

“Much in Blood and Money”: Necropolitical Ecology on the Margins of the Uganda Protectorate

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Abstract: Increasingly, political ecologists invoke the concept of “green grabbing” to refer to the ways in which processes of accumulation by dispossession articulate with various imperatives for environmental protection. This paper traces these contemporary processes to their roots in the colonial era, focusing on how dispossession in the name of environmental protection intersects with complex historical geographies of state formation and internal territorialisation. Drawing upon the case of Mount Elgon in Britain’s Uganda Protectorate, in particular, we reconstruct the ways in which the interrelated “birth” of both conservation and transcontinental agrarian markets were intimately connected to the emergence and normalisation of the colonial state itself. In doing so, we propose the term *necropolitical ecology* as a framework to encompass the ways in which contemporary “green grabs” partially emerge from racialised modes of colonial appropriation, the violence of which often still lingers in agencies and institutions of environmental governance in the contemporary postcolony.

Keywords: territorialisation, primitive accumulation, necropolitics, colonialism, political ecology, conservation

Colonial occupation itself was a matter of seizing, delimiting, and asserting control over a physical geographical area—of writing on the ground a new set of social and spatial relations (Achille Mbembe 2003:25)

If [others] continually see and hear of the defiance shown us by the Bagishu, it may, I am afraid, have the affect [*sic*] of throwing the country back some ten years and costing us *much in blood and money* to return it to its present state of advancement. It is therefore not only with the object of punishing the recalcitrant sections of the Ba-Gishu but also with a view to the advancement of the country as a whole that I have ventured to recommend that rigorous police measures should be taken to terminate once and for all the defiant attitude of these people. Report from H.M. Sub-Commissioner to H.M. Commissioner’s Office, Uganda Protectorate, 19 November 1906 (emphasis added)¹

Introduction

In December 1906, one Captain Archer led the 4th Battalion of the King’s African Rifles to Mbale at the foot of Mount Elgon, near the border between the Uganda

Protectorate and the East Africa Protectorate. Archer's task was to conduct a "punitive raid" on the Bagisu people of Namasindwo County, who had ostensibly refused both to pay their hut taxes and to accept the authority of the intermediary Baganda officials that the British installed in the region. Indeed, this particular clan of Bagisu had recently murdered a number of tax collectors and razed their outpost—a degree of insubordination that the British apparently could no longer ignore. After all, established by imperial decree only in 1894, the Uganda Protectorate was still in its infancy. To the highland populations of the East African Rift—inhabiting a chain of extinct volcanoes stretching nearly from the contemporary Republic of South Sudan to Lake Victoria—the imperial pomp and grandeur of both the British and their precocious state was still but a distant oddity. As such, it was clear to the Protectorate's administration that a heavy-handed response to this violence was all but mandatory. "Though one cannot but admire the courageous and independent spirit of the wild tribes in the Elgon district", Archer's superior later wrote from the Protectorate's headquarters in Entebbe, "nothing but severe punishment will impress upon them the fact that murder and anarchy must cease among them".²

The primary objective of this paper is to demonstrate that, far from constituting an outburst of senseless brutality, such "murder and anarchy" reveals insight into the geographical imaginary of a population straddling the precipice between a familiar *status quo ante* and the imposition of an ominously colonial-capitalist modernity. Drawing upon the case of Mount Elgon in the nascent Uganda Protectorate, in particular, we adopt colonial agriculture and conservation as a lens to examine the precise ways in which the British administration also violently imposed such "modern" institutions as the state and the transcontinental market economy. As political ecologists have long documented, the institutionalisation of protected areas restricted local access to livelihood-supporting land, wildlife, and forest products, while the imposition of colonial taxes simultaneously forced households to produce cash crops—such as cotton and coffee—for export markets (Adams and Hutton 2007; Neumann 1998). Simply put, such techniques of colonial governance were not truly biopolitical, in the strict Foucaultian sense of actively "making live" or otherwise "letting die" (Li 2009). Instead, they were "necropolitical", primarily seeking to create metaphorical "*death worlds* ... forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of *living dead*" (Mbembe 2003:40), wherein hyper-exploited subject populations possessed neither right nor entitlement to the benefits of the surplus value generated by their labour (Banerjee 2008; McIntyre and Nast 2011). Indeed, predicated upon a racialised distinction between citizen and subject (Mamdani 1996), colonial policy and practice thus ultimately determined who could, and who could not, access even the most basic means of subsistence. Initially with "the stroke of a pen" (Peluso and Lund 2011:674), but notably also with the wanton use of military force, such decisions overrode and rendered illegitimate longstanding rights of possession, use and stewardship (Blomley 2003; Springer 2013a).

Although numerous scholars have chronicled the turbulent interactions between resource managers and colonised populations (for a review, see Adams and Hutton

2007), we wish to contribute to this discourse by specifically highlighting the ways in which colonial state formation was not an unrelated, inevitable or inexorable process. As Roderick Neumann (1998:34–35) once observed, “conservation laws are at once part of the wider process of land and resource seizure by the colonial state, and a symbolic legitimation of that process”. Taking this assertion even further, our argument is that we should perceive resistance to both colonial agriculture and conservation not merely as a knee-jerk reaction to their deleterious socioeconomic *effects*, but rather in the same way that it was perceived by colonial administrators themselves: as a challenge to the legitimacy of colonial state formation *as such*, costing “much in blood and money” to suppress.³

A re-examination of these processes is warranted today, we claim, given that geographers and political ecologists have rekindled their interest in supposedly “new” incarnations of similar environmentally justified reforms and enclosures. Recently, such interest has materialised under the rubric of the concept of “green grabbing”, or environmentally justified land grabbing (Fairhead et al 2012). In general, these inquiries illuminate the ways in which processes of “primitive accumulation” (Marx 1995 [1867]:500) or “accumulation by dispossession” (Harvey 2005:137) increasingly articulate with various imperatives for environmental protection: for the conservation of biodiversity (Kelly 2011), for the mitigation of climate change (Bumpus and Liverman 2008), and even for the protection of marine resources (Benjaminsen and Bryceson 2012). Yet, as Fairhead et al (2012:247) observe, understanding the “new” dimensions of these processes also denotes the need to examine “clear continuities” with past appropriations and productions of nature. To fully appreciate the lingering traces of these violent histories, we claim, a conceptual focus on primitive accumulation should thus be complimented with one on “internal territorialisation” (Vandergeest and Peluso 1995:387), or on the ways in which enclosures of the commons were—and in many ways still are—intimately connected not just to the expansion of capital, but also to the formation and normalisation, even the *glorification*, of states. Indeed, echoing our epigraphical *homage* to Achille Mbembe, Peluso and Lund (2011:673) define territorialisation as “no less than power relations written on the land”. In this sense, colonisation is territorialisation *par excellence*, concerned as it was—to borrow one of Frantz Fanon’s (1963:37) famous phrases—with producing “a world divided into compartments”.

This argument is supported in four sections. First, we draw upon postcolonial reconfigurations of Michel Foucault’s (1978, 2003) concept of biopolitics to illuminate the ways in which the Uganda Protectorate exhibited certain features of what Mbembe (2003:22) describes as a “concatenation of biopower, the state of exception, and the state of siege”. Such an approach will assist us in identifying the unique characteristics of *colonial* state territorialisation, as opposed to the processes that unfolded within the domestic space of European nation-states, or in the post-independence era in their former colonies. Second, we outline a performative framework for analysing these processes, which conceptualises state space as a dominant, but not a solitary, monopolistic, or uncontested, incarnation of political territory. Third, as an empirical example of these discussions, we examine the practices, technologies, and strategies that the British colonial administration used to draw the specific landscape of Mount Elgon under the

authority of the wider Uganda Protectorate. We conclude with a discussion of the ways in which further inquiries in necropolitical ecology promise to yield insights into both historical and contemporary geographies of conservation, agrarian change and environmental governance.

Necropolitical Ecology, or, The Colony as Predatory Socio-ecological System

In the first instance, our invocation of the concept of necropower refers to postcolonial engagements with Michel Foucault's seminal analysis of "the art of government" from the seventeenth century onward (Banerjee 2008; Legg 2007; Mbembe 2003). As is well known, Foucault (1978:138) argues in the first volume of *The History of Sexuality* that the classical "sovereign power" of monarchs to "take life or let live" has gradually been complimented by the power to "foster life or disallow it to the point of death". For Foucault (2003:240–241), modern power thus operates via the twin poles of the "man-as-body" and "man-as-species", through the interrelated scales of an "anatomo-politics" of the body, and a "biopolitics" of the species or population, respectively. Under a biopolitical regime, however, the act of letting die is not *entirely* passive; indeed, Foucault (2003:254–255) is at pains to illuminate the ways in which "racism"—understood as a logic that separates the normative elements of a population from "the inferior race (or the degenerate, or the abnormal)"—constitutes the primary means of inducing a caesura "between what must live and what must die". Moreover, although Foucault is often criticised for his inattention to the particularities of colonial domination (Legg 2007), he notes elsewhere the ways in which various governance strategies arose in Europe as the result of a "boomerang effect" of imperialism, where a "whole series of colonial models was brought back to the West, and the result was that the West could practice something resembling colonisation, or an internal colonization, on itself" (Foucault 2003:103). Here, fingerprinting techniques—first deployed by the British in India—provide perhaps the clearest example of such a "boomerang" technology (Graham 2011:xvii–xviii).

Yet, for a variety of postcolonial scholars, Foucault does not extend his argument to its logical conclusion. Following a line of argument presented in different ways in Hannah Arendt's (1962) *Origins of Totalitarianism*, Aimé Césaire's (1972) *Discourse on Colonialism*, and Giorgio Agamben's (1998) *Homo Sacer*, Mbembe (2003:24) argues that "the colonies are the location par excellence where the controls and guarantees of juridical order can be suspended—the zone where the violence of the state of exception is deemed to operate in the service of 'civilization'". Rather than being characterised by its affirmative capacity to "make live", then, Mbembe's (2003:40) reading of colonial biopower foregrounds the "creation of *death-worlds* ... forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of *living dead*". Here, colonially imposed forms of slavery, taxation, conscription, expropriation and corvée labour constitute perhaps the clearest examples, given that the individuals subjected to these modes of accumulation possessed no formal right or entitlement, either directly or indirectly, to the returns from the surplus value generated by their labour.

Under such conditions, taxation becomes indistinguishable from extortion (Mbembe 2001:88–94), “civilisation” becomes indistinguishable from savagery (Springer 2013b) and law enforcement itself equates with violence (Springer 2013a), precisely because colonial dispossession is careful to operate under the *imprimatur* of both imperial legislation and policy (Gregory 2007:211; see also Harris 2004:176–178). In this sense, the colonial state is born from a particularly virulent incarnation of the originary yet disavowed violence that Walter Benjamin identifies in his seminal critique: for Benjamin (1978 [1921]:284), of course, state violence not only preserves the law, but also forges it in the crucible of an initial struggle against various rivals. Unlike the equality of “civilised” states assumed by Carl Schmitt’s conception of European public order or *Jus publicum Europaeum*, however, pre-colonial African societies were not legible as “legitimate enemies” for the European state, which would be subject to the accompanying constraints of the international law of war (Mbembe 2003:23). Rather than an “enemy” in the sense of European law, the colonial powers in Africa instead encountered a form of ‘*savage life*’—one that occupied a “third zone between subjecthood and objecthood” (Mbembe 2003:24, 26)—which could be subjected to various forms of civilising violence. This was sometimes literally the case, in the form of extrajudicial or “punitive” killings and maimings, as well as indirectly, as in the arbitrary imposition of forced labour and financial taxes that were so oppressive as to threaten the very subsistence of the communities that they were levied upon (eg Davis 2002:50–52; Mamdani 1982).

The salience of these forms of “death-in-life” lead Mbembe (2003:14, emphasis original) to eschew the term “biopolitics” for one that more adequately encompasses the centrality of both extracting surplus value and “letting die” under colonial rule: necropower, or, “*a generalized instrumentalization of human existence and the material destruction of human bodies and populations*”. This is not to say, however, that biopolitics primarily equates to the politics of making live while necropolitics simply equates to the politics of making die. In our reading, necropolitical governance absolutely pursues the work of “making live”, albeit perversely: its goal is not the optimisation of the lives of some at the expense of a minority of others, but rather a strategic “instrumentalisation” or even *zombification* of certain populations, a “making live” simply for the betterment of those deemed to be racially or otherwise categorically superior. Reminiscent of Marx’s (1995 [1867]:160) account of capital as “dead labour, that, vampire-like, only lives by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks”, a necropolitics ensues when certain populations are subsumed under the logic of what Foucault (2003:254–255) terms “racism”, becoming legible to the (colonial) state only as a living reservoir for the evacuation of surplus value. As Marx (1995 [1867]:527) once further put it, colonial governance comprises the “extirpation, enslavement and entombment in mines of the aboriginal population ... the turning of Africa into a warren for the commercial hunting of black skins”. While this latter description might first strike the reader as a mere overstatement, it certainly resonates with necropolitical “shoot on sight” responses to poaching and other supposed violations of colonial environmental law that followed the often violent enclosure of forests and other common property resources (eg Neumann 1998:34–35).

Such a necropolitical conceptualisation of colonial governance provides us with a useful means for rethinking the interrelated economic, ecological and territorial exigencies faced by imperial powers in East Africa and elsewhere. With reference to the Uganda Protectorate, in particular, Mamdani (1976:40–41) reminds us that “the fundamental crisis of the colonial state, in the long run, was production ... [whereas] the immediate problem of the colonial state was the problem of control”. The result is a context in which the state needs to ensure the subsistence of subject populations, but only to the extent that such actions facilitate the efficient extraction of surplus value from them. Under this arrangement—in which the colonial state “claims sovereignty without granting citizenship” (Kearns 2007:7)—there is no reciprocally enforceable constitution between coloniser and colonised of the kind that originally allowed European states to define themselves as public goods (Mbembe 2001:91–92). The colonial state’s pretenses about making subject populations live, in other words, were based on a model of contingent privilege rather than of citizenship or right, denoting that the work of “civilisation” proceeded under the rubric of charity or trusteeship rather than constitutional obligation.

With respect to the interrelated role that taxation, conservation and other forms of enclosure played in these processes, moreover, we encounter what we will call a *necropolitical ecology* of colonial governance. Fusing the perspectives of necropolitics and political ecology—a field that seeks to understand the ways in which the political dimensions of both the symbolic and the material are articulated within socio-environmental relations (Moore 1993; Peet and Watts 1996), we argue that a necropolitical ecology provides a fuller account of both the social meanings of colonial processes as well as their material outcomes for colonised populations. In this context, the imperial programme of extracting surpluses from East African peasantries is necessarily an ecological initiative, given that the project of “writing on the ground a new set of social and spatial relations” (Mbembe 2003:25) inherently entails the reordering of pre-colonial agriculturalist, pastoralist, and hunter-gatherer modes of production. In other words, the first move of such a necropolitical ecology is to override and reconfigure the socio-environmental relations that enable largely nonfinancial, noncapitalist livelihoods, or, to paraphrase Marx (1995 [1867]:501), to facilitate the process of divorcing the producer from the subsistence-based means of production. Indeed, from such a postcolonial perspective, we are perhaps able to fully appreciate Marx’s (1995 [1867]:326) argument that the development of capitalist agriculture constitutes the “the art, not only of robbing the labourer, but of robbing the soil”, as colonial governance denotes that both surplus value and soil nutrients, as well as material agricultural products, are appropriated for the benefit of populations far removed from the producers themselves. In this regard, a necropolitical ecology arguably provides the original basis for the “metabolic rift” that emerged between the colonies and their metropolitan counterparts from the long sixteenth century onwards (Moore 2011).

Of course, this process is well known to Marxist political ecologists as primitive accumulation (Kelly 2011), in which conservation and other forms of enclosure constitute the primary means of alienating producers from land and resources

(Fairhead et al 2012). Under colonialism, moreover, the violent history of these enclosures is certainly written, as Marx (1995 [1867]:501) once put it, in “letters of blood and fire”. This is true both directly, in the use of military force to collect taxes, expropriate land or to enforce resource access restrictions, as well as indirectly, in the form of the slow violence of exacerbated hunger and disease affecting the *lumpenproletariat* after its dispossession (Li 2009). Hence, the perspective of necropolitical ecology offers not just a postcolonial reading Marx’s account of primitive accumulation, but also Pierre-Joseph Proudhon’s (1966 [1840]) famous polemic regarding the nature of property itself. Proudhon’s thesis that “property is theft” is well known: less frequently recalled, however, is his corollary that “property is homicide”, because “after having robbed the labourer by usury” it “murders him slowly by starvation” (Proudhon 1966 [1840]:177). In this way, we argue, a necropolitical ecology brings into focus many of the famines that accompanied colonial rule in East Africa and elsewhere (Davis 2002; Mamdani 1982).

Differently put, even when a form of customary land tenure remained intact throughout the colonisation process, as it did in the Bugisu region of Mount Elgon (Bunker 1987:19–21), taxation, resource access restrictions and *corvée* labour dramatically changed the *de facto* status of this form of land ownership. Suddenly, landowners were only “free” so long as they provided cash, goods and unpaid labour in amounts that were considered adequate to the local representatives of the colonial state. If they failed to do so, they could be subjected to the violence of a “punitive raid”, such as the one described in the opening paragraph of this paper, risking both their property and their very lives in the process. But again, through the lens of necropolitical ecology, primitive accumulation via taxation/extortion constitutes only the first imperative of government. Indeed, we claim, far from being the primary objective of colonisation, primitive accumulation simply constitutes the process that makes the broader progression of colonial state formation materially possible. It is the means, in other words, by which imperialism finances itself. As Edward Said (1994:7) once wrote: “At some very basic level, imperialism means thinking about, settling on, controlling land that you do not possess, that is distant, that is lived on and owned by others”. Our point, in short, is that such (re)territorialisation is an inherently expensive process, whose political economy foregrounds the colonial state not as a “public good”—as conventionally assumed of its contemporary Western form—but instead primarily as a “relationship of domination” (Mbembe 2001:94). Hence, in the next section, we examine the precise techniques, strategies and technologies through which state territory may be profitably annexed, consolidated and re-coded as “natural” under colonial rule.

Performing the Colonial State: Necropolitical Ecologies of Internal Territorialisation

To fully comprehend the necropolitical functions of the enclosure of land and resources within Britain’s colonies, much can be gained by complimenting an analysis of primitive accumulation with one focused on processes of (internal) territorialisation. Geographical engagements with the latter concept often trace

their respective intellectual genealogies to Vandergeest and Peluso (1995:388), who argue that “territorialisation is about excluding or including people within particular geographic boundaries, and about controlling what people do and their access to natural resources within those boundaries”. More specifically, *internal* territorialisation refers to the precise ways in which states secure and maintain control of their respective domains, through, for example, cadastral surveys and the institution of taxes and levies (Vandergeest and Peluso 1995), scientific forestry and land use planning (Peluso and Vandergeest 2001; Scott 1998; Sivaramakrishnan 1999) or the strategic resettlement of specific populations (Peluso and Vandergeest 2011).

Accordingly, both modern cartography and the implementation of legal-institutional methods for assigning, demarcating and enforcing property rights—what Blomley (2003) refers to as “the survey” and “the grid”—play an instrumental role in enabling states to strengthen their control over territory amidst perpetual contestation and alternative territorialisations. From this perspective, enclosures of the commons are not *only* necessary for the institutionalisation of capitalist social relations and the generation of a “relative surplus population or industrial reserve army” (Marx 1995 [1867]:436). As Scott (1998:23) notes in relation to the rise of scientific forestry in Europe, “[c]ommon land, although it was a vitally important subsistence resource for the rural poor, yielded no revenue ... it was inefficiently exploited, and it was fiscally barren”. Differently put, while enclosures of the commons are sometimes interpreted solely as part of a process of primitive accumulation, the state also inherently harbours an interest in the restriction of access to common property, given that such measures allow it to optimise both the production and governance of tax revenues. Indeed, in doing so, the state simultaneously consolidates its control of populations, territory, and natural resources.

Yet, we would like to contribute to this discourse by emphasising the iterative, or indeed, the *performative* character of internal territorialisation. States, after all, are not “things-in-themselves” (Latour 1993); ontologically, we claim, they are better conceived as institutionalised assemblages of actors mobilised around a common territorial objective. As Mathews (2011:10) puts it, “state-making requires continuous performance, a work that is always contested and never done”. In order for the state to exist, in other words, this assemblage must continuously perform or reproduce itself through processes of internal territorialisation. Hence, a performative approach helps us to denaturalise and disaggregate territorialisation, thereby revealing the ways in which territorial claims are neither truly monopolistic nor uncontested. As Ballvé (2012:605) succinctly argues, “the politico-judicial defined space of the nation-state is one territory among many and not necessarily the hegemonic one”. Indeed, in this sense, we define the state at the height of its power as a *dominant spatial performance*, which is undertaken by an assemblage of political and economic actors with the common objective of annexing territory.

To this end, our empirical focus on *colonial* state territorialisation is both deliberate and strategic. Within processes of colonial territorialisation, we encounter the salience of James Scott’s (2009) engagement with the concluding lines of Pierre Clastres’ (1987:218) *Society Against the State*: “It is said that the history of peoples who have a history is the history of class struggle. It might be said,

with at least as much truthfulness, that the history of peoples without a history is a history of their struggle against the state.” Of course, this statement is somewhat tongue-in-cheek; like Wolf (1982), Clastres was all too aware of the ways in which the social category of “the traditional”, juxtaposed as it was in colonial modernisation theory to “the modern”, was instead “*denied history*” (Mamdani 1976:2). Rather, these lines draw our attention to the manner in which the European powers *created* transnational market economies in their colonies, deliberately constructing and reconstructing these in ways that best suited the economic needs of certain class interests in the metropole. This is not to say, however, that such a project was straightforward in nature. As both Graham (2011:xvii–xviii) and Legg (2007:266) note, following Foucault’s (2003:103) remarks on the “boomerang effect” of imperialism, the colonies essentially functioned as something of a governance laboratory for European states. In other words, these territories were subjected to all manner of social, economic, political and even ecological experiments, each of which was designed to improve the efficiency of colonial surplus extraction and the simultaneous control of native populations. As we will show in the ensuing section, this was certainly the case in the history of the (colonial) state’s engagement with the landscape of Mount Elgon.

For subject populations, therefore, the struggle against the marketisation of their production strategies, the restriction of access to their resources, and the commodification of their labour was also inherently a struggle against the (colonial) state. As Mbembe (2003:26) famously describes this process:

the writing of new spatial relations (territorialization) was, ultimately, tantamount to the production of boundaries and hierarchies, zones and enclaves; the subversion of existing property arrangements; the classification of people according to different categories; resource extraction; and, finally, the manufacturing of a large reservoir of cultural imaginaries.

This final aspect of territorialisation—the production of cultural imaginaries—is of particular import. Indeed, internal territorialisation does not simply reproduce the state as a social institution—it also serves to normalise and to legitimate it, just as the imposition of a colonial property regime through primitive accumulation serves to obscure the original, constitutive violence inherent to enclosures of the commons (Blomley 2003; Springer 2013b). The task of a necropolitical ecology of territorialisation, in this sense, is thus to illuminate coercive reconfigurations of social and ecological relations, hidden as though they might be under the symbolic violence meted out by the state.

To substantiate this argument with empirical detail, the ensuing section applies such an approach to the manner in which the British colonial administration sought to bring the landscape of Mount Elgon—a 4321 m high extinct volcano, bisected by the boundary with the East Africa Protectorate—under the control of the government of the Uganda Protectorate. As we will see, the colonial dynamics of governing through coffee production—in addition to controlling the ecosystem services it depended upon for its viability, and the ostensibly unruly populations that were expected to cultivate it—foreground the ways in which market-based agricultural production and environmental conservation were linked to broader necropolitical processes of internal territorialisation in the Uganda Protectorate.

A Debut Performance? Territorialising Nature and State on an East African “Frontier”

Little is known of these people, as the country has not yet been opened up to administration (Hobley 1902:57, “Miscellaneous Tribes West of Mount Elgon”)

In its Western, bureaucratic-rational form, the state is a relatively young institution in East Africa. For example, arriving in what is now Uganda in the mid-to-late nineteenth century, the British encountered a wide range of politically disparate kingdoms, chiefdoms and largely non-hierarchical groups. Some of the former, such as the Buganda, Ankole, Toro and Bunyoro kingdoms, possessed well established hierarchies, armed forces, taxation or tributary systems, and sophisticated political institutions (Turyahabwe and Banana 2008:643). Others, such as the Lugbara, Ik, Acholi and Bakiga were largely “acephalous” or only loosely hierarchical (Himmelfarb 2012:65). Further complicating the overall governance “landscape” were nomadic pastoralist groups such as the Karamojong and Pokot, who for the most part attempted to ignore the British project of colonial state formation altogether, most notably by refusing to acknowledge the boundary between the Uganda Protectorate and the East Africa Protectorate (later Kenya Colony) (Mkutu 2008:22–23). Hence, although a variety of small-scale agrarian states existed prior to the arrival of the British, these were surrounded—and in some cases separated from each other—by what Scott (2009:34–35) calls “nonstate space”. That is, by a type of frontier space in which no conventional monopoly on sovereignty, violence or taxation was either held or asserted.

In this sense, the project of colonial state formation in what is now Uganda was fundamentally an attempt to extend control, first, over these centralised agrarian states, and then outward to the “stateless communities” of the frontier (Mamdani 1996:41). As is well known to historians of East Africa, this strategy formed the natural basis for a policy of “indirect rule” in the Protectorate after its creation in 1894 (Bunker 1987:36–37). Indeed, the British initially chose the Buganda kingdom to serve as the conduit for this strategy; the very name of the established Protectorate, Uganda, derives from this early alliance (Thomas 1928). Thus, as Mamdani (1976:41) quotes Sir Harry Johnston, the Protectorate’s first Commissioner, the Buganda–British alliance constituted “a practical attempt to establish on a sound basis a ruling oligarchy, which, under British guidance, might do for Buganda what the landed aristocracy had done ... to give stability to the government of England”. In this sense, the Buganda monarchy constituted perhaps the most crucial link in the assemblage of actors known as the Uganda Protectorate, as they provided an economical means of projecting the power of the colonial state over frontier regions that it would not otherwise have marshalled the necessary resources to control.

The British formalised this alliance with the “Baganda Memorandum of Agreement” in 1900, which in practice institutionalised the privilege of the Baganda *kabaka* (king) over the other kingdoms, chieftains and clans of the newly formed protectorate (Low 2009:337). As Thomas (1928:236) reports, the agreement also afforded the British the right to impose “hut and gun taxes”, and to declare unrestricted Crown ownership of “approximately half the area of the kingdom, [which was] classified for the most part as waste and uncultivated land and forests”.

This latter provision, implemented under the interrelated colonial doctrines of *terra nullius*, unclaimed territory, and *res nullius*, unclaimed property, is of singular importance for histories of conservation, agrarian change and state formation in Uganda. Indeed, it establishes the legal and conceptual basis for the government of the Protectorate to hold previously communally owned or open-access land and resources “in trust”, and was subsequently reinforced with the signing of the Toro Agreement (1900), the Ankole Agreement (1901) and the Bunyoro Agreement (1933). As the foresters Webster and Osmaston (2003:125) note in their history of the Ugandan Forest Department, even in areas where no agreements were signed, “the Governor had the right under the Laws of the Protectorate to appropriate areas which he considered were required for forests”. Consequently, all land and forest that was not held under formalised private property or leasehold arrangements could in principle be categorised as “waste” and expropriated by the colonial government, who would ostensibly then manage it for the “common good” of the Protectorate. Of course, this discourse of the “common good” masked the violent appropriation of rights and resources that were long the basis of subsistence for African populations. As well, it established “the Crown” as the right and legitimate authority to determine the proper use and management of these resources, laying the groundwork for the taxation systems and resource control regimes that would emerge in the early twentieth century. As such, while one could argue that colonies represented spaces of exception in their entirety (Banerjee 2008; Mbembe 2003), the doctrine of *terra nullius* allowed the British to identify discrete areas of intense exploitation *within* colonies, and thus to demarcate especially pertinent zones for the necropolitical gaze of the colonial state.

However, this legal template for expropriation did not translate so easily to all of the societies of Uganda. For instance, lying in between the Baganda at one hierarchical extreme and the Ik on the other were groups such as the Bagisu and the Sebei⁴ in the Mount Elgon region. Initially, as Twaddle (1993:136) argues, both groups largely “remained independent of British colonial control throughout the 1890s, and their perceptions of British intentions appear to have remained most hazy”. Likewise, for Mamdani (1976:22), the Bagisu in particular were one of the few groups that “could be said to conform strictly to [a] description of the communal mode of production”, largely as a result of their past decision to “seek the refuge of isolation” on Mount Elgon. Further, both the Bagisu and the Sebei were loosely organised under a clan system, denoting that their “acephalous” social structure could not be so easily manipulated by a colonial “divide and rule” strategy—especially one predicated on the provision of land as a reward to cooperative chiefs (Norgrove 2002:66–68). Thus, on the Bagisu, Commissioner Sir James Hayes Sadler remarked in a letter to the Earl of Elgin and Kincardine in November 1906:

Though they are believed to number about half a million, there is no cohesion whatever among them and they acknowledge no supreme “Chief”. Each head of a clan considers himself independent of his neighbours and is a law unto himself. During the past three years the Sub-Commissioner of the Province has been trying to civilize these people ... [but] the influence of the Ba-Gishu on the surrounding tribes is beginning to have a bad effect, and I recommend that steps should be immediately taken to quell the unruly spirit which is growing in the vicinity of Mount Elgon.⁵

Here, to follow Scott's (2009:32) reading of Ernest Gellner (1969:41–42), the implicit strategy in such forms of social organisation was perhaps one of “divide so that ye need not be ruled”. Indeed, with no enduring authorities to endorse against rivals, the British found it difficult to exercise influence over the Bagisu in particular, whose social and political structure inherently constrained the whims of individual chiefs (Bunker 1987:35–40).

Moreover, it is important to emphasise that, at the outset of the colonial period, Mount Elgon represented both the geographical and economic periphery of the Protectorate. Too cold and wet to cultivate cotton—“the real maker of the [early] Protectorate”, as Director of Agriculture Samuel Simpson put it (in Youé 1978:165)—Mount Elgon's early significance to the colonial project was chiefly territorial, geared toward bringing local populations and ecosystems under administrative control with the promise of future extraction. In the early years of the Protectorate, colonial officials were unclear about how best to exploit Mount Elgon and legitimised their flexible control over the area through the doctrine of *terra nullius* described above. Harry Johnston (1902:60) went as far as to suggest that the mountain's temperate climes might one day make it suitable for settler occupation: “the seat of a most powerful industrial community of Europeans”. Indeed, as Anderson (2004:34) demonstrates in his analysis of colonial military expansion in the nearby East African Protectorate (later Kenya), the early “process of conquest was uneven and sporadic”, flexibly responding to the shifting terrain of political and economic opportunities and exigencies.

Thus, early taxation on Mount Elgon can be seen as a programme of primitive (and perhaps even *experimental*) accumulation that was designed to identify the most efficient means of both generating tax revenues and asserting centralised state control over territory. In response, however, the first serious clashes between the Bagisu, Sebei and the colonial state apparatus began to emerge in the early twentieth century, as these pressures of taxation and forced labour intensified. Conflicts primarily arose in response to legislation that enabled the imposition of the first “hut tax”, which had the dual effect of producing a discrete juridical entity known as the “household”, which was “legible” to the state for taxation purposes (Scott 1998; Vandergeest and Peluso 1995), and requiring male household heads to pay a yearly sum to the Protectorate or risk being sentenced to one month of unpaid labour (Himmelfarb 2012:66). These burdens were coupled with “thirty days per annum *luwalo* labour (free labour for government projects) ... plus fifty-two days' ‘Saturday labour’” (Heald 1998:27), during which time farmers were forced to work on projects specified by their local administrative officials. As Mamdani (1975:28) asserts, the British administration created these tax and service laws in order to construct a labour market in Uganda, “the logic being that a peasant would have to earn money through employment to pay taxes which could not be paid in kind”. Given that both Bagisu and Sebei economies were almost entirely non-cash based at this juncture, the imposition of a financial tax was understandably and earnestly resisted. Indeed, the Eastern Province in which Mount Elgon is located “recorded at least 17 tax revolts and punitive

expeditions between 1903 and 1911” (Jørgensen 1981:61), several of which were launched by clans of either Bagisu or Sebei.

Initially, the British assigned a Baganda general, Semei Kakungulu, to subdue resistance to taxation in the area with his own troops (Bunker 1987; Heald 1998). It quickly became apparent, however, that Kakungulu and his men intended to pursue their own territorial agenda under the auspices of the overarching colonial mandate, going so far as to actually carve out a small “kingdom”, complete with its own capital and court in the region of Bukedi (Twaddle 1993:160). With regard to the consequences of these processes, the observations of J.B. Purvis (1909:359–360)—a British missionary in the area and one of the first Europeans to live among the Bagisu—are worth quoting at some length:

after some four years’ residence in the district I am bound to say, having earnestly and carefully weighed the seriousness of the statement, that during the years of my residence which mark the introduction of law into Masaba [Elgon] there seems to me to have been less peace, less security of property, and more, very much more, bloodshed than during the period I lived there without direct British administration ... These Baganda tax collectors, many of them of the very worst type, distributed throughout the district and working on the percentage system, could be no other than a menace to peace and prosperity.

Crucially, then, taxation was instituted not merely by colonial-legal decree, but simultaneously by the threat of death or dispossession through expropriation, forced labour or conscription. Here, the difference between law and violence, between civilisation and barbarism, blurs into what Agamben (1998) might term a “zone of indistinction” (see also Gregory 2007; Springer 2013b). Indeed, this indistinction causes Purvis (1909:361, emphasis original) himself to imply a similar observation, noting how “the natives were punished by the expensive and deplorable method of a punitive—I had almost written *primitive*—expedition”. Under such conditions, the relationship between the colonial state and its subject population cannot truly be described as “biopolitical”—rather, considering the ease with which the state could justify the use of violence against the inhabitants of Mount Elgon in its quest to extract surplus value, this relation is more accurately perceived in necropolitical terms (Mbembe 2003).

Ultimately, such revolts only provisionally deterred the imposition of taxes, however, especially given that the maximisation of such revenues was a much more pressing concern for the colonial administration in Uganda than it was in the neighbouring East Africa Protectorate. For example, Thomas (1928:234–235) nicely summarises the interrelated political and financial predicament of the early Uganda Protectorate:

There followed five years during which the country continued to be the stage for successive excursions and alarms ... As a result the net annual cost of occupation which Portal had estimated at £20,000 had by 1899 risen to over £300,000 ... [T]he British taxpayer had, before the close of the century, contributed in all a sum perhaps approaching six millions sterling towards an undertaking which, in its inception, was a concession to public idealism.

In contrast to British East Africa, which the British directly governed as a white settler colony, the native population in Uganda was expected to provide the bulk of the Protectorate's tax revenues. This was at first problematic: as noted by Norgrove (2002:67), the British Treasury was forced to provide a "grant-in-aid" worth 84% of the Protectorate's expenditures in 1903. Hence, the colonial government faced a variety of pressing incentives to "capture the peasantry" (Hyden 1980), rather than to allow rural populations to remain in untaxable subsistence agriculture. In the Uganda Protectorate, in particular, this was pursued through the introduction of two cash crops for export: cotton and coffee (Bunker 1987). In this manner, not only could the colonial administration raise revenue through exports, but the cultivation of these crops also provided a means of providing farmers with the cash income necessary to pay hut taxes, poll taxes and other financial levies (Mamdani 1975:28).

As such, beginning in the 1910s and expanding dramatically in the 1920s with the construction of the East African railway (O'Connor 1965:36), colonial economic policy in the Eastern Province focused on developing a commercially viable, export-oriented coffee industry at Mount Elgon. Indeed, to ensure sufficient production, the cultivation of coffee was made obligatory for all households on the mountain's southern and western slopes (Bunker 1987). By 1950, these coffee exports provided more than 50% of Uganda's foreign exchange, of which the Bugisu region of the mountain, in particular, provided a disproportionate amount (Bunker 1987:259–261). As observed by Himmelfarb (2012:50), farmers in the area provided approximately two-thirds of Uganda's Arabica coffee harvest by 1958, the total value of which exceeded exports of raw cotton, cotton oil and cottonseed combined.

From the perspective of necropolitical ecology, moreover, the crucial point is this: as the economic significance of the Mount Elgon region to the colonial state grew, so too did concerns about its sustainability. Initially, the British were largely uninterested in the health of Mount Elgon's ecosystem. For instance, although Uganda's Scientific and Forestry Department was established in 1898 (Turyahabwe and Banana 2008:643), its 1921 annual report notes that "the forests of Mount Elgon have never been visited by a member of the Forest Department and very little is known concerning their area, composition, etc" (in Webster 1954:5, emphasis added). Formally, the colonial rationale for public conservation in the region—from the late 1920s—officially arose out of concerns related to the water catchment role that the mountain's ecosystem provides for surrounding agrarian communities. Indeed, by the 1940s onward, government documents regularly state that population growth and agricultural encroachment into forests posed the greatest threat to the sustainable functioning of the Mount Elgon watershed (Webster 1954). More broadly, these trends were also reflected in the Protectorate's 1938 Forest Policy, which stresses the need to preserve forests not primarily for the maintenance of indigenous livelihoods, but "for the maintenance of climactic conditions suitable for agriculture, for preservation of water supplies, [and] for provision of forest produce required in agricultural and industrial development" (in Turyahabwe and Banana 2008:646).

In accordance with these policies, portions of Mount Elgon were first gazetted as a “Forest Reserve” in 1929, upgraded to a Crown Forest under Legal Notice No. 100 of 1938, and reclassified again as a Central Forest Reserve under Legal Notice No. 41 of 1948 (Petursson 2011:33). Local communities were not consulted regarding the borders of the reserve, and no arrangements were made to allow for the extraction of resources—such as fuelwood, medicinal herbs and other culturally important resources—from the forest. As Webster (1954:6, emphasis added) puts it in Mount Elgon’s first general management plan, under a section titled “Rights and Privileges”, “*there are no rights*”. In short, the use of state violence against the Bagisu and the Sebei both preceded and followed the enclosure of land and resources with “the stroke of a pen” (Peluso and Lund 2011:637), effectively divorcing local populations from the traditional means of their subsistence-based production. The establishment of the protected area on Mount Elgon thus fulfilled the promise of the doctrine of *terra nullius*, displacing local forms of land and resource management in favour of centralised control. Practically speaking, it prevented Bagisu and Sebei farmers from expanding their fields into forest lands (an historically important strategy for coping with land shortage) and set the stage for ever-increasing restrictions of access to historically significant common property resources (see Himmelfarb 2012).

Thus, in summary, we argue that the conservation of the mountain’s forests was primarily tied, first, to the sustainability of the region’s water-dependent coffee industry, and second, to the ability of the state to curtail non-taxable subsistence livelihoods. Though Mount Elgon was previously marginal to both the political and the economic concerns of the colonial state, the rise of its coffee industry meant that, by the late 1930s, the British were increasingly reliant on the maintenance of its productivity. Under a necropolitical-ecological register, the Forest Department had little to gain by prioritising the indigenous use of forest resources, as such activities generated no financial returns for the fiscally beleaguered colonial state, and would also have inadvertently heightened the ability of communities to maintain both purely subsistence livelihoods and the relative autonomy that accompanies them. Hence, by utilising both physical and legal violence to impose export-oriented cash cropping and forest conservation, the British were instead able to coerce the Bagisu and the Sebei into the steely, cold embrace of the Empire.

Conclusion

This paper has argued that coffee production, taxation and enclosure through conservation constitute the primary means by which the frontier landscape of Mount Elgon was incorporated into the nascent Uganda Protectorate—the embryonic version of the state’s current postcolonial form. Forest preservation on the mountain initially emerged both as a means of ensuring the sustainability of an export-oriented coffee industry and restricting access to the common property resources that sustained non-taxable subsistence livelihoods. In particular, taxation and coffee exports constituted important components of the economic apparatus that the colonial state depended upon for its solvency, and thus—although perhaps more controversially—for its very existence.

This nexus of conservation, state formation and primitive accumulation comprises what we have called a *necropolitical ecology*, in which land, resources and the surplus value arising therefrom were systematically extracted from indigenous populations and utilised to support their further subjugation under imperial rule. Given that the colonial state claimed “sovereignty without granting citizenship” (Kearns 2007:7), such a perspective allows us to fully appreciate Marx’s (1995 [1867]:326) argument that the development of capitalist agriculture constitutes “the art, not only of robbing the labourer, but of robbing the soil”. Indeed, populations at Mount Elgon were thrice robbed by the colonial state: first, of the surplus value generated by their agricultural labour; second, of customary access to common-pool resources; and, third, of the freedom to determine their own livelihoods and forms of socioeconomic organisation. As such, we see how enclosures of the commons were intimately connected not just to the expansion of capital, but inextricably also to colonial state formation, given their necessity for the production and maximisation of tax revenues.

Today, far from remaining consigned to a colonial past, the violence of this necropolitical ecology lingers in contemporary agencies and institutions of environmental governance. At Mount Elgon, such violence has taken the form of recurring, large-scale dispossessions of Bagisu and Sebei communities for both conservation and carbon offset forestry (Himmelfarb 2012; Norgrove 2002). In relation to these contemporary phenomena, however, new questions arise for the study of necropolitical ecology. Precisely when and how, in other words, do postcolonies like Uganda employ the same necropolitical mechanisms as their colonial predecessors? When and where can we say that the state legitimately assumes the role of a public good, rather than merely serving as a “relationship of domination” (Mbembe 2001:94)? What might constitute an affirmatively biopolitical mode of environmental governance in the postcolony, one focused on utilising land, resources and the value arising therefrom for the betterment of whole populations? By engaging with such questions, critical human geographers will contribute—in however small a way—to taming the violence of necropolitical ecology in its newest guise: that of “green” capital and “sustainable” neoliberalism.

Endnotes

¹ Letter dated 19 November 1906, Report from HM Sub-Commissioner to HM Commissioner’s Office. Entebbe: Government of the Uganda Protectorate. Photographed by the first author at the Uganda National Archives, Entebbe, December 2011.

² Letter dated 16 March 1907, HM Commissioner Sir James Hayes Sadler to the Earl of Elgin and Kincardine. Photographed by the first author at the Uganda National Archives, December 2011.

³ Letter dated 19 November 1906, Report from HM Sub-Commissioner to HM Commissioner’s Office. Entebbe: Government of the Uganda Protectorate. Photographed by the first author at the Uganda National Archives, Entebbe, December 2011.

⁴ It is important to note that “Sebei” is an exogenous ethnonym that has historically been used to refer to the group of Kalenjin-speaking agro-pastoralists inhabiting the northwestern side of Mount Elgon, who self identify as Sabiny. We adopt Sebei here as this is the form that appears in colonial documents and historical ethnography.

⁵ Letter dated 26 November 1906, sent from Sir Harry Johnston to the Earl of Elgin and Kincardine. Photographed by the first author at the Uganda National Archives in Entebbe, November 2011.

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