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From impulsive adventure to postcolonial commitment

Making white identity in contemporary Kenya

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ABSTRACT This article examines the making and maintaining of identity and migratory history among a group of 'old colonials', white people in contemporary postcolonial Kenya. In spite of the fact that white settler communities have recently been brought under scrutiny within anthropology of colonialism and that postcolonial writing has been torrential, the postcolonial realities of former settler communities have largely remained unexplored by anthropologists. To illuminate the processing of white colonial history as a dialogue between displacement and commitment, the focus of this article is on one particular narrative, this in order to bring forth the ambiguities of lived and localized realities – temporally and spatially varied and contested – to discussions on postcolonial conditions in Africa.

KEYWORDS *diasporic histories, Kenya, postcolonial Africa, settler communities, white identities*

I Introduction

The focus of this article is on a distinctive migratory minority group of white people in contemporary Kenya, who have a background as the dominating element in a colonial society. The main concern will be how the maintaining and remaking of this white identity and an inherent migratory history take place in a context where the social circumstances have dramatically altered; Kenya gained independence more than 30 years ago, and those previously in power are entwined in a constant reassessing of their position in the society. It is essential that the determination of societal position is not limited to within closed borders of a single society, but occurs in multiple simultaneously significant spheres.

One particularity of this identity-making is the incessant self-analysis and articulate reflexivity which is manifested in everyday stories as much

as in a prospering autobiographical genre. Stuart Hall notes that such fervent search for history is what histories of migration are about. In the Caribbean context, the search for identity is a search for origins, because everyone there comes from somewhere else. Such histories of migration are always characterized by violence and rupture, and in such identities the search for history and the retention of old customs becomes pervasive (Hall, 1995: 7). Furthermore, there seems to be a preoccupation with ordering and reordering the past in situations where the future is experienced as particularly unpredictable and insecure. In Vincent Crapanzano's analysis of white identity-making in South Africa, the Afrikaners, in particular, marveled at the age of Europe and its traditions, traditions that root Europeans to their land. Europeans in Europe are presumed to possess a past that does not have to be continually 'retold and reenacted to be authentic' (Crapanzano, 1986: 95).

During the winter and spring of 1992 and 1993, I conducted fieldwork in a Kenyan Up-country town, which I have called Enduroto.[1] The town lies in the heart of what in the colonial days were called the White Highlands. The land around Enduroto is hilly and arid. During the pioneering days the area was divided between a few large cattle ranches producing beef and wool – the Merino rams were imported from Australia and South Africa and crossed with Maasai ewes (Curtis, 1986: 89, Huxley and Curtis, 1980: 67). After Kenya's independence in 1963, many of the farms in the area were bought out by the government for African settlement. Loss of land was still very much a source of bitterness among the *old colonials* in the 1990s. Even the whites who were most convinced about the Africans' right to their original land considered the government as incompetent in the way it dealt with the land transfer after independence. The disposal of the acquired land was done slowly and some plans for cooperatives never materialized (Vinnai, 1973: 21, 32). Settlement schemes produced a new class of landowning absentee African landlords, and in fact quite a few of the contemporary whites were renting their farms or farmhouses from town-based Africans.

The white memories of space are not only those of farming the land but of historical landmarks surrounding Enduroto; valleys, hills and fields that were heavy with nostalgia, and in their physical existence tie the *Mzungus*[2] to a common history. Happy Valley, or Wanjohi Valley – the arena of eccentric colonials starring in romantic Kenya literature – is in the close vicinity. Likewise is Elementeita, a huge farm started out by 'the King of the Pioneers', Lord Delamere. The attaching of one's private history to people and places of fame in white Kenyan pioneering and adventurous mythology was a continuous practice; a connaissance of such history was one measure of postcolonial commitment.

During my fieldwork I lived at a Colonial Country Club, which was founded during the immediate post-First World War years in order to attract soldier settlers to the area (cf. Duder, 1993; Holt, 1989; Mähl-

mann, 1988: 157). With the Club as my base, I participated in the everyday social activities of the community, visiting the green enclaves of white old farmhouses distinguishable from a distance against the encircling bush, mainly concentrating on listening to people's life histories among the some 20 white families of the community.

The number of members in the community of people of European origin is, since independence, not easily recorded. Kenya's independence and the implementation of settlement schemes set the settlers on the move. According to population censuses, the number of Europeans increased substantially between 1948, when there were 29,660 of them in the country, to 1962 when the number of European residents had reached 55,759. This increase in the white population was due to a new wave of soldier settlers. Britain was encouraging white settlement, despite the fact that nationalist movements in its colonies were considerably strengthening (cf. Berman, 1990; Maughan-Brown, 1985). The 1969 census shows a noticeable decrease; there were 40,593 Europeans in Kenya (Republic of Kenya, 1962, 1969a, 1969b). Those who had decided to stay in the postcolony were faced with a dilemma over citizenship. 'Indecision became widespread, suggesting a sense on the part of the non-Africans, of both alienness and powerlessness to determine future events' (Rotchild, 1973: 187).

Decisions concerning staying or leaving, of applying for citizenship or holding on to the citizenship of one's birth, were not solely decisions of the immediate post-independence years. Indeed, they were very much contemplated in white Kenya of the 1990s, the pros and cons of every alternative carefully weighed. A new commitment was in formation; quite a few of the young people – second or third generation in Kenya – were hoping to become Kenyan citizens, even if their parents were not, and even if their parents were irritated and amazed by their decision. Some considered opportunities to settle elsewhere. As at independence, the places of potential emigration continued to be other parts of the 'Empire': Zimbabwe, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand and Britain, thus mapping the world of places of possibility and significance. Recently, Tanzania seems to have become an 'extension of white Kenya'; there is an existing white community but it is also connoted with the novelty of a pioneering front.

The 1989 census divides the white population into Kenyan Europeans (3184), British (15,608) and Other Europeans (15,768) (Republic of Kenya, 1989). For the purpose of studying the make-up of the *Mzungu* community in Kenya, the division based on citizenship is not decisive. Membership in that community depended neither on nationality nor on a common ancestral background as such, although what might be called 'colonial Britishness' played a dominant role in its making.[3] In spite of the multinational character of the white postcolonial community, it pronouncedly needs to be distinguished from that of multinational,

temporary expatriates. My guess is that the size of the *Mzungu* community – people of European origin who consider Kenya their home and live in the country on a more or less permanent basis – is today approximately 20,000.

The study of settler cultures has, in recent years, been essential to anthropology of colonialism. As Peter Pels notes, both Marxist emphasis on plantation economies and feminist-inspired discoveries of colonial domesticity advanced the interpretation of colonialism as a constant struggle rather than singular coherent strategy (Pels, 1997: 173; cf. Comaroff and Comaroff, 1991, 1992, 1997; Cooper and Stoler, 1997). What is significant is that this previously vocal and ruling white minority, the topic of various studies of the colonial period and of particular interest to both novelists and analysts of the literary genre of pioneering nostalgia, has been more or less treated as if it has altogether disappeared and ceased to have any impact in postcolonial Kenya. The 'white relics of colonial history' – contemporarily settled people who have lived through liberation wars, independence struggles and postcolonial realities – have escaped scholarly attention.

This seems to be a blind spot in studies concerning other postcolonial former settler communities as well, Vincent Crapanzano's (1986) study on the whites in South Africa is perhaps a rare exception. Academic silence on present-day whites generates an idea that white history came to an end along with the ceasing of their political power. Anthony Chennels writing about white Rhodesian discourse may therefore state (1996: 129):

> In the end both the discursive space and the literal geographical space in which racist legislation had over the years embodied the discourse were smashed by war. With Mugabe's victory at the polls both [white] discourse and the Rhodesia which had produced it were simultaneously swept away.[4]

The idea that their discourse has ceased to matter is rather absurd because, as Ngwabi Bhebe and Terence Ranger in an introduction to the same book note (p. 5), the whites in Zimbabwe still dominate much of the economy and possess the most productive land in the country.

I have approached the white postcolonial Kenyan community from the previously mentioned premises that colonial cultures are about a constant negotiation and struggle for the making of identity and making of difference, about an everyday construction of boundaries on different levels and scopes. That these distinctions are more often than not considered those between the rulers and the ruled, the Europeans and the Africans, is a significant but a partial picture. In actual fact, what Crapanzano thought was extraordinary about the white South African discourse, was the insignificance of blacks in the white identity play. They were simply too distant, too different, to figure as significant for the self-constituting discourse of whites (Crapanzano, 1986: 39; see also Hartigan, 1997).

In postcolonial circumstances, the situationally significant boundaries in space and time have to be carefully scrutinized. In that white identity play the co-players and opponents were both local Africans and other Europeans in the country, they were Europeans in Europe, they were the global media as well as the pioneers and governments of the colonial period, and significantly, they were other members of the *Mzungu* community. By concentrating on a contemporary group of postcolonial whites, it is possible to illuminate how things and places and ideas are given both global and local significance, and how such significances are being simultaneously processed in making identity. Perplexity and multi-directionality of concepts such as postcoloniality and diasporic experience, as well as the cultural complexity of contemporary African societies, are illuminated by locating the different positions and places and ruptured commitments that identity-makings in such contexts inhere.

I ask how colonial history as a dialogue between displacement and commitment is made sense of in personal remembering and historical narrative in a postcolonial context. It is in such (sometimes very conscious) practice of remembering, selecting memories and silencing others, where I intend to illustrate the processing of identity. By making sense of the colonial past, the white postcolonials are also making sense of their present and pondering over the ambiguities of future. In addition to being about time, colonialism (and postcolonialism) is a question of changing land; it is about transnationality and transformation, it is about alienation from and attachment to land. As an example of such processing of identity, the focus will now be on one particular character, Douglas, and on a story he told me during our interview. His narrative, in my mind, is especially illuminating in pointing out the distinct and at times antagonistic routes – past and present – of belonging and displacement.

II Of roots and ruptures

Douglas was Kenya-born, the only son of an early settler, whose family had migrated from South Africa to Kenya in 1911, to escape the destiny of poor whitedom, due to a sudden accidental loss of livelihood. Kenya, or the East African Protectorate as it was then, from the point of view of South Africa, had an irresistible attraction compared to going 'back' to England. It was, as Douglas said, considered the land of opportunity. Pioneers from South Africa, both Boers and Englishmen, sent home enthusiastic accounts about the wonderful life in Kenya – the game and the beautiful scenery. In Nairobi, Douglas's family had set up an import business. They were agents for UK businesses throughout East Africa, representing British goods such as Andrew's Liver Salt, Jacob's Cream Crackers and cutlery from Sheffield. The success of the firm was mostly due to Douglas's mother, who was a 'strong female personality'. His

father, who died when Douglas was just a boy, was not, Douglas thought, 'aggressive enough in the modern way to make much of a go in business' until he had married his mother. When Douglas was 13, his mother – like many other whites in Kenya who could afford it – sent her son to be educated in England.

Although he had never ceased to consider Kenya his home, it was only in 1992 that Douglas had, after a cosmopolitan career, returned to his 'roots' as a middle-aged man. Douglas was striving for a personal ongoing historical narrative that would connect him to Kenya despite the lengthy gap of his adulthood. Not having ever really known his father, Douglas kept looking for evidence of him, and was moved when he had run into people who could remember him.

> In fact there is a man in Enduroto who remembers my father ... which is not a bad effort, since my father died in 1944. And there are some ancient old Hindis in Nakuru and indeed in Biashara Street in Nairobi where I've mentioned my father, and they all remember. He was a very much loved man.

It was Douglas's recent return, his explicit search for roots, and his position as a relative outsider in the *Mzungu* community of Enduroto, which gave him, he felt, a particular point of view; an ability to reflect from a detached position on the making of the white community which he very much wanted to be part of. His was a distinctly in-between position. For one, Douglas saw himself as 'a liberated free-thinking white man from Europe who considered everybody was equal'. On the other hand, however, he was also compassionate towards what he called old settler views: 'I can still understand [that] those people who've been out here for 50 years and had to hew this country out of bush, can still maintain those rather out-dated and unfortunate attitudes.'

During our discussion, Douglas reminisced about an incident in 1974, when he was back in the country for the first time since the 1950s to take care of financial matters concerning the property he and his mother had sold before emigrating to Europe after Kenya's independence. It is a self-reflexive narrative, which illustrates the contradictory and overlapping directions of migration of people and ideas, and thus the ambiguities of commitment thereby created.

> We sold in 1969, and it was the rule in those days that you couldn't get the money out of Kenya unless you invested it in Kenya government stock for five years.[5] And so in 1974 I came over to meet the man in Barclay's Bank, who was controlling the money. And so I made the appointment to be there on certain day, on certain time. And my Swahili had started to come back, and as I went up the lift to the 13th floor, I was wondering whether to speak Swahili or English, and I knocked on the door and an African voice said: 'Come in!' Very cultured. So I went in, and there was this little African

sitting behind the desk with windows on all sides, just so you see Africa in every direction. And I realized that I would speak English back.

So we discussed, he asked me if I had a lovely journey, was I pleased to come back in Kenya, and we went through all the politenesses, until the moment came when I said: 'Well, I think we better get talking about the money.' And I reached for my briefcase and got out his letter, and only at that moment properly did I look at his signature block and I said: 'That's a very interesting name you've got there Mr. Ndegwa, Mr. M. Ndegwa.' I said: 'It's only interesting because 21 years ago we used to have a man called that name, Ndegwa, helping my mother in the house.' 'Oh,' he said, 'where was the house?' I said it was down the Kilimani Road. And he was absolutely stunned. He said: 'That's my father.' I said: 'You're not Matthew, are you?' He said: 'Yes.' And he got up from behind his big desk. I got out of my leather arm chair and we just embraced. And we had tears coming down our face. Now, Matthew was two years younger than me, I remember, and he and I grew up together. And he was then this big chief in Barclay's.

But the other thing I want to tell you about, is because the story, I'm afraid, goes on a little bit. That having had this amazing meeting with Ndegwa, I said to him: 'Gosh, this is wonderful, are you married?' And yes he was, and I said: 'It would be wonderful to meet her and have a good chat about the old times. Why don't you come around to the house.' I'm staying with my cousin Derek, quite a lot older than me, been in Kenya all his life, living in a big house just near our house. And Ndegwa, [Matthew's] father, when we left Kenya, went and worked with Derek and his parents for another 20 years, I suppose. And he'd only just left them, he was a very old man, and gone out on his little *shamba*.[6] So I said to Matthew: 'Come around.' And I suddenly remembered who I was, where I was in, in Africa, in Kenya. And I was actually living in the house of an old settler with old settler views. So I said: 'Hang on, Matthew, I'll, I'll, I'll contact you, I'll have a word with Derek and I'll see what he says.' I went back to Derek and told him about the extraordinary meeting, how much I'd like to have them around for a meal. And Derek said: 'Very difficult', he said, 'to have them in the house.' He said: 'I'll tell you what, we'll have to compromise. You invite for tea on two conditions. The first condition is that of course I will be sick. I will be ill. And the second thing is that you mustn't invite them to the house. They can come onto the veranda.'

So I said: 'Ok.' And I rang up Matthew and I said four o'clock next Thursday, come down the drive, you know the drive. Of course he knew the drive 'cause he'd lived there for 20 years or so. And I will meet you at the bottom of the stairs. Right. Well, exactly at four o'clock crunching on the drive, and there was a little car, the good lady, Mrs. Matthew Ndegwa, stepped out with one of those porcupine hair-dos, must have taken her weeks to get the thing ready for this great social event. Matthew got out and I graciously took them to the top of the stairs, offered them a chair on the veranda, we talked about all sorts of things and then at the right moment

rang the bell and in staggered Karari with a silver tray, with a tea pot and with all the hot water and everything else, biscuits. And this old man staggering with this tray. Now, Karari and Ndegwa had worked in that house together as friends for 20 years. And here was now Karari serving tea to Ndegwa's son and wife in a *Mzungu* house. And I knew that just behind me, behind that stone wall, was Derek, lying on his bed, reading a book, waiting for them to get out. It was a funny old feeling.

III On settler veranda – possessing postcolonial space

Douglas's funny old feeling was a revelatory moment. The awkwardness of the situation, which Douglas felt concerned not only himself, but Matthew and Derek and Karari as well, was a condensed moment, which in its unfolding illuminated some essential contradictions that go into the processing of postcolonial identity. His will, at the moment of narration, to belong to the *Mzungu* community, and a realization that he was not quite there, made him articulate about the contradictions of belonging. Douglas was battling to balance what he considered self-evident Western ideals of equality with his cherished *Mzungu* past, which was inevitably contradictory to such ideals.

Douglas's life-historical anecdote is punctuated by abilities and dis-abilities to possess space, a narrative structure that seemed to dominate especially the male versions of the white Kenyan life histories (see Uusihakala, 1995, 1996). The directions and scopes of attempted possession of space are illustrated in Douglas's narrative transitions. He enters the scene in what seems like a globally shared field of business and banking. But soon enough Douglas was confronted with an ambiguous longing and desire to see Africa in every direction. The littleness of the African – an impressionistic memory of the colonial days – was outdone by the realization of the magnitude of space the modern African was in command of. Moreover, Douglas was economically dependent on the smooth and easy cooperation with this particular African. Hence, the nostalgic Swahili was pushed aside in order for a globalized and 'cultured' business conversation in English to take place. It is important to note that speaking English was very often an alienating activity in *Mzungu* experience – knowledge of Swahili a matter of establishment and belonging, particularly in a context where the community was being distinguished from either Europe or the short-term European expatriates in Kenya.

But the alienation of cultured conversing was suddenly broken by the realization of mutual origins and common history; a transition from the present postcolonial to the past colonial took place, in addition to which the language of personal intimacy replaced that of formal and official. Douglas and Matthew shared memories that were no one else's. Through

the memory, Douglas was taken back to his childhood bungalow-type home, but now in a postcolonial context. His impulse to renew a childhood friendship, combined with what he referred to as his liberated and free-thinking Europeanism, was ruptured by Douglas's becoming conscious that these memories and the belonging they established were built on problematic and contradictory ground.

Hence, another transition took place within the postcolonial sphere. Douglas realized that *where he was* and *who he was* required a balance with postcolonial settlerism. At the end of the narrative, all the characters of the postcolonial scene gather on the veranda. It is a cacophony of distinct but interwoven histories and voices beneath the ritualized display of colonial courtesy. The settler veranda thus becomes an emblem of the postcolonial space: the 'modern' European and the 'modern' African, who share something of a colonial history are being served by an ancient servant, depicted as a colonial relic, and the whole encounter is being barely tolerated by the 'traditional' colonial master, whose anachronism is protected by the stone wall in-between.

Identities, not primordial but as cultural constructions, need to be analyzed as socially and ideologically produced in particular historically situated processes (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1991: 28–30; 1992: 44). What needs to be established is the everyday processing of identity; how do identities come to take their distinct shapes, how do they become essential and embodied for the individuals, how do identities come to possess apparent continuity for individuals when the surrounding contexts are undergoing profound changes. Douglas's story illuminates the in-between moments and spaces of everyday where the making of identity takes place. The 'funny old feelings' are revelatory in a sense that they rupture contextual consensuses, and in so doing reveal processes of negotiating identity on the distinct but simultaneous levels of making the self, making the community and making of otherness. All of these scopes have to do with the ability to negate objectified forms of identity. Hence, the simultaneous establishing of belonging and detachment in identity demands the possibility to consider selves as others, to reflect – occasionally with irony – the objectification of selves that one is granted by others and one grants oneself.

In my understanding, the balancing of alienation and belonging is at the heart of the processing of identity in general. In the settler – as well as in the white postcolonial – experience, the alienation and belonging were further intensified in the collective experience of migration and commitment to the adopted home. That such a process of balancing requires continuous participation and negotiation, the fact that identities cannot be claimed as a birthright but demand an everyday making, was illuminated in the fact that Douglas – despite a respectful pioneering ancestry – was left somewhat on the fringes of the white postcolonial community. Douglas's partially outsider-position in the community was

evident. He was a colonial all right, but he was not an *old colonial.* In his suave manner, impeccable dress and dignified carriage, he was certainly not a *Kenya Cowboy.*[7] It seemed as if Douglas was too much of a migrant to be a migrant local – his commitment had yet to be established.

Douglas's discourse was a mixture of self-asserted imperialism and of modern Europe, hence, in both aspects slightly but significantly removed from the contemporary white discourse, which tended to prioritize knowledge with present and local character. One particularity of Douglas's narration was the fact that it was explicitly open-ended. It left the listener and the narrator baffled about the contemporary cultural complexity without offering easy (or any) ways out, whereas in most of the histories that I was told, such ambiguities were avoided. The white men's narratives were typically characterized by moral evaluations of now and then, of general outlooks on development and evolution, of willingness to look back and put the past in order. In general, they either avoided cultural conflict or else they were concluded with generalized explanatory models. This is where the issues of selective memory and significant silences in identity-making of a collectivity become prominent (see e.g. Hall, 1995: 5), for the narrated events along with their interpretations seemed to follow a relatively shared structure.

The familiar genre of white Kenyan colonial autobiography seemed to influence significantly the oral narration of life histories, even for people who were most suspicious and critical of such literature. The ideological frames of what should go into a white Kenyan life were occasionally revealed in surprising ways. One white lady, Cecilia, had volubly been telling me about her adventurous jobs and travels and houses and pets, when she suddenly remembered, and exclaimed: 'Oh, and I almost forgot to tell you about hunting.' Cecilia was startled by the thought that she might have forgotten to include a theme, which turned out to have had little relevance in her personal experience, for hunting is something the colonials (of colonial literature) of the olden days occupied themselves with.

Criticism towards this literary genre arise from the fact that the colonials in this literature are most often described as lazy and decadent individuals living lives of luxury, whereas the true settler was struggling daily, wet with sweat. A critical stand against the literature and its authors (e.g. Huxley[8] and Fox, 1982) was considered a matter of true initiation into the community, an expression of knowledge gained through individual experience. The authors of this genre, according to one critic, represented and continue to represent a minuscule part of the community; they only write about each other and for each other. On the other hand, the knowledge of the literature also meant that some common anecdotes, events and characterizations were quoted as lived experience.[9]

 But however dominating and predestined the narrative structure may

at first appear, the public meanings change in collective processing, and experiences are remembered in new ways that reflect the present context. As Alistair Thomson notes (1990: 73), the apparently private process of composing safe memories is in fact very public in nature. 'We fight within ourselves to make a particular memory of our experiences, and to repress alternative memories. We also engage in public struggle between different versions of the past. Moreover, the person battling for memory may carry contradictory versions of events, and these different versions are verbalized in different contexts and discourses. The coherence of a life history is only momentarily reached, and the shape the coherence takes is reformulated in negotiation, reshaped by new experiences that remake the past.

IV Settler paradox and double diaspora

Being a colonial or a postcolonial expresses a continuous balancing of leaving behind, of moving and changing on the one hand, and of making homes, becoming dedicated and committed on the other. It is a question of continued movement, not only of people, but of ideas, correspondence and memories (see e.g. Appadurai, 1991; Clifford, 1994). The command and the struggle for space is essentially how settler experience is most often described, and indeed the way the white postcolonial life histories are constructed. Consider the paradox of settler experience presented by two extracts from the genre of romantic pioneering autobiographical fiction:

> Having decided to make East Africa their home, their committal was fundamental to their way of life. They were people who could shrug their shoulders and adjust to circumstance. They carried within them a certain flexibility and, in their instinct to migrate, the willingness to make long treks on foot into the unknown. This impulse for adventure is an essential part of pioneering. The resulting discomforts and uncertainties were often inexplicable to relatives left behind. The lure, above all, was a sense of freedom. (Trzebinski, 1991: 4)
>
> They came in quest of adventure, stayed to make a colony, and, in the process, destroyed what they had come to seek. (Huxley, 1987: 132)

It seems, thus, that settlerism is essentially oxymoronic, the freedom and the committal to making homes mutually exclusive. In the life histories, the *Mzungu* past became meaningful and worthy by means of attachment and commitment to land through various activities: farming, gardening, safari-ing and active environmentalism. All demanded specific knowledge gained by the experience of time and space. It was knowledge of the land and an ability to improve and to utilize it that made the *Mzungus* distinguish themselves from both the Africans and the Europeans. The expatriate Europeans had no commitment to the

country, while the Africans did not seem to understand the beauty of the land. Knowledge of the land is thus a specific knowledge making 'Us' which only experience and commitment can create.

What is described as virgin nothingness of the land at the pioneering encounter was 'historylessness', because for something to exist it has to be named, mapped or cultivated. The dilemma lies in the contradiction of what was considered valuable. On the one hand, something is always better than nothing; pride was taken in making, creating, improving and developing. On the other hand, however, it was the nothing, the wide open spaces and freedom, that many of the pioneers and post-pioneers came to seek. The paradox of tradition and modern, that of wilderness and civilization, manifests itself in the context of land. Thus, to conclude that white identities were legitimated by stories of accomplishment is only half the story. Identity never equals self-satisfaction. The processing of identity includes negating aspects of self-criticism and doubt as well as those of shame and guilt. Therefore, pride in making was never without a pity in destruction. Besides, the pride was far from self-evident, but required a continuous affirmation, not least because the appreciation over outcomes of *Mzungu* makings were felt to be under the suspicious eyes of both Africans and Europeans.

In recent years, anthropologists have paid increasing attention to the fact that groups of people in postcolonial circumstances can no longer be studied (not that they ever should have been) as ethnically, geographically, culturally or historically bounded entities, as islands unto themselves. Such old localizing strategies, according to James Clifford for one (1994: 303), may obscure as much as they reveal. A plethora of concepts such as borderlands, transnationalism and diasporas have emerged in anthropological use in order to describe the hybridity of spheres, the contact zones, where ostensibly separate places become meaningful in making single communities.[10] Khachig Tölölyan (1996: 3) discusses how the intensification of phenomena such as migration, reconfiguring of ethnicity and globalization has been responded to by discursive phenomena of renaming and hence attributing *diasporic* meanings to various experiences of dispersal.

Diasporas 'as exemplary communities of the transnational moment' have entered intellectual discourse in the past three decades, coinciding with what might be seen as gradual declining of nation-state sovereignty (Tölölyan, 1996: 4). James Clifford thus argues that contemporary diasporic practices, although being defined and constrained by structures of nation-states and global capitalism, also exceed and criticize them, hence offering resources for 'emergent postcolonialisms' (1994: 303). The concepts of diaspora and postcolonialism are not synonymous although, being descriptive of similar phenomena, they regularly appear together. What is also significant, is the fact that in postcolonial studies, the most forceful arguments have come from 'diasporic intellectuals as literary

critics' (Werbner, 1996: 6; a few of the most important critics being Bhabha, 1994; Said, 1978; Spivak 1995).[11]

The spaces of postcolonialism, inclusive of the deterritorialization of cultures, exceeds, according to Anthony King (1991) the scope of academic paradigms based on national societies. People not only have no roots but they have no soil either. But whereas conceptualizing contemporary cultural groups as hybrid and mobile and trans-local can be liberating and intriguing, such phenomena coincide with recommitment and reterritorialization. People have roots in distant soils, and it might not be necessary to have that soil between your toes to make it a building material of identification. Therefore, essential in the concept of diaspora is the inherent idea of continuity and commitment in dispersal, 'experiences [...] of constructing homes away from home' (Clifford, 1994: 302).

The history of dispersal, myths and memories of an original homeland, alienation in the host country as well as desires for eventual return, that William Safran (1991, quoted in Clifford, 1994: 305) lists as some of the common characteristics in diaspora experience are far from straightforward and concrete. Attempts to define an 'ideal' case of diaspora leave little room for an essential ambivalence about physical return and attachment to new land, which Clifford sees as characterizing much Jewish diasporic consciousness, and which seems to describe the white Kenyan experience as well. Diaspora is not only about moving and transnationality, but it also signifies political struggles that 'define the local, as distinctive community, in historical contexts of displacement' (1994: 308). The 'common origin', as Douglas's example demonstrates, cannot as such determine a diasporic community. The *ongoing* history of displacement, of adaptation and resistance speaks as much about the diaspora experience as do definitions of distinctive origins (Clifford, 1994: 306; my emphasis). The question about white postcolonial and diasporic identity is about what it means for the making of identity that one is displaced in a place one strongly feels is one's own; how is the nostalgic longing worked at in practice when the place stays the same but changes?

The postcolonial identity of whites in Kenya could, in my mind, be described as a *double diaspora* from both *home England* and *home colonial Kenya*, the dispersal from England being more about a free-will pioneering emigration, while the dispersal from colonial Kenya corresponds more to classical diasporic experiences. Hence, this particular diaspora experience is as much, if not more, about time as it is about space. The history of dispersal and the memories and myths about an original homeland were in fact postcolonial memories of *colonial Kenya*, not so much of England or any other factual source of emigration. The wistful ideas of eventual return were never connected to England. Return to England would be a defeat. Instead, the current neo-liberal

writing about the 'goods of colonialism' was balm to wounded hearts, assurance for some of the whites that colonialism could and should be brought back to Africa. And importantly, if the continuing relationship with the homeland is taken to be significant for the definition of the group's consciousness and solidarity (Safran, quoted in Clifford, 1994: 305), the *Mzungu* community was very much defined by establishing personal roots and genealogies to the colonial, particularly the pioneering, period in Kenya.

Focusing a study of a postcolonial society on a group of white people is one way of bringing forth the cultural multiplicity and divergent histories of contemporary Africa. Ambiguous elements of lived realities – the funny old feelings – need to be brought to the sometimes overly static and decontextualized discussions on postcolonial condition, in order to illuminate the dynamism that postcolonialism inheres as a web of relationships and processes that refuse either to fit neatly into rigorous categories of 'local' and 'global', or to make an unconditional distinction between the past and the present. Finally, in order to emphasize that empowerment has to be historically contextualized, the culturally particular ways of how groups previously in power reconfigure their possibilities during societal transformation need to be interrogated.

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Notes

1. I have changed the names of both places and people to protect the identity of my informants.
2. My use of Swahili words attempts to correspond to that of my informants. *Mzungu*, a European, is a favored self-referential concept. It may acquire qualifiers, as in 'colonial' *Mzungus*, or 'Nairobi' and 'Up-country' *Mzungus*, which illuminate different temporal and spatial categories of the community. Simplified Swahili, sometimes referred to as *Kisettla* (settler-language) has a logic of its own. The grammatically correct plural form for *Mzungu* would be *Wazungu*, but as *Mzungus* is used by the whites, I will use that version.
3. Karen Hansen (1989) makes a similar observation of the making of white communities in Northern Rhodesia and postcolonial Zambia.
4. Bruce Berman writes in a similar tone of settler failure as a dominant class in Kenya; a failure which is crystallized in 'their astonishingly quiet

disappearance from Kenyan society within a generation after independence' (1992: 196).

5. The narrative is a direct transcript of the interview (March 1993). Only some minor repetition has been omitted.
6. Shamba (ma-) is Swahili for any plot of cultivated ground. Here the reference is to a small farm.
7. A *Kenya Cowboy* is another self-referential concept underlining the processes of definition and distinguishing of the *Mzungu* community from within. This is a discourse in which selves were named in ways that would not be easily interpreted by outsiders to the community. A *Kenya Cowboy* for one, grasps the irony in self-definition and the irrelevance of definitions by those in whose eyes the whites in a colonial or a postcolonial sphere are all the same. It stands for an un-intellectual, not-artistic, out-doorsy tough guy, whose earthy interests include farming, cars, rugby and beer.
8. The late Elspeth Huxley was an immensely productive writer of both fact and fiction on colonial Kenya. She is most renowned for her auto-biographical trilogy (1981, 1982, 1987), but her work also includes a biography of Lord Delamere (1980) and various collections of pioneering reminiscences (1984, 1992).
9. Alistair Thomson's account of war veterans' narrations of the Anzac legend in Australia is illuminating: 'Many [of the veterans] had read the official history of the war [...] and quoted anecdotes as if they were their own experiences. In some interviews I felt as if I was listening to the script of the film Gallipoli' (1990: 77).
10. On the construction of identities in between places, see King (1996) and Rouse (1995). On the significance of 'interior frontiers' in colonial spaces see Stoler (1997) and Caplan (1995).
11. In some postcolonial theorizing, postcoloniality seems detached from the actual postcolonies. In Patrick Chabal's critical words, in such a parlance '[postcolonial] refers to the implications of the postcolonial or postimperial condition for the definition of our own identity in the West today. It is therefore, more a concern about ourselves than about those who do live in actual postcolonial societies' (1996: 37). Speaking of a post-condition in Africa can then be seen as marking the end of an epoch, where an existence of such a break is questionable (Werbner, 1996: 5). Questions arise then about the ways in which colonialism can be considered as over and done with, the ways in which it is transformed and, again, reconstructed (Frankenberg and Mani, 1993: 295). The essentialized dualism between the time in colonial Africa and that of postcolonial Africa is misleading, for colonialism in itself was much less coherent and simple as these dichotomies suggest, and, furthermore, the dynamics of Colonial Africa have continued to shape the postcolonial societies. (Ranger, 1996: 273; 280.) As Stoler and Cooper strongly point out, essentializing the colonial moment as a binary opposition and hence concluding that the postcolonial world today is much more complicated, fragmented and blurred prevents us from seeing the hybridities of colonial societies (Stoler and Cooper, 1997: 9).

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