

Plague of Bureaucracies: Producing and Territorializing Difference in East Africa, 1888-1940



Connor Joseph Cavanagh

Dissertation Submitted for the Degree of Philosophiae Doctor (PhD)

Department of International Environment and Development Studies (Noragric),
Norwegian University of Life Sciences

2017

Summary

Mahmood Mamdani (1996a: 8) once provocatively argued that “apartheid, usually considered unique to South Africa, is actually the generic form of the colonial state in Africa.” The research objective of this dissertation is to examine Mamdani’s argument in relation to what are now the contemporary states of Uganda and Kenya, but also to trouble us about it for three reasons: one historiographical, one geographical, and one ecological. To fulfil this objective, the dissertation utilizes the methodology of historiographical political ecology (Part I). I have developed and practiced this methodology through archival research at the ‘national archives’ of Kenya (the Kenya National Archives in Nairobi, Nakuru, and Kakamega) and the United Kingdom (The National Archives, Kew, and the British Library, London), as well as via a recursive engagement with the historiographical archive.

The dissertation pertains to an intersection of flows, *inter alia*, of people, capital, institutions, theories, and texts within, to, from, and through a specific area in what are now the states of Uganda and Kenya, but with a primary focus on the former in certain historical periods and on the latter in others. The study area necessarily involves both states, rather than only one, because the region of interest has been administered under a variety of distinct “imperial formations” (Stoler 2006) since 1888. These were, in turn: i) a vaguely-defined ‘British East Africa’ under the mandate of the Imperial British East Africa Company (IBEAC) between 1888 and 1893; the Eastern Province of the Uganda Protectorate between 1894 and 1902; the Kisumu Province, then the North Kavirondo and Uasin Gishu Districts of the East Africa Protectorate before 1920; and eventually the Nzoia Province of the Kenya Colony after 1920.

The empirical results of the dissertation support Mamdani’s assertion that institutional segregation of the sort that led to apartheid in South Africa is the generic form of the colonial state in the study area (Part II). However, the dissertation argues that both the latter and the generic institutions of nature conservation in contemporary Uganda and Kenya share precisely the same trans-colonial genealogy, albeit one that has spawned more complex and internally differentiated bureaucracies over time (Part III). This argument complements Mamdani’s recent observation that the genericity of apartheid cannot be limited to the produced categories of

‘colonial history’ or ‘Africa’ with the corollary that it also cannot be limited to the similarly produced category of ‘society’ (Latour 1993). Differently put, the same generic institutions that were used to stratify and racialize space for the inhabitation of different ‘races’ and ‘tribes’ of humans were also used to stratify and racialize space for the inhabitation of a dualistically-conceived ideological category of nonhuman ‘nature’.

The dissertation proceeds in three parts. Part I historicizes the study’s methodology and conceptual approach, and situates them within the same historiography as the rest of the study. Chapter 2 more fully outlines the research problem with empirical detail, its context, and my own positionality. Chapter 3 develops the concept of historiographical political ecology, and explores considerations of research ethics in relation to this methodology. Chapter 4 examines the thought of Karl Marx and Karl Polanyi vis-à-vis emerging doctrines of the ‘liberal’ governance of dispossession in the mid-to-late nineteenth century British Empire.

Part II interrogates the idiosyncratic ways in which forms of British colonial governmentality in East Africa were infused with practices of institutional segregation and indirect rule. Chapter 5 engages the concepts of indirect rule and the dual mandate as articulated in the thought of Frederick D. Lugard – perhaps the chief architect and *re*-theorist of indirect rule in twentieth-century British colonial Africa – and situates these in relation to the work of Mahmood Mamdani and Bruce Berman. Chapter 6 traces certain “imperious entanglements” in the career trajectories of Frederick Lugard and Sir Harry Johnston in British East Africa, and the unfortunately durable political geographies that those entanglements appear to have produced. Chapter 7 problematizes the early twentieth-century co-production of ‘racial’ and ‘natural’ sciences in the region, and their bureaucratization within the Uganda Protectorate in particular.

Part III explores the above debates through the prism of what became known as the “Dorobo question” in eastern Africa, or uncertainties that surrounded the problem of how to govern apparently forest-dwelling populations throughout the region. Chapter 8 engages the ways in which the former types of ‘scientific’ racism were perceived to be non-contradictory with practices of advocacy and demands for the “protection” of indigenous populations, as well as how those forms of advocacy dovetailed into the early ‘nature preservation’ movement. Chapter

9 highlights how the latter process intersected with broader efforts to racialize and territorialize space for settlers, natives, and nature in Kenya Colony. Chapter 10 traces the experiences of two different and apparently ‘Dorobo’ communities in Kenya Colony of the 1930s, as well as the divergent effects of administrative decisions about whether they were, or were not, Dorobo. Chapter 11 examines the interpretation of these lingering ‘racial scientific’ concepts and discourses by state committees in relation to attempts to definitively answer the ‘Dorobo question’ in Kenya Colony. Chapter 12 is not a conclusion, but an epilogue – it explores the afterlives of these processes of dispossession, and what we can learn from the courage of those who continue to struggle against them.

Overall, the dissertation illuminates the ways in which certain forms of spatial and territorial organization for nature conservation in East Africa are inextricably entangled with these histories and genealogies of the stratification, racialization, and territorialization of space for the produced categories of settlers, natives, and nature under indirect rule colonialism. Viewed through the prism of an historiographical political ecology, this suggests that we might productively appraise conservation areas as after-effects or afterlives of indirect rule colonialism and its ‘more-than-social’ territorialities. Consequently, the study concludes that the most pressing imperative facing biodiversity and forest conservation today is its own far-reaching *decolonization*, and ideally in ways that conclusively disavow the territorialisation of an unscientific and ideologically dualist conception of nature. Given the severity of our contemporary *ecological* problematic, we cannot afford for the decolonization of conservation to be any further postponed.