

Cover Page



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CONCLUSION

MONUMENT OF NATURE?

In December 1997, Mt. Kenya obtained World Heritage status on the basis of its natural characteristics. The designation's apolitical appearance, vested in the representation of 'nature' and 'state party' as technical categories, has been the central theme of this dissertation. Throughout this work I endeavoured to bring into focus what the rhetoric of nature conservation and natural heritage preservation obscures, and I unpacked the Kenyan state party involved in Mt. Kenya's 1997 designation as well as the Kenyan state party that directed Mt. Kenya's 2013 site extension. In doing so, I drew attention to Bongo Woodley's key role in the late 1990s and dealt with Lewa Wildlife Conservancy's current dominant position; I made explicit the issues at stake, and pointed out how the ongoing rivalry between the KWS and the KFS as well as the competition between Laikipia's private conservancies affected Mt. Kenya's World Heritage status; and I situated Mt. Kenya World Heritage Site in Kikuyu and Kalenjin political elites' struggles over power as well as in Laikipia's White Highlands' history and the present day implications of that history. Each chapter made its own contributions to this exercise.

In chapter one, I identified a number of key concerns for studying World Heritage Sites. Among others, I historicized heritage's central role in nation-building and state-making, and I emphasized the authority that the 1972 World Heritage Convention ascribes to national state parties. I suggested that many World Heritage studies echo this official discourse of state authority over World Heritage Sites, thus failing to address the notion of World Heritage state party critically. Based on the work of

scholars such as Abrams (1988), Mitchell (1991), Taussig (1993), Trouillot (2001), and Radcliffe-Brown (1940), I took the position that there is no such thing as ‘the state’ – there are constantly changing networks of individuals who deploy power in the name of the state, yet whose command very much depends on the extent to which an image of the state as a unified and collective source of intention is upheld. Translating this to World Heritage, I argued that it is crucial to deconstruct specific World Heritage nominations and designations to the level of the actual individuals involved. When we fail to do this we are likely to miss how World Heritage articulates and reinforces struggles over power, for instance between different state representatives and institutions, and thus we risk misunderstanding World Heritage’s workings and effects.

One consequence of the typical reluctance to problematize notions of the state and state actors in relation to World Heritage is that it has become generally accepted that World Heritage is a nationalist instrument that buttresses state ideologies (see for instance Askew 2010, or the case studies of Hevia 2001; Long & Sweet 2006; Scott 2002; Silverman 2011). However, the case of Mt. Kenya suggests that World Heritage’s relation to the state and nationalism is not straightforward: when we closely examine who contributed to a World Heritage designation when, for what purposes, and under which circumstances, we might find that World Heritage serves a range of purposes, of which giving expression to nationalist sentiments is only one.

Finally, I considered the tendency in many World Heritage studies to treat ‘the state’ as a given (rather than as a problem) in light of how World Heritage at large depoliticizes (Ferguson 1990) heritage identification and preservation. That is to say, it reduces complex social and political matters to an expert discourse that makes believe that heritage management is technical rather than political (see also Li 2007 on ‘rendering technical’). World Heritage’s technical idiom reduces state parties to administrative entities that merely serve a bureaucratic purpose, but it also, for instance, depicts ‘nature’ and ‘ecological integrity’ as simple scientific facts to be recovered by trained specialists. In doing so, it makes invisible the politicking over what is and is not accepted as natural, and it obscures that nature is a culturally defined category that in itself might be considered a form of cultural property.

In chapter two, I introduced Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) warden Bongo Woodley, who served on Mt. Kenya between 1989 and 2006, as the mastermind of Mt. Kenya World Heritage Site. Throughout his term, Woodley was in conflict with the Forest Department over the authority to supervise the mountain. Due to former colonial policies, both institutes had an official mandate over the area, yet their intentions with Mt. Kenya differed notably: the KWS practiced colonial ideals of fortress conservation and meant to protect the mountain’s forests against human exploitation, but the Forest Department carried out large-scale logging operations.

In the mid-1990s, KWS director David Western asked Bongo Woodley to draft a document to nominate Mt. Kenya for World Heritage status. The latter took this as an opportunity to outwit the Forest Department and grab control over Mt. Kenya’s management. In the World Heritage nomination

document, Woodley deliberately depicted the mountain as a pristine wilderness area – this image did not correspond with Mt. Kenya's actual condition, but it did offer a canvas for demonizing the Forest Department's ongoing logging in front of a global World Heritage audience. In this way, Woodley hoped to mobilize an international lobby that would urge Kenya to remove the Forest Department from office.

Not long after Mt. Kenya's World Heritage designation, the KWS, in cooperation with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and a conservation platform called the Kenya Forest Working Group (KFWG), carried out two aerial surveys on Mt. Kenya. Both surveys underscored the Forest Department's mismanagement, and both called for the need to curtail the Forest Department's rights over Mt. Kenya's forests. In 2000, the Kenyan government finally cancelled the Forest Department's mandate, after which the KWS became Mt. Kenya's sole official overseer. However, the Forest Department denounced the decision: it never left Mt. Kenya's forest stations and to this day the two institutes fight over the mountain's resources. Mt. Kenya's 1997 World Heritage listing thus did not remedy the area's management conundrum. Indeed, instead of the World Heritage designation offering a solution to Bongo Woodley's problems it was itself the product of his predicament. World Heritage status did not change the power dynamics at play – instead it reproduced them and offered them a new outlet.

In chapter three, I examined Mt. Kenya's cultural and political histories. I explained that the political establishment in place when Mt. Kenya became a World Heritage Site did not allow for a celebration of these histories because they were central to the symbolic capital of its strongest opponents, the country's Kikuyu population. In the late 1930s, Kikuyu spokesman Jomo Kenyatta published a monograph called *Facing Mt. Kenya: The Tribal Life of the Gikuyu*. This work, together with Mt. Kenya's role in the Mau Mau uprisings of the 1950s, which at the time were interpreted as a Kikuyu revolt against colonial domination, consolidated the mountain's image as a Kikuyu place. Jomo Kenyatta's inauguration as Kenya's first president further reinforced this, and in due time Mt. Kenya came to symbolize the control that Kikuyu politicians gained over Kenya's post-independent political apparatus.

When Jomo Kenyatta passed away in 1978 Daniel Arap Moi took over the presidency. The latter continued the clientelistic politics that Jomo Kenyatta had put in place, but turned them to benefit his Kalenjin constituency. Moi marginalized Jomo Kenyatta's former Kikuyu affiliates, and instituted a strict regime that did not tolerate opposition parties. These conditions changed in 1991 after international organizations such as the World Bank cut off aid and demanded political reforms. In response, President Moi re-introduced a multi-party political system as well as quadrennial elections. These reforms fostered tribal oppositions, and especially from the second half of the 1990s, ethnic competition over administrative power has intensified.

When the KWS submitted Mt. Kenya's World Heritage nomination to the World Heritage Committee, Kenya's second round of multi-party elections was pending. In those days, President Moi

was most strongly challenged by the country's Kikuyu population: the Kikuyu politicians who had been replaced after Jomo Kenyatta's death encouraged Kikuyu communities to vote as one united block, and former Mau Mau war songs were revived in the region around Mt. Kenya. With elections drawing nearer, the Moi regime did everything in its power to subvert Kikuyu solidarity. However, it did not prevent Mt. Kenya's World Heritage designation. I argued that this was because the nomination that Bongo Woodley drafted 'naturalized' the mountain: it exclusively spoke of Mt. Kenya's natural features, and in doing so it gave the impression that there was nothing else to discuss. Thus, it tied in with incumbent politicians' larger efforts to downplay Kikuyu cohesion, and the Moi regime therefore had no incentive to arrest Mt. Kenya's World Heritage listing. This is not to suggest that Mt. Kenya's natural World Heritage status was the result of deliberate political engineering. Rather, Moi and his allies just let the nomination run its course because it fitted their political ambitions – had the nomination proposed to celebrate Mt. Kenya's cultural history, the situation would certainly have been different.

At the end of chapter three, I warned against seeing politics everywhere, in everything. Mt. Kenya's natural World Heritage designation came to serve a larger political purpose, but its manifestation cannot be explained in terms of this purpose – it was Bongo Woodley and the KWS that pushed for Mt. Kenya's World Heritage listing, for reasons that had nothing to do with nation-building or tribal competition over decision-making power. This illustrates that World Heritage studies should be cautious in explaining the progression of World Heritage processes in terms of the outcome, for Mt. Kenya World Heritage Site reveals that even when a designation is of service to office-holding politicians it does not necessarily mean it was also plotted as such.

In chapter four, I examined how racial colonial histories continue to inform Laikipia's land debate. With the Maasai movements of 1904 and 1911 the British colonial administration opened former Masai Land to white settlement. Subsequently, the area turned into a hub of colonial immigrants who founded farms or cattle ranches, and the region became known as the White Highlands. After independence, a part of these European settlers returned to their country of origin. The lands that became vacant were subjected to state-orchestrated resettlement programmes, although the areas that were too arid for agriculture were typically sold to other European settlers or acquired by members of Kenya's upcoming political elite. In sum, certain parts of the former White Highlands land subdivided in small African settlements while at the same time a significant number of large white-owned estates remained intact.

Apart from the few white-owned estates that were fertile enough to farm, most Europeans continued ranching. But in the late 1980s and early 1990s Kenya's cattle farming industry collapsed. As a result, ranch owners collectively sought alternative ways to make their lands profitable. In Laikipia, the part of the former White Highlands that is closest to Mt. Kenya, most ranches converted to private conservancies: in the course of the past twenty-five years, nature conservation became Laikipia's core business, and today there are many NGO projects as well as an upcoming safari

industry. But the future of Laikipia's conservancies is uncertain. Firstly, Maasai groups continue to challenge white landowners' property rights and from time to time they call upon the Kenyan government to redress colonial injustices. In addition, large landownership came under further pressure due to recent legislative changes. In August 2010, the Kenyan government adopted a new Constitution and in May 2012 it introduced a new Land Act. These statutes made land ownership rights the preserve of Kenyan citizens, and they restrict land leases by non-citizens to a maximum period of ninety-nine years.

Under these conditions, Laikipia's white landowners have developed a range of strategies to ward off the risk of expulsion, but their endeavours are complicated by colour bar politics. In the past, the colour bar served to protect the privileges of Europeans but today it has an opposite effect: in contemporary Kenya white descent marks the need to constantly account for and legitimize one's presence. In light of this, Laikipia's white landowners typically emphasize how they improve national well-being, for instance because they pay taxes or because they contribute to the country's food security. But the specific history of the White Highlands installed a narrative of white dominance that complicates such justifications. Most importantly, this narrative exaggerates Laikipia's present-day whiteness and it downplays the presence of African pastoralists and small-scale farmers since 1963 – as a result, Laikipia still has not managed to shake off the image of being almost exclusively white. On occasion, this image translates into calls for retaliation, and from time to time Laikipia's white residents are faced with politicians or protest groups who demand their eviction.

The actions against Laikipia's white landowners illustrate just how precarious the position of white residents in present-day African societies can be. Unfortunately, this has only received scant attention from social scientists (with the exception of Crapanzano 1985; McIntosh 2006 & 2015; Teppo 2009; Uusihakala 1999; Van der Waal & Robins 2011). Post-colonial scholars have tended to examine whites in Africa historically rather than ethnographically: colonial agents such as missionaries, administrators and explorers have been studied in great depth, but only rarely are white Africans welcomed into anthropological fieldwork as informants and subjects of investigation. As a result, the discipline runs the risk of reiterating colonial idioms rather than analysing their place in contemporary African societies, thus playing into racist stereotyping. To prevent this, I argued at the end of chapter four, we need more ethnographic work that asks what it means to be a descendent of a colonial settler in Africa today.

In chapter five, I discussed how Mt. Kenya World Heritage Site was drawn into the ongoing reproduction of Laikipia's colonial and racist past. In 2010, Lewa Wildlife Conservancy, which borders Mt. Kenya in the north, requested an extension of Mt. Kenya World Heritage Site to include them. Like the rest of Laikipia's conservancies, Lewa Wildlife Conservancy had grown out of a cattle ranch, which had been founded in the early 1900s by a settler family named Craig. It had been one of the first to recognize the potential of wildlife conservation, and already in 1983 it had begun hosting a small rhino project. This project expanded rapidly, and in the mid-1990s the entire ranch was turned

into a wildlife sanctuary. This wholesale transformation was unprecedented in Kenya, and its success set an example for Laikipia's wildlife industry that developed in its wake. Eventually, Lewa Wildlife Conservancy became a powerful player within this industry, primarily due to its stake in the foundation of other conservancies and conservation platforms, and because of its leading role in the preservation of iconic species.

Despite Lewa Wildlife Conservancy's relatively strong position, its executives nevertheless worried about the unpredictability of Laikipia's colour bar politics as well as about the curtailment of white landownership rights more generally. To prevent the conservancy's confiscation, either by discontent African farmer and pastoralists or by the state administration, these executives implemented a number of measures. Among others, they invested in community work and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programmes; they cultivated partnerships with influential politicians; and with the help of the American organization The Nature Conservancy (TNC) they staged a land sale to change the conservancy's legal status from private to corporate. Moreover, Lewa Wildlife Conservancy applied for World Heritage designation. The initiators behind the conservancy's World Heritage quest anticipated that World Heritage status would reinforce Lewa Wildlife Conservancy's political capital: if the conservancy became the collective property of a global heritage community, then this community could be mobilized to demand ongoing preservation if the Kenyan government announced plans to cancel title deeds or alter present land use. World Heritage thus offered Lewa Wildlife Conservancy an international podium on which to call for perpetual safekeeping, should Kenya's landownership issue or Laikipia's land debate escalate.

Initially, the World Heritage Centre rejected Lewa Wildlife Conservancy's application for the extension of Mt. Kenya World Heritage Site due to a number of procedural inaccuracies. Most importantly, the application was stranded because it did not match Mt. Kenya's original World Heritage designation – the way in which Bongo Woodley had described Mt. Kenya in the late 1990s served as a *fait accompli*, and the World Heritage Committee could only consider the application if it fitted this description. This demonstrates World Heritage's static understanding of heritage, which assumes that a site's meaning is fixed in time and exists in isolation of social and political developments. After Lewa Wildlife Conservancy received the World Heritage Centre's feedback it rewrote and resubmitted the application, even though the Craig family's land sale had already helped to secure the property's conservation future by then. Lewa Wildlife Conservancy's second World Heritage application was also troublesome for a number of reasons, including the land's complicated ownership arrangements and the disputable ecological merits of a site extension, yet IUCN backed the request. The World Heritage Committee adopted the organization's advice, and in July 2013 Lewa Wildlife Conservancy was finally added to Mt. Kenya World Heritage Site.

After designation, Lewa Wildlife Conservancy began to employ its World Heritage status for fundraising purposes. Among other things, the conservancy changed its logo and launched a new website on which it now highlights its place on the World Heritage List and conceals its ranching

history. Although Lewa Wildlife Conservancy immediately turned its newly obtained World Heritage status into a PR tool, I argue against viewing the event as a mere merchandizing or branding exercise. On the one hand, the World Heritage label acted as a mobilizer in its own right, as it encouraged stakeholders seeking the attention of international spectators to take action. On the other hand, Lewa Wildlife Conservancy's World Heritage designation gives expression to the conservancy's powerful position both regionally and nationally, for without the right contacts and the necessary support of key figures it would not have been able to follow World Heritage's strict bureaucratic procedures (which, for instance, demand state approval). The case of Lewa Wildlife Conservancy then illustrates that World Heritage is not a mere trademark – it is a catalyst, and it is likely to reproduce existing power structures.

Several larger arguments ran through this dissertation. First, every chapter in one way or another problematized the notion of the Kenyan state, and by extension stressed that there is little sense in understanding World Heritage as a mere state tool (as for instance Askew 2010 suggests). In the late 1990s, the government institute KWS requested World Heritage status for Mt. Kenya because it hoped that this would help to curtail the management rights of another government institute, the Forest Department. This demonstrates that World Heritage can simultaneously serve, and hinder, different arms of the state. That the Moi government endorsed Mt. Kenya's World Heritage designation adds a dimension to this: it suggests that, even in those cases where different state representatives support one and the same World Heritage application, they might do so for completely different reasons. Chapters four and five further dealt with World Heritage's ambivalent relation to the state, for they revealed how a conservancy started a lobby for World Heritage status with the deliberate intention to oppose Kenya's state administration if necessary. In addition, these chapters included a variety of examples that emphasized just how problematic it is to conceive of the Kenyan state as an exclusive and unified source of power. For instance, they described how the politician Mwangi Kiunjuri attacked private conservancy owners, which sat uncomfortably with the KWS's official policy to improve private-public partnerships; they showed that although Lewa Wildlife Conservancy is not a state actor it does have close relations with state representatives such as Francis ole Kaparo and Julius Kipng'etich, which guarantees them certain privileges; and they described how the non-governmental organization TNC took up state responsibilities and behaved like a state agent when it directed the revision of the 2013 Wildlife Act. All these examples underscore that boundaries between state and non-state actors, as well as boundaries between private and national agendas, are constantly reshaped and continuously under negotiation (see also Li 2005; Mitchell 1991; Trouillot 2001).

Another theme that introduced itself both during Mt. Kenya's original World Heritage designation as well as during the 2013 site adjustment is what I call the 'ownership paradox'. With this I refer to

how stakeholders tried to capitalize on World Heritage's idea of global collective ownership, but with the explicit intention to impound management rights rather than share them. Both Bongo Woodley, who aspired to gain full control over Mt. Kenya's forests, and the executives of Lewa Wildlife Conservancy, who wanted to prevent a transfer of property to the Kenyan government or pastoralist groups, interpreted the notion of 'collective heritage' as a status that would not diminish but rather reinforce their private control – sharing their treasures with the world at large, they believed, could mobilize a lobby defending their exclusive management authority. I began the first chapter pointing out that World Heritage is vested in inconsistent ownership principles, i.e. collective ownership and state ownership, and I underscored that both principles leave undecided who precisely is endowed with the privilege to supervise. Mt. Kenya World Heritage Site illustrates what such uncertainties may come to look like in practice: when a place belongs to everyone, and when there are no clear arrangements on administrative control, we may all be pulled into the competition over ownership rights.

Finally, all chapters drew attention to the struggles and processes that the technical and depoliticized narrative of Mt. Kenya's World Heritage designation obscures. Now that these struggles and processes have been discussed in detail, I take the position that Mt. Kenya World Heritage Site articulates Kenya's colonial history in various ways. First, the 1997 designation was enmeshed in an administrative conflict between the KWS and the Forest Department, which found its origins in the colonial separation of forest and wildlife management. In addition, the way in which Mt. Kenya eventually came to feature on the World Heritage List subscribed to colonial conceptions of a pristine African wilderness and reinforced colonial ideas about what conservation should be: that is, a military undertaking that protects nature against human exploitation. Secondly, Mt. Kenya World Heritage Site was drawn into the tribal competition over power between Kikuyu and Kalenjin political elites. This competition is vested in how colonialism played up and consolidated tribal identities, as well as in how the British administration helped establish Kikuyu control after independence through Jomo Kenyatta. Third, the 2013 modifications to Mt. Kenya World Heritage Site articulate white landowners' worries over potential expulsion. These worries characterize the controversy over the ongoing presence of colonial descendants in contemporary Kenya, and they revert to colonialism's colour bar.

Here, it may be noted that my suggestion that Mt. Kenya World Heritage Site articulates racial boundaries is, in light of World Heritage's institutional anchor in UNESCO,¹⁰⁵ paradoxical: ever since its foundation in 1945 UNESCO has been preoccupied with race issues, and the organization actively fought racism in different ways. In the 1950s, for instance, it aimed to formulate an alternative to scientific racism, which had provided for the hierarchical race typologies on which Nazism and colonialism thrived (see Brattain 2007; Stoczkowski 2009). This endeavour was closely entwined with the development of anthropology as a discipline, due to the involvement of, among others, Franz Boas's student Ashley Montagu, who rejected racial divisions as a social myth.¹⁰⁶ In later years,

UNESCO adopted Lévi-Strauss's relativist definitions of culture and ethnicity in the hope to foster intercultural respect (Erikson 2001: 128). Yet, such attempts notwithstanding, Mt. Kenya World Heritage Site suggests that UNESCO still has a task ahead. As long as the World Heritage programme does not scrutinize and problematize the actual architects of World Heritage Sites, and consequently fails to recognize the social and political dynamics that individual heritage designations play into, then the organization may sustain the conditions for ongoing racial struggles, perhaps without even being aware of it.

From a natural heritage point of view, Mt. Kenya may be a monument of nature – it is a place of extraordinary natural beauty with particular conservation demands that arouses a sense of awe and veneration in conservationists and nature-loving observers alike. Simultaneously, Mt. Kenya is a range of other things. It serves, for instance, as a cultural and political icon, it has been and continues to be a source of administrative struggle over management authority, it inspires nationalist propaganda (recall the hikes of Kisoï Munyao and Teddy Munyao that opened this dissertation), and it is a reminder of imperial expansion and former British rule. At times these different understandings merge, at times they collide, and at times they are simply ignorant of one another. In all cases, they make for messy social realities. Throughout this dissertation I have embraced this messiness. In fact, I am of the opinion that it forms the very tissue of Mt. Kenya World Heritage Site.