Don’t Show A Hyena How Well You Can Bite: Performance, Race and the Animal Subaltern in Eastern Africa

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Performance Studies and the Designated Emphasis in Critical Theory in the Graduate Division of the University of California, Berkeley

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Abstract

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This dissertation explores the mutual imbrication of race and animality in Kenyan and Tanzanian politics and performance from the 1910s through to the 1990s. It is a cultural history of the non-human under conditions of colonial governmentality and its afterlives. I argue that animal bodies, both actual and figural, were central to the cultural and political project of British colonialism in Africa – and in particular eastern Africa, which continues to be imagined in many circles as both “safari country” and the “cradle of humankind.” I build on extensive archival research to suggest that artistic and scientific activity in colonial Kenya, from the amateur and professional theatre to the natural-historical research conducted at the Coryndon Memorial Museum, helped to define a category of sub-political being that I call “the animal subaltern.” The animal subaltern is a concatenation of all forms of animal life lived below the horizon of “the human.” During the colonial period, this included the wildlife of eastern Africa, the pre-human hominids whose fossilized remains paleoanthropologists like Louis Leakey unearthed, and “natives,” whose political subjectivity the colonial state was determined to suppress. I argue that the forced contiguity of these variously inflected forms of life had a pervasive, if uneven, racializing effect: all of these beings became black. In the post-Second World War struggle for political, cultural and economic independence in eastern Africa, members of the animal subaltern contested their exclusion from the category of the human. I read the work of the Kenyan writer and intellectual Ngũgĩ wa Thion’o and the Tanzanian playwright Ebrahim Hussein as important interventions into this unfolding struggle and its implications for the postcolonial future of their communities. Finally, I consider the environmental activism of Kenya’s “Rhinom Man,” Michael Werikhe, whose performative blurring of the distinction between human and animal in the 1980s and 1990s helped to inaugurate a new model of interspecies solidarity that continues to play itself out to this day.
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Any individual is plural. Recent research has found that slightly more than half the cells in the human body at any time are bacterial— which is to say in some important sense non-human. And yet these tiny fellow travelers are in us and of us—which is to say in some other, equally important sense human after all. Broadening the scope of inquiry even slightly reveals millions of organisms traveling in our wake, an astonishing network of care that extends outward from the Demodex mites that scrub dead skin from our eyelashes to the many non-human mammals we have known and loved and eaten and worn. And then of course there are those who share with us the vexed category of human being, without whom we would not exist, without whom nothing we do would be possible.

I have been privileged to have an extraordinary network behind me throughout the process of writing this dissertation. Very little of this work belongs to me alone, except perhaps the typos. Regrettably, much of the labor that sustained me was anonymous or otherwise invisible to me; I can only express my gratitude in the most general of terms. There are, however, some members of my endlessly plural community that I can name and to whom I can offer particular thanks.

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My field research in Eastern and Southern Africa was sustained by friends, colleagues and mentors at the University of Nairobi, the University of Dar es Salaam, the Kenyan National

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1 Ron Sender, Shai Fuchs, and Ron Milo, “Revised Estimates for the Number of Human and Bacteria Cells in the Body,” *PLoS Biology* 14, no. 8 (August 19, 2016).
Archives, the Archives Section of the National Museums of Kenya, the Nakuru Players Theatre, the Mombasa Little Theatre, Oxford University Press East Africa, the University of the Witwatersrand, the University of Cape Town and the Johannesburg Workshop in Theory and Criticism. I would like to acknowledge in particular Immelda Kithuka and Geoffrey Iruri at the National Museums of Kenya, for the easy access they afforded me to their rich collections; S.G. Kiama at the Wangari Maathai Institute for Peace and Environmental Studies at the University of Nairobi, for his enthusiasm for and support of my research; Fleur Ng’weno, for our spirited conversations and for the loan of her Werikhe materials; and Collins Dennis Oduor at the Players Theatre, for his friendship and for knowing where all the old playbills are stashed. I would also like to thank Jay Taneja and Emily Kumpel, for helping me make a home in Nairobi. On my last few visits to Kenya, I felt the loss of Deno Kimambo very keenly; he is deeply missed.

I would not study the things I study were it not for Mahiri Mwita, Ebrahim Hussein and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o. Mahiri Mwita’s influence on my life – as Swahili teacher, as mentor, as editor, as tour guide, as beer recommender, as friend – is frankly incalculable. Before too long, an entire generation of U.S. East Africanists will owe their start in the field to him. Ebrahim Hussein and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, towering figures in the history of African literature and performance though they are, have been more generous with their time and more open to my ideas than I had any right to expect them to be. Their work is a model of the courage it requires to take a stand as an artist and intellectual; I continue to do my best to make myself worthy of their example and the faith they have placed in me. Asanteni, walimu.

My career as an academic has been sustained in countless ways by my parallel and occasionally clandestine career as a writer and theatre-maker. On that front, I have to thank Amma Ghartey-Tagoe Kootin, Khalil Sullivan, Deadria Harrington, David Mendizábal, Whitney Mosery, Marica Petrey, the Radix crew, the At Buffalo ensemble, and so many others for the space they have held open for me even when I was more absent than I should have been. Here’s to many more impossible years.

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long time and a lot of traveling to make this dissertation a reality. I am the luckiest person I know to have had her to come home to.
INTRODUCTION

Louis Leakey, the famous Kenyan paleoanthropologist, was an enthusiastic guppy breeder. Between 1964 and at least 1967, he maintained a regular correspondence with Jim Kelly of Kelly’s Pets Unlimited; Kelly was the Overseas Secretary and erstwhile Chairman of the Fancy Guppy Association of Great Britain. Their letters, which are archived in the collections of the National Museums of Kenya, detail the lengths to which Leakey went to transport the fish that he had bred at home in Nairobi to the U.K. to be exhibited and judged in the Fancy Guppy Association’s various shows and exhibitions. The English climate was a source of special concern. In a letter to Leakey dated June 2nd, 1965, Kelly quipped that if the organizers of that year’s British Aquarists Festival “made the date any nearer Christmas we would have to bench our Guppies in anti-freeze;”1 Leakey’s mirthless response was that “the November date seems a bit unsatisfactory more from the point of view of my fish travelling by air and arriving at cold airports, than the actual exhibiting.”2

September of that year brought tragedy, and with it a grim exchange of letters. Leakey’s fish were dying and he turned to Kelly to determine the cause. He sent Kelly a parcel containing a worm that he noticed in an emaciated female’s stool along with the body of another female who died the next day.3 Kelly was away on a lecture tour of the United States but his wife Constance took matters in hand, sending Leakey’s fish off for autopsy.4 Leakey wrote back to express his gratitude “for [her] great help over the cause of death of [his] fishes.”5 The results of the autopsy have not been preserved in the archives.

By 1967, Leakey had progressed far enough with his fancy guppy breeding that he felt compelled to ask what the procedure was to have a new variety officially recognized. In a short taxonomic paper he sent Kelly on October 12th, Leakey suggested that this new strain might be called “Kenya Specials.” Males of this variety, he noted, should ideally have the following coloring: “Body colour should be dark blue/black except the head. Dorsal fin preferably light blue, tail any colour.” For females: “Black colour on posterior part of body and tail. Dorsal fins should have some colour.”6 Of course, skin color doesn’t always work out as one might hope: in a subsequent letter to Kelly, Leakey noted that he was “now getting the appearance in this Fancy Guppy stock of golden coloured individuals, where the males have a golden head and forward part, black body, red tail and blue dorsal fin, while the females are entirely golden.”7

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Species of Blackness

This dissertation explores the mutual imbrication of race and animality in the colonial and postcolonial history of eastern Africa. It is a cultural history of the non-human under conditions of colonial governmentality and its afterlives. In the chapters that follow, I am concerned above all else with a category of political being that I call the animal subaltern: a concatenation of differently inflected subjectivities, in some ways co-extensive with but not reducible to either Giorgio Agamben’s concept of “bare life” 8 or the category of the animal itself, that mark out a spectrum of non-, pre-, semi- and sub-human being within the epistemic frame of coloniality.

Louis Leakey’s guppies are in many ways the prototypical subject of such an inquiry. I may be risking triviality in the eyes of some by beginning this dissertation with their story, but that is a risk that must be taken in order to enlarge the terrain of political consideration to include precisely those beings that are customarily trivialized or otherwise thought not to matter. Despite living and dying in the early days of Kenya’s independence, Leakey’s fish belonged to the colonial bestiary. They were subject to its biopolitical imperatives – imperatives that in many ways outlived the de- or perhaps re-racialization of power under Kenya’s first black president, Jomo Kenyatta. Mahmood Mamdani has shown how practices of ethnic, tribal and racial differentiation enabled colonial governance in Africa and elsewhere; 9 I am interested in how this characteristically biopolitical preoccupation with definitions and taxonomies extended as well to animal populations, like Leakey’s Kenya Specials, over which variously empowered authorities exercised profound control. The community of guppies in question here owed its very existence to the social and sexual discipline Leakey exercised over six generations of fish, beginning – as he noted in the paper he shared with Kelly – with “an aberrant neutral male mated back to its sister.” 10 I read this eugenic process as emblematic of a colonial mode of biopolitics that does not merely seek to manage subject populations but actually creates them more or less ex nihilo. While this is in some ways a generalizable phenomenon, the evidence in this case is especially stark, as Leakey kept his guppies in tanks in his home and exercised the sort of absolute control over their lives that even the most utopian forms of colonial governmentality could scarcely imagine. Leakey’s Kenya Specials were imprisoned, segregated by type to prevent miscegenation, subject to early death and involuntary autopsy, and shipped here and there to be exhibited as curiosities. In and through their subjection to this biopolitical apparatus, they were racialized as black.

Is it possible to conceive of blackness across species lines? I understand blackness in Fanonian terms as a being for others, a relational mode of being that lacks its own ontology, a traumatic immersion in a field of power structured by the free exercise of anti-blackness. 11 Contemporary scholars like Saidiya Hartman, Hortense Spillers, Fred Moten, Stefano Harney, Jared Sexton, Orlando Patterson and Frank Wilderson who are committed in various ways and to different degrees to the project of Afro-Pessimism have shown that the key dynamic of this relationality is what Hartman calls the “subjection” of black bodies to the death-dealing orders of

slavery, colonialism and their afterlives. These modes of subjection hinged on the vociferous denial of full humanity to black subjects. Indeed, the blackness of these subjects—who were not-subjects consisted in large part of their having been barred from the category of the human itself. In this sense, blackness has always been a kind of beastliness. This is what Achille Mbembe calls “la raison nègre” – “a complicated network of doubling, uncertainty, and equivocation, built with race as its chassis,” by which blackness was made equivalent to non-humanity. It follows, then, that blackness – divorced from the culturalist claims of ethnicity and heritage, firmly reoriented towards the question of subjection – is a mode of political or perhaps sub-political being that can float from body to body beyond the bounds of the human.

It is this line of thinking that leads me to resist the use of the by-now conventional designation “human and non-human animals” to refer to the broader category of animate being of which “we” are a part. Generally speaking, I try to follow the lead of animal studies scholars in affirming the many affective, social and political linkages that bind humans to other animals. I am also cognizant of the important work that many animal behaviorists have done to debunk the myths of human exceptionalism – that humans alone use language, that humans alone use tools, and so on – that have maintained human being apart from animal being since at least Descartes. However, I find that invoking “human and non-human animals” as a portmanteau term for all forms of animal life tends toward a reification of “the human” as an ontological subset, sufficient onto itself, of that broader universe. This flies in the face of the radical instability of “the human” as an idea, let alone an identity, and elides continuing patterns of violence that bar certain subjects – and in particular black subjects – from claiming that humanity to which they would otherwise seem to be entitled. Alexander Weheliye defines racialization as “a conglomerate of sociopolitical relations that discipline humanity into full humans, not-quite-humans and nonhumans,” and blackness as “a changing system of unequal power structures that apportion and delimit which humans can lay claim to full human status and which humans cannot.” It follows that in a racialized world there are non-human humans, black humans, who are consigned by the process of racialization itself to categories of semi- and non-being. When this is taken into account, the very idea of the human animal suddenly becomes fraught, and the zone of indistinction between human animals and non-human animals is recast as the heavily policed border between what Sylvia Wynter calls “Man” – that vision of the human that corresponds with uncanny precision to the self-image of those in power – and its many Others. These Others are what Derrida, unconsciously echoing Wynter, refers to when he notes that “within the strict enclosure of this definite article (‘the Animal’ and not ‘animals’)...are all the living things

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that man does not recognize as his fellows, his neighbors, or his Brothers.” By invoking what I am calling the animal subaltern, I am building on Weheliye’s understanding of “racializing assemblages” in order to better understand the mechanism of that Othering and the forms of life it inadvertently sustains.

The archives of plantation slavery in the Americas bear the trace of this Othering in particularly legible ways. Solomon Northup, for instance, registered the moment of his subjection – which is to say his racialization as black – in animal terms after he was stolen from his life as a free man in New York by slave catchers: “Could it be possible that I was thousands of miles from home – that I had been driven through the streets like a dumb beast – that I had been chained and beaten without mercy – that I was even then herded with a drove of slaves, a slave myself?” Note the continual traffic between enslavement and beastliness here: “chained,” “beaten,” “herded;” this conjunction was for Northup, who had lived all of his life up to that point in freedom, constitutive of blackness as such. Nearly a century later, in Notebook of a Return to the Native Land, Aimé Césaire wrote: “And this land screamed for centuries that we are bestial brutes; that the human pulse stops at the gates of the slave compound; that we are walking compost hideously promising tender cane and silky cotton and they would brand us with red-hot irons and we would sleep in our excrement and they would sell us on the town square and an ell of English cloth and salted meat from Ireland cost less than we did, and this land was calm, tranquil, repeating that the spirit of the Lord was in its acts.” Césaire recognized that his racialization as black within the matrix of plantation slavery and its afterlives in the Caribbean entailed the subsumption of his life into beastliness precisely insofar as the “slave compound” existed beyond the bounds of humanity itself. In the French original, it is even clearer that the “slave compound” (“le négrerie”) is productive of blackness, which in turn is productive of the animal designation that Césaire knows to be mapped onto his own body and that of all other descendants of slaves (“nous sommes des bêtes brutes”). This animalification of the black body is the substrate on which its subsequent thingification and commodification rests; a slave must be less-than-human before she can be sold and the fruits of her labor “hideously promis[ed].”

While the slave auction and the plantation are of course two of its most important sites, the exercise of la raison nègre was not confined to the Americas. As Achille Mbembe notes in his earlier work On the Postcolony, discourse on Africa is almost always deployed in the framework (or on the fringes) of a meta-text about the animal – to be exact, about the beast: its experience, its world, and its spectacle.

17 This is the central theoretical preoccupation of Weheliye’s astonishing book. Weheliye, Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics and Black Feminist Theories of the Human.
20 Ibid., 60.
21 Ibid.
22 Ibid., 61.
It is assumed that, although the African possesses a self-referring structure that makes him or her close to “being human,” he or she belongs, up to a point, to a world we cannot penetrate. At bottom, he/she is familiar to us. We can give an account of him/her in the same way we can understand the psychic life of the beast. We can even, through a process of domestication and training, bring the African to where he or she can enjoy a fully human life. In this perspective, Africa is essentially, for us, an object of experimentation.\textsuperscript{23}

To be racialized as black, in the (post)colony as much as on the (post)plantation, is to be bestialized. “We” – and Mbembe’s adoption of that subject position is a calculated attack on the privilege that makes it possible, although for me as a white scholar that pronoun has all-too-easy purchase on my political being – attempt to “domesticate” blackness in order to make “the African” fully human, but there is always something beastly that escapes “our” grasp. This discursive formation embraces everything from the politics of evolution to The Lion King. In place of the beast of burden laboring in the cane or cotton field, this discourse substitutes the animal denizens of “the bush,” that endless wilderness that colonial governmentality feared and sought to tame. According to this logic, Africa is always already wild, its inhabitants always already animal. This dissertation is at bottom an effort to understand the implications of this fact.

I began with Louis Leakey’s guppies – quintessential “objects of experimentation” within the epistemic frame of coloniality – in an effort to take the racist logic of racialization at its word. What does it mean that the discourses of la raison nègre brought animal and slave, animal and “native” together? How might an analysis of the co-constitutive proximity of blackness and animality – an analysis that neither dismisses the pain that Northup experienced at being brutalized “like a dumb beast” nor forgives the grotesque cruelty that Césaire located in those formations of white power that insisted on the animalization of black bodies while remaining “calm, tranquil, repeating that the spirit of the Lord was in...[their] acts” – illuminate the vital politics of race and species?

Mapping blackness across species lines in this way risks the grotesquity of comparison. Animal rights and animal liberation discourses have been mired in controversy for more than fifty years over Isaac Bashevis Singer’s famous contention that “‘for the animals it is an eternal Treblinka.’”\textsuperscript{24} “Abolitionist” strains of political action in opposition to industrial farming and animal slaughter raise similar questions of the deference that is owed to the epochal traumas of human history. Unfortunately, the question of whether or to what degree the lives of animals are comparable to the lives of those who died in the Holocaust or in the antebellum South devolves all too often into a mere contest of rhetoric. Like Alexander Weheliye, I believe comparison does


\textsuperscript{24} Importantly for my purposes, this assertion comes in the form of a eulogy for a mouse, a creature thought to be especially lowly: “What do they know – all those scholars, all those philosophers, all the leaders of the world – about such as you? They have convinced themselves that man, the worst transgressor of all the species, is the crown of creation. All other creatures were created merely to provide him with food, pelts, to be tormented, exterminated. In relation to them all people are Nazis; for the animals it is an eternal Treblinka. And yet man demands compassion from Heaven.” Isaac Bashevis Singer, “The Letter Writer,” trans. Alizah Shevrin and Elizabeth Shub, \textit{The New Yorker}, January 13, 1968, 44. See also Charles Patterson, \textit{Eternal Treblinka: Our Treatment of Animals and the Holocaust} (New York: Lantern Books, 2002); and J. M. Coetzee, \textit{The Lives of Animals} (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).
not suit the purpose of this type of analysis.\textsuperscript{25} It is vastly preferable to attempt instead to understand how animals function alongside their human or semi-human counterparts within the larger field of power. In the case of the Holocaust, the question is not whether the slaughterhouse resembles the gas chamber but what Hitler’s vegetarianism and affection for dogs, for instance, reveal about the murderous moral calculus of Nazism and the divergent futures of variously disempowered beings under its charge. In a similar vein, Tiago Saraiva has shown how the technoscientific and biopolitical management of wheat and food animals in Salazar’s Portugal, Mussolini’s Italy and Hitler’s Germany was symptomatic of the broader ideological project of fascism.\textsuperscript{26} These readings of humanity and non-humanity across species lines within a field of power draws into focus the network of affinities that constitute any given politics without flattening moral distinctions. Leakey’s guppies are not allegorical ciphers of colonialism. They are themselves the objects of colonial epistemic and political pressure. They constitute a population among other human and non-human populations exposed in variously inflected but integrally related ways to the exercise of colonial governmentality. In other words: it is not only because their ideal body color was dark blue or black that it is possible to speak of the Kenya Specials as being in some important way racialized as black.

This suggests that the relationship between human, semi-human and non-human members of the subaltern is not a relationship of equivalence or even metaphor, which John Berger alleges is “the essential relation between man and animal,”\textsuperscript{27} but rather one of metonymy. Because blackness and animality are often contiguous in the historical field structured by and saturated with colonial violence, it remains vitally important to wade into the complex, traumatic politics surrounding race and in-/sub-humanity in order to read blackness and animality differently together. This approach avoids the trap of insisting that blackness and beastliness are somehow straightforwardly coterminous. To do so would be to risk the erasure of the struggles of black intellectuals and revolutionaries from Northup to Fanon to attain to fully human status. Moreover, especially in the context of the histories that this dissertation explores, simply conflating animality and black humanity would risk collusion with the colonial fantasy of Africa as a phantasmagoric wilderness teaming with beasts. Instead, I advocate conceiving of blackness as a category of political alterity – a being-outside of power – that cuts across race and species. This entails reading race and species together as nodes in an assemblage that, like Weheliye’s racializing assemblage, is perhaps too structured for orthodox Deleuzeans, as it keeps the territorializing and de-territorializing work of power, or what Stuart Hall might call its articulation, resolutely in view.\textsuperscript{28} Call it an animalizing assemblage: the engine of the animal subaltern.

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{28} Weheliye, \textit{Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics and Black Feminist Theories of the Human}, 48–49.
\end{thebibliography}
Bare Life and the Political Animal

This Fanonian mode of thinking about race and species aligns in provocative ways with critical theoretical work on biopolitics and what Giorgio Agamben calls “bare life.” Indeed, I position this dissertation at the intersection of Afro-Pessimism, animal studies, critical theory and of course performance studies, which supplies the primary methodological apparatus for all my claims. Nevertheless, the tectonics of this disciplinary intersection are complex and fraught, not least because it is not immediately clear the extent to which the concept of bare life and other categories of biopolitical analysis apply to the dynamic interplay of race and species under colonialism. The colonial encounter of West and Rest is notoriously absent from the trajectory of political thought that Agamben’s work represents and the histories with which it attempts to legitimate itself. At the same time, colonial governmentality bears the unmistakable trace of those registers of violence and animality that Agamben, Derrida and others help us to see.²⁹ It stands to reason, then, that a biopolitical and zooanthropological account of bare life and the sovereign state of exception, radically reoriented towards the epistemic and political ramifications of colonialism as one of the founding events – if not the founding event – of modernity, can make for a compelling hermeneutic with which to examine what Mbembe calls commandement in the (post)colony.³⁰

At the heart of this discourse lies the Aristotelian distinction between “zoe, which expressed the simple fact of living common to all living beings (animals, men, or gods), and bios, which indicated the form or way of living proper to an individual or group.”³¹ Bios, insofar as it is directed towards the good, is for Aristotle the form or modality of life that is proper to politics, while zoe is its not-yet-political substrate; to the extent that human beings are “political animals,” they are – as Michel Foucault put it – “living animal[s] with the additional capacity for a political existence.”³² Agamben, like Foucault before him, is interested in the intrusion of zoe – bare life – onto the political. Foucault locates this intrusion in the advent of biopolitics, a mode of modern sovereign power that “assumed responsibility for the life processes [of the population] and undertook to control and modify them.”³³ In the 1977-1978 lectures collected in Security, Territory, Population, Foucault charts the emergence of a pastoral mode of governmentality that attempted to account for zoe and in so doing brought it to the center of political calculation in the modern state.³⁴ For Agamben, however, this intrusion of bare life onto politics does not inaugurate the modern; rather, the exclusion – which is always also the inclusion – of bare life from politics “constitutes the original – if concealed – nucleus of sovereign power.”³⁵ Sovereign power, according to Agamben, has always been concerned with “the production of a biopolitical body;” politics has always been biopolitics.³⁶

The mechanism by which bare life is both excluded from and included in political life is the sovereign ban. For Agamben, the Hobbesian state of nature – “the state in which ‘man is a

³¹ Agamben, Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life, 1.
³³ Ibid., 142.
³⁵ Agamben, Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life, 6.
³⁶ Ibid.
wolf to men” – is not prior to fully political life, but persists as an atavistic remainder at the very heart of sovereign prerogative as the “right of Punishing.” Agamben is interested – in some ways unlike Foucault – in drawing together the juridical and biopolitical modes of governmentality, especially as they expose the figure of the banned, the excluded, the wolf to punishment. By excluding people from political life – that is, by banishing them from the city – the sovereign reduces them to the status of homines sacri. They can now be killed without their killing entailing homicide. This formulation, which draws in large part on Schmitt’s ideas of the sovereign exception,39 is nonetheless prior to the distinction of friend and enemy that Schmitt held to be the foundation of politics.40 The institution of the ban produces the werewolf, the bandit, the homo sacer, who is both excluded from and at the heart of the political life of the state. This exclusion/inclusion is more fundamental than that of the foe or foreigner insofar as it marks the point at which the exercise of sovereign power creates a zone of indistinction in which zoe and bios intermingle.

This dissertation attempts to locate this zone of indistinction – in which semi-and non-humanity align with a sub-subjectivity that is political precisely insofar as it is excluded from full political life – in colonial space and colonial history. For Agamben, the apotheosis of the sovereign ban – and therefore of bare life – is to be found in the concentration camp, where “we” became capable of instituting “juridical procedures and deployments of power by which human beings could be so completely deprived of their rights and prerogatives that no act committed against them could appear any longer as a crime.”41 The concentration camp – the sovereign ban institutionalized and made both visible and permanent – is the nomos of the modern; it marks – in an interesting return to and revision of the periodicity that Foucault puts forward – the point at which the long-standing institution of the sovereign ban gave way to the assumption, on the part of the state, of “the care of the nation’s biological life.”42 Apart from a brief cogent analysis of “recent publicity campaigns to gather funds for refugees from Rwanda,”43 Agamben does not consider the non-Western world in any depth, so he does not identify other moments in colonial and postcolonial history when the “inscription of life” onto politics gave rise to “lethal machine[s].”44 It should go without saying that other nomoi of modernity abound. Chattel slavery was as much an instance of the sovereign ban – dispersed across an array of state institutions and state-surrogates, among them slave traders, plantation owners and citizens’ militias – and an institutional reification of bare life as was the concentration camp. Colonial laws the world over made it permissible for white settlers to kill native people and expropriate their land and property; that these laws were productive of homines sacri seems beyond doubt. The very act of colonial territorial expropriation – as scholars of international law like Antony

37 Ibid., 105–106.
38 Ibid., 106.
41 Agamben, Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life, 171.
42 Ibid., 175.
43 Agamben, Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life, 133. See also 134.
44 Ibid., 175.
Anghie have shown—was premised on the exercise of sovereign prerogative on a scale scarcely imaginable in Europe. And, lest it seem that the biopolitical were absent from colonial governmentality, Mbembe has shown that European commandement in Africa elided the “distinction between ruling and civilizing” by pursuing a social policy of “‘taming’ and ‘grooming’” the “native” with a host of “normative and disciplinary [mechanisms...that] were...designed to alter the moral behavior of the colonized” and promote their hygiene.

This radical reorientation of the discourse of bare life towards the colonial and the institutionalization of blackness requires a reconceptualization of the sovereign ban. Colonial governmentality required the production of categories of being—like “native” and “animal”—existing below the horizon of political life. Mahmood Mamdani has shown how practices of ethnic, tribal and racial differentiation enabled colonial governance in Africa and elsewhere; I am interested in how this characteristically biopolitical preoccupation with definitions and taxonomies extended as well to animal populations that, like “natives,” were assumed to exist as bios and not zoe. To put it differently: this dissertation is invested in the epistemic groundwork of exclusion, in the patient practices of love and scholarship that together with the murderous work of policing and state terror enabled the exercise of the sovereign ban in exclusionary regimes of racial apartheid across the African continent. There is no trace of ill will in Leakey’s correspondence with Jim Kelly about his guppies, only a paternalistic aura of pastoral concern for those beings over whose lives he exercises absolute control. Mbembe’s analysis of colonial commandement applies equally to Leakey here: his interventions were aimed “‘taming’” and “‘grooming’” as well.

Nevertheless, by hook or by crook, the global exercise of colonial governmentality did the work of the sovereign ban. Indeed, in many ways the study of anti-blackness within Africana cultural production anticipated Agamben’s theory of bare life and re-historicized it as the existential condition of subalternity itself. Césaire, for instance, concluded that

As there are hyena-men and panther-men, I would be a jew-man
a Kaffir-man
a Hindu-man-from-Calcutta
a Harlem-man-who-doesn’t-vote
the famine man, the insult-man, the torture man you can grab anytime, beat up, kill – no joke, kill – without having to account to anyone, without having to make excuses to anyone
a jew-man
a pogrom-man
a puppy
a beggar
but can one kill Remorse, perfect as the stupefied face of an English lady discovering a Hottentot skull in her soup-tereen?

47 Mamdani, Define and Rule: Native as Political Identity.
48 For more on the morphological and political links between South African apartheid and other regimes of racial exclusion elsewhere in Africa, see Mahmood Mamdani, Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism (Princeton University Press, 1996).
Note the degree to which Césaire’s understanding of himself as a homo sacer, as “the torture man you can grab anytime, beat up, kill – no joke, kill – without having to account to anyone” indexes both his subjection to the arbitrary exercise of racist power and his fungibility across race and species lines within the global community of colonial subalternity. This was one of the political principles of at least some strands of Négritude, made viscerally apparent in the negative here: that all oppressed people of the world, from the “jew-man” to the “Hindu-man-from-Calcutta” to the “Harlem-man-who-doesn’t-vote” to a Martinican poet and intellectual circulating in the upper echelons of Francophone cultural life participate in a shared blackness. This relegation to the sub-political status of homo sacer is not a question of “human beings...[being]...deprived of their rights and prerogatives,” which is how Agamben understood the logic of the sovereign ban as instituted in the Final Solution. Colonial governmentality produced the category of blackness prior to all other distinctions. Consequently, black people the world over – as Césaire and many others conceived of them – could not be deprived of their humanity because they had never been granted it. Their non-humanity was always the hallmark of their subalternity. No amount of “Remorse” – not even “a Hottentot skull” in “an English lady[‘s]...soup tureen” – can alter that fact.

The species confusion of Césaire’s anguished stanzas – the “hyena-men,” “panther-men,” “pupp[ies]” – speaks to animalizations built into Agamben’s concept of the ban, with its wolves and werewolves and bears. Fanon’s thinking proceeds along largely the same lines, especially when it comes to his claim that the two “sector[s]” of the colonial city are “inhabited by different species.” He is not suggesting that “Natives” and animals are the same, but rather that the racist apparatus of colonial governmentality, in all its institutional and material emanations – “[t]he dividing line, the border, is represented by the barracks and the police stations” – is the motive force behind the production of homines sacri who are marked off from full humanity by the species distinction imposed by the sovereign ban. It would, of course, be an anachronism to claim that Fanon is a theorist of biopolitics. Nevertheless, his analysis of the socio-psychological schema of colonial domination suggests a point of intersection between his work and a radically reoriented Agamben. Consider the language of exclusion and inclusion, life and death, in the following:

The “native” sector is not complementary to the European sector. The two confront each other, but not in the service of a higher unity. Governed by a purely Aristotelian logic, they follow the dictates of a mutual exclusion: There is no conciliation possible, one of them is superfluous.... The colonist’s sector is a sated, sluggish sector, its belly is permanently full of good things. The colonist’s sector is a white folk’s sector, a sector of foreigners.

The colonized’s sector, or at least the “native” quarters, the shanty town, the Medina, the reservation, is a disreputable place inhabited by disreputable people. You are born anywhere, anyhow. You die anywhere, from anything. It’s a world with no space, people are piled one on top of the other, the shacks squeezed tightly together. The colonized’s sector is a famished sector, hungry for bread, meat, shoes, coal, and light. The colonized’s sector is a sector that crouches and cowers,

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50 Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, 171.
52 Ibid., 3.
a sector on its knees, a sector that is prostrate. It’s a sector of niggers, a sector of towelheads.... The colonized man is an envious man. The colonist is aware of this as he catches the furtive glance, and constantly on his guard, realizes bitterly that: “They want to take our place.” And it’s true there is not one colonized subject who at least once a day does not dream of taking the place of the colonist. 53

I have quoted this passage at such length because it makes clear the extent to which Fanon anticipated the form that a critique of the racialized production of bare life in colonial space might take. The “colonized’s sector,” “famished” and “prostrate,” is – according to the logic of colonial governmentality – “superfluous.” It is a place in which bare life – “You are born anywhere, anyhow” – is coextensive with random and unmourned, even unmournable death – “You die anywhere, from anything.” Fanon is especially sensitive to the ways in which this biopolitics, which is always already a thanatopolitics, is made possible by racialization and its performatives. The terms “niggers” and “towelheads,” always already internalized, do their traumatic work as auxiliares of the sovereign ban. They police the boundary between political life and bare life, satiety and hunger.

For Fanon, this account of colonial détente is dramaturgical. It sets the stage for revolution – which, notably, is premised on the “colonized subject[s]” discovery “that his life, his breathing and his heartbeats are the same as the colonist’s.” 54 “Native” is a designation that Fanon believes the colonized can refuse – or at least escape. The anticolonial revolutionary can refuse to be shunted into “the ‘native’ quarters, the shanty town, the Medina, the reservation” by refusing to be racialized and, consequently, by coming to understand that her “worth” is equal to that of the colonist. 55 This is a position, however, that substantially exceeds the category of bare life as Agamben wants to define it. For Agamben, there is no recovery from the sovereign ban. Indeed, the horizon of political possibility in Homo Sacer is the utopian prospect of “a completely new politics – that is, a politics no longer founded on the exceptio of bare life.” 56 This disjuncture between Fanon and Agamben suggests that there may be a limit to the usefulness of bare life as a hermeneutic in and for the (post)colony. What is required – following Fanon – is the adumbration of a form of political subjectivity that is proper to bare life, a mechanism of re-subjectification that can lead the less-than-human into full political life.

The animal subaltern is precisely that form of political subjectivity. My use of the term “subaltern” is modeled on the work of the Subaltern Studies Group, which saw in Gramsci’s original formulation a framework within which to understand lives lived below the horizon of hegemonic politics. As Ranajit Guha put it in his foundational work on Indian colonial historiography, “parallel to the domain of elite politics there existed...another domain...in which the principal actors were not the dominant groups of the indigenous society or the colonial authorities but the subaltern classes and groups constituting the mass of the laboring population and the intermediate strata in town and country – that is, the people.” 57 This “parallel...domain,” Guha notes, mobilized “horizontally” 58 in response to “the conditions of exploitation to which

53 Ibid., 4–5.
54 Ibid., 10.
55 Ibid.
56 Agamben, Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life, 11.
58 Ibid.
the subaltern classes were subjected in varying degrees."59 This framework in turn led Guha and others to formulate theories of subaltern resistance, or – as Gayatri Spivak put it – "moment(s) of change...[that are] pluralized and plotted as confrontations rather than transition."60 The plurality of these points of conflict are key to my understanding of the subaltern, as this approach moves the discourse of resistance away from totality of organized movements into the realm of ad hoc, improvisatory refusal. This is the world of the animal subaltern, which is governed less by coherent theory of social change than by piecemeal efforts at liberation. Here as elsewhere, however, the study of subalternity is the study of bare life refusing to remain so.

The connections between animality and subalternity have recently begun to be investigated by scholars like Shefali Rajamannar and the students in Carol Erwin’s 2015 seminar at Eastern New Mexico University on “Inclusion and Resistance;”61 to my knowledge, the philosopher Cynthia Willett is the first to explicitly conjoin “animal” and “subaltern” in her important discussion of non-human laughter in Interspecies Ethics.62 My intention in this dissertation is to build on this important early scholarship in order to offer a more systematic account of animal subalternity and its connection to blackness. I believe that subalternity is an appropriate rubric with which to approach animal life precisely because the lives that animals lead are almost universally lived below the horizon of politics – and because under conditions of coloniality, as I have established, racial and animal subalternity have been inextricably linked. The concept of the animal subaltern is also a rejoinder, following Brian Massumi and other animal studies scholars, to the long-standing presumption that human beings are the only political animals and, moreover, the only beings capable of political resistance.63 I also hope to use the hermeneutic of animal subalternity to apply pressure to Agamben’s theory of bare life and his more recent assertion that “the decisive political conflict,” and the inaugural moment of Western politics as biopolitics, is the struggle between “the animality and the humanity of man.”64 Agamben is merely the latest in a long line of white social theorists to stake a political claim on “our” animality. For him, though, animality has no substantive referent; it carries with it no trace of racial trauma. This dissertation seeks to return race to the picture. How do the subaltern perform their political subjectivity? How can they – can they – speak?65

59 Ibid., 5.
65 The decisive statement on whether or not the subaltern can speak is of course Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?,” in Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 271–313. See also Kalpana Rahita Seshadri, HumAnimal: Race, Law, Language (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012) for a fascinating discussion of silence as a space between humanity and animality before the law.
Performing the Animal Subaltern

I am a performance studies scholar and this dissertation is quite firmly rooted in that interdisciplinary nexus. Performance is both an object of analysis for me and an analytic that draws into the sphere of the aesthetic any number of objects that might not be conventionally designated as such. All the chapters in this dissertation deal in large part with practices that have been identified by other scholars, conventionally or more controversially, as sites or instances of performance: the theatre in Chapters 1, 3 and 4; the museum in Chapter 2; and activist protest in Chapter 5. My work across these various sites is deeply indebted to Una Chaudhuri, Lourdes Orozco, Jennifer Parker-Starbuck, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Susan Bennett, Rebecca Schneider and other scholars who have helped to enlarge the focus of performance studies to include performances of and beyond the human.66 Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, for instance, would no doubt insist on more deeply understanding how Leakey’s Kenya Specials circulated and were displayed; this, for her and for me, is undeniably a species of object performance.67 I am also invested in the strand of performance theory, from Austin to Derrida to Butler, that draws attention to those practices that “do things.”68 I would argue that the power that Leakey reserved to himself to give his fish names aligns quite closely with this view of the performative; in my view, Leakey performed his Kenya Specials into being, at the very least on the level of taxonomy, and in the process formed and deformed what it meant to be “Kenyan” and “Special” on the threshold of postcoloniality. Here I am indebted to the work of Joshua Chambers-Letson, who builds on longstanding scholarship on the performativity of gender to suggest that race – and, I would add, species – is also performatively inscribed.69

My principal interest in performance, however, derives from a heterogeneous array of theories of personhood extending back to Hobbes’ reading of Roman jurisprudence. Here I am building again on Chambers-Letson’s work and that of other scholars of law and performance like Catherine Cole.70 In his Leviathan, Hobbes notes that “[t]he word Person is latine...Persona in latine signifies the disguise, or outward appearance of a man, counterfeited on the Stage; and sometimes more particularly that part of it, which disguiseth the face, as a Mask or Vizard: And from the Stage, hath been translated to any Representer of speech and action, as well in

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67 See Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage.
This equation of personhood with “outward appearance” – echoed in startling ways in a very different context by Darwin’s contention that the expression of certain recognizable emotional states helps to distinguish the “lower” animals from the higher – enshrines performance at the heart of the process by which beings are assigned their place in what Mel Chen calls the animacy hierarchy, in “Tribunals” as well as in “Theaters.” By this logic, which continues to this day to have enormous power, appearing before the public – whether that public presents itself in the guise of the law, the scientific community or the theatrical audience – is an exercise in performatively submitting oneself for judgement as human or potentially human, which under the circumstances refers to any being worthy of political recognition. How well one resembles a person becomes a criterion for the attribution of personhood; this startling fact gives new political life to mimesis and other well-established aesthetic categories in the theatre. Conversely, the designation of a being as “animal,” as “black,” as “native” is a nakedly political act, a racial performative in the service of the sovereign ban, a designation assigning death or bare life to the beastly among us. Performance, consequently, is that which intervenes, on the basis of resemblance and other arbitrary modes of judgement, between life and death, between the person and the non-person, between the human and the animal. This idea of performance runs throughout the dissertation, from my discussion of the racial entailments of taxidermy in Chapter 2 to my investigation of the so-called Rhino Man’s parahuman personhood in Chapter 5.

Along the same lines, the question of speaking or not speaking that determines the political future of the animal subaltern is also a question of performance. The title of this dissertation references a Nandi proverb “collected” by the British anthropologist A.C. Hollis at the turn of the twentieth century. Hollis, who like Louis Leakey, pursued knowledge of Africa in part to justify his presence there, likely missed the warning built into the saying he dutifully recorded and translated: “Don’t show a hyena how well you can bite, for his jaws are more powerful than yours.” While of course useful advice for anyone faced with a live hyena, this saying also seems to index the power of the subaltern – as Homi Bhabha demonstrated in his work on the revolutionary potential inherent in the colonized mimicking their colonizers – to expropriate the violence they endured and repurpose it for their own liberation. A hyena may not be able to speak – or at least to speak a language intelligible to human interlocutors. Nevertheless, her bite is a performance of her power, a creative inscription onto the body of her would-be captor of her determination to endure. Much the same can be said for the guppies with which I began this introduction. As Leakey noted, as soon as phenotypical blackness seemed to have settled out as the defining fact of the Kenya Specials’ taxonomic uniqueness, “entirely golden” females began to appear, as well as males that were gold, black, red and blue. One should never underestimate the capacity of the animal subaltern, no matter how circumscribed its circumstances, to resist and to transform. Even under conditions of extraordinary abjection and

depravation, in the forgotten corners in which hegemonic power can never fully penetrate, the subaltern find a way to survive, even perhaps to thrive, outside of the bounds of the human.

When, Where, How, Why
My thinking about these questions, although of course sustained by my engagement with the theoretical discourses I have explored in this introduction, has been my driven by my engagement with the social and political history of Eastern Africa. My initial impulse in contemplating my dissertation research was to investigate the figure of the partisan or “terrorist” as it circulated in discourses of African anticolonialism. However, I soon found that the logic of race and animality underscored considerations of political violence in fascinating ways. I had found a deeper, more endogenous language with which to explore the logic of coloniality and its afterlives. This is in large part due to the specific location of Eastern Africa – by which I mean present-day Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda – in the imaginary of empire. From the beginning of the colonial period to the present day, these three countries have contributed more than their fair share to the colonial fantasy of Africa as an Edenic haven for big game, exotic “tribes” and their associated pleasures. Kenya in particular epitomizes British Africa’s idea of itself – or at least it did until the Mau Mau rebellion in the 1950s convulsed the British Empire with one of the bloodiest threats to its hegemony. The story this dissertation tells begins in the early twentieth century, at what may well have been the heyday of colonial governmentality in Eastern Africa, and proceeds from there through the tumultuous period of decolonial revolution to the paradoxes of the new postcolonial order in the 1980s and 1990s. This periodization allows me to mark the establishment of the animal subaltern under conditions of coloniality and then to explore how that subaltern came to contest the circumstances of its subalternity.

There is, of course, a great deal that careful scholarship can reveal – and has revealed – about precolonial ways of thinking and being the animal. The animal subaltern, however, like blackness itself, is a product of the epistemic break occasioned by European coloniality – that is, the moment in which indigenous understandings of humanity and animality began to be subjected to sustained, transformative pressure. This is not to say that indigenous ways of being with and thinking the animal were monolithic and whole prior to the arrival of European colonists. Close study of Maasai or Turkana pastoralism, to name but one example, shows unmistakable evidence of historical change – occasioned by ethnic rivalries, precolonial trade with the Arab world, and so on – that cannot be reduced to colonial disruption. But the large-scale European incursion of the 1880s through to the Second World War did radically reorient indigenous lifeways in Eastern Africa, and I am reluctant to under estimate that reorientation. The fact that most of the published ethnographic and oral-historical accounts of cultural dispositions towards animals in the region date from the 1930s onwards points to the logic of my periodization. The utopian vision of human-animal relationships that Western observers of Africa impute to African societies is often more a testament to the epistemological and political imperatives of colonial governmentality than to the reality of indigenous lifeways. I seek to read

through these (post)colonial animal fantasies while at the same time plumbing the depth of their impact.

This approach necessarily entails that my analysis begin with a reading of coloniality and its ambivalences. This dissertation is a critique of whiteness and its associated anxieties as much as it is an exploration of the politics of black racialization. I stress the anxious – even neurotic – orientation of whiteness because it is the ground on which the politics that the animal subaltern sought to unmake were built. In Eastern Africa and no doubt elsewhere, it was precisely the racial displacement of settler colonial populations from their homes in Europe that required their obsessive attention to their non-human others. Leakey’s guppy breeding program, for instance, is intimately tied to his cultivation of a specific genre of white Kenyan personality in a rapidly decolonizing social world. Unlike most of his white compatriots, Leakey was Kenya-born, and was frequently at pains to demonstrate this natal belonging, particularly after independence in 1963. These performances of self seem to have been at least in part attempts to resolve his own anxieties and find a social and political fix for the profound ambivalence of his position as a “white African.” This appellation, which Leakey chose for his “early autobiography” – the first printing was in 1937, when he was still in his mid-thirties – is shorthand for a process of self-justification that Leakey would rehearse over and over throughout his career.

“’We call him the blackman with a white face,’” said Chief Koinange on a recent visit to England, “’because he is more of an African than a European, and we regard him as one of ourselves.’”

I was very flattered when I heard of this remark (he was referring to me) for I have always considered myself more of a Kikuyu than an Englishman in many ways.

I still often think in Kikuyu, dream in Kikuyu, and if my English is not all that it should be in the narrative which follows, my excuse must be that I would have preferred to write it in the Kikuyu language.

Leakey has the very best credentials. No less a personage than Chief Koinange – a noted leader of the Agikũyũ people and, later, an important voice for independence – has vouchsafed his status as “’more of an African than a European.’” Leakey’s bilingualism, his “think[ing]” and “dream[ing]” in the Gĩkũyũ language, is the ultimate guarantor of his belonging in Africa. There is, however, a paradox in play here. It is the same paradox, albeit in a different political key, that the black anticolonial intellectual Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o would illuminate and work to resolve in his polemical writings on language. Leakey’s claim to Gĩkũyũ natal belonging, and to Africanness more broadly, is a claim worth making only outside of Gĩkũyũ social space, in an Anglophonic cultural and political sphere to which only the English language can give access. This is only the first in a long series of fraught binaries that the term “white African,” and the line of thinking it represents, seems calculated to condense and suppress. Anxiety roils the placid surface of Leakey’s Gĩkũyũ dreams. After all, he was – by the time White African was reprinted

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80 Ibid., 5.
with a new foreword in 1966 – both a Kenyan citizen and a white man, an Agikuyu initiate and a former agent of the colonial secret police against the Mau Mau, an postcolonial subject and at least by some accounts a neocolonial reactionary. His correspondence with Kelly, which spans at least the first half-decade of Kenyan independence, is in this sense an archive of some of his attempts to negotiate his new position as a politically minoritarian subject.

Consequently, I read Leakey’s performative mobilization of his Kenya Specials – like his invocation of Chief Koinange and the de-racializing benediction (“the blackman with a white face”) that he provided – as a calculated effort to emphasize what he considered to be his rightful location in Africa and, at the same to time, to mark his continuing ability to move freely along British imperial circuits of social, political and scientific exchange. The fish themselves, which Leakey was empowered by his race and connections to have “brought over by one of the pilots of the Airways who fly into London from here,” were brought into circulation in order to earn their breeder cultural and symbolic capital as an imperial cosmopolitan. Unlike the forms of ex-metropolitan cosmopolitanism that facilitated the import into Kenya of British cultural goods, Leakey’s orientation towards the U.K. and the rest of the fledgling Commonwealth was defined by the export of locally-sourced knowledge, objects and living beings. In this regard, his cosmopolitanism, like his guppies, was “Kenya Special.”

Leakey’s carefully calibrated cosmopolitanism is important to me as it draws into focus the political and ethical quandaries I face as a white U.S. scholar of African politics and performance. The years I have spent as an artist and researcher in Eastern and Southern Africa do not remotely qualify me for the same brand of belonging that Leakey claimed for himself, to say nothing of the “native” age-mates he investigated for the secret police. Nevertheless, I am acutely aware that the claims I make are made within an extractive knowledge economy in which I have somehow become an expert broker. I implicate myself fully and without reservation in this dissertation and its diagnosis of the speciesisms of white coloniality. I have tried as much as possible to exclude self-aggrandizement from my efforts to access and analyze minoritarian discourses emanating from below the horizon of humanity that colonial governmentality set and policed; the task before me is as much to understand the bestializations practiced in the name of my whiteness as it is to offer the bestialized what space I can to speak back. In so doing, I am well aware that I may inadvertently reify race by insisting perversely on what Fanon understood to be the traumatizing inscription of blackness onto the “Native” body as a condition of its visibility in colonial space. My only defense is that blackness, though ontologically empty, has always already been historically and politically inscribed. The task of the anti-racist scholar is consequently to document the ways in which colonialism did its work, the better to fight back.

The research that enables me to make these claims was conducted over the course of several extended periods of fieldwork in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda between 2011 and 2014. I spent the most significant of these, in 2013-2014, in Nairobi, where I conducted months of research at the Kenyan National Archives, the National Museums of Kenya and the personal archive of Fleur Ng’weno. I also travelled from my home in Nairobi to conduct further research on materials housed at the Nakuru Players’ Theatre, the Mombasa Little Theatre and the University of Dar es Salaam. This dissertation is based principally on this archival research and

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84 Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*. 
on the literary and historical analysis of the published and unpublished materials that I encountered. I did, however, supplement this methodological orientation with a number of non-contextual modes of investigation, including interviews with Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o in his office at the University of California, Irvine and Ebrahim Hussein outside his home in Dar es Salaam. I also attempted some very limited auto-ethnographic research during months of repeat visits to the natural historical collections of the Nairobi National Museum and on several safaris in Kenya and a gorilla trek in Uganda. While this additional research did suggest new trajectories for my work that I am excited to pursue in the future, the impact that it had on the dissertation itself was largely contextual.

What has emerged from this research is a genealogical account of the animal subaltern in Eastern African history. In Chapter 1, I examine the role that animals and animal figures played in the white theatre of the colonial period. I begin with Kenya’s first professional theatre troupe modelled on the English repertory tradition, the Donovan Maule Players, and their touring production of the West End romp *Bell, Book and Candle*, which features a cat named Pyewacket. Pyewacket – along with other animal characters in plays put on by amateur theatrical societies like the Nakuru Players – was in my view constitutive of an animal Englishness that the white theatre sought to perform into being in the colonial hinterlands of Kenya, Uganda and Tanganyika. I read this animal history in and through discourses of naturalism in the theatre, which took on the burden of political discipline in the social life of colonial East Africa with astonishing rapidity. I close this chapter with a discussion of the Jeanes School on the outskirts of Nairobi, which staged animal parables in the hopes of educating “native” villagers in the biopolitical arts of hygiene and modern agriculture.

In Chapter 2, I turn to the Coryndon Memorial Museum and the complex web of big game hunting, paleoanthropology, ethnology and natural history that it sustained across colonial Eastern Africa between the turn of the twentieth century and the Mau Mau War in Kenya in the 1950s. The Coryndon’s emergent culture of curation and display was uniquely productive of the animal subaltern across species lines, from the efforts of early evolutionary biologists like Louis Leakey to establish the pre-history of humankind in the East African fossil record to the work of prolific hunters like C.J.P. Ionides to kill and preserve a comprehensive catalogue of East African fauna. I argue that these performance practices hinged on a subsumption of black life into animality, which in turn legitimated the expropriation of native land and the subjection of native populations in the name of science and wildlife conservation. The legacy of these practices is still with us today: East Africa is still both “safari country” and the “cradle of humankind.”

The end of Chapter 2, in which I consider the nationalization of the Coryndon Memorial after Kenya’s independence in 1963, and the beginning of Chapter 3, which is concerned with the anticolonial theatrical practice of the Kenyan writer and theorist Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, mark the transition from colonial to post- and neocolonial registers of governmentality in Eastern Africa. For Ngũgĩ in particular, anticolonialism involved efforts to de-animalize and re-humanize space that had been expropriated by colonialism and what Ngũgĩ has called its “zoological images.” I am interested in Ngũgĩ’s particular brand of revolutionary black humanism as a political disavowal of the legacy of dehumanization that precipitated the animal subaltern itself.

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85 Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, Interview with Author, September 9, 2013.
At the same time, however, his collectivist program of mass anticolonial struggle is a clear example of the politics from below that subalternity can foster and sustain.

Unlike Ngũgĩ, the Tanzanian writer Ebrahim Hussein remains unconvinced that the animal can be excised from black social life. In Chapter 4, I advance a reading of Hussein’s poetics of ambivalence, which stands in marked contrast to the politics of the early postcolonial period more generally. For Hussein, animality is and always will be an atavistic remainder, a racialized and racializing specter that even the economic and political rationalization of power enacted under black-majority government cannot dispense with altogether. Hussein’s deeply iconoclastic vision of human nature insists on the occult presence of the animal subaltern even in those spaces where it is most vociferously denied. His pessimism, which I explore at length, is a powerful antidote to the more utopian forms of postcoloniality with which other writers of his generation are allied.

In Chapter 5, the final chapter of this dissertation, I consider the generation of black intellectuals that came after Ngũgĩ and Hussein and the return of the animal in the 1980s and 1990s under the sign of postcolonial wildlife conservation. The focus of this chapter is the activist practice of Michael Werikhe, the so-called Rhino Man, whose campaign to raise international awareness of rhinoceros poaching hinged on his willingness to claim animality as his own. Like the East African marathon runners who came to global prominence beginning in the 1960s, Werikhe made his solo trans-continental treks spectacularly indexical of the suffering of the black body and its supposedly animal capacity to endure. This, in turn, allowed for the metonymic transfer of his audience’s sympathy from his body to that of the non-human animals he sought to protect. This strategically essentialist joining of blackness and animality, in the service of a vaunted political good, is symptomatic of a new direction in postcolonial politics that continues to this day to trouble the relationship between blackness and beastliness in Eastern Africa.

More than anyone else, Michael Werikhe’s career as Rhino Man helps to frame the question at the very heart of this dissertation: given the long history of denigration under the sign of the beast that so many have endured, can the beastliness of bare life offer the black subaltern a line of flight out of the human? What futures does this traumatic history make possible? Is there any hope for liberation in the conjunction between blackness and animality? Or is that possibility always already foreclosed?
In September 1947, Mollie and Donovan Maule, wife and husband, arrived in Mombasa with the intention of founding a theatre company. They had nearly a century of experience between them as actors on the British melodrama and repertory stage. Annabel Maule – their daughter and biographer, also an actress – noted that they had both “criss-crossed England” since they debuted as children in their parents’ shows;¹ they were now determined to “criss-cross” the British empire as well. Donovan Maule was fresh off a military career in Egypt as “‘Director of Drama, Middle East Land Forces’” and had been convinced that Kenya was crying out for the sort of commercial theatre his family had practiced – and would continue to practice – for generations.²

Their initial efforts at establishing a repertory company in Nairobi met largely with failure. The Maules thought seriously of packing up and going home. One sleepless night, preoccupied by their poor fortune, they drove out into what was then called Nairobi Game Park, where a primal scene transpired:

Slowly the orange bowl of the rising sun silhouetted the black lace of an acacia thorn tree ahead and what had resembled a large rock, a few yards from the car, was shown now to be a full-grown lioness. She turned her head lazily in their direction and for a few long moments, lioness and forlorn, ruined impresarios stared at one another.

Finally the big cat squeezed up her amber eyes, opened her huge jaws and yawned cavernously in the Maules’ faces. She then rose slowly to her feet and strolled away, tail swinging gently, without a backward glance.

In the deep silence Mollie’s laughter sounded shocking. Then Don was laughing too. The indifferent lioness had put the Seal of Absurdity on their aborted endeavors in the world of mere humans.

Exhausted and breathless, with tears of laughter on their cheeks, they headed back to town.³

I am struck by the theatricality of this scene. The lights come up; the lioness is revealed; she and the Maules, the “forlorn, ruined impresarios” in their car, stare back at one another, locked in the act of mutual witnessing that is in and of itself constitutive of the theatrical as such. Jacques Derrida began the first seminar of his 2001-2002 series on “the animal” “à pas de loup,” “stealthily, like a wolf;”⁴ noting that the word loup in French refers not only to a wolf but also to a kind of mask, “the black velvet mask” worn “especially at masked balls.”⁵ This leads him to

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² Ibid., 1.
³ Ibid., 11–12.
⁴ Derrida, The Beast and the Sovereign, Volume I, 1.
⁵ Ibid., 6.
conclude that the wolf of *à pas de loup* “is all the stronger, the meaning of its power is all the more terrorizing, armed, threatening, virtually predatory for the fact that in these appellations, these turns of phrase, these sayings, the wolf does not yet appear in person but only in the theatrical *persona* of a mask, a simulacrum or a piece of language, i.e. a fable or a fantasy.” In the case of the Maules, the lioness does “appear in person” – and yet, at least in Annabel Maule’s fabular retelling in the opening pages of her book *Theatre Near The Equator*, she still appears theatrically as an unexpected embodiment of Mollie and Donovan Maule’s fear of failure in the strange new country they had yet to master.

“The indifferent lioness” herself is irrecoverable behind the “appellations,” the “turns of phrase,” the “sayings” with which the Maule family has, over the course of what I assume are many telling and re-tellings, reduced her to text. She now numbers among the Maules’ “creatures of somatization,” as Una Chaudhuri puts it, “forc[ed]...to carry...[their] symbolic and psychological baggage.” Nevertheless, she is one of many animals – not animal figures but animals themselves – to intrude onto the stage of this dissertation. I have begun this chapter stealthily, like a cat, with the simulacral trace of the lioness’ presence that persists in the Maule archive because the dramaturgy of her appearance in Nairobi Game Park opens almost immediately onto broader questions of race and species in colonial East Africa. The Maules, “mere humans,” are confirmed in their humanity by their face-to-face encounter with the African wilderness – personated here by the lioness and her “cavernous” “yawn.” Humanity – which here, as elsewhere, is an ideological proxy for whiteness – has its ontological wholeness vouchsafed by its encounter with its own negation. With the lioness, *a pas de loup*, blackness arrives on the scene in the performative guise of non-humanity. It is the lioness who passes judgement. The Maules’ civilizing mission in Kenya – and Annabel Maule’s account of their work reveals the missionary zeal with which they pursued their dream of a professional repertory theatre – is met with boredom and a kind of imperious disdain. The lioness yawns, setting the “Seal of Absurdity on their aborted endeavors.”

Early humiliation in the face of Africa’s inscrutability is a well-worn trope of colonialbildung. The Maules are actually confirmed in their hopes for Kenya by this encounter; they exit the scene exhilarated, “with tears of laughter on their cheeks.” The narrative of domesticity and familial generativity they have set themselves requires that their “aborted endeavors” eventually bear fruit: “their lovely new baby of a theatre” is on its way. By the end of 1949, the Maules had established themselves in their own Studio Theatre on Government Road. By the beginning of 1953, the Maules had earned enough of a following in Nairobi to take their latest production – John Van Druten’s *Bell, Book and Candle*, starring the Maules’ daughter Annabel and a Siamese cat in the role of Pyewacket – on a tour of colonial East Africa. On the first night of their adventure, as the ensemble drove out of Nairobi on their way to their first booking, in Mombasa, the primal scene with the “indifferent lioness” repeated itself with a significant variation:

> At dead of night a large, tawny shape leapt from the dirt road ahead of us. The car slowed to a halt and a pair of eyes flashed in our direction. A full-grown lioness stood no more than five yards away, another lioness at her side. From the tall grass at the road’s edge two great heads were raised to focus on us while a fifth lioness came strolling from behind the vehicle to join the pride. For a few moments all

6 Ibid.
was still, then the big cats lost interest and turned away, disappearing from view in an instant.

As the sky lightened and acacia thorns took on familiar outlines, we drew to the side of the road, somewhere in the Taru Desert. Begrimed and stiff: we emerged from the cramped car. Across the limpid air came the sound of cattle lowing while smoke from village cooking fires rose in lazy coils.

I attached Pye by her leash to a small thorn bush and set water – which she preferred to milk – and food before her. She surveyed her surroundings, sitting neat and elegant, faintly surprised at this turn of events.\(^9\)

This time, face-to-face with the wild, fixed by its feline gaze, the Maules have their answer ready: the Siamese cat Pyewacket, on her lead, “sitting neat and elegant” “somewhere in the Taru Desert,” “faintly surprised at this turn of events.” As the lights come up and things “[take] on familiar surroundings,” Pyewacket’s interest in “her surroundings” stands in marked contrast to the dangerous indifference of the lionesses whose “eyes flashed” their way in the dark. The whole direction of the world has changed: “cattle [low],” “smoke from village cooking fires [rises] in lazy coils.” Pyewacket “[sits] neat and elegant” at the center of this newly pastoral landscape, “survey[ing]” it with the cool elegance of an urban sophisticate. In Annabel Maule’s retelling, Pyewacket is cast as the obverse of the lionesses that stalk the car in the dark: refined where they are wild, small and ladylike where they are large and feral. Her entrance consequently marks the intrusion of the domestic onto the scene. Domesticity is symptomatic of a process of domestication that has been successfully accomplished. The cattle, and obviously Pyewacket herself, are domesticated animals; the “smoke from village cooking fires” bespeaks another, related form of domesticity that the Maules’ theatre and other cultural-industrial auxiliaries of the colonial project sought to further domesticate. The political assemblage I call the animal subaltern is everywhere in evidence here, fixing the lionesses, the cattle, Pyewacket the Siamese cat and the distant unseen villagers in their respective locations on what Mel Chen calls the animacy hierarchy.\(^10\) In different though mutually constitutive ways, four out of the five parties to this encounter – all the animals on the scene here, that is, save the Maules in their car – have been consigned to that zone of semi- and non-being to which colonial epistemic power relegated the non-white, the non-human, the non-white non-human, the non-human non-white.

How that process of relegation came to serve the interests of colonial personhood is the subject of this chapter. I draw on Annabel Maule’s memoirs and the Maule archive housed at the National Museums of Kenya in Nairobi to advance a critical reading of Pyewacket’s brief career in the theatre and its implications. The chapter then opens out onto a broader consideration of amateur and professional theatrical activity in Kenya during the colonial period at three other sites of colonial cultural production: the Jeanes School in Kabete, the Players’ Theatre in Nakuru and Mombasa’s Little Theatre Club. In the four chapters that follow, I am concerned almost exclusively with the imbrication of animality, blackness and the “wild;” these are the principal coordinates of the animal subaltern. In this chapter, however, I attempt to map the subtler dimensions of animal subalternity as it operates à pas de loup in and through the domestic. I am interested in how animals and animal figures helped the Maules and the other theatre groups I

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\(^9\) Ibid., 32.

\(^{10}\) See Chen, *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect.*
consider to sustain an exogenous Englishness in the East African colony. In other words, while it is in many ways clear how the tour of *Bell, Book and Candle* fits into the much broader attempt to fix white culture in and on its imperial periphery, it is considerably less evident why that effort should be routed through the diminutive personage of a cat – and an “exotic” species at that. Pyewacket, and the other domesticated animals and animal figures on which I have centered this chapter, are not the agents of disruption that conventional wisdom on animals in the theatre might take them to be. Instead, they are – even if unwittingly – evangelists of a white humanism that sought to inscribe the bourgeois living room and the English country farm on the cultural imagination of colonial space. How did animal lives contribute to this theatre of colonial place-making?11 And how do the racialized, gendered and classed dimensions of the animal subaltern help us to understand the circuits of affective and political exchange that bind colonial humanism to its many others?

This chapter is an early attempt to synthesize a large body of historical material gleaned from a close reading of Annabel Maule’s memoir and months of archival research in the Maule collection at the National Museums of Kenya, the company records at the Nakuru Players’ Theatre and the scattered ephemera related to the Jeanes School in the Kenyan National Archives. To my knowledge, the only scholar to have worked with these materials to date is my colleague Elizabeth Dyer, whose dissertation research in the History Department at the University of Pennsylvania conceives of the colonial theatre in Kenya as a political institution in its own right.12 Her dissertation – like my work in this chapter – addresses itself to a lacuna in the scholarship on African theatre outside of South Africa: the colonial period. Scholars of Eastern African theatre and performance – including Gichingiri Ndigirigi, Jane Plastow and Laura Edmondson13 – have largely focused, for excellent reasons, on anti- and postcolonial traditions within the theatrical corpus. Close attention to white colonial theatrical activity, however, helps to flesh out the practices and idioms against which black artists would later react. For this reason, I conceive of this chapter in dialogue with historians of the colonial theatre like Kellen Hoxworth and Bhekizizwe Peterson, whose work on the South African and larger British imperial context is indispensable.14 I am also inspired by the work of the historian Luise White and in particular her magisterial *Speaking with Vampires*, which locates the epistemic practices of coloniality in Eastern Africa in the rumors that circulated amongst “native” people about the occult power of whiteness.15 My intention here is much the same: to demonstrate how the institutionalization of

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white domesticity on the stages of colonial Kenya served the apparatus of racialization and animalization that produced the animal subaltern.

“A Superb Little Actress”

One of the principal difficulties in producing John Van Druten’s 1950 West End romp Bell, Book and Candle lies in casting its feline protagonist. “Never work with animals” is an established dictum of the theatre, as scholars like Nicholas Ridout have elucidated.16 The Maules, however, got lucky. After they had seen many other aspiring performers, “an elegant Siamese was set down on the stage. With feline fastidiousness she carried out a thorough tour of inspection which included the entire auditorium. She then returned to centre stage, sat down, curled her tail round

16 Nicholas Ridout, Stage Fright, Animals, and Other Theatrical Problems, Theatre and Performance Theory (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).
her neatly placed front paws and fixed her blue eyes on the last row of seats. She was hired on the spot.”

The Maules’ Pyewacket distinguished herself, as she continued to do months later “somewhere in the Taru Desert,” with her “fastidiousness,” “elegance” and “neatness.” She also seemed to have an in-built capacity to hit her mark and share with the room. In other words, Pyewacket embodied both an idealized femininity and an instinct for European theatrical convention. This was the perfect combination for a colonial theatre of white bourgeois place-making. Una Chaudhuri has argued that “Animality...[often] breaks the frame of drawing-room drama,” allowing playwrights to “stage literal destructions of the traditional stage spaces of realism;” in Ionesco’s *Rhinoceros*, for instance, she notes that the titular animals “famously thunder in the wings, reducing bourgeois spaces to rubble.”

The Maules’ Pyewacket, on the other hand, seems almost an apologist for realism and the bourgeoisie. Her appeal to the creative team behind the East African tour of *Bell, Book and Candle* inhered in her willingness to play by the rules.

This is a far cry from contemporary avant-garde performance practice having to do with animals. I am reminded of the bemused consternation the director Richard Gregory felt when the parrot he booked for his 2008 piece *Old People, Children and Animals* fell into the habit of opening the show, every night, with a line she had devised for herself and then repeated endlessly. While avant-garde “animal acts” – and the extraordinary body of theoretical exegesis they have stimulated in the last ten years – rightfully prize the disruptive power of animal unpredictability, it is important to remember that in relatively staid settings like the Maules’ Studio Theatre in Nairobi in 1952-1953 the capacity of animal performers to hew to the script was a source of special delight. “The audience hushed, the curtains parted and...I spoke my opening line: ‘Oh, Pye-Pye-Pyewacket – what’s the matter with me?’ Dead on cue she answered with a small Siamese ‘Mmmmm... Purrr’ and was an instant hit with the audience.”

This verdict was nearly unanimous; in a review of *Bell, Book and Candle* when it played in Nanyuki, the *Kenya Weekly News* declared that “Annabel Maule and her Siamese cat rather “stole” the show; Pyewacket answered all her questions with “miaows” at all the correct places and is a superb little actress.”

In many ways, this “superb little actress” is quite far removed from the idea of the animal subaltern that I put forward elsewhere in this dissertation. Pyewacket seems a willing, even eager, adjunct of colonial meaning-making, ready to supply “‘miaows’” whenever required. However, it is important to note that Annabel Maule provides absolutely no details whatsoever about where this “‘superb little actress’” came from, what connections she had with human or non-human family, even what name or names she had been given before she became subsumed into the theatrical personage of Pyewacket. The curiously passive locution “an elegant Siamese was set down on the stage” speaks to the degree of disempowerment this particular animal performer, like most other animal performers before and since, faced in her performative labor.

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21 Quoted in ibid., 40.
Annabel Maule insists on construing Pyewacket’s rapport with the audience, the “‘miaows’” she spoke “on cue,” as evidence of her willing participation in Bell, Book and Candle, but this is purely conjectural on her part. In performance, Pyewacket was reduced to a signifying surface, a pure exteriority, that echoed in uncanny ways the political work that taxidermy was doing elsewhere in the white culturalist circles that defined colonial sociality in Nairobi at the same time. In Chapter 2, I explore how emergent practices of natural-historical, paleontological and ethnological display helped to create and maintain a racializing discourse of wildness that lay the foundation for a politics of animal subalternity. Pyewacket’s career in the theatre indexes much the same dynamic as it routed itself through femininity and domesticity instead of the masculinist imaginary of “the bush.”

On this point, Annabel Maule is quite clear. Pyewacket’s malleability, her accommodating demeanor, and her general aversion to doing much work of any kind, mark her out as an ideal actress:

She had been an unequivocal success at every appearance and this without even trying! [...] All Pyewacket had done was to come on stage in my arms and instantly all attention was on her. And she loved it! She had never swept and carried, scrubbed and ironed, hammered and lifted, packed up and unpacked, stowed and repainted. She had never been called upon to help change a car wheel nor did she have to memorise where the guns were concealed. She had been taken to 14 temporary homes, many of them with resident, alien animals. True, she had held up the departure of our convoy more than once with a last-minute escapade. She had never gone sick, or bitten anyone. She had never fouled anywhere indoors. She had travelled all the miles we travelled, complaining when road conditions were not to her liking but taking an interest in the scene or sleeping as the mood took her. Truly Pyewacket was a non-pareil among cats.

“Pyewacket was a non-pareil among cats” precisely insofar as her behavior mirrored that of the stereotypical diva, the star who “never swept and carried, scrubbed and ironed, hammered and lifted, packed up and unpacked, stowed and repainted.” She did almost nothing, got all the credit and “loved” “all attention.” This gendered and gendering language is met with an animalized and animalizing concern that she might “[get] sick, or...[bite] someone,” or “[foul somewhere] indoors” – and a distinctly patronizing pride that she did not do any of those things. This is the form that subalternity takes within the cultivated space of animal theatricality: the insistence that a cat be domesticated enough to sell domesticity to the public.

The language of domestication and domesticity is, as I have shown, inevitably gendered. But Pyewacket’s brief career in the theatre also had a racial charge that helps to account for her unique place in the hierarchized zone of non-being governed by the logic of animal subalternity in colonial East Africa. Pyewacket was a Siamese cat, a designation that carries with it a racializing connection – no matter how tacit or tenuous – to Asianness and its meanings. The “fastidiousness” and “elegan[ce]” that the Maules saw in Pyewacket is part and parcel of an interspecies Orientalism that construes the Asian animal’s bodily being as a cipher for luxury and worldliness. This, too, has gendered implications. At one point in her memoir, Annabel Maule introduces a group of – presumably male – workers of Asian descent who came to install

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22 Ibid., 64–65. Italics original.
a fire exit at the Studio in terms that invoke the rapacious, predatory masses of nativist fantasy: “Their lovely new baby of a theatre was invaded by a horde of Sikhs.”

Pyewacket, on the other hand, is all feminine refinement and cool sophistication. She belongs in the Orient of Maule’s imperial imaginary, an imaginary that is hard-pressed to take definitive shape in the landscape through which the Bell, Book and Candle tour passed:

We were enclosed by the velvety African night when Don announced, ‘This must be Sultan Hamud.’ Sultan Hamud. What a name! What visions of voluptuous luxury were evoked by the words... Sultan Hamud: gilded domes and arabesque arches, Houris in diaphanous trousers, delicately patterned tiles and tinkling fountains... I peered from the back of the car but all I could make out were a few pinpricks of light in the surrounding eiderdown of night.

The reality of Sultan Hamud – a village on the way from Nairobi to Mombasa – could not fail to disappoint Annabel Maule, who expected “voluptuous luxury” and found only the impenetrable darkness of the bush. (Here too the theatrics of light and darkness stand in for the racializations accomplished by the colonial gaze.) It is at least conceivable that Annabel Maule was tutored in these fantasies by her father Donovan, who after all spent time in Egypt during the Second World War, but in my view it is more likely that her visions of “gilded domes and arabesque arches” were symptomatic of the more general Orientalism that structured the British imperial imaginary. The title of her memoir, Theatre Near the Equator, suggests a habit of flattening historical and geographic space, a penchant for imagining distant corners of the Empire into contact with one another in the unlikeliest – which is to say the most equatorial – of places.

The same might be said for the racial theatrics of pieces like Aladdin, a pantomime staged by the Nakuru Players in 1955. Unlike the Maules, the Nakuru Players were an all-amateur outfit sustained by the enthusiasm of the local community from their founding in 1949 onwards. While the Players may have lacked the Maules’ polish, they shared fundamentally the same outlook on the purpose of a colonial theatre. Their first production, Badger’s Green, by R.C. Sherriff, was conceived as a fundraiser for the Nakuru War Memorial Hospital and aimed, as a critic at the time put it in the East Africa Standard, at “transporting us for a few delightful minutes into another and more leisurely world, that of a pleasant English village in the ’20s.”

Aladdin, one of the more spectacular pantomimes that the Players put on in the 1950s, on the other hand, featured a pan-Asian array of ethnic stereotypes. Characters included “Hoo Ping,” “Hoo Pong,” Makee-Fetch” and “Princess Laughing Jade,” but also “Abanazar,” the “Slave of the Lamp,” and of course Aladdin himself. This mélange of Orientalism speaks to the racializing blur of Asianness – itself symptomatic of the sometimes perverse “intimacies” that imperialism sustained between “East and West” – into which Pyewacket was inserted.

24 Maule, Theatre Near the Equator: The Donovan Maule Story, 15.
25 Ibid., 32.
27 My use of this term is inspired by Lisa Lowe, The Intimacies of Four Continents (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015).
Fig. 2. An autographed cast list for the Nakuru Players' *Aladdin* (1955), from one of the theatre’s scrapbooks. Photography courtesy of the Nakuru Players Theatre.
As an “oriental” cat, Pyewacket was in a position to open hearts and minds to the wider world of the British Empire. In practice, at least outside of Nairobi, in the various cities and towns to which the Donovan Maule Players toured, this meant broadening the horizons of white settlers – who, Annabel Maule grumbled, had inadequate theatrical facilities and much too provincial taste. When Bell, Book and Candle took over the Nanyuki Club, “An elderly Club member clad in khaki shorts as commodious as a tent, golfing stockings and a sleeveless khaki jacket, wanted to know why lunch was being served in the Bar, not the dining room.... Chortling..., he sipped his first pink gin of the day. His chortle back-fired and he was overcome in a paroxysm of coughing, his face turning purple.”

The Maules felt that settlers like this jovial gin-drinker in his “commodious” khakis were in need of domestication too; to their minds, the refinement that Pyewacket brought to the proceedings could not have come too soon. The intention, as the reviewer of the Nakuru Players’ production of Badger’s Green made clear, was to “transport” residents of settler towns like Nanyuki to “another and more leisurely world” – that is, to provide them with a living cipher for their connection to the metropole and the more comfortable life their cohoart enjoyed there. Pyewacket, by virtue of being outside the racial logic of the colony itself, was uniquely well-suited to this expansive task. She meant something. The luxury and refinement she had come to signify helped to suspend space and time, conjuring a London living room into being in the dining room of the Nanyuki Club. I use the word “conjure” advisedly, because Pyewacket is a witch’s familiar in Bell, Book and Candle, helping her mistress to cast spells on her love interest and, through him, on the audience. This element of magic is largely incidental – or, better, ornamental – to the play, which remains in its fundamentals a bourgeois drawing room comedy. But the idea of holding the audience, at least, spellbound is an important one – and one that links Pyewacket’s “racial mattering” back to the hazy aura of occultism surrounding Orientalist fantasias like Aladdin. In Pyewacket, as in all representatives of Eastern feminine magic, “voluptuous luxury” is bodied forth for the audience, tantalizingly within reach, even for the “elderly Club member” in his “khaki shorts.”

The clubs and amateur theatrical societies at which the Maules performed Bell, Book and Candle while on tour through Kenya, Uganda and Tanganyika were often wanting in desired amenities. At times, this meant that the spectatorship for the play extended beyond the expected audience of white settlers:

> Side doors the entire length of the auditorium [at the Little Theatre in Mombasa] remained wide, to catch any little breeze blowing. This attracted a variety of insects, lured by bright stage lights. We blinked away salty tears from our eyes and tried to remain focused on our lines as moths fluttered and flies buzzed near our ears. An amiable mongrel dog ambled into one performance and sat quietly watching until boredom sent it ambling out again. Bats swooped, executing a few circuits of the stage then swooped out.

Unlike Pyewacket, these native animals have not learned discipline. While they are “lured by bright stage lights” and can even “[sit] quietly watching for a time,” at bottom they are disruptive, fickle, easily bored. Their presence on and in the scene helps create a picturesque atmosphere of tropical indolence, with interspecies anarchy raging just beneath the surface.

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28 Maule, Theatre Near the Equator: The Donovan Maule Story, 39.
29 Chen, Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect.
30 Maule, Theatre Near the Equator: The Donovan Maule Story, 33.
While descriptions like this one seem calculated to burnish Annabel Maule’s account of the tour, adding a can-do luster to her enumeration of what the company had to forebear while they spread art and culture “near the equator,” they also speak to a deepening process of what Bourdieu calls distinction\(^{31}\) by which higher animals were distinguished, even in their proximity, from lower ones. As Annabel Maule recalled of the company’s time in Mombasa:

> Applying make-up to a face slicked with sweat, I could hear cicadas shrilling nearby. Then came another sound, a high wailing cry: ‘Allah is Mighty!’ Jeremy rapped on the dressing room door. ‘Half an hour, please.’ Three calls – the insect to mate; the faithful to prayer; the actor to work.\(^{32}\)

These “Three calls” – the cicadas’, the muezzin’s, the stage manager’s – are phenomenologically proximate for Annabel Maule even as they are politically distinct. She herself is hailed by Jeremy alone; the other two calls – the “shrilling” of the insects and the “high wailing cry” broadcast from a nearby mosque – recede atmospherically into the background, where whomever or whatever is hailed, whether it is a “mate” or “the faithful,” are not of her concern. This flattening of interspecies difference past the bright line separating white humanity from its others is one of the principal mechanisms involved in sustaining the animal subaltern and keeping it politically apart.

I have suggested that blackness arrives \(\text{à pas de loup}\) on the scene of *Theatre Near The Equator* in the performative guise of the “indifferent lioness[es]” with which I opened this chapter. Notably, black humanity makes its own entrance with animals in tow – animals whose very contiguity with black humanity marks out an ideological relation that had profound effects throughout the colonial period and beyond. As the Maules passed through the East African countryside on the *Bell, Book and Candle* tour, Annabel Maule often had occasion to note the metonymic links binding black human beings to other members of the animal subaltern:

> Thatched ronadevels and grain stores dotted the surrounding hills. Kikuyu women, bent double, worked the red fertile soil – digging, hoeing, and weeding – cultivating sustenance for their ever-growing, ever-hungry families. Others, their backs loaded, trudged the miles, their hands busy weaving a sisal ciondo. Glossy-flanked goats nibbled and tore at bushes and rust-coloured sheep, bemused and disoriented, prepared to cross the road: some moving forward, others turning back, until a little herdsboy, stick in hand, appeared over the brow of a hill. Swiftly he set about concentrating their wooly minds.\(^{33}\)

Here, as elsewhere, blackness is endlessly subject to the white colonial gaze. Simone Browne has demonstrated the extent to which surveillance is bound up with the maintenance of blackness as a political category;\(^{34}\) she calls it “the fact of antiblackness.”\(^{35}\) Annabel Maule’s metonymic rhetoric here – the ease with which “Kikuyu women, bent double” are brought into relation with “Glossy-flanked goats nibbl[ing] and [tearing] at bushes” – indexes the degree to which white surveillance of blackness in colonial space involved an elision of the differences between animality and black humanity. It is true, of course, that Maule parcels out indications of

\(^{31}\) Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste.*


\(^{33}\) Ibid., 38.


\(^{35}\) Ibid., 10.
domesticity and domestication differently and largely along species lines: the “Kikuyu women” are “digging, hoeing, and weeding – cultivating sustenance” and the “little herdsboy, stick in hand” is in a position to “[concentrate the sheep’s] wooly minds.” The ascription of agriculture and pastoralism to the people of “the surrounding hills” does serve to distinguish them from their animals – but only up to a point. Annabel Maule is not interested in advancing an ecological vision of black belonging rooted in the mastery of animal life and the cultivation of land, as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o does so forcefully. (I explore Ngũgĩ’s black ecological humanism – which in fact developed in political contestation with the vision of the animal subaltern articulated by the likes of the Maules – in Chapter 3.) Instead, she is invested in a kind of animal picturesque, a flattening of black sociality into its relationship with land and animals, a (mis)recognition of blackness as animal.

My use of the term “(mis)recognition” is in a sense agnostic. I am interested here in maintaining a productive ambivalence, when it comes to the disposition of colonial epistemic power, between mistaking black people as animals and casting them in animal roles. Whether or not the white colonial cultivation of the animal subaltern as an abjectifying category of political non-being was a calculated act makes no difference in terms of its effects; either way, the animal subaltern is imagined, forcibly, into being. But the possibility that the white gaze, as embodied by Annabel Maule in this instance, is prone to misseeing blackness as animal is an intriguing one, not least because it illuminates the piecemeal, improvisatory way in which colonial governmentality made its political claims. Nowhere is this more clear than in relation to the larger circumstances in which the Bell, Book and Candle tour took place. The backdrop for the tour, as Annabel Maule makes abundantly clear, was the opening of hostilities in the Mau Mau War. Because they were “a band of Strolling Players...barnstorming outlying areas of Kenya where vicious, murderous attacks had taken place with equally vicious retaliation from Armed Forces,” the Maules were required to carry firearms and maintain a base level of racial paranoia at all times. The political situation, as one might expect, gave way to certain absurdities: “Our final performance at the coast was to a Full House with bouquets for Mollie and me and tributes to Pyewacket: a tin of sardines and a large plate of cold, cooked sausages – two of her favourite foods. Her star status was now assured and her fame spread with frequent mentions in the press. That night, on their farm on the Kinangop, Mr. and Mrs. Ruck and their young son Michael were murdered by Mau Mau.”

The sun was setting as we left Thomson’s Falls, outlining the crest of a hill ahead of us in a fierce shade of pink. Dense, dark forest enclosed the road on either side. A line of figures, silhouetted against the evening sky, came into view over the brow of the hill, occupying the width of the road. They appeared hooded and as they moved forward we caught the flash of metal.

I urged the Morris to greater effort, to gain ground... to reach the brow of the hill. As we cleaved through the centre of the cordon it scattered to either side of the road. The way ahead was clear. We had escaped the ambush.
Donald, from the back of the car, gave his verdict: “Poor things. You’ve frightened them to death.”

The African women, heavily-laden with firewood, their metal ear ornaments swinging, scrambled back on the road to continue the miles to their destination.\(^{38}\)

Annabel Maule mistook the “African women, heavily-laden with firewood” for Mau Mau fighters, but that misrecognition is also a recognition of the links between blackness, animality and danger that the authorities fighting the Mau Mau worked quite deliberately to establish. She emerges from this scene a bit chagrined for having annexed the “Poor things” – and even here, even incidentally, black life is made fungible, objectified, less – to her larger anxieties about the place of white domesticity in “the bush.” In the next two chapters, I will explore the links between animality and black “terrorism” against the colonial order, noting – as Jacques Derrida did in another context\(^{39}\) – the uncanny confluence of dehumanizations that structure that relationship. I would only note here how Annabel Maule casts the encounter back onto an atmospherics of wilderness and the dangers it contains: the light is a “fierce shade of pink;” “[d]ense, dark forest enclose[s] the road.” This seems an attempt to retrieve the danger of the primal scene, of the lionesses’ eyes as they “flashed in our direction.”\(^{40}\) Surrounded on all sides by bestial danger, the Maules have nowhere to turn but inward; Pyewacket, their “familiar,” the token of their evangelical domesticity, is the only animal that they can trust.

There is, then, a gulf between Pyewacket and other members of the animal subaltern. This is in part because “Africans,” unlike the “amiable mongrel dog” in Mombasa,\(^{41}\) do not seem to have come to see the show. Their spectatorship – that is, the reversal of the colonial gaze, the moment the colonized look back – takes place outside the theatre. This is not to say, however, that that spectatorship is not theatrical. Consider the comedy the Maules inadvertently stage for a busload of locals when their car breaks down on the road:

A country bus came laboring up the hill, the familiar load of beds, bicycles and bananas on the roof. At every window grinning black faces witnessed the scene of three wazungu standing beside their visibly steaming gari. Their laughter set off a cackle of alarm from the chickens travelling with them. As the vehicle crept past us, it lurched dangerously as passengers came from the off-side to get a closer look. When at last it drew ahead, the rear window filled with grinning faces intent on one last, hilarious glimpse.\(^{42}\)

This scene recalls, as ever, the Maules and the lioness: Africa –personified here by the “grinning black faces” and, inevitably, “the chickens travelling with them” – “put[s] the Seal of Absurdity on whiteness’ “aborted endeavors.”\(^{43}\) The black human beings who “witnessed the scene” of the wazungu, or white people, and their misfortune answer with cacophonous laughter and with a marked desire for “one last, hilarious glimpse.” In the process, they confirm for the Maules the anxiety at the heart of their project: the inarticulate but still ever-present feeling that they are out

\(^{38}\) Ibid., 45.

\(^{39}\) Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign, Volume I*.

\(^{40}\) Maule, *Theatre Near the Equator: The Donovan Maule Story*, 32.

\(^{41}\) Ibid., 33.

\(^{42}\) Ibid., 52.

\(^{43}\) Ibid., 12.
of place and far from home. In Nanyuki, this feeling connected forcefully with its political
correlative. Outside the Club, after their last performance, Annabel Maule looked up at Mount
Kenya, which was in many ways the symbolic center of the Mau Mau insurgency, and
wondered: “a full moon silvered Mount Kenya, highlighting the snow on the peaks. Mau Mau
gangs used caves up on the mountain; how many pairs of eyes had observed our comings and
goings in and around the Club? What reports of our activities had flashed along the swift,
mysterious bush-telegraph?” The “pairs of eyes” that so frequently “flashed” their way as they
made their way from town to town to perform their spectacles of Englishness are now imagined
into human-not-so-human flesh. For the Maules and other settler colonials, “Mau Mau gangs”
were the animal subaltern armed. Blackness bound the beast and the terrorist together and made
it invisible in what Annabel Maule calls “the velvety African night,” “the surrounding eiderdown
of night” – the curtain that closes around the scene, sectioning everything beyond the lights of
the car, the settler town, the London flat fit neatly into the dining room of the Club, from view.
Ta-Nehisi Coates has written forcefully of this phenomenon from his own perspective: “We were
black, beyond the visible spectrum, beyond civilization.” While Coates is of course referring to
the radically different context of the United States decades into Annabel Maule’s future, the
equation of epidermal blackness with the darkness of night and its terrors is a fundamental
feature of anti-black terror in the colonial world as well. The Mau Mau terrified white settlers
because they saw without being seen. Instead of making their way onto the stage to speak their
lines and be spoken to in return, they crept into the basement and burned the theatre down.

Pyewacket, of course, was the furthest thing from a revolutionary. Her body and its
meanings were annexed by the project of white domesticity and the subjunctivity of Englishness
in the African colonies. To the extent that this involved an involuntary subjection to political
orders beyond her world, she was made part of the animal subaltern. However, her gendering as
feminine and her racialization as “Oriental” held her apart from other animals onto which
colonial governmentality sought to project its power. She was both domesticated and
domesticating. Small wonder, then, that the only black people with whom Pyewacket cultivated a
connection, at least according to Annabel Maule’s retelling, were those members of the subaltern
who had already been attached or who had already attached themselves to the institutions of
white authority. On one notable occasion, just as Annabel Maule made ready to leave the house
where she had stayed the night, Pyewacket went missing. The household staff – although
evidently amused by the proceedings – willingly volunteered their time to help with the search:
“The gardener, together with a few women and children, materialised and joined in the fun. At
the foot of every tree, peering into every flowering shrub, was an African crying: ‘Poozz...
Poozz...’ before succumbing to uncontrollable laughter.” The laughter remains, and with it the
Maules’ paranoid sense of their own mis- or displacement so far away from home, but the
menace has gone. These “Africans,” Annabel Maule assumes, unlike the Mau Mau, have made
their peace with whiteness and indeed have actively entered into an affirmative relationship with
white domesticity. The same might be said for the askari, which in this context referred to black

44 Ibid., 41–42.
45 My understanding of “flesh” and “enfleshment” is deeply informed by Weheliye, Habeas Viscus: Racializing
Assemblages, Biopolitics and Black Feminist Theories of the Human.
46 Maule, Theatre Near the Equator: The Donovan Maule Story, 32.
47 Ta-Nehisi Coates, Between the World and Me (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2015), 43.
48 Maule, Theatre Near the Equator: The Donovan Maule Story, 42.
soldiers and policemen in colonial service, who guarded the border between Kenya and Uganda that the Maules intended to cross. These men, whom Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o would later excoriate as “watchdogs” for colonial interests, guarded a border post plastered with signs warning “ALL DOCUMENTS TO BE SHOWN. RABIES!! The movement of DOGS is strictly controlled.” As they approached, the Maules tried to conceal Pyewacket, since she had no papers, but she would not stand for it:

...she pushed and clawed her way out of her basket yelling, ‘Sssssshhhhhhit!!!’ She then jumped onto the back of the driver’s seat, eyes flashing and every hackle raised. A low rumble came from the back of her throat: she was one very angry Siamese. We waited meekly for the summons to the Police Post. Instead, one after the other, the ebony faces [of the Askaris] broke into grins, displaying perfect teeth. ‘Pousssee! Pousssee!’ they exclaimed in delight, stretching long, elegant fingers towards her. Mollified by their admiration, she refrained from spitting or scratching and allowed herself to be stroked by loving fingers.... *the Askaris* gave smart salutes, the barrier was raised and we crossed into Uganda. We drew up at the Border Inn still weak from laughter.

Here, at last, the laughter is mutual. Like (mis)recognizes like. Pyewacket, the famous “Siamese” is the coin of the realm. “The barrier...[is] raised.” The performance goes on.

**“Bringing Out Of Personality”**

The Maules’ *Bell, Book and Candle* tour allied itself on a fundamental level with the epistemic and political project of colonial governmentality. This was especially true in Kenya, where the violence of the Mau Mau conflict continued to proliferate; as Annabel Maule acknowledged, performances there were clearly “intended to ‘take settlers’ thoughts off their worries for an hour or two.” The larger project of the Donovan Maule Theatre, however, was to build a professional theatre infrastructure in East Africa – complete with a paying, culturally-minded audience. In order to do this, as I have suggested, the Maules built a theatre of place-making, staging play after play on the road and at their home theatre in Nairobi that conjured metropolitan living out of wood and paint and nails. The subjunctivity of the theatre allowed white nostalgia for Englishness to take a more definite shape; it also branded and commoditized that nostalgia, allowing it to circulate experientially at the cost of a seat. There is very little doubt that this was an educative – or, better, a re-educative – project for the Maules. Besides the work that they did on and with their audiences, they also opened an acting school in 1948, which promised – according to a flyer reproduced in *Theatre Near the Equator* – “Private lessons by arrangement in accordance with needs of individual student (child, or adult): dispelling of shyness, awkwardness, speech defects, improvement of diction, ease of movement, bringing out of personality.” This was the power of the theatrical training that the Maules imported from Europe. Training in its mimetic codes allowed one to “[bring] out...[one’s] personality.”

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49 Ibid., 54.
50 Ibid., 55.
51 Ibid., 37.
52 Ibid., n.p.
theatre, in this instance, was a technology of subjectification, a mechanism for the production of colonial persons.

The Maules arrived in Kenya as emissaries of theatrical naturalism. They did not, of course, stage naturalistic plays exclusively; *Bell, Book and Candle* itself is a farce that takes place in a world governed at least in part by magic. Nevertheless, the Maules’ emphasis on “professional” standards of theatrical production and their preference for drawing-room plays imported straight from Broadway or the West End align with the bourgeois revolution that swept naturalism into vogue. In his 1880 essay “Naturalism on Stage,” which for many inaugurated naturalism as a theatrical mode, Émile Zola took a cue from the burgeoning experimental sciences in order to argue that the modern theatre should probe the secrets of modern life like an anatomist might the human body:

Zola’s essay repudiates the “abstract characters” and “lying inventions” of the Romantic theatre in favor of “the story of daily life” in the bourgeois metropole. The new drama he envisioned would follow Darwinian theories of social psychology in conceiving of individual characters as in large part determined by their surroundings. The trouble for the Maules was that the surroundings that produced the characters in the plays they staged were not the surroundings in which they staged them. This obliged them not only to – as Annabel Maule put it – “create their own actors”54 at their theatre school but to “[bring] out...the personality” of their audiences. The mode of instruction in both cases was the theatre itself, converting the “direct observation” of bourgeois life that Zola advocated into a mode of discipline.

Here, too, the figure of the animal intrudes. Zola unwittingly anticipated this when he wrote “There is a tinge of the human beast in all of us, as there is a tinge of illness...to make them moral everything must be told.”55 He no doubt meant to refer to the “beast[ly]” depravity, the “tinge of illness,” to which he and other naturalist writers were so attracted as they plumbed the depth of their characters’ psyches. But the figure of “the human beast” – by which I mean quite specifically the human being in beastly costume – also figured quite prominently in the disciplinary theatricalization of domesticity and Englishness in colonial Kenya. This may not have been what the Maules, ever the purveyors of good taste, had in mind, but the conjuncture is nevertheless striking. In 1955, less than two years after the Maules embarked on their *Bell, Book and Candle* tour with Pyewacket, the Nakuru Players staged their *Aladdin*, in which Roger Bent played the front legs of a horse. In 1956, in *Jack and the Beanstalk*, he returned as another “human beast,” appearing this time as the front of what appears to be a Holstein cow:

55 Zola, “Modernism on Stage,” 127.
Aladdin, as I argued above, mobilized the discursive patterns of late Orientalism in the service of an affective flattening of the larger British Empire. Roger Bent’s “HORSE (front legs)” – as it was listed in the program – may or may not have contributed to the exotica sustaining that production and its political entailments. With “Claribelle (Widow Borden’s Cow) – fore,” however, Bent entered definitively into the realm of an animal Englishness. Jack and the Beanstalk was quintessential British mythmaking. The Holstein cow, which of course was hardly native to colonial East Africa, was a cipher for the European dairy farm, which is to say the European pastoral, which is to say a generic fairy-tale whiteness. I would also note that in the story the cow is the currency with which Jack purchases his magic beans; one can hardly imagine a more apt figure for the subjunctivity of the colonial theatre and its capacity to convert the lives of animal “familiars” like Claribelle and Pyewacket into an opportunity for the “bringing out of [white] personality.” The same might be said for these young girls, who appeared in the Nakuru Players’ 1967 pantomime Babes in the Woods in rabbit costume, confirming in the process not only their white femininity and its correlates (innocence, purity, that ineffable “aesthetic category” that Sianne Ngai calls “cute”\(^5\)) but also their being-at-home in the English wood into which colonial governmentality sought to domesticate the African bush. That this production

took place four years after Kenyan independence is further proof that the dicta of white colonial governmentality did not expire with the end of white government.

Fig. 4. The Nakuru Players’ pantomime Babes in the Woods (1956-1957), from one of the theatre’s scrapbooks. Photograph courtesy of the Nakuru Players Theatre.

There is little doubt that the epistemic and political project of the Nakuru Players – like the Maules – was aimed almost exclusively at white colonial subjects. These were the “personalit[ies]” that European theatre imported into Kenya – and the animal figures with which it was curiously populated – sought to cultivate. It is true that by the 1960s, black actors like Joseph Gichure – a housepainter turned stage hand and lighting technician turned performer\textsuperscript{57} – began to appear in the Maules’ productions. The Nakuru Players and Mombasa’s Little Theatre followed suit shortly thereafter. The Donovan Maule Theatre lasted until the mid-1980s; the Nakuru Players and the Little Theatre survived significant disruptions and re-organizations and are open today as black-run performance venues and community centers. None of these institutions, however, became centers of decolonial black aesthetics. Unlike Ngũgĩ’s experiments at Kamiriithù and elsewhere, which will take the stage in Chapter 3, the plays staged by latter-day multi-racial companies at the Maules or the Nakuru Players or the Little Theatre evince a continued willingness to explore the European canon and a concomitant conviction that black “personality” could be cultivated in and through European texts.

In many ways, productions like the Maules’ 1965 reimagining of Robert Bolt’s \textit{A Man For All Seasons}, which featured a black actor, Donald Kiboro, as The Common Man, spoke to

\textsuperscript{57} Maule, \textit{Theatre Near the Equator: The Donovan Maule Story}, 107–108.
the aesthetics of the black bourgeoisie in newly independent Kenya, to the conviction that white cultural forms – like white political institutions – could be reimagined with black bodies in place of white ones without significant disruption. Kiboro himself declared, in an interview with the *East Africa Standard* that Annabel Maule quotes approvingly, “I cannot bear to go to any theatre. Sheer jealousy is to blame. I simply cannot sit in front of the footlights without wanting to go on to the stage and take over one of the roles.” 58 Kiboro did not seek to unmake the colonial theatre but to revalue it from within. He saw enough of himself in the story of an obdurate 16th century English statesman to want to “take over one of the roles.” There is a certain type of decolonial energy in play here that should not be undervalued. But it can only go so far – as more radically decolonial artists and intellectuals like Ngũgĩ would establish a few years later – because Kiboro’s personality had been “[brought] out” within the disciplinary mode of colonial theatre. I want to propose, by way of closing, that this too speaks to the project of domesticating the animal subaltern, of remaking black subjectivity in a colonial mode.

A generation earlier, in the mid-1930s, at the Jeanes School in Kabete, white teachers worked concertedly to instruct their pupils in the biopolitical virtues of “a new faith and a new ideal centred round ‘Better Homes’, ‘Cleaner Homes’, ‘Healthier Children’, ‘Better Schools’, ‘Better Methods of teaching’, and ‘Better Gardens and Plantations.’” 59 In many ways, this approach was a holdover from the first iteration of the Jeanes Schools in the United States, where black children in rural areas from 1908 onwards were taught agricultural and industrial skills by board-approved teachers. The more or less seamless transfer of this pedagogical approach from the United States to Britain’s African colonies speaks to global reach of coloniality and the fungibility of black subjects in the minds of those who insisted – as the Maules did in a different context – on the “bringing out of...[their] personality.” 60 Here, too, the preferred approach was dramaturgical. W.H. Taylor, writing in *Oversea Education*, noted that “Various ways of instilling these tenets into the pagan population have been tried by Jeans [sic] teachers, but no one way has proved so successful in its practical outcome as the lecture combined with the propaganda play.” 61 And how did those “propaganda play[s]” unfold?

The moral or points to be emphasized were always placed in a favourable position by the use of characters personifying animals from native lore. If the object of the play was to teach the value of grainstores, it was the clever hare who profited by its use and the Hyena who regretted clinging to the old methods; if we were trying to show the value of good management of a village school, the poor type of teacher was generally represented by the Monkey or Hyena and the better type by the Hare or the Bee. The acting was burlesque in the extreme and often overdone, but the point or points to be stressed were much discussed afterwards and taken to heart. 62

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58 Ibid., 107.
The pupils at the Kabete Jeanes School could only be expected to learn their lessons about "Cleaner Homes" in and through "characters personifying animals from native lore." W.H. Taylor and other agents of colonial governmentality, in other words, assumed that the only way to accomplish the "bringing out of personality" that the white educational system required of its black students was to meet them where they were; before they could be domesticated, they had to be brought face-to-face, in a theatre of white place- and person-making, with their wildness, "personif[ied]" here by Hyena, Monkey, Hare and Bee. "The acting was burlesque in the extreme and often overdone," but that hardly mattered. The "point...[was] taken to heart."

It is unlikely that someone like Donald Kiboro was educated at the Jeanes School, which was at that time primarily a rural teacher training program. Very little of Kiboro survives in the archive besides his interview with the Standard and a few photographs. Here as elsewhere, I am attempting to abstract historical and theoretical insight from a small constellation of referents. Nevertheless, I do think it valid and worthwhile to ask whether anyone can fault someone like Donald Kiboro for seeking to divest himself of all traces of the animality foisted upon him and other colonial subjects in institutional contexts like the Jeanes School by virtue of their blackness. If the alternative is an uncertainly sourced "native lore" made subject to the requirements of biopolitical discipline, why not invest in that ideal of humanity that European theatre seemed so eagerly to foster? Why shouldn’t Kiboro be the Common Man? Wasn’t that, deep down, what the colonial project had made him want to be?

Coloniality did not have a monopoly on animal signification. The Jeanes School teachers are likely to have been acting in good faith when they designed their curriculum by drawing on the vast repertoire of animal fables and proverbs promulgated by Kenya’s many and varied oral literary traditions. Indeed, their approach may well have been sustained by the mania for “tribal” ethnography that sustained institutions like the Coryndon Memorial Museum in colonial Nairobi, which I turn to in the next chapter. But the fact remains that the Jeanes School operationalized this animal repertoire, no matter its provenance, in the service of a racializing imperative. The vital task of domestication was shared across the spectrum of activities comprising the white theatre in colonial Kenya, from the Maules to the Nakuru Players to the Jeanes School. Collectively, this theatre worked to establish and enforce an Englishness in the imperial hinterland. It did this with animals like Pyewacket, whose cool sophistication brought an urbanity to the provincial stage, and animal figures like the cow in the Nakuru Players’ Jack and the Beanstalk, which allegorized in animal form the domesticity of the English fairy tale and its utopian marketplace of magic beans and dreams of home. Whiteness stands at the heart of this project but blackness is always its correlative, not only for those Jeanes School teachers for whom the colonial theatre provided distorted reflections of the “native” animal imaginary but also for Donald Kiboro and his cohort, waiting in the wings for a chance to step onto the colonial stage and make its domesticity their own.
Chapter Two
AN EMPIRE OF THE LIFELIKE DEAD
Staging the Animal Subaltern in the Coryndon Memorial Museum

The previous chapter dealt with the burgeoning culture of white theatrical societies in colonial Kenya, which inaugurated and later helped to defend an imaginative suspension of space and time in which a two-man Holstein cow or a precocious Siamese cat could conjure a Dover country field or a London drawing room into being in the midst of what was otherwise a dusty settler backwater. I suggested that “Claribelle (Widow Borden’s Cow),” Pyewacket the cat and virtually all the other animals on the colonial stage were stock figures of an animal Englishness. They formed part of a constitutive inside for white artists and their audiences that was comfortable, familiar, non-threatening — in a word, domestic. This chapter, in turn, is addressed to the wild — that infinite space of alterity beyond the lights of the settler town to which the colonial imagination often anxiously returned. Rather than escaping into the subjunctive pastoralism of a fairy tale England as the Maules and their audiences did, the colonial natural historians, ethnologists and paleoanthropologists who are the focus of this chapter sought to master the animal subaltern by making it knowable or, ideally, known. This is the root and route of the epistemic pressure that colonial governmentality brought to bear on the East African landscape.

In 1909, in the words of historian Jean Brown, “a small group of enthusiastic amateur naturalists, including hunter Blayney Percival, excited by the wealth and diversity of living things in East Africa, met at the home of the Governor [of Kenya] Sir Fredrick Jackson, himself an authority on birds, and decided to form the East Africa and Uganda Natural History Society.”2 The Society, which from its inception moved in elite circles of British colonial officialdom in Nairobi, went on to establish a small exhibition space near the Provincial Commissioner’s Office for the study and display of natural-historical specimens. In 1922, it moved its growing collection into a larger space on Kirk Road, only to move it yet again in 1930 into a still-grander space on Ainsworth Hill, now called Museum Hill, where it remains to this day.3 The new museum on Ainsworth Hill was named The Coryndon Memorial Museum, after Sir Robert Coryndon, another Governor of Kenya, who died in 1925. Coryndon, like his predecessor Sir Fredrick Jackson, was a naturalist, and his friends agreed that the best way to memorialize him would be to raise funds for the study of natural history in the colony; as Sir Edward Grigg put it in a letter published by the East African Standard on February 13th, 1926, “it is because…[Coryndon] was a field naturalist, with a high realization of the valuable economic uses to which knowledge acquired in the field may be put, that all have agreed that his memory should be perpetuated by something in the nature of a museum building which will bear his

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1 My use of this term is informed by Spivak’s work on “epistemic violence.” See Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?”
name.”⁴ A first-rate museum, as Sir Edward Denham noted in another letter requesting contributions, would not only honor Coryndon’s memory but also serve a civic purpose: “The Colony is growing, and there are a large number of children growing up in this Colony, and they are doing without many amenities. Of course, at present we have only a Natural History Museum and not properly equipped, but I have in my mind a much bigger scheme....a museum on a prominent site in Nairobi, which will deal with, first of all, the fauna and flora of Kenya.”⁵ By the mid-1930s, that museum, despite the odds that increasingly desperate fundraising letters evidently had to overcome, had become a reality.

Accounts of the Coryndon Memorial’s founding lay bare the social and intellectual traffic between “enthusiastic amateur[s]” that was at the heart of natural history research and collecting in Kenya during the interwar period. These were political functionaries, not museum professionals, and they conceived of naturalist scientific enquiry as being in some way aligned with the colonial project. Their social location in and of the burgeoning white colonial aristocracy – and more broadly in and of the British Empire – required that they route a significant part of their energy towards “the fauna and flora of Kenya.” To put it differently: because East Africa’s cachet within the Empire inhere in large part in its wildlife, the bureaucrats tasked with administering colonial holdings there had to take an active – and ideally “enthusiastic” – interest. As one M.E. Roberts put it in a 1928 letter to the editor of The Times of London:

> ...certain parts of the world, and of our Empire, are highly valuable for purposes of natural science and art, as well as for settlement and for commercial and trading purposes.... The attraction of an old country lies chiefly in its culture, and in those aspects of civilization for which men are richer and happier. The fascination of a new country lies largely in its wild life and natural surroundings, and in the wise use and enjoyment of them. Squander these advantages, and in a short space of time such a country becomes primarily a commercial proposition, a land where people can live and trade and tour.⁶

Because “a new country” did not – could not – lay claim to “those aspects of civilization for which men are richer and happier,” its administrators had to have recourse to its wildness. Additionally, they had to defend that wildness from the encroachment of a purely “commercial” sensibility that would domesticate it, rendering “a new country” like Kenya “a land where people can live and trade and tour.” The word “people” here, though without question racialized as white, has a decidedly classist valence as well: if ordinary “people” were allowed in in large enough numbers, places like Kenya would be in danger of losing what made them “highly valuable for purposes of natural science and art.” The colonial administrative class was consequently tasked with the maintenance of a liminal state. Kenya would never be England, but neither should it ever be a place where “people” would merely “live and trade and tour.”

As a consequence, colonial administrative policy in Kenya tended towards the museumification of its “wild life and natural surroundings.” The Coryndon was in effect a museum within a museum, a central hub linking together an array of interventions into the so-

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⁴ Quoted in “Report of The Committee Appointed to Inquire into the Relationship Between the Coryndon Memorial Trustees and the East Africa and Uganda Natural History Society, and into the Conditions under Which the Coryndon Memorial Is Maintained” (Nairobi: Colony and Protectorate of Kenya, 1937), 3.
⁵ Quoted in ibid.
called “bush,” that vast region of animal alterity beyond the lights of white settler towns. As a scholar of theatre and performance, I am interested in these interventions – which ran the gamut from big game hunting to archeological digs to ethnological field studies – as examples of what Una Chaudhuri calls “zooësis,” the “myriad performance and semiotic elements” that help to structure the relationship between human beings and animals.7 I use the term “animals” advisedly, despite the fact that ethnology and other branches of natural historical inquiry in the early twentieth century sought to make claims about emphatically human beings, because what was at stake here was the very definition of the human across racial, ethnic and species lines. Reading these interventions as performances helps to lay bare the improvisatory political dramaturgy that sustained the Coryndon Memorial. The Coryndon’s exhibits, and the zooëtic practices that made them possible, offered up an ad hoc performative enunciation of the colonial political project vis-à-vis the non-human. Nothing more or less was at stake than the deathly power of colonial governmentality itself, the disciplinary power to make and display death at will.

This essay follows in the wake of pioneering scholarship, from Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett to Susan Bennett, on the performativity of objects and the theatricality of museums.8 I am invested in continuing to expand the terrain of performance studies work on material culture outside of the Global North into spaces like colonial Nairobi – an effort that is not without its complications. Unlike ethnological and natural-historical museums in the colonial metropoles of Europe – which sought to theatricalize the astonishing bounty of faraway lands for an imperial public9 – the Coryndon was very much in situ10 in colonial Kenya, working to make manifest the ongoing subjugation of the wilderness for a local audience. Consequently, the claim, advanced by defenders of metropolitan museums like James Cuno, that while “encyclopedic museums” “might be witnesses to empire...they are not instruments of empire”11 does not hold water in the Coryndon’s case. The Coryndon was an engine of colonial governmentality as it sought to expand its power over the East African landscape.

On the surface, this statement may seem in need of qualification. A recent wave of museological scholarship beginning with John MacKenzie’s important volume Museums and Empire advocates a granular approach to colonial museums and their history, an approach that in practice seems to entail a deep skepticism towards – if not an outright refusal of – any totalizing claims about the links between museums and empire writ large.12 Clair Wintle attributes these totalizing claims to “Pervasive Foucauldian scholarship emphasising the hegemony of the

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8 Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage; Bennett, Theatre & Museums.
10 Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett makes a very productive distinction between “in situ” and “in context” museum displays in her essay “Objects of Ethnography,” a distinction that I am adapting for my own purposes here. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage, 19-23.
museum as a technology of power and as an architect of singular knowledge” and echoes “calls to reveal the inconsistencies and failures in authority of such ‘disciplinary regimes.’” While it is true that careful historiography is indispensable and theory shouldn’t serve as a scholarly deus ex machina, this rejection of Foucault is misplaced – not least because it minimizes the important work done in a Foucauldian mold by scholars like Tony Bennett and Timothy Luke. Because power, for Foucault, is dispersed throughout the body politic as blood is through the bloodstream, it cannot be singular or monolithic; micro-powers “are not univocal; they define innumerable points of confrontation, focuses of instability, each of which has its own risks of conflict, of struggles, and of an at least temporary inversion of the power relations.” Foucauldian analysis is consequently uniquely suited to capturing the inconsistencies, ambivalences, false starts and failures that feature so prominently in the story of the Coryndon and other sites of colonial power. The highly provisional, experimental and piecemeal process that Jackson, Grigg, Denham and others embarked on in order to establish “something in the nature of a museum building” in Nairobi speaks to their amateurishness and at the same time their immersion in a field of power. This is the stuff that Empire is made of. Politics absent intention is still politics.

Moreover, the Foucauldian approach I take to the question of the production and display of non-human artifacts in this essay is inspired in part by Foucault’s own observation that the roots of discipline lie in the surveillance of non-human animals. Bentham’s Panopticon itself, Foucault notes, had its antecedent in the menagerie at Versailles: “[t]he Panopticon is a royal menagerie; the animal is replaced by man...and the king by the machinery of furtive power. With this exception, the Panopticon also does the work of a naturalist.” The history of the Coryndon bears out the truth of Foucault’s assertion and its converse – that naturalism “also does the work” of discipline. The reports, letters, memoranda, photographs and other ephemera from the pre-Independence period that are housed in the archives of the Coryndon’s postcolonial successor, the National Museums of Kenya, point to the political ramifications of the zoöetic practices by which the administrative class of colonial Kenya sought to consolidate its power. By abrogating to itself – in official documents as much as in informal accounts of shooting safaris – the right to ask as custodians for Kenya’s museumified landscapes and the non-human beings that lived there, the apparatus of colonial governance vouchsafed its own authority and the legitimacy of its claim on the land it occupied. This disciplining of the land itself found its echo in the disciplinary ramifications of the culture of display enshrined at the Coryndon, where artifacts of non-human life like taxidermied animal bodies and pre-human hominid fossils performed the “subjugation of the wilderness” that colonial governmentality was so anxious to demonstrate. This

16 Ibid., 203.
“enlivening” of the non-human dead\textsuperscript{18} – this obsessive insistence on the lifelikeness of skins and bones – should be of singular interest to performance and theatre scholars, at the very least for the new and provocative ways in which it raises the question of mimesis and its political function. As Jennifer Parker-Starbuck has asked in her work on taxidermy, “[w]hat does it mean to place a once living animal in a living space?”\textsuperscript{19} In the context of the Coryndon, the answer is clear: the display of taxidermied animals and other remains of beings thought to be non-human performed the sovereign power of colonial governmentality to take life and give names to what it killed.\textsuperscript{20}

\textbf{Anxiety and the Maintenance of Colonial Distinction}

Colonial natural historians, anthropologists, archeologists and big game hunters – four categories of expertise that were decidedly not mutually exclusive at the time – felt very keenly that they were out of place in East Africa, but that they were nonetheless best positioned to look out for its best interests. Many documents from the interwar period bear the trace of this affect, a distinctive collocation of uncertainty and compensatory self-aggrandizement. Here, once again, the psychic life of coloniality routed itself through the figure of the animal. “Old Africa hands” with many years’ experience of Kenya’s wildlife – among them the men who helped establish the Coryndon – were particularly quick to tout their qualifications as sensible and sensitive interpreters of the zooëtic field. Many of these men were concerned with what the anonymous author of a piece in a \textit{Times} of London “East Africa and Sudan Number” called “the promiscuous slaughter of animals by alleged sportsmen.”\textsuperscript{21} These “alleged sportsmen,” mostly European and North American tourists “on safari” in British East Africa, failed to respect the rules of behavior that the white hunting aristocracy in Nairobi and elsewhere held to be sacrosanct. These visitors, unlike their more prudent hosts, “took” game animals needlessly and in great numbers and in the process made it “more and more difficult to approach them in their haunts.”\textsuperscript{22} This was in part because the “alleged sportsmen’s” excessive use of automobiles caused the animals – who until that point “failed to connect the motor with the presence of danger”\textsuperscript{23} – to become wary. This was unacceptable; as subjects of king and crown, the wild animals of the Kenya Colony and the Tanganyika Territory were supposed to be available at all times to the “white African’s” steady watchful eye.

Aaron Bady has shown how the East African “bush” came to serve as a geographically and historically dislocated Western frontierscape for American sportsmen like Theodore Roosevelt and Ernest Hemingway.\textsuperscript{24} For white colonial hunters like Denys Finch Hatton, the


\textsuperscript{19} Parker-Starbuck, “Animal Pasts and Presents: Taxidermied Time Travelers,” 152.

\textsuperscript{20} My ideas about sovereignty, violence and the exception have been shaped in particular by Schmitt, \textit{Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty}.

\textsuperscript{21} “Hunting Game With A Camera,” \textit{The Times}, March 13, 1928, sec. East Africa and Sudan Number, xii.

\textsuperscript{22} “Hunting Game With A Camera.”

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{24} Aaron Bady, “White Man’s Country: The Image of Africa in the American Century” (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2013).
charismatic “Africa hand” hazily immortalized in Karen Blixen’s Out of Africa, places like the Serengeti plain were an ecological commons. The idea of the commons in this case was somewhat paradoxically modeled on – and consequently subject to the exclusionary logic of – European feudal land policy. Like royal deer parks, African game reserves had to be defended by knowledgeable managers and wardens from the depredations of greed and what Finch Hatton called “org[ies] of slaughter.”

In a series of letters to the Times, published between 1928 and 1929, that helped to inaugurate and sustain a conversation about wildlife management in which both M.E. Roberts and the authors of the “East Africa and Sudan Number” took part, Finch Hatton advertised his knowledge of the “bush” in order to maintain the productive distinction between good and bad hunters that underwrote colonial zooësis and the systems of value it propagated. Although an excellent marksman himself, Finch Hatton went on the record with his enthusiasm for non-lethal engagement with wild animals, touting on several occasions “the opportunities which...[the East African wilderness] offers for the observation, study, and photographing of all kinds of game.”

A well-executed photographic safari, in Finch Hatton’s opinion, was actually greater proof of a guide’s expertise than a shooting expedition:

Hunting for pictures is in many ways more exacting than hunting for trophies. For success it requires an equal knowledge of the quarry’s habits; equal skill in tracking and in finding him unawares; greater skill and patience in the actual approach, since the distance at which a good picture can be taken must nearly always be far less than the distance for a safe shot with a rifle. For this reason the picturing of some dangerous game animals tends to be more exciting, and it is certainly more educative, than the shooting of them. For the photographer must often remain for hours in close proximity with his subject: right judgments and quick decisions are in constant demand while he waits upon his game. Sometimes he has to remain for days in close touch with his quarry before his opportunity comes. During such times, while on the qui vive for his chance of a picture, he is of necessity constantly observing the habits of the animals which he is trying to photograph. I have spent four days and two nights close to a herd of buffalo before getting a picture, and one might easily have spent twice as long without success.

I have quoted from Finch Hatton’s article at such length because it brings to the fore a number of tropes that structure the relationship of the white colonial aristocracy to that infinite region of animal alterity that surrounded it. A true African sportsman, Finch Hatton argues, is “knowledge[able],” “skill[ed]” and “patien[t],” capable of “right judgments and quick decisions” – in short, uniquely, even preternaturally, competent in his ability to move through this dangerous landscape. While he is the chief actor in the performance of dominion over nature that big game hunting entails, he is also a spectator par excellence, a connoisseur of the spectacular scene that nature affords those who know enough not to blunder along guns blazing. The relationship of the African sportsman to “his game” is one of “close proximity,” “close touch” – an intimacy that borders on the erotic: “I have spent four days and two nights close to a herd of buffalo.” The gendered logic of this intimacy – the deep imbrication of white masculinity in the erotics of “picturing...dangerous game” – justifies the continued use of the male pronoun to describe this prototypical “sportsman,” the well-documented adventures of women hunters like

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26 Ibid.
Karen Blixen notwithstanding, insofar as it marks the extension of patriarchal and masculinist regimes of power, property and knowledge into the always already gendered (and racialized) animal realm. All told, it is apparent from the language Finch Hatton uses that African game are “his” – his property, his wards, his objects of desire – in a way they cannot be for profligate American tourists, who count themselves great hunters on their first and likely only trip to Africa for having shot everything in sight.  

Maintaining the distinctive forms of cultural capital that legitimated their unearned and therefore precarious position at the pinnacle of the colonial social hierarchy required that white hunters like Finch Hatton ritually distinguish themselves from tourists insofar as they represented the intrusion of an unacceptably foreign sensibility. As Andries Pienaar – a European settler in Moshi – put it in a letter to the *East African Standard* that Finch Hatton quoted with approval: “They had never been in Africa before, but a single *safari* sufficed to raise them to the front ranks of the ‘greatest’ hunters.” But Finch Hatton and his cohort also had to defend themselves from an endogenous threat: the “natives” whose land they had so recently expropriated. The relationship of indigenous Kenyan and Tanganyikan communities to the wildlife that surrounded them was a favorite subject of colonial anthropologists, who tended to suggest that these people, by virtue of being “of the land” in a mysterious primeval way, had a closer and healthier relationship to animals than white people did. This was part and parcel of the racializing metonymy that colonial biopolitics established and policed: black people, according to the logic of this view, stood alongside wild animals on the continuum of life and its relative value. Finch Hatton and other white hunters shared this sentiment to a certain extent, but their main interest in “the native” was in the threat “he” posed to the ecological commons. In his 1928-1929 articles in the *Times*, Finch Hatton acknowledged that Maasai herdsmen, with their spears and poison arrows, were able to “give...[a] good account of themselves” in confrontations with lions. However, Finch Hatton also suggested that other animals, like antelope and kudu, were in danger of being completely wiped out in Tanganyika because the government there held to the theory that “the game belongs to the natives,” who – the implication is clear – could not be trusted to exercise sensible restraint. This point was brought home by Alfred Sharpe who, writing in response to Finch Hatton, noted that “In olden days the native had neither guns nor powder; he had spears and bows and arrows, and set traps and snares, &c. It is the white man who brought him first muzzle loaders, and latterly cordite rifles.” Lifted out of “his” traditional life-ways – one might also say out of the state of nature – by modern technologies of killing, “the native” now had the capacity to run amok, to pursue “his” elemental desire for meat to catastrophic ends. In order to avoid such an outcome, the colonial administration –imagined as it often was as a benevolent father, an agent of stern but loving care – must step in to maintain the peace.

Caught between equally but differently rapacious threats to the ecological commons, the colonial state and the “enthusiastic amateurs” that acted as its agents sought to assume political and intellectual control over the wild. What better way to resolve their anxieties over being so obviously out of place than to claim superior knowledge? “White Africans” like Leakey and

29 Quoted in Ibid.  
30 See, for instance, Hollis, *The Nandi: Their Language and Folk-Lore*.  
31 Hatton, “Lions At Their Ease,” 12.  
Finch Hatton traded on being both “of” and “out of” Africa, intimately familiar with its esoteric mysteries and at the same time removed enough to be capable of objective assessment of their true nature. In the political-intellectual economy of colonial East Africa, knowledge of “the bush” guaranteed one a spot at the table. Men like Finch Hatton, Leakey and the founding fathers of the Coryndon Memorial were determined to be the wild’s interpreters. They sought to establish themselves as the curators and docents of Kenya’s museumified landscape, abrogating to themselves the power to decide what should be taken from the natural world and how. By delineating the finer points of naturalist connoisseurship, they sought to distinguish their interventions – their judicious use of gun or camera, paring knife or specimen brush – as illustrative performances of colonial power and its beneficence.

**Power, Knowledge and the Production of Taxonomies**

The signal desire of colonial governmentality in Eastern Africa was to master the wild and its beasts. This was a tall order. Innumerable popular and scientific accounts of the Kenyan and Tanganyikan landscape attested to how vast, how dangerous, how wild the wild really was.

![Punch cartoon](image)

*Fig. 5. A badly damaged *Punch* cartoon, “Uganda Railway,” that appeared in Kenyan newspapers (c.1900). Photograph courtesy of the Archives Section of the National Museums of Kenya.*
This cartoon, which appeared “by permission of Punch” but does not seem to have been published there, appeared in at least one colonial Kenyan newspaper, The Globe Trotter, to commemorate the completion of the Uganda railway at the turn of the twentieth century. The railway – a mammoth feat of civil, political and social engineering – was in and of itself an attempt to master the wild, to make Kenya traversable all the way from the Indian Ocean coast to Lake Victoria. This effort, the cartoonist suggests, could only ever be partially successful, as dangerous beasts lurked behind every bush in the “bush” through which engineers – read: imported Indian “coolie” labor – had laid the track. A closer look shows these beasts doing their grizzly work; snakes and leopards and the infamous “man eaters of Tsavo” drag respectable white men in khaki suits from their train cars and run them up improbable palm trees. The colonial everyman on his knees at the center of the image begs politely for his life, but the lion is indifferent. The nascent regime of wildlife conservation in the East African Protectorate, the artist suggests in the signpost on the right, is to blame. The bush and its “big game” mean to devour white men; for civilization to survive and progress to continue, the wild must be mastered.

Lions are not the only beasts that menace the future of civilization in Africa. Other familiar figures abound, among them the sly, cowardly native and the savage ape. This image gleefully collapses the hundreds of miles that separate the lions of the savannah from the gorillas of the mountain forest, and makes of the gorilla at the bottom-center an anthropomorphic racial (and racist) cipher: the black brute, grinning his gap-toothed smile, a virginal white woman, fainting picturesquely, captive in his meaty arms. The “natives” on the station house roof – and that is the correct term, natives, for these are not people but signs, hooting, straw-skirted figures of a bestial blackness – are ape-like too, limber climbers, cheeky not-quite-human observers of fully-human misery. It would be easy, and undoubtedly correct, to read the gorillas and the natives here as racial (and racist) caricatures. My argument is broader and more difficult: namely, that “natives,” apes, snakes and lions alike exist on a continuum of non-humanity, a racializing and animalizing assemblage that links blackness and animality for human beings and animals alike. In other words, this cartoon indexes a contiguity – brought into being and policed by colonial power – between blackness and beastliness, between which there is now the possibility of metonymic transfer.

The Coryndon Memorial Museum collected and displayed specimens drawn from this entire spectrum of non-humanity. Its extensive holdings of animal skeletons and taxidermy were often exhibited alongside ethnologic displays of contemporary “tribal” artifacts. Even today, in independent Kenya’s National Museum, the one flows – sometimes disconcertingly – into the other. The Museum’s principal display of human material culture – including clothing, cooking and eating utensils, ritual objects, and so on – is currently housed in a second-floor balcony space that opens onto the Great Hall of Mammals below. Some of the larger taxidermied animals, most notably a worn giraffe, poke their heads inquisitively up through the opening so that they seem almost a part of the anthropological exhibit above them. In this way, the conceptual proximity of human and non-human animal life is made corporeal, deeply – if perhaps inadvertently – rooted in the affective experience that visitors have of the museum. Much the same could be said of the Museum’s extensive collection of pre-human hominid fossils, which – thanks in large part to the efforts of the Leakey family – have accumulated impressively since the early twentieth century. In the Museum, as in a great deal of the paleoanthropological literature, the pre-human hominid
functions as a mediating third term, intervening ambiguously between modern humanity and its (our?) animal past.

This approach to staging the non-human is not unique to the Coryndon or to the National Museum that succeeded it. Many natural historical and anthropological museums in Europe and North America continue to rely on similar modes of display. However, the Coryndon is of special interest because of its location in and of colonial East Africa, where questions of the humanity or animality of colonial subjects were adjudicated on their own terrain. The Coryndon’s culture of display was in my view constitutive of an improvisatory political dramaturgy, an ad hoc performative enunciation of the colonial political project vis-à-vis the non-human. The most obviously political aspect of this dramaturgy was the (re-)educative function the Coryndon was expressly intended to carry out in and on the visitors who walked through its doors. But the politics of the museum and its culture of collection and display stretch further back – as the foregoing discussion of hunting and safari culture showed – to the animal themselves and their subjection to death-dealing orders beyond their world. It is important, no matter the difficulties involved, to try to think politically, to conceive of a politics, beyond the human – as scholars like Brian Massumi and Bruno Latour are increasingly encouraging critical theorists to do. Massumi in particular has stressed the ludic dimensions of a politics that takes animals into account. It is clear that for the Coryndon’s hunter-collectors, animals were indeed “big game.” However, once the game was won, the animals in question lost (irrevocably) the power of improvisation and invention that Massumi values so highly. They became, in a word, objects.

This was an important kind of dispossession, and even the Coryndon’s staff – who, it bears repeating, were developing their practice by trial and error as they went along – felt it as a loss. Norman Mitton, for instance, the Keeper of Exhibitions for many years, was famous for his extraordinarily lifelike paintings and castings of fish, which he was only able to make by “photographing and casting fish as they were taken out of the sea” – that is, by photographing and casting fish while they were still alive or only just dead; this technique allowed Mitton to “revise the descriptions of many fish which had formerly been described only when they were dead and had changed colour.” Here, description – like the related processes of “segment[ation], detach[ment], and carry[ing]...away” that Kirshenblatt-Gimblett ascribes to the act of collecting ethnographic objects – is figured as both a triumph of scientific will and a hopeless attempt to keep the colors of life from fading away. Norman Mitton – like Louis Leakey, Dennis Finch Hatton and other members of the colonial natural historical community before him – found that securing and disseminating knowledge about the wild necessarily entailed a struggle with the deathliness of life itself.

The animals displayed at the Coryndon, once they were dead and described, were captive to the colonial gaze, made subject to the imperatives of colonial order. Derrida has advanced a compelling reading of the deep intimacy between sovereignty and beastliness; here colonial

36 Ibid.
37 Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage, 2.
sovereignty was exercised – as Mary Louise Pratt might have intuited on the basis of her work on imperialism and scientific travel writing – in the guise of science, as the Coryndon and its surrogates in the Natural History Society killed, mounted and displayed its subject beasts. The records of the Coryndon are rife with more or less aggrandizing accounts of the adventures of hunter-scientists like “Snake Man” C.J.P. Ionides, or “Iodine.” Ionides earned his double nickname by “indulging in his favourite occupation of hunting rarities by foot safari” until illness obliged him to build his own wheelchair and hunt snakes instead. Jean Brown credits him with one of the Coryndon’s gorilla specimens, a giant eland and a white rhinoceros – not to mention 266 snakes, 205 lizards and 34 amphibians in 1954 alone. The dominion of (white) man over (black) nature – this empire of the lifelike dead – is made dramatically evident in this reduction of the wild to its remains, its tallies, its tropes: now made domestic, peaceful, still.

This stillness was sometimes achieved – as in the case of Norman Mitton’s fish – by means of plaster casting, but more often than not the technique of choice was taxidermy. It is worth noting in some detail the gruesome labor of dismemberment that this required. Here is Jean Brown’s account of the skinning of Ionides’ white rhinoceros:

> These huge beasts, half as heavy again as the black rhinoceros are not difficult to hunt but their size makes the job of skinning and preliminary curing into a nightmare. In the heat it must be done at great speed, but the removal of the skin is difficult and requires great care as the horns, composed of compressed fibre, are part of the skin and adhere to the bosses of bone on the skull. The bone, therefore, had to be cut off inside the skin under the horn and dug out later. Every particle of fat had to be pared systematically off the skin with great care taken of the lips, eyes, nostrils and ears as any trace of fat left would have rotten through and damaged the skin. The whole skin was then rubbed with alum and salt until dry. The operation took relays of men thirty-six hours non-stop; even so, visitors examining the rhinoceros closely will find that his skin has cracked in places.

Ionides’ gunshot – the shot that felled the rhinoceros – was a violent performative, an embodied instantiation of his claim on the animal in the moment of its death. In her important anti-hunting polemic “The Killing Game,” Joy Williams notes “Hunters....kill for the thrill of it, to make an animal ‘theirs...’ The animal becomes the property of the hunter by its death.” The act of killing is performative here because it makes something happen: the live animal becomes, in an instant, an object, a piece of property. In the context of the epistemic economy of natural history in colonial Kenya, in which the Coryndon functioned as a kind of board of exchange, this property relation was taken still further. Ionides’ rhinoceros was converted into currency, into a kind of “animal capital” in the moment its death. But the act described in such detail above – the act of skinning the corpse; of paring the fat; of taking great care of the lips, eyes, nostrils and ears; of rubbing the hide with alum and salt – is another sort of performance altogether. Here the
politics of white masculinity reassert themselves in the messy, bloody struggle of homo colonialis to attain dominion over nature. The act of field dressing is intimate, erotic, like Finch Hatton’s “four days and two nights close to a herd of buffalo;” the flesh of the animal is never more present than in this moment of stripping it away. If the taxidermied rhinoceros is the trace that remains after the fact, this is the live act itself: the deathly passage from living to lifelike, animal to object. Here too the silent presence of black human life is felt in the guise of the “relays of men” that took thirty-six hours to skin Ionides’ beast. The anonymous trackers, skinners, safari guides and porters that made the rugged individualism of the white hunter’s “foot safaris” possible precisely insofar as they were able to make themselves invisible are always close at hand, in forced contiguity with the rest of the animal subaltern.

The deathliness of this rhinoceros and other animals “collected” by Ionides and his colleagues persisted in the taxidermied facsimiles exhibited by the Coryndon and the photographs of those taxidermied facsimiles that the Coryndon printed in its annual reports. Here, animal remains – that is, the traces of hunters’ performances of dominion over nature – themselves performed. Describing and analyzing these performances presents a methodological challenge. In many cases, the performers in question – the taxidermied animals, often now rather the worse for wear – are still on view to the public in the National Museum. However, they have more often than not been moved or re-contextualized, the sceneography and dramaturgy of their performances irrevocably changed. The closest I have been able to get to the historical performances these taxidermied animals presented to the public are the photographs included in Museum reports and other records. Here, for instance, is a doubly simulacral klipspringer, presented to the public in 1956:

![Klipspringer](image)

*Fig. 6. Klipspringer, from the 1956 Annual Report of the Museum.*
Photograph courtesy of the Archives Section of the National Museums of Kenya.
There is something uncanny about a photograph of a taxidermied animal; what Rachel Poliquin has called its “breathlessness” is somehow doubled, as is its melancholy glass-eyed gaze and its almost comic loss of itself. Taxidermy is also linked to photography by its deathly purpose: to capture life. Both are quixotic arts, invested with manic longing, continually failing to keep back time. The taxidermied subject, like the photographic subject, is there but not there, perfectly but emptily mimetic, lifelike but dead, exposed—as Cora Diamond, reading Stanley Cavell, would have it—to a spectral deferral of the gaze. The relationship of safari photography to big game taxidermy is especially worthy of further study, at the very least for the manner in which both genres perform the remains of the animal, re-living and re-enlivening memories of the hunt. The taxidermied animal is the trace of the living animal’s death, the “trophy” the hunter earned in and through his performance; taxidermy, consequently, is a species of reenactment.

This is another way of saying, quite simply, that taxidermy is performance, “a twice-behaved behavior,” an uncanny surrogation. But closer attention to the dramaturgical circumstances of this performance reveal the politics behind the Coryndon’s zooëtic practice.

Fig. 7. Lions, from an undated Coryndon report (c. 1955).
Photograph courtesy of the Archives Section of the National Museums of Kenya.

47 Marvin, “Elivened Through Memory: Hunters and Hunting Trophies.” I am also indebted here to Schneider, *Performing Remains*.
Many of the animals that the Coryndon exhibited, like the lions in this 1950s display case, were displayed in simulacral reproductions of their habitats – the wild contained and made domestic. This signaled, however tacitly, the power of colonial governmentality to make its own reality. Not only could the state and its surrogates penetrate “the bush” and dispossess those that lived there of their life, it could then remake that life and its surroundings in a space manifestly under colonial control. This suggests that in the Coryndon the chief virtue of displaying a taxidermied animal to the public – and especially a non-white public – was disciplinary. The museum kept fastidious count of how many white, Asian and black people visited each year; for these last, the dismemberment of the animal and its re-membering in the display case could not but serve as a memento mori, a corporeal instantiation of the power the colonial order had over the lives of its constituent Others, the animal subaltern.

Even more important, however, was the power of the taxidermied animal – with its English and Latin, but not its Swahili or Gīkūyū or Dholuo, names typed neatly on its label – to signal the ascendancy of Western epistemologies, the power of colonial governmentality to give names to what it killed. I invoke the Swahili and Gīkūyū and Dholuo names for animals here in order to point to the continuing vitality of indigenous ways of thinking and knowing the animal, even under colonial epistemic pressure. There is a lacuna in Western anthropological and political thinking about non-Western animal imaginaries; precolonial or otherwise “primitive” societies are feted by the likes of E.E. Evans-Pritchard and Claude Lévi-Strauss for their intimacy with nature50 while their postcolonial descendants are excoriated as what Sarah Ray has called “ecological others”51 for their refusal or inability to abide by international norms of wildlife and habitat conservation. The ambivalence I noted above in Finch Hatton’s admiration for Maasai hunting techniques, on the one hand, and his fear that they and other “natives” would ruin the Serengeti by over-hunting, on the other, marks the mid-century colonial period in Eastern Africa as an important time of transition around which this scholarly lacuna formed. In subsequent chapters, I assess how indigenous ways of being and knowing the animal survived colonial attempts to erase them and became important, if sometimes ambivalent, resources for anticolonial struggle. The Coryndon, however, registered these epistemological alternatives only as absence, as the unwritten remainder of the official taxonomies it endorsed.

The disciplinary power inherent in the giving and withholding of names – that is, the creation and maintenance of taxonomies – surfaces with even greater clarity in the discourses surrounding colonial paleoanthropology. Beginning at the turn of the century, Eastern Africa became quite famous for its pre-human hominid fossils, many of which were unearthed by Louis Leakey, his wife Mary, and their protégés, and subsequently made their way into the collection of the Coryndon. I believe that these remains – like the taxidermied animals they shared display space with – worked to discipline black visitors into proper colonial subjects, the English names for things always on the tips of their tongues. The not-quite human remains of hominids like the Nutcracker Man, original scientific name Zinjanthropus Bosei, also exist along a racializing continuum of figures, staged as they often were as steps along an evolutionary journey towards modern humanity. In the anti-black context of colonial Kenya, this journey could not help but be figured as an act of white overcoming, an act of becoming-master of the wild and its many

ters. Zinj, as his “discoverers” Mary and Louis Leakey affectionately called him, came by his name honestly: Zinj, from the Medieval Arabic Zanj, the land of the blacks. Zinj-anthropus: black man. The claim that East Africa is “the cradle of humankind,” that “our” “common” history begins there, requires a subsumption of blackness into non- and pre-humanity, a staging of the beast-as-black, the black-as-beast, the beast discovering fire.

Even today, in democratic Kenya’s National Museum, the displays devoted to what is now somewhat euphemistically called “human origins” reiterate the metonymic traffic between pre-humanity, sub-humanity and the beast that characterized the Coryndon. The fossilized skeletons unearthed and reassembled by the Leakeys and other scientists are housed, lying on their backs, in somber glass-topped display cases that remind one, irresistibly, of an open casket at a wake. Here too the deathliness of these performances of life long ago makes itself known; these bones suggest the person, or proto-person, as absence, just as the skin of a taxidermied animal suggests, melancholically, the flesh that once lay within. These funerary displays are offset, however, by life-size dioramas depicting speculative scenes of pre-hominid social life. The sad dilapidated figures in these displays are arranged in inadvertently kitschy tableaux – standing at attention, squatting at the fire, tending to the children – that seem calculated to adduce the beginnings of a human sensibility. By virtue of their dark brown skin and heavy brows, the “primitivity” of these figures links itself citationally to well-established racializing codes of visual representation, to the extent that one might well wonder whether having been born in Africa millions of years ago is enough to make one black. The political consequences of this representational decision are brought home by the fact that these displays are organized – just as they were fifty years ago – according to a taxonomic logic, with each species in the fossil record representing a step on an evolutionary journey towards full humanity. At one of the entrances to the exhibit, guests are instructed to compare their own – presumably human – hands to those of a plasticized ape; how far some of us have come.

In the discussion of Linnaeus and taxonomies included in The Open: Man and Animal, Giorgio Agamben argues that the negotiation of difference – and specifically that difference that separates the human from the non- or not-yet-human – is at the very center of the idea of homo sapiens as a species:

_Homo sapiens...is neither a clearly defined species nor a substance; it is, rather, a machine or device for producing the recognition of the human. In line with the taste of the epoch [the eighteenth century], the anthropogenic...machine is an optical one.... It is an optical machine constructed of a series of mirrors in which man, looking at himself, sees his own image always already deformed in the features of an ape. Homo is a constitutively “anthropomorphous” animal (that is, “resembling man,” according to the term that Linnaeus constantly uses until the tenth edition of the Systema), who must recognize himself in a non-man in order to be human._

Colonial natural historians like Louis Leakey were singularly preoccupied with the production and performative display of taxonomies – of guppies as of Nutcracker Men – because the production of knowledge about the wild helped secure their precarious position as strangers in a strange land and because reflecting on the wide array of non-human life helped to define what it

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52 See Derrida, “Signature Event Context.”
53 Agamben, The Open, 26–27.
meant to be fully human. This sensibility carried over to the Coryndon’s displays, leading me to believe that the museum functioned for white visitors as an optical machine, a “series of mirrors in which man, looking at himself, sees his own image always already deformed” as ape, as proto-human, as black man. For “native” visitors to the Museum, this “series of mirrors” served a different and more intensively disciplinary function, reminding them of who and what they were. Even the ethnologic displays, which one might have expected to mirror back to them something of their own reality, served only to further taxonomize them into language group, tribe, characteristic “superstitions,” and so on.

In Black Skin, White Masks, Frantz Fanon writes: “In West Africa, the Negro is an animal.” It is clear – given Fanon’s politics – that this aphorism is meant to invoke an act of political subjection rather than any ontological equivalence, an instantiation of the murderous work that racial sociogenesis carries out on and in the black body and psyche. The discursive symptoms of this disciplinary conjuncture can be discerned quite readily in colonial literary and political culture. Consider the following from Karen Blixen’s Out of Africa, which ties the slippage between “animal” and “primitive,” “primitive” and “animal,” the fungibility of the native beast, to the appropriation of indigenous people’s land:

> It is more than their land that you take away from the people, whose native land you take. It is their past as well, their roots and their identity. If you take away the things that they have been used to see, and will be expecting to see, you may, in a way, as well take their eyes. This applies in a higher degree to the primitive people than to the civilized, and animals again will wander back a long way, and go through danger and sufferings, to recover their lost identity, in the surroundings that they know.

This is the contiguity I want to address: “primitive people...and animals again.” Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o has noted, with characteristic analytical clarity and moral force, the racism inherent in Blixen’s placid contention that the behavior of animals gave her insights into the psychology of the Agikũyũs on her farm. I want to stress again that the slippage indexed by the vanishingly small distance spanned by the “and” in “primitive people...and animals again” is not reducible to metaphor. This is not simply a question – as Chaudhuri, reading Baudrillard, might have it – of the availability of the animal figure for metaphoric signification, of making animals “creatures of somatization, forcing them to carry our symbolic and psychological baggage.” Rather, again and again in Out of Africa – and elsewhere in colonial discourse – the “native” and the “animal” stand one in front of the other on the road to modernity, the former only one step removed from the primitive past to which the latter perpetually belongs.

The political project of the Coryndon Memorial Museum was, at least in part, to make this metonymic linkage between blackness, sub-humanity and beastliness an instrument of social control. The natural-historical knowledge that the Coryndon’s collector-curators so assiduously amassed was bound up from the beginning in the exercise of biopolitical power. The clearest example of this comes from the relationship of the museum administration to the anticolonial

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54 Fanon, Black Skin, White Masks, 113.
Mau Mau War in the 1950s, which was by all accounts the most serious challenge to British dominion of East Africa since its inception seventy years before. In 1956, at the disastrous tail end of the insurgency, the Coryndon mounted a special exhibition of the “regalia and cloak” of a captured Mau Mau general, the vanquished enemy of the colonial order. There can be no clearer example of the power of colonial visual culture to performatively discipline its subjects; the exhibition was a thuggish memento mori: so too go you, it said, if you don’t toe the line.

A year later, in 1957, Field Marshal Dedan Kimathi, the supreme commander of the Mau Mau guerilla army, was captured and subsequently executed. A photograph of a white official holding Kimathi’s leopard-skin cloak and headpiece as he knelt above Kimathi’s body circulated widely in the press as proof that the enemy of the state had been captured. If this photograph is any indication, the “regalia and cloak” the Coryndon displayed, likely made of animal skin like Kimathi’s was, functioned – as Fanon might have expected – as a kind of racial epidermis, skinned from the bodies of both the animals that wore it. Here too we see the racializing power of taxidermy: the reduction of the animal to its signifying epidermis by removing the flesh, which Hortense Spillers called “that zero-degree of social conceptualization that does not escape concealment under the brush of discourse.”

This is what remains: the leopard and the man, the leopard-man, both black.

New Materialism, the Animal Subaltern and the Possibility of Resistance

In this chapter, I have traced the itinerary of a set of performances of white epistemic power from their roots in the ambivalence and anxiety of settler-colonial social life through their effervescence in the production of knowledge of the African wilderness, the concomitant creation and maintenance of exclusionary taxonomies of non-human being and the display of non-human remains in the service of public discipline. There is another stop on this itinerary – namely, the capacity of the animal subaltern to transform, to resist and to escape. But what form did this insurgency take?

Uhuru, independence, in Kenya in 1963 occasioned a name change at the museum. It ceased to be the Coryndon Memorial and became the National Museum. This was part and parcel of a black, de-colonial and, crucially, humanist nationalism that characterized the politics of Uhuru and the administration of the first democratically elected President of Kenya, Mzee Jomo Kenyatta. Museum publications from this era reflect this shift; suddenly references to the black human labor that had always been involved in creating the simulacra on view were everywhere in evidence, despite the fact that white curators – more often than not members of the Leakey family – remained in charge. I call this political disposition humanist because it persistently – and understandably, given the corrosive history of racist theories of black sub-humanity in the colony – denied the animal figure a place in postcolonial social life. The extent to which this was truly possibly in cultural production writ large is the subject of the next two chapters.

In the National Museum, however, it was impossible to even think of disavowing the animal. The material remains of colonial natural history – the bones, the bodies, the skins – remained.

58 Fanon, Black Skin, White Masks.
This was a legacy that could not easily be put aside. Visitors to the National Museum in Nairobi today will see the many of the same beasts in many of the same display cases that their counterparts did in the 1950s. But there will be one very prominent addition. In the early 1970s, President Jomo Kenyatta faced a crisis of elephant poaching on par with the one his son, the current President Uhuru Kenyatta, faces today. One of the more symbolic steps the elder Kenyatta took to preserve the wild elephant population was to assign a twenty-four-hour armed security detail to Ahmed, a particularly famous bull elephant with massive tusks that would have been highly prized on the ivory market had they been poached. When Ahmed died of old age – happily – in 1974, the National Museum had him memorialized. His skeleton is on display at the very center of the Great Hall of Mammals, and an anatomically correct sculpture resides in the Museum courtyard.60

The wild, the wilderness, the bush – figured now in accordance with international convention as “nature” – continued to function as an operative term in postcolonial Kenyan politics. The stakes, however were radically different. Ahmed’s bones were not meant to suggest the power of “man” over nature, but rather signaled the inviolability of independent Kenya’s sovereignty, its ability to protect its national body, human and non-human, from foreign incursion. This performance, it is crucial to note, rested on a voluntary affiliation of animality and blackness under the sign of wildlife conservation and national defense. The new postcolonial dispensation embodied by Ahmed – which I will explore in another context at far greater length in Chapter 5 – required Kenyans, most of them black, to claim animals like Ahmed as an “us” that had to be protected from a violent, foreign “them.” Perhaps Agamben unwittingly supplied the key to this new conjuncture when he noted that the homo sacer, the object of the sovereign ban, the no-longer-human being made subject to “bare life” is not unlike the werewolf: the man-wolf, the animal subaltern.61 Alexander Weheliye, his reluctance to think non-human animality alongside black humanity notwithstanding, also tends in this direction when he builds on Wynter to ask whether or not forms of life persist beyond the sovereign ban, under conditions of bare life, that may open up genres of the human that are not captive to the colonizing force of “Man.”62 This leads me to ask in the wake Ahmed’s life and death whether or not new genres of black politics became possible in the postcolonial period that permitted a more complex interplay of blackness and beastliness.

This line of thinking draws on the work of Jane Bennett and other scholars of new materialism, animism and what Mel Chen calls “animacy.”63 What would it mean in this case to “highlight the active role of nonhuman materials in public life,” to “give voice to a thing-power,” as Bennett has suggested64 in other words: is it possible to think of the insurgent work that the bones and skins themselves do, rather than what is done to and with them as the political dramaturgy of their staging shifts around them over time? It is at least conceivable that if Ahmed’s bones could speak, they would make note of the fact that, unlike most of his

61 Agamben, Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life.
62 Weheliye, Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics and Black Feminist Theories of the Human.
64 Bennett, Vibrant Matter, 2.
companions in the Great Hall of Mammals, Ahmed is in the Nairobi National Museum because he was not killed. There is no question that the world continues to be structured by genocidal anti-black violence. But Ahmed’s body, standing there in the Great Hall of Mammals, looming over his colonial ancestors, seems to open a window – a small window, perhaps, opened only a crack – onto new, utopian possibilities. His bones reverse the polarity of the colonial natural-historical relationship of lifelikeness and deathliness. In Ahmed’s case, death is reimagined as the last triumph of life, as the absence of a bullet. In at least this one case, “the Negro is an animal”\textsuperscript{65} – and the animal a Negro – who lives.

\textsuperscript{65} Fanon, \textit{Black Skin, White Masks}, 113.
Chapter Three
KILLING THEMSELVES IN ORDER TO LIVE
Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s Animals & the Becoming-Human of Black Resistance

You want to imitate the birds, do you, Wanjiro?
Remember birds don’t have to kill themselves in order to live.

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, *This Time Tomorrow*¹

The life of Ahmed the elephant and the disposition of his bones after his death mark the transition from coloniality to its variously inflected afterlives in East African histories of being and thinking the animal. This chapter and the next center on the thinking of a generation of black artists, activists and scholars who came of age during the independence struggles of the 1950s and 1960s in Kenya and Tanzania. For these anticolonial intellectuals, the pain of having been subjected to the existential and political demands of animal subalternity was fresh. As a consequence, they pursued the question of what the human was and how black humanity could be achieved with singular attention. For many, this seemed the key to deeper questions of land and belonging, violence and revolution, memory and hope. At the very center of the politics of anticolonialism, in other words, was the psychic wound of coloniality and its bestialization of blackness. Fanon understood this wound, and the weapons that caused it, better than anyone:

At times this Manicheism [of colonial social organization] goes to its logical conclusion and dehumanizes the native, or to speak plainly, it turns him into an animal. In fact, the terms the settler uses when he mentions the native are zoological terms. He speaks of the yellow man’s reptilian motions, of the stink of the native quarter, of breeding swarms, of foulness, of spawn, of gesticulations. When the settler seeks to describe the native fully in exact terms he constantly refers to the bestiary. The European rarely hits on a picturesque style; but the native, who knows what is in the mind of the settler, guesses at once what he is thinking of. Those hordes of vital statistics, those hysterical masses, those faces bereft of all humanity, those distended bodies which are like nothing on earth, that mob without beginning or end, those children who seem to belong to nobody, that laziness stretched out in the sun, that vegetative rhythm of life – all this forms part of the colonial vocabulary. General de Gaulle speaks of “the yellow multitudes” and François Mauriac of the black, brown and yellow masses which soon will be unleashed. The native knows all this, and laughs to himself every time he spots an allusion to the animal world in the other’s words. For he knows that he is not an animal; and it is precisely at the moment he realizes his humanity that he begins to sharpen the weapons with which he will secure his victory.²

¹ Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, “This Time Tomorrow,” in *This Time Tomorrow: 3 Plays* (Nairobi: Kenya Literature Bureau, 1970), 35.
² Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 42–43.
I have quoted Fanon at such length because he offers such a forceful diagnosis of the beastliness of colonial biopolitical discourse and its “hordes of vital statistics,” which stand at the center of the first part of this dissertation – and, even more than that, because he so clearly marks “the moment” at which that beastliness is disclosed and the “native” “realizes his humanity” in and through anticolonial struggle, which is the subject of this second part. In this chapter, the first of two on the pioneering generation of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, I explore the humanism that underlies the varied work of the Kenyan playwright, novelist and critic Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, who has done a great deal to make the animalization of the “native” – if not laughable, as Fanon wished it to be – at the very least discernable and subject to attack. For Ngũgĩ, asserting the humanity of black subjects is of a piece with his political praxis, which foresees both the racist logic of dehumanization that brought the animal subaltern into being and the bourgeois ethos of individualism that allowed both colonial and neocolonial forms of governmentality to flourish. This collectivist mode of participation in the insurgencies of his day was sometimes beset with complexity, not least because Ngũgĩ himself is a prodigious individual talent who has been singled out by his political enemies on numerous occasions for exceedingly individualized punishment. Nevertheless, he has remained committed to the project of rehumanizing the animal subaltern and renewing the ties that bind black humanity to their native land.

The humanism that Ngũgĩ and other intellectuals of his circle practice has not caused them to abandon the animal entirely. Animal stories and proverbs continue to animate their prose, as they do the everyday speech of countless former colonial subjects to this day. Animals of various stripes remain potent sources of figural language, especially when it comes – as I will explore more fully later in this chapter – to laying bare relations of subordination and revolt. To put it differently: animals are of interest to anticolonial humanists like Ngũgĩ precisely insofar as they illuminate the power dynamics to which human beings are subject. There are also moments when human beings and animals alike are swept up together in circuits of social and affective exchange that go beyond the figural:

THONI: I’ll not cry any more,
And when I feel grief come,
I’ll go out and seek companions in the trees on the hills.
I’ll watch little birds,
And lizards and insects.
Often at night,
I’ve walked about, alone,
Letting the moon and the stars speak to me.
At times, darkness shelters me.¹

Here Thoni, the doomed heroine of Ngũgĩ’s early English-language play The Black Hermit, rehearses a kind of human-animal companionship that would echo the relations of metonymic contiguity so crucial to the animalizing work of colonial power if it were not of her own choosing. One can certainly imagine a different version of this speech that makes Thoni’s closeness to the animals “in the trees on the hills” a cipher for her less-than-human immersion in beastly life, but that is not Ngũgĩ’s agenda. He is instead foregrounding her belonging in and to the land, a belonging that enfolds her along with the “little birds,” the “lizards and insects” – and

“the trees on the hills,” “the moon and the stars,” even “darkness” itself – in an all-encompassing mutuality of care. This ecology of belonging does not efface Thoni’s humanity but rather affirms her rightful place in the landscape of home, amongst the other beings that make their home there. In a stroke, Ngũgĩ has radically remade the animal subaltern. In place of the racializing and animalizing assemblage of colonial power that sought to performatively discipline its subjects into categories of semi- and non-being, he imagines an ecology of companionship that affirms, crucially, the humanity of the black subject and its place in what the poet Mary Oliver has called “the family of things.” In place of the imperial idea of the commons as a matrix of extraction that sustained the practices of archeology, big game hunting and ethnology that I explored in the previous chapter, Ngũgĩ substitutes a generative idea of the commons as a space in which those beings that are of the land can grow and thrive. This is a politics of place-making, made potent by a revolutionary demand: that the land appropriated by colonial violence be returned, and made whole again.

Even here, however, the animal has its limits. In his remarkable short play This Time Tomorrow, which was produced as a radio drama for the BBC African Service in 1967, Wanjiro – another tragic heroine – dreams of the “slum yard” in which she lives being cleared away by the postcolonial state’s public health department, as it has promised to do the morning the action of the play takes place. Wanjiro dreams of “Floods and floods that destroyed and washed away these slums.... Bones, decaying meat, white maggots, tins, paper, broken pots – all these were carried away. And fleas bloated with blood to the size of rams.” Wanjiro’s use of animal figures follows well-worn tracks, even if the images she makes of them are extraordinarily vivid, and her meaning is clear. Her long-suffering mother Njango puts up with this line of thinking until Wanjiro takes her animal fantasies too far. She says, wistfully, since she wishes she could stay in bed: “The village is waking up. Yet the birds are hardly awake” – to which Njango replies: “You want to imitate the birds, do you, Wanjiro? Remember birds don’t have to kill themselves in order to live.” This is an extraordinary statement, which Njango quickly makes more prosaic by specifying that birds don’t have to earn money to buy food and clothes and pay for school fees. Nevertheless Njango knows – as Ngũgĩ’s listeners in 1967, a mere ten years since the end of the Mau Mau rebellion, surely did as well – that working for wages is not the only sense in which human beings, especially black human beings under conditions of anticolonial struggle, “kill themselves in order to live.” Njango’s husband, Wanjiro’s father, “went to the forest” with Dedan Kimathi and other Mau Mau partisans; he was captured by colonial forces and “shot...dead like a dog.” His killing may have been animal, “like a dog,” insofar as it was criminally without consequence, but his death was in the service of life, “in order to live,” in a way that was uniquely human. This is at the heart of Ngũgĩ’s woundedness and his anger at the violent depravations that brought the animal subaltern into being. The insurgent form of human being that black colonial subjects seize as their own is deathly in a way that animal life can never be. The work of revolution is also the work of mourning.

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5 Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, “This Time Tomorrow,” 32.
6 Ibid., 33.
7 Ibid., 35.
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid., 39.
Ngũgĩ’s mournful and revolutionary humanism has taken many forms over the course of his long – and often dangerously fraught – career as a writer and public intellectual. In this chapter I follow the thread of his thinking through his many plays, novels and essays. I begin with his outright repudiation of colonial animalizing assemblages and his sly inversion of their dehumanizing work. In his view, it is those in power – whether it is a colonial District Officer or the neocolonial inheritor of his office – who are made animal, most often made dog, by their own monstrosity or by their unthinking obeisance in the face of someone else’s. I then turn to Ngũgĩ’s confrontation with the postcolonial Kenyan state under Jomo Kenyatta and, especially, Daniel arap Moi, and the ways in which his efforts to engage in anticolonial struggle even after independence in 1963 were met with determined resistance. Ngũgĩ’s detention without trial in 1977-1978 made him an international human-rights cause célèbre, but the vision of the human cherished by his supporters abroad – and even that put forward by Moi and others in response to their demands – did not accord with Ngũgĩ’s own. I end this chapter with a re-reading of Ngũgĩ’s theory of the human, its relationship to the animal subaltern, and the radical claims it makes on the very categories of life and death.

**Ghosts of the New Safari**

In *A Grain of Wheat*, his 1967 novel of de-colonial transition, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o stages the death of an innocent. Gitogo is a deaf and mute man who speaks “with his hands often accompanied with animal guttural noises.”10 He works odd jobs in his village in order to care for his elderly mother. When the Mau Mau War breaks out and the colonial government declares a state of emergency – as Ngũgĩ puts it, with characteristically visceral economy, “Gunfire smoked in the sky; people held their stomachs”11 – soldiers arrive in the village to search for insurgents and their sympathizers.

Gitogo ran to a shop, jumped over the counter, and almost fell on to the shopkeeper whom he found cowering amongst the empty bags. He gesticulated, made puzzled noises, furtively looked and pointed at the soldiers. The shopkeeper in stupid terror stared back blankly at Gitogo. Gitogo suddenly remembered his aged mother sitting alone in the hut. His mind’s eye vividly saw scenes of wicked deeds and blood. He rushed out through the back door, and jumped over a fence into the fields, now agitated by the insecurity to which his mother lay exposed. Urgency, home, mother: the images flashed through his mind. His muscles alone would protect her. He did not see that a whiteman, in a bush jacket, lay camouflaged in a small wood. ‘Halt!’ the whiteman shouted. Gitogo continued running. Something hit him at the back. He raised his arms in the air. He fell on his stomach. Apparently the bullet had touched his heart. The soldier left his place. Another Mau Mau terrorist had been shot dead.12

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11 Ibid.
12 Ibid., 4–5.
This is a primal scene for Ngũgĩ. It repeats itself in his 2010 memoir *Dreams in a Time of War*, in which another Gitogo—Ngũgĩ’s own half-brother, also deaf—is shot by colonial police in exactly the same way: “Being deaf, he did not hear the white officer shouting *simama*, stop. They shot him in the back. His death exemplified what was beginning to happen to families everywhere.”⁴ Ngũgĩ’s half-brother Gitogo, who died in 1954; the imagined Gitogo of *A Grain of Wheat* thirteen years later; the remembered Gitogo of *Dreams in a Time of War* forty-six years after that. I want to hold these three Gitogo-s together, each the shadow of the other, each deathly and then again enlivened by Ngũgĩ’s prose.

The uncanny traffic between Ngũgĩ’s Gitogo-s lifts *A Grain of Wheat* and *Dreams in a Time of War* off the page and into the realm of performance. In this dissertation I am interested in conceiving of performance as a fraught and almost always inconclusive intervention between life and death. The production of a deathly lifeliness is almost always its result, in the case of the taxidermied animals in the Coryndon Memorial Museum as much as in the case of the Gitogo-s here. Ngũgĩ is “following the ghosts,” in Avery Gordon’s memorable phrase, tracking “the unhallowed dead of the modern project,” “putting life back in where only a vague memory or a bare trace was visible to those who bothered to look.”⁵ In *Dreams in a Time of War*, Ngũgĩ remembers forgetting Gitogo—“By the time I went through the ceremony of becoming a man and resumed schooling at Kinyogori, the memory of this tragedy had faded. A human normalizes the unusual in order to survive”⁶—but this remembered forgetting is itself a mark of the resurrection that the text itself performs, returning Gitogo to something like life. Or rather to something like death, because Gitogo returns only to be re-killed.

But what does this re-killing accomplish? The elder Ngũgĩ, reflecting back on his life for his memoirs, remembers forgetting as a human act, a “normalizing” of “the unusual” and the tragic “in order to survive.”⁷ In this way, Gitogo’s death binds itself to Ngũgĩ’s “becoming a man,” and not only because it coincided with Ngũgĩ’s circumcision and return to school. Gitogo’s ghost, like all ghosts always already dead and revivified, is part of the traumatic historical legacy that made Ngũgĩ the person that he is. The fact of his humanity—and the humanity of the characters that populate his novels and plays—is something to which Ngũgĩ endlessly returns. Defying the efforts of colonial epistemic power to reduce black people to less-than-human status is at the heart of his artistic and political project. Since the beginning of his writing career in the early 1960s, Ngũgĩ has become an outspoken critic of what he calls colonialism’s “zoological images”⁸ and the dehumanization they inflict on black subjects. The phrase may well be inspired by Fanon’s “zoological terms”—which is appropriate, given the fact that Ngũgĩ wrote *A Grain of Wheat* between 1964 and 1966 while in England at the University of Leeds, where he neglected his thesis and read Fanon and Marx instead.⁹ Fanon’s influence in particular is difficult to overstate; Ngũgĩ noted years later that Fanon “became the prophet of the

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13 Gitogo and Gitogo are the same name, the diacritical difference notwithstanding. Ngũgĩ’s early work, despite having been re-issued very recently, has not been brought into concordance with Gikuyū orthography except in the case of the author’s own name.


18 Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, Interview with Author, September 9, 2013.

struggle to move the centre and his book, *The Wretched of the Earth*, became a kind of Bible among the African students from West and East Africa then at Leeds.\(^{20}\)

It is in this Fanonian light that the killing of the Gitogo of *A Grain of Wheat* is best understood. Gitogo – like the first Gitogo before him and the third Gitogo after – is manifestly human, his “animal…noises” and what Fanon would call his “gesticulations” notwithstanding. Ngũgĩ does not allow Gitogo to be animalized by his disability; a great deal of the passage I quoted above is filtered through his consciousness and is as good as speech: he is “agitated by the insecurity to which his mother lay exposed. Urgency, home, mother: the images flashed through his mind. His muscles alone would protect her.” It is only after the unheard order to stop and the gunshot – that moment when poor un-forgotten Gitogo is re-killed – that the narration of the event slides into a clinical mode of free-indirect discourse that attaches, almost immediately, to the “whiteman,” the soldier, the voice of colonial power: “Apparently the bullet had touched his heart. The soldier left his place. Another Mau Mau terrorist had been shot dead.” The blithe unconcern of that “[a]pparently” wrenches one away from Gitogo and his emotional life, and the obviously mistaken attribution of “Mau Mau” and “terrorist” – to say nothing of the automatic conflation of the two – to his corpse accomplishes the terrifyingly swift consolidation of meaning around the Other that hegemonic power so expertly enacts. It is not his speechlessness but his being-unto-death, the ease with which he can be killed, that mark Gitogo as less-than-human within the colonial necropolitical frame. He is a “terrorist” – and the distance from there to “animal,” as Derrida has shown, is vanishingly small.\(^{21}\) In that sense, Gitogo is part of the animal subaltern, linked by the bite of the “whiteman’s” bullet to all those others who can be killed without their death entailing murder.\(^{22}\) Ngũgĩ’s project is to lay bare that animalization in order to undo it. Like Fanon’s “native,” he “knows what is in the mind of the settler” and can make it plain. The fact that Gitogo died like an animal is emotionally and politically powerful for Ngũgĩ precisely insofar as readers know he was not one.

At the same time, this moment also suggests a number of important links between race, animality, disability and the production of sympathy. Ngũgĩ relies on Gitogo’s deafness and speechlessness, which under other circumstances might have been deployed as markers of his putatively insufficient claim to full humanity, to index his vulnerability, his innocence and the injustice of his death. Temple Grandin has suggested that her experience of autism allows her to understand the mental world of animals in a more immediate and visceral way than others can.\(^{23}\) Is Ngũgĩ, even if unwittingly, opening up an affective and political connection between Gitogo’s disability and the animality inscribed upon him by the “whiteman” and his bullet? It is at least conceivable that some of the animals killed by colonial hunters and displayed in the Coryndon Memorial Museum – unable, like Gitogo, to speak – experienced their death in similarly terrifying and disempowering ways. This is an important line of inquiry that deserves more careful attention than is possible within the confines of this chapter. Ngũgĩ, for his part, is demonstrably less concerned with what actual animals may or may not have felt than with the animals colonial authorities took black people to be. His concern with the animal subaltern, in

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\(^{21}\) See Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign, Volume I*.

\(^{22}\) See Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*.

other words, lies chiefly in understanding – and then breaking – the links that bind the human subaltern to the animals adjacent to it rather than cultivating inter-species solidarity.

In this way, Ngũgĩ’s performative remembering of the three Gitogo-s and their deaths allies itself to the same political project as the 1953 Kenya Report, which the London-based Kenya Committee circulated in order to draw attention to the atrocities committed by British forces during the Mau Mau War, then in bloody progress. The Colonial Office had not issued an official report on Kenya since 1951, before hostilities began in earnest, and the Committee felt that a public statement was in order. Their Report included this haunting image, which might as well have been an illustration of the moment the Gitogo-s died:

![Image: The New Safari, from the 1953 Kenya Report, published by The Kenya Committee in London. Photography courtesy of the Kenyan National Archives.]

Like the “whiteman” who shot Gitogo, these two soldiers have the full force of colonial epistemic power behind them. They’ve shot the barefoot and seemingly unarmed man who lies dead in the center of the frame, only to realize that he wasn’t “on the list” of suspected Mau Mau. No matter, says the officer on the right, “we can soon put him on.” This, as the anonymous artist behind this cartoon so presciently noted, is “the new safari,” blurring still further the line between black men and the beasts that the colonial authority had always taken them to be. Because they were now “terrorists,” alleged Mau Mau could be stalked and killed like wild animals, which had been the principal draw of East Africa in the global imagination for at least seventy-five years; the “hunter after pleasure,” to use Ngũgĩ’s own term for wildlife tourists,²⁵

and the counter-insurgent were now one and the same. The depravities to which the colonial armed forces resorted in their attempt to put down Mau Mau insurgency were – by this logic – little more than hunting accidents. War gave rise to an open season on black men, who could be imprisoned or killed even absent any evidence whatsoever of a connection to the guerrillas in the mountains. This intensification of the violence visited on black bodies by white power was yet more proof of the claim made by Ngũgĩ and other anticolonial intellectuals like those at The Kenya Committee – namely, that “natives” were animals only insofar as calling them that made it easier for white people to kill them.

There is no one more beastly and more ghostly in the late colonial historiography of Eastern Africa than Dedan Kimathi, the Field Marshall of the Kenya Land and Freedom Army, better known as the Mau Mau. In many ways he exemplifies Derrida’s insight that the “terrorist” shares with the authorities an “obscure and fascinating complicity, or even a worrying mutual attraction, a worrying familiarity, an unheimlich, uncanny reciprocal haunting.” In the previous chapter, I showed how Kimathi was made animal by colonial power; now I want to switch analytical points of view, tracing the flow of animal meaning from Kimathi back through the channels of that “worrying familiarity,” which in this particular case operates principally through the intimacy of violence. In 1976, Ngũgĩ began the first of his experiments in collective theatre-making: a largely English-language play, co-authored with his collaborator Micere Mugo and made with a great deal of community input, called *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*. Here Kimathi, captured and on trial for his life, has a telling conversation with Shaw Henderson, a lightly fictionalized version of Ian Henderson, the member of the Special Branch who wrote *Man Hunt in Kenya* about the search for Kimathi and who becomes, in the play, a kind of malevolent spirit of colonialism, its prosecutor, judge and executioner:

HENDERSON: Look, you may not believe this either, but you are very special to me. Don’t you remember how we used to play together as children, on the slopes of Mount Kenya? Remember the day we played Horse and Rider? We fell. [he laughs.]

KIMATHI: You mean I threw you off! And you went sniffing and crying to your mother.

HENDERSON: You must admit you were rather nasty!

KIMATHI: Yes. You wanted me to play the horse. And you the rider.

HENDERSON: Well, my friend, there has to be a horse and a rider What would be the point of the game?

KIMATHI: There must be horses and riders, must there? Well, let me be Balaam’s ass then. [chuckles]: Yes, the one who rejected his rider. [pause]: When the hunted has truly learnt to hunt his hunter, then the hunting game will be no more.

Early in the play, as he leaves the courtroom, Kimathi is attacked by a white settler who – moving fluently between the mutually interchangeable terms designating terrorist, black man and animal – calls him a “bloody bastard Mau Mau,” a “bush communist,” a “fucking black monkey,” a “wog” and a “lunatic…[with a] pack of bandits.” This sort of language positions

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29 Ibid., 28.
Kimathi squarely within the web of significations that make up the animal subaltern. In his cell, however, faced with Shaw Henderson’s more subtle line of attack, Kimathi intervenes decisively in his own animalization. He rejects Henderson’s game of Horse and Rider – an imaginary childhood idyll of interracial (read: interspecies) friendship “on the slopes of Mount Kenya,” overlaid with a distinctly homoerotic logic of riding and being ridden – and in its place proposes an animal figure of his own. He will not be Henderson’s horse but rather Balaam’s ass: the Biblical animal that rejected its master. In order to win this game of figurations and make his larger point, Kimathi reimagines the animal subaltern as an insurgent body that is capable of rejecting and remaking its own animal identifications. In doing so – in throwing his rider like Balaam’s ass – Kimathi demonstrates his fluency with colonial epistemologies. Unlike the three Gîtogo-s and the unnamed human prey brought down by “the new safari,” Kimathi knows enough about the hunt to hunt the hunter and end the game once and for all.

**A Dog’s Obeyed in Office**

In the titular trial scene of *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, Micere Mugo and Ngũgĩ make it clear that Henderson, like some of the figures I wrote about in Chapter 1, views racial discipline as a form of domestication. Jean-Paul Sartre, in his Preface to Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth*, offers up a similar theory of the animal subaltern and draws out some of its unexpected corollaries. For Sartre, the dehumanization of colonized subjects is haunted by a paradox: in order to turn human beings into animals, one must break down their strength and endurance, which makes them less productive and ultimately less exploitable as laborers, which was the reason for attempting to turn them into animals in the first place.30

> For when you domesticate a member of our own species, you reduce his output, and however little you may give him, a farmyard man finishes by costing more than he brings in. For this reason the settlers are obliged to stop the breaking-in halfway; the result, neither man nor animal, is the native... Poor settler; here is his contradiction naked, shorn of its trappings. He ought to kill those he plunders, as they say djinns do. Now, this is not possible, because he must exploit them as well. Because he can’t carry massacre on to genocide, and slavery to animal-like degradation, he loses control, the machine goes into reverse, and a relentless logic leads him on to decolonization.31

I take exception to Sartre’s supposition that economic rationality curtails the killing of non-white subjects, or somehow prevents genocide; colonial history is proof enough that it does not. I would also stress that conceiving of animalization only as domestication – as productive of “farmyard man” – neglects the potent figurations of wilderness and wild animals that have structured colonial racial imaginaries since the first pseudo-scientific reports of non-white social realities, written by explorers and missionaries, began circulating in Europe centuries ago. But Sartre’s point is well-taken, particularly when it comes to the dialectical force of colonial history

31 Ibid., 16.
throwing “the machine...into reverse.” The world of Ngũgĩ’s novels and plays is the world of this reversal and its reverberations.

Sartre is also quick to note an interesting corollary of his theory of animal subalternity: in dehumanizing the “native” the colonial settler also necessarily dehumanizes himself. “The reason,” he writes, “is simple; this imperious being, crazed by his absolute power and by the fear of losing it, no longer remembers clearly that he was once a man; he takes himself for a horsewhip or a gun.”32 This is the object lesson of works of anticolonial propaganda, like “The New Safari,” aimed at calling attention to colonial crimes. Ngũgĩ goes still further, deploying a chain of comparisons and equivalences that seem calculated to reduce colonial human being not merely to objecthood – horsewhip, gun – but to beastliness, the very form of animality that colonial epistemic power worked to make synonymous with blackness. Often figural language, with its capacity to condense complex dispositions of power into aphorism, does this political work. In The Trial of Dedan Kimathi, for instance, a woman who has narrowly escaped a King’s African Rifles patrol complains to herself: “We are only ants trodden upon by heavy, merciless elephants.”33 When Ngũgĩ himself spent a few days in detention before departing for college at Makerere in Uganda, he dreamt of “the district officer, a boy my age, a leering smile on his face, reminding me that earlier in the day he let me go, only to bring me back to him, a white cat playing with a black mouse.”34 In each case, Ngũgĩ affirms the animality of the subaltern subject only to set it against the larger, more “merciless,” more predatory animality of the colonial oppressor.

Language of this type opened the door for more overt attacks on coloniality as animal and as opposed to the insurgent humanity of black colonial subjects. Consider the following exchange between Kimathi and Henderson in The Trial of Dedan Kimathi, in which Henderson tries to convince the captured Field Marshall to plead guilty to his charges:

HENDERSON: Dedan Kimathi: you must plead. Life comes before pride. You once vowed that no whiteman would ever get you. But now you are in custody. Hanging between life and death. Plead, plead, plead guilty. It’s a game, yes. You can name your prize. You’ll have your life. Only, we must end this strife. Plead guilty for life!

KIMATHI: [angry, grabs him by the neck]:
Who are you, imperialist cannibal, to guarantee my life?
My life is our People
Struggling
Fighting
Not like you to maintain
Slavery
Oppression
Exploitation
But
To end slavery, exploitation,
Go back to your masters and tell them:

32 Ibid.
33 Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o and Mugo, The Trial of Dedan Kimathi, 14.
Kimathi will never sell Kenya
to the British or any other
Breed of man-eaters, now or in the years to come.35

What Ngũgĩ and Micere Mugo have achieved here is a symbiosis of the animal and the monstrous; Kimathi is forcing Henderson, as a representative of the colonial state, to assume the “formless form of animal monstrosity…an artificial monstrosity of the animal” that Derrida suggests has historically been predominant in representing sovereign power.36 The animal terms that Kimathi chooses – “rat,” “breed of man-eaters” – come freighted with deeply acculturated assumptions about filth and menace that derive from colonial fantasies of the wild and its barbarities. The real “man-eaters of Tsavo,” Kimathi suggests, are not the lions that ate the so-called coolies building the Mombasa-Kisumu railroad but the “imperialist cannibals” that set them to that work in the first place. The discursive circuits of empire have been entirely reversed; it is now the white man, formerly secure in his position of power, who must answer the charge of being violent, insatiable, and consequently less than human.

Notably, Ngũgĩ and Mugo have conceived of the “game” that Henderson and Kimathi are playing as a liminal state, “hanging between life and death.”37 Henderson claims that Kimathi has a choice that the three Gĩtogo-s never had: to confess and live. “Plead[ing] guilty,” by this logic, is an Austinian performative that will restore Kimathi to life, wiping away all traces of his half-existence as black, as animal, as terrorist.38 He “can name his prize;” all Henderson asks for in return is the usual sort of information about Stanley Mathenge and the other Mau Mau still fighting in the forest.39 Henderson repeats the word “life” over and over again, as if it were a mantra, a temptation that Kimathi could not resist. But Kimathi rejects this out of hand. To confess would be to “give up my life for your life” – that is, to foreshow the insurgent subjectivity he cultivated as a leading member of the Kenya Land and Freedom Army for a life of servitude and obedience to colonial authority. Kimathi, understandably, finds it ridiculous that Henderson, that dealer in death and destruction, could be in the position to stand on the side of life: “Who are you, imperialist cannibal, to guarantee my life?” Henderson is, after all, a beast whose word cannot be trusted. Here, then, the deathliness of resistance and the deathliness of repression meet each other on a field of animal representation, each the mirror image of the other. This is a scene that will repeat itself throughout Ngũgĩ’s oeuvre: the black man and the white man, both speechless and exhausted, face to face at last, with nothing to do but die. The colonial state will not capitulate; neither will Kimathi. The only way forward is Kimathi’s execution. Paradoxically, his death is the only option open to him that will vouchsafe his life – that is, a life untainted by the social death of surrender and the resumption of the colonialist status quo. As Njango told her daughter in This Time Tomorrow – because he is human, and black, Kimathi must kill himself in order to live.

35 Ngugi wa Thiong’o and Mugo, The Trial of Dedan Kimathi, 35–36.
37 Ngugi wa Thiong’o and Mugo, The Trial of Dedan Kimathi, 35.
38 Austin, How to Do Things with Words.
39 Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o and Mugo, The Trial of Dedan Kimathi, 33–34.
In *A Grain of Wheat*, Ngũgĩ arrives at one of his favorite figurations of the becoming-animal of power. On the eve of Uhuru and his departure from Kenya, colonial administrator John Thompson watches from his window as his colleague Dr. Lynd’s dog, “a brown bull-mastiff with black dewlaps” comes very close to attacking Karanja, a black man employed by the agricultural research station where he works. Dr. Lynd accuses Karanja, who picked up a stone to defend himself, of having antagonized the animal, which Karanja truthfully denies; “The way you people lie – ,” she says, “I should have allowed him to get at you. Even now I’ve half a mind to let him – .” This is the guard dog, the attack dog, the watchdog as auxiliary of white power and beastly figure of its violence. To put it differently: the dog is how coloniality, dispersed among the various formal and informal agents of colonial governance from the secret police to civil servants like Dr. Lynd, “get[s] at you.” Even John Thompson, who as a district officer during the Emergency faced an official commission of inquiry for brutalizing Mau Mau detainees, understands the implications of this. He knows that if Dr. Lynd’s dog had bitten Karanja, he would have to “endure another enquiry, this time under a black government;” after all, the dog is one of his own. Ngũgĩ drives this point home by emphasizing the affective links that bind the likes of John Thompson and Dr. Lynd to their animal companions: “Like many other Europeans in Kenya, Thompson had a thing for pets, especially dogs.” Donna Haraway and other leading animal studies scholars have shown how deep this “thing” people have for their pets can be; Ngũgĩ provincializes this relationship by making it something bounded by race and circumstance. Thompson learns that Dr. Lynd’s relationship to dogs and to black people has been informed by “the incident that had plagued her life, had shamed her being.” During the Emergency, Dr. Lynd’s house was robbed and the dog she had at the time was “hacked...to pieces” by her “houseboy,” with whom “the dog had developed a friendship” and whom it consequently neglected to attack when he broke into the house with his accomplices. Because Dr. Lynd and her dog were so deeply affectively entwined, she suffers the attack as an attack on her own person, with all its attendant trauma: “She had never been able to outlive the heavy smell, the malicious mad eyes of those men – no – no, she would never forget it to her dying day.”

The beastliness of colonial violence justifies itself – in Ngũgĩ’s moral universe – with recourse to the cruelty, the “malicious mad eyes” of the native Other. In telling her story to Thompson, her obvious and understandable pain notwithstanding, Dr. Lynd is mobilizing the discourse of animal welfare as a justification for white racial dominion. It is in the figure of the dog, in other words, that the quintessentially colonial discourses of pastoral care and sovereign

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42 Ibid., 42.
45 Ibid., 43.
47 Ngugi wa Thiong’o, *A Grain of Wheat*, 44.
48 Ibid., 45.
49 Ibid.
violence converge. The fact that black people – read: one particular black person – are violent or cruel towards dogs, for whose well-being white people hold a certain paternalistic regard, justifies these same white people in cultivating canine violence as an auxiliary of their power over and against black people. The fact that *A Grain of Wheat* takes place in the days leading up to Kenya’s independence celebrations makes this interplay between sympathy and aggression still more indicative. Thompson – who throughout the book moves in a kind of haze, preoccupied with how his imminent departure and the broader decolonial transition will lead to neglect and inevitable decline, which he imagines as “test-tubes and beakers...broken or...unwashed on the cement, the hot-houses and seed-beds strewn with wild plants and the outer bush which had been carefully hemmed...gradually creep[ing] into a litter-filled compound”\(^{50}\) – relates the story that Dr. Lynd tells him with yet another ghostly dog that he struck with his car on his way to Nairobi a year before. He sees the animal in his headlights with plenty of time to spare but an existential paralysis takes hold and he is unable to bring himself to brake; in the aftermath of the accident, “it was if he had murdered a man.”\(^{51}\) Here, as independence emerges as a near-term certainty, the animal logic of colonialism begins to cannibalize itself. The end of colonialism means the end of Thompson’s political and social reality; “wild plants” and the “outer bush” will “creep” back into the spaces he worked so hard to clear and to civilize. What is left for him, in such a deathly moment of loss and departure, but to kill – even without meaning to, even if paralyzed with what he calls “the low rage of fear”\(^{52}\) – the very emblem of his power?

Ngũgĩ has returned again and again to this representational schema – this co-articulation of loss, fear and animality – throughout his long career. Most recently, in the second volume of memoirs he has published so far, he turns to a canine figuration of power to account for his first – thankfully brief – period of imprisonment in between finishing secondary school and going to Makerere for undergraduate study. He refers to the incident as the “tale” or “saga” “of the hounds”\(^{53}\) and it plays out in according to a familiar logic:

> ...the district officer...has stolen into my dreams disguised as a plantation owner. Everything about him is disguise. But this time he cannot deceive me. I am not a mouse; I am human. I have done no wrong. What does the white boy have that I don’t? With malicious glee, my only triumph over him, I think of him as having failed in his bid for college. And even physically, one on one, blow for blow, I think I could hold my own: was I not once circumcised into manhood? Yes, a voice answers me, but this has nothing to do with manhood, age, physique or mind: do you want to know the great image of authority? Yes, I answer back. He has vanished. Just like that. Instead I hear Andrew Kaingu’s voice, speaking lines from *King Lear*: [....] *a dog’s obeyed in office.*\(^{54}\)

The spectral quality of the colonial authority – his “disguise,” his disembodied voice – is something that Ngũgĩ’s Tanzanian contemporary Ebrahim Hussein explores in even greater depth; I take up his work in the next chapter. For Ngũgĩ, the magical nature of his encounter with power is less important than its vicissitude, its entirely arbitrary force. It does not matter that the district officer is a boy his age who didn’t get into college and who may even have been

\(^{50}\) Ibid., 41.  
\(^{51}\) Ibid.  
\(^{52}\) Ibid., 45.  
\(^{54}\) Ibid., 216. Italics original.
physically weaker – he is white, and even a dog will be “obeyed in office.” Power brings beastliness along with it, animalizing anyone who will avail him- or herself of its prerogatives.

This is the critical insight that Ngũgĩ takes forward into his mature writing, which is less invested in European colonialism than in the corruption and cronyism of the postcolonial state. Like many of his contemporaries in the black intelligentsia, including his fellow playwrights Penina Muhando, Francis Imbuga and John Ruganda, Ngũgĩ was profoundly disappointed by the traces of colonial governmentality that persisted in a new guise even after independence. This was true even in the case of postcolonial leaders, like Julius Nyerere in Tanzania, who adopted a radically humanist claim on land, intellectual capital and political capacity in the wake of colonialism’s dehumanizations. Many in Kenya no doubt understood the impulse that led General Idi Amin to give himself the truly astonishing title “His Excellency, President for Life, Field Marshal Al Hadji Doctor Idi Amin Dada, VC, DSO, MC, Lord of All the Beasts of the Earth and Fishes of the Seas and Conqueror of the British Empire in Africa in General and Uganda in Particular;” Amin’s messianic claim to lordship over all the beasts and fishes was indexical of the desire – to a certain extent shared by artists and intellectuals like Ngũgĩ – to reassert black humanity over and against colonial epistemic violence. The trouble was that lordship, even black lordship, was corruptive, productive of a beastly subjectivity no better than that to which the previous regime resorted. Ngũgĩ draws a direct line from the black homeguards and other colonial loyalists – whom Mau Mau detainees hated even more than the white authorities – to members of the neocolonial bourgeoisie in government and civil society.

In *Ngaahika Ndeenda – I Will Marry When I Want* – the play that earned Ngũgĩ his second and much more brutal period in prison, the black capitalist Ikuua wa Nditika takes this still further by voluntarily taking up the identity category of “watchdog” for (neo)colonial interests. In a conversation with his business partner Kĩoi about an insecticide factory that a foreign firm intends to build in a poorer part of the country – “it’s bound to produce a lot of smelly gases and therefore it cannot be built in an area where important people live” – he lays bare the rationality that organizes his economic and social life:

IKUUA:...poverty has no governor.

It’s better to sometimes cover up our eating habits
Rather than show the poor our mastications!
Being the local director of foreign firms
Is not a very taxing job;
What they want is just an African’s name.
All we are required to do
Is to be their watchmen.
Yes, we could be called their watchdogs!
[They laugh]
Yes, watchdogs for foreign interests! 

Ikuua is a proud member of the black comprador bourgeoisie of postcolonial Kenya, which, in Ngũgĩ’s estimation, was as debased – as dehumanized – as the white capitalist class it purported to, but didn’t really, replace. This is part and parcel of Ngũgĩ’s critique of neocolonial capitalism, which he began to put forward even in the immediate aftermath of decolonial independence in

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56 Ibid., 76.
1963. Uhuru, he argued, betrayed the truly revolutionary spirit of the Mau Mau, because “instead of breaking from an economic system whose life-blood is the wholesale exploitation of our continent and the murder of our people, most of our countries have adopted the same system. There has been little attempt at breaking with our inherited colonial past – our inherited economic and other institutions, apart from blackanizing the personnel running them.”

Herein lies the morbidity of the becoming-animal of neocolonial civil society: because neocolonial capital simply “blackaniz[ed]” the murderous work of colonial capital, Ikuua’s “watchdogs” are chewing their own flesh. No wonder they think it “better to...cover up...[their] eating habits,” hiding their “mastications” from view.

This pattern of associating the brutality of colonial and neocolonial power with the figure of the dog is as close as Ngūgī comes to a representational orthodoxy in his endlessly heterodox creative oeuvre. There is one notable exception, however, which is notable chiefly for the way in which it confirms the rule. In his memoir In the House of the Interpreter, Ngūgī remembers hearing the news that the Soviets had put a dog, Laika, in Sputnik II, the second satellite they launched into space in 1957. Ngūgī notes that this “raised a hue and cry from white people from all corners of the colony: the Russians had sent a dog to die in space.”

The young Ngūgī does not understand this at all; he remembers the extermination campaigns the colonial authorities waged against feral dogs, which no one thought to protest. His sympathy comes via another route than any straightforward discourse of animal welfare:

Then I learned that Laika was actually a stray dog from the streets of Moscow. The Gikũũ word for stray dogs, ngũi cia njangiri, or simply njangiri, was also the word for the homeless or the irresponsible. Boys threw stones at stray dogs. Despite the fact that dogs had once bitten me, I never could stand their screams: they eerily evoked the cries of humans in pain.

I could not help noting the irony that a stray dog from the streets of Moscow had done what no human had ever done before; that though forced, a njangiri had been the chosen vehicle for dramatizing the dawn of a new age. Once again the street had demonstrated its power.

Here Ngūgī’s usual schemata is upended. Laika emerges as both the victim of hegemonic violence and the protagonist of an entirely new period in history, “the dawn of a new age.” In a stroke, Ngūgī identifies himself – in a strikingly posthumanist mode – with the stray dog, the njangiri, and the power of “the street” over and against the colonizing force of “human” imperatives. It is obvious how Ngūgī’s politics led him to this point, but it is worth considering why he set aside the representational practice of so much of his own writing – and of In The House of the Interpreter in particular – in order to express fellow-feeling with a Russian space-dog. The answer, I think, is simple: Ngūgī is, and always has been, much more concerned with the work of hegemonic power and the subjectivity of its victims than with any doctrinaire

58 Ngugi wa Thiong’o, In The House of the Interpreter, 125.
59 Ibid., 126.
60 Ibid., 125–126.
investment in taxonomic distinctions between forms of life and their respective value. He is at heart a humanist, and animals are of interest to him only insofar as they help to illuminate human concerns. Here as elsewhere, it is only in their analogic relationship to the human— their screams’ evocation of “humans in pain,” their linguistic and political twinning with the homeless and the disempowered—that dogs hold Ngũgĩ’s attention. Far more than any of these animal becomings, what most concerns him is the becoming-human of black resistance.

**Free Ngũgĩ**

But what is “the human” for Ngũgĩ? What is the ontological substrate on which his politics of humanism rests? I have begun answering that question by posing it in the negative—that is, what is “the human” not? Clearly, for Ngũgĩ, at least most of the time, “the human” is diametrically opposed to “the animal.” Animals aside, however, there are any number of theories of human being to which Ngũgĩ does not subscribe. One of these alternative theories of the human surfaces in a fascinating way within the international uproar that greeted Ngũgĩ’s imprisonment in the wake of Ngaahika Ndeenda and his controversial novel *Petals of Blood*. I want to begin there, with a misreading of Ngũgĩ’s artistic and political project, in order to draw his own ideas dialectically into greater focus.

On Christmas Eve, 1978, the *New York Times* published a piece by George Vescey that detailed the efforts of a Long Island chapter of Amnesty International to secure Ngũgĩ’s release from prison a week and a half before:

> Bettyann Pernice has no way of knowing if the letter-writing campaign conducted by her chapter of Amnesty International was responsible, but the novelist Ngugi wa Thiong’o was released from a Kenyan Prison this month, and that was reason for celebrating.

> Her group, in Garden City, L.I., has seen three of the political prisoners it concentrated on released recently, an unusual rate. Her chapter and hundreds like it are the backbone of Amnesty International, based in London, which won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1977 for putting pressure on governments to release political prisoners....

> “I must have written 30 letters, each one taking two or three hours,” said Mrs. Pernice, who lives in Baldwin, L.I. “I’d wake up every morning with this man on my mind.”

What disposition of political life caused Bettyann Pernice from Baldwin, Long Island to “wake up every morning” with a radical Kenyan writer “on...[her] mind?” Vescey notes that Pernice self-identified as a “religious humanist” and felt very strongly that “Something must be done. People cannot be walked over.” In her view, in other words, there is something innate in human being that cannot be violated, “walked over,” suppressed. This is the language of human

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62 Ibid.
rights – and it is the theory of “the human” at the heart of human rights discourse that Bettyan Pernice seems to have held dear.

Samuel Moyn has argued that human rights came into vogue as an organizing principle for international politics and law in the mid- to late-1970s, just about at the same time that Ngũgĩ was imprisoned.\(^{63}\) Certainly, the meteoric rise of organizations like Amnesty International – and in particular Amnesty’s 1977 Nobel Prize – signaled a sea change in the ways in which political dissidence was conceived. Vecsey is quick to note that it was Amnesty’s “rul[ing]” that Ngũgĩ was a political prisoner that “authorized” groups like Mrs. Pernice’s “to write in his behalf.”\(^{64}\) In the American press, the fact that Ngũgĩ was the victim of human rights abuses was driven home by the repeated evocation of his stature as “Kenya’s best-known novelist,”\(^{65}\) an “author and [the] chairman of the department of literature at the University of Nairobi,”\(^{66}\) “East Africa’s foremost novelist and playwright”\(^{67}\) and by the insinuation that he was arrested for the relatively innocuous crimes of “possessing 18 banned books”\(^{68}\) and “organizing a play troupe that performed a work dealing with the exploitation of peasants.”\(^{69}\) In order for Ngũgĩ to appeal to international audiences as an object worthy of sympathy and solidarity, his involvement in real political struggle had to be evacuated and redirected towards the convenient trope of the blameless artist-intellectual persecuted by the state. Paradoxically, in order to be legible as a political prisoner, Ngugi had to be depoliticized.

It seems clear in retrospect that Ngũgĩ’s detention was prompted by his efforts to “organiz[e] a play troupe that performed a work dealing with the exploitation of peasants.” Scholars like Gichingiri Ndigirigi have shown how subversive Ngũgĩ’s work on Ndaahika Ndeenda with his co-writer Ngũgĩ wa Mirii and their collaborators in the village of Kamĩrĩthũ, where it was first staged, really was.\(^{70}\) But the communal aspects of this activity – which, as in most popular theatre projects, is where its political content lay – were evacuated by the supposition that Ngũgĩ was a lone dissident, an individual claimant of human rights. In Detained: A Writer’s Prison Diary, his account of the year he spent at Kamiti Maximum Security Prison, Ngũgĩ makes clear his aversion to this forced individuation:

I have...tried to discuss detention not as a personal affair between me and a few individuals, but as a social, political and historical phenomenon. I have tried to see it in the context of the historical attempts, from colonial times to the present, by a foreign imperialist bourgeoisie, in alliance with its local Kenyan representatives, to turn Kenyans into slaves, and of the historical struggles of Kenyan people against economic, political and cultural slavery.\(^{71}\)

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\(^{64}\) Vecsey, “An L.I. Group Helps Free Three Political Prisoners.”


\(^{68}\) Ibid.

\(^{69}\) Vecsey, “An L.I. Group Helps Free Three Political Prisoners.”

\(^{70}\) Ndigirigi, Ngugi Wa Thiong’o’s Drama and the Kamiriithu Popular Theater Experiment.

Joseph Slaughter has argued that there is a morphological and ideological link between human rights discourse and the Bildungsroman — which underscores the dependence of human rights thinking on the idea of the individual human being as the universal rights-bearing subject. For all his insistence that his detention was “a social, political and historical phenomenon” aimed at suppressing the continuing struggle that the postcolonial peasantry and working class continued to wage against the forces of neocolonial imperialism, Ngũgĩ himself is frequently preoccupied with his own Bildung. His early novels and plays — chief among them Weep Not, Child and The Black Hermit — and his more recent autobiographical writing stress the ways in which he and his fictional avatars grew into social and political maturity in and through colonial education, a classic trope of postcolonial Bildungsroman across genre lines. Even Detained, which comes from a period of expansive political engagement beyond the personal, is almost exclusively concerned with his evolving sense of himself as he endures deprivation, mistreatment and doubt in the confines of his cell. This suggests that the individualist misreading of his dissidence in terms of intellectual freedom and human rights is strong enough, and pervasive enough, that Ngũgĩ himself turned to it for clarity and comfort. Nevertheless, he remains aware throughout Detained that his case is part and parcel of collective struggles that, for whatever reason, remain illegible to the foreign “idealists” working for his release.

The theory of the human that these idealists held dear was, paradoxically, one they shared with their — and Ngũgĩ’s — antagonists. Kenyan authorities under Kenyatta and then Moi seized opportunistically on the individualist misreading of Ngũgĩ’s case that enabled Amnesty International to rally people like Bettyann Pernice and Arthur Dobrin to the cause. This is not to say that the Kenyatta and Moi governments somehow enjoyed the pressure that organizations like Amnesty and PEN put on them to release their political prisoners. But the idea that Ngũgĩ was a lone artist-intellectual with unpopular — and uncompromising — views was the story that Kenyatta and Moi wished to tell. Consider the following excerpts from Ngũgĩ’s detention order, a facsimile of which is appended to Detained:

IN EXERCISE of the powers conferred by regulation 6(1) of the Public Security (Detained and Restricted Persons) Regulations 1966, the Minister for Home Affairs, being satisfied that it is necessary for the preservation of public security to exercise control, beyond that afforded by a restriction order, over

NGUGI WA THIONGO

(hereinafter referred to as the detained person), HEREBY ORDERS that the detained person shall be detained.

[...]

This statement is written in the ENGLISH language, which you have stated you understand.

The detailed grounds on which you are detained are:–

You are detained under the following grounds:–

1) You have engaged yourself in activities and utterances which are dangerous to the good Government of Kenya and its institutions.

In order to thwart your intentions and in the interest of the preservation of public security your detention has become necessary.\textsuperscript{73}

This document, its tortured bureaucratese notwithstanding, is evidence of a careful calculus of political and legal expediency. In the run-up to Ngũgĩ’s arrest, \textit{Ngaahika Ndeenda} was banned. But no mention is made in this detention order of Ngũgĩ’s co-writer Ngũgĩ wa Mirii, or of the many actors and other members of the community who had collaborated with them on the production. Rather, Daniel Arap Moi, then the Minister for Home Affairs, cites “activities and utterances which are dangerous to the good Government of Kenya and its institutions.” These activities are understood to be Ngũgĩ’s – “the detained person [who] shall be detained” – alone. Ngũgĩ’s detention order opposes the one – the malcontent, the traitor – and the many – the “public,” the “good Government” – who must be protected from the malignancy of evil “intentions.” That this is a creative misreading, to say the least, should be apparent by now. That this misreading was oddly in line with the position taken by Amnesty International is borne out by a statement Moi gave when he released all sixteen of Kenya’s political detainees three and a half months after assuming the presidency in August 1978. In a report published in the \textit{New York Times}, Moi is quoted as saying “As you know, considerations of national security have in the past compelled the Government to take strong measures against a few individuals whose activities endangered our unity and stability. In order to show all Kenyans that I have firm faith and confidence in their determination to respect and promote our unity and stability, I have today released all detainees.”\textsuperscript{74} Moi’s rhetoric could not be more telling. “A few individuals” had been detained because their \textit{individual} “activities” posed a threat to “our [collective] unity and stability;” now that “all Kenyans” are “determin[ed] to respect and promote...unity and stability,” there is no harm in letting those “few” malcontents go free. Amnesty might have put it differently, but the upshot would have been the same: this was a case of individual dissidents coming up against the state in their capacity as private citizens.

In \textit{Juridical Humanity}, Samera Esmeir suggests that in the act of introducing a particular take on “the human” into its epistemologies and practices, colonial law in Egypt “detached itself from the checks of the past and established its authority in its own present.”\textsuperscript{75} I would argue that the Kenyan state’s misreading of Kamĩrĩthũ did much the same work. By insisting on individuating Ngũgĩ’s dissidence, the authorities stripped his work with his collaborators in the peasant theater of its historicity – which is to say its connectedness with the important legacy of anticolonial struggle. That this was deeply ironic, given the “dissidence” of founding fathers like Kenyatta and its violent repression by the colonial state, was not lost on Ngũgĩ. If \textit{Detained} is any indication, he made it a point to regularly provoke his guards with the “witticism” that he was writing to President Kenyatta because of the things they had in common as one-time political prisoners:

“What are you doing?”

[...]

\textsuperscript{73} Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, \textit{Detained: A Writer’s Prison Diary}, n.p.


“I am writing to Jomo Kenyatta in his capacity as an ex-detainee.”
“His case was different,” the warder argues back.
“How?”
“His was a colonial affair.”
“And this, a neo-colonial affair? What’s the difference?”
“A colonial affair...now we are independent...that’s the difference,” he says.
“A colonial affair in an independent country, eh? The British jailed an innocent Kenyatta. Thus Kenyatta learnt to jail innocent Kenyans. Is that the difference?

That Kenyatta may well have “learnt to jail innocent Kenyans” from the treatment he received at the hands of the British is further proof of one of Ngũgĩ’s most trenchant arguments: that power corrupts, that watchdogs learn their violence from their masters. What is truly remarkable, however, is how easy it seems to have been for Kenyatta and then Moi to empty dissidence in the postcolony they governed of its historical and political entailments. Individualizing dissent has long been a favorite tactic of autocratic regimes; by jailing prominent dissidents like Ngũgĩ, the Kenyatta regime hoped to cripple the broader social insurgency of which he was a part and at the same time deny that that insurgency existed beyond him in the first place. In much the same vein, the state’s insistence – here personified by Ngũgĩ’s warder – that Kenyatta’s own imprisonment was “a colonial affair” that in no way resembled the punishment to which Ngũgĩ was supposedly rightfully subjected seems intended to strand anti-imperialist politics in the postcolony in historical limbo, cut off from earlier struggles. This is the dark obverse of that brand of humanism that takes the individual rights-bearing subject as its center. Bettyann Pernice and Arthur Dobrin’s conviction that “‘People’” – by which they meant a select few recalcitrant intellectuals – “‘cannot be walked over’” was, unbeknownst to them, exactly what Kenyatta and Moi wanted to hear. I think it is safe to say that Kenyatta felt that if the way that he handled the challenge that Kamĩrĩthũ posed had to create controversy abroad, he would greatly prefer that that controversy concern his decision to detain a single artist-intellectual and not the alarming fact that the peasantry he governed seemed suddenly to have resumed their struggle against exploitation and unfreedom.

Black Becoming-Human

I turn now to Ngũgĩ’s own brand of anticolonial humanism and its connection to collectivism and the politics of land. In Detained, and in his seminal collection of essays Decolonising the Mind, he is very clear that the roots of Ngaahika Ndeenda lay in close collaboration with the peasant community in Kamĩrĩthũ, “one of several villages...originally set up in the fifties by the British colonial administration as a way of cutting off the links between the people and the guerillas of the Kenya Land and Freedom Army, otherwise known as Mau Mau.”77 Kamĩrĩthũ was also, not incidentally, the village that Ngũgĩ’s family was sent to during the Emergency;

76 Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, Detained: A Writer’s Prison Diary, 4.
after his home village outside Limuru was raised to the ground while he was away at school, Kamirithu was the closest thing to a home that he had. All the actors in Ngaahika Ndeenda were members of the community, as were the behind-the-scenes staff. The stage itself was built in an “empty space” – to invoke Peter Brook’s famous formulation, as Ngũgĩ frequently does 78 – by willing peasant labor. The script, developed by Ngũgĩ and Ngũgĩ wa Mirii in close consultation with the community, aimed to restore some of the links that the very history of Kamirithu had severed: to the anticolonial energies of Mau Mau and to the traditions of Gĩkũyu sociality that time and imperialism had attenuated.

Kamirithu then was not an aberration, but an attempt at reconnection with the broken roots of African civilization and its traditions of theatre. In its very location in a village within the kind of social classes [that were found there]...Kamirithu was the answer to the question of the real substance of a national theatre. Theatre is not a building. People make theatre. Their life is the very stuff of drama. Indeed Kamirithu reconnected itself to the national tradition of the empty space, of language, of content and of form.79

The aim of Ngaahika Ndeenda was community renewal. As such, it was bound up with a panoply of communitarian impulses: rural education, mother-tongue language politics, labor organizing, and so on. There was, clearly, very little that was individual about it.

The play itself puts forward a fairly didactic commentary on the failure of Independence in 1963 to decisively break the hold of international capital on Kenya’s institutions and its people. In Ngũgĩ’s words,

Ngaahika Ndeenda depicts the proletarisation of the peasantry in a neo-colonial society. Concretely it shows the way the Kiguunda family, a poor peasant family, who have to supplement their subsistence on their one and a half acres with the sale of their labour, is finally deprived of even the one-and-a-half acres by a multinational consortium of Japanese and Euro-American industrialists and bankers aided by the native comprador landlords and businessmen.80

This summary does not quite do justice to the play – and in particular the feminist implications of Kiguunda’s daughter Gathoni’s refusal to marry for social gain81 – but it does illuminate quite clearly what Ngũgĩ and his collaborators had in mind. Ngaahika Ndeenda puts forward a strident communitarian critique of the neocolonial and kleptocratic direction in which Kenyatta and his associates were leading the Kenyan postcolony. It alleges in no uncertain terms “that independence, for which thousands of Kenyans died, had been hijacked,”82 that – to return to Moyn and the moment in which human rights thinking became hegemonic – “anticolonialism...had shipwrecked as a moral and political project.”83

But to conceive of Ngaahika Ndeenda only in terms of critique would be to return to, and reify, the terms on which both Amnesty International’s and the Kenyatta regime’s misreadings of

80 Ibid., 44.
81 See the published playscript: Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o and Ngũgĩ wa Mirii, I Will Marry When I Want, trans. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o and Ngũgĩ wa Mirii (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1982).
82 Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literatures, 44.
Kamiriithu were premised. For Amnesty International, the Ngūgī case was important insofar as it concerned the free-speech right of artist-intellectuals to criticize the government. Kenyatta and Moi, however they may have felt in private, took great pains to present the Ngūgī case publically as one of an artist-intellectual whose critical “utterances” had taken him too far. Reading Ngaahika Ndeenda and Ngūgī’s scholarly writing about the process of making it might lead one to theorize the work under the sign of communal, cooperative critique in place of the individualistic brand of dissent on which both human rights advocacy and statist repression were fixated. But even that is misguided, because the very notion of critique assumes, at bottom, an object-oriented airing of grievances, an excavation of inadequacies, an exchange of ideas premised on the presupposition that whatever it is that is being critiqued can be made better if intelligent thinking shows the way. Ngaahika Ndeenda went far beyond critique. To be sure, its staging at Kamiriithu brought forward a particular brand of anti-government dissent, but the modalities of that dissent are not straightforwardly reducible to an accommodationist politics of reform.

For one, the work that Ngūgī and his collaborators did at Kamiriithu usurped, quite explicitly, the power the government had reserved to itself to acculturate its citizens as it saw fit. The Kamiriithu Community Education and Cultural Centre – which Ngūgī helped found in the run-up to Ngaahika Ndeenda – was not, in and of itself, a critique of the Kenyatta government, but rather a workaround that was intended to teach history and class-consciousness to people the government neglected to educate in anything other than farming, factory work and the glory of Independence. In a 1982 article for the New York Times, Alan Cowell makes clear that the Kenyatta government construed the peasant-centric pedagogical mission of the Kamiriithu Centre as a direct threat to its own parallel efforts at rural education: “The authorities said at the time [that Ngaahika Ndeenda was banned] that the group has usurped Government activities and was taking people away from adult literacy classes.”

The threat that Kamiriithu posed to the government as a particularly insidious type of shadow-politics was made even clearer in retrospect when, in 1982, after the Centre tried to mount another Gikũyũ-language play at the National Theatre in Nairobi, armed police came to Kamiriithu and razed the theatre to the ground. In 1984 – as if wiping it off the face of the earth were not enough – President Moi traveled to Kamiriithu to recolonize the “empty space.”

In February...President Moi made a “surprise visit” to Kamiriithu and he shed tears at the poverty he saw around the centre: how can human beings live in such conditions? On “an impulse,” “an unrehearsed” act of “personal” generosity, he there and then gave a donation towards the building of a polytechnic where the open air theatre used to be. No mention of the Kamiriithu Community Education and Cultural Centre. But the people were not deceived. A polytechnic was what they were hoping to build. They would welcome one built by the government for after all it was their money. But the regime had different hopes.

The performances that Ngūgī and his collaborators staged at Kamiriithu were met at every turn by counter-performances staged by the Moi regime. At stake was nothing less than the life of the

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community over and against the deathliness of power. The “crime” for which Ngũgĩ was detained was not the relatively straightforward one of individual dissent or unsolicited critique, but the much more complicated and compelling one of having participated in an attempt to build alternate, and unauthorized, institutions of community empowerment beyond the reach of the state. That this was a form of cultural and political insurgency was not lost on the Kenyatta regime, which moved quickly to neutralize and then re-naturalize it. Given the prevailing misreadings of the Ngũgĩ case, this went largely unnoticed, both within Kenya and internationally. Cowell’s article notwithstanding, the implications of the Kenyan government’s long-term response to Kamĩrĩthũ more or less escaped international attention; by contenting itself that all had been resolved when Ngũgĩ was released from prison, Amnesty International – and other human rights organizations like it – blinded itself to the fact that the forms of dissent that really were at issue all along were still being ruthlessly suppressed.

I have used the word insurgency to describe the shadow-politics of Kamĩrĩthũ because of what may well have been its most damning feature. Ngũgĩ notes, with obvious enthusiasm, that one of the key accomplishments of Ngaahika Ndeenda inhered in the work it did to reconnect the peasants of Kamĩrĩthũ with anticolonial struggles that they themselves had engaged in in the past:

The participants were most particular about the representation of history, their history. And they were quick to point out and argue against any incorrect positioning and representation of the various forces – even the enemy forces – at work in the struggle against imperialism. They would compare notes from their own actual experience, whether it was in making guns in the forests, in stealing arms from the British enemy, in carrying bullets through the enemy lines, or in the various strategies for survival. Land and freedom. Economic and political independence. Those were the aims of the struggle and they did not want Ngaahika Ndeenda to distort them. The one who made imitation guns for the play at Kamiriithu was the very person who used to make actual guns for the Mau Mau guerrillas in the fifties. 87

The principal problem Ngaahika Ndeenda posed to the Kenyatta government was not on the order of critique but on the order of rebellion. Some of the actors in the piece had actually fought the British during the Mau Mau War. The prop man who made prop guns for the show was an actual gunsmith. Ngaahika Ndeenda, therefore, posed a radical problem of the political real. The play was set off within the aesthetic frame of “theatre,” but that frame was exceedingly porous, and the politics of anti-imperialist struggle and revolution bled through. Can one really blame the Kenyan authorities for seeing in Ngaahika Ndeenda a rehearsal of the struggle to come? After all, that was what Ngũgĩ, following Augusto Boal, intended it to be. 88

It is here that Ngũgĩ’s theory of the human, and of humanist politics, emerges most clearly. It is in the collective struggle for land and freedom – to return to the bywords of the Mau Mau, which Ngũgĩ continues to hold dear – that black historical subjects lay claim to their humanity. Black becoming-human happens through resistance, on a mass scale. It is an insurgent becoming-many. The specificity of that insurgency, its rootedness in a particular historical terrain, links Ngũgĩ back to theories of the partisan – who, as opposed to the terrorist, is invested

87 Ibid., 55.
in the local, its memories and its futures.\textsuperscript{89} In this way, black becoming-human is also a kind of place-making, a politics of life and history that is always set against the death-dealing apparatus of hegemonic power. For Ngũgĩ, this is best understood not through the figure of a given man or woman, whose individuality forecloses the multiplicity of black struggle, or through the figure of an animal, whose body will always carry the trace of black dehumanization, but through a complex figuration of nature and the seed. No character in an Ngũgĩ play or novel is more empowered than when she or he is traveling through or working on the land; in moments like this, insurgent black humanity – like Gikonyo in \textit{A Grain of Wheat} as he carves a new handle for his beloved’s mother’s panga – is made to feel as if “the whole world was under the control of his hand.... He felt a holy calm; he was in love with all the earth.”\textsuperscript{90} In part, this is simply a dramatic staging of the Marxist axiom – which Ngũgĩ has reiterated on several occasions – that human being defines itself in its mastery over nature. But in the context of anticolonial struggle, the question of human belonging to the land runs much deeper. After all, the blood of all those who “killed themselves in order to live” is in the ground on which Gikonyo stands. “Then nobody noticed it; but looking back we can see that...[that] blood contained within it a seed, a grain, which gave birth to a movement whose main strength thereafter sprang from a bond with the soil.”\textsuperscript{91} The deathliness of Dedan Kimathi, or of the three Gitogo-s, in other words, is the seed from which black becoming-human continues to grow. The onus, according to this brand of insurgent black humanism, is on writers and intellectuals like Ngũgĩ to water the seed of revolution and in effect to become seeds of revolution themselves. In order to do this, they must heed the Pastor’s warning in \textit{The Black Hermit} to plant themselves well:

\begin{verbatim}
PASTOR: Politics. He became lost to us. Like a seed Which falling on the wayside Lacked the nourishment of the rich earth, He dried up – was lost.\textsuperscript{92}
\end{verbatim}

Ngũgĩ’s entire career is reflective of his determination to keep this from happening – to plant himself well, in “the rich earth” of his native country, so that the struggle can continue.

\textsuperscript{90} Ngugi wa Thiong’o, \textit{A Grain of Wheat}, 80.
\textsuperscript{91} Ibid., 12.
\textsuperscript{92} Ngugi wa Thiong’o, \textit{The Black Hermit}, 19.
Chapter Four
EVERYBODY AND EVERYTHING HAD SPROUTED FEATHERS
Animal Monstrosity in the Plays of Ebrahim Hussein

The 1960s were an extraordinary decade in the history of Eastern Africa. Tanganyika achieved independence in 1961, followed by Uganda in 1962, Kenya in 1963 and Zanzibar in 1964, leading shortly thereafter to unification with the Tanganyikan mainland and the formation of modern Tanzania. In Kenya, as I demonstrated in the previous chapter, the euphoria of decolonial transition soured in short order, at least for radical intellectuals like Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o. This lead Ngũgĩ to embrace an oppositional poetics of subalternity that enshrined a collectivism humanism at the heart of his political project. For Ngũgĩ’s Tanzanian contemporary Ebrahim Hussein, however, the lay of the land was markedly different.

This was in large part because Julius Nyerere, the first president of independent Tanganyika and then Tanzania, remained invested in the cause of anticolonial revolution even as his counterparts in Kenya and to a different degree in Uganda repurposed the legacy of revolution for what Ngũgĩ and others considered kleptocratic, neocolonial ends. By 1967, Nyerere had committed his country to the socialist politics of Ujamaa. Nyerere’s – and by extension Tanzania’s – investment in anticolonial humanism is readily apparent even in the term Ujamaa, which Nyerere translated from the Swahili as “Familyhood,” 1 but could also be taken to mean people-ness or, more abstractly, relationality. Under the heading of Ujamaa, Nyerere advocated what he called a “man-centred” 2 socialism, the basis of which would be “a belief in the oneness of man and the common historical destiny of mankind.” 3 This meant that what he called “human equality” was the most important consideration in his political calculations; “the justification of socialism,” he argued, “is man; not the state, not the flag.” 4 That said, while Nyerere’s commitment to unraveling the strictures of colonial and neocolonial capitalist order never wavered, he was not cut from the same revolutionary cloth as Dedan Kimathi and the other Mau Mau partisans across the border in Kenya. The Tanganyikan independence struggle – unlike the Zanzibari Revolution, in which Nyerere played no part – was remarkably nonviolent, and Nyerere’s patient faith in the power of humanism and egalitarianism led him to conceive of even the most wrenching transformations as steps in a gradual process of universal emancipation. He believed in “revolution through evolution,” 5 a slogan that betrays a political organicism that – like many forms of evolutionary thinking – put its trust in the future:

What we are attempting is a telescoped evolution of our economy and our society.
This is not a sociological, or even a biological, impossibility.

4 Ibid.
It has taken hundreds of millions of years for life on the earth to develop from simple living matter to the complicated and inter-linked cell structure which is a human being. Yet a human foetus develops from one to the other in nine months.

The national growth of our country can be telescoped and yet remain organic. It will take more than nine months; but the union of our people and our land, in the light of the human knowledge available in this century, can certainly shorten very considerably the period during which countries like the United Kingdom or the United States achieved their present affluence.  

It should come as no surprise, given Nyerere’s interest in evolution, that he was instrumental in the repatriation of hominid fossils discovered by the Leakeys in colonial Tanganyika, and that in the theory of production he advanced in an important 1964 essay on socialism, he counted “that ancient gentleman ‘Early Man’” as a rudimentary tool-maker whose labor on the land helped to produce wealth. For Nyerere, everything proceeded from these early beginnings, developing – “organic[ally]” – towards a more equitable human future. African socialism, after all, was “an attitude of mind” that could and would be cultivated humanistically with special attention to the forms that human collectivity took on the continent, from the days of “‘Early Man’” onwards.

Even as he mobilized considerable political resources to “telescope” the process, the achievement of a just society in the wake of colonialism remained a natural inevitability, like the fetal development of a human being out of “simple living matter.”

This is the political milieu in which Ebrahim Hussein wrote his plays. Eight of these have been published and produced: *Wakati Ukuta*, or *Time Is A Wall* and *Alikiona*, or *She Got What She Deserved*, naturalistic evocations of bourgeois life in mid-century Dar es Salaam that Hussein published in 1970 but wrote at least four or five years earlier; *Kinjeketile* (1969), a history play that reimagines the 1904-1907 Maji Maji War against German colonial dominion; *Mashetani*, or *Devils* (1971), a surrealistic meta-theatrical reflection on the fall-out from the union of the mainland with Zanzibar; *Ngao ya Jadi*, or *The Shield of Tradition*, and *Jogoo Kijijini*, or *The Cock Crows in the Village* (both 1976), poem-plays that mythologize anticolonialism and its afterlives; *Arusi*, or *The Wedding* (1980), a political statement on Nyerere’s program of villagization concealed within a failed romance; and *Kwenye Ukingo wa Thim*, or *At the Edge of No Man’s Land* (1988), a tragedy of tribalism. These plays, which taken together represent one of the most important dramatic corpuses in contemporary African literature, are unified by their preoccupation with the intractability of social problems and the persistence of an array of dehumanizing forces, even after independence. The insistent pessimism of this dramaturgy has a great deal to do with context. Unlike Ngũgĩ, who found himself in the position of having to defend a subaltern humanism from the encroachment of an acquisitive neocolonial governmentality, Hussein was faced with the vast humanist ecology of Nyerere’s “man-centred” socialism, a politics that assumed the voice of the subaltern and celebrated its rootedness in “traditional African society.”

This political philosophy, emancipatory though it was, left little room for maneuver. The past and the future both belonged to socialism, to a classless political sociality in which everyone worked, wealth was held in

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6 Ibid., 94.
8 Ibid., 1.
9 Ibid., 3.
common and the tribe and “the extended family” acted as a hedge against communal misfortune. The task of the present – the heady early years of Tanzania’s independence – was to build a link between the past and future, restoring to political power the collectivist practices that the epistemic incursions of capitalist colonialism had rendered subaltern. For Hussein, a born iconoclast, the optimism of Nyerere’s vision for Tanzania was difficult to reconcile with reality and its complexities. As Jane Plastow has noted, while did he have an early period of “commitment to Marxism,” Hussein subsequently “moved further and further towards an aesthetic, individualist approach to theatre.” This led to his increasing estrangement from the Tanzanian literary and political mainstream, culminating in his resignation thirty-odd years ago from his teaching post at the University of Dar es Salaam and his entry into almost total seclusion at his family home. Although he continues to write, Hussein does not publish or produce any of his plays anymore and has all but disappeared from public life.

Alain Ricard and Robert Philipson – the two scholars in the Euro-American academy who have considered Hussein’s work in the most depth – both attribute this internal self-exile to Hussein’s refusal to be co-opted into the mainline discourse of Tanzanian literature of the early postcolonial period, which largely consists of politically-inflected work that is either overtly didactic or at the very least social-realist. For Ricard in particular, Hussein’s refusal to give himself over completely to Nyerere’s vision for Tanzania is largely a question of aesthetics, of Hussein’s stubborn insistence on his own independence: “Tanzania’s socialist cultural and political unity-project was a totalizing one and it left very little space for the autonomy of artistic creation – Ebrahim’s space.” Ricard notes that, aside from an incident in Kenya in 1990 that involved Hussein being arrested and beaten for throwing a chair at a painting of then-president Daniel Arap Moi, he has assiduously avoided political entanglements and confined himself to the realm of what Philipson refers to as “artistic truth, which cannot be arrived at by a simple analysis of themes or ‘message.’” This insistence on the sacrosanctity of “artistic creation – Ebrahim’s space” aligns with the critical consensus that Hussein’s plays are difficult. Joachim Fiebach – Hussein’s friend and former teacher – notes that “[h]is pieces are designed for a ‘theater of intimacy,’ loaded with symbols and dreams and visions, employing dense, difficult-to-decipher metaphors and intricate flashbacks and flash-forwards in ‘fictional time.’” By this logic, it is precisely the difficulty of Hussein’s oeuvre that makes it political. Faced with the grand outlines of Nyerere’s theory of history and social change, Hussein’s refusal to make his meaning plain – or, as Philipson puts it, his maintenance of “that mystery at the heart of...[his]
plays that no critical analysis will ever reach, no reading can ever quench”\textsuperscript{18} is tantamount to an act of political refusal.

I agree with this argument in its broad outlines and in other, forthcoming work on Hussein I suggest that his refusal to make meaning as Nyerere does is constitutive of a radical anti-politics. I am, however, wary of any reading of Hussein that makes of his insistence on what Fiebach calls the “ambivalent modes of existence...[and] the incertitudes of life in modern African societies”\textsuperscript{19} a merely aesthetic object. To put it another way: the politics (or anti-politics) of Hussein’s plays is not exhausted by their literary unorthodoxy. For one, the difficulty of Hussein’s language is at least in part a function of his immersion in the deep and complex traditions of Swahili literary cosmopolitanism. Hussein himself is very much of the Swahili coast of Tanzania, that littoral contact zone in which centuries of exchange between Arabs and Africans produced unique ethnic, cultural and political formations. The Swahili of his plays – unlike, for instance, the lucid Swahili that Nyerere used in his translations of Shakespeare, which are very much a part of the nationalist cultural project and as such are intended for as broad an audience as possible\textsuperscript{20} – is marked by the proto- and trans-national history of the Swahili language and Hussein’s cultural location within it, a history that puts considerable pressure on the idea of unitary African traditions that Nyerere prized so highly. To date only Kinjeketile and Kwenye Ukingo wa Thim have appeared in English translation, the former in Hussein’s own English version and the latter in Kimani Njogu’s. This is in part due to the difficulty of Hussein’s Swahili, as I myself have discovered in my scholarship on Hussein and in my efforts to translate and publish his complete plays. I am already aware that no matter how fluently I render Hussein’s prose in English, my translations will inevitably fall short insofar as the language of the Swahili original carries within it those atavistic remainders that Hussein believes persist, inevitably, in the wake of the “telescop ed evolution of...economy and...society.”\textsuperscript{21} The most I can do, here and elsewhere, is to mark the currents that trouble the depths of Hussein’s artistic vision, the better to understand their irresistible pull.

This chapter is concerned above all else with atavistic remainders, with figures of doubt, memory and ambivalence. In Hussein, these figures often appear in animal guise – or, more to the point, in the form of animal monstrosities.\textsuperscript{22} In this respect, Hussein emerges as the mirror image of Ngugi. Where Ngugi insists on the re-humanization of blackness, on the insurgent politics of black humanism in the face of colonial and neocolonial bestialization, Hussein draws attention to the ways in which revolutionary humanism cannot hope to fully exorcise the most bestial facts of history. Notably, the only real Other in Nyerere’s theory of socialism without class struggle, the only impediment to the evolution of a just postcolonial society that he envisioned, is itself nonhuman: “Not only was the capitalist, or the landed exploiter, unknown to traditional African society, but we did not have that other form of modern parasite – the loiterer,

\textsuperscript{19} Fiebach, “Ebrahim Hussein’s Dramaturgy,” 26.
\textsuperscript{21} Nyerere, “The Purpose Is Man,” 94.
\textsuperscript{22} In this chapter, and particularly when it comes to questions of monstrosity, I am refining, deepening and in several instances radically revising some of the work I did for my MA thesis in Comparative Literature at the School of Oriental and African Studies. See Joshua Williams, “Wonders Taken For Signs: Re-Reading Monstrosity and Metamorphosis in Girish Karnad and Ebrahim Hussein” (MA thesis, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 2009).
or idler, who accepts the hospitality of society as ‘right’ but gives nothing in return!’

The capitalist, the landlord, the “loiterer,” the “idler:” these are all parasites, a subhuman menace, living like vampires off the lifeblood of their human host. For Nyerere, parasitism is an abominable aberration, but for Hussein – in plays like Kinjeketile, Mashetani, Ngao ya Jadi and Kwenya Ukingo wa Thim – it is indexical of the creaturely persistence of social forces that revolutionary politics cannot simply will away. Faced with Nyerere’s faith in the capacity of the human subaltern to regain its voice and build a just society, Hussein held open space for his own vision of animal subalternity. This species of animal subalternity is – like all others – racialized, linked in vital and complex ways with the question of blackness in the (post)colony.

The Ambivalence of Insurgency

Their differences aside, Hussein understood as well as Ngũgĩ did the degree to which the European colonial project relied on the dehumanization of black subjects. In his 1969 history play Kinjeketile, Hussein rehearsed the insurgent humanism of the animal subaltern in the context of the Maji Maji War, an anticolonial uprising that roiled the politics of German East Africa at the turn of the twentieth century. In the play, the diviner Kinjeketile touches off the anticolonial insurgency with a prophecy that promises that warriors anointed with water from a certain river will be made invulnerable to German bullets. At a secret war council convened in advance of battle, an Mkichi warrior debates Kitunda, Kinjeketile’s lieutenant and one of the play’s most reluctant revolutionaries, on the merits of open rebellion:

MKICHI: ...why are you so hesitant about declaring war on the white man?

KITUNDA: The people who will die. I see thousands and thousands of our people dying.

MKICHI: But it is better to die than to live like this. We are made to work like beasts in the cotton plantation. We are forced to pay tax. We die of hunger because we cannot work on our shambas. I say death is better than this life.

KITUNDA: It’s better to live like this than to go to war and lose thousands of our men. And the few who will survive will get the same treatment, or worse, as before.”

I have drawn here from Hussein’s 1970 English-language “transcreation” of his Swahili original, the only such translation of his work that he has produced himself. In Swahili, the relations of objectification that define the beastliness of the labor that Africans were compelled to perform on German farms is even clearer. Mkichi’s line “But it is better to die than to live like this. We are made to work like beasts in the cotton plantation” approximates the lyrical

distillation of the work of power in “Afazali kufa kuliko kukaa hivi tunatawaliwa, tunalimishwa kama wanyama,”26 which in a more literal translation might read “It is better to die than to stay like this, being ruled, being compelled to farm like animals.” The verbs “kutawaliwa” and “kulimishwa,” “to be ruled” and “to be compelled to farm” are not only passive in mood but actually objectify their subjects. To be turned from a subject into an object, even at the level of language: this is the becoming-beastly of the animal subaltern.

Notably, Mkichi understands – to return once again to one of the central concerns of this dissertation– that the difference between personhood and objecthood, humanity and beastliness, is one of life and death. It does not matter, he argues, whether “thousands and thousands of our people” die in their bid for freedom, because life as beasts of burden in service to the Germans – life, that is, lived below the horizon of political and social possibility – is hardly worth living. In a very real sense, Mkichi understands animal subalternity as less than life, as bare life; his would-be insurgents are what Eric Cazdyn calls “the already dead.”27 In fact, Cazdyn’s theory of illness, capitalism and what he calls “the new chronic” applies in startling ways to the condition of black and animal subalternity under colonial regimes of bestialization. His injunction to “look away from what appears to be the immediate crisis and toward the crisis that is at work even when the system is functioning well”28 echoes Mkichi’s insistence that “liv[ing] like this” is no less dire than dying in war would be. Mkichi – like so many other anticolonial revolutionaries – understands that the “crisis constitutes the system itself.”29 To be black under colonialism is to suffer from a chronic condition – a deathly form of life that may only be remedied by death or the revivification of political subjectification. In the face of the total logic of abjection, Kitunda’s careful calculus of political costs and benefits – his contention that anything could be “worse” – rings hollow.

Hussein also joins Ngũgĩ in imagining black insurgency as a vegetal process, a proliferation of resistance sprouting from revolutionary seeds, a refusal of the earth itself to bear the weight of exploitation. The Maji Maji War began in earnest with attacks on German farms and the destruction of crops like cotton; as Kitunda puts it in the play, “They cut down the trees with the same force the Germans had used, to flog a black skin. And each blow they dealt, it wasn’t the cotton tree they slashed, it was a German they slayed.”30 In place of the cotton they destroyed, Kitunda’s soldiers imagine themselves as “mibaazi,”31 pea plants, creepers, primed to choke out invasive species and reclaim their land from foreign use:

\[A\text{ }number\text{ }of\text{ }men,\text{ }some\text{ }armed\text{ }with\text{ }guns\text{ }and\text{ }some\text{ }with\text{ }sticks.\text{ }They\text{ }are\text{ }lined\text{ }up\text{ }like\text{ }soldiers\text{ }while\text{ }dancing\text{ }the\text{ }likida.\]

KITUNDA: Who are you?

MEN: We are pea-plants.

KITUNDA: Eh?

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28 Ibid., 1.
29 Ibid.
MEN: Pea-plants.

KITUNDA: And like pea-plants...

MEN: We'll crawl. We'll crawl. We'll crawl. We'll crawl. We'll crawl.

*They fling themselves to the ground as they chant the above slogan and crawl on their bellies with the help of their arms, ready to pounce on the enemy.*

The likida – a “war dance”\(^{33}\) that, like many other war dances, verges here on a military drill – draws on the affective power of the earth itself. Kitunda’s men “fling themselves to the ground,” affirming their reciprocal identity with the plants that grow there, the better to take their enemies unawares. This, too, is a form of metonymy, as former farmers make of their closeness with the soil a resource for revolutionary struggle. The animal is present as well; indeed, animal tactics of stealth, of creeping along “on their bellies...ready to pounce” supplement the vegetal profusion of resistance here – resistance that, as Ngũgĩ wrote, came from “a seed, a grain” of refusal, “which gave birth to a movement whose main strength thereafter sprang from a bond with the soil.”\(^{34}\)

Here, however, Hussein and Ngũgĩ part ways. For while Ngũgĩ and other anticolonial humanists hold out hope for a de-animalization of blackness in and through revolutionary struggle, Hussein insists on the ambivalence of revolution, the piecemeal work of metamorphosis, and the continuing presence of the animal at the very heart of black social and political life. In his later work, especially the plays *Mashetani* and *Ngao ya Jadi*, this preoccupation with the bestial remainder of colonial power prompts a deeper engagement with animal monstrosity. In *Kinjeketile*, however, the barest hint of trouble to come arrives in the shape of a snake that is and is not there. Kitunda’s wife Bibi Kitunda and their daughter Chausiku notice smoke coming from the diviner Kinjeketile’s hut. Kinjeketile’s wife assures Bibi Kitunda that Kinjeketile is performing rituals inside, but she suspects that they are actually cooking some delicious meal that they will not share:

**BIBI KITUNDA:** Go and see what she’s cooking. *(Chausiku goes. Suddenly she comes back and runs to her mother’s arms.)* What’s the matter?

**CHAUSSIKU:** A snake! I’m being chased by a snake!

**BIBI KITUNDA:** A snake? Where is it?

**CHAUSSIKU:** Behind me!

**BIBI KITUNDA:** Where?

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\(^{33}\) Ibid., 22.

\(^{34}\) Ngugi wa Thiong’o, *A Grain of Wheat*, 12.
On the face of it, this exchange complicates more than it reveals. Chausiku sees a snake but “[t]here is no snake.” Kinjeketile is at home performing rituals, “worshipping and propitiating the spirits” but also at the German farmer’s plantation where he and Kitunda supply their compulsory labor, albeit in “a place...some distance” away. Kitunda sees “someone very much like him – from afar” but it seems he is not there – or perhaps is there but also is not. The only explanation for all this – as Bibi Kitunda at least seems to intuit – is that Kinjeketile’s immersion in the arcane world of the spirits has made his person multiple, split between several human and non-human corporealities that seem to exist and not exist in multiple places at once.

This is notable because Hussein based the character Kinjeketile on the historical figure Kinjeketile Ngwale, the diviner whose prophecy inspired the Maji Maji uprising in 1904-1905. Oral histories conducted by G.C.K. Gwassa and others reveal that the god, Hongo, who is thought to have possessed Kinjeketile, was “a huge snake which normally lived under deep waters;”36 Mohammed Nganoga Nimekwako, who was a teenager at the time of Kinjeketile’s apotheosis, told Gwassa that a “very large snake...[with] the head of a monkey, large red eyes

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and the colour of a rainbow’’ entered the hut of a certain mzee in the village, and that afterward a man in a white kanzu appeared, a ‘‘phenomenon [that] was connected with the mysterious snake in that its trail...was interrupted by foot marks between the points where the man in white robes appeared and disappeared.’’\textsuperscript{37} Hussein is clearly playing with the historical record here, implying but not confirming that Kinjeketile has been visited by Hongo the snake god – or perhaps that he himself has the power to transform into a snake. Under other circumstances, this might be taken as proof positive of Kinjeketile’s power and the incontrovertibility of the divine mandate for anticolonial war. Kinjeketile himself, when he enters into a prophetic trance later in the play, proclaims his own divine power over all other beings, declaring that “two lions...[became] tame and powerless in...[his] hands” and that therefore his army will be made “invincible.”\textsuperscript{38} In the next scene, however, when Kitunda tells Kinjeketile what he said when possessed, Kinjeketile is seized by existential doubt that throws his divine mandate into question:

\begin{quote}
KINJEKETILE: I’ve been cheated! They have killed me – no, I have killed myself! It was a dream, yes, I was dreaming! No, no no, no! I have been cheated! No!\textsuperscript{39}
\end{quote}

\textit{Kinjeketile} is a deeply ambivalent play. At the core of this ambivalence is Kinjeketile’s fear that he has been deceived, that the prophecy is false and will fail, that he may inadvertently lead Kitunda and the rest of their men to their death. On this point, of course, Kinjeketile is prescient. The prophecy does fail and with it the revolution. German guns mow down Kitunda’s troops. The play ends, as the Maji Maji War did, in death – a tragic ending all the more striking for a play written in the 1960s, a euphoric decade of political liberation across Eastern Africa. This is classic Hussein. To my mind, the snake that is and is not there is a cipher for the fallibility of revolutionary faith, a quite possibly malignant spirit of interference in an insurgency that might have unfolded differently, more cannily, with much less loss of life. At the very least, the absent presence of the snake undermines any claim that revolution is – as Nyerere would have it – an entirely human or humanist process.

There is no avoiding the spirit of critique in which \textit{Kinjeketile} stages this intervention into the politics of anticolonial insurgency. However, it would be a mistake to conclude on this basis that Hussein is a reactionary. He is, instead, for all the surreality of his poetics, a disciplined realist, insistent on the difficulties of history and the ghosts that haunt moments of upheaval and rupture. Kinjeketile and the spectral snake are harbingers of forms of animal monstrosity that emerge much more clearly in Hussein’s later plays, most notably \textit{Mashetani} and \textit{Ngao ya Jadi}. There too, the emphasis is on what can never be fully excised from political life: the forms of bestialization that can never be unlearned.

\begin{center}
\textbf{The Afterlives of Zanzibar}
\end{center}

Kinjeketile’s first indication that he may have been “cheated” by Hongo – or by another supernatural being disguised as Hongo – comes when Kitunda informs him that his prophecy

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 261.
\item \textsuperscript{38} Hussein, \textit{Kinjeketile}, 1970, 19.
\item \textsuperscript{39} Ibid., 21.
\end{itemize}
made mention of Seyyid Said, the early-nineteenth-century Omani potentate who established a sultanate in Zanzibar. Kinjeketile – or perhaps Hussein – seems to conflate Said with Ali bin Hamud, the Sultan of Zanzibar at the time of Maji Maji. When he discovers that he prophesied that “after our victory, we will be the children of Seyyid Said,” Kinjeketile is afraid that this means that his people are poised to expel their German overlords only to see the Arabs at the coast extend their power inland. The anxiety that he feels at that prospect speaks to the racial, religious and territorial fractures that have riven the politics of what is now Tanzania since long before the time of Seyyid Said. Hussein himself is both linguistically and ethnically Swahili – that is, in and of the mélange of Africanness and Arabness produced by centuries of war, trade and other forms of exchange across the Indian Ocean.

Although Kinjeketile evinces a marked concern for the fate of the mainland tribes under German colonial dominion, and although Hussein makes a point of drawing the question of Zanzibari economic and political paternalism into the discourse of anticolonialism that Kinjeketile and Kitunda elaborate, there is no doubt that he dislocated that anticolonialism by translating it into the literary Swahili of the play. In so doing, Hussein implicates himself – his Swahili heritage, and with it his cultural capital, his Muslim faith, and his distinctive place in the epistemic and political nexus of race in Eastern Africa – as a potentially disruptive force within the anticolonial project. “Zanzibar and the Arabs,” as Ricard notes, remain “imaginary actors in the foreground of...Hussein’s oeuvre” from this point onwards.

The precise nature of this disruptive force was of significant political concern in the late 1960s, as Nyerere’s Tanzania came to grips with the 1964 union of the mainland with revolutionary Zanzibar. Hussein’s 1971 play Mashetani (Devils) addresses this moment of social and political upheaval directly. Mashetani is set in 1966, in the uneasy interval between the 1964 union and Nyerere’s 1967 Arusha Declaration, in which he formalized Tanzania’s commitment to socialist development. The play is ostensibly the story of two University friends, one – Juma – a member of a family of Zanzibari landowners displaced by the revolution there, and the other – Kitaru – a member of the new black nouveau riche at the center of political and economic power on the mainland, but it almost immediately opens up onto broader questions of identity in the Tanzanian postcolony. This is not to say that the play is a national allegory, however. I share in Aijaz Ahmad’s trenchant critique of Fredric Jameson’s argument in “Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism,” which recasts virtually all postcolonial literature as an aestheticization of “Third World” nationalisms. Indeed, if anything, Mashetani is anti- or

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40 Ibid.
42 In a prefatory essay “Juu ya Lugha” – “Concerning Language” that appears in the original Swahili-language edition of Kinjeketile, Hussein explains how he arrived at the accented patois he gave his Matumbi and Zaramo characters. More to the point, he writes: “Nisemapo hivi sikusudii kusema kuwa katika maisha yao ya kila siku Wamatumbi au Wazaramo husema hivi. Misemo hii nimeibuni mimi katika mchezo huu kwa sababu maalum ingawa nafiki tunaweza vile vile kusikia mishabaha yake katika maisha ya kila siku.” “I should specify that I did not intend to say that the Matumbi or the Zaramo usually speak this way in their day-to-day lives. I chose their language for this play because it is special, even though I think we can hear something resembling their everyday speech in this way.” Hussein, Kinjeketile, 1969, xii.
43 Ricard, Ebrahim Hussein, 74.
supranational in its preoccupation with what survives the revolution, existing in a space of disavowed alterity beyond its conceptual bounds. This, for Hussein, is the space of the supernatural – which, more often than not, takes animal form.

Robert Philipson notes that “the introduction of the supernatural in Hussein’s work” in the guise of the snake god Hongo in Kinjeketile “marks a turn to considerations of ideology and culture that become increasingly obsessive.”\(^{45}\) The critical consensus in the Hussein scholarship seems to be that the “considerations of ideology and culture” that Mashetani – which Hussein wrote immediately after Kinjeketile, in 1971 – advances are largely reducible to what Ricard calls “a surprising parable of class conflicts linked to the establishment of a new socialist society.”\(^{46}\) The class conflicts in question stem from the fact that Juma and Kitaru come from different worlds and their friendship cannot take the strain; as Juma, the erstwhile son of the Zanzibari aristocracy, says at the end of the play: “He who is climbing a ladder and he who is coming down a ladder can’t shake hands.”\(^{47}\) The supernatural intervenes metatheatrically in the story in the shape of a play-within-a-play that Juma and Kitaru stage to amuse themselves – an abstract, prolix piece that delves into the relationship between “the Devil” and “Man.” The Devil is a trickster and a bully – and although he allows the Man to kill him, the Man is left in doubt that his adversary is in fact dead. Performing this play seems to affect Kitaru, who plays the Man, in unexpected ways: he storms off before the play is finished, leaving Juma to wonder what is wrong. The remainder of Mashetani – the play-within-the-play only takes up the first act – concerns Kitaru’s increasing obsession with devilry and the gradual disintegration of his friendship with Juma. In the last scene of Hussein’s play, the two friends attempt to perform their play again, but when Juma refuses to let Kitaru play the Devil instead of the Man, they fight – and Juma walks out with the expectation that they will never see each other again. It is obvious by this point that the question of who enacts which role has significant consequences. Philipson argues, convincingly, that the play-within-a-play must be understood as “an allegory that follows the course of colonialism from conquest, to internalization through education, to the throwing off of its political forms, to the hegemonic recreation of its values in the formerly colonized.”\(^{48}\) The Tanzanian critics S.D. Kiango and T.S.Y. Sengo put it still more baldly: “Tumeonyeshwa kwamba mkoloni ndiye Shetani” – “We are shown that the Devil is in fact the colonialist.”\(^{49}\) Philipson carefully draws out this point in his reading of “The Devil and the Man;” his argument that the Man’s speech at the end of the play-within-a-play mirrors the language of Nyerere’s Arusha Declaration\(^{50}\) is especially illustrative, as it links Kitaru with the incipient politics of anticolonial socialism and, more abstractly, makes concrete what I have been arguing about Nyerere’s humanism and the way in which it stages the conflict between “Man” and the larger forces of exploitation that bedevil him.

Its obvious utility notwithstanding, this reading of Mashetani largely neglects the atavistic space with which I believe Hussein is most concerned. This is the space of the animal –

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46 Ricard, Ebrahim Hussein, 58.
which, crucially, has a different and more fraught relationship to blackness than it did in Kinjeketile. While Philipson concedes that Hussein’s characterization of Juma and Kitaru would suggest that the former is a Zanzibari Arab and the latter a black African, “questions of ethnicity in the play are assiduously avoided.”\textsuperscript{51} I think that interpretative caution is unwarranted here, as Hussein explicitly states in his Preface to the play that Kitaru comes from the new black bourgeoisie; because they were hungry for money and power, he notes, “many of these people, as Mwalimu Nyerere put it, were really ‘black Europeans.’”\textsuperscript{52} I make no claims about ethnicity per se here, as the analytical purchase of blackness as an ethnic category remains dubious at best in the African context. I believe Tanzanian actors of almost any skin color could play Juma or Kitaru without straining credulity. However, blackness as a \textit{racial} category – that is, blackness as a political position, blackness as the lived fact of subjugation to anti-blackness, blackness as what Fanon called “being for others\textsuperscript{53} – is operative here in fairly transparent ways. Nyerere sought to contain the acquisitiveness of so-called “Wazungu weusi,” or “black Europeans,” precisely because they could not remedy the subalternity inherent in their blackness by simply taking their masters’ tools for their own. Kitaru – whose father has prospered under the new regime to the extent that he is able to purchase a Benz,\textsuperscript{54} and who enters for the first time singing, in English, “Papa pa pa pa pa / I like some money. / Papa pa pa pa pa / I like some honey / Papa pa pa pa pa / [...] / A very good life\textsuperscript{55} – is immersed in the political field of blackness. Juma, however, is not. Before Abedi Karume and the other Zanzibari revolutionaries nationalized his family’s estate, he belonged to the landed aristocracy and had little occasion to experience his “being for others.” He is, consequently, a member of that “leisured class of landowners” that Nyerere believed that “Africa could not produce,”\textsuperscript{56} and which he therefore put “in the same class as...loiterers...: the class of parasites.”\textsuperscript{57} By this logic, Juma is a parasite, an animal, insofar as his former location within Zanzibari feudalism mark him out as un-African and non-black. “The Devil and the Man,” the play-within-a-play that Juma and Kitaru stage, is as much about the difficulty of integrating “parasites” – which is to say non-blackness, non-humanity – into black revolutionary nationalism as it is about securing a final victory over colonial power.

This is an extraordinary reversal of the politics of subalternity that prevail in the works of Ngũgĩ and other East African writers. With the black bourgeoisie ascendant, the Arab or Arab-identified aristocracy expelled from revolutionary Zanzibar takes on a new role: that of the parasite, or more broadly the animal subaltern. It is Juma who originates the role of the Devil, a shapeshifting spirit of malevolence who frequently appears in animal guise:

\begin{quote}
DEVIL: Behold this wonder.
\end{quote}

\textit{He transforms himself.}

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., 132.
\textsuperscript{53} Fanon, \textit{Black Skin, White Masks}, 89.
\textsuperscript{54} Hussein, \textit{Mashetani}, 22.
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., 21–22.
\textsuperscript{56} Nyerere, “Ujamaa—The Basis of African Socialism,” 2.
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., 7.
DEVIL: Now who am I?

MAN: Like a bird...like...like a bird.

DEVIL: Alright. I have changed myself into a bird. Just like that, I can be wind, and be everywhere. I can be spirit and enter into your soul and your companions’ souls.  

Philipson notes that “The shetani can appear in any form and it can enter any person. This Protean power puts much of the play’s imagery into a twilight zone between literal reality and metaphor – where the shetani himself resides. The shetani doesn’t act like a bird, he becomes a bird.” Most critics, including Philipson, tend to link this “Protean power” of the Devil back into the prevailing allegorical reading: since the Devil of colonialism can take any shape, one can never quite tell who might turn out to be a neocolonial reactionary. It is certainly true that by the end of the play, after Kitaru suffers a nervous breakdown and begins to see devils everywhere, the monstrosity of the shetani – or, crucially, the many mashetani – has become plural and pervasive. But this obsessive, polysemic re-inscription of the figure of the Devil is, to my mind, more immediately tied to the tropes of Swahili myth-making that continue to circulate as spectral remainders in the new present of Nyerere’s Tanzania. To put it differently: Philipson is right to intuit that Mashetani is a play about “residual” traces that have “not been effectively dissolved by...hegemony,” but the hegemony he has in mind is exclusively Western. I want to suggest that the “residual” modes of being with which Hussein is most concerned are not only non-Western but also non-black.

These “residual” forms flow through Juma and – even more importantly – his grandmother, who is especially loath to disavow her aristocratic roots in Zanzibar. In Kitaru’s mind, mashetani arise out of her stories, more often than not appearing in monstrous animal guise:

KITARU: I was thinking about a story.

MAMA KITARU: A story!

KITARU: A story. Juma’s grandmother told us a story the other day – I just remembered it.

MAMA KITARU: A story! What story?

KITARU: The story of the fish. Far, far away – if you cross the seven seas – there’s a big fish. If this fish takes a breath, all the water’s gone – all the water goes in his mouth. From where he is, he can suck in any boat he wants and swallow it. The boat will just be pulled along by the current of the water – if it wants to or if it doesn’t. And this fish isn’t a fish but a Devil.

58 My translation. Hussein, Mashetani, 2.
60 Ibid.
61 Ibid., 143. Interestingly, Kiango and Sengo are also interested in what they call “mabaki ya mkoloni,” “the remains” – or literally, “that which remains” – “of the colonialist.” Kiango and Sengo, “Mashetani,” 9. See also Philipson, 139.
Mama Kitaru looks at her son. She is filled up with fear.

MAMA KITARU: A very good story, very good. Who told it to you?

Kitaru sees that his Mother’s face has changed.

MAMA KITARU: Juma’s grandmother. I forgot. Juma’s grandmother knows very good stories. Even I love them. But, baba, what’s the point of remembering these old stories? It’s not that I want to keep you from them, but...no one believes in them anymore.

[...]

KITARU: No one believes in them anymore?

MAMA KITARU: (shaking her head) That’s just the old ignorance. Primitive. An educated person shouldn’t believe.

KITARU: A devil can change himself in whatever way he wants. He can come under different guises.62

Philipson links this moment back to an earlier scene in which Kitaru puts forward his own version of the “ship of state” speech in Antigone, wondering aloud what would happen “if the current is pulling to one side, and the captain wants the boat to go in another direction.” Juma ventures that the current against which the captain is struggling issues from “the mouth of the Devil.” This train of thought carries Kitaru forward to his dialogue with his mother, in which he recalls Juma’s grandmother’s “story of the fish” – a monstrous fish that is now revealed in its capacity to menace the functioning of the state itself: “From where he is, he can suck in any boat he wants and swallow it. The boat will just be pulled along by the current of the water – if it wants to or if it doesn’t.” Kitaru’s mother considers this one of “these old stories” that “no one believes in...anymore,” part and parcel of “the old ignorance. Primitive.” Her critique is quite explicit in its evocation of the racial and class distinctions that separate her family from Juma’s; their former wealth and prestige notwithstanding, the traditions Juma’s grandmother and others like her hold dear are “ignorant” and “[p]rimitive.” More importantly, however, Kitaru’s mother is adamant that these stories are “old,” or more literally “of the past” – “a zamani” – and suggests that “[a]n educated person” should leave them behind for the sake of progress and enlightenment. Juma himself, as he says goodbye to Kitaru at the end of the play, admits that his way of being in the world belongs to a rapidly receding past and that that is part of the reason they can longer understand one another:

JUMA: You live today. I live yesterday. How can we be friends? Each of your todays is a step up towards your tomorrow. Me – each of my todays is a step down from all my yesterdays. And whenever I go there, when I come back I come back with stories...devilish stories.65

65 My translation. Ibid., 56.
Ricard is right to call this “a...parable of class conflicts;”\textsuperscript{66} Juma is all too well aware that his social standing is in decline while Kitaru’s has nowhere to go but up. At the same time, however, Hussein is dramatizing the degree to which the animal monstrosities of Tanzania’s “yesterdays” – the atavistic remainders of those lives lived outside of blackness that have suddenly become subaltern – continue to haunt its present. Juma and Kitaru will continue to “go there” and “come back with stories...devilish stories.”

Nyerere’s efforts to steer the Tanzanian ship of state clear of devilish currents were guided by his faith in the power of economic rationalization to return African economies to their precolonial traditions of communalism. Hussein, for his part, insists that any attempts at economic and political rationalization will never fully exorcise the ghost of other socialities – represented here by a “fish [that] isn’t a fish but a devil.” That devil-fish may be “[f]ar, far away,” but its spectral presence is felt close to home, in myriad entanglements with other mashetani. Antonio Gramsci argued that economic rationalization – or, in the context of his work on Fordist modes of production, “industrialism” – inevitably entails a continuing struggle...against the element of “animality” in man. It has been an uninterrupted, often painful and bloody process of subjugating natural (i.e. animal and primitive) instincts to new, more complex and rigid norms and habits of order, exactitude and precision which can make possible the increasingly complex forms of collective life which are the necessary consequence of industrial development. This struggle is imposed from outside, and the results to date, though they have great immediate practical value, are to a large extent purely mechanical: the new habits have not yet become “second nature.” But has not every new way of life, in the period in which it was forced to struggle against the old, always been for a certain time a result of mechanical repression?\textsuperscript{67}

Hussein’s darkly poetic vision immerses his readers – and the audiences of his plays – in one such moment of “struggle against the old,” in which “the new habits have not yet become ‘second nature.’” It is obviously not appropriate to impute to Gramsci the radically revalued idea of animality as a valued category of being that has gained currency in critical-theoretical circles in the twenty-odd years since the beginning of the animal turn; he certainly believed that the suppression of “natural (i.e. animal and primitive) instincts” to make way for “increasingly complex forms of collective life” was inevitable, a “necessary” – even if “painful and bloody” – part of the development of the means of production over time. Nevertheless, his analysis holds open the possibility that vestigial forms of animality might persist in the interstices of new, and newly human, hegemonies. In Mashetani, Hussein explores the spectral remainder of Zanzibari feudalism as it takes monstrous animal form in the imaginary of the new Tanzania. Far from being an un-African form of what Mama Kitaru might call “[p]rimitive” superstition, belief in mashetani is an essential form of political knowing in the postcolony. In this context, seeing devils everywhere does not mean one is hallucinating; it means that one has finally become aware of the fault lines that run beneath the project of national (re)invention, the deep veins of irrationality that no amount of rational economic and political planning can cover over completely.

\textsuperscript{66} Ricard, Ebrahim Hussein, 58.
Kitaru, who begins the play as Nyerere’s “Man,” is the one character who most fully experiences this awakening to the ghostly presence of animal monstrosity in his world. While he remains “faithful,” as Philipson puts it, “to his ideology of optimism and the beneficial effects of change,”68 he is deeply shaken by his encounter with devilry. At one point near the end of the play, he has an extraordinary fever dream, which he recounts to Juma upon waking:

KITARU: I don’t know what time I fell asleep. But all of a sudden I saw that I had feathers. I’d sprouted feathers, my old man’d sprouted feathers, everybody and everything had sprouted feathers. Lots of feathers – lots. And all of a sudden the feathers became wings. We were all thrown up into the sky. In the beginning it was fun – just pure fun. But then all of a sudden we started to feel scared. We can’t do anything. Our wings fly us where they want to go. Things are flying into the sky – houses, cars, us – carrying us along. Me – I remembered – I started to feel scared. I started to pull out my feathers. But every time I pulled a feather out, others sprouted. They suffocated me. Others sprouted – bigger and stronger than the old ones. I started to get worried – really worried: was I a person or a bird? There I was, asking myself – thinking, thinking. My parents called the doctor. And the doctor has feathers like us – even more than we do. He told me I’m spoiling my brain, overindulging, letting it run wild. And if I go on obsessing I’ll give myself apoplexy. Well, that word – “apoplexy” – sapped all my strength. I saw that I was falling – falling out of the sky. I’m falling, but I can’t stop myself. My hands aren’t working. Just my mind. And then I made a resolution – I had to stop having all this doubt and anxiety. I mean – right then the doubt that filled me up was hurting me more than the feathers, more than everything. I closed myself off. I told myself I had to find my way out of this sickness. So I got out of bed and came out of my room, and right away I saw you and my mother. The first thought that came to me was “My God! The dream’s started again. I’m starting again from the beginning.” It took a long time for me to realize that what I was seeing wasn’t a dream or an evil thought, but just ordinary reality – truth.69

As fantastical as they seem, Hussein’s plays are not invested in the alibi of unreality. Kitaru dreams that he undergoes an exhilarating but also terrifying animal metamorphosis, that he – and “everybody and everything” – had started to “sprout feathers,” had taken to the sky, had become monstrous half-birds. Like so many of the other figures with which this dissertation is concerned, Kitaru is unable to know to his satisfaction whether or not he is fully human: “I started to get worried – really worried: was I a person or a bird?” He has become the shetani of his play-within-a-play, except that he is not in control of his own becoming and his feathers suffocate. If this were merely a dream, it would be one thing. But Hussein takes the scene further. Kitaru decides to make a “resolution” – not unlike Nyerere’s “Declaration” – to “stop having all this doubt and anxiety.” He forces himself out of bed, sees Juma and his mother, and thinks “[t]he dream has started again,” but soon realizes that in fact what he is seeing isn’t “a dream or an evil thought, but just ordinary reality – truth.” This is the essence of Hussein’s poetics and his iconoclastic vision of the alterity at the heart of social life. The animal – which in Mashetani indexes the persistence of forms of socioeconomic stratification that are racialized as non-black and politicized as non-socialist – retains its purchase on “ordinary reality.” Kitaru is in a very real sense the quintessential subject of Nyerere’s socialist humanism on the eve of the Arusha Declaration: university-educated, politically-minded, significantly less acquisitive than his

69 Hussein, Mashetani, 48–49.
parents, open to dialogue even with lapsed aristocrats from Zanzibar. But even he knows the “truth.” There is a coat of feathers just beneath his skin and his arms are wings.

Colonialism’s Monstrous Remainder
After Mashetani, the world of Hussein’s plays continued to darken and grow more obscure. The pair of poem-plays, Ngao ya Jadi and Jogoo Kijijini, that he published in 1976 were dismissed by many critics as hopelessly opaque; as Ricard notes, “Hussein was criticised by Kiango for the complexity of Mashetani and he is reprimanded by Mutegi for the complexity of Arusi; the silence which greeted Jogoo Kijijini and Ngao Ya Jadi and Kwenye Ukingo wa Thim is the worst criticism.”70 I continue to believe that the difficulty of his later plays is part and parcel of his anti-political refusal to toe the nationalist line. Ricard argues that both Njao ya Jadi and Jogoo Kijjini take the form of a kitendawili, a genre of East African orature that is best understood as a “riddle which lends itself to unfolding as a tale,” in which “[t]he author himself invites us to decipher the enigma he proposes.”71 For it to be a satisfying kitendawili, this “enigma” must be difficult to unravel; fortunately, Hussein is well-versed in the poetics of fumbo, a figurative principle of Swahili prosody that emphasizes playful incoherence.72 In both plays, Hussein ties the difficulty of the text to the difficulty of the political circumstances and the persistence of those spectral presences that make unencumbered progress a utopian dream. Notably, in Ngao ya Jadi, he does this within the narrative frame of an extended animal parable, a parable that returns readers to the figure of the snake that haunted the deathly terrain of Kinjeketile.

Hussein wrote Ngao ya Jadi for a Storyteller and Chorus – and played the Storyteller himself at the only performance of the play scholars know to have taken place, at the University of Dar es Salaam in 1975.73 The story the Storyteller tells is freely adapted from a Baganda myth,74 and this folkloric element has led Fiebach to link it to “the overall search for the resumption, continuation and renewal of an authentic African performance culture that had been going on in East Africa, particularly Tanzania, since the late 1960s.”75 The play concerns a young man, a chief, who volunteers to fight against a monstrous, hydra-headed snake named Sesota who has been terrorizing his village. He succeeds in cutting off one of Sesota’s heads, but is spiritually contaminated in the process. Sesota returns in a new guise, and the young man is unable – or unwilling – to fight him again. The “ngao ya jadi” or ‘shield of tradition,’ which the people of the village gave the young hero to defend himself against Sesota, is irreparably broken.

Unlike Mashetani, this is almost certainly an allegory of anticolonial resistance. Philipson, working from within a Marxist idiom, argues that “Sesota is colonialism, which is killed by the ‘peasant fighter’ but which reappears in the guise of a neo-colonial elite.”76 Ricard points to the fact that the published version of Ngao ya Jadi and Jogoo Kijijini is dedicated to the

70 Ricard, Ebrahim Hussein, 68.
71 Ibid., 97.
73 Ricard, Ebrahim Hussein, 63.
“Wanakijiji wa Mbambara,”77 “the villagers of Mbambara” – which was “one of the first, and one of the most widely studied model villages of Tanzanian socialism;”78 the implication is that the “‘peasant fighter’” stands in for Nyerere and that Sesota represents colonialism and neocolonialism at once. The “‘peasant fighter’s’” inability to defeat the revitalized neo-Sesota indexes Hussein’s disillusionment with the ineffectual economic and social reforms, including the villagization campaigns carried out in places like Mbambara, enacted under Ujamaa. The “shield of tradition” no longer avails Nyerere – and by extension Tanzania in general – in the post-independence period because defeating colonialism left him exhausted and marked by grief:

STORYTELLER: ...into the midst of all this
Grief would soon creep
Traitorous grief
Came into the chest of the Chief

Sooner than soon
Time no longer time
He recognized
Again he recognized
The poison of the snake
What a shock! It remained there in the village
In his own body
A dirty smell, a contamination remained!

He understood, suddenly
He understood
The hard law
Even in his heart, there it was
Free

That
That every dealer in degradation
Visits degradation on himself79

On a surface level, characterizing the independence struggle embodied by the young Chief as “contaminated” seems strange, given that what condemns him to “[t]raitorous grief” is the fact that he was willing to “enter into violence.”80 Nyerere, of course, though not committed to pacifism as a general principle, famously waged the Tanganyikan independence struggle on a nonviolent basis. On a deeper level, however, this assessment of the post-independence period and the “dirty smell...[that] remained” indexes the degree to which Nyerere’s faith in “tradition,” and in particular in the precolonial spirit of communalism that he believed would be restored under Ujamaa, failed to inspire. The “degradation” of colonialism – and the capitalist infrastructure it brought with it – remained, and was in fact always bound to return. The Chief had only defeated the first of Sesota’s heads. The second was sure to make an appearance before long, and there were sixty-eight more after that.

78 Ricard, Ebrahim Hussein, 63.
80 “...vita hivyo ataviingia.” My translation. Ibid., 38.
Sesota, in other words, is of a piece with the devilry of *Mashtani*: a monstrous animal embodiment of those atavistic tendencies towards rent- and power-seeking that even the principled rationality enshrined in Nyerere’s vision of postcolonial socialism could not totally dislodge. As the Storyteller puts it, “the friends of the Chief / Since they were economic experts / Put young girls under arrest.”

*(Neo)colonial governmentality, in all its various guises, has here assumed what Derrida calls the “formless form of animal monstrosity…[the] artificial monstrosity of the animal.”* The economic experts who have betrayed the political philosophy of their friend the Chief are unavoidably of Sesota; they have dressed themselves in his skin. Notably, Hussein does not exclude postcolonial artists and intellectuals from the ranks of those who continue to speak for the “animal monstrosity” of colonialism and its remains. After the Chief fights the first of Sesota’s heads and the monster vanishes, a who’s-who of the East African literary set arrives on the scene to celebrate:

**STORYTELLER:** Shaaban Robert  
Stood tall in the field  
Mathias Mnyampala  
Was called there by his friends  
Kezilahabi, Muyaka  
Both heeded the call  
People were intoxicated with poetry  

Also Penina Muhando  
Especially Ngugi wa Thiong’o  
Abdilatif isn’t stiff  
They entertained people with songs for the dancing  

And in the midst of the hubbub  
Were those Husseins, common men  
And with them came devils  
They waved with relief and were allowed in  

[...]

Years went by  
Years went by  
People were married  
Babies were born  
And the wealth of the village  
Grew and grew  

[...]

And we, so much like Pambo,  
Came to fabricate issues  
We made beauty  
The snake scales we dressed ourselves in.*

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81 Ibid., 47.  
Robert, Mnayampala, Kezilahabi, Muyaka, Muhando and Abdilatif are all important Swahili writers; Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o needs no introduction and neither do “those Husseins,” who of course bring their “devils” with them. Each of these writers has her or his own decolonial credentials – and yet, as the “[y]ears...[go] by” and “the wealth of the village / [grows],” they begin to lose touch, to “fabricate,” to equate “beauty” with the “snake scales” that they wear.\(^84\) No one is spared Hussein’s critique here, least of all himself. He recognizes the degree to which even decolonial aesthetics have been infiltrated by the monstrosity of the colonial. Once again, in a curious inversion of the epidermal politics of animality I explored in my analysis of the Coryndon Memorial Museum in colonial Nairobi in Chapter 2, the black subject has been reduced to its signifying surface – except in this case that surface has been fashioned out of colonial remains, a white skin with which to cover a black one.\(^85\) As Hussein recognizes, and as Fanon would of course agree, this act of appropriation should not be taken as proof of the triumph of the subaltern, but rather its continued haunting by that which it can never fully kill.

**No Man’s Land**

Is any remedy possible? Is there any escape from the spectral forces that bind the present to the past and cloud all visions of the future? Interestingly, it is Hussein’s last – and perhaps most atypical – published play, *Kwenye Ukingo wa Thim* (1988), that offers some hope. *Kwenye Ukingo wa Thim* – unlike all of Hussein’s other plays, which are either explicitly set in Tanzania, usually Dar es Salaam, as *Mashetani* is, or take place in a mythologized space with deep thematic linkages to Tanzanian history, as *Ngao ya Jadi* does – is set in contemporary Kenya and fictionalizes the 1987 S.M. Otieno case, in which the family of a deceased Luo man successfully sued his Agikũũyũ widow to force her to allow them to bury him according to Luo custom.\(^86\) Although in some ways *Kwenye Ukingo wa Thim* marks Hussein’s ambivalent return to the conventions of naturalistic drawing-room theatre that he seemed to abandon after *Wakati Ukuta* and *Alikiona*, it nevertheless, in characteristic Hussein style, takes the conflict at the heart of the Otieno case and turns it into a dark and bloody existential crisis.

In the second scene of the play, however, after the Otieno-figure Herbert has died, there is a lyrical moment of rest and release in which a ghost speaks to Herbert’s brother George:

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GHOST: *(Speaking to George who is asleep)*
You see.
An umbrella tree.
Another one,
and another,
and another one again.
Do you see?
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\(^84\) Even here, the web of allusions is dense: *Gamba la Nyoka*, or *The Scales of the Snake* is a volume of poetry by Euphrase Kezilahabi.

\(^85\) This, of course, is a phenomenon with which Fanon provides an enormously powerful analytical vocabulary. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*.

How the shadows
are linked ...

[...]

The deer can see you.
And you too can see the deer.
It is time to bid each other farewell.

Your brother was a good man
with a clean heart.
He will run with the deer
and sheep will follow him.

The porcupine that will see him
will go into a hole,
and in the hole he will confess.

Yesterday the frogs said
The rain that is coming
Is rain of blessing

Their souls will be happy
When the souls meet
When they see each other
At the edge of Thim.87

Kimani Njogu, who prepared this English translation, chose not to translate the word “Thim,” which Hussein is very careful to gloss in his introduction to the Swahili version of the play: “Thim ni neno la Kijaluo. Maana yaka ni mwitu.... It is no man’s land”88 – “Thim is a Dholuo word. It means ‘the bush....’ It is no man’s land.” In Njogu’s translation, the last line of this speech – “At the edge of Thim” – which of course is also the title of the play, may not come across as forcefully to non-Dholuo speakers as it otherwise would. “At the edge of no man’s land,” or “[a]t the edge of the bush” might make it clearer to Anglophone readers that what is at issue here is the liminal space between life and death, society and the wilderness – a liminal space that has defined the conceptual terrain of this dissertation from the outset. Notably, this deathly space is full of a living profusion that extends from “linked” “shadows” of “umbrella tree[s]” to the deer and sheep and porcupine and frogs that bear witness to Herbert’s passing shade. The idea that, in this in-between “at the edge of no man’s land,” “The deer can see you. / And you too can see the deer,” is especially significant, as it strips the anxiety and the weight of power away from looking at, and being looked at by, the animal.89 There is a kind of communion here in seeing and being seen – “Their souls will be happy / When the souls meet / When they see each other” – that cuts across species lines. Here, finally, the remainder – Herbert’s “soul” –

attains to a kind of grace, relieved from the ontological pressure of having to haunt the political scene.

This is a fascinating choice for Hussein to make, particularly given the play’s engagement with questions of ethnicity and tribalism. Tribalism, in particular, was a favorite target of black humanists in Kenya; in fact, the very existence of tribalism was often imagined as a bestial remainder of a less enlightened time:

![Image of an election poster for the centrist political party KADU in Kenya (c. 1965). Photograph courtesy of the Kenyan National Archives.](image)

**Fig. 9.** An election poster for the centrist political party KADU in Kenya (c. 1965). Photograph courtesy of the Kenyan National Archives.

In this election poster, the Kenya African Democratic Union, or KADU – chief rivals to Jomo Kenyatta’s Kenya African National Union, or KANU, party in the early years of Kenya’s
independence – warns of the dangers of tribalism with recourse to an animal figure freighted with racial connotations: the rampaging ape. The implication, it is clear, is that any voter who chose KANU on the basis of its ethnic power base amongst the Agikũũyũ and the Kalenjin is little better than the mindless apes colonialism took black Africans to be. Even Ngũũi, in early plays like The Black Hermit, worked, as he put it at the time, “to expose and root out the cantankerous effects of tribalism, racialism and religious factions.” And yet Hussein, in the midst of a bloody tragedy based on one of the most famous incidents of tribalist antagonism in postcolonial Kenyan history, offers up a moment of peace and calm, in which a Luo man’s soul enters into irreducible proximity with the land and the animals who live on it, the rain that falls on it, the universe itself, which here is figured as the bush, as “no man’s land,” as Thim. This is Hussein, iconoclast to the end, at his most utopian. The monstrous ghosts of the past and of forbidden regions of the present may continue to haunt political idealism in all its forms, opening up rifts and fractures where humanist nation-making seeks to tamp down the earth, but in death – even as one’s family haggles over one’s corpse – perhaps there is a little space, a no man’s land, in which blackness can be at peace with its animal others, in which the souls of a black man like George and the souls of porcupine and deer and sheep “meet” and “see each other” and are blessed.

In 1982, the Kenyan factory worker Michael Werikhe walked alone and unaided from Mombasa to Nairobi – a distance of approximately 300 miles. In 1985, he walked from Nairobi to Kampala, then from Kampala to Dar es Salaam, and then from Dar es Salaam to Mombasa – a distance of approximately 1,300 miles. In 1988, he walked from Assisi to London, traversing parts of Switzerland, West Germany and the Netherlands on the way – a distance of approximately 1,800 miles. In 1991, he walked through much of North America on a discontinuous route from Florida to California – a distance of approximately 2,000 miles, at least by one early estimate. These treks – totaling considerably more than 5,000 miles of walking in less than ten years – had a singular purpose. Michael Werikhe walked in aid of black rhinoceros. His remarkable long-distance treks were intended to raise awareness and funds for the rehabilitation and conservation of this highly endangered population, reduced by some estimates to fewer than 500 individuals in Kenya in the late 1980s. By the time his first international journey, in 1985, began to make headlines, Werikhe had come to be known by the posthuman nom de guerre Rhino Man; by the time of his untimely death in 1999, the Rhino Man was one of the most well-known environmentalists in Africa.

Michael Werikhe, born in 1956, was a generation removed from the anticolonial struggles of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o and Ebrahim Hussein. While Ngũgĩ came of artistic and political age during the Mau Mau struggle, Werikhe was a child of Independence and its transformative energies. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that his politics differ markedly from his predecessors’. In the first two chapters of this dissertation, I showed how the epistemic regime of colonial natural history and public culture inaugurated the animal subaltern as object and as other. I went on to demonstrate how the anticolonial poetics exemplified by Ngũgĩ refused the political entailments of that othering by mobilizing a radical black humanism to contest the animalizing inscription of the black subject as subaltern. Werikhe’s embodied enlivening of the slippage between beast and human being that the term “Rhino Man” suggests marked out a third – and uniquely post-colonial – moment in the history of animal subalternity in East Africa. This was not necessarily the case for other black environmentalists of Werikhe’s generation; Wangari

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1 This epigraph is frequently attributed to Roosevelt but I have not been able to ascertain its source. Notably, the fact that it may be apocryphal does not keep anyone from quoting it; organizations as ideologically disparate as the Sierra Club and the Boone and Crockett Club have featured it in their press and social media materials. This speaks to the enduring appeal of speaking for the animal, no matter what one wants to say.

2 “Rhino Man Coming to America,” Around The Horn: The Rhino Conservation Newsletter 1, no. 3 (Autumn 1990): 5.
Maathai and Ken Saro-Wiwa, amongst many others, certainly continued to confront the neocolonial political establishment in Kenya, Nigeria and elsewhere with a range of interventions that very clearly recalled and continued the work of anticolonial humanists like Ngũgĩ. But Werikhe chose another path, one that – while certainly less confrontational than Maathai’s or Saro-Wiwa’s – may even have been more radical in its disposition towards the animalization of black bodies. Indeed, as he became more and more famously the Rhino Man, Werikhe seemed to grow more determined to live within the potent contradictions of animal subalternity, cultivating what Monique Allewaert might call a “parahuman” personhood in pursuit of his political ends.³

My use of the term “personhood” here returns me to Thomas Hobbes’ Leviathan and the ways in which it grounds a theory of performance as a kind of (self)fashioning before a public:

The word Person is latine...Persona in latine signifies the disguise, or outward appearance of a man, counterfeited on the Stage; and sometimes more particularly that part of it, which disguiseth the face, as a Mask or Vizard: And from the Stage, hath been translated to any Representer of speech and action, as well in Tribunalls, as Theaters. So that a Person, is the same than Actor is, both on the Stage and in Common conversation; and to Personate is to Act, or Represent himselfe, or an other.⁴

What is remarkable about Hobbes’ formulation here is that legal personhood – the capacity to appear before “‘Tribunalls” and “Represent...[oneself] or an other” – is premised on the “counterfeit” of the theatre, on the dissimulation of the “outward appearance” through “disguise,” “mask or vizard.” Becoming a person, in other words, is a matter of acting the part convincingly. It follows that whether or not one is accounted a person is an aesthetic judgment. How deeply or thoroughly one resembles a human being in the eyes of one’s public is the sole determinant of whether or not one is granted human status. This disorienting introduction of the simulacral into the very heart of Western theories of the self and the subject is of signal importance to this dissertation as a whole; my broader conception of performance as a fraught and inconclusive mediation between life and death, human and less-than-human is deeply informed by the politicization of mimesis as the terrain of social and juridical determination that Hobbes’ theory of the person necessarily entails. Performance is the engine that drives the production of the epistemic and ontological taxonomies that sustain the animal subaltern and the means by which members of that subaltern sought to revise or undo those taxonomies.

In Michael Werikhe’s specific case, what is of note is the difficulty that his location within the animal subaltern posed for his efforts to “represent...an other” – in this case, the black rhinoceros for whom he staged his walks. Unlike his white counterparts in metropolitan activist circles, from eighteenth- and nineteenth-century animal welfare pioneers in Europe to Teddy Roosevelt and the golden age of American conservationism to Steven M. Wise and the Nonhuman Rights Project today,⁵ Werikhe could not be confident in his own legibility as a

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⁵ For a history of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century animal welfare campaigns and their attendant claims on the “creaturely voice,” see Tobias Menely, The Animal Claim: Sensibility and the Creaturely Voice (Chicago:
person before the public. Consequently, his efforts to speak for rhinoceros – to serve, in Hobbes’ terminology, as an “Artificiall person” on their behalf, to “personate” them⁶ – were marked from the beginning by uncertainty and ambivalence. Could a black man speak for another member of the animal subaltern? Werikhe’s “way out”⁷ of this quandary was to speak very little, if at all: “He said he chose walking as a means of publicizing the rhino’s plight because, ‘being a poor man, it was a way to get the message across to people.’”⁸

When Werikhe died in 1999 – of injuries sustained during an assault that seems not to have been connected to his activism – he left very little behind. Because he chose, with few exceptions, to walk rather than talk, very little survived him in his own words. My work on his life and activism is consequently based in large part on others’ accounts. Fleur Ng’weno, a writer and conservationist who befriended Werikhe in the early days of his activist practice, has maintained a small private archive of newspaper clippings, press releases, photographs and other ephemera related to the Rhino Man walks; this material, to which Ng’weno very graciously gave me access, has proved indispensable to me in the writing of this dissertation. The nature of this archive, however, is such that I must draw my conclusions about Werikhe at second-hand. I have tried to give special weight to the statements that he himself made to reporters and other interested interlocutors, but since these statements were relatively rare, I have had to focus more than I would like on Werikhe’s reception in the various places that he traveled and the meanings that observers of his work attached to it and him. My work on the Rhino Man threatens to add to this cloud of interpretation that surrounds the walks themselves, with the added danger that my reliance on a set of conceptual and theoretical tools with which Werikhe might not have identified will only further obscure his activism and its intent. There is, in other words, a significant danger that my analysis will lapse into a kind of interpretive coloniality. While I do not seek to obviate or in any way minimize that risk, I do believe that my efforts to link what I know of Werikhe’s outlook to larger scholarly conversations about personhood, black endurance and the animal subaltern are germane to the walks themselves. I have tried my best, in short, to see the Rhino Man walks as a theoretical corpus in and of themselves, rather than a set of illustrative objects from which theory can be extracted.

In this chapter, I read Michael Werikhe’s activist practice as a theatrical deterritorialization of the category of the person and as a disidentifactory embrace of the dehumanizations latent in the category of the animal subaltern itself⁹. Choosing to walk – rather than to speak – for the rhinoceros he (im)personated allowed Werikhe to dodge the perennial question of whether or not the subaltern can speak and put forward in its place an eminently


⁷ My invocation of the term “a way out” is inspired by the ape Red Peter’s ambivalent enactments of refusal in Franz Kafka, “A Report to an Academy,” in Collected Stories, ed. Gabriel Josipovici, trans. Willa Muir and Edwin Muir (New York: Everyman’s Library, 1971), 195–204. This concept is crucial to Deleuze and Guattari’s further development of their theories of a minor literature, lines of flight and deterritorialization.


⁹ The term “deterritorialization” is derived, at least for my purposes here, from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature, trans. Dana Polan, Theory and History of Literature 30 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986); the term “disidentification” is taken from José Esteban Muñoz, Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics, Cultural Studies of the Americas 2 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).
legible repertoire of black/beastly bodily endurance. “Being a poor man” – and, what is more, a poor, black, African man in an epistemic and political field still keyed, in the 1980s and early 1990s, to the rhetorical power of white conservationists’ voices – Werikhe chose to embrace the elision of his subjectivity with the rhino’s and the atomization of his body into its performative parts:

Fig. 10. A fundraising ad, sponsored by Caltex Oil, for Werikhe’s North American walk (1991). Photograph courtesy of Fleur Ng’weno.

10 Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?”
More than simply a synecdoche for his person, which of course is always radically in doubt, Werikhe’s battered sneakers are his walk. His walk, in turn, is his politics. His sneakers, then, divorced of his feet, to say nothing of the rest of his body, are his political being. The corporeal is made material is made semiotic. This steadily intensifying process of disembodiment is reminiscent in many ways of Allewaert’s theory of the “parahuman” — a being who, by virtue of the deprivations of the plantation form in the American tropics, is “broken in parts” and exists “as an interstitial form of life that could be exploited for labor power in the way animals were and that also protected Anglo-Europeans from recognizing their own animality.”

This is another way of saying that the plantation slave in the Americas, like the East African (post)colonial subject, is always already part of the animal subaltern — which exists, in Allewaert’s analysis, in “analogical relation...to the human beings to which it is proximate.”

This metonymic logic of proximity, analogy and contiguity is undoubtedly brutal and brutalizing, but at the same time it does open up the ambivalent possibility of subjectification outside the realm of humanity as such:

In taking up the term parahuman, I aim to challenge the hierarchical organization of life-forms that was common to colonial anthropologies and natural histories: I put animals, parahumans, and humans in horizontal relation (that is to say, para or beside each other) without conflating them. In addition to describing a relation whereby one category is beside another, presumably prior category, the prefix para- can describe a perversion of that prior category (paranormal, paranoia).

Taking up this double signification of the prefix para, I propose that tracing the figure of the parahuman...reveals a perversion of the category of the human that was effected by diasporic Africans’ performance of their parahumanity.

Like Allewaert’s parahuman, Michael Werikhe is what Donna Haraway calls an “odd boundary creature,” positioned on the contested border that keeps the animal subaltern apart from human life, that liminal zone where the beast comes all too close to being indistinguishable from “Man.” This means that he is higher up on the scale of the “hierarchical organization of life forms” than the rhinoceros, but his humanity is still only partially assured.

I argue that Werikhe actually capitalized on this biopolitical disposition by actively drawing the beastly into his performance of (im)personation and in so doing staging “a perversion of the category of the human” itself. In this chapter, I draw on the traces of Werikhe’s walks that remain in the archive in order to better understand the dramaturgy of his political performances. I am particularly interested in the extraordinary salience of endurance — 300 miles, 1,300 miles, 1,800 miles, 2,000 miles — as a bodily practice for Werikhe within the larger field of postcolonial animal subalternity on an increasingly global scale. I end on a more speculative note with a provisional reading of contemporary performances of animality, capital and development in the wake of Rhino Man.

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12 Ibid., 85.
13 Ibid., 86. Italics original.
15 See also Mel Chen’s work on animacy hierarchies in Chen, Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect.
Becoming Rhino Man

By any standard, Michael Werikhe’s long-distance walks were spectacular solo performances. The dramaturgy surrounding these performances, the interplay between performer and spectator, is immediately legible. Consider Fleur Ng’weno’s description of the Rhino Man’s audiences in Italy:

...the stocky hiker – a rucksack on his back and worn shoes on his feet – seems an unlikely figure for adulation. Yet as he strides towards the town hall of Bologna, Italy, on May 14, 1988, he is met by a throng calling “Michael! Michael!” and “Rhino Man!” They swarm around him, seeking autographs.

Later, when this modern Pied Piper leaves the town of Como to the north, the youngsters release a cloud of balloons.16

The Rhino Man’s departures and arrivals – and the walking in between – follow an established and repeatable format, a minimally improvisatory script. My goal here is not to aestheticize Werikhe’s walks for the sake of aestheticizing them, although it is worth noting that his performative praxis has a deep structural similarity with that of walking artists like Richard Long.17 Contemporary accounts of Werikhe’s treks are also quick to emphasize their artistic character. Lois Kampinski, a representative of the American Association of Zoological Parks and Gardens, called Werikhe’s walking “‘a dramatic gesture;’”18 the Sunday Standard heaped somewhat hyperbolic praise on Werikhe for “dramatising the frightening fact that the remaining rhino population can be counted on the fingers and toes of a person.”19 This language of dramatization and gesture is not accidental. Werikhe’s admirers understood that his gift lay in giving – in and through his body – an appreciable form to the problem of rhinoceros survival. As Britain’s Prince Philip put it in a letter he wrote Werikhe upon completing his European walk in London:

“Hearty congratulations on reaching the end of your marathon walk across Europe to draw attention to the plight of the black rhinos. Millions of Europeans are now much more aware of the nature and the seriousness of the threat to the survival of this splendid species.

[...]

It is easy enough to analyse the threats to the future of the black rhino, and it is not very difficult to suggest what needs to be done to prevent it becoming extinct. The real problem is to generate the human will and commitment. Your magnificent walk is just the sort of gesture that provides the spark of inspiration which makes people respond to a crisis.”20

Werikhe’s body, and its “magnificent” “marathon walk,” becomes gestural here – “the sort of gesture that provides the spark of inspiration.” The materiality of his body, reduced piecemeal to its signifying parts – in Fleur Ng’weno’s formulation, the “rucksack on his back” and the “worn

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16 Fleur Ng’weno, “Michael’s March to Save the Rhino,” Reader’s Digest, August 1990, 33-37, 33.
shoes on his feet” – becomes his performance, which is in turn understood to inaugurate a politics of “human will and commitment.” It was this performance, or series of performances, that allowed Michael Werikhe to appear on the global stage – in front of, as one critic put it, “crowds of inquisitive strangers,” “common folk as well as presidents, emperors, princes and kings” as a person empowered to speak and act on behalf of rhinoceros. Prince Philip, for one, would never have acknowledged Werikhe’s existence if he had not become the Rhino Man. In other words, it was in becoming Rhino Man that Michael Werikhe entered into a recognized form of personhood. But what form did this becoming take?

For many commentators, capturing in print how physically demanding Werikhe’s walking performances were and how selfless his political purpose so clearly was, required a very nearly messianic language of exceptionalism. The conservationist and author Kuki Gallmann, an early supporter of Werikhe’s, noted that he had not even seen a live rhinoceros in the flesh when he began his walks; “[o]nly an extraordinary person,” she wrote, “can walk for an animal he had not seen.” The Rhino Man’s efforts were billed as “a lonely crusade,” a “one-man crusade,” and a “pilgrimage.” Through it all, Michael Werikhe’s humility is vouchsafed: “Neither a media celebrity nor an academic, Michael Werikhe (or the Rhino Man, as he has come to be known) is a worker in a Kenyan vehicle assembly plant who has translated his outrage at the slaughter of the dwindling population of rhinos in Africa into fund-raising and educational pilgrimages; Werikhe has in a few years become an international celebrity but remains a humble and unassuming personality, keeping his job as a security officer with the Associated Vehicle Assemblers in Mombasa even as he traverses the globe on his chosen mission.” Here is the Rhino Man as humble pilgrim, a supplicant at the door of powerful friends of wildlife in Europe and America, hat in hand, famous for his political efforts but still an ordinary man and a worker. This is the sort of person that inspires what can only be described as “belief:”

What could he do, what could one man do, to help?

Michael Werikhe thought of a way – to walk, alone, and raise funds for the rhino. He convinced the East African Wild Life Society and the Wildlife Clubs of Kenya to believe in him and support him. He convinced his employers, AVA, to believe in him and give him time off. And as he walked the long hot road from the coast, he convinced the people along the way to believe in him and his message.

Within this framework, it is “believing in the Rhino Man and his message” that is the mechanism by which his performances become felicitous in Austinian terms. For Michael Werikhe, then, becoming a person is a question of becoming believable.

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22 Quoted in P.J.C. Hughes, “Michael Walks and Talks to Save the Rhino” (Nairobi, n.d.), 19.
24 “Rhino Man Coming to America,” 5.
27 “Werikhe’s Million-Shilling Accolade,” 17.
28 “Why Is Michael Werikhe Walking to Save the Rhino?,” n.d.
29 See Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*. 

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To be sure, on at least one occasion Werikhe himself invoked the messianic language of “spread[ing] the gospel of conservation...to villages, schools, town and cities in Africa and Europe” to account for his work and its purpose. But the insistence on Werikhe’s humility and his status as “only one man, a factory worker” that these hagiographic accounts endlessly rehearse is also indicative of the classed and racializing entailments of becoming believable – which is to say, being recognized as a person – on the international stage. Then as now, the major players in the metropolitan power centers of the global conservation movement were keen to recognize “local” activists who had bought into the movement’s core philosophies. Naming Werikhe to the United Nations Environment Programme’s Global 500 in 1989 and awarding him the Goldman Environmental Prize in 1990, for instance, helped the conservation movement’s gatekeepers formalize the Rhino Man’s authorization to speak. This authorization, in turn, depended on Werikhe’s continuing willingness to position himself as an ordinary Kenyan opposed to poaching and the illicit markets that drove it. These markets were extensively Orientalized in the press, in part because the principal demand for poached rhinoceros horn largely originates in the Arabian Peninsula and in East Asia. As Terry Rodgers put it in *San Diego Evening Tribune* on the occasion of the Rhino Man’s visit to California in May 1991, “[r]hino horns – which are growths of keratin, the same substance that makes up fingernails and hair – are highly prized in Asian cultures as an ingredient in folk medicines, especially aphrodisiacs. In North Yemen, dagger handles carved from rhino horns are a symbol of male status.” As an ordinary black man from Kenya – “one man, a factory worker” – Michael Werikhe was uniquely positioned to address this profoundly otherted “taste in exotic animal products” and attendant “fantasies of heightened libidos” and improved social standing. In other words, the Rhino Man’s currency in the global environmentalist discourse inhered in the fact that he was a black man who could help white men save charismatic animals from brown men. He could help – as a sort of brand ambassador – in “[d]evising an overall preservation strategy that’s workable in both Asia and Africa, where rhinos share the land with peoples of predominantly poor Third World countries.”

In order to appear before a global public as a person, Michael Werikhe had to be positioned amongst the “peoples of predominantly poor Third World Countries” and in opposition to those the conservation movement considered “ecological others.” At the same time – and to the extent prescribed by the significant overlap between regimes of racialization and animalization – he had to appear as a beast. As Prince William put it in his letter to Werikhe, the Rhino Man’s task was to generate “the human will and commitment” – capacities that lay outside himself, in his fully human audience. All of this was already implied in his parahuman name and the traffic between human and less-than-human that it called forth, but the discourse

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31 “One Man’s Fight to Save the Rhino,” c 1990.
33 “A Salute to Four Selfless Kenyans.”
34 Rodgers, “A Roundup Here of Rhino Experts.” Werikhe’s own version of this Orientalizing discourse was considerably more complex, though similar in the most important details. For instance, he noted that Yemeni demand for rhino horn was largely a product of the improved economic outlook of the region after the oil boom of the 1970s, but did little to counter the racist implication that Middle Eastern and East Asian consumers of animal products are somehow less enlightened than their Western counterparts. See “Why Is Michael Werikhe Walking to Save the Rhino?”
35 See Ray, *The Ecological Other*. 

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surrounding his performances made it even clearer. Indeed – and here I return to the question of Werikhe’s agency and the philosophy that underlaid his performances – the Rhino Man himself may have enabled this elision between man and beast by choosing to appear on behalf of rhinoceros with his beloved pet snake in his arms.

Fig. 11. Michael Werikhe with a snake in a widely-circulated press photograph (1990). Photography courtesy of Fleur Ng’weno.

As the Sunday Standard put it, “a Mombasa factory worker with a snake round his neck and the initiative and stamina to hoof it through 1,600 kms of countryside has got certain very definite advantages over the professional zoologists, botanists, sociologists and anthropologists. Men of
Werikhe’s background and dedication are as rare and as valuable as...rhinos.” Here the by-now-familiar insistence that Werikhe was an ordinary, uneducated man is joined to a zoomorphizing emphasis on his capacity to “hoof it” through the “countryside.” Because he was somehow closer to animals than the rest of us, Michael Werikhe could serve as their interpreter:

From the beginning, Michael Werikhe loved animals. As a boy growing up in Mombasa, Kenya, he roamed the mangrove forests at the ocean’s edge, and explored the pools between the tides. Along with young Michael’s interest in nature was a desire to share it with others. Soon, if a snake was found in the school grounds, the cry was no longer “Kill it!” but “Get Michael!”

Michael Werikhe had never seen a rhinoceros. He had read about them, and held the horns torn from their flesh in his hands when he worked in the Ivory Room of the Game Department, before hunting was banned in Kenya. A burning ambition grew inside him – to do something to help save the rhino from extinction. He was only one man, a factory worker, but he found a way.

This passage, which is taken from a brochure that Werikhe’s Kenyan supporters prepared in advance of his North American walk in 1991, returns readers to the primal scenes of the Rhino Man’s beastly subjectification: the mangrove forests of his youth, the beleaguered snakes in the schoolyard, the mutilated bodies of elephants and rhinoceros that the Kenyan Wildlife Service encountered in their attempts to stem the tide of illegal poaching. Because the Rhino Man had a deep and unusual affinity with animals and with the natural world more broadly, his immersion in the beastly politics of animal life and death was all but preordained. Within the epistemic and political field of newly postcolonial Kenya, the only personhood that Werikhe could be expected to achieve would be marked by animality.

My contention here is that, far from being somehow duped into taking up this political position, Michael Werikhe actively cultivated his parahuman personhood as a means to an end. Playing to his audience’s expectations allowed the Rhino Man to give an apparently innocuous shape to what might otherwise have been dismissed as a fringe critique of colonialism across species lines:

“Traditionally, Africans lived in harmony with the environment.... We used animal products, but took only what we needed, and supply and demand were roughly in balance. The plundering of Africa’s wildlife began with the age of exploration in the fifteenth century.

At the turn of this century, our wild wealth came under extreme pressure. Uncontrolled hunting safaris and skyrocketing demand for ivory piano keys decimated wildlife over large areas of Africa. In Kenya, for example, a colonial officer was commissioned to shoot several hundred rhinos in an ill-conceived effort to clear an area of Ukambani of tse-tse files for a settlement scheme.

[...]

In spite of the tough measures to curb poaching, elephants and rhinoceroses are still facing heavy pressures.... Ivory is not used here, in Kenya; it is bought and sold

37 “One Man’s Fight to Save the Rhino.”
by people overseas. They view it as a symbol of luxury; they should see it instead as the dead body of an elephant.”

I want to underscore two aspects in particular of the history that Rhino Man puts forward here in one of the few complete statements of his philosophy that I have found in his own words. The first is the degree to which he stresses the economistic regime of “supply and demand” and “wild wealth;” insofar as this is a critique of interspecies colonialism, it is also a critique of capitalism and its rapacious appetite for “[plunder].” The second, related point that Werikhe makes very forcefully here is that colonial and neocolonial capitalism are death-dealing regimes. My argument in the first part of this dissertation is deeply consonant with Werikhe’s reading of ivory, for instance, as “the dead body of an elephant.” Here, as elsewhere, performance intervenes on the side of life. Over and over again in his interviews, Werikhe stressed that “‘The rhino is a unique animal. It represents life itself.’” His walking performances are the bodying-forth of that “life itself.” His laboring body is a material and somatic enunciation of the capacity of rhinoceros to go on living. As he himself put it: “‘Will the rhino live or die? [....] The choice is ours.’”

On a certain level, this transfer of affect and meaning from the Rhino Man to the rhinoceros he walked for was a simple matter of representation. Michael Werikhe had become what Hobbes called an “Artificiall person” on rhinoceros’ behalf, empowered to speak for them, to “personate” them, on the global stage. Both Werikhe and his interlocutors in the press used the language of symbolism to capture this operation of political personation. “For Michael Werikhe, the endangered black rhinoceros is symbolic of all threatened nature.” “To this humble man from Mombasa, and to other Kenyans living in southern and eastern African provinces, the black rhino is a sacred symbol, the equivalent of America’s bald eagle. Preserve it, they believe, and the essence of a people and their land endures.” “For Michael Werikhe the rhino is a symbol: ‘If there is no hope for an animal so huge, strong and recognizable, what hope is there for the lesser animals – the reptiles, monkeys and so on?’” “The rhino is a symbol of wildlife conservation in Kenya and Uganda and there will be no sense using that symbol in a country like Uganda where the animal is now almost extinct. That is why this animal must be conserved otherwise its extinction will seriously threaten the existence of other wild animals in the country.” Examples of this sort of reasoning abound in the Rhino Man archive. By this logic, Michael Werikhe symbolized – which is to say represented – the black rhinoceros, which in turn symbolized or represented “‘reptiles, monkeys and so on,’” which in turn symbolized or represented East African ecology as a whole, even “the essence of a people and their land.” This series of symbolic equivalences makes the Rhino Man the representative figurehead of Africa in general, or at least its continuing natural vitality, its Edenic profusion of animal life. The logic of this political configuration is metaphor, one being standing in for the next.

In actual fact, another, more precise, rhetoric of political personation is in play here. While there is of course no question that the Rhino Man stood – and walked – for rhinoceros and

38 “Why Is Michael Werikhe Walking to Save the Rhino?”
40 “Why Is Michael Werikhe Walking to Save the Rhino?”
41 Ibid.
42 Ozzie Roberts, “The ‘Rhino Man’ Has but One Aim.”
43 Winnie Ogana, “‘Rhino Man’ Crusades from Nairobi to Washington” December 7, 1990, 1.
other animals, he also very clearly stood – and walked among them. This is the very essence of the parahuman personhood that he so carefully cultivated: to exist alongside other beings, in what Allewaert calls a “horizontal relation.” Throughout this dissertation, I have stressed that the composition of the animal subaltern is a question of metonymy rather than metaphor, of contiguity, or even of the radical openness to the other that Stacey Alaimo’s theory of transcorporeality and the “interconnections, interchanges, and transits between human bodies and nonhuman natures.” Michael Werikhe found a way to make this feature of the animal subaltern a political virtue. He saw himself as personally implicated in the life and death of the rhinoceros: “‘Being an African, I see wildlife as part of my heritage.... If wildlife goes, then part of me is dead.’” This synecdochal and metonymic language of “part[s]” – the mirror image of the atomization of Werikhe’s own body into its laboring components: feet, legs, shoulders, “hoo[ves]” – opens up onto a broader politics of the animal subaltern:

My love for nature and concern for her made me take drastic steps to help her have a future. I believe mother nature has taken care of us from time immemorial. The least I can do in my appreciation for her good work is ensure that we treat her right. The killing of rhinos and other species of animals to the point of extinction made me respond to the crisis. I believe the rhino is part of my heritage and history. If it disappears, then part of me will also die. We will surely lose a lot more than just the rhino, for smaller animals, birds, insects and well as the habitats will also go the same way.

Michael Werikhe performed himself into being on the global stage as a beast because he knew that that was how the world was primed to see him – but also because on a certain level he was a beast, was an inextricable part of the animal subaltern in Eastern Africa. He admitted as much to a reporter in Florida when asked whether he had anything else planned after his 1991 North American walk: “This walk could be his last. ‘It could be. I just don’t know. I think I’m missing something. I’m an animal. I think I really belong in the bush,’ he said.”

“A Marathon Walk” and the Spectacularization of Black Endurance

In his remarkable book GoatMan, the British designer Thomas Thwaites details his attempt to live life as a goat. His rationale for this project – which culminates in a quadruped meander through the Swiss Alps in a custom goat exoskeleton complete with an artificial stomach semi-capable of digesting grass – is simple, and revealing:

Wouldn’t it be nice to escape the constraints and expectations of not just your society, your culture, your personal history, but your very biology? To escape the inevitable worries of personhood? To step away from the complexities of the world and have a lovely holiday...away from your very self itself? To have a

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48 Werikhe, “Personal Statement from Michael Werikhe.”
holiday from being human? Escaping the complexities of the human world and
living life with just the bare necessities. Living without the trappings of
civilization and without all the complications either. Treading lightly on the Earth;
causing no bloody suffering... Wouldn’t it be nice to be an animal just for a bit?50

For Thomas Thwaites, “being human” is a burden. This is because, in his experience, humanity consists of – as his fellow pioneer in European “literary shamanism,” the naturalist Charles Foster, puts it – “striding colonially around.”51 Only those for whom personhood has never been in doubt fantasize about casting it aside. And if “the trappings of civilization” are what characterize humanity for Thwaites and Foster, then their “lovely holiday[s]” in the abjected space of the animal subaltern, no matter how ingenious and entertaining they are, represent an always already racialized foray into primitivity and savagery.

For Michael Werikhe, of course, the situation was exactly reversed. Because he was born into the postcolonial animal subaltern, his personhood had to be cobbled together, performed into being; his great genius lay in realizing that, given the appetites of the global public, it was his parahumanity that would earn them his attention. Given the deep and abiding links between animalization and racialization in Eastern Africa, this is another way of saying that Werikhe’s blackness was intimately bound up with how he could appear before the world and what he could make of his hard-won access to elite precincts of the global political imagination.

To be sure, the international – and in particular the U.S. – press was careful to avoid the subject of the Rhino Man’s race. Nevertheless, minimally coded references in publications like the San Diego Zoo’s Zoonooz to Werikhe’s “childlike confidence” that ordinary people can be brought into the conservation fold, lay bare a tokenizing logic of blackness as political inexperience and naïveté: “Lacking any kind of formal degree, Werikhe operates at the grass roots level, trusting average people to become as concerned as he is, and it usually works.”52 Werikhe himself, of course, made a virtue of his forced immersion in this matrix of racializing expectations. His critique of the coloniality of mainstream environmentalism is never clearer or more forceful than when it emerges out of his proximity to other “average people” “at the grass roots level” in the continuum of animal subalternity; in the same Zoonooz piece, he is quoted as saying “‘Conservation cannot be imposed; it must have the understanding and support of the public, and especially the people on whose lands the animals live. So much of the conservation message has begun to sound sentimental, and must seem horribly out of place to a man whose maize (his sole means of staying alive) has just been trampled by a herd of buffalo.’”53 “‘The people on whose lands the animals live’” – the people whose relationship to animal being is proximate and not merely ideological, keyed to questions of their own survival as much as that of wildlife – must be part of the conversation. Werikhe goes on to say that conservation itself must be substantively reoriented in order to be brought “‘in line with these realities.’” The echoes of the radical black environmentalism of Ken Saro-Wiwa and Wangari Maathai are clear. In his own way, Werikhe is proposing a decolonization of ecological discourse in the service of a new politics of land use aimed at human and animal flourishing.

53 Ibid.
The materiality of Rhino Man’s body and its capacity to endure occupy the center of this politics and provide it with its raison d’être. His endurance was his performance; his performance was his politics. It is not surprising, then, that effort and pain are the watchwords of the Werikhe archive. For one, they give the more messianic dimensions of Werikhe’s project their affective shape; Salatheia Bryant declared that “Michael Werikhe...walked to the ends of the earth...to save the endangered rhinoceros.” \(^54\) Ozzie Roberts marveled that “Michael Werikhe hates to walk. Yet for love of a majestic beast, he’s pushed his feet more than 3,400 miles across three continents in nine years.” \(^55\) Another account, in \textit{Buzzworm: The Environmental Journal}, compared the Rhino Man to fellow half-beasts Spiderman and Batman for his efforts to “[save] us from harm and destruction.... He’s the newest of the superheroes – but he’s real.” \(^56\) Here the circle of Werikhe’s moral concern is extended past the rhinoceros to which he is transcorporeally bound; he is here to redeem “us” all. Suffering and altruism are correlative here insofar as it is the pain that Werikhe endured on behalf of other beings – or, as a Kenyan official put it on Werikhe’s 1985 East Africa walk, “the tremendous effort and dedication he had for wildlife...” \(^57\) – that distinguishes his performance as extraordinary. But more workaday accounts of Werikhe’s bodily endurance abound in the archive as well: “hilly terrain in Uganda...caused him serious muscle fatigue forcing him to seek treatment and rest;” \(^58\) after crossing into Kenya, “he was slightly hampered by heavy rain storms and severe cold...which almost killed his only companion in the walk, ...[his] python;” \(^59\) years later, as he crossed the Swiss Alps, wading through deep drifts of snow, “his feet [went] numb” and “[h]ere and there he [sank] in over his calves, wrenching his knees.” \(^60\)

The wounding of Michael Werikhe’s body is proof here of the seriousness of his purpose. The cumulative effect of this enumeration of “fatigue” and “numb[ness]” and pain is a hagiographic spectacularization of his capacity to endure. No matter what, he did not abandon the road he had chosen. As he said to one reporter: “‘It’s painful (going) long distances, but it’s a very small sacrifice.... I won’t rest until the cause is won.’” \(^61\) It is no accident, of course, that Prince Philip and others chose the term “a marathon walk” to describe the Rhino Man’s slow corporeal work. In many ways, the global imaginary was prepared for Michael Werikhe by the black African marathon runners who began to achieve high-profile success in marathon running in the postwar period – chief among them the Ethiopian Abebe Bikila, who won sub-Saharan Africa’s first Olympic gold medal in the marathon at Rome in 1960. Bikila famously ran the Rome marathon barefoot – and his shoelessness, like Werikhe’s battered sneakers twenty-five years later, came to stand for the black body’s beastly endurance and its imperviousness to pain. To this day, a racializing mythos of running genetics persists like an aura around East African marathoners and their supposedly in-built capacity to go the distance. \(^62\)

\(^{54}\) Bryant, “Man Walks to Help Save Rhinoceroses.”
\(^{55}\) Ozzie Roberts, “The ‘Rhino Man’ Has but One Aim,” 1.
\(^{58}\) Masara, “‘Rhino Man’ in the City,” 9.
\(^{59}\) Ibid.
\(^{60}\) Ng’weno, “Michael’s March to Save the Rhino,” 34.
\(^{61}\) Ozzie Roberts, “The ‘Rhino Man’ Has but One Aim,” 1.
I want to suggest, however, that Werikhe’s walks had a deeper and more self-consciously political rationale. Bodily endurance has been at the heart of black politics worldwide since at least the nineteenth century, when former plantation slaves in the United States wrote autobiography after autobiography detailing the depravations they endured in bondage and the lengths to which they went to achieve their freedom. Ellen and William Craft’s 1860 account of their escape, *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom*, makes a totem of the distance “run,” but endurance is a staple of the genre. On the African continent, political autobiographies of black liberationists are structured around the endurance of imprisonment, exile and state violence; Nelson Mandela’s *Long Walk to Freedom* is the canonical example here. In Kenya, Wangari Maathai – whose marches and sit-ins, while not acts of individual endurance, in some ways most closely resemble Michael Werikhe’s political performances – described her own life as a “journey [she] never walked alone.” In the 2002 elections, her slogan was “Rise Up and Walk” – and by the end of her memoir *Unbowed* she has translated that sentiment from its original Biblical context of miracles and healing to a transspecies ethic of which Michael Werikhe would have been proud:

Those of us who witness the degraded state of the environment and the suffering that comes with it cannot afford to be complacent. We continue to be restless. If we really carry the burden, we are driven to action. We cannot tire or give up. We owe it to the present and future generations of all species to rise up and walk!

This is the tradition of black resistance to which I believe Werikhe subscribed. He chose to spectacularize the “burden” he “carried” because, in carrying that burden, he too was “driven to action.” His “restlessness” – the diametric opposite of Thomas Thwaites’ longing for a holiday from “being human” – emerged out of his demonstrable lack of political personhood, his subjectlessness. Like the Crafts and countless others before him, he was obliged to prove his humanity in and through the suffering he endured. In so doing, he established the value of his own life – and that of the animal others for whom he “[rose] up and walked” – by giving it material shape: a battered shoe, a frostbitten toe, a snake nearly dead from the cold.

**Value and the Economization of Animal Life**

In this chapter I have argued that Werikhe’s own body and its beastly endurance provided the material substrate on which the figure of the rhinoceros could be made to appear as an object of moral concern. In the process, Werikhe’s subjectivity became fused with that of the animal he championed; he himself could only appear before the public as a politico-legal person in the parahuman guise of Rhino Man. Crucially, despite Werikhe’s own critique of the coloniality of capitalism, all of this deeply embodied work served an economistic purpose: to give rhinoceroses a definitive value in international conservation markets. Poaching, of course, had already established an exchange value for rhino-death-as-rhino-horn; Werikhe sought to establish a value

66 Ibid., 287.
67 Ibid., 295.
commensurate to or exceeding that death-value for rhinoceros life and flourishing. There is no
doubt that this approach to the problem was enormously effective. I would argue, also, that
becoming a broker of animal capital was virtually required of Werikhe within the political frame
in which he tried to operate.68 In order to appear before the international public as a person
empowered to stand for the rest of the animal subaltern, Werikhe – unlike Saro-Wiwa and other
more intransigent contemporaries – chose to subscribe to the increasingly neoliberalized
imaginary on which wildlife conservation campaigns rested. This brought Werikhe’s project
more fully in line with international ecological capitalism than one might expect.

From the beginning, as I have noted, Werikhe’s press emphasized the fact that he was a
working man. Even more than that, he was a model employee, punching in day in and day out at
the auto assembly plant in Mombasa where he worked and saving his vacation time for his
activism. The persona that this helped him to cultivate – unobtrusive, reliable, economically
productive – endeared him to national and international elites who might not otherwise have
supported the cause. Instead of seeking out confrontation with capital or the government,
Werikhe chose to embody one of the foundational dicta of capitalist philanthropy: that
extraordinary individuals, acting in their capacity as private citizens, can move the needle on
issues of social concern without disrupting the continued functioning of the market. On this issue
at least, Werikhe and his fellow Goldman Environmental Prize winner Ken Saro-Wiwa are as far
apart as possible. Saro-Wiwa paid for his antagonism of the Nigerian government and Royal
Dutch Shell with his life; Werikhe’s treks were promoted and partially subsidized by the U.S.-
based oil conglomerate Caltex. This is not to disparage Werikhe or his activism. Rather, I believe
he had identified a critical dynamic of the international environmentalist field. While they may
not have been as uncompromising or as radical as the efforts of Saro-Wiwa’s Movement for the
Survival of the Ogoni People, Werikhe’s Rhino Man performances appealed to an international
public that wanted to give a “local” face to wildlife conservation. That Werikhe’s activism – his
determination, as he repeatedly made clear, to persist until the cause was won – hinged on well-
established tropes of black bodily endurance only served to raise his profile. Werikhe, in short,
knew his value.

It was not long, however, before the economic rationalities of ecological capitalism began
to push past Rhino Man as a useful surrogate for animal life. In 1990, a few months after
Werikhe was awarded the Goldman Environmental Prize, a private South African wildlife
reserve made headlines by purchasing a “founder population” of five rhinoceros from the Natal
Parks Board for 2.2 million rand.69

The...transaction was of great economic benefit to the Natal Parks Board because
sale proceeds were used to provide important funding for its various conservation
management programs. Of even greater significance, however, was the fact that
for the first time ever in South Africa, black rhinos were assigned an economic
value. This could potentially prove helpful in the courtroom, as judges can now
take into consideration a replacement cost in assessing penalties against rhino
poachers. Increased fines and stiffer sentences are being called for in the South

68 For more on “animal capital,” see Shukin, Animal Capital.
69 “Black Rhinos Sold to Private Owner in Southern Africa,” Around The Horn: The Rhino Conservation Newsletter
1, no. 3 (Autumn 1990): 2.
African judicial system where the current penalty for rhino poaching is only 1,500 rand, or one year in jail.\(^7\)

Michael Werikhe was not, to my knowledge, involved in any way in this “transaction.” In fact, the very terms of the agreement obviate the need for the kind of activism that he practiced. If questions of animal life and death are reducible to establishing pricing, there is no need to find ways to speak for animals. Their value has already been assessed. It is notable, however, how fully Werikhe’s efforts to prevent poaching and establish sanctuaries for rhinoceros align with this economization and privatization of animal being. One might even say that the Natal rhinoceros sale was symptomatic of the success of Werikhe’s political project. However, this high-water mark for animal capital had significant consequences for the animal subaltern more broadly. I find it significant that the benchmark valuation of rhinoceros life that this “transaction” established was imbricated from the beginning with the punitive power of “the courtroom” and the “penalties” it could “[assess]...against rhino poachers.” Not only does this approach reinscribe the deathliness of rhinoceros on the very scene of their flourishing, as this “founder population” is reimagined proleptically as a surrogate for any and all rhinoceros that will be killed in the future, it also serves to highlight the continuing criminalization of the overwhelmingly black human beings who engage in poaching and their variously Orientalized buyers. In other words, the logic of ecological and animal capital in this case used the ascription of monetary value to animal life to insure itself against the loss of one member of the animal subaltern while pursuing an intensifying regime of criminalization towards another. It is an exceedingly short step from here to the contemporary milieu of neocolonial hunting-as-conservation, best exemplified by Corey Knowlton, the Texas “sportsman” who paid $350,000 in 2015 to “bag” a black rhinoceros in Namibia. Having established the exchange value of a rhinoceros’ life, Knowlton could simply compensate the Namibian government for its death; the Namibian government could then spend that money on rhinoceros conservation, bringing the market back to equilibrium. This is truly – to return to Ngũgĩ’s aphorism from This Time Tomorrow in a very different context – killing the animal for it to live.\(^7\)

Examples like this proliferate across the contemporary conservation landscape in Africa and elsewhere. They participate in the same regime of value that Werikhe helped establish with little of his emphasis on the material mattering of animal bodies and animal lives. (Hunting, of course, is a deeply material practice, as I argued in Chapter 2, but when animal death is priced so explicitly a level of abstraction has interceded that might even exceed the bloodless taxonomies of natural history.) At the same time, Werikhe’s commitment to a trans-species politics of the animal subaltern has largely receded from view; rote invocations of the importance of local communities to conservation efforts invoke these politics only obliquely and never in those terms. Developmentalist accounts of wildlife conservation and management – like the current debate in Tanzania about whether or not to build a road through the Serengeti – hinge on ultimately economic questions of the relative value of animal life and infrastructure, tourism and poverty, intangible heritage and market development.

This is not to say, however, that Werikhe’s influence, nearly twenty years after his death, has entirely receded from view. In Nairobi, one can witness a beastly performance practice that

\(^7\) Ibid.

\(^7\) Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, “This Time Tomorrow,” in This Time Tomorrow: 3 Plays (Nairobi: Kenya Literature Bureau, 1970), 35.
works along the same lines as Rhino Man’s at the David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust. At the appointed hour, a crowd gathers at the fence around a small corral. After an anticipatory moment that feels longer than it is because of the midday heat, the performers take the stage – a ragtag coterie of toddler elephants, gently herded by their human keepers. As they drink their milk from the keepers’ jugs, and take mud baths, and snort and flop and tussle, the audience snaps photographs and laughs delightedly. These elephants are orphans, their mothers the victims of accident or poachers, and they are here – like Michael Werikhe was on his treks – to appear before a public.

None of this would have been possible without help of many people worldwide, for the rearing an infant elephant is an expensive and long-term commitment during the time it is dependent upon milk and a team of trained carers who represent the lost elephant family and are there for the little elephant until such time as it is comfortable amongst the wild herds and chooses to become independent. The time involved depends entirely upon the personality of each individual and also upon how well the elephant can recall its elephant family, but all the orphans reared by The David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust are “elephants” again and integrated into the wild community by the age of ten, though always in their large elephant hearts will be a corner for the specific humans who were their family in infancy.72

Audience members can adopt any one of the elephants they see perform – provided she or he hasn’t been snapped up already – with an annual donation of $50. In return, the human foster parent – in a fascinating re-speciation of the adopt-a-child programs pioneered by organizations like Save the Children elsewhere in the “developing world” – receives regular updates about her or his elephant, photographs and watercolor paintings, and so on. In this way “people worldwide” become part of the elephant’s “family in infancy” and the elephants themselves – although free to “[choose] to become independent” – enter into political subjectivity as “elephants’ again,” with “affection always in their large elephant hearts” for the human beings who cared for them. Like the Rhino Man, these elephants-cum-“elephants” have become “persons” in a larger world, capable of making social contracts of care and mutual obligation. Each “elephant” is acknowledged to have her or his own “personality” and is – crucially – judged capable of mature choice. This is the ideal subject of the twenty-first-century developmentalist discourse vis-à-vis the animal subaltern: the “individual,” sustained by the largesse of foreign benefactors, emerging into a bright future from a tragic past, finally able to stand on her own four feet.

The question of value here has obviously not receded. The elephants fostered at the Sheldrick facility are worth exactly $50 a year on the conservation market. What is more, the subalternity these orphaned infant elephants are able to perform so convincingly remains the coin of the realm; a happy, healthy wild elephant cannot appear before the public in the same way, just as another Kenyan wildlife activist who was not a black factory worker might not have become Rhino Man. For their efforts to endure to be successful, both elephants and Rhino Man need to demonstrate their need as well as their appeal: these are beings, their performances assure their public, on whom charity will not be wasted. This mode of activist performance consequently does very little to dislodge the neocolonial culture of dependency to which Ngũgĩ

and other committed anticolonialists so strenuously objected. Nevertheless, what both Michael
Werikhe and the orphaned elephants at the Sheldrick Wildlife Trust point to is the continuing
capacity of the animal subaltern to act and speak for itself, to enter into a relation with a global
public, and to turn the racializing and animalizing circumstances of its emergence into a
minoritarian subjectivity that is perhaps uniquely capable of reimagining modern political and
legal life from the outside in. The cause has not yet been won – and so the animal endures.
The terrain of racial mattering – to return once more to Mel Chen’s indispensable formulation – traversed by Michael Werikhe has changed a great deal since his death in 1999, but the questions his work raises about the political and moral equivalency of variously inflected forms of animal life remain very much unresolved. Animal subalternity remains a motive force behind contemporary politics of race and species, which continue to bear the trace of the histories explored in this dissertation. In May 2016, as I worked on Werikhe’s life and legacy for what became Chapter 5, employees of the Cincinnati Zoo shot and killed Harambe, a Western lowland gorilla in their care, after a small child fell into his enclosure. Harambe’s death served as an object lesson for me as I wrote about Werikhe. The specifics of the case mirrored the dynamics I had been observing in my research for years, condensing into a single incident the racial and species entailments of coloniality and its afterlives.

To begin with, Harambe’s very presence in a U.S. zoo is a testament to a deeply colonial natural-historical tradition of studying, capturing, breeding and displaying African primates. Donna Haraway has made clear the deep racial and gendered entailments of primatology, much of which got its start in East Africa with Dian Fossey and Jane Goodall. Fossey and Goodall were two of Louis Leakey’s protégés – or “Leakey’s Angels,” as they are sometimes known, in a transparent allusion to the whiteness and femininity they modeled in contradistinction to their always-already black and masculine surroundings – and their research on gorillas and chimpanzees, respectively, captured the global imagination as the political project of postcolonial renewal first began to sour. Though born in Brownsville, Texas, Harambe was part of a global African ape diaspora sustained by the extractive industry of (neo)colonial primate research. One of his predecessors, Michael, a companion to the famous Koko at the Gorilla Foundation, is thought to have used the sign language he learned from his keepers to tell the story of his mother’s death at the hand of Cameroonian poachers; this confessional performance facilitated efforts to cast Michael in the readymade role of African “orphan,” lost in the lawlessness of violence and civil strife that marked the end of the colonial period until he was pulled to safety by loving white arms. Harambe’s origins were decidedly less traumatic, though no less immersed in the global circulation of blackness. Dan Van Coppenolle, a retired teacher in Brownsville, gave Harambe his name. As he put it in an opinion piece for CNN after Harambe’s death,

[The name] came to me one day while I was on my treadmill listening to some music. A song by Rita Marley, “Harambe,” came on. It was a live performance recording from a Bob Marley Tribute concert in Central Park. Halfway through the song, Marley explained what Harambe means. It’s a Swahili name meaning working together, pulling together, helping each other, caring, and sharing. I

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3. For an illustrative example of this logic, see Carole Jahme, Beauty and the Beasts (New York: Soho Press, 2000).
remember thinking what a cool word it was and that I should share it with my
students.

After I was finished exercising, I sat down to read my local paper and came across
an article about a contest to name a baby gorilla at the Gladys Porter Zoo in
Brownsville, Texas. Immediately, a lightbulb went off in my head and I thought
of Harambe. It seemed perfect: an inspiring African name for an endangered
species.  

Naming a West African gorilla born in Texas for a Jamaican musician’s song about a Swahili
term – a term, to be sure, that had been stripped of its primary context in the struggle for Kenyan
independence and misspelled – “seemed perfect” because it indexed Harambe’s blackness,
linking his status as a member of an endangered species to Africanness writ large. I do not mean
to disparage Coppenolle. His affection for Harambe seems deep and sincere. I found his
suggestion that the Cincinnati Zoo repatriate Harambe’s remains to Africa – where of course he
had never been – an oddly touching gesture. What is at issue here is the impersonal coloniality
of the epistemic field in which Harambe was involuntarily located – a field that, like the natural
historical research carried out at the Coryndon Memorial Museum decades earlier, sought to
establish the truth of “Africa” in the bodies of its animal denizens.

Of course, the aggression that Harambe allegedly displayed towards the boy that fell into
his enclosure is equally bound up with the coloniality of animal representation. The 1934 Cooper
and Schoedsack King Kong, starring Fay Wray as the beast’s ambivalent object of desire, merely
crystallized longstanding patterns of colonial discourse on great apes as always-already
racialized avatars of ferocity and rage, tempered now and then with a certain measure of noble
savagery.  No amount of careful rationalization of gorilla behavior could prevent the citational
inscription of the rampaging Kong onto Harambe, in a representational universe structured by
animal fantasy, nothing an animal does can be only itself. This attests to the power of
representation, to the material effects of performances like the Maules’ 1953 Bell, Book and
Candle and the Nakuru Players’ 1955 Aladdin, which disciplined audiences into seeing animals
like Pyewacket and animal figures like Roger Bent and John Townsend’s two-man horse as
signifiers of the larger universe of empire. Harambe, immersed in the coloniality of his citational
world, was violence, or at the very least violence-to-be. Initial news coverage described Harambe
in terms strikingly reminiscent of the King Kong film: “a hulking silverback gorilla”
“drag[ging]” the boy who fell into his enclosure “around like a toy.” Even when Harambe did
not behave as expected, expectations of savagery clung to him like a second, signifying skin: “It
was pure panic,’ said Brittany Nicely, 29, who was there with her two children.... ‘He wasn’t
throwing...[the boy] around,’ Mrs. Nicely said. ‘He wasn’t mauling him to death, which I

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6 The word “Harambee” literally means “pulling together,” and was used by Jomo Kenyatta as the watchword of his drive for cooperation and fellow-feeling after Independence in 1963.
7 Van Coppenolle, “I Named Harambe. What His Death Means to Me.”
8 Merian C. Cooper and Ernest B. Schoedsack, King Kong (Radio Pictures, 1934).
9 See Derrida’s account, contra J.L. Austin, of how performatives can proceed from the realm of the fictive back into
thought was going to happen.”¹¹ “Pure panic” ensued despite the fact that Harambe “wasn’t” doing what everyone “thought was going to happen;” even subjunctive animal violence has an affective charge. Harambe, like so many other members of the animal subaltern, was on trial from the outset for what he might have done.

The racial entailments of the incident at the Cincinnati Zoo were complicated by the fact that the boy who fell into the enclosure – unlike Fay Wray’s Ann Darrow in Kong’s gargantuan grip – was black. Almost immediately, as Shaun King noted in an important critique published by the New York Daily News, the history of the boy’s family became an issue, with more than one commentator pointing to the fact that the boy’s father had a criminal record, as if that were in some way germane to his son’s ordeal.¹² Even in moments in which black people are very clearly victimized, their putative ties to criminality, neglect and irresponsibility are endlessly rehearsed; the Cincinnati Police Department even briefly considered bringing charges against the boy’s parents for allowing the incident to happen. This raises once again the question of the relative value of human and animal life with which black humanists from Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o to Shaun King have grappled for decades. In the aftermath of Harambe’s death, the idea that many human lives seem to matter less than his gained a great deal of traction. In one particularly affecting instance, Pulitzer-winning editorial cartoonist Steve Sack linked Harambe to the fate of Syrian and other refugees; the cartoon, “Attention-Getters,” originally published in the Minneapolis Star Tribune, depicts a boatload of people at sea with a caged gorilla placed strategically in their midst so that “people would care what happens to us.”¹³ Here, the subalternity of refugees links them – in a curious inversion of Michael Werikhe’s practice – to an animal whose life and death has more political currency than their own.

I felt these questions of value particularly keenly in the summer of 2016 in part because a month before Harambe’s death, in neighboring Cleveland, the city settled a wrongful-death suit raised by the family of Tamir Rice, a black boy only a few years older than the one who fell into Harambe’s cage, killed by police as he played in a park. The city agreed to pay Rice’s family six million dollars – without, of course, admitting any fault.¹⁴ Rice had been shot by the uniformed officers of the state because they suspected – with considerably less to go on than in Harambe’s case – that he might be a threat. It occurred to me when I read about the settlement that while six million dollars might very well help Rice’s family in the wake of their catastrophic loss, it was a perversely belated attempt to make his life matter. The writing of this dissertation coincided with the insurgent beginnings of the Black Lives Matter movement and is in deep solidarity with its transformative politics. I felt quite strongly, in the aftermath of the Rice settlement and the Harambe shooting, that the operative question facing Black Lives Matter was not simply one of value but rather one of materiality. I of course affirm that black lives matter and do what work I can to make them matter. At the same time I believe we must be attentive to how black lives

¹¹ Ibid.
matter, to the forms that the matter of black life takes, to the material reality of black lives’ mattering. I sound this cautionary note because – at least under current conditions, which is to say in an anti-black world structured by genocidal violence and the racist depredations of capital – it is conceivable that simply asserting that black lives matter will feed into the continuing economization of black life. Certainly there is a neoliberal strain of Black Lives Matter discourse, developing parasitically in center-left political circles off its original and more radical formulation, that seeks merely to correct the undervaluation of black subjects in political, social, cultural and economic markets. This economized and economizing line of thinking risks commoditizing black life so that it may be priced appropriately – as wages, as educational statistics, as wrongful-death pay-outs. The corrective, in my view, is to remain attentive – as the activists on the vanguard of Black Lives Matter so often have – to the mattering of black life, from the wounding and killing of black bodies by the police and their surrogates to the more diffuse forms of violence that intervene materially in black people’s lived experiences.

To put it another way: what is at stake in our fractured present is the struggle for black liberation and the unmaking of all subalternities. The animal subaltern is riven by differences that even the contiguity forced upon bodies and lives defined by coloniality as collectively less-than-human cannot paper over. I do not want to minimize these differences and the pain they often cause. But there are nevertheless lessons to be learned. After Harambe’s death, some commentators called for a lawsuit against the Cincinnati Zoo on his behalf. The humor website FM Observer published a curiously representative piece on this topic, “Harambe’s Family To Sue Zoo Who Blew Him To Timbuktu,” in November 2016:

What’s left of Harambe’s grieving family has decided to work together and is now filing a hefty $100 million wrongful death lawsuit against the Cincinnati Zoo.

Along with wives Chewie and Mara, and sisters Asha and Gladys, the family’s matriarchs M’Linzi and Samantha successfully convinced Jomo, the one remaining male silverback at the zoo, to contact an attorney who specialized in wrongful death zoo murders.

Harambe’s family’s attorney’s initial public statement: Harambe’s life mattered, mmkay? The author of this piece – known online as “Johnnny” – walks a fine line here, especially with his racializing invocation of “Timbuktu” and “M’Linzi;” it is not entirely clear what his politics are. Nevertheless, his suggestion that “Harambe’s life mattered” to the tune of one hundred million dollars aligns with the efforts of Steven Wise and the lawyers at the Nonhuman Rights Project “to secure legally recognized fundamental rights for nonhuman animals,” often in the service of remediating neglect and abuse. While I agree that working through the courts on behalf of animals like Harambe – like pursuing a wrongful-death suit against the Cleveland Police Department on behalf of Tamir Rice – is brave, necessary and important, I continue to wonder whether the unmaking of subalternity can occur in and the language of rights and grievances. The exclusion of the non-human from personhood is a foundational fact of modern political rationality. This suggests, quite simply, that liberation will not be found in appealing to

that rationality to take into its fold that which it was created to exclude. The task of liberation, consequently, is both simpler and more daunting: to make politics anew, outside the bounds of the human.
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