

‘Reordering and Counterordering’:
Forestry Preservation, Bush Clearing and the
Sociophysical Mapping of Chepalungu, Kericho
District, Kenya, 1930–1963

ALPHONSE OTIENO

Department of History
ICC 600, P.O. BOX 571035
3700 O ST. NW,
Georgetown University
Washington, DC 20057-1035

ABSTRACT

Recent research on Africa has emphasised conservation and trypanosomiasis control as the major factors, which first motivated colonial officials and scientists to embark on forestry preservation and bush clearing policies in colonial Africa. This paper, drawing on recent emphasis on the high modernist nature of colonial policies in general, contends that in Chepalungu, Kenya, forestry preservation and bush clearing were implemented with the objective to create a racially and tribally segregated landscape – not merely to conserve the landscape and control trypanosomiasis. Whereas colonial policies have commonly been generalised into imposed instruments of power which local people merely submitted to or resisted, this paper argues that the bush clearing and forestry preservation in Chepalungu unfolded in ways that exceeded imposition and resistance. The colonial officials and Kipsigis inhabitants of Chepalungu were not only in conflict with each other; they were also in negotiation over the use of the environment. In the process policies were adapted to local Kipsigis practices, just as Kipsigis interests were insinuated into the policies. Thus, just as conflicts were central in the policy making, tangled processes also played a significant role.

KEYWORDS

Preservation, trypanosomiasis control, segregation, imposition, negotiation, entangled processes, resistance

INTRODUCTION

In the late 1940s, colonial officials and zoologists embarked on a policy for forest preservation and bush clearing in Chepalungu, Kericho district, Kenya colony. Chepalungu was a reserve for the Kipsigis, a Nilotic speaking group, who mainly practised pastoralism and shifting agriculture. Bordering the reserve in the west and north was an area called Sotik, which the British colonial government had alienated earlier for white settlers. The colonial officials and zoologists proposed the forest preservation and bush clearing in 1947 in the aftermath of an alarm at two outbreaks of animal trypanosomiasis in the white settlement in Sotik. But the policy by no means reflected a mere reaction to the outbreaks. Neither was it motivated by conservation ideology and commercial interests, whose significance in environmental policies implemented elsewhere in colonial Africa has been emphasised in certain works.¹ Its formulation and implementation embodied a conjuncture of social and ecological processes, which can be traced back to the 1930s. This paper seeks to investigate these processes and how they shaped motivations for, as well as nature and impacts of, the policy in Chepalungu.

Recent work on colonial Africa has viewed such processes as essentially top down in nature.² This view is significant in understanding what beyond the two trypanosomiasis outbreaks and conservation ideology motivated the preservation and bush clearing in Chepalungu. But at the same time it homogenises policies in colonial Africa in general into imposed instruments of power which local people merely submitted to or resisted, thus ignoring their spatial and temporal variations.

In the 1990s, work in colonial policies emphasised significance of the policies in social control, segregation and environmental systematisation. It offered significant perspectives on motivations and actual ramifications of the policies on African societies and environment. For example, Mahmood Mamdani has captured the segregationist nature of the systems of colonial rule in Africa. Mamdani argued that notwithstanding variation in terminology, the systems of colonial rule were essentially segregationist. 'As a form of rule', he posits, 'apartheid is what Smuts called institutional segregation, the British termed indirect rule, and the French association. It is this common state form that I call decentralized despotism.'³ In his view, apartheid aimed at not only segregating colonists and Africans, but also balkanising Africans into different ethnic enclaves. James Scott, in the same vein but from a slightly different perspective, has viewed imperialist policies as high modernist in nature, driven by the objective to simplify incomprehensible local social and environmental terrains for legibility and control.⁴ Ian Phimister, just as Mamdani, has also stressed the segregationist significance of colonial environmental policies. In his response to William Beinart's overemphasis of conservationism in environmental policies

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in South Africa, Phimister argues that the state intervention through agrarian policy in southern Rhodesia were ‘so far less for conservationist considerations than for segregationist reasons’.⁵ Work on trypanosomiasis in colonial Africa has also captured the social engineering significance of trypanosomiasis control measures that included bush clearing.⁶ It has highlighted how colonial trypanosomiasis control policies entrenched state control over Africans by reorganising their political authority and economies and changing their relationship with the environment, particularly their contact with tsetse habitats.

The emphasis on the significance of colonial policies in social control is invaluable in understanding what motivated the colonial officials to implement forestry preservation and bush clearing in Chepalungu. Drawing on it, this paper contends that the forestry preservation, whose motivation in colonial context has generally been viewed as conservationist and commercial in nature, was implemented in Chepalungu as an instrument for social policy to create a physical device for segregation – racial and ethnic. In the same way, the bush clearing appears not merely as a prophylactic strategy, but a tool for racial and ethnic segregation. The few trypanosomiasis outbreaks that occurred in the Sotik white settlement were overblown to legitimise the bush clearing and forestry preservation to resettle the Kipsigis and segregate them from white settlers.

Apart from its concern with the objectives of colonial policies, the above-mentioned work has also addressed the process through which the policies were implemented. It views the process generally as coercive and homogenises rural Africans’ responses to it into resistance. But using the case of Chepalungu, this paper unravels divergent and entangled processes that shaped colonial environmental policies in localised contexts. In this case, the Kipsigis, white settlers and colonial officials struggled intensely with each other. They negotiated, contested and compromised over the policy. Through these processes, colonial and Kipsigis’ interests, practices and representations of society and environment diverged and crossed each other. The resulting policy hardly, therefore, reflected a pure colonial agenda for society and environment in Chepalungu, but embodied diverse values, which were colonial and Kipsigis in origin. In emphasising the refracted and entangled processes, this paper by no means suggest symmetrical power dynamics between the Kipsigis and colonial officials. But it argues that differentiation of interests within the colonial administration and among the Kipsigis and need to legitimise the policy in the eyes of the Kipsigis, as well as resilience of the Kipsigis in making their demands, diffused a certain amount of power to the Kipsigis that enabled them to inject their interests and practices into colonial agenda, reshaping the policy in the process. The entangled preservation and bush clearing process unfolded in ways more complex than Scott’s modernist perspective or Mamdani’s decentralised despotism.

Since 2000, work in colonial policies for trypanosomiasis and forestry, has, however, provided valuable attention to ways in which rural Africans impacted

the policies notwithstanding their social engineering objective.⁷ But the entangled African and colonial interests and practices, and their impacts on polices in colonial contexts still demand localised study to unravel how and why they occurred. Given its proximity to white settler farms, its economy, its population, and its diverse ecosystems, Chepalungu provides a perfect case.

CHEPALUNGU: PEOPLE AND ENVIRONMENT IN THE 1930S BEFORE FORESTRY POLICY

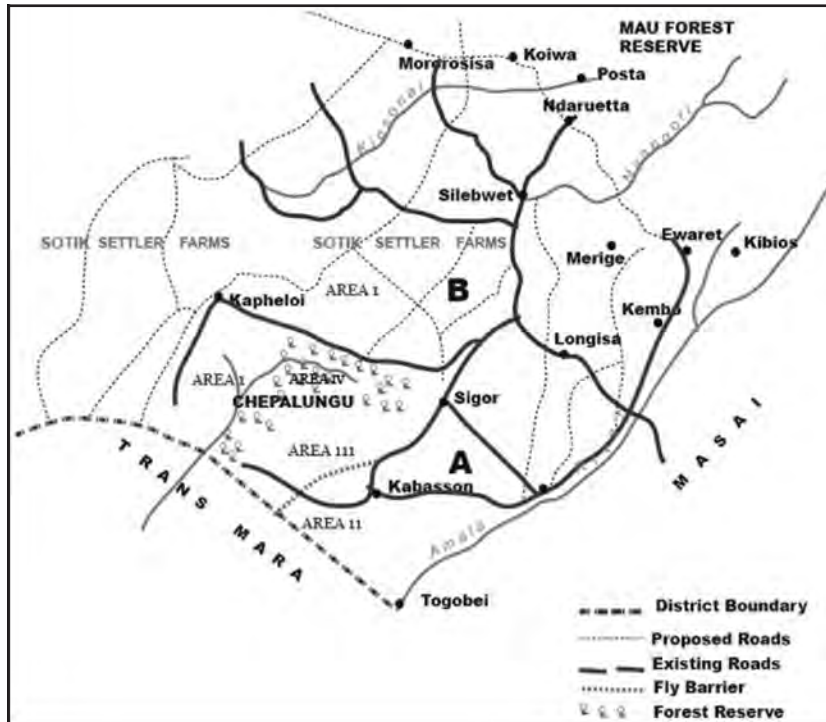
One can get a glimpse of Chepalungu in the 1930s through the writings of the colonial officials who left behind written descriptions and through the memories of the Kipsigis who presently predominate in the area. Exploring Chepalungu, its people and environment during this period is important in understanding the context in which the forestry and bush clearing policy emerged. It can also help in understanding the changes that resulted from the policy.

Chepalungu was one of the locations of Kericho district in the Rift Valley region, part of which then fell in Nyanza province in the western Kenya region. It was hemmed in between Trans-Mara, Masailand in the south, Sotik in the west and north, and River Nyangoris in the east, beyond which lay Buret, another location within Kericho district (see Map 1).

Chepalungu is a Kipsigis term with ancestral connotation, meaning daughter of the original inhabitants. It is derived from the prefix *chep*, meaning daughter of, and *lungu*, the original inhabitants. Chepalungu thus owes its origin to the daughters of *lungu* from whom the Kipsigis presently living in Chepalungu trace their origin.⁸ Chepalungu in this case appears as a name developed by the Kipsigis to claim rightful ownership of the area on the basis of their connection to its original inhabitants. That the area became known by this term shows the political influence that the Kipsigis, who currently predominate in the area, had over other groups who also made claims over the place. These groups included Masai and Okiek, sometimes called Dorobo, a Masai word for poor and lacking in cattle. This term is used for Okiek because of their hunting and gathering lifestyle and their lack of cattle.

The environment of Chepalungu exhibited diverse ecosystems. Colonial officials and the present inhabitants of Chepalungu described and remembered, respectively, a mosaic environment with a patchwork of high thick forest of cedar and olive, dense undergrowth of witch hazel, open grasslands with thick clumps of trees and bush, hillocks and rivers, most of which were seasonal.⁹ The area's rainfall varied spatially and seasonally from 50 inches in the northern part to 35 inches in the southern part along the Masai border, with heavy rains occurring between March and May, and short rains November and December. January and February were the driest months. The rainfall pattern typically oscillated

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MAP 1. Chepalungu-Sotik Forest Scheme

between highs and lows, with some years receiving very low rainfall leading to periods of drought. The soil was varied, black and heavy, and poor in drainage in Sotik locations mostly under European settlement and shallow and lighter in texture in Chepalungu wooded area. Generally, soil conditions were poor and could not support intensive crop cultivation, and that explains the prevalence of shifting cultivation in Chepalungu.

Chepalungu's diverse ecosystems resulted from diverse ways in which the Kipsigis inhabitants used the environment. Through shifting cultivation that involved clearing of new patches of land for crop farming, cultivators produced open grasslands and several pockets of bush that traversed the landscape. The open grasslands provided good grazing grounds that supported pastoralism, a major economic activity of the Kipsigis. The bushes, in turn, were places in which the people gathered wild fruits and hunted small wild animals such as

rabbits, squirrels and antelopes. Equally important was the dense forest, in the interior of Chepalungu, which acted as a constant source of wood fuel, building poles, weaving materials, medicine, honey and big game. Its indispensability was manifested during droughts, when crops failed and pasture in the grasslands dried out. The forest became an indispensable reservoir of food for people and pasture for stock.¹⁰

The diverse ecosystems in Chepalungu not only reflected the multiple economic activities that the Kipsigis practised. They also represented underlying perceptions of the forested environment. Among the Kipsigis, forested landscape was referred to as *oosnet*. The word hardly referred to a secluded landscape. Rather, as my interviewees emphasised, it referred to a place to live in and to be utilised by people.¹¹ Forests thus appeared not as secluded spaces, but as spaces implicated in culture, economy and social relations. Living was not just a biological process entailing exploitation of forest resources, a factor which had contributed to the mosaic landscape. It was spiritual as well. Forests were in this case valuable as sites that linked the material and spiritual world. Shrines existed within the forest where rituals were conducted to influence the spiritual world in favour of the living. For example, there was a shrine at Kapkoros in Gorgorr, Chepalungu. There were also sacred trees, for example, *korosek*, used in making altars on the shrine.

But, by the 1930s, because of the effects of Christianity, the use of the shrine had stopped. The National Holiness Missionaries had established a mission and a school in Chepalungu that attracted converts and students.¹² Ian Q. Orchardson was an English settler who, after damaging his lungs as a result of his work as a chemist in England, on medical advice came to Kenya in 1910 and lived among the Kipsigis for 19 years. Orchardson wrote in his ethnography of the Kipsigis that the sacrifices done at the shrine had not taken place in the twentieth century.¹³ He did not, however, explain why the Kipsigis had not conducted the ceremony for almost thirty years. What we learn from him is that this practice had stopped by the 1930s. But my interviewees emphasised that the ceremony stopped partly because of the missionary teachings which had attracted adherents from the Kipsigis. Despite the change, the tree *Korosek* and the shrine at Kapkoros were still considered sacred. But there is no evidence available to link the religious beliefs and practices to ways in which the Kipsigis responded to the forest preservation and bush clearing in the late 1940s. Instead, the social, economic and political significance of the forested landscape played a central role in shaping how the Kipsigis responded to the policy.

The interactions between the Kipsigis and the environment in Chepalungu were embedded in social relations. The environment unfolded as a social product, embodying varied effects of socially differentiated activities. The differences were predicated on gender, clan and generation. While young women and girls related to the environment in their roles as collectors of firewood, gatherers of

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plants and fruits, and cultivators of crops, young men cleared bush and forest to create fields for cultivation. After some period of use, the fields were frequently left as fallows, which reverted back to bush or grasslands, areas in which the young men grazed cattle and hunted small animals. As herders and hunters, men enjoyed dominance over such areas. Old men acted as the custodians of the environment.

By virtue of their experience and knowledge, old women supervised young women and girls in their roles as cultivators and collectors of firewood and plants. They were also specialised in medical practice, a field that was left for the old, women and men, because of their wide knowledge of the environment and its flora. The field was also protected by the belief that it was only the old, beyond child bearing, who were supposed to handle and administer medicine. Other specialised fields for men were honey and game hunting which were done in the dense parts of the forest.

These human relations to the environment in Chepalungu, however, were not as clear-cut as they may seem. They were typically ambiguous, not just in the social realm but in their effects on the environment. The varied ecosystems thus appeared as convoluted expressions of multiple activities of men and women of different ages. Within this context, the Chepalungu environment turned out to be more than physical. It was a social landscape where social differences and negotiations were actualised through utilities that imprinted socially complex ecosystems, which appeared to the colonial officials as disordered.

Yet it would be a misrepresentation to see the Chepalungu of the 1930s only as a product of socio-economic and cultural activities of the Kipsigis. The effects of colonialism had penetrated this place in significant ways by this time. White settlers had settled and established farms around the eastern, north-eastern and north-western borders. Furthermore, some Kipsigis and Okiek who lived in Chepalungu had emigrated from Koiwa, Buret and Tinderet, areas in the north and east, where settlers had alienated land for ranching in the 1930s, forcing groups of Kipsigis and Okiek to move south-eastwards to Chepalungu where they settled and continued with their extensive agro-pastoral activities. As happened elsewhere, e.g. in Central Kenya, the settlers in Kericho district, with the help of the colonial state, alienated vast areas endowed with rich soil and perennial water supply.¹⁴ They carved out Sotik and left Chepalungu to the Kipsigis because the rivers there were seasonal. In the preceding periods, the Kipsigis living in Chepalungu, Okiek and Masai living near the southern border depended on the permanent water sources in Sotik for domestic use and for their cattle during dry periods when rivers in Chepalungu dried out.¹⁵ Although Sotik had been alienated by the early 1930s, the Kipsigis herders in Chepalungu continued to depend on the permanent springs in Sotik during dry periods, contributing to conflicts between them and settlers that occurred, for example, in 1938. These conflicts, however, were social, not just environmental.¹⁶

THE SOTIK-CHEPALUNGU SCHEME: FORESTRY, BUSH CLEARING,
TSETSE FLIES AND SEGREGATION

On December 23, 1938, B. Sinclair Lockhart, the District Officer of Kericho district, Kenya colony, received one call in the morning and another in the afternoon from an Assistant Inspector in charge of Police and a settler, Mr H.C. Dawson. The two callers asked Lockhart to visit the latter's farm at Manga on account of a previous midday's event that almost broke into violence between the settler's headman, Arap Chemaset, a Kenya Police Constable, Kibor, and Kipsigis herders whom the two alleged were trespassing with their stock on Mr Dawson's farm. The Police Constable apparently had been sent there earlier 'to patrol the area for the trespassing Kipsigis and their stock'.¹⁷ Mr Dawson's headman, Arap Chemaset, narrated that on that day a group of Kipsigis herders were grazing their cattle on an unoccupied alienated land near a famous local watering place, Kelongit. The headman and the Police Constable, Kibor, under the impression that the said area was part of Mr Dawson's estate, ordered the herders to depart with their stock. The herders refused and instead, called for help from those nearby. A group of 'natives' responded and with *pangas* (machetes), threatened the two, who in dread escaped to a neighbouring homestead belonging to another settler by the name Charles. From there, the two made calls to the Assistant Inspector of Police, who arrived at 4 p.m. with two constables. The Inspector reported having seen 'a great many 'natives' sitting on hillocks around and hundreds of stock around moving off towards the Abossi end of Chepalungu after having watered at the Kelongit permanent spring and no doubt having grazed in the vicinity en-route'.¹⁸

Dawson's case, however, was not the only one that had attracted the attention of colonial administrators in Kericho district. Earlier in the month of November that year, Mr K. de P. Beaton, another settler, had written to Lockhart complaining about the Kipsigis who trespassed on his estate. He wrote:

I am writing to you to ask you to please take immediate action to stop the wholesale trespass of Chepalungu natives and their stock on my Kytit property... Daily the women are incanting and pouring water from gourds, as a supplication to whatever god or gods they worship. As no result has come of this, they calmly walk across my farm with all their stock to water each day. Not only do they graze to and from the water, but there are several outbreaks of rinderpest in various bomas [homes] and there is no Veterinary or Police control.¹⁹

It was in the context of such tension between the Kipsigis herders and white settlers that in 1947, A.C. Swann, the District Commissioner of Kericho district, reported alarm about two outbreaks of animal trypanosomiasis in the Sotik settler area, bordering Chepalungu, the Kipsigis reserve. In response to this report, a group of zoologists and veterinary officials from the region conducted a field survey in the settler farms in Sotik and the Kipsigis reserve in Chepalungu to

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determine the origin of the outbreaks of trypanosomiasis. Throughout the settler farms and the Kipsigis reserve, however, the surveyors collected only three *Glossina pallidipes* (tsetse), one in the vicinity of the settler farms and two in the Kipsigis reserve. Based on this finding, field zoologists, E. Aneurin Lewis and J.D. Freund, disapproved the fears among Sotik settlers that tsetse flies had spread into the alienated farms. The question still troubling some settlers, nonetheless, was how the fly reached the vicinity of their farms and whether or not it had any connection to the two outbreaks of animal trypanosomiasis. Maintaining their position against the rising fears among settlers, the zoologists attributed the presence of one fly in the vicinity of Sotik farms to mechanical transmission from the nearest known fly infested area in Trans-Mara, Masailand, bordering Chepalungu area in the south. But they delinked it from the few outbreaks of trypanosomiasis that had occurred in the settler farms.²⁰ They maintained that these outbreaks had been ‘transmitted by biting-flies from infected native-owned cattle grazing, watering or passing near to the cattle farms’.²¹

The zoologists then blamed the Kipsigis herders for the mechanical dispersal of tsetse flies from Trans-Mara, the infested area, and the small outbreaks of trypanosomiasis in Sotik settler farms. The two *Glossina pallidipes* caught earlier in Chepalungu wooded area were reportedly found in ‘isolated pocket of thickets where no breeding places were found’.²² According to Lewis, however, the thickets that in his view were ‘residual patches of dense forest’ afforded permanent breeding environments to tsetse flies, because during the survey ‘[n]o flies were found in the dense forest, nor in the open country occupied by the Kipsigis. They [the two tsetses] were restricted to the half-cleared patches of forest [thickets].’²³ Consequently, a discourse developed denigrating the ways the Kipsigis related to their environment. The zoologists accused the Kipsigis of clearing the forest haphazardly and leaving behind several patches of bush favourable to *Glossina Pallidipes*. Lewis wrote:

They have not known that the partial opening-up of the dense bush, creating numerous glades separated by narrow bends of forest and leaving behind them patches of uncleared bush in the form of thickets, has favoured the dispersal and rather prolonged the stay of *G. pallidipes* in the vicinity of grazing-grounds within the forest.²⁴

An important question to raise is why the zoologists developed a critical attitude towards the Kipsigis when they had earlier dismissed the settlers’ fears about tsetse flies spreading on to their farms. Based on their finding from the survey that the fly disliked ‘continuous dense forest on the one hand and open country (without thickets) on the other’, the zoologists went on to propose a policy for clearing bush, preservation of dense forest, afforestation of open spaces within the forest and erection of physical fences across the landscape of Chepalungu.²⁵ The objectives and plan of the scheme were framed in benevolent language, a euphemistic strategy to secure legitimacy in the eyes of the Kipsigis and other

colonial officials. 'The pressing need', the Provincial Agrarian Development Officer, Nyanza province, had emphasised, 'is to control the movement of tsetse fly in the Trans-Mara of Masai from moving north in the Chepalungu and into the European settled area in Sotik.'²⁶ This statement implies that the scheme was intended to benefit not just the white settlers living in Sotik, but also the Kipsigis in Chepalungu. Apart from preventing the encroachment of tsetse flies into Kericho district, of which Chepalungu and Sotik were parts, A.C. Swann, the District Commissioner, stated that the policy was 'to open up additional land for African settlement', to improve the lives of the Kipsigis.²⁷ The Kipsigis, natives of Chepalungu and migrants from Buret and Koiwa, north and east of Chepalungu, were to occupy the cleared spaces to 'prevent regeneration of the cleared bush'.²⁸ This notion of improving the Kipsigis' lives was epitomised in the designation of the scheme as Betterment, a concept reflecting its objective of developing the Kipsigis reserve by transformation of the environment, infrastructure, settlement, agriculture and livestock farming.

Just as in most state projects, the plan of the scheme was produced through mapping. Chepalungu was abstracted into a map that the colonial administrators were to follow in their objective of reordering the place. Ignoring all other things, the map captured only those features that interested the colonial administrators: the forest to be protected and the thickets to be cleared and used in settling the Kipsigis (see Map 1). As Scott points out, schemes of this nature typically 'are designed to summarize precisely those aspects of a complex world that are of immediate interest to the map maker and to ignore the rest'.²⁹ The rest of the things that such maps neglect are, however, the very things that end up shaping the projects that the maps represent. Scott maintains that 'the transformative power resides not in the map, of course, but rather in the power possessed by those who deploy the perspective of that particular map'. The case of Chepalungu, however, provides evidence for diffusion of power not just among colonialists who deployed the maps for various interests, but among the Kipsigis and things the map was intended to transform.

According to the plan, Chepalungu was to be divided into four areas (see Map 1). Area I, bordering Sotik settler farms and stretching north of the dense forest, already settled by the Kipsigis, was to be cleared and the Kipsigis living there given the option of adopting co-operative farms. Area II, the fly pocket area, adjoining Trans-Mara, was earmarked for clearing and not settlement because of its fragile soil. Area III, south of the dense forest – partly forested and filled with bush and glades – was proposed for clearing to settle immigrants from Koiwa, east of Chepalungu, strictly under cooperative farms. Area IV, the dense forest was for preservation. As portrayed in the map, the forest was to act as a green barrier against movements of cattle and people up north into the white settler farms. The Kipsigis who lived near the northern border of the forest were to adopt permanent agriculture and controlled cattle farming aimed at restricting their movements into the white settlements. But the segregationist objective

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underlying the mapping was cloaked in a technocratic language used by the veterinary officials. They claimed that the purpose of clearing patches of forests and protecting the dense forest was to create barriers against the encroachment of tsetse flies into the Chepalungu Reserve and Sotik farms.³⁰

Besides clearing bush and protecting the forest, the District Commissioner, A.C. Swann, and the zoologist, Aneurin Lewis, proposed the construction of fences to create a boundary between Sotik settler farm, Chepalungu and Trans-Mara, the fly infested area that fell in Masai land (see Map 1). One fence was to run between Area I and Sotik settler farms, then westwards round the forest, then turn southwards toward the fly infested area, where a fence was to be erected between Area II and III to ‘act as a barrier to fly advance from the pocket in Masai’ (shown in Map 1). Justifying the fencing project, the District Commissioner emphasised that ‘it would help considerably in preventing the spread of trypanosomiasis and reduce the danger to European stock arising from cattle trespass’.³¹

Although the colonial officials attempted to present the scheme in a neutral language, underpinning it was a discourse that depicted the Kipsigis as backward, incompetent and unhygienic. According to this discourse, the Kipsigis, their stock and environment appeared essentially as agents of diseases that threatened the settler world. The discourse explains why, when trypanosomiasis broke out in the two settler farms in Sotik in 1947, even before the zoologists did their survey, the settlers and colonial officials quickly pointed to the Kipsigis reserve as its origin because of the ‘dirty’ stock and unhygienic environment. The available evidence shows that prior to the outbreaks of trypanosomiasis, the settlers had been blaming the Kipsigis herders for outbreaks of other diseases such as rinderpest in their farms. For instance, P. Beaton, a settler, reporting to the District Commissioner about the Kipsigis herders who were trespassing his estate, wrote, ‘Not only do they graze to and from the water, but there are several outbreaks of rinderpest in various bomas and there is no Veterinary or Police control. As you are aware, I am trying to clean this property from a stock point of view, and unchecked movement of dirty stock in this way hardly helps.’³²

The discourse hardly spared the environment of Chepalungu. It presented this environment as disordered so prone to disease infestation, while blaming the Kipsigis herders and farmers. In his criticism of the Kipsigis, Aneurin Lewis, the chief field zoologist wrote, ‘the clearing of forest by the Kipsigis in parts of the Chepalungu has been so haphazard as to create conditions favourable to *G. Pallidipes*’.³³ According to the colonial scientists, the diverse ecosystems in Chepalungu, made of dense forest, grasslands, cultivated fields and bush, resulted from the uncontrolled shifting agriculture and pastoralism. In this context, the policy of clearing and preserving the forest unfolded as a strategy to protect Sotik white settlement by reordering the environment and restricting the Kipsigis’ economic activities that had contributed to the environmental conditions in Chepalungu that, in the opinion of the colonial officials, threatened disease.

In proposing the forest preservation and bush clearing together with the project of creating physical fences in Chepalungu, the colonial officials and scientists essentially aimed to segregate, racially and ethnically. Besides creating physical boundaries, the proposed fences appeared as metaphors for separation, a warning to the potential aggressor that crossing was a trespass. The fences were not just aimed at preventing cattle trespass, but restricting the movement of the Kipsigis across the Sotik farms and Masai land. They were about stock as much as about people. Pushing for colonial government funding for the fencing project, acting District Commissioner, Kericho District, P.W. Low, wrote, 'The Sotik settlers have an extremely difficult time keeping native cattle off their farms. They have suffered heavy losses through the mechanical transmission of disease from native cattle.' He added, 'The provision of the fence would be a sound move politically. Not only would it make the work of this office and the police very much easier, but relationships between the settlers and Kipsigis would improve.'³⁴ The question worth asking is how this fence would have improved relationships between the Kipsigis and white settlers if not used a tool for segregation. The northern fence was to keep the Kipsigis and their 'dirty' stock away from the settler farms, and the southern to keep the Masai and their stock away from Chepalungu. In the latter case, the idea was not to protect the Chepalungu reserve, but the Sotik settler farms. Criticising the proposal to erect a fence between Chepalungu and Trans-Mara, the fly infested area, the Provincial Commissioner of Nyanza Province, K.L. Hunter, insisted that '[t]his fence would not add any protection to the area which is fly infested, but was designed merely as an insurance for [white] farms lying to the north'.³⁵ Besides protecting Sotik farms, the fencing was aimed at separating the Kipsigis of Chepalungu from the Masai in order to prevent the Masai from moving with their cattle into Chepalungu and the Kipsigis from moving into Masailand.

Segregation as a means of ensuring security to the white settlers was not only about creating barriers between the settler farms and the Kipsigis reserve and resettling the Kipsigis on particular spaces. It was also about transforming lives of the Kipsigis. With experiences elsewhere, the colonial officials had realised that segregation could not be achieved by restricting movements alone. In their opinion, the key also lay in spurring development in the African reserves, separate from the white settlement, with the aim of changing African practices that seemed threatening to the settler community. This idea was in fact in accord with the justifications that had earlier been provided for Indirect Rule. As anthropologist Lucy Mair stated in 1936, 'The basic aim of Indirect Rule is the development of African society able to participate in the life of the modern world as a community in its own right.'³⁶

Thus, given the extensive nature of the major occupations of the Kipsigis – shifting cultivation and cattle keeping – in the opinion of the colonial officials, the key to instantiating segregation was to initiate change towards intensive or permanent farming. In proposing to preserve the forest and clear bush, the

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colonial officials intended to stop shifting farming, which had contributed to the open and bushy spaces threatening trypanosomiasis, in order to initiate a transformative process towards permanent agriculture and cattle farming in the Chepalungu reserve. This objective is implied in the chief field zoologist Aneurin Lewis’s justification of the scheme. The scheme, Lewis wrote, was ‘to enable the district team to inculcate the principles of agricultural improvements, prevent haphazard destruction of forest which among other disadvantages will, in this case, attract tsetse; it will also enable the introduction of improvements with regard to stock and stock diseases’.³⁷ This scheme demonstrated how the forest preservation and bush clearing were deployed to transform agriculture and livestock farming.



FIGURE 2. A Part of Chepalungu Forest Reserve and the spaces that have been cleared for settlement, cultivation and grazing of stock since the inception of the Forest Scheme (photograph taken in 2005)

REORDERING CHEPALUNGU AND THE RESHAPING OF THE
FOREST PRESERVATION AND BUSH CLEARING

While the objectives of the forest preservation and bush clearing scheme were to segregate the Kipsigis herders and farmers within and outside Chepalungu and transforming their practices and environment, its implementation unfolded as a process of contests and negotiations among colonial officials, the Kipsigis and the Masai. The policy outcomes at different moments thus exceeded the

decentralised despotism or high modernist perspective on colonial policies. The policy process appeared more complex. It embodied ramifications of struggle between and among the colonial officials and the Kipsigis. Through the struggle, varied interests were not just conflicted, but were intersected as well.

Implementation of the clearing and settlement facet of the scheme began in 1947. It was implemented in two parts using Kipsigis labourers within Chepalungu. The first part covered the areas north and south of the dense forest in the Kipsigis Reserve, and the second concentrated on the southern border of Chepalungu adjoining Trans-Mara, the tsetse infested area (see Map 1). Whereas the first part aimed at clearing the partly forested areas in the Kipsigis Reserve for resettlement of the Kipsigis, the second aimed at clearing a barrier between Trans-Mara and Chepalungu without settlement. The Kipsigis Reserve project started off successfully, but the one near Trans-Mara started spasmodically and then stopped. According to the available evidence, labour seems to have been central in shaping the disparate courses the two parts of the project took.

The central question was whether or not the labour conditions dovetailed with the local Kipsigis ways of using the environment. The Kipsigis made their claims vis-à-vis the scheme on the basis of the utility of the forest environment as a place to live in. Although the scheme in the Kipsigis Reserve aimed at stopping shifting cultivation, paradoxically, the colonial officials implemented it within the context of usufruct rights to land underlined by the view of the forest as a place to live in. In shifting cultivation, individuals or households acquired land rights by clearing bushy areas for cultivation and settlement. Application of labour on a specific land thus conferred ownership rights. When an individual or a household stopped cultivating a piece of land, their claims over the place also ceased, for the land reverted back to grassland or bush, becoming a communal property accessible to members of the community for grazing, hunting, gathering, farming and as a source of wood fuel. Thus the practice did not contradict communal ownership, but operated within the system. Within communalism, individual or household ownership was recognised.³⁸ As Mamdani points out, 'there was no necessary contradiction between notions of community rights and corporate and individual rights: the existence of one did not necessarily preclude that of others'.³⁹

Whereas elsewhere in Africa the colonial land and agricultural policies were implemented on the basis of premises that assumed non-existence of individual ownership in African land tenure, the policy of clearing and settlement in the Kipsigis Reserve of Chepalungu agreed with the usufruct ownership that underlay the practice of shifting cultivation. This overlap contributed to the successful take off of the project. Placed under the management of the African Settlement Board, the project depended on free labour from the Kipsigis who were destined to settle the cleared spaces. Basically, the labourers cleared spaces in which they were to settle in and cultivate. The clearing was done in four-acre blocks, and a family settled in four or five of these blocks.⁴⁰ Writing about the method used

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in this project and the success it had registered by 1951, the District Commissioner, P.G. Tait, stated, ‘I am quite certain that settlement and clearance are the answer here and that we can clear our own side of the border. The clearance that has already been done by settlers here is immense.’⁴¹ This method of clearance and settlement had elements that dovetailed with the usufruct ownership system where individuals gained land rights by clearing bush lands for cultivation or settlement. As the evidence shows, the overlap between this practice and the method adopted for the project contributed to the success of the project in terms of its objective of clearing patches of forests and settling the Kipsigis farmers and herders. The project thus was by no means a product of mere use of force, or submission of the Kipsigis to force for that matter, but rather an expression of overlap between the Kipsigis land use practices and the method of clearing and settlement adopted for the project. But in its objective of transforming shifting cultivation into intensive agriculture, the project contradicted local land use practices. As a result, it generated among the Kipsigis farmers and herders contests for more forestland for cultivation, grazing and settlement that later affected the forest preservation policy. The case shows how the forestry policy was intersected with the policies for labour, agriculture, settlement and stock keeping.

Contrary to what happened in the Kipsigis Reserve, in the southern border of Chepalungu, the project of clearing generated intense contests from both the Kipsigis and Masai, and colonial officials. The contests were over the method that the field zoologist proposed in consultation with the District Commissioner for implementing this project. They opted to use paid labour without any provision for settlement and cultivation rights to labourers. The reason behind this proposal was an assumed fragility of the soil in this area, which according to the colonial officials made this place less conducive for settlement and permanent agriculture. Furthermore, the fact that the site was in the border between Chepalungu and Masailand, and that some of it was in Masailand complicated even more the labour issue for this project, especially in terms of whether the Kipsigis or Masai were to provide labour, under what conditions and how they were to be convinced to do so. The colonial officials had already envisaged difficulty in making the Masai work in the project given their nomadic lifestyle. They thus opted to use labour from the Kipsigis who lived in Chepalungu. But this option presented the problem of convincing the Masai, in case they refused to work, to allow the Kipsigis labourers to work in their territory, and getting the Kipsigis workers, to provide their labour for wages without cultivation rights or a plan for settlement. To resolve this conundrum, the colonial officials convened a joint meeting of the Kipsigis and Masai elders in Gorgor, Chepalungu, in April 1947. The meeting failed to reach a resolution and instead generated further tension between those who attended. The Kipsigis elders insisted their young people would provide labour only if they were allowed to cultivate the land, while the elders from Masailand maintained their preference to clear the

land themselves.⁴² A member for agriculture and natural resources rebutted the position taken by the Kipsigis elders with a caveat. He warned: 'any indication which might be given to the Kipsigis that land could be claimed by them for settlement owing to action taken in clearing bush and preventing regeneration might gravely prejudice the future issue'.⁴³

Because of the difficulty the colonial officials had already experienced in attracting labour for the project, to raise the number of labourers that the project required up to its completion the Provincial Commissioner proposed as an alternative the invoking of the Compulsory Labour Ordinance of 1936. According to the estimation of the District Commissioner, this project required a labour force of between 600 and 1,000 to be completed in one year.⁴⁴ The recruitment of labour was to be done by the District Commissioner with the help of Kipsigis leaders whom the colonial officials considered to be knowledgeable in matters of African 'religion, social life, and agriculture', and thus could provide necessary advice during this exercise.

The labourers drawn from Chepalungu through this exercise, some of whom volunteered, proved futile to the colonial officials in implementing this project. Apart from showing no interest in their work, they proved to be uncontrollable. Expressing his frustrations, the field zoologist, R.B. Power, wrote:

Labour is voluntary only in name i.e. of the 250 men theoretically on clearing, only about 30 are in the least interested in their work or in their pay. The rest are with us only because they have been sent to work by the Administration, or by local Headmen. It is hopeless trying to deal with such labour. They openly refuse to do the work, always reasonable, which they are given, they come to work or stay away as they please and then expect to draw money at the end of the month.⁴⁵

This situation actually speaks less of control than a contest between the labourers and colonial officials just as the field zoologist had realised when he wrote, 'If facts be faced what this amounts to is our paying labour over which neither we, nor the administration have any control.'⁴⁶ Even the colonial officials' attempts to use the colonial legal system to make the Kipsigis labourers work in the project failed. Names of defaulters were submitted to the local tribunal for trial and a return to work plan, but the colonial officials achieved much less with this strategy.

The contests between the labourers and colonial officials were not merely an expression of resistance against the project that the colonial officials had put a lot of effort to legitimise through their propaganda on tsetse flies and trypanosomiasis. Instead they were struggles over meaning and practice. In resisting work, the Kipsigis labourers were essentially involved in a struggle to reconfigure the project in order to fit their ways of using the forest environment. Central in this case was the link between the practice of clearing, cultivation and settlement. The Kipsigis labourers were accustomed to clear land not to earn wages or food rations, but to get a place to cultivate, graze cattle or establish a homestead, in

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other words, a place to live. Contrasting the success achieved in the clearing in the Kipsigis Reserve with the frustrations experienced in Trans-Mara, the field zoologist observed, ‘Settlement have accomplished more in heavy bush and at no cost, in two months in the Kipsigis Reserve with labour that is willing, than we accomplished in 6 months in 1950 at a cost of nearly 3,000 [pounds].’⁴⁷ In the same vein, in explaining the attitude of the Kipsigis labourers to paid labour, the District Commissioner, P. Tait, noted sarcastically that the Kipsigis ‘is much more concerned with his cattle and crops. Money is of little real interest hence the preference for working for settlement’.⁴⁸ These observations indicate that in making claims for cultivation rights and settlement in exchange for labour, the Kipsigis labourers were basically adapting the project into their perception of the forested environment as a place to live. The project was significantly reconfigured in the process.

Because the project in Trans-Mara contradicted local practices, its failure was inevitable without an agreement between the colonial officials, the Kipsigis labourers, and the Masai who owned the majority of the land. Convinced of the unfeasibility of gaining Masai acceptance to the Kipsigis settlement in Trans Mara, the colonial officials proposed to either use outside labour or improve the conditions for the available workers.⁴⁹ Adoption of the latter bore no fruits, for despite the efforts to improve labour conditions by purchasing new tools and increasing food rations and wages, the project ground to a halt in April 1951. The field zoologist reported, ‘We had no labour what-so-ever working in Masai [the Trans-Mara site] during March, with the result that not only has Fly clearing been at a standstill, but also breeding site clearing.’⁵⁰

The methods that the colonial officials adopted for the clearing project after this failure resulted not only from the contests over the site, but also change that occurred in the physical site. Having surveyed the area and seen that places cleared earlier had, during the period the project stopped, regenerated into bush, the chief field zoologist feared that that these bush might generate disease. He decided to allow the Kipsigis labourers to enter this area only for a period of 3 years for cultivation purpose, something that he and other colonial officials had vehemently objected to before. He, however, allowed cultivation to take place with certain conditions.⁵¹ ‘The cultivators would live in the Kipsigis Reserve and cross the border only for cultivation.’ No huts were to be constructed in the area and no stock taken there for grazing. Apart from being screened by the District Commissioner and Agricultural Officer, the cultivators had to sign a written agreement that they would leave the area at the end of the period laid down.

Of note in this case is that the policy of clearing patches of forests that aimed at controlling movements of the Kipsigis, Masai, and their stock between Masailand and Chepalungu created instead a physical space that generated contests between the Kipsigis, Masai and colonial officials not only over labour, but also over the control and use of the site. These contests, for the most part, resulted from the disjuncture between the Kipsigis land use practices and the method

adopted for the project, as well as the interethnic tensions that the project engendered. By making claims for land rights, the Kipsigis labourers were essentially engaged in the process of reshaping the project to fit their practices and interests. In the process, the Kipsigis and Masai struggled among themselves and with the colonial officials. The policy adopted later for this project that allowed the Kipsigis labourers to cultivate the site, resulted from the struggle. Although the policy was a colonial initiative, its contested implementation transformed it into an ensemble of varied interests and practices of the Kipsigis labourers and the colonial officials. Thus, the processes that shaped its implementation were more complex than the mere control ascribed generally to imperial policies.⁵²

FOREST PRESERVATION AND CONSTRUCTION OF FENCES

The other facets of the scheme included forest preservation and construction of fences. Earlier in the 1930s the Forest Department had proposed the preservation of the dense forest measuring 50,000 acres but with conditions less restrictive on local use than those its officials later proposed in the 1940s. In the 1930s, the Kipsigis herders and farmers were allowed to graze cattle and sheep and harvest honey, but were prohibited from residing in the forest.⁵³ Yet even with such concessions they opposed the colonial officials' proposal to protect the forest.⁵⁴ In the 1940s the objective of preserving the forest shifted to transforming the extensive agro-pastoral activities in Chepalungu and creating a hygienic environment by restricting human and stock movements into the white settler farms. To achieve this objective, the zoologists and District Commissioner proposed maintenance of an undisturbed dense forest, which was to involve outlawing activities that in the opinion of the colonial officials disturbed the equilibrium of the forest. Justifying the scheme, the District Commissioner stated, 'Open country or thick forest are said to be effective fly-barriers. It is therefore proposed to keep a large L-shaped block of thick forest in the centre and to clear systematically the inner and outer perimeter and settle them.'⁵⁵ The shift in the objectives of the forestry policy resulted from the fear of disease that had engulfed the settler community in the 1940s. It influenced colonial officials and zoologists to propose preservation to create an environment that approximated the colonial imageries of hygiene and a barrier as an insurance of health and social security to the settler community.

Just as the project of clearing generated disagreements among colonial officials and the Kipsigis, as well as the Masai, so too did preservation and construction of fences. In the case of fence construction, the Provincial and District Commissioners disagreed on the objectives of the project and the modalities of its funding. The District Commissioner fully supported the project and proposed that the African Settlement Board should fund it because it 'would help considerably in preventing the spread of trypanosomiasis and reduce the danger to European

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stock arising from cattle trespass’.⁵⁶ In response, the Provincial Commissioner disputed the notion that this fence would prevent the spread of tsetse flies from the fly infested area. He wrote that this ‘fence would not add any protection to the area which is fly infested, but was designed merely as an insurance for farms lying to the north [white settler farms]’. And on that note, he insisted that ‘it could not therefore be justified as a charge against the African Settlement and Land Utilization Board Funds’.⁵⁷ Furthermore, he doubted if this fence would be effective in achieving its objective if erected, for ‘any person determined to move stock illicitly would not hesitate to cut the fence’.⁵⁸ As a result of his views, the colonial government declined to fund the construction of the fence. The project stalled until February 1949 when R.R.E. Livingstone-Bussel, a settler in Sotik, agreed to provide funds. The fence, however, did not stop interactions and movements between the Kipsigis and Masai. Its porosity allowed them to move back and forth between Masailand and Chepalungu beyond the watch of the colonial officials.⁵⁹ It revealed the fissures that existed within the colonial administration, as well as the influence that the settlers had over colonial administrators that showed how power was differentially diffused in the colonial domain. The fissures and power differentials compromised legitimacy of the project among colonial officials, which attenuated the project’s implementation and impact on the Kipsigis.

On the forest preservation, the colonial officials from the civil administration and Forest Department differed over the method to be used, while the Kipsigis elites, farmers and herders contested the project on different grounds. Having failed to figure into the clearing project, the Forest Department attempted to take centre stage in the planning and implementation of this project. The conservator of forests proposed that the forest be protected as a Native Forest Reserve under the Forest Ordinance. According to the ordinance, management of forests was supposed to be under the Forest Department. Aware that adoption of the proposal would lead to complete usurpation of control of the forest by the Forest Department, the Local Native Council (LNC), whose membership included local chiefs and elders and the District Commissioner as its president, opposed it. LNC members instead demanded that the forest be made a Local Native Council Forest. According to A.C. Swann, the District Commissioner, the Kipsigis members of LNC opposed the proposal because of ‘a deep rooted dislike and distrust of the Forest Department’, which resulted from their fear that they would lose use and control of the forest if the Forest Department took over its management.⁶⁰ Although the local chiefs and elders supported the idea of protecting the forest, they demanded that they be allowed to make the rules guiding the management of the forest, and that the policy be implemented with certain concessions to the Kipsigis farmers and herders with regard to the use of the forest, which included honey harvesting and grazing of cattle.⁶¹ Whereas the conservator of forest opposed this idea of preserving the forest as a Local Native Council Forest, the District and Provincial Commissioners fully supported

it, not for the interests of the Kipsigis, but as a strategy to legitimise the project in the eyes of the Kipsigis.⁶² Yet, the District Commissioner sought legitimacy not just for the preservation of the forest, but so that he, as the president of the LNC, not the Forest Department, could gain control over the management of the forest. There was thus a struggle between the District Commissioner, Forest Department, and the Kipsigis members of the LNC over control of the forest, each fighting for legitimacy to exercise this control. Whereas the local Kipsigis elites who included elders and chiefs compromised with the colonial officials, farmers and herders contested the policy because of its restriction on their use of the forest resources.

These struggles contributed to the abandonment of the earlier proposal to preserve the forest under the Forest Ordinance and to the adoption of the proposal to preserve it as an LNC Forest in order to legitimise the forestry policy. Evident in this case is how legitimacy was not an objective that the colonial state uniformly pursued. The struggle for legitimacy was variegated among the colonial officials, each one of them pursuing it for personal interests, not those of the state, especially as for this case where controlling the forest would include issuance of licenses for specific uses of the forest. The Forest Department lost this battle, while the District Commissioner gained the upper hand after siding with the demands of the LNC members who, as representatives of the colonial government, also attempted to gain legitimacy from the Kipsigis farmers and herders by at least fighting for concessions that seemed to be in the interest of the local community. In April 1949, the LNC passed a resolution that declared Chepalungu an LNC Forest. According to the resolution, the LNC had to make By Laws for the protection and control of the forest, implying that the elders and chiefs would be included in the process. The District Commissioner regarded the LNC resolution as a huge success, for it marked, as he stated, 'the successful climax of 4 years' battle'.⁶³

But that was not the end of the battle over the forest. For although the forest was placed under the management of the LNC, the laws that guided its management restricted local forest use, save for honey collecting, which continued because it benefited settlers and colonial officials.⁶⁴ The laws outlawed cutting of trees, cultivation, grazing and hunting in the forest. As a result, from a socialised space, the forest was turning into an alienated device, a green wall, for preventing movements of the Kipsigis herders, farmers and their stock, in order to secure the white settler farms. The forest morphed into a fence, both real and metaphorical; real in terms of its new utility as a physical barrier, and metaphorical in the new meanings and unfamiliar images of restriction that it evoked among the Kipsigis farmers and herders. Despite these changes, outside the watch of forest guards the Kipsigis continued to use the forest for firewood, honey and poles. But arrests by the forest guards threatened serious punishment.

The economic and ecological changes that resulted from the preservation, intensive agriculture and cattle farming implemented in Chepalungu increased

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demands for the forestland. By 1949 overstocking had become a major problem in Chepalungu. It was, however, not the result of an actual increase in stock population, but a decrease in the capacity of the available grazing land. Most of the land had been alienated as part of the forest, and the rest put into cultivation. The land that remained for grazing cattle could thus hardly cater to the available stock. Figures are, unfortunately, not available to show this decrease in land capacity in the 1950s, but one can tease out it from an observation that the Works Supervisor for Development, Officer, J. de Delmege, made in 1949. He wrote, ‘The Kipsigis cattle have deteriorated enormously within the last two years or so, and their cattle nowadays are stunted, small framed, and generally of low constitution.’ He explained that ‘This is probably due to the great increase of cultivation and the stock population, lack of water and controlled grazing, inbreeding and overstocking.’⁶⁵ Evident in this statement are the effects of increase of cultivation and controlled grazing within the context of limited land. Controlled grazing and its effects on cattle farming adversely impacted the area, for young men who were once involved in grazing found themselves idle, having the option of either helping in cultivation, which was already doing poorly due to depletion of soil fertility and limited land, or moving out of Chepalungu in search of employment. About three quarters of my interviewees in Chepalungu who were born in the 1930s and were in their late teens in the 1950s migrated during this period to urban centres and settler farms to look for better lives. Most of them got jobs as squatters and houseboys in settler farms and urban centres. As they pointed out, the situation in the villages was becoming tough, so they had to leave Chepalungu to look for ways to survive.⁶⁶ The loss of labour, as the result of the rural-urban migration, combined with the problems of limited land, low food production and decrease in stock, left the locals with no option but to contest the preservation and demand repossession of the forest.

Apart from the difficulties experienced in agriculture and livestock farming, the alienation of the forest also led to dearth of food and a reduction of wealth in Chepalungu. As a reservoir of food that the Kipsigis farmers and herders turned to during periods of low food production, preservation of the forest left the locals without recourse during hard times. It also changed the ecology of the forest, affecting not only the local economy, but also local perceptions of the forest. The population of wild animals increased following the restriction on hunting activities and human movements in the forest. Not only did these animals become a big threat to villagers and stock; they also wreaked havoc on local farms.⁶⁷ Furthermore, criminals, especially stock thieves, also found the forest to be a strategic hideout, a place from which they launched raids on the villages and retreated when pursued.⁶⁸ The forest for once became an unfamiliar physical space, withdrawn from the Kipsigis, not a place to live, but a place where dangers that threatened the locals lurked.

To eradicate these dangers, the Kipsigis farmers and herders demanded the whole forest for settlement, cultivation and grazing purposes. Members of the

Kipsigis County Council led farmers and herders in this struggle. The clerk of the council, S. Soi, sent several petitions to the colonial government demanding the whole forest. Although the Kipsigis' struggle for the forest intensified in the 1950s when Mau Mau war arose in Central Kenya, no evidence appeared during this research, linking directly the two struggles. The struggles, however, represented Africans' adjustments to colonial agrarian and land policies and attempts to regain their control over land. In Chepalungu, the Kipsigis' demands forced the colonial government to ask the Director of East African Agriculture and Forestry Research Organization, E. W. Russel, to visit the Chepalungu Forest Reserve to determine 'probable hydrological consequences of excising a portion of the northern part of the Reserve for settlement'.⁶⁹ From the survey he conducted in 1960, Russel concluded, 'As far as I can judge the excision would have little effect on the water supplies of the region and I can find no important hydrological reason for maintaining the forest.'⁷⁰ The Kipsigis leaders appropriated and deployed Russel's findings to beef up their arguments against the preservation of the forest. In response, in 1962 the colonial government agreed to degazette 12,906 acres of the forest – almost half of it – for use by the Kipsigis. One might simply attribute the policy shift to the national decolonisation process taking place in Kenya during this period. Yet that generalises a process shaped by varied factors, for whereas forests preserved in the country during the colonial period remained untouched, almost half of Chepalungu forest was opened up for local use. The shift in the policy punctuated the struggle by the Kipsigis herders, farmers, and a part of their elites to counterorder what the colonial officials had attempted to reorder since the 1940s.

CONCLUSION

This article has shown that the forestry and bush clearing policy implemented in Chepalungu from the 1940s was a product of the conflicts that had been taking place between white settlers and the Kipsigis herders and farmers over grazing lands and water points as early as the 1930s. The conflicts were no less social than ecological. They were underlain by the discourse that painted the Kipsigis, their stock, and environment as agents of disease that threatened the colonists' settlement. Within this discourse, settlers viewed contacts with the Kipsigis and their stock as a means of spreading disease into the white settlement. To the settlers and some colonial officials, the solution to these threats laid in segregation and transformation of Kipsigis' cultivation, livestock farming and the environment, which in the white settlers' opinion harboured disease vectors.

The forestry and bush clearing policy was central in the pursuit of these objectives. As this article has shown, the clearing and preservation were implemented to create spaces for the sedentarisation process and to create a barrier to secure the white settlement. By no means has this paper trivialised the effects

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of the fear of disease in the formulation of the policy. Rather, it has underlined the centrality of the social conflicts and considered the fear of disease as a tool that the colonial officials deployed to legitimise the policy not just in the eyes of the Kipsigis, but those of the white settlers. The formulation of the policy, however, demonstrated intricate linkages between the policy for forests, agriculture, settlement, livestock, health and labour. Thus, forestry in Chepalungu was not just about trees, but appeared as an embodiment of the linkages between livestock, people, trees, insects and microorganisms.

Although the objective of the policy to segregate the Kipsigis, its implementation provided a picture that speaks not of mere control or resistance, but contests and negotiations that stemmed from conflicting and intersecting interests and practices. I have argued in this context that the successful take off of the clearing and settlement in the Kipsigis Reserve hardly resulted from the mere use of force or the submission of the Kipsigis labourers to the colonial state. Instead, it unfolded as an intersection between Kipsigis land and forest use practices and the method adopted for clearing, which provided settlement and cultivation rights to labourers. By contrast, the clearing project in the southern part of Chepalungu near Trans-Mara stalled as the result of the disjuncture between Kipsigis land use practices and the method of paid labour adopted for the project. The policy that colonial officials later adopted for the clearing embodied the contests that sprung up from this disjuncture and the success of the Kipsigis labourers in bending the project in order to fit their practices and interests. The same process characterised the declaration of the area as a Local Native Council Forest Reserve and not as a Native Forest Reserve under the management of the Forest Department. This decision resulted from contests among colonial officials, Kipsigis farmers and herders and their leaders over control of the forest. In this case, the need among the colonial officials to legitimise the policy in the eyes of the Kipsigis to ensure its sustainability led to the decision to place the management of the forest in the hands of the Local Native Council. Yet the rules that were adopted for the management of the forest were quite the opposite of what the nomenclature LNC Forest stood for. Instead of protecting the forest by considering interest of the farmers and herders, local forest uses were restricted and this generated further contests among the farmers and herders and their elders for the forest. In response, the colonial government gave back 12,906 acres of the forest to the Kipsigis for cultivation, grazing and settlement. A large part of the forest remained under preservation, but the giving back of a portion of the forest to the Kipsigis claimants marked a compromise between the Kipsigis old view of the forest as a place to live and the official view of forest as a resource to be preserved.

Despite the compromises struck between the Kipsigis and colonial officials, this paper by no means claims a balance of power between the colonial officials and the Kipsigis. Instead, it points to the fact that the differentiated nature of the colonial administration and difference within the Kipsigis community, on the one

hand diffused power among the colonial officials, weakening the effect of the colonial administration, and on the other, prevented collective resistance among the Kipsigis. The differentiations generated the contests among and between the colonial officials and the Kipsigis over control of the environment. They contested and bargained over the preservation and bush clearing, contributing to the conflicted and entangled processes that constituted the policy at different times.

Because of the interconnected economic and ecological impacts of the preservation and bush clearing, the Kipsigis struggled to reclaim the whole forest. The transformation of farming and alienation of the forest contributed to depletion of soil fertility and reduced the capacity of the land to sustain stock. The changes increased dearth of food as much as they reduced wealth valued in stock. It appeared ironic to the Kipsigis that they lacked places to cultivate and herd while the forest earlier open for use remained protected as a Forest Reserve. As a corollary, they persistently claimed the whole forest in order to get land for settlement, cultivation and grazing stock, utilities that reflected the old perception of forest as a place to live in. In this struggle, the Kipsigis were essentially involved in the process of counterordering what the colonial officials had attempted to reorder in Chepalungu through the Forest and Bush Clearing Scheme.

NOTES

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¹ William Beinart, 'Social Erosion, Conservationism and Ideas about Development: Southern African Exploration, 1900–1960', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, **11**, 1 (1984): 52–83. See also David Anderson and Richard Grove, *Conservation in Africa: Peoples, Policies, and Practice* (Cambridge University Press, 1989); Richard Grove, 'Scottish Missionaries, Evangelical Discourses and the Origin of Conservation Thinking in Southern Africa, 1820–1900', *Journal of Southern African History*, **15** (1989): 163–87; William Beinart, *The Rise of Conservation Politics in South Africa: Settlers, Livestock, and the Environment 1770–1750* (Oxford University Press, 2003).

² James Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998). Anderson and Grove, *Conservation in Africa*.

³ Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizens and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (Princeton University Press, 1996).

⁴ Scott, *Seeing Like a State*.

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⁵ Ian Phimister, ‘Discourse and the Discipline of Historical Context: Conservationism and Ideas about Development in Southern Rhodesia 1930–1950’, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, **12**, 2 (1996): 263–75, p. 275.

⁶ See John Ford, *The Role of Trypanosomiasis in African Ecology: A Study of the Tsetse-Fly Problem* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971); James Giblin, *The Politics of Environmental Control in Northeastern Tanzania, 1840–1940* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992). Giblin focuses on the political-economic changes resulting from colonialism that contributed to the rise of trypanosomiasis epidemic. See also Richard Waller, ‘Tsetse Fly in Western Narok, Kenya’, *The Journal of African History*, **31** (1990): 81–101. Waller is concerned with socio-ecological factors – intra-social conflicts and vegetation change (re-growth of bush environment) – that contributed to the rise of trypanosomiasis epidemic in Narok. Also see Maryinez Lyons, *The Colonial Disease: A Social History of Sleeping Sickness in Northern Zaire, 1900–1940* (Cambridge University Press, 1992).

⁷ Kirk Arden Hoppe, *Lords of the Fly: Sleeping Sickness Control in British East Africa, 1900–1960* (Westport: Praeger, 2003), 4; Tamara Giles-Vernick, *Cutting the Vines of the Past: Environmental History of the Central Africa Rain Forest* (University of Virginia Press, 2002); Jacob A. Tropp, *Natures of Colonial Change: Environmental Relations in the Making of the Transkei* (Ohio University Press, 2006).

⁸ This idea was also expressed by David Lang’at, a researcher with the Kenya Forestry Research Institute based in Londiani, in January, 2006. He hails from Chepalungu.

⁹ Kenya National Archives (KNA), PC/NZA/11/7, District Commissioner A.C. Swan’s report to the Provincial Commissioner, September 17, 1947; KNA, PC/NZA/3/11/9, Assistant Conservator R.L. Porter’s letter to the Conservator of Forests, April 17, 1940.

¹⁰ The idea of forest being a reservoir during times of scarcity in food came from an interview I had with Simeon Rono in August 2005. During such times, the forest became a source of root tubers such as yams and arrowroots, wild plants and animals, and honey.

¹¹ My interviewees stated that *oosnet* referred to open landscape – a place to live. To live in here means to settle in and utilise. In this case, there was no distinction between nature and society. People considered themselves part of nature and nature as part of them, and this perception shaped ways in which they related to all aspects of nature.

¹² PC/NZA/3/11/9, Report on safari carried out by My J.B.S. Lockhart, District Officer, August 24, 1938.

¹³ Ian Orchardson, *The Kipsigis* (Nairobi: The Eagle Press, 1961).

¹⁴ Nancy Jacobs, ‘The Flowing Eye: Water Management in the Upper Kuruman Valley, South Africa, c. 1800–1962’, *The Journal of African History*, **37**, 2 (1996): 237–60.

¹⁵ John Kiprotich, September 2005. He narrated how during dry periods the rivers in Chepalungu dried and they would take their cattle to Kerongit permanent spring in Sotik for water.

¹⁶ The linkage between race and colonial rule is emphasised in Mamdani, *Citizens and Subject*; Nancy Jacobs, *Environment, Power, and Injustice: A South African History* (Cambridge University Press, 2003); Fiona D. Mackenzie, ‘Betterment and the Gendered Politics of Maize Production, Murang’a District, Central Province, Kenya, 1880–1952’, *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, **33**, 1 (1999): 64–97.

¹⁷ KNA, PC/NZA/3/11/9, District Officer’s letter to the District Commissioner, Kericho, December 23, 1938.

¹⁸ KNA, PC/NZA/3/11/9, District Officer's letter to the District Commissioner, Kericho, December 23, 1938.

¹⁹ KNA, PC/NZA/3/11/9, K. Beaton's letter to the District Commissioner, Kericho, October 15, 1938.

²⁰ Richard Waller studied expansion of tsetse fly in this region in the period, 1900–1950. He argues that depopulation, resulting from rinderpest pandemic reduced pastoral activities which had earlier kept the environment under human control. As a result, bush and fly expanded into areas which were formerly settled by the Masai and used as grazing fields. For details see Waller, 'Tsetse Fly'. James Giblin has also made this argument linking tsetse fly expansion to loss of human control over environment in his study of Northeastern Tanzania. While to Waller, the loss of human control over environment resulted from the impact of Rinderpest pandemic on Masai population, to Giblin, it was a manifestation of loss of political control over environment. See Giblin, *The Politics of Environmental Control*.

²¹ KNA, PC/NZA/2/14/63, Aneurin Lewis's report on Tsetse-fly situation in Chepalungu, December 20, 1946.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ KNA, PC/NZA 3/ 11/7, E. Aneurin Lewis, Chief Field Zoologist, December 20, 1946.

²⁶ KNA, PC/NZA 3/ 11/7, The Provincial Agrarian Development officer's letter to the Commissioner, African Land and Settlement, 1948.

²⁷ KNA PC/NZA 3/11/7, A.C. Swann's letter to the Provincial Commissioner, Nyanza Province, September 17, 1947.

²⁸ KNA, PC/NZA 3/ 11/7, The Provincial Agrarian Development Officer's letter to the Commissioner, African Land and Settlement, 1948.

²⁹ Scott, *Seeing Like a State*, p. 87.

³⁰ KNA, PC/NZA3/11/7, conservation and forestry, Nyanza Reserves, South Lumbwa, Chepalungu, 1946–1950.

³¹ KNA, PC/NZA 3/11/7, A.C. Swann's letter to the Provincial Commissioner, Nyanza Province, May 4, 1948.

³² KNA, PC/NZA/3/13/25, P. Beaton's letter to Swann, the District Commissioner, November 15, 1938.

³³ KNA, PC/NZA/2/14/63, Aneurin Lewis's report on Tsetse-fly situation in Chepalungu, December 20, 1946.

³⁴ PC/NZA3/11/7, P.W. Low's, acting District Commissioner, letter to the Provincial Commissioner, May 4, 1948.

³⁵ KNA, PC/NZA 3/11/7, Minutes of the proceedings of the Provincial Team assembled in the Provincial Commissioner's Office, January 10, 1948.

³⁶ Quoted in Jesse C. Ribot, 'Decentralization, participation and Accountability in Sahelian Forestry: Legal Instruments of Political-Administrative Control', *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, 69, 1 (1999), 26. Also see Mackenzie, 'Betterment'.

³⁷ KNA, PC/NZA 3/ 11/7, E. Aneurin Lewis, Chief Field Zoologist, December 20, 1946.

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³⁸ Pauline E. Peters also makes this point in regard to Botswana where colonial officials misunderstood local land tenure by assuming that it was all, but communal. Pauline Peters, *Dividing the Commons: Politics, Policy and Culture in Botswana* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1994), 10; also see Mamdani, 139; David M. Gordon, *Nachituti's Gift: Economy, Society, and Environment in Central Africa* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006).

³⁹ Mamdani, *Citizens and Subject*, 139.

⁴⁰ KNA, PC/NZA/ 2/14/63, Senior Veterinary Officer, R.A. Hammond's letter to the District Commissioner, October 19, 1946.

⁴¹ KNA, PC/NZA/ 2/14/63, the District Commissioner, P. Tait's letter to the Provincial Commissioner, February 5, 1951.

⁴² KNA, PC/NZA/ 2/14/63, the District Commissioner, A.C. Swann's letter to the Provincial Commissioner, April 3, 1947.

⁴³ KNA, PC/NZA/ 2/14/63, A member of Agriculture and Natural Resources' letter to the Provincial Commissioner, May 15, 1947. His signature is unreadable, so I could not figure out his name. Agriculture and Natural Resources was a department within the executive.

⁴⁴ KNA, PC/NZA/ 2/14/63, the District Commissioner, P.W. Low's letter to the Provincial Commissioner, October 18, 1948.

⁴⁵ KNA, PC/NZA/ 2/14/63, field zoologist's letter to the chief zoologist, February 1, 1951.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ KNA, PC/NZA/ 2/14/63, field zoologist's letter to the chief zoologist, February 1, 1951.

⁴⁸ KNA, PC/NZA/2/1/43, the District Commissioner's letter to the chief field zoologist, April 15, 1951.

⁴⁹ KNA, PC/NZA/2/1/43, field zoologist's letter to the chief zoologist, February 1, 1951.

⁵⁰ KNA, PC/NZA/2/1/43, field zoologist letter to the chief field zoologist, April 3, 1951.

⁵¹ KNA, PC/NZA/2/1/43, chief field zoologist report (undated).

⁵² See Scott.

⁵³ KNA, PC/NZA/ 3/ 11/9, Assistant Conservator of Forest to the Conservator of Forest, April 17, 1940.

⁵⁴ KNA, PC/NZA/3/11/9, Provincial Commissioner's letter to the Conservator of Forests, April 17, 1940.

⁵⁵ KNA, PC/NZA/11/7, minutes of a meeting held by the District Team, Kericho District, September 17, 1947.

⁵⁶ KNA PC/NZA/3/11/7, District Commissioner's letter to the Provincial Commissioner, May 10, 1948.

⁵⁷ KNA PC/NZA/3/11/7, Minutes of the Proceedings of the Provincial Team Assembled in the Provincial Commissioner's Offices (Undated).

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Interview with Cheruyiot, September 2005. He narrated how despite the construction of the fence, they continued to trade, visit and even intermarry with the Masai.

⁶⁰ KNA, PC/NZA/3/11/7, Nyanza Forest Reserve, 1946–1950.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² KNA, PC/NZA/3/11/7, Conservator of Forest's letter to the Provincial Commissioner, June 30, 1949. The Conservator stated in regard to the proposal for an LNC Forest that it did not seem to him 'possible for the area to be proclaimed a Native Forest Reserve under the Forest Ordinance and yet not be fully protected under the various clauses in that Ordinance'.

⁶³ KNA, PC/NZA/3/11/7, Kipsigis Local Native Council meeting held at Kericho, April 1, 1949.

⁶⁴ KNA, PC/NZA/3/11/7, Schedule 1 to Forest Resolution 1, Kitui Local Native Council Forest Rules, 1949. The same rules that were used in Kitui in the eastern region of Kenya were applied in Chepalungu Forest.

KNA, PC/NZA/3/11/9, assistant agricultural officer P.P. Bickber's letter to the to the District Commissioner, April 27, 1939. In the letter, the agricultural officer indicated that in 1938, the value of honey exports from Chepalungu could be estimated at 2,000 pounds compared to the exports of the precedent years, which ranged between 4,000 to 5,000 pounds.

KNA, PC/NZA/3/11/9, assistant conservator's letter to the Conservator of Forest, April 17, 1940. The Conservator indicated in 1940 that honey industry brought about 70,000 Kenya Shillings to the 'inhabitants' of Chepalungu. The Kipsigis harvested the honey from the forest and sold it to settlers living in Sotik settlement and sometimes to outlying markets in Kericho district.

⁶⁵ KNA, PC/NZA/2/14/63, Report for Sotik-Chepalungu Betterment Scheme for the Months of April/May, 1949.

⁶⁶ Interviews with Rono, Cheruiyot, Kiprotich, Kirui, September 2005.

⁶⁷ Interview with Cheruiyot, September 2005. Also in KNA, BA/6/34, K.A. Ng'etich, County Council of Kipsigis, January 26, 1974. In this memorandum, Ng'etich recapitulates the history of the Forest Reserve and the issues that generated demands for the excision of the whole forest.

⁶⁸ KNA, BA/6/34, K.A. Ng'etich, County Council of Kipsigis, January 26, 1974.

⁶⁹ KNA, BA/6/34, Report by E. W. Russell, Director of East African Agriculture and Forestry Research Organization, 1960.

⁷⁰ Ibid.