole Naishu, a ranch that today is

owned by the CEO of a large Kenyan coffee roaster and exporter, had also made a deal with BATUK in the past. ‘When they were training there’, one of Ole Naishu’s neighbours said, ‘it seemed as if the Third World War was being fought next door’. BATUK, in turn, responded by implementing its own CSR programme, in the hope of ameliorating its presence and improving its reputation after the court cases.

When the combined efforts of ranching, conservation, tourism, and handing out leases to entrepreneurs or to the British Army did not work, a landowner still had one last resort: sell land. Yet, it seemed that when a descendant of a colonial or early-postcolonial settler family did so, he or she would be ostracized by the rest of Laikipia’s settler community – in general, it seemed that in such cases land sales were not taken as an indication of Laikipia’s economic and political plight, but as demonstrating a lack of character and perseverance. The owner of Solio⁶³ ranch, for instance, bore the brunt of such emotions, and he recounted to me how he became Laikipia’s black sheep after he had decided to sell a considerable part of his ranch to the Kenyan government.

In the mid-2000s, Mwai Kibaki’s government had made the owner of Solio ranch an offer to buy three thousand acres of land. The government’s official reason for this request was that it finally wanted to relocate the people who had been evicted from Mt. Kenya’s forests in 1989, as I discussed in chapter two, and who had been living on the roadside between the village of Naro Moru and Mt. Kenya ever since. Allegedly, the poor conditions of these forest evictees had distressed some members of the Kibaki family, who came to the area now and then because the president owned a large estate there. The story goes that these family members lobbied for a resettlement programme.

Solio’s owner had agreed to the proposal, but the selling process was tedious and took about eighteen months – politicians who also owned land in Laikipia learned of the deal, and they tried to frustrate the agreement with Solio to sell their own plots instead. But these politicians could not provide as vast a territory as Solio’s owner could, and eventually the latter won the bid. He clarified to me that he had had different motivations for the transaction. On the one hand, the government’s offer had come at a time when he was just turning his ranch from a beef cattle operation into a milk cattle operation. The latter brought in more money, which meant he needed less livestock, which in turn meant he needed less terrain. Secondly, he indicated that he had realized all too well just how difficult it is to dispose of large ranchlands, for they offer little potential and are politically vulnerable. He had understood the government’s offer as an opportunity that only comes once. And thirdly, he pointed out that the piece of land he had sold was of the most vulnerable category: it was fertile enough to farm yet he used it for cattle, and he anticipated that one day someone would have imposed land use restrictions upon it. Like other former ranchers, Solio’s owner believed that large landownership in Laikipia is on its last legs and he aimed to make the most out of it before it finally collapsed.

The rest of Laikipia’s white landowners were not particularly enthusiastic about Solio’s move, its owner told me. Some had painted him as a money grabber, but there was another side to the story as well. The three thousand acres that Solio had sold had been teeming with wildlife, which needed to be

moved elsewhere in order to enable the government's relocation programme. Initially, the KWS had tried to move all the animals to what remained of the Solio Ranch, but Solio's owner had fiercely objected to this because he needed the land for his milk cattle. Like other former ranchers he did not seem to think much of the KWS, and he told me that he been clear to the organization that the wildlife was their problem, not his – the argument took place at a time when the KWS still claimed the exclusive mandate over Kenya's state-owned wildlife and criminalized private conservancies. Against the background of these conditions, Solio's owner had said to KWS officers something along the lines of 'this is a good exercise for you, now show us that you can manage your assets effectively'.

It was not the first time that Solio's owner and the KWS had had a different perspective on things, and their antagonism already had a history. The 1989 Wildlife Act indicated that the Kenyan state owned all Kenya's indigenous wildlife species, yet it said nothing about exotic species. Solio's owner had taken advantage of this: he had begun to farm white rhinos, which unlike the black rhino is not endemic,⁶⁴ and sold these animals to ranches in countries such as South Africa. He compared it with old French families taking down a painting from the wall when short of funds – when he needed money because his cattle ranch did not bring in enough, he simply sold a rhino. For a while all went well. But then the Kenyan government changed its export regulations, after which he could no longer move the animals out of the country. By 2012, Solio's owner was still stuck with approximately 180 white rhinos. They had no economic value in Kenya, and he had no purpose for them.

While the KWS and Solio's owner argued over who was responsible for the wildlife on the three thousand acres of sold land, Lewa Wildlife Conservancy and Ol Pejeta Conservancy eventually meddled in the dispute. Both agreed to take some animals, and partially funded the relocation of wildlife to other conservancies that the KWS had no budget for. Lewa Wildlife Conservancy had been especially keen on adopting a particular kind of antelope, but after the animals had been moved lions and leopards killed them almost instantly: the antelopes had come from a relatively predator-free environment, and as such were unaccustomed to Lewa Wildlife Conservancy's circumstances. All in all the relocations had been expensive, and both Ol Pejeta Conservancy and Lewa Wildlife Conservancy were somewhat angry with Solio's owner for refusing to pay. According to Solio's owner the entire affair caused bad blood – by 2012 he still largely avoided Nanyuki town, and often kept away from social gatherings.

Who exactly came to inhabit the resettlement programme that Solio's land sale enabled remains a matter of discussion: some say that current inhabitants came from Nyeri and acquired plots from politicians in exchange for votes, and others say that the programme turned into an Internally Displaced People (IDP) camp for the victims of the 2007 and 2008 election riots. Either way, many plots within the settlement have been bought and sold since 2009, and at present even residents themselves seem uncertain about to whom the land was initially given. Nevertheless, it is obvious that the programme not only benefitted the landless and the poor, and when I visited the place in mid-2012 under guidance of Anthony Ochino,⁶⁵ a forester from the Laikipia Wildlife Forum, I observed how

simple huts alternated with flamboyant houses. During that visit I heard various complaints about the hardships of the settlement, and people described, among other things, how permanent wind covers everything in dust; how the entire area turns into a gigantic mud pool in the rainy season; how there are only a few access roads that are all in bad condition; how farming plots are of low quality, which makes people largely dependent on relief food; and how in some places pastoralists have moved in to graze their cattle, which in itself became a source of conflict.

Although Solio's land sale received much criticism from other white landowners, it seemed that by the early 2010s such sales had become more common. These were usually not as drastic as Solio's, yet different owners had sold plots, or were in the process of doing so, to wealthy foreigners looking for an idyllic holiday getaway or a family retreat – Ol Pejeta Conservancy even announced opening an entire holiday park with about one hundred houses (see Mount Kenya Wildlife Estate at Ol Pejeta Conservancy n.d.). This development concerns conservationists who foresee extra pressure on Laikipia's already-scarce resources. Mordecai Ogada, for instance, explained that many such luxury homes will have swimming pools and lush green gardens, and he feared how that would affect the availability of water to African farmers and pastoralists further downstream. 'The demand on natural resources goes up, and up, and up' he said. He added that Laikipia is becoming the victim of the success of its wildlife and safari industry, which attracts more and more people to the area. 'We will be strangling ourselves' he concluded.

Is Laikipia's colour bar inescapable?

Today, forty-eight large estates cover about forty percent of Laikipia's surface. The rest consists of African settlements and government land (Graham 2012: 15). The owners of these large estates differ greatly in origin, success and financial means. For example, there are those who have been born and raised in Laikipia and who belong to settler families such as the Craig family, the Dyer family or the Murray family. There are also owners from families that came to Laikipia not long after independence. Kuki Gallmann is an example in this regard, or Edward Parfet, son of mining magnate Courtland Parfet who bought Solio Ranch in 1966. One could also count former presidents Daniel Arap Moi and Mwai Kibaki among them who, like a number of other politicians, took possession of large tracks of lands on Mt. Kenya's slopes and in Laikipia after 1963.

Those landowners who have been in Laikipia for a prolonged period typically experienced different setbacks, such as the collapse of the ranching industry. How they recovered from such setbacks varies: today, some are well off, while others struggle to survive financially, and there are yet others who have had to sell, such as Daniel Arap Moi. In addition to these long-time occupants, Laikipia is also home to a handful of successful and wealthy entrepreneurs who have bought their estate recently, and who, in general, have little financial incentive to make their lands productive.

Among them is, for instance, the Kenyan Jeremy Block, hotelier and chairman of the coffee chain Dorman Ltd, who bought Ole Naishu in the early 2000s (see Rees 2002: 145), or Jochen Zeitz, former chief executive of the brand Puma and currently director of the Kering group, who bought a property called Segera in 2006 (see for instance Financial Times, 10 May 2013). One could also count Alec Wildenstein among them, although he obtained his estate through his family, which made a fortune in art dealing and bought a Laikipian property called Ol Jogi Ranch in 1977 (see for instance How To Spend It n.d.). Landowners such as these tend to keep their estates private, or occasionally rent out their sumptuous homes for exorbitant prices.

The properties that offer high-end and extremely luxurious safaris, such as Ol Jogi Ranch (see for instance *Forbes*, 8 September 2014), reinforce the image that Laikipia continues to be the playground of the rich and the famous. ‘Many people still regard Laikipia as some sort of Happy Valley with Kenyan Cowboys’ Max Graham said to me, after we discussed the area’s land division and its land use patterns extensively. But Laikipia is not a Happy Valley: the region’s colonial history and the ongoing presence of a few wealthy and influential individuals consolidates the idea that Laikipia is exclusively white and rich, yet in practice the area is highly diverse and heterogeneous. Nevertheless, the narrative of white domination and white opulence has come to demand from all white landowners that they should continuously point out what they are worth or how they are contributing to the well-being of the nation at large – in short, it asks them to substantiate why they should not be expelled.

One result of these dynamics is that many white landowners are cautious. Mordecai Ogada once explained to me that most former ranchers and farmers are exceptionally careful about complying with all government rules and regulations, for they understand very well that people who would rather see them leave will use even the smallest mistake as a ‘stick to hit them with’. At the same time, colour bar politics have made white landowners outspoken on a range of topics: especially the country’s inability to feed its own citizens and the state’s failure to bring about social improvement have become two strong arguments in debates over the legitimacy of white estates, for it enables white landowners to raise themselves as food producers and/or CSR development agents. The transformation of former ranches into conservation sanctuaries also became a powerful rhetorical device – though in light of Kenya’s colonial history, during which nature protection served as one oppressive regulatory mechanism amongst many, such reasoning seems primarily directed at international audiences and funding organizations and is used less in domestic land discussions. Yet there are exceptions, such as the Laikipia Wildlife Conservation Strategy.

In January 2013, the Laikipia Wildlife Forum, in cooperation with a local conservation organization called Space for Giants, launched a document entitled *Wildlife Conservation Strategy for Laikipia County 2012-2030* (Graham 2012). It was a management plan that had been developed with an eye to the 2013 elections, and that aimed to buffer the anti-conservation rhetoric of politicians such as Mwangi Kiunjuri. The document primarily targeted what many conservationists and former ranchers consider to be one of the main obstacles to Laikipian wildlife conservation, namely the

widespread presence of wastelands. Max Graham, who drafted the document, explained the situation to me as follows.

At present, approximately half of Laikipia's land is not claimed or used by its legal owner. There are various reasons for this. For one, after independence, the Million Acres Settlement Scheme and various group ranch initiatives lured African farmers and pastoralists to the area. Yet many of these farmers and pastoralists soon found Laikipia too dry and infertile, and left again. There are also the properties owned by Kenya's political elite, or the properties acquired by wealthy foreigners who only visit occasionally, which are typically not managed and left vacant. As a result, large parts of Laikipia have become deserted.

These deserted lands bring about a number of problems. Most importantly, under changed circumstances of an ever-growing population, Laikipia's empty lands came to attract the attention of pastoralist groups in search of grazing lands. These groups took advantage of the ownership vacuum, and took possession of the areas that no one else wants or uses. But as there are more deprived pastoralists than empty lands, different pastoral groups have come into conflict over access rights. Such conflicts are generally fought with arms, which made certain parts of Laikipia unsafe and dangerous, and today some areas are in a state of anarchy. In addition to such hazards, pastoralists' usage of empty lands is also problematic from a conservation point of view, Max Graham stressed: since pastoral groups do not have legal title deeds they lack the incentive to use Laikipia's land in a sustainable manner, he insisted, echoing Garrett Hardin's principle of the tragedy of the commons.⁶⁶

Max Graham and other conservationists anticipate that the depletion of Laikipia's vacant lands will eventually have various negative consequences. Firstly, by the time that these areas are stripped of resources, pastoralists might decide to move into properties with more resources and invade white-owned conservancies. Secondly, the depletion of about half of Laikipia will pose serious limits to the habitat available to wildlife. Conservationists and landowners have indicated that, if current trends continue, Laikipia's private conservancies are likely to become isolated conservation islands located in an otherwise barren environment. In short, those involved in Laikipia's wildlife conservation industry have at least two strong motives to prevent pastoralists from exhausting Laikipia's wastelands, and in an attempt to alter current circumstances a handful of landowners and conservationists teamed up to devise a conservation strategy.

Although all the initiators behind the *Wildlife Conservation Strategy for Laikipia Country 2012-2030* deemed pastoralist invasions an urgent matter, it was not easy to draft the document in a way that all parties involved approved of it. In fact, different draft versions were rejected, primarily because they posed the problem in 'us/them' language, an insider told me. Commentators feared that if the strategy discussed the situation in terms of conservationists versus pastoralists, it would further reinforce Laikipia's black/white polarization. Alternatively, they wanted to present Laikipia as a region where all inhabitants, black and white, work together to achieve the best conservation results. By focusing on unity, Laikipia's Wildlife Conservation strategy tried to deconstruct and undo colour

bar politics: it aimed to initiate a discussion of Laikipia's plight in which race is not the main point of departure, and in which white landowners' discursive space is not limited to pointing out how present-day white landownership differs from the 1930s Happy Valley jet set. The document deliberately foregrounded what would be the consequence if no one intervened in the current state of affairs (i.e. the environmental deterioration of large parts of Laikipia), rather than detail the activities that were supposed to prevent such consequences (i.e. conservationists curtailing and controlling pastoralists' movements). Like the poverty alleviation programmes that Ferguson (1990) studied, the Wildlife Conservation Strategy turned Laikipia's management into a technical discussion: it foregrounded ecosystem integrity and ecological connectivity, and as such drew attention away from racial inequalities.

Presenting Laikipia as a whole offers conservationists the dialectics for arguing in favour of large-scale and widespread conservation measures, but the sense of regional integrity and cooperation might be lost on other residents, especially those who live under the harshest and least favourable conditions. I realized this during a chat with James Mwangi, one of the Laikipia Wildlife Forum's conservation officers. He told me that, a few days before we met, his car had broken down when he had been on the way to one of the forum's conservation projects. He was stranded on the roadside in the vicinity of a place called Endana, located on the way from Nanyuki to Rumuruti. As he waited for a repair team he got into conversation with a group of people from the area, and he took the opportunity to discuss Laikipia's environmental issues with them. He said he soon realized that the people he talked to did not at all identify with Laikipia, but spoke of it as if it were Nairobi – a faraway place they had heard of, but never came. An older woman had even asked him if he knew Laikipia, to which he had responded that she herself, and all the others present, were themselves Laikipians. But people said he was wrong, and they maintained they were not from Laikipia but from Endana. 'People from remote areas think that Laikipia is Nanyuki, or that Laikipia is Dol Dol' he indicated, and he concluded: 'they don't understand that Laikipia is right where they are'.

Laikipia's white landowners have employed a variety of strategies to escape colour bar politics, this chapter pointed out, but in the main they have been unable to break away from the discursive patterns set by Laikipia's colonial past. History is inevitable to them, one could say. I consciously phrase it like this, for it acknowledges that these landowners are at least partially the victims of a historical record for which they were not responsible. There are landowners who live up to the stereotype of neo-colonial landlords who think little of their African neighbours, but there are also plenty of landowners who try to be responsible citizens of a country that is highly ambivalent about their presence. Third-generation farmers, or third-generation rancher-turned-conservationists, simply cannot help being the descendants of colonial settlers, yet they continuously carry the burden of their forefathers' actions.

Thus far, anthropology as a discipline has largely failed to address this issue, and it mostly continues depicting white Africans as neo-colonial relics of a troublesome past. I believe that this is

partly the result of an ethnographic void: anthropologists have studied the role of colonial administrators, settlers, and missionaries at great length, but after the continent de-colonized, whites in Africa have largely been excluded from the ethnographic gaze (with the exception of Crapanzano 1985; McIntosh 2006 & 2015; Teppo 2009; Uusihakala 1999; Van der Waal & Robins 2011). This reinforces stereotypes on white presence in Africa, simply because we lack accounts that prove otherwise. Terence Ranger once commented on this:

My desire is to see both whites and blacks in Africa as human beings, each with a fully human capacity for heroism and villainy and mediocrity. And one cannot see either whites or blacks as fully human in the framework of conventional colonial historiography, where white humanity is distorted by the burden of power, and black humanity is distorted by the image of submission.

Ranger (1998: 256)

Like Ranger, I call for social analyses that do not merely reiterate colonial idioms, but that make a sincere effort to come to grips with the ambiguities of post-colonial African societies. To achieve this, we should award honest ethnographic attention to all parties involved and welcome white residents, white development workers, and white conservationists, to mention just a few, into our studies as ethnographic subjects. I have tried to do this in this chapter and continue to do so in the next, where I discuss how Mt. Kenya was implicated in Laikipia's white landowners' perils and struggles.