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The Imperial Lightning Rod: Competing Visions of Race and Labor among Colonial Kenya's Failed Settlement Schemes, 1870-1939

By

Calvin Scott Paulson

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

History

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in Charge:

Professor James Vernon, Chair

Professor Tabitha Kanogo

Professor Bruce Hall

Professor Sharad Chari

Summer 2026

Abstract

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The racialized political economy of British East Africa (today Kenya) was based upon a precarious foundation of unsustainable land speculation. Meanwhile, what production occurred depended upon the labor of Africans who were often forced to sell their labor or squat on European estates. Thus, the glamorous "Happy Valley" image which typified colonial Kenya was a precarious illusion sustained by generations of land speculation, colonial violence, and forced labor. This dissertation analyzes how this illusion was constructed and reconfigured by examining as cultural artifacts the many failed attempts by people around the world to profitably annex, subdivide, and allocate land in colonial Kenya. These failed settlement schemes were acts of economic as well as cultural speculation. Each settlement scheme was its own act of imaginative worldbuilding, an attempt to imagine a new colonial society. These societies varied widely from a Zionist state in the Kenyan highlands, to a fully mechanized socialist utopia, to an aristocratic society of masters and servants, to a confederation of agricultural cooperatives and beyond, each a testament to the breadth of visions and fantasies which could be projected upon a single British settler colony. Some were proposed sincerely, some were merely confidence tricks, yet all these imaginary societies reflected the political economy they hoped to (re)shape. Yet as the lands available for speculation dwindled and the white settler population proved itself an unreliable partner for the colonial state, the form of the settlement schemes changed from more utopian visions of expansive new settler states to a more laundered, developmental vision of white settlement which was calibrated to assure the colonial state that the failing project of white settlement deserved further public support despite ongoing anticolonial resistance and economic depression. Read together, colonial Kenya's expansive archive of failed settlement schemes demonstrates the protean nature of whiteness in the 'white man's country' and how definitions of whiteness, imperial citizenship, and development were constantly reconfigured as the colony's speculative political economy evolved.

For Matthew and Pan

Acknowledgements

The best, and first, advice I ever received when coming to graduate school from my advisor James Vernon was this: “Treat this program like a job. And like any job, make sure you carve out a life for yourself outside of the program, no matter how much pressure you feel not to.” As with all the other advice I’ve gotten from James over the years, these words were exactly what I needed to hear, exactly when I needed to hear them. This dissertation is the largest and most demanding single project I have ever undertaken. It owes its existence to many long years of study, research, and collaboration with a broad range of extraordinarily talented people within the academy. Yet it also owes its existence to the family and found family I have been fortunate to have outside of the academy’s walls, without whom none of my scholarship would be possible or worthwhile.

I am remarkably fortunate to have had a network of mentors who, like James, have helped me develop as both a scholar and a person. My committee members Tabitha Kanogo, Bruce Hall, and Sharad Chari have been invaluable at each step of this process. Each was generous enough to share with me not only their knowledge but also their passion for this discipline, and I have savored every long chat in their offices and every book they have offered me from their overstuffed shelves. Whether chatting about Stan Rogers in Bruce’s backyard, gushing about *Moby Dick* with Sharad, or qualifying-exam-prep-turned-riveting-conversation with Tabitha, I have never walked away from a meeting with any of them without feeling more passionate, and more fulfilled as a historian. I also want to thank Julie Aranda, our department’s tireless graduate advisor, for her willingness to answer so many of my panicked emails and anxious follow-ups. I am also deeply indebted to Trevor Jackson for his ongoing stewardship of the Berkeley History Department’s ‘foundling hospital’ (i.e. professional development programming for graduate students). He is a valued mentor who did much to demystify an ever-mystifying job market for me and for many others at Cal.

I also owe much to Jordanna Bailkin, Lynn Thomas, Taylor Soja, Laurie Marhoefer, and Charity Urbanski for nurturing and supporting my love of history as an undergraduate. Lynn’s African survey class was what first drew me to this research. The cup of tea she served me during her office hours years ago, and the sense of warmth and collegiality that small gesture gave an insecure undergraduate, is why I always have a pot of tea for my students whenever they come to my office hours. Jordanna, beyond writing the letter of recommendation which likely got me into Berkeley, was also a rigorous and generous advisor for my undergraduate thesis and did much to instill in me a passion for British history. Charity’s warmth, humor, and love of storytelling did so much to shape both my desire to become an educator and how I conduct myself in a classroom. And Taylor guided me through each step of the graduate application process with an unmatched level of kindness, generosity, and patience.

Then, James. I’m at a loss to express the profound impact James has had on my life, as a scholar, as a mentor, and most importantly as a friend. Through tireless scholarship and organizing James has built a lasting community of historians who embody his principles of mutual support, aid, and committed scholarly activism targeting the social ills of the present. Eva Vaillancourt, Claire Wrigley, Penny Ismay, Arianne Chernock, and Trevor Jackson welcomed me into this community and I am so honored to be a part of it. In his capacity as my advisor James’

first concern was always my well-being, and his main focus was always bent towards making this program useful to me whatever professional aspirations I pursued. James somehow managed to guide me through the dizzying administrative minutiae of a graduate program while also instilling in me the value of this work, and how to share that value with others. James taught me how to do this work healthily and sustainably, rather than view it as a metonym for my own self-worth. He valued my work, yet he also always valued me. It is a trite thing to say that "I couldn't have done this without him", yet that is very literally true here. I do not know if I would have survived this program without James' support. I do not have the words to express the depth of my gratitude to him.

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And beyond the academy I have had an invaluable foundation of support in my very queer found family. Whether we were sharing a movie, road tripping to a ghost town, catching a baseball game, roleplaying, brainstorming new art projects, or just savoring each other's company over tea, Collin, Ember, Jinny, Nooah, Klaus, Tam, Jack, and Rowan have brought so much joy into my life. Each of them have sustained me, shown a deep love for my work, and

also taught me how to set it aside when needed. With Jinny and Nooah as roleplaying partners I've gotten to travel to imaginary worlds and go on wonderous adventures that I will never forget. Collin and Ember effortlessly exemplify what it is to truly love art, to love the making of it, and to make community through art. Tam taught me how to love a stage play, and took me to some of the best I've ever seen. Rowan and Klaus taught me to see art and beauty in the world around me, whether in the flutter of a bird's wings or in the glinting of light on a fish's scales. And Jack, all those years ago, showed me that I really could be a storyteller if I wanted to be one. Together they have been a font of love which has sustained me throughout the whole of this program. Between us there are too many joys to name.

Then, there is my family. Without my mom I would never have had the deep passion for history which drew me to this work. Without my dad I wouldn't have the humor and the storytelling skills which have sustained me whether in the classroom or on the road. Without my brother Spencer by my side every step of the way I would never have pursued graduate school, nor succeeded in it. Ever since I was a child I have been in awe of his brilliance, and he remains the most remarkable scholar I have ever met.

Finally, Matthew. Matthew, who has been my most cherished companion for the last fourteen years; Matthew, who abandoned a good job, a fine home, and the closeness of family to follow me as I pursued this dream; Matthew, who has stood by me and supported me through every panic attack, every depressive episode, every mistake and every triumph. There are no words, Matthew. There never have been. This program, this dissertation, this move to California and back again, all of this is just one dream you and I have made real together. We will make more dreams real together, after.

Though these are the first words a reader is likely to read of the project, they are the very last that I have written as a graduate student. There is so much more I could say. I could put in so many more winking allusions to the good times and the bad. But I do not think this is the place for it. When writing acknowledgements there is a great pressure to try and bottle up all that the project has meant for the author, to try and succinctly address how our work is not the reflection of our personal genius but rather the blossoming of a whole community of people, scholars and non-scholars, professional and personal, family and found family. Yet I still hold to James' advice. The dissertation which follows is the product of my work. It is work I have treasured, work which I have been honored to do, and work I could never have done without the support and love of those named here along with many others. But it is work, nevertheless. And I have carved a place outside of this work for myself, a place where most of these people live. In that place I can relive with them all the good times and the bad, and tell them more fully what they have truly meant to me.

Now I will return to that beautiful place. I leave you, dear reader, with the work.

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Prologue

It's not a lie if you believe it.

--George Costanza, *Seinfeld.*

Delamere for example is a rich man on paper. On paper he has made at least £500,000 in Kenya. Not by working. All he did was get the Govt. to give him land and pay experts and managers and laborers to use it. At one time or another he must have had control of nearly 300,000 acres. As soon as any European arrived from home prepared to buy any of it (outright or on mortgage) for £3 an acre, D[elamere]. sold. By now he has got rid of perhaps 60,000 acres (most of that area is probably either leased or on mortgage so that D[elamere]. hasn't really received most of the money yet.) If he could sell most of the rest at £3 an acre on average, he would make his fortune and still own as much African soil as would make an English county. But that cannot happen unless a few thousand more Europeans go out to the country, each with so many thousand pounds to spend in buying land from Delamere. And all the big landowners […] are in the same position. If European immigration and the import of capital stop, farewell to their hopes of fortune.

--Norman Leys.[1]

The political economy of British East Africa was, from its very inception, founded upon vicious cycles of violent, unsustainable speculation. The Uganda Railway, completed in 1901, was a costly boondoggle which simultaneously opened the lands which would become Kenya to mass settlement and incurred an onerous government debt whose repayment became the chief desideratum of the colonial economy. The initial wave of white settlers, embodied by the colony's biggest landowner Lord Delamere, were concessionaires who insisted they were 'pioneers.' They were men who had received large grants of free land in the hopes they would develop it with their own capital and make the "Lunatic Line" pay. Through fierce lobbying and legal chicanery they secured from the colonial government thousands of acres of prime agricultural land in what came to be called the "white highlands." There, they would fashion an image which resonates down to the present day: the freebooting "Happy Valley" set, a glamorous world of flappers and aristocrats, sundowners and safaris.[2] Yet by 1938, only about 10% of the lands alienated to European settlers were formally under cultivation, and the little cultivation that

[1] School of Oriental and African Studies University of London (SOAS): IMC-CBMS/01, Box 248, File B, Norman Leys to J.H. Oldham, March 3, 1925, p. 5.

[2] The "Happy Valley" image has not been the subject of much historical scholarship, and most writing on the subject has been done by amateur historians. See Erika Rappaport, "Fashioning the Postcolonial State: The Glamour Industries & the Commodification of White Sexuality in 1960s Kenya" (Conference Paper, Pacific Coast Conference on British Studies, UC Riverside, 2023). This paper will form the basis of a chapter in a forthcoming book by Rappaport provisionally titled *Whitewash: How Public Relations Sold the End of Empire*. For an example of amateur historical work on the Happy Valley image, see Frances Osborne, *The Bolter: The Story of Idina Sackville, Who Ran Away to Become the Chief Seductress of Kenya's Scandalous 'Happy Valley Set'*, (Vintage, 2010).

did occur depended upon generous government assistance, a lack of taxation, the labor of African squatters, and when that failed, forced labor.[3] In British East Africa the vaunted "white man's country" was, even at its height, a precarious illusion sustained by and for those who were merely "rich on paper." It was an illusion which, as colonial medical officer turned anticolonial activist Norman Leys observed in the epigraph above, depended upon the enticement of yet more crops of settlers with capital who might sustain the speculation. If that stream of settlers and capital stopped, "farewell to their hopes of fortune."

When I first encountered the passage above from Norman Leys' correspondence with the reformer and missionary J.H. Oldham, I couldn't help but think of the intertwining of financial fraud, white supremacism, and authoritarianism which has come to dominate my own country one hundred years later.[4] Kenya's highly speculative land market, dominated by a wealthy class of white supremacists whose fortunes depended on enticing yet more settlers to purchase from them lands they'd received for free, somewhat resembles the "greater fool theory" of asset bubbles, wherein a bubble is driven by "agents [who] are willing to pay more for an asset than they think it is worth because they anticipate they might be able to sell it to someone else for an even higher price."[5] Yet while dissimulation and fraud were essential features of settlement boosterism, nevertheless, settler colonialism in Kenya cannot be explained by mendacity alone. The value of land in Kenya was never just a matter of pounds and shillings; there was far more to be gained and lost than money when one speculated on land in Kenya.

Indeed, throughout the colony's brief existence a wide range of people within and beyond the colony's borders would attempt to stake a claim on land in Kenya for a dizzying range of reasons. The dream of the "white man's country" sprang from innumerable settlement schemes, most of which were never implemented, yet all of which demanded that yet more African land be allocated for settlement, and that yet more settlers be brought into the colony. These schemes were proposed by socialist utopians and wealthy aristocrats, by globetrotting swindlers and philanthropists, by Zionists and anticolonial nationalists. Though some certainly did imagine a "white man's country" of aristocratic planters, others dreamed of a Jewish state in the highlands, or a federation of white farming cooperatives, or an "America for the Hindu," or even a fully automated socialist "Eden." In advancing their own claims for why they deserved a prime concession of colonial land, settlement schemers would tell many lies about East Africa, its economy, its lands, and its peoples. Yet these were lies which the liars themselves often believed, acts of cultural as well as financial speculation, assertions both of what Kenyan land was worth and what it *meant*. Colonial Kenya's speculative political economy provided strong material incentives for this deluge of settlement schemes, yet it did not dictate whom these settlement schemes ought to serve nor what sort of society ought to be built in what would become one of Britain's last directly administered settler colonies.

Throughout this dissertation I will advance three overarching arguments. First, I argue that the settlement scheme constituted a medium of cultural expression rooted in colonial Kenya's speculative political economy and its unique position at the confluence of the British

[3] Kenya National Archives (KNA): MAC EAI 28/2, "Memorandum submitted by the Executive Committee of the East African Indian National Congress to the Secretary of State for the Colonies on the 'Reservation of Highlands of Kenya for Europeans'", October 7, 1938, 6-7.
[4] Quinn Slobodian and Ben Tarnoff, *Muskism: A Guide for the Perplexed*, (Harper, 2026).
[5] Gadi Barlevy, "Bubbles and Fools", *Economic Perspectives* (Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago, 2015), 55.

Empire's South African, Indian, and metropolitan spheres of influence. Each settlement scheme constituted an act of imaginative worldbuilding, a particular vision for who deserved to own colonial land, who deserved to work it, and what relations they ought to have with one another. More succinctly, each settlement scheme was its own imaginary colonial society. These schemes were historically significant even when they didn't stand a snowball's chance of securing state approval, because they both revealed and altered what people believed the boundaries of the possible to be.

The settlement scheme—like a poem, a song, or a novel—could serve as a vehicle for a vast array of claims, demands, ideas, or lies beyond the request for land itself. A settlement scheme might be the vehicle for demands for imperial citizenship, attempts to (re)define colonial development, assertions of whiteness, efforts to resolve class conflict, expressions of new economic theories, aid for refugees, and of course, confidence tricks. And Kenya's unique position as the hinge between South Africa, the Western Indian Ocean, and Britain made it a lightning rod for demands from all three. Though the settlement schemes analyzed here focused on a small part of the lands which would become Kenya, this cultural medium was shaped by the theories, dreams, lies, insecurities, and demands of a vast swathe of the British Empire. These schemes reveal that Kenya functioned as an imperial imaginary, reflecting Priya Satia's contention "that the activities of the modern state are shaped by the cultural imagination."[6] Just as "the Orient" was to Edwardian Britons a mystical "spy space," East Africa was construed as an exhilarating 'settlement space,' a blank canvas upon which one might convince the state to impose whatever settler society they could imagine. Or at least, one could try until reality rudely intruded.

Secondly, I argue that Kenya's settlement schemes existed in a constant dialogue with the colony's shifting political economy and its racialized labor regime, simultaneously shaping them and being shaped by them. Cultural speculation and economic speculation entailed each other. Though my focus here is on settlement schemes and the cultural imaginings they reveal, these imaginings were constantly colliding against the reality of life and labor in colonial East Africa. In the late nineteenth century, when access to the interior was restricted by the dependence upon African porters, it was easier for men like Dr. Theodor Hertzka to project upon the interior his dream of a heavily industrialized socialist "Eden," where African labor would be supplanted by machines and railroads (Chapter 1). Conversely, once the white settler plantocracy had politically established itself around 1907 and found itself heavily dependent upon African corvée and squatter labor, there was a wave of "closer settlement" schemes which imagined African squatters being replaced by colonies of white veterans culminating in the 1919 Ex-Soldier Settlement Scheme (Chapter 3). Thus, Kenyan settlement schemes developed alongside the colony's political economy, yet the relationship was reciprocal. The failure of Hertzka's freelanders helped cement the perception that East Africa could only be properly developed by 'men of capital,' legitimizing the wave of massive concessions to follow; the failure of soldier settlement to produce either a profitable white yeomanry or dominance over African labor sparked a chain of crises which fostered disillusionment among policymakers over settlement-as-development. The white settler plantocracy epitomized by the "Happy Valley" image was never a telos. Rather, it was a contingent outcome which had to constantly rearticulate itself in the face of many competing alternatives. Kenyan settlement schemes reflect the colony's racialized

[6] Priya Satia, *Spies in Arabia*: The Great War and the Cultural Foundations of Britain's Covert Empire in the Middle East (Oxford University Press, 2008), 5.

political economy, yet that racialized political economy emerged as an unstable compromise from the constant debate surrounding the colony's many competing settlement schemes.

Thirdly and most significantly, I argue that the interplay between cultural and economic speculation reflected by the colony's many failed settlement schemes reveals the protean nature of whiteness and of imperial citizenship in the British Empire. Despite the injunctions of the new imperial history to consider metropole and colony as mutually constitutive, whiteness is often taken for granted as something that remained the same across time and space.[7] In practice, neither whiteness nor imperial citizenship were ever something the colonizer could simply pack in their suitcase and carry with them into colonial frontier. Yet as Ann Stoler observed, to simply stop at an acknowledgement of the protean character of whiteness would be insufficient, because:

> My point is that the celebrated emphasis on fluidity may not be the trenchant postcolonial critique it has been taken to be. It may only signal a somewhat belated recognition that racisms gain force precisely through the double vision they foster and allow, in the fact that they combine notions of fixity and fluidity in ways that are basic to their grammar. The "proof" that racial categories are fluid and not fixed confirms race as a fiction, but it does little else. It leaves untouched the infrastructures that make race an operative and commanding economic, political, and affective fact, very real in its effects, protracted in its imposed duress, and firmly in place.[8]

This project, by treating Kenya's failed settlement schemes as cultural artifacts, seeks to show the shifting forms and political economies through which whiteness was articulated and through which historical subjects *imagined* it might be articulated. A close study of Kenya's failed settlement schemes shows that white supremacy was *not only* precarious because of the "fluidity" of whiteness itself, but also because the "infrastructures" (i.e. the political economy) necessary to make white supremacy "an operative and commanding economic, political, and affective fact" were the subject of constant speculation themselves. Kenya's speculative political economy both produced, and was produced by, the constant cultural speculation surrounding both the meanings of whiteness and imperial citizenship, and which political economy would best reflect and reproduce these protean statuses. Whiteness was not a hazy "double vision" sitting atop some firmly entrenched "infrastructure" because the infrastructure was itself the product of double, triple, and quadruple visions. These failed settlement schemes are those visions.

Early colonial Kenya was uniquely generative for these imaginings because land in the colony became a metonym for full imperial citizenship, and by extension for whiteness, even as these concepts themselves remained eternally protean. Though in 1906 the so-called "Elgin Pledge" asserted that "land outside municipal limits, roughly lying between Kiu and Fort Ternan, should be granted only to European settlers" this was neither a concrete definition of the borders

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[7] Antoinette Burton, *Burdens of History: British Feminists, Indian Women, and Imperial Culture, 1865-1915* (University of North Carolina Press, 1994); Anne Mcclintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (Routledge, 1995); *At Home with the Empire: Metropolitan Culture and the Imperial World* eds. Catherine Hall and Sonya Rose (Cambridge University Press, 2006); Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination* (University of Chicago Press, 2002).

[8] Ann Stoler, "Racial Regimes of Truth" in *Duress: Imperial Durabilities in Our Times* (Duke University Press, 2016), 260.

of the white man's country nor was it legally binding. Indeed, as Elgin later clarified and as generations of colonial administrators would subsequently insist, "it is not consonant with the views of His Majesty's Government to impose *legal* restriction on any particular section of the community, but as a matter of administrative convenience grants in the upland area should not be made to Indians."[9] This policy of administrative, *ad hoc* racial segregation meant that both the borders and barriers to entry for the white man's country were being constantly negotiated, a negotiation which often took the shape of competing settlement schemes. Could an impoverished Jewish refugee from the Pale of Settlement own land in the white man's country? What about a wealthy British Jew? Or a Dutch homesteader? Or a Swedish aristocrat? Or a Sikh soldier? Was it more important that a settler be understood as white, or that they be a British subject regardless of how they were racialized? Was a wealthy foreigner more deserving of a prime concession of land because they were better positioned to develop it, or a poorer British veteran because he had loyally served the Empire?

Every Kenyan settlement scheme was required to advance some claim for which combination of race, nationality, and class made one a 'deserving' stakeholder in the British Empire. They had to advance their own version, whether tacitly or explicitly, of what it meant to be white in the British Empire, or what it meant to be a full imperial citizen, or what it meant to properly develop a colony. And the land available for alienation, and thus for this cultural speculation, was finite; to grant one claim was necessarily to deny others. Whereas European settlers militated fiercely against the Zionist settlement scheme in 1905 on the grounds that it would create a Jewish "*imperium in imperio*" in the white man's country (Chapter 2), by the 1930s some of those same settlers cautiously welcomed the settlement of Jewish refugees fleeing Nazi Germany on the grounds that it would reinforce white control of the highlands against Indian incursion (Chapter 4). A close study of colonial Kenya's settlement schemes reveals that the meanings of imperial citizenship and whiteness were always intertwined with the availability of concessions, the value of land, the price of exports, and the scarcity of African labor. Settlement schemes speculated upon far more than the monetary value of land; they speculated on what the British Empire could be, and who its most deserving subjects were.

Historiography and Clarification of Terms

First and foremost, I see this dissertation as a contribution to the history of race and more specifically to the history of whiteness, with secondary interventions in the historiographies of colonial development and of imperial citizenship. Though this study focuses on Kenya, I conceive of it first and foremost as a history of race in the British Empire, and of the precarity of whiteness. This is a study of how would-be imperialists imagined Empire, and the violent collisions between those imaginings and reality. Before beginning my analysis, I will first clarify some of the key terms and the main historiographic traditions with which I will engage throughout.

The Imperial Lightning Rod and Imperial Citizenship

Though I will generally refer to my subject as "colonial Kenya," "Kenya," "British East Africa," or sometimes "the lands which would become Kenya," these terms are elisions in the name of legibility. The territory I am analyzing was variously reckoned by its colonizers as a

[9] "The 'Elgin Pledge' 1906 and re-affirmation, 1908" in G.H. Mungeam, *Kenya, Select Historical Documents, 1884-1923* (East African Publishing House, 1979), 334.

territory of the Sultan of Zanzibar, a territory of the Imperial British East Africa Company, then as the "East Africa Protectorate" or as "British East Africa" (until 1920), then the "Colony and Protectorate of Kenya" until formal independence in 1963, when it became the "Dominion of Kenya" (1963-1964), and finally what it is today: the Republic of Kenya. This frequent shifting of names reflects colonial Kenya's unusual position at the intersection of so many overlapping intra-imperial spheres of influence. The settler colonial project began in earnest when the territory was, officially speaking, not a colony but instead a protectorate overseen by the Foreign Office on behalf of the Sultan of Zanzibar and the territory's indigenous inhabitants. Though the Colonial Office assumed responsibility for the territory in 1905, it was not until 1920 that it was formally redesignated as a "colony," and then only partially as the "Colony and Protectorate of Kenya" with the coastal strip around Mombasa still being officially a protectorate and the interior being a colony. Colonial Kenya sat at the hinge of many overlapping intra-imperial spheres of influence: British, Indian, Afrikaner, Zanzibari, and African.

A history of settler colonialism in Kenya is necessarily a global history. Thomas Metcalf correctly characterized the Uganda Railway as a "'wedge of India' driven into the heart of Africa," and indeed the railway was designed explicitly to facilitate an Anglo-Indian monopolization of the commercial networks which had long connected Uganda to the Western Indian Ocean.[10] Colonial Kenya was indisputably a part of the "interregional arena" of the Indian Ocean, before and especially after the construction of the railway which depended upon indentured Indian labor and Indian capital.[11] And as Sana Aiyar has shown, East Africa's Indian population maintained robust networks which bound the purportedly "white man's country" of the highlands to South Asia politically, culturally, and economically.[12] Yet Kenya's white settler population, consisting primarily of Anglos and Afrikaners, defined itself *against* these Indian Ocean connections. They resented the influence of the Indian Office and instead looked towards Rhodesia and South Africa for solidarity, an "island of white" in an archipelago of whiteness which stretched all the way down to the Cape.[13] Their efforts to bar Indians from land ownership in the colony, and their lobbying for settlement schemes to replace Indian labor, situated Kenya at the forefront of a "global color line" which extended from White Australia to Jim Crow America.[14] And the settler colonial project also intersected at several key points with the history of modern Zionism, whether at the Sixth Zionist Congress in 1903 when a delegate sought to "demonstrate that the Jordan Valley was a continuation of the Great Rift Valley [and thus] should be considered a part of greater Israel" or in 1938 when Asaph Grasovsky, a Senior Horticultural Officer of mandatory Palestine's Department of Agriculture, advanced a cooperative settlement scheme for Jewish refugees fleeing Nazi Germany.[15]

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[10] Thomas Metcalf, *Imperial Connections: India in the Indian Ocean Arena, 1860-1920* (University of California Press, 2007), 188.
[11] Sugata Bose, *A Hundred Horizons: The Indian Ocean in the Age of Global Empire* (Harvard University Press, 2009), 6.
[12] Sana Aiyar, *Indians in Kenya: The Politics of Diaspora* (Harvard University Press, 2015).
[13] Dane Kennedy, *Islands of White: Settler Society and Culture in Kenya and Southern Rhodesia, 1890-1939* (Duke University Press, 1987).
[14] Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men's Countries and the International Challenge of Racial Equality* (Cambridge University Press, 2008); David Atkinson, *The Burden of White Supremacy: Containing Asian Migration in the British Empire and the United States* (University of North Carolina Press, 2017).
[15] Adam Rovner, *In the Shadow of Zion: Promised Lands Before Israel* (NYU Press, 2014), 56.

The unique genre of Kenyan settlement schemes grew from and expressed the friction of these many intersections. It is because of these many intersections that I describe colonial Kenya as an "imperial lightning rod." These uncertainties surrounding race and imperial citizenship crackled throughout the entire British Empire like static energy, yet colonial Kenya's unique positionality drew that energy towards it, crystalizing it into dramatic bolts of lightning: settlement schemes. Like a lightning strike, these settlement schemes were often ephemeral and fleeting even as they left behind them a sharp impression on the eye, or a smoking crater in the land. British subjects around the world used these flashes to try and augur what their subjecthood really meant, and what demands they could conceivably make of the Empire.

For this reason the study of Kenyan settlement schemes is bound up not only with race but more broadly with the question of imperial citizenship, because so often the stakes of a given settlement scheme were the extent to which the two were entangled. Like whiteness, imperial citizenship during the period covered by this project lacked any formal definition. Indeed, it was not until the 1948 British Nationality Act that imperial citizenship became a formally defined status under British law. Post-1948 one could be a "citizen of the United Kingdom and Colonies," yet prior to 1948 one was—regardless of their race or nationality—simply a "British subject." As such, when discussing imperial citizenship in this project I am not referring to demands for a legal status. Rather, drawing from the work of Sukanya Banerjee, this work "situates [imperial] citizenship not so much in the realm of statutory enactment as in the cultural, imaginative, and affective fields that both engender it and are constituted by it." Banerjee, by situating imperial citizenship as a narrative process (rather than a legal status), revealed "how the various sites that enable an articulation of the universalist ideal of citizenship—sites recognized as bearing the imprint of rational modernity: credit, political economy, bureaucracy, professionalism—do so by yielding a more layered, uncertain, and composite script, one that gestures to what remains spectral, takes recourse to idioms of liminality, *dwells on failure* [emphasis mine], cites the ineffable or exorbitant, or pointedly mourns what cannot be represented."[16] Prior to 1948 at least, imperial citizenship was something one could long for, or even demand, yet never truly possess. Crucially, this was the case whether or not one was racialized as white. Yet one could possess land, and one could monopolize African labor, and so shortly after the construction of the Uganda Railway the control of African land and labor became metonyms for the ever-elusive category of imperial citizenship.

As I use the term here, 'imperial citizenship' encompassed two interlocking conditions: equal protection before the law, and reciprocal obligation between oneself and the Empire. Only the first of these had any objective referent, with the second being an affective status rather than a legal one. Indian settlers in Kenya increasingly came to view the colony's racially discriminatory land and immigration laws as a denial of their imperial citizenship because they were being denied equal protection before the law. Similarly, European settlers with less capital would rage at the injustice of practices like "dummying" (applying for a parcel of land under a false name or under the name of a relation who had no intention of settling the land) because they privileged those who were already wealthy and influential. Ostensibly, since all were British subjects, all ought to derive equal benefit from the laws regardless of their race or class. Debates

[16] Sukanya Banerjee, *Becoming Imperial Citizens: Indians in the Late-Victorian Empire* (Duke University Press, 2010), 5; 16.

such as these are significant to my story here insofar as they impinged upon debates surrounding particular settlement schemes, yet they are not my focus.

More significant in this project is the second, more affective component of imperial citizenship: the constantly repeated narratives of mutual obligation between oneself or one's community and the Empire. Many settlement schemers, regardless of their race, would frame the concessions they desired as something owed to them by dint of some service they performed for the Empire. This is clearest in the case of the 1919 Ex-Soldier Settlement Scheme, where the explicit justification for the concessions was that they were a reward for white officers who had loyally served the Empire (Chapter 3). Yet we also see this in the case of the East Africa Syndicate, a mining consortium which presented its mineral prospecting efforts as "pioneering" labor which signified that they were a "responsible English syndicate" and thus deserved more free land (Chapter 2). And we see it too in the insistence by European settlers that the colonial government owed them African labor to make their estates profitable. Whereas a subject was merely ruled or protected by the Empire, a citizen could reasonably make a demand of the Empire and its subjects, whether of land or labor.

It is tempting, especially in a colony such as Kenya where the settler population was relatively small, to speak of colonial "civil society" as a monolith. As Mamdani observed, "The history of civil society in colonial Africa is laced with racism […] for civil society was first and foremost the society of the colons […] The rights of free association and free publicity, and eventually of political representation, were the rights of citizens under direct rule, not of subjects indirectly ruled by a customarily organized tribal authority."[17] Yet Mamdani's sharp distinction between a rural world of despotic 'customary' rule on the reserves and an urban civil society for the colons fails to account for the fact that even among the colons themselves there was very little agreement over who, exactly, was a full imperial citizen. Indeed, as the work of Marilyn Lake & Henry Reynolds, Sukanya Banerjee, Sana Aiyar, Duncan Bell, Vivian Kong, and Bill Schwarz reveals, during the period covered by this project British subjects the world over fiercely contested what qualities were necessary to claim imperial citizenship, and which demands this protean status entitled one to make upon the Empire or its subjects.[18] In Kenya, to be "directly ruled" did not necessarily make one an imperial citizen. Indeed, a close study of the colony's failed settlement schemes reveals that at varying points the ability of British Indians, European Jews, and even Scandinavian capitalists to claim imperial citizenship within the colony was fiercely contested despite their shared status as directly ruled settlers. To advance a settlement scheme, then, was necessarily to advance a claim of who *deserved* a stake in the British Empire and who had the right to insist upon a mutual obligation between themselves and the wider Empire.

The Settlement Scheme

This project focuses on a particular type of colonial development scheme: settlement schemes. More specifically, it focuses on failed settlement schemes. For the purposes of this

[17] Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*, (Princeton University Press, 1996), 19.

[18] Duncan Bell, *Dreamworlds of Race: Empire and the Utopian Destiny of Anglo-America*, (Princeton University Press, 2020); Duncan Bell, *The Idea of Greater Britain: Empire and the Future of World Order, 1860-1900*, (Princeton University Press, 2007); Bill Schwarz, *Memories of Empire: The White Man's World,* vol. 1, (Oxford University Press, 2011); Vivian Kong, "Whiteness, Imperial Anxiety, and the 'Global 1930s': The White British League Debate in Hong Kong", *Journal of British Studies* vol. 59, no. 2 (April 2020).

project, a "settlement scheme" refers to an attempt by some person or party to demand from the state material assistance to install settlers on colonial land. Crucially, every settlement scheme necessarily imagined the land in question as being already conquered. Settlement schemers presumed that the colonial state exercised sufficient sovereignty over this colonial land to redistribute it among concessionaires, even when this was hardly self-evident. Indeed, the initial wave of massive concessions which followed the construction of the Uganda Railway took place against the backdrop of the Nandi Resistance and the forced relocations of the Maasai, as the catastrophe of conquest was still ongoing.

Though the forms of assistance requested varied widely, settlement schemes usually requested some combination of the following. I have organized this list broadly chronologically: settlement schemes prior to 1919 tended to consist more of items 1-5, whereas later settlement schemes were usually "closer" settlement schemes and focused on items 5-10 as the land available for concessions dwindled and the number of settlers requiring financial assistance grew:

1. That the state annex more African land, reduce the size of African reservations, and/or reduce the size of forest reserves to make available more land for settlement.
2. That the state give a private entrepreneur a concession of land on free or easy terms, so that the entrepreneur could then subdivide the concession and place settlers upon it. Or, that the state give an entrepreneur a concession of land as a reward for having successfully attracted other settlers to the colony, or having contributed otherwise to the development of the colony.
3. That the state directly allocate land to some category of persons, such as veterans or refugees, on free or easy terms.
4. That the state subdivide larger plots of land into smaller ones, so that more settlers (usually those with less capital) could be accommodated in the colony. Or, that the state grant permission to private actors to carry out this subdivision on their own. This was called "closer settlement."
5. That the state reduce financial barriers to entry for participating settlers in the scheme. This might include subsidizing transit fares or forgiving the monetary sureties ordinarily required of settlers entering the colony.
6. That the state use public money to create or contribute to some fund meant to assist incoming settlers, maintain existing settlers, and/or facilitate transfers of land between settlers.
7. That the state allocate public money to advertise the colony abroad, or that it collaborate with private actors who are seeking to market the colony abroad.
8. That the state grant political concessions to a group of incoming settlers, such as the right to set up a semi-autonomous state of their own, in the hopes that this will attract more settlers.
9. That the state allocate funds for the construction of infrastructure to train or equip incoming settlers, such as demonstration farms, irrigation works, roads, fencing, etc.
10. That the state administratively redesignate a parcel of land to facilitate further settlement. This might mean allowing freehold rather than leasehold tenure, waiving a racially restrictive covenant, or redesignating a parcel of land as "township" land so that those not deemed white could legally reside there.

At their core, these schemes consisted of a request or some combination of land, subsidies, and permission to facilitate settler colonialism. Importantly, though most of the settlement schemes analyzed here stemmed from private actors and were directed towards the state there were also settlement schemes which originated from within the state itself. For instance, the Zionist settlement scheme analyzed in Chapter 2 emerged from the lobbying of Theodor Herzl and Leopold Greenberg for land for Jewish settlement, yet the allocation of the Uasin Gishu plateau in East Africa was first proposed by Colonial Secretary Joseph Chamberlain. The boundary between public and private was often so porous as to be illusory, and some schemes imagined virtually no involvement from the state and much more from private investors.

Failure

Given that the settler colonial project in Kenya formally lasted less than a single human lifetime (1901-1963), one could argue that all settlement schemes in Kenya 'failed.' My methodological emphasis on failure here is not meant to imply that there was elsewhere some more 'successful' model of settler colonialism or of colonial development against which these schemes ought to be juxtaposed. As Bruce Berman and John Lonsdale demonstrated, colonial Kenya's political economy was riven by paradoxes which the colonial state was unable to resolve, torn as it was between its trustee obligations to Africans and European settler-investors.[19] The inefficiency of settler agriculture, the lack of development on settler estates, and the constant necessity of state assistance for the settler colonial project has been observed by many historians of colonial Kenya.[20] And indeed each iteration of the idea of 'colonial development,' from the Chamberlainite vision which inspired settler colonialism in East Africa, to the Lugardian 'dual mandate' of the interwar years, to the technocratic "second colonial occupation" by development experts interested in stimulating African production and welfare post-1945, was marked by costly inefficiency and frequent failure.[21] My methodological focus on failure here is not meant to imply that these schemes were just a few bad apples.

Rather, my conception of failure here stems from an engagement with both the historiography of colonial development and the new imperial history. Development is a semantically slippery concept.[22] M.P. Cowen and R.W. Shenton recognized that while development itself refers to the vague intention to "[create] anew, or improved, or renewed, or of the unfolding of potential which has the capacity to exist but which presently does not" in a socio-economic context, nevertheless "An intention to develop becomes a doctrine of development when it is attached, or when it is pleaded that it be attached, to the agency of the state to become an expression of state policy."[23] This first understanding of development—rooted in intentions—must be understood separately from what development actually has been in practice, which they argue has been "the foundation of policy made to keep population confined

[19] Bruce Berman and John Lonsdale, "Coping with the Contradictions: The Development of the Colonial State, 1895-1914" in *Unhappy Valley: Conflict in Kenya & Africa* (J. Currey, 1992).
[20] Tabitha Kanogo, *Squatters and the Roots of Mau Mau, 1905-63*, (J. Currey, 1987); Claire Robertson, *Trouble Showed the Way: Women, Men, and Trade in the Nairobi Area, 1890-1990*, (Indiana University Press, 1997).
[21] Joseph Hodge, *Triumph of the Expert: Agrarian Doctrines of Development and the Legacies of British Colonialism* (Ohio University Press, 2007), 209.
[22] The subject of competing definitions/doctrines of development will be given a fuller treatment in Chapter 4, but for more thorough accounts on the intellectual history of colonial development, see Michael Havinden and David Meredit, *Colonialism and Development: Britain and its Tropical Colonies, 1850-1960* (Routledge, 1993); H.W. Arndt, *Economic Development: the History of an Idea* (University of Chicago Press, 1987).
[23] M.P. Cowen and R.W. Shenton, *Doctrines of Development* (Routledge, 1996), VIII.

to territory, to fix and confine the potential of productive force to the local place, of field and factory, where the need of local capital for labour power might be constructed."[24] I wholeheartedly accept this definition of development-in-practice, certainly as it applies to colonial Kenya. As we shall see in Chapter 3, once established white settlers came to understand control over African labor, fixing and confining their "potential of productive force" to a local place (i.e. the European estate), as one of the chief desiderata of proper colonial development. So much so that they framed a state-sanctioned petty dictatorship of white capital over African labor as an obligation owed to the settler by the colonial state, a confirmation of their full imperial citizenship.

Yet because my methodology is to treat Kenyan settlement schemes as cultural artifacts, my focus here remains trained on the 'intentions' and especially on the 'pleading' which Cowan and Shenton recognized as a necessary step between development-as-intention and development-as-doctrine. Most of the settlement schemes analyzed here failed because the schemers failed to attach their intentions robustly to the will of the state. The schemes failed because they were not attempted, or because the process of welding intentions to state actions so thoroughly mangled the original scheme that it became unrecognizable. The Plough Shares Association was only able to resettle a small handful of Jewish refugees fleeing the Nazis because its humanitarian aims could only be awkwardly attached to the state's prevailing doctrine of development (Chapter 4). Sometimes, schemes failed because they were never meant to succeed. The East Africa Syndicate settled very few people in the colony because their settlement schemes were mainly ploys to secure state approval for their mining concessions (Chapter 2); the Ex-War Service Federation's ethno-populist vision for soldier settlement failed because it was also a cover for embezzlement (Chapter 3). And of course, some schemes advanced far enough to fail in a more tangible way. The British East Africa Disabled Officers' Colony was approved by the state and lasted for several years, but it failed due to a combination of mismanagement and the collapse of flax prices (Chapter 3). These failures are worthy of closer study not as counterfactuals, but rather because they undermine the coherence of any single "doctrine" of development, because any such doctrine was shaped by the many competing interests of actors within and beyond the state who sought to graft their interests upon it.

By analyzing these failures I complicate the notion of development—like whiteness—as being some ready-made thing imposed unilaterally by the state, instead situating it as a culturally embedded, multipolar process defined by a constellation of actors all trying and failing to weld their intentions to a perennially indecisive state. This work builds on a historiography of development which, though it is increasingly situating development as an experimental practice which was often prone to failure, remains primarily focused on the role of scientific experts and the world post-1945.[25] Though some of the settlement schemers analyzed here claimed some level of expertise (honestly or dishonestly), many others made no such pretensions. Indeed, Kenya's European settler population was proudly atavistic. Scorning the "high-modernist ideology" which was the foundation of so many colonial development projects, many of the

[24] Cowen and Shenton, *Doctrines of Development,* 338.
[25] James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition have Failed* (Yale University Press, 2020); Timothy Mitchell, *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity* (University of California Press, 2002); Joseph Morgan Hodge, *Triumph of the Expert: Agrarian Doctrines of Development and the Legacies of British Colonialism* (Ohio University Press, 2007)*;* Helen Tilley, *Africa as a Living Laboratory: Empire, Development, and the Problem of Scientific Knowledge, 1870-1950* (University of Chicago Press, 2011).

settlement schemes contained here envisioned a return to some imagined prior era which the gallop of high-modernism was sweeping aside.[26] Many settlement schemers imagined a colony of genteel lords ruling over African peasants, or farming cooperatives of white yeomen, which could serve as an escape from an industrializing, urbanizing, modernizing metropole. And as Jordanna Bailkin demonstrated with her research into the Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO), even amidst the postwar "hypervaluing [of] the expert" there remained in the world of (post)colonial development a niche for "a cadre of young amateurs."[27]

Development, like race and like imperial citizenship, were in British East Africa more narrative than objective. Focusing on the failed settlement schemes helps us to see how many competing scripts there truly were even among those who were all putatively invested in telling the same story. Antoinette Burton, writing of the place of the many "mutineers and guerrilla fighters and deserters and protesters and insurgents" in the Empire's history, argued that "it's hard *not* to see that the history of the British empire is not rise and fall but skirmish, scramble, stumble, recover; not up and down but perpetual crash and burn; not success and failure but fail, fail, fail and make the most of it—with an eye on your backyard and your hand on your Martini rifle."[28] Though this project examines prospective colonizers rather than anticolonial resistors, it reaches a similar conclusion. An analysis of Kenya's failed settlement schemes reveals that the Empire chronically struggled to profitably engage with those who *most* supported the imperial project, those who fervently desired to become imperial stakeholders. The "perpetual crash and burn" gave rise to constant reconfigurations of both the colonial project and of the aspiring colonial stakeholders themselves.

Yet, the above passage from Burton also foregrounds one of the primary limitations of my methodology: this is not a history of the colonized, nor of those who resisted the imperial project. Because this project focuses on settlement schemes, it necessarily focuses on those who possessed both the inclination and the position to lobby the state for land directly. A history of Kenyan settlement schemes is often a history of the privileged and the powerful. By focusing on their chronic failures I still aim to produce a "methodologically anti-imperial empire history, one that does not take extension and hegemony at face value [and] presumes turbulence and tension," yet the substantial role played by the colonized themselves in producing that "turbulence and tension" is less examined here. To be sure, British attempts at hegemony were met with constant resistance. Porters engaged in desertion, theft, and slowdowns.[29] Indian laborers engaged in strikes and desertions.[30] Squatters strategically withheld their labor and played settler employers against each other. Indigenous peoples, particularly the Maasai, the Kikuyu, and the Nandi, resisted British incursions into their lands with armed force, and Harry Thuku's East African Association mounted a pan-ethnic campaign of anti-colonial labor resistance which had profound

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[26] Scott, *Seeing Like a State*, 4.
[27] Jordanna Bailkin, "Young Britons: International Aid and 'Development' in the Age of the Adolescent" in *The Afterlife of Empire* (University of California Press, 2012), 55-95.
[28] Antoinette Burton, *The Trouble with Empire: Challenges to Modern British Imperialism,* (Oxford University Press, 2015), 219.
[29] Stephen Rockel, *Carriers of Culture: Labor on the Road in Nineteenth-Century East Africa,* (Heinemann, 2006); Jonathon Glassman, *Feasts and Riot: Revelry, Rebellion, and Popular Consciousness on the Swahili Coast, 1856-1888*, (Heinemann, 1995); Angela Thompsell, *Hunting Africa: British Sport, African Knowledge and the Nature of Empire,* (Palgrave Macmillan 2015).
[30] Neera Kapila, *Race, Rail, and Society: Roots of Modern Kenya*, (East African Educational Publishers, 2009).

ramifications for the colony's political economy. Even white settlers threatened a violent uprising when confronted with the prospect of the franchise being extended to Indians.[31]

Resistance took many forms, yet it was not the only factor which rendered British rule precarious and to focus on anticolonial resistance alone would simplify matters by presuming that there was ever a coherent thing to oppose. The methodological anti-imperialism of this project stems from situating the settler colonial project as a perpetually speculative enterprise, one perennially riven by contradictions as its most enthusiastic participants struggled to define the meaning and boundaries of whiteness. To be sure, some of these schemes failed because of anticolonial resistance. More intriguing though, is how many of them failed *before* they ever met any direct anticolonial resistance. Many of these schemes failed because widespread, sustained African resistance in the labor market forced enough people to regard them as impossible before they were ever attempted.

Periodization and Structure

This story begins in 1870 with the accession of Sayyid Barghash bin Said as Sultan of Zanzibar, under whose reign Zanzibar and the stretch of the East African littoral it purported to rule came increasingly—yet haltingly—under a British sphere of influence. This story ends in 1939 with the outbreak of World War II. The choice of end date stems from both scholarly and logistical reasons. Originally, I had intended to carry the story forward into the 1950s with a discussion of the Swynnerton Plan and its failed attempt to create a loyal African yeomanry to guard against independence. However upon delving into the archives, I found a far greater variety of failed settlement schemes than I had anticipated! Yet I also revised my end date to 1939 because, as I pored over the many colonial dreamworlds offered up by these earlier settlement schemes, I realized that it would be insufficient to analyze them through the teleological prism of Swynnerton and Mau Mau. Between 1870 and 1939 the lands which would become Kenya transformed in the British imperial imaginary from a frustrating *terra nullius*, with access to/through it being gatekept by both Zanzibari political power and African labor power, into an overcrowded problem space freighted with far too many competing claims for the Empire to profitably sustain.

This project will proceed in four chapters, each organized around a particular moment of friction between the East African imperial imaginary and the East African political economy expressed by the failed settlement schemes within. Broadly, as we march further into the twentieth century settlement in East Africa was conceptualized as a utopian panacea (Chapter 1), then as an investment opportunity for deserving British settler-investors (Chapter 2), then as a reward for service to the Empire (Chapter 3), and finally as the praxis of one of several competing theories of imperial citizenship and colonial development (Chapter 4). Each of these imaginings grew as a fraught compromise between many competing, failed visions for settlement expressed in their own settlement schemes.

Chapter 1 will examine the fraught transition of East Africa from an Indian Ocean commercial entrepot to a British protectorate from 1870 to the completion of the Uganda Railway in 1901. It will consist primarily of a close reading of Theodor Hertzka's *Freeland: A Social Anticipation* (*Freiland: Ein Sociales Zukunftsbild*) and the associated Freelander

[31] Christopher P. Youe, "The Threat of Settler Rebellion and the Imperial Predicament: The Denial of Indian Rights in Kenya, 1923" *Canadian Journal of History* vol. 12, no. 3.

movement's attempt in 1894 to establish a utopian socialist commune in the foothills of Mount Kenya. I argue that Hertzka's "political romance" is the earliest instance of the Kenyan settlement scheme as a cultural genre. Hertzka and the Freelanders demonstrate not only the global origins of this genre, but also how Kenya—due to its perception as an empty, liminal space between the Indian Ocean and Uganda—functioned as an imperial imaginary whereupon prospective colonizers could imagine their ideal colonial societies. Yet, I argue that the failure of the Freelanders must be considered in tandem with the failure of the Imperial British East Africa Company—despite its greater reserves of capital and imperial support—to meaningfully project British hegemony beyond the coasts, a failure which culminated in Britain itself seizing the reins and pouring public funds into the construction of the Uganda Railway. The twin failures of the Freelanders and the Company to monopolize sufficient African labor to project their visions past the coast created an opening for wealthy, private, non-corporate concessionaires to position themselves as the only parties who could conceivably develop the new British protectorate.

Chapter 2 will focus on the nascent frontier of 1901-1907, which witnessed a chaotic scramble among prospective concessionaires even as the process of conquest was still ongoing. This chapter focuses on three failed settlement schemes: those of the East Africa Syndicate, of a South African settlement booster named Robert Chamberlain, and finally the Zionist settlement scheme to establish a Jewish proto-nation state on the Uasin Gishu plateau. I argue that the debates surrounding these schemes established a precarious precedent: that the best agricultural land in the colony was a metonym for the undefinable statuses of full imperial citizenship or whiteness. As such, concessions could not just be sold off to the highest bidders but needed to be reserved for the most *deserving*. Yet the fundamentally cultural question of which combination of race, nationality, and class made one sufficiently deserving of a concession remained open for speculation. Ultimately, successful concessionaires countered both Zionist and corporate concessions by positioning them as economically, racially, and nationally foreign and thus unbefitting of a British colony.

Chapter 3 will focus on the many competing visions for what eventually became the 1919 Ex-Soldier Settlement Scheme, particularly the ethno-populist vision advanced by Walter Sidney Bromhead and the more corporate vision advanced by Bror von Blixen. I argue that the proliferation of "closer settlement" schemes between 1907-1919 reflected a growing conviction among the dominant class of white settlers that dominance over African labor, as well as African land, was a constituent element of their imperial citizenship. Yet when the colonial state proved either unwilling or unable to secure them this monopoly, settlement schemes were imagined which would either subdue or, more radically, replace African labor by introducing a loyal constituency of white veterans who were indisputably *deserving*. Yet as the failed alternatives to the 1919 scheme reveal, the precise ratio of class, nation, and race needed to be a deserving pioneer remained unsolvable. Blixen's "Swedish scheme" posed the question of whether British veterans might be settled on the land under the auspices of a Swedish concessionary company, or if their being beholden to "alien" capital would be a betrayal of the values of the Empire. Bromhead and other more populist settlement boosters went further and argued that it was necessary for white settlers to directly replace African labor to better reproduce whiteness in the colony. Ultimately the final 1919 Ex-Soldier Settlement Scheme emerged as a failed compromise between its many competing alternatives, enshrining the position of the white settler in the colony as a capitalist employer rather than a laborer while also establishing the precedent that

concessions could be granted for cultural rather than economic reasons (e.g. by dint of one's imperial service).

Finally, Chapter 4 will continue the story into the interwar from 1919-1939. I argue here that the failures of the 1919 Ex-Soldier Settlement Scheme, the crises of 1919-1923, and the shift from a Chamberlainite towards a Lugardian doctrine of development forced yet another reconfiguration of concessionary claim making in the colony which I have dubbed 'laundering.' Between 1919 and 1939 both European and Indian settlement schemers had to reconfigure their demands for further state support of closer settlement so as to appear unthreatening to the vision of East Africa as "Primarily…an African territory" wherein "the interests of the African natives must be paramount." Yet because control over Kenyan land had become so central to both white and Indian conceptions of imperial citizenship by 1919, policymakers could not publicly disavow any one group without destabilizing both the colony and the wider Empire. This impasse meant that neither policymakers nor settlers could call the bluffs of the other without popping the culturally and economically speculative bubble both had invested so much to build.

The settlement scheme remained a potent cultural artifact well into the interwar despite there not being much land left to grant and despite the lack of development on extant concessions because some prospective concessionaires proved capable of presenting their old demands using the emerging language of development, laundering them to suit the post-Devonshire moment. Whereas more hardline boosters like Walter Sidney Bromhead were doomed to obscurity for their refusal to launder, more subtle boosters were still able to weld their imaginations to the agency of an increasingly unwilling state so long as they spoke its language. Demands for direct state aid to settlers were rejected, yet in their place came Kenya's land bank which offered "cheap money" to settlers in the name of development. Demands to open Kenya as an asylum to Jewish refugees fleeing the Nazis were rejected, yet when Jewish philanthropists established Plough Shares Association Limited as a shell land settlement company, it was able to launder a humanitarian project to aid refugees with the language of development. The study of failed settlement schemes in Kenya reveals that "development," like imperial citizenship and like whiteness, was sufficiently protean concept to accommodate a wide variety of contradictory dreams.

This dissertation, then, is the history of those dreams.

Chapter 1: "Enthusiastic and Hopelessly Impracticable Visionaries" The Imperial British East Africa Company, the Freelanders, and the Lunatic Line, 1870-1901

> The change comes upon me too suddenly. It is antagonistic to my ideas of the necessity of the organic historical evolution of all human things. One does not make a new order of society as a new machine is made in a workshop, and I cannot believe in this Freeland because it is a creation of art and the work of men who are united especially for the purpose of managing the matter so and not otherwise, whilst my experience of the world teaches me that only that which has been organically produced can be reasonable and lasting.
>
> --Theodor Hertzka, *A Visit to Freeland.*

> "Freiland" is a complicated piece of mechanism with numerous cogged wheels catching into each other; but there is nothing to prove that they can be set in motion. Even supposing "Freiland societies" were to come into existence, I should look on the whole thing as a joke.
>
> --Theodor Herzl, *A Jewish State.*

The first epigraph above were lines spoken by Professor Tenax, a character in Theodor Hertzka's utopian novel *A Visit to Freeland, or, The New Paradise Regained* (*Eine Reise nach Freiland*). This novel was a sequel to *Freeland: A Social Anticipation* (*Freiland: Ein sociales Zukunftsbild*), and together the two spawned throughout Euro-America in the 1890s a brief fad of "Freeland" societies devoted to establishing a liberal socialist commune in the foothills of Mount Kenya. Throughout the novel Professor Tenax plays the role of a doubting Thomas. An older professor of economics now in his dotage, Tenax is unable to accept the self-evident perfection of the Freelanders' society even as they patiently explain it to him. In Freeland all land is held in common, all economic activity organized into cooperative companies which anyone can enter or leave at will, all women can vote, and hydroelectric trams whisk Freelanders from place to place. Tenax cannot accept that such a well-functioning society could be "a creation of art." Yet in reality, between 1870 and 1901 a wide range of actors, from concessionaire capitalists, to Austrian socialists, to Britain's parliament, when confronted by a complex East African political economy which had "been organically produced" by longstanding Indian Ocean dynamics, rejected it, and sought instead to substitute their own colonial society manufactured "as a new machine is made in a workshop."

In June of 1894 a group of over twenty Freelanders arrived in East Africa and tried to make Hertzka's dream a reality. Though Hertzka had imagined a vast urban metropolis springing up on the slopes of Mount Kenya, the Freelanders never made it past coastal Lamu. Infighting, lack of funds, political opposition, and prodigious alcohol consumption caused the group to splinter apart by the close of July 1894. If a history of colonial Kenya deigns to mention them, that is usually the extent of it. What scholarly attention Hertzka has received has generally come from economic and cultural historians interested either in literary utopias or Hertzka's economic

theories, and these tend to focus almost exclusively on Hertzka's writings and not on the 1894 attempt to implement them.[1] The few who have elected to study the 1894 Freelanders in greater detail have usually done so to better contextualize the later Zionist settlement scheme in 1903, which itself usually features as a footnote in the larger history of European settler colonialism in East Africa (Chapter 2). Retrospective assessments have often been as dismissive as those of Hertzka's contemporaries. Historians like Robert Weisbord and Adam Rovner characterized Freeland as a "farce", a "fiasco", and "just a castle in the air."[2] Similarly, such eminent Victorians as Theodor Herzl, Frederick Lugard, Henry Morton Stanley, and Charles Dickens all wrote against Freeland, with Herzl dismissing it as "a joke."[3] Unsurprisingly then, Freeland figures in the historiography of East African settler colonialism as a footnote of a footnote.

I will not argue that the Freeland experiment was actually some hidden hinge on which the history of East Africa turned, but instead that its failure should guarantee (rather than deny) it a more prominent place in the historiography of European settler colonialism in the region. The Freeland experiment was indeed a dysfunctional farce. Thus, it is quite similar to the more traditional starting points of a history of settler colonialism in the region: the Imperial British East Africa Company (IBEAC) and the construction of the Uganda Railway. A year after the Freeland experiment ended, in 1895, the IBEAC's dominion over East Africa collapsed and a British Protectorate was established in its stead. Then, nearly two years to the day after the Freeland experiment, on July 2, 1896, the British Empire began an infrastructure project which would prove catastrophically costly in both blood and treasure. The Uganda Railway, dubbed "the Lunatic Line" even before its construction, would ultimately cost the British taxpayer upwards of £5,000,000. Its construction also depended upon tens of thousands of indentured Indian laborers. According to the final report of the Uganda Railway Committee 31,983 indentured Indian laborers were "imported" to East Africa for the construction of the railway, 6,454 were "invalided" before the end of their contracts, and 2,493 died.[4] If we were to treat the construction of the Uganda Railway as a military campaign with 'casualties' then according to these statistics the indentured labor force suffered a casualty rate of about 28%, and a death rate of about 7.8%. Failure and farce were not deviations from the norm; rather, they were the norm.

Yet Freeland was not just one farce among many. Berman and Lonsdale observed that white settlement in Kenya was "almost an accident", growing from a *post facto* attempt to justify

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[1] This is a characterization of the Anglophone historiography. See Ulrich Bach, "Seeking Emptiness: Theodor Hertzka's Colonial Utopia *Freiland* (1890)," *Utopian Studies* 22, No. 1 (2011): 74-91; Peter Rosner, "Theodor Hertzka and the Utopia of 'Freiland'," *History of Economic Ideas* 14, No. 3 (2006): 113-137; Elun Gabriel, "Utopia, Science, and the Nature of Civilization in Theodor Hertzka's Freiland," *Seminar* 48, No. 1 (2012): 9-29.

[2] Robert Weisbord, *African Zion: The Attempt to Establish a Jewish Colony in the East Africa Protectorate, 1903-1905* (Jewish Publication Society of America, 1968), 26-27; Adam Rovner, *In the Shadow of Zion: Promised Lands Before Israel* (New York University Press Press, 2014), 49.

[3] Theodor Herzl, *A Jewish State: An Attempt at a Modern Solution of the Jewish Question*, trans. Sylvie d'Avigdor (D. Nutt, 1896), vi; "Mr. H.M. Stanley on the Freeland Expedition" *Glasgow Herald,* March 6, 1894, 6; Charles Dickens, "The Freeland Colony Scheme", in *All the Year Round* vol. XII, ed. Charles Dickens (Chapman and Hall, 1894), 65-69.

[4] The National Archives of the UK (TNA): FO 403/339, No. 4, Uganda Railway Committee, "History of the Undertaking", p. 284, from AM Digital: Confidential Print: Africa, 1834-1966, "Construction of the Uganda Railway Further Correspondence Part VIII", accessed 28 July 2026, https://www-confidentialprintafrica-amdigital-co-uk.libproxy.berkeley.edu/Documents/Detail/construction-of-the-uganda-railway-further-correspondence-part-viii/15681978?item=15681992.

the railway's construction by enticing capitalists to develop the lands around it.[5] Settler colonialism in East Africa took place without any overarching vision for its goals. Yet years before the first spike of the Uganda Railway was driven into the ground, and before there was any sort of consensus concerning settlement in East Africa, Theodor Hertzka *had* such a vision. Though many failed settlement schemes never grew beyond a few unanswered letters to the colonial office, a scattering of newspaper articles and pamphlets, or at best a draft report or a provisional constitution, Hertzka's vision was elaborated in two dense novels which outlined nearly every aspect of his imagined society from land tenure, to credit, to labor, to gender relations. Freeland is both the earliest and the most complete elaboration of what a European settler colony in British East Africa ought to *mean* culturally, whom it ought to serve, and how it ought to realize its founding ideals. No other colonial Kenyan settlement scheme was this elaborate or this radical, which is all the more remarkable given that this settlement scheme predated colonial Kenya itself by nearly a decade.

I argue that Hertzka's Freeland was the beginning of the East African settlement scheme as a cultural genre, and the clearest example of it. Freeland demonstrates that settler colonial cultural speculation predated economic speculation in East Africa. Freeland also demonstrates the global dimensions of this cultural speculation. Not only was Hertzka not a British subject, but Freeland societies sprouted up in "England, Germany, America, Holland, Sweden, and Switzerland."[6] Yet to date Hertzka's work has been analyzed in an almost exclusively European context. My objective here is to situate Freeland in both a European and an East African context, to understand it not just as a peculiar outgrowth of European thought but also as one of many failed filibustering missions which hoped to hegemonize a preexisting Indian Ocean political economy. I aim to take Hertzka's dream of Freeland seriously, but not because it was ever likely to succeed. By treating Freeland's failure as a telos, we simultaneously ignore the material reasons it failed and grant unearned legitimacy to the other farcical attempts at European imperial hegemony which surrounded it. The Freelanders, the IBEAC, and the builders of the Uganda Railway all struggled immensely to project hegemony (or even just to travel) beyond the littoral. The railway only 'succeeded' in this respect because it was underwritten by a blank check from Westminster, and its costs were catastrophic. This stemmed from a chronic inability of would-be imperialists to monopolize the diffuse networks of both credit and labor which underwrote the political economy of the western Indian Ocean in the late nineteenth century.

I also must clarify that my analysis of the Freelanders is based solely on English translations of Hertzka's work and on the Anglophone archival record, and as such is not a comprehensive overview of the movement or its objectives. This is significant because portions of Hertzka's novels, particularly those concerning "well-figured, brown ladies", were omitted from the English translation of *Freiland* I draw from here.[7] Similarly, the role of women in both Hertzka's imaginary Freeland and the actual expedition itself is beyond the remit of my analysis here though it deserves more thorough study.[8] My objective with this chapter is to weave both Theodor Hertzka's vision for Freeland and the 1894 attempt to realize it into the historiography

[5] Bruce Berman and John Lonsdale, *Unhappy Valley: Conflict in Kenya & Africa* (J. Currey, 1992), 34.
[6] Dickens, "The Freeland Colony Scheme," 66.
[7] Bach, "Seeking Emptiness", 83.
[8] One of the articles in the inaugural (and possibly only) issue of The Social Problem, the organ of the British Freeland Association focused exclusively on the role of women in Freeland and the relationship between Freeland and feminism. See Evelyn Rawson, "Women in Freeland" *The Social Problem*, 1, No. 1, June 1893, 30-35.

of the British settler colonial project in East Africa as, in Hertzka's words, a "social anticipation." Meaning, Hertzka's work of speculative fiction anticipated the tortured relationships between the colonial state, European settlers, and colonized labor which would ultimately sustain British East Africa's speculative political economy. Similarly, the failure of the 1894 expedition due to national rivalries between its Anglophone and Germanophone ranks anticipated how contests over East African land and concessions would, for the rest of the colony's history, always also be contests over the boundaries of imperial citizenship.

This chapter will proceed in three parts. In the first I will situate Hertzka and Freeland in the historiographies of both *fin de siècle* Vienna and *fin de siècle* East Africa. In the second part, I argue Hertzka accidentally produced an imaginary mirror to the real European settler colony which arose in East Africa a few years later. The speculative land bubble that was colonial Kenya could trace its roots back to a vision of a society where all land was held in common and thus had no market value: *free* land. One must ordinarily turn to Greek tragedy to find such irony. Yet this irony is not merely a fun historiographic coincidence; it is an analytical north star. In articulating his dream of Freeland Hertzka inadvertently foreshadowed many of the same problems which animated subsequent generations of settlement schemers: the scarcity of African labor, the threat of land speculation, the problem of swindlers, and the question of a settlement scheme's relationship to the colonial state. Herzl may have called Freeland as a joke in 1896, but when in 1903 he attempted to establish a Jewish state in the Kenyan highlands he would find himself the punchline of the same joke (Chapter 2).

In the third part I will recapitulate the 1894 Freelander expedition, then situate it as the complement to the 1896-1901 construction of the Uganda Railway in the conclusion. I argue that the Freeland fiasco and the construction of the railway presaged the colony's tensions surrounding imperial citizenship. The Freelanders were a multi-national group, and the question of whether those of other nationalities or ethnicities could be deserving stakeholders in a putatively 'British' colony would resurface perennially in the years to come. Furthermore, the attempt of certain British Freelanders to reconfigure the 1894 expedition into a British filibustering expedition anticipated how, following the railway, generations of British concessionaires would position themselves as uniquely deserving entrepreneurs by dint of their loyalty to the Empire. Between the construction of the railway and the Freelanders, the great animating questions of colonial Kenyan society were already being fiercely debated years before the existence of such a society.

Situating Freeland in fin de siècle Europe and East Africa

Though I read Hertzka's work as utopian fiction, he would have strongly disagreed with this characterization. Indeed, in the preface of *Freeland: A Social Anticipation* Hertzka spilled much ink to dispel the notion that there was anything fantastical about his vision. He instead characterized his work as a "political romance", and repeatedly emphasized that Freeland was "no imaginary fairy-land" nor a mythic "El Dorado" but instead a sober economic theory concocted by an expert in his field, conveyed in narrative form. Indeed, Hertzka claimed:

> I was led, by reasons stated in the book, to fix upon the remarkable hill country of Central Africa; but similar results could be achieved in many other parts of our planet. I must ask the reader to believe that, in making choice of the scene, I was not influenced by a desire to give the reins to my fancy; on the contrary, the descriptions of the little-known mountains and lakes of Central Africa adhere in all points to sober reality. Any one who

> doubts this may compare my narrative with the accounts given by Speke, Grant, Livingstone, Baker, Stanley, Emin Pacha [sic], Thomson, Johnston, Fischer—in short, by all who have visited these paradisiacal regions.[9]

Yet while Hertzka would have preferred his readers see his choice of East Africa as almost coincidental, in reality it was anything but. That Hertzka could with one breath insist that his choice of locale did not constitute "[giving] reins to [his] fancy" and that the locale was "paradisiacal" reflects a tension which would animate much European activity in the region in the late nineteenth century. Hertzka's dream of Freeland, whether he recognized it or not, was deeply shaped by an ongoing struggle between prospective imperialists to monopolize the diffuse commercial and labor networks of the western Indian Ocean and the East African littoral. This struggle over East Africa's political economy had a cultural valence: the inaccessible hinterland was accessible only through *imagination*. Thus, before we can analyze Freeland as a failed settlement scheme we must first contextualize it within the East African political economy it sought to reshape.

Towards Fin de Siècle East Africa

In October 1870 Barghash bin Said al-Busaidi assumed the mantle of the Sultan of Zanzibar and inaugurated both a "modernization" of Zanzibar and an escalation of British imperial intervention in East Africa. Both he and the British inherited a polycentric political economy which resisted at every turn profitable imperial hegemony.[10] British entry into East Africa was paracolonial before it was properly colonial, relying upon established middlemen and local powerholders. In this respect British hegemony was much like the Omani hegemony it supplanted, which was itself "a network of ports, held together more by shared commercial interests than by a state structure" and just as "The Zanzibari state that was taken over in 1890 was less an effective institution than a nodal point in a widespread network of commercial relationships."[11] As Sugata Bose observed, "From about 1800 to 1930 pre-existing interregional networks were utilized, molded, reordered, and rendered subservient by Western capital and the more powerful colonial states, but never torn apart until these networks came under severe strain during the 1930s."[12] Barghash himself was an embodiment of this pattern. Having led a failed coup in 1859 which was put down by the combined forces of the Sultan and British marines, he then spent the next two years in exile in Bombay before returning to Zanzibar in 1861 and acceding to the throne in 1870. As sultan, Barghash used the British just as they had once been used against him: "to strengthen himself against Omani and Swahili opposition", such that "The origins of the colonial state thus lay in an alliance with a particular segment of the old elite that slowly and subtly changed its nature."[13]

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[9] Theodor Hertzka**,** *Freeland: A Social Anticipation*, trans. Arthur Ransom (Chatto & Windus, 1891), xxiii.
[10] A full treatment of the larger Indian Ocean political economy is beyond the remit of this text. See K.N. Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilisation in the Indian Ocean: An Economic History from the Rise of Islam to 1750* (Cambridge University Press, 1985); Sugata Bose, *A Hundred Horizons: The Indian Ocean in the Age of Global Empire* (Harvard University Press, 2009); Thomas F. McDow, *Buying Time: Debt and Mobility in the Western Indian Ocean* (Ohio University Press, 2018).
[11] Frederick Cooper, *Plantation Slavery on the East Coast of Africa* (Yale University Press, 1977), 32; Frederick Cooper, *From Slaves to Squatters: Plantation Labor and Agriculture in Zanzibar and Coastal Kenya, 1890-1925* (Yale University Press, 1980), 55**.**
[12] Bose, *A Hundred Horizons*, 14.
[13] Cooper, *From Slaves to Squatters,* 56-57.

That slow and subtle change in nature, beginning in the 1870s and continuing through the 1890s, ultimately set the stage both for Freeland and for the Uganda Railway. British attempts at curtailing the slave trade were robust enough to damage the sultan's political rivals and destabilize the coastal economy but anemic enough to avoid completely alienating the local powerbrokers upon whom the nascent British sphere of influence depended.[14] In 1873 the British pressured Barghash to ban all trade in slaves by sea. In 1887 the British East Africa Association received a concession from Barghash to administer the ten mile coastal strip from Vanga to Kipini, and in April 1888 it received a royal charter and incorporated as the IBEAC.[15] Its concession was quickly expanded by Barghash's successor Khalifa to include (among other coastal islands and ports) Lamu, the future landing site of the Freelanders. Because the Sultan's power on the coast—and certainly in the hinterland—was tenuous at best, these concessions were calibrated to head off the efforts of the IBEAC's German counterpart, the German East Africa Company (*Deutsch Ostafrikanische Gesellschaft,* or DOAG). The DOAG was busily conniving to assemble a corpus of fraudulent treaties throughout mainland East Africa in the hopes of compelling Germany into greater imperial intervention in the region, an effort which both the British and the Sultan of Zanzibar regarded with extreme prejudice.[16] Thus, *fin de siècle* East Africa's political economy was defined not only by polycentric commercial networks of debt and clientage but also by European filibustering expeditions which sought to conquer, hegemonize, or graft themselves upon these networks. The IBEAC's interventions were sanctioned by both the British and the Zanzibari state, yet these sanctions amounted to the thinnest fig leaf of legitimacy. There were other filibusters, like Carl Peters and like the Freelanders, who lacked even that fig leaf.

Fears of German influence quickly drew the IBEAC into Uganda, and the company dislodged the dysfunctional German Witu Company in 1890 accompanied by a British punitive expedition.[17] Yet by March of 1893 the IBEAC withdrew from Uganda, blaming "the difficulties attending the maintenance of stations situated far in the interior, and separated from the coast by the waterless and roadless belt, necessitating a continuance of the objectionable system of human porterage."[18] By 1893, "the Company administration was virtually non-existent" beyond the coast, and its "maps which showed the route dotted with 'stations' and 'posts' were a farce."[19]

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[14] For more on the anemic nature of the British anti-slavery campaign in the western Indian Ocean see also Matthew S. Hopper, *Slaves of One Master: Globalization and Slavery in Arabia in the Age of Empire* (Yale University Press, 2015).

[15] Fred Morton, *Children of Ham: Freed Slaves and Fugitive Slaves on the Kenya Coast, 1873 to 1907* (Routledge, 2019), 128. The IBEAC was yet another reflection of the dependence of British hegemony upon regional middlemen. The company was led by William Mackinnon, who had also established the British-India Steam Navigation Company which maintained significant commercial connections throughout the Indian Ocean.

[16] The DOAG was established by "an apparent sadist and a patent fraud" by the name of Carl Peters, who assembled around himself a coalition of "impoverished Junkers, idle military officers and ruined petit-bourgeois, who hoped that overseas they might find the glory and riches denied them in the rapidly industrializing world of Bismarck's Germany." These "conquistadors" (as Bismarck mockingly called them) worked throughout the late 1880s as a vanguard of German imperial hegemony in the region whose actions helped to push Barghash into the arms of the British. Jonathon Glassman, *Feasts and Riot: Revelry, Rebellion, and Popular Consciousness on the Swahili Coast, 1856-1888* (Heinemann, 1995), 177-179.

[17] TNA: FO 2/58, "Appendix A: The Company's Position in Uganda" in "Report of the Court of Directors to the Shareholders" pp. 12-14; Morton, *Children of Ham*, 127-134.

[18] TNA: FO 2/57, Ernest Bentley to Foreign Office, May 4, 1893, 242.

[19] John S. Galbraith, *Mackinnon and East Africa 1878-1895: A Study in the 'New Imperialism'* (Cambridge University Press, 1972), 228.

And the IBEAC's control of coastal Witu proved similarly illusory as from 1890 to 1893 as raids, primarily by maroon communities, "kept the Lamu mainland and the Tana river districts in turmoil."[20] And so the company withdrew from Witu in 1893 and ultimately the territory came under formal British control with yet another punitive expedition in 1894, sacking Pumwani and destroying the food stockpiles which had been sustaining the maroons of the Utwani forest. Thus, when the exceedingly well-armed Freelanders arrived on Lamu—just off the coast of Witu—in 1894, they were arriving on a battlefield.

News of the IBEAC's planned withdrawal from Uganda sparked much unease, with The Scotsman proclaiming the "present situation on the East African mainland is that everything is left hanging in suspense" while one Bishop Tucker in Uganda warned that a British withdrawal from Uganda "is not simply a question of Uganda; it is a question that concerns more or less the whole of Africa."[21] East Africa in the 1890s was in a state of significant flux. The institution of slavery was destabilized, yet still central to the regional economy. *Fin de siècle* East Africa was awash with filibusters—German, British, and Arab— crisscrossing the region trying to secure some legal pretense to justify their desired 'spheres of influence'.[22] Some organized companies, some were formally affiliated with governments, others were purely private. Because of this, knowledge of the region's riches was more widespread than ever in Europe. Yet no single power had managed to secure hegemony over those riches because access to them was gated by diffuse networks and human infrastructure which would require a colossal investment of capital and force to break through.

Slavery, Porterage, and the Paracolonial Labor Crisis

The polycentric character of *fin de siècle* East Africa's political economy stemmed from the contest over labor, specifically over the institutions of slavery and porterage. From the 1870s well into the 1890s East Africa's "runaway problem" grew evermore acute, as "slaves had moved faster than the law."[23] Maroon communities like those at Frere Town and Fuladoyo posed a direct threat to the authority of both coastal slavers and their British collaborators, not only because they occasionally engaged in armed conflict with them (as during the Fuladoyo Wars of 1883-84) but also because the missionaries, the coastal elites, and later the IBEAC all relied upon slave labor for porterage. Thus, IBEAC attacks on slavery often amounted to little more than "paroxysmal gestures", usually taking the form of mass manumissions during moments of crisis such as the remittances at Rabai shortly after the company's formation or the liberation of approximately 800 enslaved people from the Witu rebels in 1894.[24] Often IBEAC manumissions were of maroons who had already freed themselves, done with the goal of maintaining a precarious illusion of stable hegemony.[25] Any protections the IBEAC offered to the enslaved people of East Africa were offered begrudgingly because the company lacked the strength, the resources, and the inclination to enforce such protections.

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[20] Morton, *Children of Ham,* 133.
[21] TNA: FO 2/57, *The Scotsman*, May 24, 1893, p. 306; "Bishop Tucker in Uganda" *St. James's Gazette*, May 24, 1893, p. 308.
[22] See Steven Press, *Rogue Empires: Contracts and Conmen in Europe's Scramble for Africa* (Harvard University Press, 2017), especially Chapter 5.
[23] Cooper, *From Slaves to Squatters,* 51.
[24] Morton, *Children of Ham,* 137-138.
[25] TNA: FO 2/57, Ernest Bentley to C.T. Wakefield, April 24, 1893, pp. 217-218.

The limits of the company's control are well-illustrated by the controversial case of Reverend R.M. Ormrod and an enslaved woman he identified as "Yasamine." According to Ormrod, Yasamine had been enslaved by a "rich old man, named Shaabeg […] who not only kept her in slavery, but used her as a concubine." Yasamine escaped her captor and took shelter at Ormrod's mission nearby with her husband. She lived at the mission for several months and was apparently a model member of the community, "[working] industriously on her little farm, and generally commended herself to her fellow villagers."[26] Yet when her captor discovered where she was, he dispatched an agent accompanied by two IBEAC askaris who proceeded to drag Yasamine from her home and attempt to march her back to Mombasa. Then, according to Ormrod, "Some of the villagers came running to the mission house with the news; and a few minutes later I was running along the Mombasa road with a train of armed natives behind me in pursuit of the slaving party […] At my orders the soldiers turned 'right about face' and escorted the Swahili and slave back to the village."[27]

The IBEAC, meanwhile, was livid at both Ormrod's "wholly illegal [and] most injudicious" actions, along with his impropriety of disclosing to a metropolitan readership that company mercenaries were involved in returning escaped slaves to their captors.[28] Yet Ormrod's self-righteousness and the Company's rebuke of him elide the fact that both of them were *reacting* to this situation, not shaping it. Ormrod by his own admission had confronted the two company askaris alongside "a train of armed natives" whose presence likely did far more to force the askaris to release Yasamine than did Ormrod's stern command. Even at the heart of the IBEAC's power, more often than not it acted as a feeble intermediary between enslavers, maroons, missionaries, merchants, and statesmen than an authority over them.

Thus the 'labor crisis' which bedeviled so many settlers in colonial Kenya had roots stretching decades before the construction of the Uganda Railway and the beginnings of mass white settlement. According to an IBEAC report, it took a caravan approximately three months (83 days) to travel the approximately 731 miles from coastal Mombasa to Mengo in Uganda "not allowing for extraordinary delays" (which were frequent).[29] Due to the prevalence of the tsetse fly, it was virtually impossible for caravans to rely upon animal labor as most beasts of burden introduced to the region quickly died from animal trypanosomiasis.[30] Caravans depended upon the labor of African porters, who functioned as human infrastructure. East African porterage blurred the lines between slavery and freedom, with porters being paid in a combination of currency, trade goods, and rations at regular intervals.

Take for instance the case of one William Astor Chanler, an American who in July of 1892 hired a "headman porter" named Himidi in Zanzibar to organize an expedition inland. According to a statement submitted by Himidi to the British consulate in Zanzibar afterwards, the expedition into Witu and along the Tana River quickly became a nightmare. When five porters tried to desert back to the coast Chanler had the Somali overseers he'd hired against their wishes give each of them "150 lashes with a whip of hippopotamus hide, and four of them,

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[26] "Slavery in East Africa", *The Carlisle Journal*, May 5, 1893, 7, from the British Newspaper Archive, accessed July 28, 2026, https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000362/18930505/206/0007.
[27] TNA: FO 2/57, R.M. Ormerod to C.T. Wakefield, pp. 214-215.
[28] TNA: FO 2/57, Ernest L. Bentley to C.T. Wakefield, April 24, 1893, p. 219.
[29] TNA: FO 2/57, "Approximate Caravan Time Table", February 2, 1893, p. 41.
[30] For more on the tsetse fly see Clapperton Chakanetsa Mavhunga, *The Mobile Workshop: The Tsetse Fly and African Knowledge Production* (The MIT Press, 2018).

namely, Bakari, Hussan- bin-Jooma, Hamisi-Bin-Feruzi, and Kombo Wadi Baruti, died a few days afterwards form the effects of this thrashing." And Chanler devised other tortures: "Some of the porters were tied by the hands on a tree, a heavy weight of ivory placed on the nape of the neck and left hanging for a quarter of an hour, when on being released they would faint away." The nightmare only ended after fourteen porters had died and some of the survivors seized three loads of Chanler's cloth, used it to buy food, and ran back to the coast.[31] The story of Chanler's expedition reveals that the ability for coastal elites or would-be colonizers to reach the interior was, since it depended upon African labor, always uncertain and rested on the threat of force to curb their labor power. The constant whippings, shootings, and tortures Chanler administered occurred because he was not only unwilling but incapable of participating in the political economy of the western Indian Ocean otherwise. He might temporarily beat it into an unprofitable submission, but he could do no more.

Dr. Hertzka and Fin de Siècle Vienna

To understand Freeland, we must situate it in two places at once: Europe and East Africa. East Africa in the 1890s was the perfect canvas upon which a distant European might paint their own imaginary society, yet that alone cannot explain why Dr. Theodor Hertzka felt the need to do so. Freeland was a product of the chaotic artistic and political scene of *fin de siècle* Vienna, where Austrian liberalism was buckling in the face of an ethno-populist backlash. For this reason, even though the Freelanders themselves never made it past the coast their failed attempt foreshadowed the fate of the actual colonial society which sprang up in colonial Kenya, a society which was dominated by aristocratic refugees from a changing metropole they felt they could no longer understand. Hertzka's imaginary society was, to him, the promise of liberalism fulfilled. He projected that dream upon East Africa because he could no longer project it upon Vienna. In that sense, he was very much like all of the settlers who would pour into the colony following the completion of the railway.

By 1890 Hertzka was already a respected economist and public intellectual, and Freeland's limited successes depended upon his expert status.[32] Hertzka was born fifteen years earlier than Herzl but in the same city: Budapest, 1845. Hertzka witnessed as a young adult the apogee of Austrian liberalism's influence in the 1860s and the early 1870s; Herzl, born a generation later, witnessed at the same age the liberal unraveling of the late 1870s and 1880s.[33] From 1872 to 1879 Hertzka was editor for the economic section of the Viennese Neue Freie Presse and "published several academic studies regarding financial and currency issues of the day, in which he stated his social-liberal convictions, such as individual freedom in all economic aspects of life and approval of individual self-interest as a driving force for economic growth."[34] Yet in 1873 Austria's speculative *Gründerzeit* came to a skidding halt with the *Krach* of May 9. And as Pieter Judson noted, the "economic depression and psychological disillusionment"

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[31] TNA: FO 403/194, Inclosure 2 in No. 141, "Declaration by Himidi, Headman Porter" pp. 93-95, from AM Digital: Confidential Print: Africa, 1834-1966, "East Africa Further Correspondence Part XXXVII", accessed July 28, 2026, https://www-confidentialprintafrica-amdigital-co-uk.libproxy.berkeley.edu/Documents/Detail/east-africa-further-correspondence-part-xxxvii/15402399?search=Freeland&forceLogin=true.

[32] Gabriel, "Utopia", 10.

[33] For a more holistic account and less Vienna-centric account of liberalism's political fortunes in the Austrian Empire see Pieter M. Judson, *Exclusive Revolutionaries: Liberal Politics, Social Experience, and National Identity in the Austrian Empire, 1848-1914* (University of Michigan Press, 1996).

[34] Bach, "Seeking Emptiness", 76-77. In the 1890s, Herzl worked as a Paris correspondent for *Neue Freie Presse* covering the Dreyfus Affair.

caused by 1873 "severely damaged popular confidence in the efficacy of liberal principles" like the good of an unregulated free market and prompted increasingly strident demands from liberalism's opponents for greater state intervention.[35]

In 1880 Hertzka founded his own newspaper, Wiener Allgemeine Zeitung. Hertzka was also Jewish, in a city whose politics from the 1870s onwards became increasingly bent around an anti-liberal, antisemitic populism which Karl Schorske dubbed the "politics in a new key".[36] As Schorske observed, "The new anti-liberal mass movements—Czech nationalism, Pan-Germanism, Christian Socialism, Social Democracy, and Zionism—rose from below to challenge the trusteeship of the educated middle class, to paralyze its political system, and to undermine its confidence in the rational structure of society."[37] Hertzka was an embodiment of that liberal "educated middle class", he possessed an ironclad "confidence in the rational structure of society", and Freeland was at its core an attempt to salvage liberalism from the flames consuming it. Hertzka stated as much explicitly in *A Visit to Freeland*, declaring "The doctrine of Adam Smith is accepted literally in Freeland" and that Freeland "does nothing else than what modern Liberalism claims to have always done."[38]

The flames grew hotter throughout the 1880s, fed by the likes of demagogic politicians like Goerg von Schönerer and Karl Lueger whose political coalitions depended upon the scapegoating of "Judeo-Magyars" for economic instability and corruption.[39] Throughout the 1880s Hertzka delivered public lectures arguing for an enlightened, liberal "synthesis" of "Arian and Semitic Spirit" (*"Arischer und Semitischer Geist"*). This synthesis, Hertzka contended, could be achieved through a restructuring of the political economy. As Ulrich Bach observed, "In this future heaven on earth, arts ('the incarnation of the beautiful' = Jewish) and science ('the incarnation of the sublime' = Christian) will reciprocally fulfill each other. Although Hertzka is fully aware of the anti-Semitism in Vienna, for his assimilated audience he portrays xenophobia as a catalyst to a beautiful liberal world. In this light, the freedom of the African plains that Hertzka is going to describe in *Freiland* appears as a reflection of a partially unperceived, but real, lack of freedom for Jews in Vienna."[40] The year Hertzka published *Freiland* (1890) was one "marked by unusual intensity [and] scarred by anti-Semitism" with police having to intervene "to separate Jews and anti-Semites on election day."[41] Neither Hertzka's economic theories, nor his

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[35] Judson, *Exclusive Revolutionaries,* 166-167.

[36] The March 1877 Viennese elections were an important turning point: "A municipal campaign technique in 1877, anti-Semitism was later to escalate into a program to disenfranchise Jews." During the same decade that European powers were beginning to forge their own hegemonic spheres of influence in East Africa, antisemitic anti-liberalism was remaking Viennese politics. Richard S. Geehr, *Karl Lueger: Mayor of Fin de Siècle Vienna* (Wayne State University Press, 1990), 49.

[37] Carl E. Schorske, *Fin de Siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture* (Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 1980), 118.

[38] Theodor Hertzka, *A Visit to Freeland or The New Paradise Regained* (William Reeves, 1894), 21; 22.

[39] In 1892 Heinrich von Etienne, "a company official and brother of the cofounder and publisher of the *Neue Freie Presse*" (where Hertzka had worked as editor) challenged Karl Lueger to a duel over a "parliamentary anti-Semitic diatribe", which Lueger declined. Geehr, *Karl Lueger*, 86.

[40] Bach, "Seeking Emptiness", 80**.** We see this in *Freeland* as well. In the climactic debate which concludes the novel, one Freelander proclaims: "There is, then, no contradiction between the Christian ideas and what we are striving for; the difference between the two lies simply herein: that the first announcement of the idea of equality was made in an age when the material conditions necessary for the practical realisation of this divine idea did not yet exist, whilst our endeavours signify the 'Incarnation of the Word,' the fruit of the seed then cast into the mind of mankind." Hertzka, *Freeland*, 352.

[41] Geeher, *Karl Lueger,* 83.

newspaper, nor his speeches had stemmed the rising tide of antisemitic, anti-liberal populism in Vienna. The time had come for something new: "political romance." With Freeland Hertzka hoped to play the old tune of liberalism in a 'new key'.

Writing of Schönerer, Lueger, and Herzl, Schorske described them as "political artists" who addressed "the social and spiritual needs of their followers by composing ideological collages—collages made of fragments of modernity, glimpses of futurity, and resurrected remnants of a half-forgotten past" which to liberals "were mystifying and repulsive" because they "grasped a social-psychological reality which the liberal could not see."[42] Hertzka's vision for Freeland demonstrates that some liberals did grasp that reality, or at least a version of it, and could make collages of their own.[43] Hertzka's collage grew from and spoke to "the social and spiritual needs" of a liberal bourgeoisie within and beyond Vienna which was growing increasingly concerned with both the failures of industrial capitalism and the rise of nationalist, often antisemitic mass politics. At the exact same time liberal industrial capitalism was faltering in Europe, the contest over spheres of influence in East Africa presented to the sufficiently imaginative mind an 'Old-New Land' ripe for speculation. This imaginary East Africa existed in Hertzka's mind because no European power had yet hegemonized the real East Africa's diffuse networks of commerce and labor, so these remained illegible and invisible to the distant economist. *Fin de siècle* East Africa's political economy made it appear to European would-be colonizers as an empty imaginary, and thus as a suitable site for a settler colony. The constant struggles between indigenous Africans, Arab colonists, coastal planters, maroons, porters, and European would-be colonizers produced a regional political economy which Europeans were neither willing to understand nor capable of dominating. Easier, then, to call it empty, undeveloped, and already known.

This tension between the theoretical and the tangible, between the fantastical and the feasible, is a constitutive element of the East African settlement scheme as a genre. Hertzka was seeking to imagine away the problems of *fin de siècle* Vienna with a work of art which synthesized theory and praxis. Hertzka's theoretical vision of "unity and harmony of a definitive whole" evokes the Wagnerian idea of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* or 'total work of art' which also animated many of the artists of the Vienna Secession. As Kevin Karnes observed, "Wagner's vision of a total work of art […] foretold a complete, utopian refashioning of European society, and even of the psyche itself" and thus, "the eupsychian longings of many artists, though claiming no domain beyond the mind itself, were nonetheless explicitly activist in nature, and therefore not escapist at all."[44] He didn't see himself as radically rejecting the "physicalist realism in which [he] had been reared" per Schorske, but rather insisted that his imaginary society was the continuation of his liberal realism:

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[42] Schorske, *Fin de Siècle Vienna,* 119-120.

[43] Here I build on the work of Judson and other historians who have since revised Schorske's original thesis. For a useful survey of this work, see Steven Beller, ed., *Rethinking Vienna 1900* (Berghahn Books, 2001).

[44] Kevin C. Karnes, *A Kingdom Not of This World: Wagner, the Arts, and Utopian Visions in Fin-de-Siècle Vienna,* 31*;* 27. I do not mean to imply here that Hertzka was directly inspired by Wagner to the same degree as the artists of the Secession. Wagner's artistic metaphysics, inspired by Schopenhauer, imagined an annihilation of the individuated ego in the ecstatic realization of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Conversely Hertzka's vision prized self-interest and individuality, which he sought to realize through communal ownership of land and a democratization of the market.

> My intense delight at making this discovery robbed me of the calm necessary to the prosecution of the abstract investigations upon which I was engaged. Before my mind's eye arose scenes which the reader will find in the following pages—tangible, living pictures of a commonwealth based upon the most perfect freedom and equity, and which needs nothing to convert it into a reality but the will of a number of resolute men. It happened to me as it may have happened to Bacon of Verulam when his studies for the 'Novum Organon' were interrupted by the vision of his 'Nova Atlantis'—with this difference, however, that his prophetic glance saw the land of social freedom and justice when centuries of bondage still separated him from it, whilst I see it when mankind is already actually equipped ready to step over its threshold. Like him, I felt an irresistible impulse vividly to depict what agitated my mind.[45]

These are not the words of a pessimist harried into a *voyage intérieur* by liberalism's unraveling, but rather of a man determined to embark upon a literal voyage towards a liberal salvation he was certain was on the threshold of realizing. When confronted by *fin de siècle* East Africa, the IBEAC and Hertzka both felt they were "ready to step over its threshold" even as they were incapable of recognizing that the door had been ajar for centuries.

"Political Romance": A Journey into the Mirror Colony

The settler colony Hertzka envisioned for East Africa was, in brief, a liberal-socialist sovereign business cooperative where the market and the state were effectively coextensive, all citizens lived as bourgeois employers, and the proletariat had been automated out of existence. According to Hertzka, these were the five constitutional laws of Freeland:

> 1) Every inhabitant of Freeland has an equal inalienable right to the common land and to the means of production which are furnished by the state.
>
> 2) Women, children, and old men, and those who are unfit for work have a right to sufficient maintenance corresponding to the amount of wealth belonging to the state.
>
> 3) No one can be hindered in executing his own free individual will so long as he does not interfere with the rights of others.
>
> 4) Matters of public interest are decided by all the inhabitants of Freeland who are of the requisite age (over twenty-five years) without distinction of sex. All these possess the same active and passive rights of speaking and voting in everything that concerns the state.
>
> 5) The legislative and executive powers are divided according to the branches of business in such a manner that the totality of those who have the right of voting choose separate representatives for each of the principal branches of public business. These form their decisions apart, and watch over the working of the organs of administration which belong to each.[46]

Common land ownership, universal basic income for women/children/retirees/the disabled, universal suffrage for all above the age of twenty-five, and most significantly, a state which functions as a cooperative business enterprise. For Hertzka this was a solution to the long-vexed

[45] Hertzka, *Freeland*, xxi-xxii; Schorske, *Fin de Siècle Vienna*, 208.
[46] Hertzka, *A Visit to Freeland*, 22-23.

social question, yet more immediately it was also a blueprint for establishing a settler colony in East Africa. Hertzka ultimately wanted to do the same thing as the men of the IBEAC and the engineers of the Uganda Railway: to organize, centralize, and hegemonize *fin de siècle* East Africa's political economy.

Ultimately, Freeland is a reflection of colonial Kenya glimpsed through a funhouse mirror. By gazing into that mirror, we can witness in miniature the interplay between cultural and economic speculation which would ultimately shape so much of colonial Kenya's political economy. So, for the remainder of this section I will read Hertzka's imaginary Freeland as a genuine "social anticipation" by exploring certain key areas where the Freelander vision for East Africa 'rhymed' with the vision of the Uganda Railway's architects and with the settlement schemers which followed in their wake. By braiding Hertzka's imaginary future together with what actually followed, we can get a better sense of why East Africa's settlement schemers—despite representing a heterogenous collage of conflicting interests and beliefs—kept returning to the same tropes, the same visions for development, and kept adding to the peculiar microgenre of the East African settlement scheme. Hertzka's attempt to fuse the settler colonial state and private capital was a "social anticipation" not of a utopia, but of the tortured relationship between the colonial state and private enterprise which animated colonial Kenya's political economy.

Rhyme 1: Libertarian High Modernism and Self-Interested Colonial Development

Freeland follows a plucky group of colonists who, inspired by "Dr. Karl Strahl" (Hertzka's stand-in), found an international society and plunge into the heart of East Africa. The novel alternates between prose, letters, diary entries, and meeting minutes written by various characters involved in the establishment of Freeland. In the first part of the novel Hertzka elaborates the Freelander vision for a moral, liberal colonial conquest. It takes them about one year from Strahl's first publication to reach the foothills of Mount Kenya whereat they establish their capital of "Edenthal" (in English translations "Edendale" "Edenvale" or just "Eden"). In the second part we follow Freeland's development over its first twenty five years wherein its population grows in leaps and bounds from a handful of colonists to "twenty-six million whites and fifteen million natives", its economy booms, and Uganda is also conquered by the Freelanders.[47] In the third and final part of the novel Freeland is invaded by Ethiopia but triumphs, finally demonstrating to the wider world the superiority of their economic model.[48] This culminates in a great "Universal Congress" which Hertzka uses as the stage for a dialectical examination of his economic theories, concluding with delegates from all around the world agreeing to join Freeland.[49] At no point is the success of Freeland in doubt. Every problem they encounter is easily and triumphantly resolved through the rational application of scientific knowledge, liberal principles, and industrial technology.

According to Hertzka, a capitalist market economy was not necessarily unstable or exploitative as such because the real problem with modern industrial capitalism was not overproduction but rather underconsumption.[50] The anachronistic persistence of exploitative social institutions held the purchasing power of workers to bare subsistence rather than allowing

[47] Bach, "Seeking Emptiness", 81.
[48] Hertzka, *Freeland*, 334.
[49] Bach, "Seeking Emptiness", 80-82.
[50] Paul Jackson, "Freiland. Theodor Hertzka's Liberal-Socialist Utopia", *German Life and Letters*, 33, No. 4, 270; Hertzka, *Freeland*, xxi.

it to rise with production, thus creating overproduction crises and general misery. Hertzka and his followers contended that technological progress had finally made universal prosperity possible whereas previously the reliance upon human and animal labor made such prosperity feasible only for an elite few. As Ernest Udny clarified in the inaugural issue of The Social Problem, the official publication of the British Freeland Association, "The community [i.e. Freeland] in its collective capacity would carry on little more of the work of the country than it does in England—except, indeed, in the department of *distribution*. The bulk of industrial production would be done by private undertakings organised as they are in Europe, that is under foremen and directors."[51] Freeland did not envision an elimination of capitalism nor even of industrial capitalism's labor hierarchy, but rather a renewal of both through "a synthesis of communal ownership, individual effort and free trade" bolstered by industrial technology.[52] The animating question of Hertzka's novels was how to bring this new system of distribution into reality now that it was technologically feasible.

Freeland's new system of "distribution" was based upon articles one and five of its constitution: common ownership of non-residential land and a self-regulating collective capitalist state. In Freeland the purpose of the state would be to guarantee the economic rights and sustain the rational self-interest of Freelanders by acting as a centralized distributor of land, capital, and information. Because, "*All* means of production are common property", Hertzka's colonial state would act first and foremost as a central bank/warehouse.[53] All capital would be centralized within the state bank, to which all people/associations could apply for no-interest loans of whatever sum they required, which would then be paid back from the profits of their venture. Crucially Hertzka's imaginary colonial state, by centralizing within itself all economic transactions, would effectively become omniscient:

> The supreme authority in Freeland was at the same time the banker of the whole population […] A 'clearing system,' which really included everything, made these numberless debit and credit operations possible with scarcely any employment of actual money, but simply by additions to and subtractions from the accounts in the books. No one paid cash, but gave cheques on his account at the central bank, which gave him credit for his earnings, debited his spendings to him, and gave him every month a statement of his account. Naturally the loans granted by the commonwealth as capital for production […] appeared in the books of the bank. In this way the bank was informed of the minutest detail of every business transaction throughout the whole country. It not only knew where and at what price the producers purchased their machinery and raw material and where they sold their productions, but it knew also the housekeeping account, the income and cost of living of every family. Even the retail trade could not escape the omniscience of this control […] Even if anyone had wished to do so, it would have been simply impracticable to conceal or to falsify everything.[54]

By having all capital "thrown into one lump" to which all Freelanders were equally entitled, Hertzka believed he had finally resolved the social question.[55] There would be no class conflict

[51] Ernest Udny, "To All Whom it May Concern. Our Social Gospel: A Summary" *The Social Problem*, 1, No. 1, June 1893, 4-5.
[52] Jackson, *"Freiland"*, 270.
[53] Hertzka, *Freeland*, 103-104.
[54] Hertzka, *Freeland*, 108.
[55] Hertzka, *Freeland*, 361.

because all Freelanders would be "in the condition of partners who carry on their business for their joint advantage".[56] Furthermore, the state bank's "Central Statistical Office" would maintain a public registry of *all* economic activity—distributed as a daily paper in public places—such that Freelanders could objectively ascertain which ventures were profitable and which were not.[57] From there rational self-interest would obviate the need for any communistic central planning because all Freelanders could perceive the economy *in toto* and determine how to most profitably allocate both their personal labor power and the communal pool of capital.

All economic activity would then be organized as cooperative companies, which all members could enter and leave at will. No company could refuse to hire someone, nor could a company prevent someone from leaving its employ, because all people have the right to allocate their labor towards the most profitable pursuit within their ability. Each cooperative compensates each member according to the amount of work they did at a rate set by the cooperative, catalogued by the state bank. And while all Freelanders have a right to vote for all representative bodies of the state, Hertzka would clarify that Freelanders as a rule only vote on matters which they understand and which affect them directly. Thus all industries in Freeland effectively self-regulate, yet since their interests are coextensive with the larger society their rational self-interest will always direct them towards enlarging the great communal pool of capital from which they draw.[58]

I argue that the Freelander vision for a colonial state is an expression of *libertarian* high modernism. James Scott in *Seeing Like a State* characterizes 'high modernism' as "a supreme self-confidence about continued linear progress, the development of scientific and technical knowledge, the expansion of production, the rational design of social order, the growing satisfaction of human needs, and, not least, an increasing control over nature (including human nature) commensurate with scientific understanding of natural laws."[59] Because this "supreme self-confidence" usually produced sweeping, high-cost, highly intrusive efforts at social engineering Scott contends that high modernism tended towards a statist authoritarianism. Certainly this was true of the architects of the Uganda Railway, who believed that the sheer industrial supremacy of the railway would itself obliterate the institutions of slavery, the labor power of porters, and all other inconvenient anachronisms of *fin de siècle* East Africa's polycentric political economy.

Yet Hertzka's high modernism makes that of the IBEAC or of the railway's engineers appear tame by comparison. Freeland was envisioned as a highly automated, mechanized, industrial society of progress. Within twenty-five years of its establishment Freelander railways connect the Atlantic, Mediterranean, and Indian Oceans to Lake Victoria, an extension of the Uganda Railway on a continental scale.[60] Hydroelectric railways and tramlines whisk Freelanders easily from coast to hinterland, its carriages are drawn by "mechanical power" instead of horses, its "refuse is cleared away by a system of pneumatic sucking apparatus [sic]", all its homes have "electric ovens" and a "special apparatus for cooling or warming the food",

[56] Hertzka, *A Visit to Freeland,* 106.
[57] Hertzka, *A Visit to Freeland*, 39-40.
[58] Hertzka, *A Visit to Freeland,* 123.
[59] James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (Yale University Press, 2020), 89-90.
[60] Hertzka, *Freeland*, 169.

and its warehouses brim with so many industrial machines that "Man was in truth here only the overseer who watched over and guided the labor of the elements."[61]

Yet Freeland rhymed with the settlement schemes to come not because of its high modernist vision, but because of its libertarian spin on high modernism. James Scott correctly observed that while "high modernists might well hold democratic views about popular sovereignty or classical liberal views about the inviolability of a private sphere that restrained them, but such convictions are external to, and often at war with, their high-modernist convictions."[62] Yet Hertzka was determined to reconcile his "classical liberal views" with his high modernism, and he did so by arguing that *all* people would naturally 'see like a state' if only given the opportunity to do so. Freeland was founded on the belief that settlers would, so long as they were provided with sufficient capital, information, and access to land, *naturally* develop the colony productively just by pursuing their rational self-interest. As one article in The Social Problem asserted, Freeland would be governed not by base selfishness, but rather by "enlightened self-interest": "In a co-operative commonwealth, such as Dr. Hertzka has sketched for us, founded upon Freedom and Economic Justice, a truer and higher conception of Self-interest (and therefore of Social Duty also,) would take root and grow up *spontaneously* [emphasis mine] even in the most commonplace minds."[63]

According to Freeland's libertarian high modernism, the colonial state would behave less as a symphony conductor and more as a jazz band leader, coordinating the improvisations of each musician around a shared melody. Freeland has no police, no courts, and its criminal justice system is administered by its department of health because "here the advantage of the State stands in perfect harmony with everyone's peculiar interests, and it is superfluous to defend these interests of the state, surrounded by the insurmountable wall of general self-interest, through special safeguards."[64] This is precisely what the settler colonial state must do to survive. For Hertzka this idea helped him imagine a solution to Europe's social question without sacrificing his classical liberal convictions: everybody would be a liberal like him, if only capital and market information were distributed more efficiently. The colonial state would not need to *do* anything, just distribute the means of production to those who knew how best to use them. Ultimately, Kenya's colonial state and many of its settlement schemers would—for very different reasons—reach the same conclusion.[65] Kenya's aristocratic settlers were often quite happy to jettison the high modernist aspirations which built the railway in favor of a backward-looking, aristocratic social order of masters and servants (Chapter 3).[66] Yet, even when their imagined future was so different from Freeland, they would still demand that the colonial state behave like Freeland: a

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[61] Hertzka, *A Visit to Freeland,* 32; 70; 53.
[62] Scott, *Seeing Like a State,* 94.
[63] "Self-Interest and the Commonweal" *The Social Problem*, 1, No. 1, June 1893, 40.
[64] Hertzka, *A Visit to Freeland,* 128.
[65] As Bach observed in his analysis of Freeland, "Effectively, Freeland would structurally not be too different from the actual nineteenth-century European colonies in Africa." For Bach, this was because he believed Hertzka had inadvertently imagined a society which—though it dabbled with a civilizing mission for the African—would ultimately "be a caste system, with little social contact between Africans as menial workers and whites as rulers." Though I agree that Freeland's vision overlapped significantly with actual European colonization, I would argue this stems more from Hertzka's vision of the role of the colonial state and less from how he conceptualized African Freelanders. Bach, "Seeking Emptiness", 87.
[66] See Brett L. Shadle, *The Souls of White Folk: White Settlers in Kenya, 1900s-1920s* (Manchester University Press, 2015); Dane Kennedy, *Islands of White: Settler Society and Culture in Kenya and Southern Rhodesia, 1890-1939* (Duke University Press, 1987).

conductor of rational, self-interested exploitation. But that left a question unresolved: what about *irrational* self-interest?

Rhyme 2: Swindlers, Speculators, and Scoundrels

Hertzka's "social anticipation" was ultimately correct that Kenya's colonial state would be conceptualized as a conductor of self-interested profiteers. Yet Hertzka put much more thought into the ramifications of a society built entirely around self-interested profit seeking than colonial Kenya's administrators ever would. The bar was not high, admittedly, but nevertheless Hertzka devotes a surprising amount of both *Freeland* and *A Visit to Freeland* to the question of how his utopia would manage the threat of confidence tricksters, fraudulent company promotors, and swindlers. In this respect Hertzka, the grandfather of the microgenre of East African settlement schemes, differed markedly from later schemers. Most Kenyan settlement schemes never acknowledged the possibility of swindling unless they were accusing a rival schemer of it. Yet if the colonial state was to act as the gatekeeper and distributor of the means of production (primarily land, but to a lesser extent labor and capital), what was to stop unscrupulous actors from conning it out of those things? And even absent any ill intentions, what was to stop people from squandering the communal pool of capital on foolish ventures? In both the imaginary colony and the real one, settlers would depend for their livelihood upon convincing both the colonial state and their fellow settlers that they deserved privileged access to the means of production. In both Freeland and colonial Kenya, most settlers' wealth would exist largely on paper. For Hertzka, unproductive selfishness would be transmuted into a more "enlightened" self-interest through a combination of social pressure and an omniscient state. In reality Kenya's colonial state was resolutely ignorant: its districts were poorly defined, its survey department was perennially underfunded, its land laws were opaque, and concessions were secured through backroom dealing and public browbeating. Much swindling ensued.

In *Freeland*, there is a lengthy interlude following the establishment of the colony wherein a group of forty-six American "men of business" attempt to fleece Freeland's central bank. The initial plan of the "unscrupulous Yankees" was to "draw as large a sum as possible from our central bank under the pretence [sic] of requiring it to found an association."[67] Hertzka uses the episode as a way to anticipate and refute certain criticisms of his theory, namely, that in a society where one can draw a theoretically infinite line of credit from the state bank, what would stop one from drawing as much as they could get away with and running? Upon arriving in Freeland the leader of the American swindlers takes up residence in a Freeland hotel and gets some clothes from the local warehouse, all on credit. All goes well at first ("Mckay or Gould cannot get credit in New York more readily than we did in Freeland"), yet gradually Freeland's libertarian anti-fraud measures complicate the scheme.

First, the omniscient state and free labor. Because Freeland's constitution "insisted upon publicity in connection with every act, date, and circumstance connected with business", and because no association could legally deny membership to anyone, the swindlers quickly realize that they will have difficulty restricting their membership to only those invested in the swindle.[68] Every transaction their shell association made would be a matter of public record, and even if they managed to cook their books, they couldn't then turn away any honest Freelander who wanted to join. Frustrated, the swindlers resolve to "give our plans such a character as to prevent

[67] Hertzka, *Freeland*, 162.
[68] Hertzka, *Freeland,* 163.

the Freeland workers from having any wish to share in them" by setting up an association which is, on the surface, both unprofitable and boring: a needle factory.[69]

This leads to a second problem though: in devising an association which putatively employed few people and made little money, it would be difficult to request a large enough loan from the central bank to justify all the deception. And finally, even if the swindlers received their loan how would they translate credit from the bank into cash they could carry away? All commerce within Freeland is cashless, and as a bank teller explains to the exasperated swindler, "we, the central bank, give merely productive credit—we cannot advance to you what you consume."[70] The swindlers can draw as much credit as they like, but it will exist only on paper. Ultimately the American swindlers realize that it is in their best interest just to stay in Freeland and work honestly, their rational self-interest ultimately compelling them despite their best efforts to become productive members of the utopia. Yet within twenty years of *Freeland*'s publication British East Africa would be full to bursting with 'needle factories' great and small. As one "Landless Ex-Soldier" complained amidst the 1919 Ex-Soldier Settlement Scheme, "it seems to me that a few land speculators run this colony and own the Colonial Office."[71]

Colonial Kenya's real history of predatory land speculation and Hertzka's vision of communal land ownership are not antinomies, but rather two sides of the same coin. Hertzka recognized—as would every settlement schemer after him—that the colonial state was a piggy bank to be plundered by anyone who could adequately position themselves as a deserving entrepreneur. One of the core contradictions Berman and Lonsdale identified *vis-à-vis* the colonial state in particular (and the state in general) is that its ability "to act as an 'ideal collective capitalist' or as the explicit instrument of particular sectors of capital is limited by the need to maintain the apparent autonomy of the state itself. The interests of the state authorities diverge from the interests of capital over the need of the state to sustain the conditions of its own legitimacy."[72] The land speculation dilemma grew from this very problem: the colonial state acted as the exclusive grantor of concessions, thus it was always picking winners and losers from among the throngs of competing schemers, yet if it intervened too forcefully to regulate the land market it created and sustained the state would then sacrifice its veneer of neutral legitimacy.

Settlers themselves recognized and weaponized this problem. As David Forbes wrote to The East African Standard in 1912 when he wrote against a Colonial Office proposal to allot lands via a public auction: "By all the laws of equity the Government is not entitled to impose conditions on a man who buys his land in open market bidding against all comers. The Government cannot 'eat its cake and have it.' If they themselves become land speculators and wish to make the most money out of the sale of Crown Lands they cannot also assume the role of

[69] Hertzka, *Freeland*, 164.
[70] Hertzka, *Freeland,* 165. Colonial Kenya's land bank, founded in the 1920s, was originally intended to operate similarly, though within its first year of operation it quickly backslid on this founding principle in an effort to shield settlers from the fallout of the Great Depression (Chapter 4).
[71] Landless Ex-Soldier, "Letting In Light: Ex-Soldier Promises a Land Campaign", *The East African Standard*, August 2, 1919, 28, from the British Newspaper Archive, accessed July 28, 2026, https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0001838/19190802/281/0028.
[72] Berman and Lonsdale, *Unhappy Valley*, 142.

a Progressive Government and impose conditions of occupation and improvements."[73] Hertzka, ever determined to "eat [his] cake and have it", instead imagined a society where the capital of the state and the capital of *all* settlers were collectively pooled but not centrally planned, thus creating, literally, the "ideal collective capitalist." The state would be legitimate because there would be no meaningful distinction between its interests (or its resources) and those of the settlers.

Absent this fusion of interests, concessionaires would always be incentivized to tell the state whatever it needed to hear to give them access to the means of production it had seized, then turn around and lease or sell to the highest bidder they could find. And if land prices had risen so high that nobody could afford the price, then they would need to approach the state again with a settlement scheme whereby the state would subsidize some newcomer to afford what the state had already given away freely. Thus, we oughtn't read the many failures of settler estate production solely through the lenses of 'inefficiency' or 'unprofitability', however apt they may be. For as Bruce Berman reminds us, "settlement became not simply or even primarily a means of profit, but rather an attempt to create a way of life rooted in non-capitalist, indeed, pre-capitalist values".[74] Like for Hertzka, East Africa was for many settlers a site primarily of cultural speculation, a place to create an imaginary world. Yet that cultural speculation necessarily entailed economic speculation because it was sustained by capital. That capital had to come from somewhere, and when capital could not be imported via new wealthy colonists or conjured on paper it would have to come from the state. British East Africa's most successful concessionaires never saw quite like a state, but some eventually proved very adept at *talking* like a state. As Norman Leys warned his friend J.H. Oldham while the Ormsby-Gore Land Commission was finalizing its report, "Delamere is as sly as a jackal. He is as determined as a buffalo as well. I know him as O.G. doesn't. With O.G. he was playing a game, exactly as he played it with half a dozen governors in succession."[75]

And of course, as Hertzka accidentally anticipated, the combination of a colony-as-fantasyland and a state-as-piggy-bank would attract not only unscrupulous actors but also well-meaning fools. In *A Visit to Freeland* a chapter is devoted to yet another American newcomer, this one an inventor asking for an advance of £600,000 "for the purpose of founding a company for navigating the air."[76] The inventor's ideas were deemed too audacious and impractical by European and American investors, so he turned to Freeland. After making his application to the Central Bank the inventor must make his case to the rest of Freeland—for in Freeland all business ventures are ultimately adjudicated in the court of public opinion—and after a few tries he convinces them. And yet, for all his brilliance:

> The idea of the inventor did not turn out to be as practical as he had supposed. His undertaking failed, but the experience obtained by making the attempt was so important and of such a decisive nature, that the same body of representatives which had wished to hinder the trial a few months before unanimously adopted a proposal to pay the whole

[73] David Forbes, "Land Settlement in B.E.A." *The East African Standard,* June 29, 1912, 12, from the British Newspaper Archive, accessed July 28, 2026, https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0001838/19120629/112/0012.
[74] Bruce J. Berman, *Control & Crisis in Colonial Kenya: The Dialectic of Domination* (James Currey, 1996), 134.
[75] School of Oriental and African Studies University of London (SOAS): IMC-CBMS/01, Box 248, File B, Norman Leys to J.H. Oldham, February 26, 1925, p. 9.
[76] Hertzka, *A Visit to Freeland*, 113.

> costs and to continue the experiments already begun at the cost of the State, and the inventor, who was for a short time treated by his partners as a queer and insane fellow, was made director of these important experiments.[77]

Though the inventor's flying machine was a failure, the story is meant to show how the state of Freeland, by acting as the 'ideal collective capitalist', would enable audacious new ideas to be explored to the fullest. It is also meant to show how in Freeland the court of public opinion was the only regulator the market required.

In colonial Kenya, though European settlers proved very adept at grafting their opinions onto state policy through a succession of quasi-government bodies. The Colonist Association in 1902, then the Planters' and Farmers' Association in 1903 ("at first purely of commercial concern but soon enough consumed by politics", a progression after Hertzka's own heart!), then the Pastoralist Association established by Robert Chamberlain, which in 1910 fused into the new Convention of Associations, "the settlers' parliament."[78] These quasi-governmental institutions, dominated by the colony's most successful speculators, were able to effectively organize against any curbs on land speculation as the most prominent members of the Convention of Associations were usually also unofficial representatives in the colony's legislature, the Legislative Council (Legco).[79]

And as Kenya's politics grew increasingly contentious a revolving door of commissions would parade through the colony, some convened by the colonial state and some dispatched by Westminster. Yet whether it was the 1912 Native Labor Commission, the 1917 East African Land Settlement Commission, the 1926 Hilton Young Commission, or the 1932 Kenya Land Commission, each was dominated by European settlers at every turn. Even when a given commission wasn't made up of settlers, much of the testimony invariably came from settlers. And for each new agent of the state dispatched from the metropole, once they arrived where would they stay but in settler hotels or on settler estates? With whom would they drink, dine, and carouse if not the settlers they had come to regulate? Hertzka's vision of a colonial state which had fused so thoroughly with the profiteering self-interest of its settlers that it would extend capital to even the most apparently "queer and insane" fellows among them, and even after their ventures failed allow them to become directors of yet more "important experiments" fueled by yet more assistance from the state, was ultimately an accurate one.

Rhyme 3: Imagining Away the African

Hertzka's Freeland depended upon conceptualizing East Africa as an empty paradise.[80] And indeed, Hertzka frequently insisted that the region the Freelanders intended to settle was a "virtually unappropriated" *tabula rasa*.[81] Yet Hertzka was hardly alone in this conviction. Sir Charles Eliot, a British administrator, put this attitude most succinctly when he wrote, "We have

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[77] Hertzka, *A Visit to Freeland*, 117.
[78] Shadle, *Souls of White Folk,* 15.
[79] See Robert M. Maxon, *Struggle for Initiative: The Loss and Reassertion of Imperial Initiative, 1912-1923* (Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 1993), 54-55. The Legislative Council was divided into "official" and "unofficial" members. "Official" members were colonial administrators directly appointed by the Colonial Office, and always retained a majority. "Unofficial" members were settlers or those from outside of the Colonial Office meant to provide advice on policy.
[80] Bach, "Seeking Emptiness", 85.
[81] Hertzka, *Freeland*, 4.

in East Africa [...] the rare experience of dealing with a *tabula rasa,* an almost untouched and sparsely inhabited country, where we can do as we will, regulate immigration, and open or close the door as seems best […] Whatever East Africa will be in ten years' time will be the result, not of circumstances beyond our control, but simply of what we do now."[82] Eliot and Hertzka both saw in East Africa an exhilarating *tabula rasa*, an illusion sustained by the fact that the larger political economy of the western Indian Ocean was illegible to them.

The libertarian high modernism of Freeland is sustained by a sleight of hand which would be repeated by many settlement schemers long after the Freelanders came and went: imagining away the African. Hertzka, like the more reactionary colonizers who would follow the railway, imagined a settler colony where all settlers would be "employers." British East Africa was, in fact, designed as a colony where all settlers were meant to be employers of Africans. Yet in Hertzka's more liberal fantasy, all settlers (and eventually all humans) would become employers not because of the availability of African labor, but because of machine labor. Hertzka declared that "Freeland has employment for more machinery than the whole of the rest of the world put together, for the work of its machines takes the place of that of the slaves or the wage-labourers of other countries; and as our 26,000,000 whites—not to reckon the civilised negroes—are all 'employers,' we need very many steel and iron servants to satisfy our needs, which increase step by step with the increase of our skill."[83] Hertzka, in his quest to imagine the European proletariat out of existence, devised a settlement scheme which effectively imagined Africans out of existence. Rational self-interest, supported by high modernist automation, would in Freeland resolve both race and class conflict. Hertzka and the Freelanders were the first to look at East Africa and imagine it as a place where all settlers could become harmoniously bourgeois, and they would not be the last.

Africans play a significant yet muted role in the conquest of Freeland. Hertzka concedes at the outset that "conflicts with inimical wild races will probably be inevitable" and so the Freelanders bring with them hundreds of rifles purchased from the Austrian government and four Krupp mortars.[84] Hertzka acknowledges the necessity of porters as an "advance guard" to clear brush and build paths, but maintains that the tsetse fly would pose no danger on the route they intended to take and so most of the transportation would be done by pack animals.[85] It takes the Freelanders eight weeks to reach their destination, during which time they form trading alliances with the Kikuyu and thus never want for provisions.[86] The Maasai however must be subdued with force after they demand a toll, yet here again the Freelanders' superior technology saves the day. The Maasai "turned in an instant and fled away howling" after "only one volley" of rockets and muskets, and with minimal casualties the Freelanders quickly press the Maasai into a treaty of "friendship". The Maasai, in return for providing military service to the Freelanders, would be provided protection, glass beads, cotton trousers, and other trade goods.[87] The Freelanders move

[82] M.F. Hill, *Permanent Way, The Story of the Kenya and Uganda Railway; Being the Official History of the Development of the Transport System in Kenya and Uganda* (East African Railways and Harbours, 1949), 263.
[83] Hertzka, *Freeland*, 171.
[84] Hertzka, *Freeland*, 5; 11.
[85] Hertzka, *Freeland*, 9-10. Though he was aware of the tsetse fly, Hertzka contends that the "heavy losses of other caravans, which sometimes lose all their beasts in a few days, are to be ascribed […] to the utter inexperience of the Swahili in the treatment of animals. Had we relied merely upon our blacks, we should have left most of our beasts, and certainly all of our horses, on the road to feed the vultures and the hyenas." Hertzka, *Freeland*, 52.
[86] Hertzka, *Freeland*, 46.
[87] Hertzka, *Freeland,* 38.

across the country precisely as the IBEAC always hoped to, yet never really could: seamlessly dabbling in the existing East African economy before peacefully obliterating it with industrial force when it became inconvenient.

Hertzka, like the builders of the Uganda Railway, ultimately believed that the superior force of European industrial technology could sweep away all the anachronistic African social, economic, and political networks which acted as a barrier to European hegemony in the region. Just as Hertzka believed the Maasai could be easily bribed and intimidated into grateful vassalage, George Whitehouse (Chief Engineer of the Uganda Railway) insisted that railway work should be made "as attractive as possible" to prospective African laborers by distributing as "rewards for working well," "Umbrellas, Straw Hats, Cheap Shirts, Colored Blankets &c," because, "There is no doubt that like other savage tribes they take a delight in the possession of an old hat or a red coat and continually ask for a blanket or clothes of any kind."[88] Yet the Freelander vision for colonial conquest ultimately embraced the civilizing mission far more than the IBEAC or the first generations of Kenyan settlers because Hertzka believed that Africans were sufficiently rational to productively exercise self-interest, and thus to cooperate with the Freeland experiment.

Once established, virtually all labor which would be done in colonial Kenya by Africans is, in Freeland, done by machines. Recall that Hertzka asserted that in Freeland "civilised negroes" were also "employers". His fictitious traveler in *A Visit to Freeland* even clarifies that though "I had imagined that these negroes were employed by the Freelanders as menials and for occupations which they would not undertake themselves […] This now appeared to be a mistake, and I will remark that the black servants in Lamu and Hargazo are also united into an association and are organized upon exactly the same principles as their Caucasian fellow workmen in Freeland."[89] There are white domestic servants in Freeland (they work for the "Association for rendering Personal Services"), but like all Freelanders they can leave their positions at will and their work is lightened to a trifle by "ingenious machines".[90] Very few Freelanders engage in agricultural labor due to the "universal employment of machinery in agriculture".[91] For Hertzka, industrial machinery and automation enabled him to imagine a bloodless conquest and a humane settler colony.

And of course, as means of production, these machines are stocked in state warehouses and loaned to associations by the state as needed, just as later settlers would demand the colonial state form its own employment bureaus and for district administrators to act as labor recruiters on the reserves.[92] In reality, colonial Kenya was perpetually in the throes of a "labor crisis" as both settlers and the colonial state perennially struggled to force Africans to work for them, frequently resorting to coercion (Chapter 3). Indeed, one of the most infamous attempts at solving this problem took a distinctly Hertzkan form: the reviled *kipande*, or work passport. The Registration of Natives Ordinance required African men over the age of fifteen wear the *kipande* around their necks, a metal case containing their fingerprints, names, and employment histories. Hatred of the *kipande* would in the early 1920s galvanize Kenya's first pan-ethnic anticolonial

[88] TNA: CO 537/53, George Whitehouse, March 25, 1897, pp. 224-225
[89] Hertzka, *A Visit to Freeland*, 27.
[90] Hertzka, *A Visit to Freeland,* 25; 27.
[91] Hertzka, *A Visit to Freeland*, 100.
[92] See Opolot Okia, *Communal Labor in Colonial Kenya the Legitimization of Coercion, 1912-1930* (Palgrave MacMillan US, 2012).

mass movement, the East African Association (EAA), founded by Harry Thuku (Chapter 4). Reflecting on the *kipande* years later in his autobiography, Thuku recalled it was the employment history section which galled him the most, for "if an employer did not like you, he could spoil your name completely by putting 'lazy', 'disobedient', or 'cheeky'. That column made me very angry."[93]

Yet the *kipande* was nothing but the funhouse reflection of the Freeland Central Statistical Office's daily reports on the whole economy and all its participants, just as Hertzka's wonderous machines were nothing but distorted reflections of Indian "coolies" and African porters. In Hill's official history of the railway, he describes the "coolies" being brought in "batches" like so many machines from India to East Africa, their value being primarily understood in terms of the number of "cubic feet of earthwork per man per day."[94] The *kipande* reflected the settler demand that all African actions be economic ones, productive ones, *mechanical* ones, and that every single African *homo mechanicus* over the age of fifteen ought to carry with him a record of his qualities the way a company truck ought to have an equipment maintenance log. When Owen Grant testified before the 1912-13 Native Labour Commission in favor of creating a "Government Labour Bureau [which] employers of labour should be allowed to have some interest by means of a subscription towards the cost involved—the control, however, to be entirely in the hands of the Government" he was demanding a funhouse reflection of Freeland's wonderous warehouses stocked with machines free for the taking.[95] The fantasy of a colony where all settlers are employers necessarily entails that they always have some*thing* to employ. If one lacked Hertzka's high modernist faith in the power of automation, the only option available to them was to look upon the colonized as so many machines owed to them by the state. And if one came to see the colonized as defective machines, then the next step was to go back to the warehouse and demand the state import a new model. Perhaps one from Europe?

In order to imagine a viable settler colony, one must simultaneously fantasize that the land is empty and that the indigenous peoples (whose presence refutes that emptiness) exist in sufficient numbers, and are sufficiently pliant, to do the labor needed to sustain the colony. This paradoxical belief is sustained by what Césaire called "thingification", the transformation of "the indigenous man into an instrument of production."[96] As an instrument of production the labor of the colonized can continue without their colonizers reckoning with their presence, in much the same way I do not name my computer (or the thingified factory workers who built it) in the acknowledgements of this dissertation despite their significant contributions to the project. Mavhunga's work on the tsetse fly draws our attention to how Césaire's thingification is no mere synonym for dehumanization, but requires two intertwined processes: "Dehumanization is not merely about being made a tool or a pest; it is also a reduction to a nonthinking thing, or deintellectualization."[97] Thingification resolves the cognitive dissonance engendered by a populated *terra nullius* by reconfiguring the colonized as unthinking instruments, capable only of laboring in the name of their colonizers' fantasies. As Pheroze Nowrojee, a Kenyan Asian, human rights lawyer, and descendent of one of the Gujarati subordinates on the railway line

[93] Harry Thuku and Kenneth King, *Harry Thuku: An Autobiography*, (Oxford University Press, 1970), 19.
[94] Hill, *Permanent Way*, 147.
[95] J.W. Barth, *Native Labour Commission, 1912-1913*. *Evidence and Report* (Government Printer, 1913), 10
[96] Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, trans. Joan Pinkham, introduction by Robin D.G. Kelley (Monthly Review Press, 2000), 42.
[97] Mavhunga, *The Mobile Workshop*, 13.

wrote, “Human beings cannot be ‘imported’ or ‘exported’ save in the minds of those who disregard their humanity”.[98]

Most of Kenya’s colonizers reflexively dehumanized and deintellectualized Africans, while Hertzka made an apparently sincere attempt to avoid deintellectualizing those he hoped to colonize by asserting that they too possessed enlightened self-interest. Yet Hertzka was still an astute enough economist to recognize that the construction and maintenance of a profitable settler colony would depend upon a colossal amount of work that no human would ever consent to doing themselves. Whomever did that work would need to be transformed from a human into some synonym for an “instrument of production.” Whether “coolie”, “squatter”, “slave” or “steel slave”, each reflects merely a different ratio of deintellectualization and dehumanization. As one fictional Freelander succinctly put it*:* “Our ability to compete first comes into existence when we let our steel slaves take the place of the slaving work of the day laborer of the *bourgeois* world.”[99] Freeland would not be without “slaving work”, but it would be taken up by “steel slaves” and “iron servants”. Dr. Wilhelm, leader of the 1894 Freelander expedition, declared in a speech before Zanzibar’s German Club, “Industry and manufacture are so far advanced, that we are now able to replace slaves by machinery” and in doing so create a society “where each workman would be a shareholder and every shareholder a workman.”[100] The foreign traveler and reader-surrogate in *A Visit to Freeland* is delighted when he learns that the colony still has plenty of domestic servants: “I must confess that the certainty of not having to clean my boots myself in Freeland removed a weight from my heart in spite of all my enthusiasm for the equality of rights.”[101] The dream of a society where all settlers are equal, yet where *none* must blacken their own boots, would be espoused by many settlement schemers who followed in Hertzka’s wake even if they never knew his name.

“Game Within Game of Crooked Dealing All Round”: The 1894 Freelander Expedition and its Discontents

Following Hertzka’s publication of *Freiland* in 1890, Freelander societies sprouted up throughout Europe and America and, headed by Hertzka himself in Vienna, began fundraising for a pioneer expedition into East Africa. Yet crucially, though Hertzka was understood to be the founder and nominal head of the movement, once the expedition was organized and underway his ability to meaningfully influence its course diminished rapidly. Hertzka’s ideas were—fittingly—the scaffolding around which many contradictory interests would ultimately cohere. Thus while Hertzka busied himself in Vienna promoting Freeland ideas, fundraising, and liaising with the Austro-Hungarian government, in May of 1893 Dr. Julius Wilhelm, an Austrian chemist, reached out to the Foreign Office on behalf of the International Freeland Association with British East Africa’s first proper settlement scheme.

Wilhelm claimed that the global Freeland movement had nearly 4,000 members throughout Euro-America encompassing “noblemen, gentlemen of independent means, bankers, lawyers, manufacturers, merchants, physicians, engineers, &c., as also representatives of the working classes” and that they intended to establish a community “at the foot of Mount Kenia,

[98] Pheroze Nowrojee, *A Kenyan Journey*, (Transafrica Press, 2014), 14.
[99] Hertzka, *Visit to Freeland*, 84.
[100] TNA: FO 403/194, Inclosure in No. 315, “Address by Dr. Wilhelm in the German Club, Zanzibar” May 23, 1894, p. 239.
[101] Hertzka, *A Visit to Freeland*, 27.

within the British sphere of influence, and under the protection of the British Government". This colony would "consist entirely of Europeans; black labourers will not be employed, at least not systematically", presumably because their labor would be automated, yet somehow this wouldn't prevent the colony from "relieving England of the task of finding employment for the number of skilled and unskilled workers who must become a burden upon the British tax-payer". Wilhelm requested "moral support" from the government and a "promise of non-interference with the institutions of their new commonwealth". In return, the Freelanders promised they would suppress the slave trade, and civilize the "surrounding tribes of the country [and] induce them to a settled agricultural life, prevent intertribal wars, and so extend civilization into their midst." Furthermore, the Freelanders promised they would "increase the revenue through the augmented imports and exports" their presence would surely produce. Best of all, the Freelanders promised:

> The security of life and property within the British sphere of influence will gain a guarantee which no armed police force can insure, since the presence of several thousand Europeans, and, above all, the influence of such a Colony upon the native population, must give a character to the social life in a new country which cannot be assured by a dispersed number of individual settlers—planters who employ black labour merely for their personal gains. In fact, in the interior of the British sphere of influence, Her Majesty's Government would find in Freeland and the Freelanders a great support and assistance (especially if Uganda would be retained) for the firm and full establishment of British power and influence.[102]

In short, Wilhelm pitched Freeland to the Foreign Office as a panacea for both Britain's social problem and its sphere of influence in East Africa.

And the British government was hungry for such a panacea, because both Gladstone's minority government and the British sphere of influence in East Africa were very precarious. The IBEAC had been persisting "in a comatose condition" for months and "Without a railway, or at least a firm assurance that it would be constructed, there was no market for the shares of a near-bankrupt company."[103] All their lobbying had secured up to this point from the recalcitrant Gladstone ministry were some funds for a railway survey, but no promise that one would actually be built. The IBEAC was forced by the mounting costs of maintaining a line of communication from Mombasa to Uganda to withdraw from Uganda by the end of 1892, a withdrawal which they claimed (to nobody's satisfaction) would only be temporary. Archibald Primroe, fifth Earl of Rosebury, was Foreign Secretary under Gladstone when the Freelanders submitted this settlement scheme and was more determined to retain Uganda than he even if it meant the state cannibalizing the IBEAC. The IBEAC's retreat from Uganda was a political black eye which the Uganda Railway would eventually be designed to resolve, yet the Freelander settlement scheme arrived in the uncertain years of 1893-1895 when nobody quite knew what such a sphere of influence would even look like, or who would pay for it. Indeed, the Freelanders only approached the Foreign Office in the first place because they were uncertain whether the IBEAC would even exist by the time they arrived at Lamu.

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[102] TNA: FO 403/182, No. 248, International Freeland Association to Foreign Office, May 31, 1893, 221-222, from AM: Digital: Confidential Print: Africa, 1834-1966, "East Africa Further Correspondence part XXXIII", accessed July 28, 2026, https://www-confidentialprintafrica-amdigital-co-uk.libproxy.berkeley.edu/Documents/Detail/east-africa-further-correspondence-part-xxxiii/15706750?item=15706983.
[103] Galbraith, *Mackinnon and East Africa,* 216.

Hertzka himself would remain in Europe to coordinate fundraising while the expedition itself would be led by Wilhelm. It would be a small, multinational party of about thirty men and women. Hertzka's influence managed to secure the Freelanders some token assistance from the Austro-Hungarian Natural History Museum, the Military Geographical Institute of Vienna, and the Austro-Hungarian Ministry of War in the form of money, scientific instruments, and surplus weapons.[104] Yet the bulk of the expedition's resources were provided either by private donations or by the expeditioners themselves, and the Berlin section of the International Freeland Association clarified that "A contribution of 1,000 marks or more is not an indispensable condition of acceptance [to the expedition], but it creates a preference in case of equal qualifications."[105] The expedition would follow the broad steps of Hertzka's vision in *Freiland* but use a different route. This first party would first sail to Lamu, then using a small steamship they had purchased would steam up the Tana River "to the rapids" which divide the lower and upper Tana, establish a station there, then proceed to Mount Kenya to determine a suitable site for settlement. Once a site was determined, larger parties of hundreds and then thousands of freelanders would follow.

Obstacles arose before the Freelanders even arrived because, to the suspicious eyes of the IBEAC and the Foreign Office, there was scant difference between the Freelanders and an Austrian filibustering expedition. This impression was not helped by the fact that the Freelanders initially wanted to bring with them one military-grade rifle and one revolver per expeditioner, along with several more rifles per person for "sporting purposes", yet more guns to arm African askaris, and finally a maxim gun, an armory which to P.L. McDermott of the IBEAC "seemed to be excessive".[106] More significantly though, nobody quite knew what to make of the Freelanders themselves. Early press coverage usually alternated between benign curiosity and contempt, as did IBEAC and Foreign Office officials who frankly admitted that they did not know what these strangers hoped to do.[107] Pigott, the IBEAC's acting administrator at the time, was told by the board to treat the Freelanders and their "somewhat vague, and perhaps visionary" project with a sort of salutary neglect. The IBEAC would give them letters of safe conduct and even a flag, and

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[104] TNA: FO 403/193, No. 76, "Memorandum by Mr. Lowther" January 26 1894, p. 61. The precise amount of material support the Freelanders received from the Austro-Hungarian government is difficult to determine. It was nonnegligible, yet also often exaggerated both by the Freelanders themselves and their detractors. Count Deym, Austria-Hungary's ambassador in Britain, was initially unaware of the Freelanders having received any arms from his government such that he first denied it on February 26, 1894, saying that any arms the Freelanders had they doubtless had gotten from the Englishmen in the party. Deym had to hastily backtrack two days later and clarify that the Freelanders received only "a very small quantity of guns, revolvers, and cartridges". TNA: FO 403/193, No. 170, Earl of Rosebury to Sir E. Monson, February 26, 1894, p. 214; No. 179, Count Deym to Earl of Rosebury, February 28, 1894, p. 220, from AM: Digital: Confidential Print: Africa, 1834-1966, "East Africa Further Correspondence Part XXXVI", accessed July 28, 2026, https://www-confidentialprintafrica-amdigital-co-uk.libproxy.berkeley.edu/Documents/Detail/east-africa-further-correspondence-part-xxxvi/15894981?item=15895062.

[105] TNA: FO 403/193, Inclosure in No. 207, "Extract from the 'Standard'", March 9, 1894, p. 238.

[106] TNA: FO 403/193, No. 73, Inclosure 1, "Note of a Conversation held by Mr. McDermott with three Representatives of the British Freeland Association", January 24, 1894, p. 59. Ultimately the Freelanders were not allowed to bring the maxim gun, yet they would frequently class with the IBEAC over registering their firearms, accusing the IBEAC of weaponizing the firearms restrictions of the Burssels treaty to obstruct their expedition.

[107] The Isle of Wight Observer even ran a mocking poem to bid farewell to the departing Freelanders, labeling them "silly youths" who "yearn to be Pagans again" and "crotchety faddists". Truth, "Well Done Doctor!" *Isle of Wight Observer,* September 30, 1893, 6, from Gale Primary Sources: British Library Newspapers, accessed July 28, 2026, https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/R3208486333/BNCN?u=ucberkeley&sid=bookmark-BNCN&xid=2531dd44.

repeatedly insist that they had no desire to "thwart the objects of the Association […] but, on the other hand, the Company is not to be compromised in any way," such as by securing African labor for the Freelander caravan in the same way its troops might forcefully return escaped slaves to their captors.[108]

The 1894 Freeland expedition was a very heterogenous group, and significantly, not all of its participants were interested in the vision for Freeland. About half were either German or Austrian, about one third were English, and the remainder were Scandinavian or other nationalities (Belgian, Russian, New Zealander).[109] Most of the Germanophone expeditioners were technical professionals: engineers, scientists, artists, shopkeepers, clerks, merchants, journalists, etc. The rest were either naval or army veterans from the British, Danish, or Austro-Hungarian military. That the expeditioners were expected to contribute their own funds indicates that most were independently wealthy, and some clearly saw the expedition less as the beginnings of a new utopia and more as a shooting trip. For instance Captain Barchard, one of the English expeditioners, frankly admitted that "I, myself, was nominally a member of the expedition, my object being solely the sport and shooting I might get, but it is my opinion that they will fail entirely."[110] The Freelanders, by prioritizing those who could make sizable monetary contributions to the endeavor, inadvertently created a multinational, multilingual expedition divided between wealthy dilettantes who were zealously devoted to the dream of Freeland and wealthy dilettantes who were deeply hostile to it. And both groups were heavily armed.

The main party arrived on Lamu in mid-April 1894 and rented a house they dubbed the "Freeland House." Yet even before the main party landed discord was already brewing. One Francis Sandys Dugmore, a retired English captain who also joined the expedition mainly as a shooting trip, wrote a letter to the IBEAC while still onboard the German steamship "Reichstag" at Port Said, wherein he warned the IBEAC that the Freelanders were incompetent fools whose plan of steaming up the Tana was doomed to failure. The Freelanders were, according to Dugmore, "younger and hotter heads, who appear to be cherishing a vague idea of settling as close as possible to the furthest British boundaries as they *mis*understand them, so as to overflow eventually into what they regard as a no-man's-land." This was true enough—Herzka's novels stated as much—yet Dugmore's next accusation was more intriguing: "Personally, I strongly suspect that Dr. Hertzku [sic] is being made a tool of by some people, of whom we know nothing ("Colonialmenschen"), desirous of getting Austria to take a hand in the African pie, and designing to get her committed to overt action in a similar fashion to that in which the hand of Germany was successfully forced; to this end they deem a collision or two with natives desirable, that the cry of danger to the lives of Austrian subjects may be raised and made the most of."[111]

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[108] TNA: FO 403/193, Inclosure in No. 85, "Imperial British East Africa Company to Mr. Pigott," January 19, 1894, p. 65.

[109] The British archival record regarding the 1894 Freelanders contains multiple competing lists of the expedition's participants, making it difficult to assemble a complete picture of the expedition's members. TNA: FO 403/193, Inclosure in No. 216, "Extract from the 'Presse' of March 8, 1894", p. 242; FO 403/194, Inclosure 2 in No. 132, "Nominal Roll of Members of the Freeland Expedition who disembarked at Lamu" April 1, 1894, p. 34; FO 403/193, Inclosure 1 in No. 223, Don MacLennan to Pigott, April 14, 1894, 182.

[110] TNA: FO 403/194, Inclosure in No. 132, "Captain Barchard to Mr. Cracknall" April 10 1894, p. 83.

[111] TNA: FO 403/194, Inclosure in No. 104, "Dugmore to Imperial British East Africa Company", April 16 1894, p. 74.

Dugmore saw in Wilhelm an Austrian Carl Peters, a rogue Germanic filibuster who posed a grave threat to British imperial interests.

Dugmore then grafted himself onto the Freelander expedition and volunteered his services to the IBEAC as a spy in their ranks. The IBEAC did not ask him to do this, and were apparently perplexed as to why he kept writing to them unsolicited, yet nevertheless his letters were frequently kicked up the command chain and form a significant portion of the English-language archival record of the 1894 expedition.[112] Dugmore would claim in a flurry of letters in the early weeks of the expedition that the Freelanders were a "gang of filibusters", that they would soon smuggle maxim guns supplied by shadowy Austrian backers, and that they intended to use "the successful Boer tactics in Zululand" to "attempt the foundation of an entirely independent State under a flag of its own" by provoking an armed conflict with Africans and thus drawing in Germany or Austria.[113] He provided a shortlist of "Freeland Detrimentals" accompanied by sneeringly reactionary biographical sketches: "Gleisring—Drunkard, thief, and lunatic, with homicidal tendencies", "Sassy—Drunkard, fanatic Anarchist and supporter of the 'bomb-worker,' clever chemist; wife a second Louise Michel", "Huhnel—Revolutionary and violently anti-British", and so on.[114] The IBEAC and the Foreign Office were already disinclined to see the Freelanders positively, and Dugmore's unsolicited ravings did not improve matters.

Upon arrival Dugmore and some of his fellow English expeditioners began to push the Freelanders to abandon the idea of going all the way to Mount Kenya and instead to settle somewhere along the banks of the lower Tana River more firmly within the IBEAC's coastal sphere of influence. Conversely the more devoted German and Scandinavian Freelanders saw this as British meddling. When the Freelanders took up residence at Freeland House on Lamu "a strong element of discord prevailed in the party."[115] Absent a railway and unable to hire porters, the only option the Freelanders could conceive of was trying to steam up the shallow Tana River. This plan sprang from the enlightened self-interest of one Gustav Denhardt of Denhardt and Co., who was not formally affiliated with the expedition yet happily provided it his "gratuitous services" in the hopes of "securing for his firm the coast agency of the Freeland Association."[116] The plan failed, with the Freelanders making it about fifty miles upriver before the boats "proved utterly useless against the rapid stream".[117]

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[112] According to W.B. Cracknall Dugmore "appears to like giving information, and I have sent his communication for what it is worth." Don MacLennan, another IBEAC official, told J.R.W. Pigott that "Dugmore is a most excitable old fellow, and what he states should be taken *cum grano*." Nevertheless, Dugmore's letters kept getting cycled up the chain of command. TNA: FO 403/194, No. 223, W.B. Cracknall to the Earl of Kimberley, May 9, 1894, p. 181; FO 403/194, Inclosure 1 in No. 119, J.R.W. Pigott to Arthur Hardinge, June 29, 1894, p. 117.

[113] TNA: FO 403/194, Inclosure 3 in No. 223, Captain Dugmore to Mr. Cracknall, May 8, 1894, p. 183.

[114] For the sake of posterity I feel I must include my personal favorites as well, "Stockerbye—Drunkard, but perfect gentleman, even when drunk" and "Buschell—Mentally unsound and eccentric, otherwise harmless." Based on these descriptions, I cannot help but feel a certain kinship with "Stockerbye" and "Buschell". TNA: FO 403/195, Inclosure 4 in No. 119, Captain Dugmore to A Hardinge, June 26 1894, p. 120, from AM Digital: Confidential Print: Africa, 1834-1966, "East Africa Further Correspondence Part XXVIII", accessed July 28, 2026, https://www-confidentialprintafrica-amdigital-co-uk.libproxy.berkeley.edu/Documents/Detail/east-africa-further-correspondence-part-xxxviii/15690007?search=Freeland&forceLogin=true.

[115] TNA: FO 403/194, Inclosure in No. 132, Captain Barchard to Mr. Cracknall, April 10, 1894, p. 83.

[116] TNA: FO 403/194, Inclosure 1 in No. 223, Mr. MacLennan to Mr. Pigott, April 14, 1894, p. 181.

[117] TNA: FO 403/194, Inclosure 6 in No. 114, "Précis of Intelligence supplied to Associated Press Agency, London", June 21, 1894, p. 104.

Now stuck on Lamu, Freelanders of all nationalities received a crash course in what Jeffrey Auerbach called the "widespread disenchantment that lay just beneath the surface of the nineteenth-century British imperium."[118] Boredom and suspicion reigned in Freeland House in the summer of 1894 as the Anglophone and Germanophone factions grew increasingly resentful of each other, funds dwindled, the IBEAC's patience wore thin, and Wilhelm proved to be an indecisive leader. According to the British consul-general in Zanzibar Arthur Hardinge, the Freelanders frequently "got frequently dead-drunk, and offended Mohammedan feeling by taking liberties, in the name of 'free love,' with native women".[119] Dugmore staved off boredom by parading about with a pet cheetah, writing furious letters warning of Freelander treachery, and "enjoying some very fine black game shooting" from the roof of Freeland House (i.e. sniping African passersby with an air rifle for sport).[120] And when a mysterious wandering fabulist calling himself "Achmet Shukri Effendi" appeared at Freeland House the expedition proved less capable of spotting a swindler than Hertzka had hoped. Apparently after he had failed to secure employment from the IBEAC, "Achmet" came to Freeland House and spun a tale that "was the son of the Turkish Ambassador at Paris, and a member of the Diplomatic Corps, and was now globe-trotting for five years" and that the "Freelanders […] were sitting on a 'fulcrum,' and that, though they now laughed, yet in five months' time they would say that Shukri Effendi's words were indeed true. He also stated that the English were most unpopular in Zanzibar, and the Germans held much in favour; also, that within five months all the English on this coast would be seized and imprisoned by the Arabs, who would make their own terms."[121] The British Freelanders said the man was a "thorough scoundrel" and an "impostor", yet he apparently spoke fluent German and so was much more popular among the Germanophone Freelanders, presumably because he was quite skilled at telling them what they wished to hear.

In the final weeks of June 1894 the expedition dissolved into, in Dugmore's words, "game within game of crooked dealing all around".[122] The Germanophone faction began holding private meetings and excluding the English on the (correct) suspicion that most of the Englishmen were spies. After the initial failure to navigate the Tana and much dithering, Wilhelm eventually proposed that the expedition would go by two routes, with himself leading a party via Mombasa to Machakos and William Slingsby Godfrey, an Englishman, would lead a new party up the Tana again. This was unacceptable to the German members of the expedition who "accused Mr. Godfrey of working for 'British interests,' that he was on good terms with the

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[118] Jeffrey A. Auerbach, *Imperial Boredom: Monotony and the British Empire* (Oxford University Press, 2018), 144.
[119] Arthur H. Hardinge, *A Diplomatist in the East* (Jonathan Cape Limited, 1928), 145. Hardinge actually blamed an uptick in hard liquor imports into the Zanzibar Protectorate in 1894 to the Freelanders, a claim which—though it is apparent that the Freelanders drank quite a lot—seems exaggerated. TNA: FO 403/211, No. 260, Mr. A Hardinge to the Marquess of Salisbury, p. 216, from AM Digital: Confidential Print: Africa, 1834-1966, "East Africa Further Correspondence Part XLIII", accessed July 28, 2026, https://www-confidentialprintafrica-amdigital-co-uk.libproxy.berkeley.edu/Documents/Detail/east-africa-further-correspondence-part-xliii/15599258?item=15599319.
[120] TNA: FO 403/195, Inclosure 4 in No. 114, Captain Dugmore to Captain Rogers, June 20, 1894, p. 101. The full quote, which I include here to give a fuller sense of the scope of Dugmore's disregard for human life, reads: "If you would like to resume the interrupted musketry course on your roof, the air-gun is always at your service. I have been enjoying some very fine black game shooting therewith. True, it costs a little for perforated chatties and damages to hands that will get in the way and are hit accordingly; but, on the whole, I get splendid value for my money. It's all I can do, having nobody to talk to since the advent of these blooming swells." It is revealing that for all of Dugmore's accusations that the Freelanders were violent, scheming, rapacious "Colonialmenschen" in the style of Carl Peters such accusations were, in effect, confessions.
[121] TNA: FO 403/195, Inclosure 1 in No. 114, Sir L. Matthews to Mr. A. Hardinge, June 22, 1894, p. 99.
[122] TNA: FO 403/195, Inclosure 3 in No. 114, Captain Dugmore to Captain Rogers, June 19, 1894, p. 101.

'British officials,' and that his object in proceeding via the Tana was to obtain sport, and not to further the aims and objects of Freeland." An argument broke out in the Freeland House mess hall, culminating in the German members accusing Dugmore of being a British spy and demanding Wilhelm expel him from the mess. Dugmore, characteristically, "refused to consider himself expelled" and so his fellow Englishman Godfrey "stated that if steps were taken to expel Captain Dugmore he would be forced to use a revolver on whoever placed hands on him."[123] No blood was shed, but Wilhelm was forced to finally admit that the original expedition had effectively dissolved. He issued a proclamation to this effect, declaring that the original pioneer expedition was over, and sold off much of their remaining goods to raise money to send any expeditioners who wished to return back to Europe. To most within the expedition as well as those observing it, Wilhelm's proclamation was the end of the story.[124]

From Freelanders to Filibusters

Yet the words of "Achmet Shukri Effendi" were prophetic: the Freelanders did indeed sit at a "fulcrum", and the dissolution of the original party led to small flurry of new Freelander settlement schemes. Though Wilhelm had dissolved the original expedition and most of its members had left Africa by the end of July 1894, Wilhelm had also declared his intention to lead a new expedition of some of the remaining Freelanders into Kenya to start a pioneer settlement on the Freeland model. From this point onwards most of the remaining Freelanders in East Africa were British, and they attempted to reconstruct the remnants of the original Freeland expedition into a British filibustering expedition. This began with Dugmore convincing Wilhelm to forward a new settlement scheme. In this new plan Dugmore would (somehow) convince Frederick Lugard himself to lead Wilhelm and some remaining Freelanders to "the Masai [sic] district between Machakos and Kikuyu" whereupon they would negotiate the purchase of some IBEAC land to establish "an industrial Settlement" which would, in keeping with Hertzkan principles, "[recognize] no individual ownership in any land to be acquired by the community."[125] Dugmore had actually been sending letters to Lugard since the beginning of June trying to convince him to assume leadership over the expedition, threatening that the Freelanders at any moment might seize the lands between the coast and Uganda and thus jeopardize all Lugard had achieved there. Yet if Lugard came, Dugmore promised, it would:

> […] result in knocking on the head, once and for all, this idiotic scheme for a Settlement in about the most difficult region that could have been selected. Such a Settlement would, with the ultimate aims that are cherished, including complete and defiant independence, prove very detrimental to Imperial interests, but municipal experiments might safely be permitted on the waterways, where they could be reached with a strong arm in case of need; or the world's regenerators might be induced to move, if not to Pondoland, on to a splendid bit of country, a spur of Kilimanjaro, coming close down to the coast of German territory near Tanga, which I was admiring a few weeks ago.[126]

In essence, since early June Dugmore had hoped to somehow attract Lugard to the expedition so that he might, through Lugard's influence, convert a treacherous German filibustering expedition into a patriotic British one. By scaring Lugard with threats of German treachery Dugmore

[123] TNA: FO 403/195, Inclosure 2 in No. 119, Mr. MacLennan to Mr. Pigott, June 27, 1894, p. 119.
[124] TNA: FO 403/195, Inclosure 7 in No. 114, Dr. Wilhelm to Mr. A. Hardinge, June 21, 1894, pp. 104-105.
[125] TNA: FO 403/195, Inclosure 7 in No. 114, Dr. Wilhelm to Mr. A. Hardinge, June 21, 1894, p. 104-105.
[126] TNA: FO 403/195, Inclosure 5 in No. 114, "Captain Dugmore to Captain Lugard", June 3, 1894, 101-102.

thought he might steer the reconstituted British expedition towards lands where *he* wanted to settle. Dugmore may not have shared the Freelanders' beliefs, but his desired relationship with the colonial state was remarkably Hertzkan: he insisted that he and the colonial state ought to share information, pool resources, and retain his self-interest as a compass. In the end, perhaps unsurprisingly, Lugard never replied to Dugmore's letters.

Yet Dugmore was not the only one who attempted to alloy the remnants of the pioneer expedition to his rational self-interest. William Slingsby Godfrey had worked as a correspondent for the Pall Mall Gazette on the expedition. According to Dugmore on June 1, Godfrey was "a member of the 'Samuels' or 'Commonweal,' group of dynamiting and assassinating Anarchists" yet by June 27 Dugmore (possibly swayed by Godfrey's declared willingness to shoot anyone in the Freeland House mess hall who laid hands on him), conceded that "In spite of his Anarchism, Godfrey has been behaving like a trump and an Englishman, though he says publicly that he is a Freelander first and an Englishman afterwards."[127] This *volte face* on Dugmore's part is demonstrative of Godfrey's ideological flexibility, which he attempted to parlay into his own settlement scheme.

In late July 1894 Godfrey and a fellow English Freelander named Bosanquet applied simultaneously to the IBEAC and Hardinge for "500 acres jointly or 250 acres each separately […] at Hargazo, the furthest point to which the Tana is navigable." Godfrey lobbied Hardinge in Zanzibar directly, even though the region was well beyond his jurisdiction, because he recognized that "Hargazo, although claimed by the Company, is not under its effective control."[128] Godfrey claimed he had written to the London Freeland Society for financial aid for the scheme, and that each Freelander in his scheme would need to make a £75 deposit to participate, possess a "certificate of good health", be "certified as of good character by a Magistrate and clergyman", and have a "competent knowledge of English". He further assuaged Hardinge that "there is not the least reason for supposing that a Freelander would be less loyal to the British government than anybody else; their sympathies are more with the native races, and they are therefore more likely to treat them with kindness than the generality of people." He also tactically misrepresented certain key elements of Hertzka's writings, declaring his "work was a mere romantic one, picturing an ideal, not a real, colony" anyway. To further sweeten the deal, Godfrey added that he didn't even want the Government to "part with the freehold" (which he acknowledged it did not even have!) and that he would be content with a "'peppercorn' rent". All of this to prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that "we would give any guarantee possible of our loyalty." Godfrey, by framing these stipulations as patriotic generosity on his part, flattered his interlocutors in the Foreign Office by not reminding them that he was still asking them for more than they had the power to grant him.

Godfrey's settlement scheme was a Freelander scheme in name only. Years before European settlers in East Africa turned to African squatters to develop the estates they couldn't afford to develop themselves, this would-be colonizer volunteered to be a squatter *himself* on behalf of the still-twitching corpse of the IBEAC, "understanding that we have no absolute pledge that the land on which we 'squat' will either be sold or rented to us" but nevertheless with

[127] TNA: FO 403/195, Inclosure 5 in No. 114, Captain Dugmore to Captain Lugard, June 3, 1894, p. 103; FO 403/195, Inclosure 5 in No. 119, Captain Dugmore to Sir L. Mathews, June 27 1894, p. 122.
[128] TNA: FO 403/195, No. 138, Mr. A Hardinge to the Earl of Kimberly, July 28, 1894, p. 133.

the understanding that, in time, it would be allotted to them.[129] And ultimately, Hardinge and the Earl of Kimberly accepted the scheme. After all, Hardinge conceded, now that the scheme was being put forward "by two respectable Englishmen, and purged of the revolutionary foreign element, a Settlement on the Upper Tana, even on Freeland lines […] might prove of a certain advantage to the district in which it is formed."[130] In the "fulcrum" year of 1894, Hardinge and the Foreign Office were so desperate to maintain the barest semblance of a British sphere of influence in East Africa that they permitted a filibustering expedition of British socialists to claim hundreds of acres of land so long as each of them had £75, a good grasp of English, and letters of recommendation from a magistrate and a clergyman.

Of course, Godfrey's filibustering expedition and settlement scheme did not materialize.[131] Though he received the assent of the Foreign Office, his expeditions up the Tana were derailed by conflicts with local peoples and ultimately he left East Africa disappointed.[132] Yet the story of the 1894 Freelander Expedition is significant not because it put any settlers on the land, but because it revealed how and why settlers ultimately would be put on the land. The Freelander expedition forced the IBEAC, the Foreign Office, and some of the Freelanders themselves to reckon with what the abstract concept of a British "sphere of influence" truly meant. For Hertzka, Wilhelm, and for later generations of non-British settlement schemers (Bror von Blixen, Theodor Herzl, etc.), a British colony could still be developed by autonomous 'foreigners' so long as they obeyed British law, invested capital or labor into the colony, and proved themselves good guardians of African interests. The Freelanders were just the first in a long line of would-be colonists who saw an opportunity to finally live their ideal lives in a place which was British but not Britain. When Hardinge suggested to Wilhelm that he might try to found his Freelander colony in German East Africa he purportedly replied, "God forbid […] go to Dar-es-Salaam and put ourselves under brutal Prussian Junkers! Never!"[133] Little could they

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[129] TNA: FO 403/195, Inclosure 1 in No. 371, Mr. Godfrey to Mr. A. Hardinge, August 6 1894, pp. 303-304.
[130] TNA: FO 403/195, No. 371, Mr. A. Hardinge to the Earl of Kimberly, August 12, 1894, p. 302.
[131] Though Godfrey told the Foreign Office that his scheme was in partnership with the London Freeland Society, the Society itself did not seem to meaningfully exist by October 30, 1894. A Scotland Yard investigation found that mail addressed to them bounced back to the Dead Letter Office, and "that this Society, although having no office at No. 70, Newman Street, had the use of a room periodically there, presumably for the purpose of conducting this business, also had several letters addressed there." By the end of October the Society had abandoned this temporary address, its secretary "Mr. Knox Johnson" had moved to Eastbourne, and ultimately the inspector was "unable to ascertain the class or extent of any business they have carried on." We cannot know for certain whether Godfrey knew the London Freeland Society was a non-entity and used their name in his scheme to create an illusion of credibility, or whether he truly was in contact with them and sincerely believed they had the resources to support his scheme, but in either case it appears the London Freeland Society was never really in a position to support Godfrey's filibustering expedition. TNA: FO 403/196, Inclosure in No. 102, Inspector W. Turrell and Superintendent John Shore, "Report", October 30, 1894, p. 69, from AM Digital: Confidential Print: Africa, 1834-1966, "East Africa Further Correspondence Part XXXIX", accessed July 28, 2026, https://www-confidentialprintafrica-amdigital-co-uk.libproxy.berkeley.edu/Documents/Detail/east-africa-further-correspondence-part-xxxix/15555764?item=15555836.
[132] More specifically, Godfrey's expedition up the Tana (which Dugmore joined) culminated in a shootout with Somali raiders at a Swedish-American mission station at Kulesa. As usual, Dugmore wrote a lengthy and heroic account of the incident to the Foreign Office wherein he claimed that he, Godfrey, and a handful of other Europeans heroically defended the mission station from an onslaught of over one thousand Somalis. IBEAC and Foreign Office officials doubted this account, finding it "teeming with exaggerations and misstatements […] evidently written for effect and publication." Details of the Kulesa mission station shootout can be found at TNA: FO 403/196, pp. 170-180.
[133] Hardinge, *Diplomatist in the East*, 146.

have expected that in a few years many British "Junkers" would soon be washing up on East Africa's shores, determined to never again live under the boot of liberal economists like Hertzka! *Fin de siècle* East Africa appeared to both as an empty canvas awaiting their imaginary society, just as the colonial state appeared to both as the perfect instrument for realizing their fantasies.

Yet for men like Dugmore and Godfrey, and later for Delamere or Robert Chamberlain, a British colony needed to be settled by the indisputably *British*. This claim was always self-interested, even in cases when it was also sincere. Regardless of whether Dugmore truly was "before all things a loyal Englishman and staunch Imperialist", or whether Godfrey truly was as loyal to the British Empire as he eventually claimed, these claims were part and parcel of their attempts to secure land from the colonial state. Dugmore's and Godfrey's schemes were the first to lay a claim to some portion of the East African hinterland on the basis of their imperial citizenship, yet this would become one of the dominant forms of concessionaire claim-making in British East Africa. Dugmore and Godfrey couched their schemes as loyal, patriotic, indisputably *British* alternatives to the foreign treachery of the original expedition. They argued that so long as they were loyal Britons the colonial state owed them access to the means of production. Their settlement schemes construed these demands for land, labor, and material assistance from the colonial state as a form of patriotic service on their part. Dugmore and Godfrey may have failed to ultimately secure these lands, but in a few short years others would gain exponentially larger concessions using the same means. Dugmore and Godfrey cannibalized the original Freelander Expedition; Westminster cannibalized the IBEAC to build the Uganda Railway; settlers brought in by the railway cannibalized the colonial state for vast concessions on the basis of their wealth and their pretensions of loyalty. The "game within game of crooked dealing" which constituted colonial Kenya's political economy was played out in miniature on Lamu in 1894, but with the construction of the railway it would finally be carried at great expense into the hinterland.

Conclusion

In both the academic and the popular historiography, the Uganda Railway is generally understood as the origin of the settler colonial project in British East Africa.[134] In a sense this is true: without the railway, and without the devastating famine, epidemics, and conquest which accompanied its construction, settlers and their capital could never have penetrated the East African hinterland as quickly as they did. The railway's official history, as well as the many popular histories which came in its wake, generally focused on the activities of its few white European engineers and cast the railway's construction as a reflection of its European architects' unique genius.[135] More recently the railway has undergone a reappraisal in light of the outsized role played by South Asian laborers in its construction. Neera Kapila's *Race, Rail, and Society* trains its focus specifically on indentured South Asian laborers on the railway line, outlining the

[134] Throughout this dissertation I will be referring to the railway as the "Uganda Railway" or just as "the railway." It is important to note, however, that the railway's name would eventually be changed to "The Kenya-Uganda Railway" in 1926. In 1927 it would be renamed again to "Kenya-Uganda Railways and Harbours," until 1948 when the system would again be renamed the "East African Railways and Harbours." Finally in 1969 the East African Railways and Harbours would split into the "Kenya Railways" and the "Kenya Ports Authority." For the sake of clarity and consistency, I have chosen to use the original name of the line.

[135] See M.F. Hill *Permanent Way*, as well as Charles Miller *The Lunatic Express* (Head of Zeus, 1971); Stephen Mills and Brian Yonge, *A Railway to Nowhere: The Building of the Lunatic Line, 1896-1901* (Mills Publishing, 2012); Ronald Hardy *The Iron Snake* (Putnam, 1965).

depths of their exploitation on the line.[136] Thomas Metcalf dedicates a chapter to the railway in his *Imperial Connections*, arguing that the Uganda Railway represented a "wedge of India driven into the heart of Africa," one whose construction "gave visible shape to East Africa's position from the 1890s onward as a colony as much of British India as of Britain itself."[137] These accounts have overwhelmingly demonstrated the British and Indian dimensions of the railway project.

Yet a more complete analysis of the origins of the settler colonial project in East Africa must encompass the first attempted European settlement scheme in the region: the Freeland scheme. The Freelander expedition forced the IBEAC and the British state to confront questions for the first time which would resurface perennially all the way down to 1939. Who deserves to pioneer a "British" colony? Are the best British colonists necessarily British subjects, or can they be foreigners? Should settlement be funded by the state, by individual settlers, or by cooperatives of settlers? Is the purpose of a British colony to benefit the state, to civilize the colonized, to generate profits for settler-investors, or to solve Europe's social question? Must the colonial state maintain a monopoly on legitimate violence, or can this monopoly be shared with settlers? These questions did not surface in colonial Kenya after the construction of the railway; the case of the Freelanders demonstrates that these questions were so potent years before the railway was ever finished that would-be colonizers stuck on the coast had to be prevented from shooting each other over their conflicting answers. Theodor Herzl called Freeland a "complicated piece of mechanism with numerous cogged wheels catching into each other [with] nothing to prove to prove that they can be set in motion." The Uganda Railway was the mechanism which finally enabled all the other cogged wheels Hertzka had assembled to be set in motion. The furious arguments which ultimately tore the Freelander movement apart in the summer of 1894 would not disappear. Instead these debates over what the British Empire meant, and whose interests it ought to serve, would be heaped upon the backs of porters, packed into railway cars, and shipped inland.

For instance, the railway experienced several small, sporadic strikes throughout its construction wherein both European and South Asian subordinates would strike together at a particular railway station.[138] The most significant of these strikes occurred in late March 1900, and it consisted of European, Eurasian, and South Asian subordinates stationed in Mombasa, Nairobi, Kilindini, and Makindu. They protested the discrepancies between the privileges accorded to subordinates on "English" agreements—meaning subordinates who had been recruited from Britain—and subordinates on "Indian" agreements, meaning those who had been recruited from India. As Neera Kapila noted, "although subordinates had all signed the same contract, the administration had a hierarchical ranking order" wherein white British subordinates recruited from Britain were treated the best, white subordinates recruited from India were ranked beneath them, and South Asian subordinates were ranked last.[139] Nonetheless, this practice was

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[136] Neera Kapila, *Race, Rail, and Society: Roots of Modern Kenya* (East African Educational Publishers, 2009), 26-53.
[137] Thomas Metcalf, *Imperial Connections: India in the Indian Ocean Arena, 1860-1920,* (University of California Press, 2007), 188.
[138] The term "subordinate" in the context of the Uganda Railway's labor hierarchy indicates mid-level staff who were not indentured. This would include medical assistants, engineers, overseers, clerks, accountants, and so on. Though most subordinates were South Asian a sizable minority were European or Eurasian.
[139] Kapila, *Race, Rail, and Society,* 166.

resisted by the strikers who demanded that certain privileges be accorded to workers on both English and Indian agreements.

The strike of March 1900 began ostensibly because Chief Engineer Whitehouse had announced that the railway would no longer permit subordinates the privilege of "free carriage", meaning the ability to have the train carry some amount of cargo for them without cost. Subordinates had taken to using free carriage to bring goods from the coast to the thriving railway bazaars in Nairobi and sell them for profit. Yet the railway was designed expressly to monopolize the coast-hinterland commerce which subordinates now saw as their own prerogative. Indeed, once free carriage was denied to them the strikers accused the railway's agents across the Indian Ocean of misrepresenting work on the line, saying that these recruitment agents "misinformed, promised and deluded the Subordinates into believing that this was a veritable gold mine and paradise" just as many settlers later would. The strikers claimed they signed their contracts only because "We also had faith in H.M's Government not to press and exact from us the full performance of such an agreement and which we maintain is a totally illegal agreement, and can by law be set aside." As "a body of men, British subjects," they argued the nascent colonial state owed them certain concessions in return for their pioneering labor. Six years before the March 1900 strike Dugmore and Godfrey had made the same claims; six years after the March 1900 strike, Robert Chamberlain and Israel Zangwill would also make the same claims (Chapter 2).

The strike also revealed how these claims of imperial citizenship were inflected by both race and class. The many South Asian subordinates on the railway allied themselves here with their fellow European and Eurasian subordinates. They demanded that rules for sick leave, paid leave, and holidays be applied to both European and South Asian subordinates equally, and that rules which held on Indian railways be brought across the Indian Ocean to East Africa. Yet all these demands rested on a sharp distinction between the subordinates and the indentured laborers they oversaw. When demanding that the railway stop levying arbitrary fines, they wrote to the committee "In connection with this we must remind you that Cooly labourers are only liable to have two days wages deducted for each days absence, and we fail to see why such a severe punishment was inflicted on a Subordinate, who ought certainly to expect better treatment than an ordinary cooly." Similarly, the strikers protested that "lower Subordinates" were compelled to use the "Cooly ration ticket," indicating again that they deserved to be treated better than mere "coolies."[140] The alliance of "British subjects" which formed between European, Eurasian, and South Asian subordinates very purposefully did not encompass the many thousands of indentured laborers they jointly managed, despite the fact that these laborers were also "British subjects." This was because the railway's many indentured laborers, regardless of their British subjecthood, existed to sustain both the commercial activities and the imperial citizenship of their employers/overseers. They were to the railway what Hertzka's "steel slaves" were to Freeland, the laborers which must be imagined away to sustain the fantasy of high modernist colonial development.

This occurred even as African knowledge was crucial to the construction of the railway at every turn. R.O. Preston, a railway engineer, recalled how in the Nyiri Desert "my boy"—his Swahili servant—suggested "straining [water] through the end of his turban, saying they always

[140] All preceding quotations from the striking subordinates were sourced from TNA: CO 537/65, Striking Subordinates to George Whitehouse, March 24, 1900, pp. 280-290.

did that with the water they drank."[141] Preston ignored the advice, opting instead to use soluble flavoring crystals. Yet the knowledge furnished by African laborers was not always ignored. The railway surveyor Richard Church made frequent, if brief, references to the constant presence of his gunbearers. The rations of railway camps were constantly supplemented by game hunted by British officers and subordinates, to such an extent that laborers would frequently run towards the sound of gunshots in the hopes of grabbing the carcasses. In one dramatic example, recorded in a letter from Church to his wife, he recounted how one morning he was awoken by his Swahili servant at 6:30am to inform him that a leopard who had recently been attacking laborers had been caught in a trap set up near Church's bungalow. Church grabbed his rifle, found the leopard in the cage, and shot it to death before bringing it back to the camp in triumph and hanging its skin and skull in his house. It is only after recounting this story that he noted, briefly, "The trap was made by one of my Swahilis and is very ingenious."[142] All Church needed to do here was shoot a caged animal at point blank range. It was one of the many Swahili laborers upon whom he constantly relied who had to go out into the wilderness, alone, and fashion a trap strong enough to cage an adult leopard. His knowledge of how to do so likely saved lives.

Hertzka's liberal sympathies may have been sufficient to prevent him from "enjoying some very fine black game shooting" *à la* Dugmore, or from sharing Whitehouse's comfort with his wonderous railway being built by an army of captive indentured laborers, yet ultimately Hertzka, Dugmore, and Chief Engineer Whitehouse were all bound together by shared understandings of the colonial state, of labor, and of the rights of colonists. Hertzka's utopia, the IBEAC's charter, Dugmore's filibustering expedition, and Whitehouse's railway each began as precarious fantasies whose success or failure depended upon their architects' ability to persuade an unstable colonial state of the necessity of maintaining them. To do so, each needed to both dehumanize and deintellectualize any Africans residing in the lands they desired, then do the same to any laborers they needed to employ. Dehumanization ensured that any floggings, lion attacks, or outbreaks of disease might be waved away as so much inconvenient collateral damage; deintellectualization served as the foundation for the schemers' own high modernist pretensions of entrepreneurship and expertise. Yet these pretensions were daily sustained by all the porters, "coolies", and others thingified into living as "steel slaves." These thingified people were always the ones to strain puddle water through their own turbans only to watch their boss opt for the flavoring crystals instead, or to subdue a leopard in their employer's garden in the dead of night with an "ingenious" trap of their own making.

With these tasks done each would-be colonist could finally look upon East Africa as a *tabula rasa* to be speculated upon with a clean conscience. Any preexisting political economy could be seen as an anachronistic obstacle to be demolished, as so much haggling over bolts of cloth and "cheap umbrellas" soon to evaporate. So, the colonial state would obviously be obliged to supply as many slaves (steel or otherwise) to those pioneering imperial citizens who made the case that their self-interest was a sufficient guide towards profitable development. And if there were multiple parties attempting to make that case, then a winning strategy would often be to paint one's opponents as treacherously foreign, as insufficiently British, as attempting to selfishly pillage the colonial state rather than loyally serve it out of an *enlightened* self-interest. The

[141] R.O. Preston, *The Genesis of Kenya Colony; reminiscences of an early Uganda railway construction pioneer* (Colonial Print Works, 1947), 17.
[142] British Library (BL): Add MS 89338/2, Letter 129, Richard James Church to Christine Master, November 1, 1901.

speculative insistence that East Africa was an empty paradise awaiting entrepreneurship led, invariably, to demands that the colonial state provide would-be entrepreneurs with land and with labor to develop it. In other words, it led to many failed settlement schemes.

Chapter 2

Imperium in Imperio: Defining the Deserving Pioneer on the Early East African Frontier, 1901-1907

> They were trying to follow a covered wagon tradition in the era of the Ford. They belonged, historically, to the nineteenth century; and yet there they were, clearing bush and breaking in new land and behaving as empire builders while Marconi was sending his first wireless signals across the Atlantic, and Orville Wright was demonstrating the conquest of the air, and linotypes were rattling out halfpenny newspapers for the populace, and while the world was shrinking and distances were contracting with the suddenness of elastic. Pioneering in the twentieth century was bound to lead to difficulties.
>
> --Elspeth Huxley, *White Man's Country; Lord Delamere and the Making of Kenya.*

> Today! With the ideas, knowledge, and facilities that humanity possesses on this 31st day of December, 1902, it could save itself. No philosopher's stone, no dirigible airship is needed. Everything needful for the making of a better world exists already. And do you know, man, who could show the way? You! You Jews! Just because you're so badly off. You've nothing to lose. You could make the experimental land for humanity. Over yonder, where we were, you could create a new commonwealth. On that ancient soil, Old-New-Land!
>
> --Theodor Herzl, *Old New Land.*

On January 16, 1905, six young men between the ages of nineteen and twenty-five wrote a short letter to the editor of The American Hebrew & Jewish Messenger, a magazine published in New York City. Identifying themselves as students of the Baron De Hirsch Agricultural School in Woodbine New Jersey, they were a diverse group. Isaac Lipchitz and Joseph Forman, both nineteen, had been born in New York City; Benjamen Reinitz, nineteen, had been born in Hungary; Samuel Jonas Alcalay, twenty-five, had been born in Jerusalem; Jacob Weber, twenty-five, had been born in Odessa; finally Moses Azancot, twenty-one, had been born in Tangier. Yet rather than dwell on their diverse origins their letter focused instead on their shared convictions:

> We are Zionists and have followed with great interest all the latest efforts of our great patriots tending to the formation of a Jewish state in Uganda. We are willing to be among the first pioneers. We believe that those pioneers must be hardy, strong, courageous and ambitious farmers, who will not give up hope, even in the last moment. We are farmers who are invested with those qualities and are willing to sacrifice ourselves for our future country; we also have experience in farming, ranging from three to eleven years respectively. Our knowledge in agriculture may assure us a tranquil life in this country,

but moved by a patriotic sentiment, we propose ourselves for this great enterprise and we beg of you to plead our cause before the Zionistic societies to put into action our project.[1]

With this letter these six young men threw their hats into a land rush half a world away and already several years old. The Woodbine students were responding to a proposal from Colonial Secretary Joseph Chamberlain to Theodor Herzl to establish a Zionist proto-state in British East Africa for Jewish refugees fleeing antisemitism in Europe.[2] With their enthusiastic invocations of "sacrifice" and "patriotic sentiment" they sounded like many of the settlers already pouring into Britain's newest settler frontier. Yet, perhaps unbeknownst to them, opposition to Jewish settlement in East Africa was so extensive among the extant settler population that two years before the Woodbine students published their letter the front page of The African Standard ran an advertisement reading: "East Africa may be Jewed but you will not if you deal with T.A. Wood, Nairobi Stores."[3] Ultimately this settlement scheme, like so many of those which focused on the early East Africa Protectorate, would never materialize. Yet each of the many settlement proposals which proliferated in the first decade of the Protectorate represented competing claims on the essential nature of the nascent colony, and how it ought to be developed economically, politically, and racially.

Following the completion of the Uganda Railway the colonial government was determined to attract private capital to the colony so as to make the railway pay. Yet if "capital was [to be] the axe with which to cut a path through political jungles as well as nature's," to use Berman and Lonsdale's phrasing, it remained uncertain precisely whose capital would be doing the cutting, and who would be holding the axe.[4] Between 1901 and 1907 Jewish refugees, South African mining moguls, British aristocrats, and Punjabi farmers would each stake their own claims to "pioneer" status in East Africa. The white plantocracy which came to define colonial politics in Kenya would emerge from this crucible of competing claims, defined as much by the settlement schemes which they had militated against as by those which brought them into the colony.

Relative to Britain's other colonies Kenya's settler population was notably smaller and wealthier, a "sprinkling of footloose aristocrats and retired officers of the Crown" alongside a small yet robust corps of mostly Afrikaner homesteaders and plantation managers.[5] Yet this small cadre of white settlers would quickly develop a reputation for controversy as they frequently locked horns with the colonial government over who should be allowed to settle in the nascent

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[1] Benjamin Reinitz *et al*., "Pioneers of Uganda" in *The American Hebrew & Jewish Messenger,* January 20, 1905, 273, from ProQuest Historical Newspapers, accessed July 28, 2026, https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/letter-editor-1-no-title/docview/871872723/se-2?accountid=14496.

[2] Though the plan was commonly referred to as the "Uganda Scheme," the lands in question were located entirely within the borders of the East Africa Protectorate and later modern-day Kenya. For the sake of clarity I will refer to this proposal as the "Zionist Settlement Scheme."

[3] *The African Standard Mombasa Times & Uganda Argus*, October 24, 1903, 1. Note that this newspaper was later renamed The East African Standard. From Readex African Newspapers, Series 1, accessed July 28, 2026, https://infoweb-newsbank-com.libproxy.berkeley.edu/apps/readex/doc?p=WHNPAFR1&t=pubname%3A12BE6F7A2FFCBE88%21East%2BAfrican%2BStandard%252C%2BMombasa%2BTimes%2Band%2BUganda%2BArgus/year%3A1903%211903/mody%3A1024%21October%2B24&year=1903&docref=image/v2%3A12BE6F7A2FFCBE88%40WHNPAFR1-12BF56EA1B8EB3E8%402416412-12BF1677F2C8A028%400.

[4] Bruce Berman and John Lonsdale, *Unhappy Valley: Conflict in Kenya & Africa* (J. Currey, 1992), 35.

[5] M.P.K. Sorrenson, *Origins of European Settlement in Kenya* (Oxford University Press, 1968), 4.

colony, and upon what terms. Churchill remarked upon his visit to East Africa that "One would scarcely believe it possible, that a centre so new should be able to develop so many divergent and conflicting interests, or that a community so small should be able to reach such vigorous and even vehement expression."[6] These early conflicts demonstrate a crucial point: Kenya's white settler plantocracy was not the inevitable telos of British conquest, but rather a contingent outcome emerging from some of the many competing claims made upon the nascent colony in its early years combined with the unique exigencies of the early twentieth century. Though Churchill was correct that Nairobi was a new city and its population recent arrivals, the issues they were contesting were as old as the British Empire: whose interests were Britain's colonies meant to serve, and which people could legitimately claim a place within them?

This brief period between the completion of the Uganda Railway in 1901 and the beginning of 1907 was an eventful one in British East Africa as it saw the rapid progression of three interrelated processes: the military conquest of East Africa, the development of a colonial government in East Africa, and the beginnings of an East African land rush. The construction of the Uganda Railway had been equally costly and ill-conceived, motivated more by the desire to cement a geopolitical sphere of influence than a sober assessment of the railway's potential profits. As Mugo Gatheru aptly put it: "After the Kenya-Uganda Railway was completed, there was a pause to consider what use it might have."[7]

Yet there was no corresponding pause in the military conquest of East Africa, the railway acting as the "iron backbone" of that conquest.[8] The railway meant less of a reliance upon African porters just as it meant that soldiers and laborers from India could move quickly inland without the aid of African auxiliaries and guides. East Africans were now expected not to function as local allies but as local agents, providing taxes, labor, and military support in return for protection; failure to do so was a sign of disloyalty which would be met with overwhelming force. The brutal crushing of the Nandi resistance, or the initial movements of the famine-stricken Maasai onto reserves in 1904-1905 to make room for European settlement and mining, underscore this point. It is imperative to recognize that all the settlement schemes analyzed here were claims on an active war zone, one already devastated by the famine and epidemics of 1899. This is not just a moral imperative, but a scholarly one as well. The ability of these prospective colonizers to radically reimagine what constituted a 'British colony' depended upon the continued perception of East Africa as an empty place; the illusion of East Africa as an empty place was sustained by it being violently emptied. The schemes analyzed here were each attempts to get in on the ground floor of something new *before* the dust had settled, bids on lands which were not yet conquered.

British East Africa emerged from company rule as an incomplete jurisdictional jigsaw puzzle. The lands on the coast surrounding Mombasa were ostensibly governed in the name of the Sultanate of Zanzibar, itself a separate British protectorate. Conversely the lands further inland belonged to indigenous African peoples, whose claims the British only sporadically considered. The confusion was compounded by the existence of the newly-built Uganda Railway. Because the railway had been built by an act of Parliament both it and the lands

[6] Winston Churchill, *My African Journey* (William Briggs, 1909), 21.
[7] R. Mugo Gatheru, *Kenya, from Colonization to Independence, 1888-1970* (McFarland & Co., 2005), 22.
[8] John Lonsdale, "The Conquest State, 1895-1904" in *A Modern History of Kenya, 1895*-1980, eds. William Robert Ochieng and Bethwell A. Ogot, (Evans Brothers Kenya, 1989), 16.

immediately alongside it fell under the purview of the Treasury rather than the Foreign Office, resulting in what some colonial officials complained was "an *Imperium in Imperio* […] owning all the land along the main artery of communication, yet independent of the Commissioner."[9] Thus even if Protectorate administrators wanted to sell land to a prospective settler, the most desirable lands—those along the railway—could only be granted on terms acceptable to the Treasury in London, which was determined to see a return on Parliament's investment in the colony even if it meant alienating potential investors with unfavorable terms.

Yet the same logic which made the Treasury hesitant to sell land on easy terms was also what drove men like Charles Eliot and Joseph Chamberlain to hastily auction it off to the highest bidder (or even just to the first bidder). The railway's immense cost was both a cause and an obstacle for the ensuing wave of settlement. The Treasury was hesitant to sell the land outright because the ongoing conquest of that land was so expensive. By contrast Eliot, the Protectorate's first commissioner, observed that "If the country is worth anything, people will find out for themselves. This argument is true enough of an ordinary Colony, but East Africa is not an ordinary Colony. It is practically an estate belonging to His Majesty's Government, on which an enormous outlay has been made, and which ought to repay that outlay."[10] Eliot parroted Joseph Chamberlain's 1895 contention that British imperialists "are the landlords of a great estate" with a duty to deploy "British capital and British credit" to develop it.[11] This outlook positioned the Empire as a combination of a salesman and an absentee landlord. Its purpose, in the eyes of men like Eliot and Chamberlain, was to find a suitable partner to share the expenses of developing its recently conquered estate. Yet with so many chefs already in the kitchen (Treasury, Foreign Office, Colonial Office, etc.), it would be challenging to find a candidate of whom all could approve. And besides, what really counted as "British capital" anyway? Chamberlain presumably thought the meaning was self-evident. The friction generated by the many competing settlement schemes of 1901-1907 would quickly prove him wrong.

This jurisdictional tangle was exacerbated by the exigencies of the early twentieth century. East Africa was being conquered at great expense to the British taxpayer just as Britain's other settlement frontiers in Canada, Australia, and South Africa seemed to be closing. The late nineteenth century was a period of protracted economic depression. The vast South African mineral frontier following the South African War was rapidly consolidated in the hands of a few mining magnates, leaving both prospective settlers and investors looking for new territory.[12] Furthermore the early Protectorate and the Railway administration jointly acted as an administrative frontier for dissatisfied functionaries of the India Office. In the protectorate's early years those who had flunked their civil service examinations, had been held back by their Anglo-Indian status, or had simply found themselves in a lowly position in India often transferred or even smuggled themselves to East Africa seeking a better position.[13] This liminal position is discernable in the historiography surrounding the early settlement of the colony. Where

[9] TNA: FO 2/805, R.B.P. Carter, draft memorandum respecting the process of the Uganda Railway in East Africa, February 4, 1902, p. 262.
[10] "Sir Charles Eliot argues for the development of the East Africa Protectorate, which is 'practically an estate belonging to His Majesty's Government' April 1903" in G.H. Mungeam, *Kenya, Select Historical Documents* (East African Publishing House, 1979), 93-94.
[11] M.P. Cowen and R.W. Shenton, *Doctrines of Development* (Routledge, 1996), 257.
[12] Sorrenson, *Origins of European Settlement,* 3-4.
[13] Thomas Metcalf, *Imperial Connections: India in the Indian Ocean Arena, 1860-1920* (University of California Press, 2007), 191-192.

Sorrenson would say that "European settlement in the Kenya highlands was in a very real sense […] a South African colony," Metcalf saw the railway which enabled that settlement as a "wedge of India driven into the heart of Africa," while Sana Aiyar instead saw the progress of Indian merchants and settlers alongside that same railway as an extension of Indian Ocean commercial networks which long predated the British conquest of East Africa and India both.[14] Kenya's liminal position, combined with the closing of Britain's other settler frontiers, meant both that it was susceptible to competing claims from subjects throughout the Empire and that there was no single authority within the imperial bureaucracy who could effectively arbitrate these claims, often forcing them into an intra-imperial court of opinion.

In this chapter I seek to examine the origins of European settlement in East Africa through the lens of the many failed or partially-attempted settlement schemes against which the colony's early white settlers defined themselves. Put another way, by investigating the colony's paths untaken or partially-taken I intend to demonstrate how Kenya's white plantocracy emerged as a compromise in the eyes of colonial policymakers, growing up in between alternative forms of settlement and defining itself against them through vigorous, intra-imperial lobbying. Though both settlers and colonial administrators would claim that East Africa was indisputably a "white man's country," this position was never an explicit policy even through the 1930s. Berman and Lonsdale recognized that white settlement in Kenya was the result of a "private bargain between […] Sir Charles Eliot, and the first white frontiersmen who took Lord Delamere for their leader."[15] Yet this was not the only "private bargain" which had the potential to fundamentally shape the course of colonial Kenya, and it must be understood in the context of its alternatives.

Prospective entrants to the nascent East African frontier needed to make two intertwined claims to the satisfaction of multiple competing factions both within and without the imperial government. First, they needed to prove that they could satisfactorily develop the colony in partnership with the colonial government without burdening its coffers; second, they needed to prove that they *deserved* to settle in what rapidly came to be understood as one of Britain's last available settler frontiers. The first claim was usually the more straightforward. A settlement scheme needed to assure the imperial bureaucracy that its colonists would either already have sufficient capital to support themselves (meaning that the colonists would already be quite wealthy), or that colonists would be guaranteed by some wealthy patron (a private syndicate, a Zionist territorial organization, a pension from the Raj, etc.). The second claim was much more fraught. How 'British' did one need to be to merit a place in Britain's last settler colony? Did they need to be white, or could they simply be an imperial subject? And if whiteness was a prerequisite, how was it to be defined? Could a Russian Jew be considered white in the British Empire? Could a British Jew? What about an Afrikaner farmer? I argue that from 1901 to 1907 the "accident" of Kenya's white settler plantocracy emerged because this fierce competition over concessions ultimately established the precarious precedent that the best agricultural land in the colony was a metonym for full imperial citizenship; to receive a prime concession in East Africa meant that one was not simply an imperial subject, but that they possessed a relationship of reciprocal obligation with the Empire. To be a concessionaire was not just to be an imperial subject, but to be an imperial stakeholder. Alternative visions of corporate development and a Zionist proto-nation state were positioned as an alien "*imperium in imperio*" ("empire within an

[14] Sorrenson, *Origins of European Settlement,* 1; Metcalf, *Imperial Connections,* 187; Sana Aiyar, *Indians in Kenya: The Politics of Diaspora* (Harvard University Press, 2015), 6-7.
[15] Berman and Lonsdale, *Unhappy Valley,* 34.

empire"), whereas white, British settler-investors like Robert Chamberlain were able to position their concessions as the fulfillment of the British imperial project in East Africa.

"A Responsible and Influential English Syndicate:" The East Africa Syndicate and the Quandaries of Corporate Colonialism

The British colonial project in East Africa had begun with a private company, the IBEAC, and following its dissolution the role to be played by private companies in developing the colony became uncertain. The IBEAC's dissolution also meant the dissolution of its monopolistic charter, which opened the door for other corporate investors in the colony. One of the earliest and most controversial of these was the East Africa Syndicate, a mining company with British and South African origins. Portraying itself as "a responsible and influential English syndicate," the Syndicate argued that the capital and survey-work it had invested should have guaranteed it a privileged position and significant concessions in the colony. These efforts were initially successful. The Syndicate's lobbying efforts secured mineral prospecting rights throughout the Protectorate, and their geological surveys eventually culminated in the Lake Magadi mining lease.[16] More controversially among the settler community, the Syndicate also secured a 500-acre grant of prime farmland in the Rift Valley, nominally with the intention of subdividing the lot and leasing it to homesteaders. In practice the Syndicate ended up bringing more sheep than settlers to its concession and most of its plans did not come to fruition in the colony. Yet the controversy surrounding them spotlights the tensions which sat at the heart of British colonialism in East Africa under the Protectorate, as settlers and administrators alike confronted the question of whether a corporation could legitimately claim to be a "pioneer."

The East Africa Syndicate was founded by a group of South African and British investors in the chaotic period immediately following the South African War. With South Africa's economy ravaged by the war and soldiers returning to their homes, many South African investors and settlers alike looked—as Rhodes had done—northwards, assuming that the mineral frontier would continue even as far as East Africa.[17] When it was incorporated on February 12, 1902, the Syndicate's intentions in East Africa were vague and ambitious in equal measure. The Syndicate's articles of incorporation made mention of carrying out the business of everyone from "farmers, graziers, planters, [and] miners" to "hotel keepers, store keepers, publishers, printers, agents, and general merchants," and finally "to buy and sell, and deal in every commodity, substance and product."[18] This breadth is indicative of how settlers, investors, and administrators alike viewed the nascent East African frontier: as a *tabula rasa* where virtually any business proposition might succeed, yet without a strong dedication to any one in particular. That same year Charles Eliot, the Protectorate's first Commissioner, published the first "General Information as to the East Africa Protectorate" pamphlet through the London-based Emigrants' Information Office, effectively as an advertisement to attract settlers and capital. In it he assured readers that "those who are attracted by the more adventurous task of penetrating as pioneers into practically unexplored lands will still find ample scope for their energies" in the Protectorate.[19]

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[16] Lotte Hughes, "Mining the Maasai Reserve: The Story of Magadi," *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 2, no. 1, 134.
[17] Sorrenson, *Origins of European Settlement*, 65.
[18] TNA: FO 2/805, "Memorandum of Association of East Africa Syndicate, Limited", February 12, 1902, p. 352.
[19] Charles Eliot and Emigrants' Information Office, *General Information as to the East Africa Protectorate* (Darling & Son Ltd, 1902), 3.

Fittingly then, the Syndicate sought to portray itself as an energetic pioneering force, moving at a breakneck pace. The Syndicate initially set its sights on two main ventures: mineral prospecting and monopolies on commodities. Shortly after incorporating the Syndicate hired Frederick Burnham, an American scout who had served in the South African War, to lead their prospecting expeditions in search of precious metals.[20] Yet before Burnham had even set sail for East Africa the Syndicate's agents in London had met with the Foreign Office to discuss a "10,000*l* trial scheme of development" requiring a "ninety-nine year lease of 500 square miles of land […] out of lands which are not in the occupation of any native tribe."[21] The Foreign Office provisionally agreed to the proposal, informing Eliot of the scheme and that Burnham would act as the Syndicate's representative in East Africa. As Burnham traveled throughout East Africa fruitlessly searching for precious metals, his reports back to the Syndicate's directors expounded upon the Protectorate's potential for settlement and the richness of its soil. Indeed after visiting Ainsworth's farm he wrote back to his directors that "If mineral is never found in this country it will still be a valuable country, and settle thickly with white people once it is known to be healthy. If the Company can acquire 500 square miles and only have to put up £10,000, it should prove a profitable thing." Apparently Ainsworth was also enthusiastic about this trial scheme, and together he and Burnham imagined the Syndicate acting as the colonial government's principal private partner in a joint settlement venture: "[Ainsworth's] idea is that the Syndicate expend their capital in doing those permanent things which private settlers cannot do, such as turning the rivers, building roads and bridges, and even constructing certain types of buildings, selling the land to the settlers on easy terms, but at a sufficient rate to make a good profit while the unoccupied land would all the time become more and more valuable and the sale of water be a steady source of income."[22] This proposal is both economically and culturally resonant. On the one hand it pitches the Syndicate as an ideal business partner to the colonial state, investing capital into the colony which private investors could not muster—an appealing prospect after the disastrously costly construction of the Uganda Railway. Yet culturally it also positions the Syndicate as a kind of midwife to a new class of British settlers, selling them lands on "easy terms" after building for them a new African Eden. Burnham enclosed with his letter a small packet of Uganda coffee, so his directors might taste the profits to come.

For the next year the Syndicate's settlement scheme mostly lay dormant as Burnham surveyed possible sites, yet there were incidents in the meantime which presaged the controversies to come. The most revealing of these concerned the Syndicate's attempt in late 1902 to secure a monopoly on opium production in the Protectorate. Ernest Gedge, then scouting the East African coast in search of ways for the Syndicate to make money, heard that "certain of the Hindies" were growing opium in small quantities and were even seeking government licenses

[20] Though my focus here is on the East Africa Syndicate's brief foray into colonization in East Africa, by far its most lasting impact on East Africa came from its mining initiatives, in particular the coke mine on Lake Magadi. Built upon stolen Maasai land and still in operation today, the Lake Magadi coke mine is one of the longest continuously operating commercial mining operations in East Africa. For more, see Hughes "Mining the Maasai Reserve".
[21] Africa No. 8, Cd. 2099, *Correspondence Relating to the Resignation of Sir Charles Eliot and to the Concession to the East Africa Syndicate* (1904), J. Coltman to Foreign Office, April 22 1902, 37, from ProQuest U.K. Parliamentary Papers, accessed July 28, 2026, https://www.proquest.com/government-official-publications/africa-no-8-1904-correspondence-relating/docview/2746231917/se-2?accountid=14496.
[22] TNA: FO 2/806, Burnham to Syndicate, 20 June 1902, pp. 41-42.

to do so commercially.[23] Not wanting to miss an opportunity, he quickly wrote to Charles Eliot to ask if "His Majesty's Government should accord to the East Africa Syndicate the sole right or concession for the production, sale and export of opium from the East Africa Protectorate" despite having, by his own admission, "no knowledge whatever as to the advisability and possibilities of such a scheme."[24]

On its face, Gedge's proposal was not dissimilar to what the Protectorate government had already been willing to provide the Syndicate with respect to mineral rights in certain areas, nor from the monopolistic charter previously enjoyed by the IBEAC. Yet in this new era of direct administration, the prospect of offering a private company a monopoly on the production of a somewhat taboo commodity clearly made administrators uncomfortable. Gedge was given an evasive answer at first, being told that the Syndicate could seek a license to grow opium in the colony when more became available. Yet Gedge pressed, and in doing so used rhetoric which would become a hallmark not only of the Syndicate's future arguments for pride of place in the Protectorate, but of nearly every controversial settlement scheme to come. He wrote:

> The East Africa Syndicate is spending a very considerable amount of capital in endeavouring to open up East Africa commercially which if successful, will mean a large increase of revenue, to H.M's Government, and I ventured to hope […] that preference will be shown to them in this matter over the Hindi and other native traders, who in the majority of cases merely come to take money out of the country, and from whom the inhabitants derive but little benefit in the way of circulation. The proposition I have made can, under the existing regulations surely be no injustice to the Hindi or other traders, on the contrary, it would be, in my humble opinion, a more advantageous and satisfactory arrangement for the Government to deal with a responsible and influential English Syndicate than with a number of other traders of possibly unknown quality and doubtful reputation.[25]

And indeed, wouldn't the Foreign Office rather deal with a "a responsible and influential English Syndicate," one owned and operated by the sort of men a colonial administrator might already be inclined to fraternize with over a sundowner, than with racialized Indian capitalists or, worse yet, colonized East Africans themselves?

In a similar vein Gedge also sought for the Syndicate monopolistic concessions on the coast for rubber gum, copal, and timber, all of which were rejected along with the opium concession on the grounds that these monopolies would violate the Berlin Act, though the Syndicate did manage to secure a concession on pearl fisheries on the coast.[26] While these more ambitious schemes were rejected, they represented more than business proposals. These, along with the money hemorrhaged on mineralogical surveys, were claims to belonging in the nascent protectorate. They drew the boundary lines between deserving capitalists and dubious ones,

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[23] Though Gedge's request for an opium concession was apparently inspired by Indian opium growers on the coast, a similar issue would arise among the Indian settlers at Kibos less than a year later, who told C.W. Hobley that they were "anxious to experiment with opium culture" there in the very early days of the Kibos settlement. Eliot, similarly, was "not disposed to encourage the desire of the settlers to experiment with opium." BL: IOR/L/PJ/654, File 2721, Annex 2, "Report by Mr. C.W. Hobley. Indian Immigration Scheme"; Annex 1, Charles Eliot to Marquess of Lansdowne, May 12, 1903.

[24] TNA: FO 2/806, Ernest Gedge to Charles Eliot, August 14, 1902, p. 171.

[25] TNA: FO 2/806, Ernest Gedge to Charles Eliot, October 9, 1902, p. 173.

[26] TNA: FO 2/806; FO 2/807.

between a full imperial citizenship and mere subjecthood. The Syndicate would use this same playbook when it came to advancing its settlement scheme.

The first hurdle concerned land tenure. Eliot was eager to bring white settlers into the colony and was willing to adopt liberal terms to attract them. However the Treasury—which oversaw the railway lands upon which most settlers wished to settle—was opposed to selling any railway land freehold, initially refused to do so at all, and when it eventually relented did so on the condition that the costs be "substantial." The reason for this dispute, ironically, was that the Treasury was determined that the British state itself was obligated to speculate upon the lands it had just conquered instead of private entrepreneurs so it might recoup the costs of building the railway. As Treasury Secretary Chalmers explained, "My Lords remain of opinion that the Railway Zone, which should increase in value with the development of the Protectorate forms an asset on which They may properly rely for recovering part of the expenditure on the Uganda Railway and They are therefore entirely opposed to the alienation of more than the minimum held necessary by the local authorities to attract permanent settlers for the development of the Protectorate."[27] The logic was circular: the railway would only become profitable once the lands around it were 'developed', yet the railway zone couldn't be sold freehold to private developers because there hadn't been sufficient development to augment its market value such that its sale might justify the cost of its conquest. Thus, the files of the early Protectorate brim with correspondence between Eliot, the Foreign Office, and the Treasury concerning land tenure and the Commissioner's power (or lack thereof) to sell land in the Protectorate he ostensibly administered.[28] Though the Treasury would gradually relent on this issue, this initial hurdle compelled the Syndicate to try again to portray itself as the sole candidate deserving of an exception.

In response to terms which would have had the Syndicate paying rent on their land grant, the Syndicate's representatives reminded the Foreign Office of "the exploration work carried out […] which has already entailed an expenditure of over £30,000 [which] must tend largely to assist in opening up the country and to attract it to desirable settlers." Indeed, the Syndicate was "practically in the position of a pioneer" with "a considerable area of land under cultivation […] for experimental purposes, including crops of coffee, potatoes, Lucerne, oranges, Egyptian cotton, sim-sim, peanuts, Indian corn, castor oil., and the Directors would much regret having to abandon their scheme for the development of the land."[29] The implicit threat was that if the Syndicate's "pioneer" work were not rewarded with freehold land, they might pull out of the colony. An exasperated Clement Hill complained "It looks rather as if the Syndicate wants to be considered as the sole possible instrument of developing our protectorate."[30]

Yet it was a threat keenly felt by Eliot and other advocates of settlement in the imperial bureaucracy. While the Syndicate had focused much of its lobbying efforts on Foreign Office administrators in London, with the commissioner usually only learning of the deals they had

[27] TNA: FO 2/807, Robert Chalmers to Foreign Office, May 14, 1903, pp. 30; 31
[28] See TNA: FO 2/807. Eliot would later complain that the difficulties he experienced rapidly granting land concessions stemmed from the colony's origins as a protectorate administered by a consul in Zanzibar, which he called a "legal fiction". From this legal fiction stemmed "the absence, inadequacy, or at best unconscionable dilatoriness of legislation on really important questions such as land settlement." Charles Eliot, *The East Africa Protectorate* (Edward Arnold, 1905), 203.
[29] TNA: FO 2/807, East Africa Syndicate to Clement Hill, July 23, 1903, pp. 273-274.
[30] TNA: FO 2/807, August 18, 1903, p. 332, back of page.

struck after the fact from his superiors, Eliot himself had been busily working to attract more settlers to the Protectorate. His efforts had been similarly stymied by disputes over land tenure, and by August 1903 Eliot was so frustrated that he complained in a private letter to his superiors "The Treasury always seem to be afraid that someone besides the Government may make a profit out of the country, but how on earth are you to attract people to the country except by offering them a chance of getting a profit?" Indeed, Eliot understood himself less as a commissioner of a Protectorate and more as a salesman, and reminded his superiors in the Foreign Office that "A good salesman should humour his customers and in buying land it is clear that much depends on whims."[31]

Thus, though Eliot was ambivalent about the Syndicate's settlement scheme, he still was quite generous in his negotiations with Burnham. On his own initiative Eliot dropped the issue of rent and offered the Syndicate two fifty square mile blocks of agricultural land near Nairobi and Limuru respectively, along with a 400 square mile block in the Rift Valley, all on ninety-nine year leases with right to purchase after three years so long as "a mere £10,000" had been invested.[32] When the Foreign Office learned that Eliot had offered such generous terms, they took over negotiations with the Syndicate from him completely. By the end of 1903 they arrived at slightly more stringent, yet still very generous terms: the Syndicate would receive 500 square miles on a twenty-five year lease with no rent for the first seven years, a right of purchase fixed at £50,000, and an obligation to "start five farms of not less than 5,000 acres each, under European supervision, within the first seven years."[33] The syndicate insisted it was most expedient, cost-effective way of developing the Protectorate and putting European settlers upon it. Even if the Syndicate's shareholders were not truly interested in undertaking the cost of putting homesteaders on the land—they clearly were more interested in mineral rights and trading concessions—by offering these settlement schemes the Syndicate had managed to stake a claim upon East Africa as a "pioneer."

"My Crimes […] may be many and heinous:" Robert Chamberlain and the Definition of a Pioneer

Yet it would not be long before the Syndicate's scheme ran headfirst into another South African settlement scheme, and the collision sparked a debate which would reverberate throughout the rest of the colony's history. At the center of this scandal was a man named Robert Chamberlain, a former editor of the Johannesburg Star recently driven from his post "after he voiced opposition to the importation of Chinese laborers for the Rand gold mines during the postwar labor crisis."[34] In May of 1903 Eliot informed the Foreign Office that "Two representatives of Messrs. Pullinger, of Johannesburg, by name of Bowker and Chamberlain…[propose] to apply for considerable concessions similar to those of the East Africa Syndicate, but in different localities."[35] Specifically, Chamberlain and Flemmer proposed a scheme to bring one hundred European South African colonists "with a capital of not less than five hundred pounds each" into the

[31] TNA: FO 2/807, Charles Eliot to Lord Cranborne, August 10, 1903, pp. 311; 312.
[32] Sorrenson, *Origins of European Settlement,* 71.
[33] Africa No. 8, Cd. 2099, *Correspondence Relating to the Resignation of Sir Charles Eliot,* no. 27, Clement Hill to East Africa Syndicate, December 18, 1903, 54.
[34] Dane Kennedy, *Islands of White: Settler Society and Culture in Kenya and Southern Rhodesia, 1890-1939* (Duke University Press, 1987), 25.
[35] Africa No. 8, Cd. 2099, *Correspondence Relating to the Resignation of Sir Charles Eliot,* no. 1., Charles Eliot to Marquess of Lansdowne, May 25, 1903, 1.

Protectorate and settle them on grants of five thousand acres apiece of Maasai grazing lands around Naivasha.[36] "As a reward for their trouble," Flemmer and Chamberlain also sought "a grant of fifty thousand acres" for each of them, though Eliot told his superiors that he believed he could bargain them down to twenty-five thousand acres apiece.[37] As a separate proposal, Chamberlain and Flemmer also proposed to spend £10,000 on mineral prospecting in the colony in return for "exclusive prospecting rights for a period of three years over eight areas of 500 square miles each" with at least one area situated on the coast.[38]

In virtually all respects Flemmer and Chamberlain's scheme, along with their tactics for securing it, mirrored the Syndicate's. Both sought free land from the government upon which they promised to settle colonists, and in return demanded free land and mineral concessions for themselves. Indeed, Eliot later clarified to Lansdowne that "Interest of Pullinger limited to minerals," while the proposed agricultural parts of the scheme would be handled by a new syndicate which would be incorporated if the deal went through: the "African Farms Company."[39]

Initially, the strong similarities between the Chamberlain scheme and the Syndicate scheme portended its rejection. Lansdowne was skeptical, saying "It is not quite clear to what extent these gentlemen could influence colonists who, being possessed of some capital, are probably well able to judge and act for themselves," and furthermore since the government was already negotiating a large land grant to the East Africa Syndicate and even contemplating a major Zionist settlement scheme, Chamberlain and Flemmer's appeared excessive.[40] This began to change following an incident where Chamberlain got in a fistfight on a train with a Mr. Bowker—another representative of Pullinger—over seating, after which Chamberlain and Flemmer cut ties with Pullinger and began to represent themselves alone.[41] By late 1903 settlers were streaming into the Protectorate, mostly from South Africa. British control of the Protectorate was still tenuous, and resistance to colonial encroachments on indigenous lands was mounting.

Yet despite the dangers, Eliot was determined to attract more settlers to the colony even if it meant acting on his own initiative. Frederick Jackson, one of Eliot's subordinates, warned in a memorandum to the Foreign Office that "Up to the time I left Mombasa the large grazing areas applied for in the Naivasha district were 500 square miles (320,000 acres) by the East Africa Syndicate, 100,000 acres by Lord Delamere, and 32,000 acres each by Messrs. Chamberlain and Flemmer, and I pointed out to Sir C. Eliot that these areas not only embraced the best and most favoured grazing grounds of the Masai between Lakes Nakuru and Naivasha, but also embraced both banks of the only four rivers in the vicinity."[42] Plus, it was rumored that Chamberlain had

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[36] The surname of Chamberlain's counterpart is spelled variously as "Flemmer" and "Flimmer" depending on the document in question. For sake of ease and consistency, I have elected to spell it as "Flemmer" unless quoting directly from a document which does otherwise.
[37] TNA: FO 2/807, Charles Eliot to Marquis of Lansdowne, September 10 1903, p. 368.
[38] TNA: FO 2/807, Robert Chamberlain to Charles Eliot, August 25, 1903, p. 386.
[39] Africa No. 8, Cd. 2099, *Correspondence Relating to the Resignation of Sir Charles Eliot,* no. 5., Charles Eliot to Marquess of Lansdowne, October 22, 1903, 3.
[40] Africa No. 8, Cd. 2099, *Correspondence Relating to the Resignation of Sir Charles Eliot,* no. 4., Marquess of Lansdowne to Charles Eliot, October 15, 1903, 2.
[41] TNA: FO 2/807, Arthur Lawley to Alfred Lyttelton, November 23, 1903, pp. 600-601.
[42] Africa No. 8, Cd. 2099, *Correspondence Relating to the Resignation of Sir Charles Eliot,* no. 10., Feb 22, 1904, 6-7.

been hawking concessions of East African land in South African markets, lands which were not his to sell. These rumors evidently soured Foreign Office administrators' opinion of him.[43] Most in the Foreign Office—including Eliot's subordinates in the Protectorate—appeared to believe that, because of these factors, Chamberlain and Flemmer's applications would be rejected; Delamere was made to choose a less populated spot, and the Syndicate's application would proceed.

Yet in fact Eliot had already entered into contracts in his capacity as commissioner with Chamberlain and Eliot and promised them land in Naivasha.[44] When told by the Foreign Office that these grants could not proceed, both Eliot and Chamberlain were furious: Chamberlain because he would not receive his land, Eliot because he felt he was being overruled by his subordinates and disregarded by his superiors. The dispute quickly went public. Lansdowne, Hill, and others in the Foreign Office argued that Eliot's promised grants to Chamberlain and Flemmer would violate the Protectorate's obligations to the Maasai, and could spark a costly uprising. This wasn't an unreasonable expectation, though ultimately it did not materialize.[45] Eliot, damning himself, replied with a cavalier attitude towards the prospect of any conflict with the Maasai since he regarded it as an inevitability given the policy of settlement-as-development:

> Your lordship has opened this Protectorate to white immigration and colonization, and I think it is well that, in confidential correspondence at least, we should face the undoubted issue—viz., that white mates black in very few moves. In spite of all Mr. Jackson's memoranda and all Mr. Wason's questions, there can be no doubt that the Masai and many other tribes must go under. It is a prospect which I view with equanimity and a clear conscience. I wish to protect individual Masais, and would go farther than your Lordship might consider convenient in the way of punishing Europeans who ill-treat natives, but I have no desire to protect Masaidom. It is a beastly, bloody system, founded on raiding and immorality, disastrous to both the Masai and their neighbors. The sooner it disappears and is unknown, except in books of anthropology, the better.[46]

Ironically, though this statement doomed Eliot's job prospects at the time, it proved an accurate summary of the policies the colonial government would adopt. As Sorrenson noted, there were very few meaningful differences between Eliot and his superiors in the Foreign Office on the question of Maasai sovereignty. Though the Foreign Office rejected Chamberlain and Flemmer's settlement scheme on the grounds that it would violate Maasai sovereignty, Eliot's successor was in no way censured when he forced the Maasai from their homes north of the railway line onto a

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[43] Sorrenson, *Origins of European Settlement,* 74.
[44] Sorrenson, *Origins of European Settlement,* 74.
[45] Lotte Hughes argues that ultimately it was Maasai familiarity with British military supremacy and, more significantly, the lingering consequences of the catastrophic droughts, diseases, and famines of the 1890s which decimated around 90% of Maasai stock which prevented armed resistance to the first forced relocations. A full treatment of the forced relocations of the Maasai in 1904-1905 and later in 1913 is beyond the remit of this project, though it must be noted that both were tremendously costly. The Maasai of British East Africa "lost at least 50 per cent of the land they had once utilised" due to these forced relocations, with some estimates ranging closer to 70%. Precise figures for the amount of lands lost are difficult, if not impossible, to determine. The Maasai were moved primarily from the central Rift Valley around Naivasha and Nakuru to reservations on Laikipia to the north, and to the south near the German border by Kilimanjaro. For a more complete account see Lotte Hughes, *Moving the Maasai: A Colonial Misadventure* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 35; 6.
[46] Africa No. 8, Cd. 2099, *Correspondence Relating to the Resignation of Sir Charles Eliot*, No. 25, Charles Eliot to Marquess of Lansdowne, April 9, 1904, 26.

reservation south of the line.[47] Given that both the Foreign Office in London and Eliot in Mombasa were so zealous to attract settlers, and willing to spurn Maasai sovereignty, why were they arguing over virtually identical settlement schemes?

I argue that the scandal surrounding the Syndicate and Chamberlain settlement schemes was rooted not in an acknowledgement of indigenous sovereignty nor even in petty intraoffice bickering, but rather in an irresolvable dispute over who 'deserved' pride of place in Britain's dwindling colonial frontier. Though doubtless Eliot had been initially willing to offer the Syndicate very favorable terms, as more and more individual colonists began to pour into the colony his opinion of the Syndicate soured. In writing to Lansdowne justifying his resignation, Eliot spoke harshly of the Syndicate: "Further, all we know of the Syndicate's methods shows that they care for nothing but large returns, and that, if an enterprise does not show a prospect of making a rapid fortune they drop or neglect it. As soon as private individuals were ready to take up the Syndicate's area, I regretted that we could not break off negotiations with them […] to regard them as in any way superior to private proprietors or safer seems to me an inversion of the real state of the case."[48] Eliot would occasionally in private letters seek to hedge this position, even going so far as to say in a private letter to Lansdowne a few days later that "I do not like Mr. Chamberlain + Flemmer—though I think them just as good as the East Africa Syndicate." Yet he still claimed that the Syndicate had poisoned the minds of the "not intelligent gentlemen" working under him by convincing them of the "grotesque idea that the Masai have an affection for the Syndicate + its members […] How can naked savages understand or have sympathy with this or that financial body?"[49] While Eliot likely did see Chamberlain as an untrustworthy figure, he nevertheless claimed that the Syndicate's agents had conspiratorially manipulated his subordinates into working against concessions he had arranged.

As commissioner Eliot was in much closer proximity to the settlers entering the colony than his superiors in London, and though he maintained a pronounced distance from them he nevertheless was clearly influenced by their antipathy towards the Syndicate. These colonists, coming mostly from South Africa, were often fleeing the dominance of large conglomerates like the Syndicate. Eliot informed Lansdowne that "They complain too, that most of the Protectorate is taken up by Jewish reserves, native reserves, game reserves, and forest reserves, which swallow up between them the best land…and if I have to inform them in addition that Concessions which I have negotiated are cancelled, and that no Europeans are to be allowed in the Rift Valley except a very unpopular Syndicate, it appears to me that I shall not only call forth an explosion of indignation and accusations of bad faith."[50] By contrast, Eliot argued that Chamberlain and Flemmer "have been the means of sending several eligible settlers here (independent settlers that is, not a part of any scheme of colonization), and that, though their patriotic and philanthropic declarations may create scepticism, they are partly responsible for the present immigration of Europeans, and can prove it."[51] According to Eliot's logic, while the Syndicate was an inherently predatory organization seeking a quick profit, men like

[47] Sorrenson, *Origins of European Settlement,* 80.
[48] Africa No. 8, Cd. 2099, *Correspondence Relating to the Resignation of Sir Charles Eliot*, No. 25, Charles Eliot to Marquess of Lansdowne, April 9, 1904, 27.
[49] TNA: FO 2/835, Charles Eliot to Lord Lansdowne, April 11, 1904, pp. 303-306.
[50] Africa No. 8, Cd. 2099, *Correspondence Relating to the Resignation of Sir Charles Eliot,* No. 26, Charles Eliot to Marquess Lansdowne, April 10, 1904, 28.
[51] Africa No. 8, Cd. 2099, *Correspondence Relating to the Resignation of Sir Charles Eliot*, No. 24, Charles Eliot to Marquess Lansdowne, April 7, 1904, 25.

Chamberlain—engaged in the exact same activities—must have their "patriotic" and "philanthropic" pretensions entertained and rewarded by the colonial government, despite any private misgivings.

Ironically, Chamberlain's fistfight with Bowker over train seats transformed him from a predatory capitalist into a philanthropic patriot. By severing his ties with Pullinger he became an 'individual settler' rather than a representative of any large capitalist firm. Whereas the Syndicate's negotiations with the Foreign Office had gone largely unreported, Chamberlain ensured his own received fawning coverage in the East African press. In February 1904, a South African correspondent (likely Chamberlain) sent a letter to The African Standard reporting, "I hear that Major Burnham was acting in [British East Africa] for Ecksteins here, the big mining house; they appear to be all on the land grab—not to settle on it but just to hold it and trust to luck." Of those who received their land from syndicates he wrote, "Now those are the kind of gentlemen that want a stopper put on them; else the surrounding country will just be owned by a few. These people have no money, but simply take it up for syndicates, and nothing more."[52] To illustrate the difference between penniless speculators and deserving colonists, the South African correspondent attached an article from The Star of Johannesburg which outlined Chamberlain and Flemming's "Grand Settlement Scheme" and how they had recently negotiated a fare reduction for Mombasa-bound colonists on a German shipping line. Chamberlain tactically omitted that he had originally arrived in East Africa on behalf of a wealthy South African investor with the expressed purpose of founding a new syndicate and securing new mineral concessions.

Following Lansdowne's veto of Chamberlain's land grant, he pled his case in the imperial court of public opinion using the same pioneering rhetoric, and his tactics were prototypical for later white settler grievances with the colonial state. He lobbied officials in East Africa, South Africa, and Great Britain, and drawing upon his experience as a journalist he saw to it that his correspondence and opinions were published in newspapers throughout the Empire as well. He appealed to the high commissioner of South Africa as a "private individual against a powerful Government."[53] He characterized his land grant in letters to the colonial office as "a reward for work of a valuable public character," and assured them that he possessed "a small capital which represents the fruits, not of speculative gains, but of 20 years of unremitting labour and persistent thrift and frugality."[54] By contrast the East Africa Syndicate was a "powerful combination of capitalists, with its ramifications and agents everywhere," one "part and parcel of the combination of financiers which was responsible for the Jameson Raid."[55] And beyond portraying himself as a benighted citizen, Chamberlain also sought to connect his concession—however dubiously—to the colony's nascent labor shortage. In a letter to the Naivasha sub-commissioner following the desertion of several African laborers, he snidely remarked, "A large number of settlers, of whom I am one, desire to learn whether the local Administration intends to deal with impartial justice on these questions between the native labourer and the white employer of labour, or whether the dishonest treatment accorded to private individuals and not to powerful Syndicates of titled and other financiers by His Majesty's Government in respect to land

[52] "THE SETTLERS COMING," *The African Standard Mombasa Times & Uganda Argus,* February 20, 1904, 2.
[53] TNA: CO 879/87, Enclosure 1 in No. 2, Robert Chamberlain to Viscount Milner, February 8, 1905, p. 5.
[54] TNA: CO 879/87, No. 177B, Robert Chamberlain to Colonial Office, "My Enderit River Grant", August 17, 1905, p. 172.
[55] TNA: CO 879/92, No. 139, Robert Chamberlain to Colonial Office, April 16, 1906, p. 379.

questions is to be imitated here by the local Administration in questions of labour contracts."[56] Because Chamberlain could not claim that he was a more capable investor than the Syndicate or wealthy aristocrats like Delamere he instead needed to reframe his concession as a reward for his public service, a confirmation of his loyal service to the Empire, thus prefiguring later settlement schemes like the Ex-Soldier Settlement Scheme of 1919 (Chapter 3).

The most representative summary of Chamberlain's campaign can be found in a letter published by the Guardian in 1905. In it Chamberlain depicted his foray into East Africa as having been motivated by the "disastrous" policies of the British government, which had "already resulted in strengthening the enormous hold upon the resources of the Transvaal of a certain group of Rand financiers." Again breezing past the fact that he had come to East Africa as a representative of one of those Rand financiers, Chamberlain insisted that he "made application to the Commissioner for a private farm for my own sole use and for development by my own capital and labour." Most importantly, Chamberlain exceeded the Syndicate's pioneer rhetoric. He was not just "practically in the position of a pioneer," but rather he wrote:

> My crimes, it is possible, may be many and heinous. It is true that I am a South African colonist and British subject of English birth. It is true that I am one of the pioneer settlers in British East Africa. It is true that at the expense of my own time, energy, and money, I have helped to make the name of British East Africa…familiar as household words throughout South Africa. It is true that I have been the means of sending up to the protectorate some two hundred settlers, a large number of whom have their families with them. It is true that I chose my own land well at a time when no one else wanted any land in the protectorate and when the enterprise I entered upon was associated with grave risks and dangers. It is true that I am not a Hebrew financier, and that, as an obscure British colonist, I have neither social nor political influence in England. It is true…that I know as a South African that the late Boer government was corrupt on a cash basis; and that I know equally well…that the British Government is still more corrupt on a basis of 'influence.' These may or may not be crimes in the eyes of His Majesty's Government.[57]

For Chamberlain, as for so many of the settlers who followed him, land in East Africa was a tangible representation of his imperial citizenship. To have it was to be confirmed as a responsible imperial citizen, to be denied it was to have one's imperial citizenship questioned, and to see it granted to someone undeserving was a miscarriage of justice. The East Africa Syndicate was to Chamberlain and his allies not just a company, but the embodiment of "influence," of corruption, of 'big men' on the frontier, of the 'red tape' which stood between them and free land, and an extension of the "Hebrew financier" imagined to control finance in London as well as Johannesburg.

The Syndicate/Chamberlain scandal demonstrates that while capital was a necessary condition to be an East African 'pioneer,' it was not a sufficient condition. The Syndicate had arrived before Chamberlain, had invested more into the colony, and was better connected in London. Yet after the Lake Magadi concession the Syndicate's efforts in the colony would

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[56] TNA: CO 879/87, Enclosure 10 in No. 122, Chamberlain to Colonial Office, June 12, 1905, p. 120.
[57] Robert Chamberlain, "East Africa: The Land Settlement Question," *The Manchester Guardian,* Feb 27, 1905, 4, from ProQuest Historical Newspapers, accessed July 28, 2026, https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/east-africa/docview/474391835/se-2?accountid=14496.

quickly dry up, eventually being subsumed by other companies after a few years.[58] Chamberlain, by contrast, would become an early leader in settler politics. By 1907, after East Africa had been transferred to the Colonial Office, the young colonial under-secretary Winston Churchill saw to it that Chamberlain received his 32,000 acres. He would go on to found the Pastoralist Association, an early engine of white settler politics, and helped found the Convention of Associations, the main vehicle of white settler politics in the colony. Chamberlain had gotten his foot into the door by dint of capital, just as the Syndicate had done, yet he was only able to pry that door fully open by advancing himself as a philanthropist, as a pioneer, and as a loyal Briton. Though East Africa had very recently been managed by a chartered company, by 1907 the combination of direct government management and an influx of South African settlers made corporate settlement schemes less defensible. These schemes were not untenable for lack of capital, which the nascent colonial state desperately required, but rather because the position that large grants of land should be made to syndicates over private settler-investors was culturally indefensible. East Africa would no longer be auctioned off to simply the highest bidder, but rather to the most *deserving* bidder.

"Imperium in Imperio:" The Zionist Settlement Scheme

In 1903 Colonial Secretary Joseph Chamberlain (unrelated to Robert Chamberlain) passed through the British East Africa Protectorate while *en route* to South Africa. He had arrived at a crucial moment: Delamere had recently arrived to take up his own concession, agents of the Syndicate were scouring the territory for development opportunities, yet the settler population of the Protectorate was still small. Observing the countryside as he bumped along the Uganda Railway Chamberlain—an imperialist even when at rest—began to imagine where different groups of people might be settled in the nascent Protectorate. He imagined Indian farmers settling with their wives and children along the railway line, while English and Scottish farmers could be settled in the highlands provided they had the capital to build profitable plantations and farms. Then, "almost as an afterthought," he added that land could easily be found for Theodor Herzl's Zionist movement, though he assumed interest would be low on account of the great distance from Palestine. Of course, all this speculation should have come to naught; the British East Africa Protectorate was not at the time overseen by the Colonial Office and would not be for several years. Lansdowne, when Chamberlain first mentioned the prospect of a Zionist settlement scheme in the Protectorate replied: "I hardly know how to set to work about this."[59] He was hardly alone.

Herzl's name sprang to Chamberlain's mind because he had already been campaigning for years to secure land for Jewish settlers either within or near Palestine. The Basel Program stipulated that the ultimate aim of the Zionist movement was to establish a home for the Jewish people in Palestine, yet as negotiations with the Ottomans had stalled out Herzl had also investigated possible settlement sites in Cyprus and Sinai. Yet by April of 1903 these inquiries

[58] Though not before the Syndicate attempted to convince the Protectorate to fund a connecting line between the Lake Magadi concession and the Uganda Railway with "wild claims" of "the 'fine agricultural country' through which the branch line would pass for the first 40 miles, which were (in its estimation) bound to attract European farmer-settlers." The land was, in fact, quite arid. Again, for the Syndicate settlement schemes were a carrot it dangled before the nose of the Protectorate in the hopes of extracting concessions or of convincing the state to develop its concessions on its behalf. Hughes, "Mining the Maasai Reserve," 142.

[59] Robert Weisbord, *African Zion: The Attempt to Establish a Jewish Colony in the East Africa Protectorate, 1903-1905* (Jewish Publication Society of America, 1968), 30.

had stalled as well, and the horrific Kishinev Pogrom added further urgency to Herzl's pursuit for an asylum for Jews fleeing persecution in Eastern Europe. Shortly after the Kishinev Pogrom Chamberlain first broached the topic of a Jewish settlement in East Africa with Herzl, yet specifics of the proposal would only begin to emerge a month later in a private meeting between Chamberlain and Leopold Greenberg.[60] Chamberlain told Greenberg of a land "on very high ground, with an excellent climate suitable for white people," one bearing a "considerable resemblance to the Sussex Downs, and, in parts, to an English park."[61] Greenberg was skeptical, yet Chamberlain assured him when asked that he was offering a settlement with "self-government for the Jews," to be overseen by a Jewish governor, yet that the Zionists would need to act fast because "it will not be long vacant as there are undoubtedly large mining prospects."[62] It was not Palestine, nor even anywhere near Palestine, but it was land and it was a promise of "self-government."

The settlement scheme which grew from Chamberlain's "afterthought" would go on to fundamentally alter not only Kenyan history but the history of the Zionist movement. It would ignite a global controversy, and even an assassination attempt against Max Nordau to boot. It is most widely known by a misnomer, the "Uganda Scheme," even though the lands offered were completely outside of the Uganda Protectorate. I have elected to refer to it as the "Zionist" settlement scheme, yet even this name comes with some important caveats. Though Theodor Herzl campaigned literally until his death for this settlement scheme to be accepted by his movement, it was nevertheless rejected and largely forgotten. Some proponents of the scheme like Israel Zangwill felt the rejection of this scheme was so shortsighted that they broke from the mainstream Zionist movement, with Zangwill founding the Jewish Territorial Organization (ITO) through which he unsuccessfully sought to keep the scheme alive. Furthermore, to call the settlement scheme "Zionist" should not imply that the British officials making the proposal were themselves Zionists, nor even that they had a solid grasp of Zionism's basic tenets. I have chosen to call this the "Zionist" settlement scheme to differentiate it both from the Freelander settlement scheme envisioned by Dr. Theodor Hertzka (Chapter 1) and the Jewish settlement scheme carried out by the Plough Settlements Association Limited in the 1930s on behalf of refugees fleeing Nazi persecution (Chapter 4). The scheme is "Zionist" in the sense that it was originally an offer of land to Theodor Herzl's Zionist movement, even as the scheme itself forced this movement to reexamine its core convictions and continued to be advanced for over a year after the Zionist movement had abandoned it.

Ultimately a full consideration of the early Zionist movement and of this settlement scheme's impact upon it is beyond the scope of this work. My aim here is to show how the Zionist settlement scheme and its proponents staked an alternative claim of belonging within the nascent Protectorate. The Zionist settlement scheme asked whether one could claim a place in the colony on moral grounds as an asylee even if they lacked capital of their own. Where men like Robert Chamberlain insisted upon their concessions as a reflection of their imperial citizenship, the Zionist settlement scheme opened the question of whether a deserving colonist might consider themselves to have two homelands, one within and one beyond the colony. Finally, while the idea of the "white man's country" was still in its infancy, the Zionist settlement scheme

[60] L.J. Greenberg was British Jew who worked as a journalist and editor of The Jewish Chronicle. He was a staunch Zionist and a close ally of Herzl.
[61] Rovner, *In the Shadow of Zion,* 52.
[62] Weisbord, *African Zion,* 65-66.

forced both its proponents and detractors to ask what precisely constituted whiteness, and where the borders of the "white man's country" might be found.

Joseph Chamberlain's motivations for proposing the Zionist settlement scheme remain ambiguous, yet this ambiguity reflects British East Africa's ambiguous position within the Empire itself. Chamberlain is a seismically important figure in the history of development. As mayor of Birmingham, he elaborated a doctrine of development which envisioned "a political pact between large-scale capitalist enterprise and a well-paid, well-housed and educated industrial workforce of high productivity" facilitated via state public works and accompanied by an "extinction of small-scale [i.e. artisanal] production."[63] In Ireland, Chamberlain remained a die-hard unionist who believed that development—not home rule—was the solution to the Irish question. When it came to colonial development, Chamberlain understood the Empire as the landlord of a "great estate" one which again ought to be developed through a partnership with large-scale capitalists cemented via extractive infrastructure feeding metropolitan industry. In South Africa, Chamberlain supported the Jameson Raid and the ensuing war to secure for British markets South African gold and diamonds.

Chamberlain was also likely familiar with Theodor Hertzka's work and with *Freeland*, as "Hertzka was also a major influence on the then-fashionable economic theories of the Manchester School, with which Chamberlain had been associated earlier in his political career."[64] Herzl was just as adamant as Hertzka that his settlement scheme was no utopian pipe dream, and to refute that accusation he alloyed Hertzka's high modernist mechanical symbolism with Zionist nationalism:

> Everything depends on our propelling force. And what is our propelling force? The misery of the Jews. Who would venture to deny its existence? […] Everybody is familiar with the phenomenon of steam-power, generated by boiling water, lifting the kettle-lid. Such tea-kettle phenomena are the attempts of Zionists and of kindred associations to check Anti-Semitism. Now I believe that this power, if rightly employed, is powerful enough to propel a large engine and to despatch passengers and goods; the engine having whatever form men may choose to give it.[65]

Chamberlain's primary concern, along with the rest of the British imperial bureaucracy concerned with developing the East Africa Protectorate, was the movement of "passengers and goods". In East Africa, Chamberlain had been a staunch advocate for the construction of the railway. Now, a large Jewish colony along the line could develop the land whether through the introduction of Jewish "large-scale capital" or through the introduction of a Jewish "industrial workforce of high productivity."

The Zionist settlement scheme, like the concessions to wealthy settler-investors who virulently opposed it, conformed neatly with the Chamberlainite "great estate" doctrine of development. The Zionist Organization from its very founding in 1897 "tried to assume the role of a colonizing state" and "overtly emulated European practices by establishing a colonial bank, funding research and experimentation in tropical agriculture, and supporting capitalist joint-stock

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[63] Cowen and Shenton, *Doctrines of Development*, 256.
[64] Adam Rovner, *In the Shadow of Zion: Promised Lands Before Israel* (New York University Press Press, 2014), 52.
[65] Theodor Herzl, *A Jewish State: An Attempt at a Modern Solution of the Jewish Question*, trans. Sylvie d'Avigdor (D. Nutt, 1896), vii.

companies that, like their counterparts in the service of European imperialism, were thought to eventually yield a profit to their shareholders."[66] In this respect, Herzl and his movement were playing the same game as the East Africa Syndicate, Robert Chamberlain, and everyone else jockeying for concessions in the nascent Protectorate. Just as Hardinge had favorably considered Godfrey's British Freelander filibustering scheme regardless of its politics, Chamberlain's understanding of colonial development made him similarly disposed to grant concessions to aristocratic antisemites and to Zionist organizers. As Herzl put it, "the engine [could have] whatever form men may choose to give it."

Then there were the obvious humanitarian considerations. The proposal was made only a few weeks after the Kishinev Pogrom. Yet while Kishinev was horrific, it was only the latest example of a surge of antisemitic violence in Eastern Europe dating back to the 1880s which had already caused many Jews to seek asylum abroad, including in Britain.[67] This influx combined with Britain's general economic downturn during the Long Depression produced a rise in British antisemitism and immigration restrictions clearly meant to prevent Jews from entering the country, namely the 1905 Aliens Act. Recognizing this, Herzl and Greenberg pitched a Jewish colony in Cyprus or Sinai to Parliament as a means of diverting this stream of migrants away from the metropole, doubtless recognizing that British politicians were eager for an easy (and distant) solution to this intractable problem.[68] Chamberlain himself proclaimed in a speech before "4,000 genuine working men of the East End," that the "alien" (i.e. Jewish) immigration problem could be solved by converting some portion of the "hundreds of thousands of miles of unoccupied territory" within Britain's empire into an asylum.[69]

Less altruistically, there is the hypothesis put forward by historians like Weisbord that Chamberlain saw in the Zionist settlement scheme a way to endear himself to Jewish interests in both the City of London and South Africa so they might help him alleviate the financial burden of the South African War, particularly given that "some of the wealthiest Jewish promotors and investors in the Rand mines were Zionists."[70] Though it is impossible to determine which of these considerations weighed most heavily on Chamberlain's mind when he made the proposal, it is likely he saw the situation as Adam Rovner would later put it: "Chamberlain would save the Jews and the Jews would save Chamberlain."[71]

Ironically, the opposite would prove more apt. Opposition to the South African War in both Britain and South Africa had become thoroughly entangled with the antisemitic belief that the war had been started at the behest of Johannesburg Jews to augment their extant control of African mineral wealth. As a result, "'Jew' was perfectly understood to be 'capitalist' and Chamberlain's doctrine of development easily assimilated to the 'development projects' of

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[66] Derek J. Penslar, "Is Zionism a Colonial Movement?" in *Colonialism and the Jews*, eds. Ethan B. Katz, Lisa Moses Leff, and Maud S. Mandel, 280.

[67] Indeed, Kishinev took place amidst what Steven Zipperstein called an "Age of Pogroms". Kishinev was neither the first nor the most destructive pogrom in the first years of the twentieth century, yet global mass media coverage and coalescence of two major Jewish political movements (the Labor Bund and the Zionist movement) transformed it into a "stand-in for evil." Steven J. Zipperstein, *Pogrom: Kishinev and the Tilt of History* (Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2018), 12.

[68] Weisbord, *African Zion,* 120-121.

[69] Rovner, *In the Shadow of Zion,* 53.

[70] Weisbord, *African Zion,* 127.

[71] Rovner, *In the Shadow of Zion,* 53.

financial speculators […] 'Sordid', 'ignoble', 'vulgarity and cupidity', are the very epithets of 'Jew' which were used to mark Chamberlain with the taint of finance and its association with 'development'."[72] The nascent East African frontier was populated by many settlers from both Britain and South Africa, Britons and Boers, who arrived with this association ready-made. The debate surrounding the Zionist scheme, just like the controversy surrounding Robert Chamberlain's denied concession and the concessions to the East Africa Syndicate, cannot be understood separately from the developmental and imperial politics of South Africa. Yet neither can these development schemes be disentangled from the issues of race and antisemitism in the Empire more broadly.

After Chamberlain's initial offer Herzl and Greenberg contracted the law firm of a young David Lloyd George (Lloyd George, Roberts and Company) to draft a charter for the settlement scheme. Lloyd George, convinced that the Foreign Office would reject the proposal out of hand because Herzl was not a British subject, made sure to draft the charter with the Jewish Colonial Trust (*Jüdische Kolonialbank*, hereafter JCT) as the recipient of the land grant, a bank which had been incorporated under British law and had its main office in London.[73] Thus, this settlement scheme had been initially proposed by a British secretary of state, drafted by a sitting M.P., and had as its proposed recipient a corporation based in London. Why then would so many come to view it as a subversion—if not a betrayal—of the British colonial mission in East Africa?

The charter proposed a sort of hybrid sovereignty, one both British and distinct from Britain. The JCT would receive lands in the protectorate upon trust to enable Jewish settlement "therein and then [encourage] the Jewish National Idea subject nevertheless to the supreme control […] of His Majesty's Government." Yet how would this "Jewish National Idea" be fostered? The charter specifies that the colony, to be called "New Palestine," would be allowed to draft its own constitution and laws. It would be empowered to establish "a form of popular government in the territory which shall be Jewish in character and with a Jewish Governor to be appointed by His Majesty in Council."[74] New Palestine would be empowered to define "the relationship and status of the settlement and all persons therein with any other part or parts of His Majesty's dominions […] and with any Foreign State and with the Chiefs of independent tribes in British East Africa […] but so that all persons domiciled in the territory shall be and become and always remain British and the subjects of his Majesty."[75] The government of New Palestine would be empowered to expel anyone from the colony "deemed to be opposed to the interests of the settlement […] or the dignity of His Majesty the King", just as it would appoint its own judges and officers. It would even be charged with "the preservation of the customs and laws of the native peoples of the territory." New Palestine would have its own "National flag" (subject to the approval of His Majesty's Secretary of State), and any disputes between New Palestine and "any [other] State Government or person" would be arbitrated by His Majesty's Secretary of State.[76]

Ironically Lloyd George, in attempting to draft a settlement scheme palatable to the Foreign Office, drafted one which fundamentally challenged what constituted a "British" colony.

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[72] Cowen and Shenton, *Doctrines of Development,* 260.
[73] Weisbord, *African Zion*, 70.
[74] TNA: FO 2/785, "Jewish Colonization Scheme: Terms and Conditions," p. 19.
[75] TNA: FO 2/785, "Jewish Colonization Scheme," p. 20.
[76] TNA: FO 2/785, "Jewish Colonization Scheme," pp. 22-26.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Lansdowne and the rest of the Foreign Office were aghast when confronted by the possibility of New Palestine. The nascent East Africa Protectorate was already a gordian knot of jurisdictions and New Palestine, if created along the lines of the Lloyd George charter, would have represented yet another zone of exception, a part of and apart from the rest of the Protectorate. Cecil James Barrington Hurst, then assistant to the legal advisor at the Foreign Office, and Lansdowne himself made extensive comments on the Lloyd Geroge charter which demonstrate an almost willful misunderstanding of the Zionist political project. Confronted with the possibility of a "constitution," Hurst commented that surely "the grant of municipal charters" would be sufficient. Any sort of stewardship of the Protectorate's native population was out of the question, as was any notion of an independent foreign policy for New Palestine whether arbitrated or not. Confronted by the Lloyd George charter, Lansdowne felt compelled to write one of the greatest understatements in the historiography of Zionism: "I am afraid this shows that they want something more than municipal autonomy."[77]

It is important to note that unlike Kenya's settler lobby, objections to the Zionist settlement scheme within the colonial bureaucracy were primarily administrative instead of being national or racial. Lansdowne feared a magnification of a problem he already had: an *imperium in imperio.* This phrase, meaning 'empire within an empire,' recurs frequently in the archival record of the British East Africa Protectorate to describe its peculiar jurisdictional tangle. Initially the phrase was used mainly to complain of the undue power of the Uganda Railway authority relative to the Protectorate administration. As early as 1902, a year prior to Chamberlain's offer to Herzl, one Foreign Office memorandum complained, "I feel strongly that the existence in East Africa of an *Imperium in Imperio* in the shape of a government Railway authority, owning all the land along the main artery of communication, yet independent of the Commissioner is an impediment to the wellbeing of the Protectorate."[78] By July of 1903, confronted with the Lloyd George charter for New Palestine, Hurst wrote "I have looked at this scheme which appears to me…to contemplate the creation of an *imperium in imperio* which would be anomalous and, to say the least, inconvenient."[79] As negotiations dragged on and the Sixth Zionist Congress drew closer, Greenberg struggled to convince Hurst and Lansdowne that the Zionists were not asking for an *imperium in imperio* while also insisting that a smattering of towns each with "municipal autonomy" was insufficient. Instead, according to Greenberg, the aims of the movement could only be satisfied with a land grant of about 150 x 200 miles wherein the colonists would be able to live a "national life," yet—somehow—this would not constitute its own state. Hurst remained unconvinced, concluding "he is asking for something of which the logical outcome is a separate administration."[80]

Setting the tone for much of colonial Kenya's administrative history, the Foreign Office elected to stall for time rather than attempt to hammer out the irreconcilable paradoxes of the Lloyd George charter for New Palestine. Ultimately Greenberg went to the Sixth Zionist Congress not with any charter or formal settlement scheme, but with a short and noncommittal letter from Lansdowne. The letter proclaimed the government's broad interest in "the amelioration of the position of the Jewish race," and the establishment of "a Jewish colony of

[77] TNA: FO 2/785, "Jewish Colonization Scheme," p. 20.
[78] TNA: FO 2/805, R.B.P. Carter, "Memorandum Respecting the Powers of the Uganda Railway in East Africa," February 4, 1902, p. 262.
[79] TNA: FO 2/785, Cecil James Barrington Hurst, July 13, 1903, p. 5.
[80] TNA: FO 2/807, Cecil James Barington Hurst, "Jewish Colony in East Africa," August 11, 1903, p. 326.

settlement, on conditions which will enable the members to observe their National customs" through the "appointment of a Jewish Official as chief of the local administration, and permission to the Colony to have a free hand in regard to municipal legislation and as to the management of religious and purely domestic matters, such local autonomy being conditional upon the right of His Majesty's Government to exercise a general control."[81] When compared to the Lloyd George charter, this letter was evidently as slim a commitment as Lansdowne felt he could get away with. Yet it was a commitment nevertheless, one that inadvertently opened the debate of who deserved to be a settler in this new East African frontier. Like the concessions made to the East Africa Syndicate, the possibility of yet another large land grant to a company infuriated many British settlers.

Though much of the settler reaction against the Zionist settlement scheme was explicitly antisemitic, it cannot be reduced to considerations of race alone. The debate surrounding New Palestine was a nuanced intersection of nationality, race, and class which merged to form a picture of the 'deserving pioneer' in Kenya. However, whereas Chamberlain usually invoked the image of the Jew as a sophisticated, scheming "Hebrew Financier," when it came time to consider the Zionist settlement scheme many detractors pivoted to seeing the prospective Jewish settlers as low-class, predatory, and non-white. The East African Standard, under headlines of "Jewish Invasion," synthesized the main settler criticism of the scheme with a pithy phrase, constantly repeated: "a colony of pauper alien Jews." It was an invective simultaneously rooted in class, nationality, and race, each reinforcing the other. Shortly after the proposal became public Lord Delamere capitalized on the ensuing controversy to advance his leadership among the Protectorate's British settlers by authoring a pamphlet that argued Jews could not pioneer the country as "Jews in a free country are never agricultural, they are purely parasitic, and require a large population for the exercise of their various trades."[82] The Bishop of Mombasa objected to the scheme on political, moral, commercial, and religious grounds. To him, "it is much to be desired that Christian settlers shall be much in evidence in the important Kikuyu and other highlands, as living examples to the benighted Africans of the Christian life and Christian civilization," whereas a Jewish colony would only "use [native Africans] to their own fullest advantage…but will leave them on their low levels of degraded life and superstitions."[83] Only a wealthy, British, Christian settler could simultaneously enrich the colony both economically *and* morally.

Indeed, decades before the Devonshire White Paper's declaration of African "paramountcy" in Kenya, settlers prototyped many of the claims they would later make in the 1920s of a benevolent white trusteeship to justify their status as Kenya's most 'desirable' class of settlers (Chapter 4). Note how in this particularly revealing passage from The East African Standard, the antisemitic trope of Jewish acquisitiveness is mobilized to support the argument that any Jewish colonists would by their very nature be incapable of exercising responsible stewardship over the colony or its native inhabitants:

> 'Russian and Roumanian Jews!' We know them! The long-greasy-frock-coated gentlemen, who 'vould sell you a coat' or anything else—who drop into a bar and

[81] Weisbord, *African Zion,* 79-80.
[82] TNA: FO 2/807, Lord Delamere, "The Grant of Land to the Zionist Congress and Land Settlement in British East Africa," September 30, 1903, p. 113.
[83] TNA: FO 2/835, No. 179, "Extract", Bishop of Mombasa William Peel to Sir Charles Eliot, pp. 116-117.

> produce from the manifold pockets of their rags anything from a comb or piece of soap—for neither of which have they any use—to a watch or a revolver. 'Peruvians' of the worst kind. And these are the men who are to have the pick of the agricultural land. Agriculturalists, forsooth! It is pretty safe to argue that within six months of their arrival five out of every ten of them will, under the specious term of traders, be swindling the natives, and that the other five will have gone back to their native country with enough money to start an 'old-clo' shop. What has been the history of the South? Simply this: that the natives absolutely distrust the white men, thanks to the swindling practices of these itinerating 'Peruvians.' And is the state of the country so peaceful that we can afford to set down in the midst of a warlike, uncivilized people such a disturbing element?[84]

This early in the colonial conquest of East Africa, there was an acute understanding of the fragility of white supremacy in the colony. During the initial land rush British settler-investors claimed it was South African mining conglomerates and Jewish asylees who were conspiring to swindle both the hard-working colonists and their African wards; in the 1920s and 1930s it was Indian colonists who were supposedly conspiring to steal the highlands and swindle Africans with their bazaars and *dukkas* (Chapter 4). In both instances, the moneyed, white, British settler-investor was depicted as the more responsible and more deserving recipient of the colonial government's largesse than the 'alien pauper.'

Jews in the early twentieth century, particularly eastern European Jews, occupied a liminal position in the European conception of whiteness.[85] To argue that Jewish refugees needed to be barred from the supposedly 'white' highlands, one needed to claim that Jews were not white, and therefore could not exercise the selfless responsibilities of whiteness. To Delamere the introduction of a Jewish colony into the white highlands was objectionable less on racial grounds—though antisemitism clearly was foundational to his opposition—and more because the particular form of whiteness which entitled one to land in the highlands was more than a matter of race alone. According to this line of thinking, settling any Jewish asylees in the Protectorate would be a betrayal of the colonial mission because they would constitute a racial, national, and commercial *imperium in imperio*, not just an administrative one. Because the colony was "British" it needed to be pioneered by the indisputably British, because the country was "white" it needed to be pioneered by the indisputably white. The Zionist settlement scheme was unacceptable because the proposed colonists lacked capital, because even if they acquired capital it would cease to be British capital, and because they were racially destined to acquire their capital at the expense of others. "Pauper alien Jews"; class, nation, race.

The Zionist movement itself was hardly united in support of the settlement scheme. Some of course sought to insist that this compromise was not a compromise, with one delegate at the

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[84] "The Threatened Jewish Invasion," *The East African Standard*, September 12, 1903, 4, from Readex African Newspapers, Series 1, accessed July 28, 2026, https://infoweb-newsbank-com.libproxy.berkeley.edu/apps/readex/doc?p=WHNPAFR1&t=pubname%3A12BE6F7A2FFCBE88%21East%2BAfrican%2BStandard%252C%2BMombasa%2BTimes%2Band%2BUganda%2BArgus/year%3A1903%211903/mody%3A0905%21September%2B05&year=1903&docref=image%2Fv2%3A12BE6F7A2FFCBE88%40WHNPAFR1-12BF5686B1D971B0%402416363-12BF1623AD0738C0%404&origin=image%2Fv2%3A12BE6F7A2FFCBE88%40WHNPAFR1-12BF5686B1D971B0%402416363-12BF161E67C3B000%400.

[85] Netta Cohen, "Shades of White: African Climate and Jewish European Bodies, 1903-1905," *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History,* vol. 50, no. 2, 301.

Sixth Zionist Congress going so far as to present a "large map in a tortured effort to demonstrate that the Jordan Valley was a continuation of the Great Rift Valley," and thus that the Kenyan highlands were actually part of greater Israel.[86] Others, like Herzl himself, argued in support of the scheme mainly out of pragmatism. Jews were dying, land was needed, this land had been offered, and so this land should be accepted. Opponents of the scheme, particularly from the Russian delegation, rejected the scheme on the grounds that it was not Zion and thus could not be called Zionist. The debate within the global Zionist movement was fierce and even violent; the Congress itself nearly erupted in a riot. Though ultimately Herzl's faction won out and the Congress did vote to send an exploratory commission to East Africa to scope out a possible site for the settlement, it proved a divisive and pyrrhic victory. Between the conclusion of the Congress in August 1903 and the publication of the commission's report in June 1905, the debate raged on. On December 19, 1903, shortly after the Congress had ended Chaim Selig Louban attempted to assassinate Max Nordau at a Zionist gala in Paris, shouting "Death to Nordau the East African!"[87]

Conversely British Jews like Israel Zangwill and Leopold Greenberg insisted that Zionists could make good pioneers using the language of white British settlement. In an open letter to British Zionists, Greenberg drew from the same well as the East Africa Syndicate and Robert Chamberlain alike by contending that the "pioneer work" of Jews in the colony would justify their presence. Jewish colonists, he insisted, were just as capable of 'pioneering' East Africa as any other colonists. Zangwill went even further. Born in Whitechapel, Zangwill constantly insisted that despite the demand for Jewish national autonomy in the colony that the scheme was still eminently British. In a speech before the Sixth Zionist Congress Zangwill insisted:

> […] we could create a colony that would be a source of strength, not only to Israel but to the British Empire, a colony second to none in loyalty to the British Flag, a colony that would co-operate in extending civilization from Cairo to the Cape, and which, even when Palestine was resettled by our people, would remain one of the brightest gems in the British Imperial Crown. For it happens that the British, being an Old Testament people, have the same political and moral ideals as those of Moses, and therefore there could be no real clash between the institutions which we should develop and those of the British Empire.[88]

For Zangwill, New Palestine would be the polar opposite of an *imperium in imperio* because it would represent the highest expression of Britishness, a sort of Jewish home rule. By securing their own national autonomy from British institutions Jews would, paradoxically, extend British civilization all the better.

To further counter the "alien pauper Jew" image mobilized by British settler-investors in Kenya, Zangwill answered with a vision of Jewish colonists as the truest standard-bearers of white, European "civilization" in East Africa. Before the Sixth Zionist Congress Zangwill proclaimed that the land offered was "eminently a white man's country." Later, in a speech in Manchester, Zangwill argued Jews would reinforce whiteness in Britain's African colonies,

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[86] Rovner, *In the Shadow of Zion*, 56.
[87] Rovner, *In the Shadow of Zion*, 59.
[88] Israel Zangwill, "The Sixth Zionist Congress" speech, in *Speeches Articles and Letters of Israel Zangwill,* ed. Maurice Simon (The Soncino Press, 1937), 195.

unlike the imported "coolies" in South Africa.[89] In advocating for Jewish colonization in East Africa Zangwill emphasized that Jews were far from "middlemen [and] parasite classes," and were well-suited to the "rough work" of pioneering a virgin frontier. With their "old Maccabæan muscle and grit" Jews would work the land themselves, and work it as white men.[90] After all, "There are lions in East Africa, but what would Judah be without the Lion of Judah? Our ancestors grappled with lions, and why should not we?" Zangwill's vision stood in stark contrast to the plantocratic conception of whiteness which ultimately dominated Kenya's political economy, where white settler-investors were meant to only oversee African laborers rather than till the soil themselves. Whereas Zangwill understood pioneering labor as a way Jewish settlers could express their whiteness, settler-investors like Delamere understood the management of African laborers as the highest expression of whiteness. Thus, it is essential to recognize that the Zionist settlement scheme imagined an alternative political vision for British East Africa, an alternative conception of whiteness, *and* an alternative labor regime. Not only did it insist that Jews were white enough for the white man's country, but it also insisted that the highest expression of whiteness was "rough work" instead of simply managing the labor of others.

In time, a Zionist exploratory commission did arrive in East Africa and its final report was presented to the Seventh Zionist Congress in 1905, though ironically only one of its three members was Jewish and he was the least enthusiastic about the scheme. The expedition consisted of Major A. St Hill Gibbons, an explorer who had conducted expeditions in Africa before, Alfred Kaiser, a Swiss botanist who had conducted fieldwork in Sinai, and finally Nachum Wilbusch, an engineer with no relevant experience. Ultimately their report was inconclusive: they had traveled separately and frequently disagreed with each other.[91] The report's most infamous line came from its least experienced member, Wilbusch, who had spent much of his time in Kenya lost, starving, without a compass, and then confined to his camp, where he finally concluded that "where nothing exists, nothing can be done." This from a man who had spent only seven days out of the four weeks of the expedition actually exploring the land![92] When their report was presented at the Seventh Zionist Congress, its negative findings were emphasized, its positives downplayed, and ultimately it was used as ammunition by Palistinocentric Zionists to finally reject the scheme. Yet this rejection splintered the movement further. For Zangwill, and for other territorialists like him, it was unconscionable to reject the offer of any land while Jews continued to suffer and die. Thus, he and his allies quit the Zionist Organization and established the ITO in August 1905.

For the rest of 1905 and 1906, Zangwill would continue to lobby the Colonial Office to not only revive the settlement scheme, but to expand it. The pogroms had only intensified since Kishinev, exacerbated by the Russo-Japanese War and continued economic hardship. Thus, in a letter sent to Alfred Lyttleton, the new Colonial Secretary after the collapse of the Balfour ministry, in December 1905 Zangwill made a remarkable request: that the ITO be given *all* British East Africa in trust. After all, "The British East Africa Protectorate is yet in the plastic

[89] Israel Zangwill, "The East Africa Officer" speech, in *Speeches Articles and Letters of Israel Zangwill,* ed. Maurice Simon (The Soncino Press, 1937), 214-215.
[90] Zangwill, "The East Africa Offer" speech, 220; 221.
[91] A fuller examination of the expedition can be found in Gur Alroey, "Journey to New Palestine: the Zionist Expedition to East Africa and the Aftermath of the Uganda Debate," *Jewish Culture and History* 10, no. 1, (August 2008).
[92] Alroey, "Journey to New Palestine," 41.

stage, politically unborn," and its white population "British or non-British […] is a negligible, if possibly, noisy quantity."[93] Though a bold request given how little support Zangwill actually had, his assessment was accurate. The British East Africa Protectorate circa 1905 was still nascent, and its conquest was still ongoing.[94] More than anything else, Zangwill's attempt to revive and expand the original Zionist settlement scheme into a territorialist settlement scheme reflects how fluid and uncertain the colony's future truly was. In this letter Zangwill demonstrated a remarkable fluency in the peculiar language of East African settler claim-making, positing Jews as pioneers who could work the land and deliver capital investment simultaneously. Jews were racially disposed not to siphon capital out of the colony but to *invest* in it, not to prey upon native African laborers but to *replace* them, not to supplant white settlers but to swell their ranks.

By January 1907, seeing the writing on the wall, the ITO turned its attention towards other possible sites while the Zionist movement concentrated its efforts increasingly on Palestine. Yet the debates surrounding these early schemes for Jewish settlement in East Africa reveal how rhetorics of race, class, and nation constantly ran together in any claim on East African land. Where detractors of the scheme imagined the colony being "invaded" by "pauper alien Jews," proponents of the scheme—particularly Israel Zangwill—posited that Jews were uniquely suited to pioneering East Africa, capable of supplying both the labor and the capital the colony desperately needed. Where Lansdowne saw in the Lloyd George charter for New Palestine an *imperium in imperio*, a zone within yet removed from British sovereignty, Zangwill insisted that this was no different from Canada or Australia, Anglo settler colonies afforded by dint of their pioneering labor and loyalty to the mother country a measure of "home rule." Zangwill, himself a British Jew, insisted that East Africa was capacious enough to accommodate colonists with two professed national identities just as Germans, Swedes, and Italians could migrate to the United States without being "accused of unpatriotism" because, "In the modern world citizenship is optional."[95] Racially, Zangwill insisted that "We *are*—five-sixths of us—a European people," that Jewish colonization in East Africa would by definition augment its white population, and that Jewish soldiers would defend white supremacy in the colony. Why, then, did they not deserve to pioneer the white man's country?

Conclusion

Unlike other less subsidized forms of settler colonialism, proposed settlement schemes like those of Robert Chamberlain, the East Africa Syndicate, and the Zionist movement, forced into the foreground questions of who deserved the opportunity to be a "pioneer" in the British Empire. These settlement schemes cannot be treated as a mere footnote in the historiography of white settlement in Kenya because they reveal how much disagreement there truly was over what constituted whiteness in the "white man's country." The very idea of the "white man's country" depended upon the premise that whiteness was self-evident just as the idea of a "British" East Africa Protectorate depended upon the premise that Britishness could be easily defined. Neither premise could withstand close scrutiny. The only thing that could be agreed upon was that control over land in East Africa—or at least in certain parts of it—meant that one controlled land in a white, British colony. The construction of the railway had branded these ephemeral national

[93] TNA: CO 879/87, No. 247, Israel Zangwill to Alfred Lyttelton, December 6, 1905, p. 242.
[94] Less than two months before Zangwill penned this letter, Richard Meinertzhagen resorted to murdering Koitalel Arap Samoei and his bodyguards under a peace banner in an effort to pacify the Nandi resistance which had been ongoing since 1900.
[95] Zangwill, "The East Africa Offer" speech, 211.

and racial markers onto the land, and now ownership of a piece of that land might confer these same properties upon its owner.

This premise was complicated by the fact that so many of East Africa's early settlers did not arrive by dint of any organized settlement scheme, as demonstrated by the case of Indian settlement in East Africa. Though during the construction of Uganda Railway several colonial administrators had entertained the possibility of large-scale settlement schemes for retired Indian soldiers and/or indentured laborers along the line, both Charles Eliot and George Whitehouse were skeptical of the prospects of subsidized Indian settlement in the colony.[96] Nevertheless, this period from 1901-1907 did see several proposed Indian settlement schemes which failed to gain traction. In 1903 General W.H. Manning proposed that retired Sikh officers be granted lands in the East Africa Protectorate "which could not be settled by a European community" on the condition that the grantee along with "his sons and descendants […] be liable for military service in the Uganda or East Africa Protectorates."[97] Manning's proposed settlement scheme imagined Indian settlers not as settler-investors nor even as laborers but as yeomen-soldiers who would provide a hardened shell to separate European settlements from the zones to which native Africans would be relegated. Though some Sikh officers were dispatched to conduct surveys of possible settlement sites, no funds appear to have been allocated.

Similarly, Charles Hyde Villiers, one of the East Africa Syndicate's men on the ground and a former Jameson raider, lobbied for a scheme wherein the Treasury would set aside £200,000 to further develop land along the railway line and settle "50 white farmers in farms of 5000 acres each on the high plateaus and place 500 Indian families […] on the lower parts of the line." This investment, he argued, would entice more European settler-investors to come to the colony as the land would already be more developed, and furthermore "East Africa is so suitable for the overflow population of India."[98] Yet because this scheme required that the Treasury invest still more money into the colony, it was rejected out of hand. Indian settlement schemes in this period generally failed to gain traction because Indian colonists were never considered by colonial administrators as possible settler-investors.

Rather, as demonstrated by the Indian settlement at Kibos, Indian colonization of East Africa could be legitimized within the colonial bureaucracy by being retroactively branded as a "scheme" even though the colonists had arrived without any aid from the state. By 1904 Kibos (about ten miles from Kisumu) consisted of about thirty settlements of Punjabi cultivators.[99] The initial settlers had arrived on their own initiative while these Indian settlement schemes were being debated within the colonial government in 1902-1903, and so local administrators 'allowed' them to squat on land at Kibos and begin to develop it. Despite an initial lack of support from the government the Punjabi farmers were able to bring forty acres under cultivation by April of 1903, which doubled to eighty acres by May, which would grow into the hundreds of acres in the years to follow. The farmers at Kibos were able to successfully employ Kavirondo laborers on their farms, and—far from later concerns that Indian settlers would somehow corrupt or swindle native Africans—district administrators reported that "[the Kavirondo] are imitating

[96] BL: IOR/L/PJ/6/583, File 2029, "Proposed settlement in East Africa of time-expired Uganda Railway Coolies from the Punjab".
[97] BL: IOR/L/PJ/6/654, File 2721, Enclosure in No. 1, "Memorandum by General Manning upon a scheme of Indian Immigration into the East Africa Protectorate".
[98] TNA: FO 2/807, Charles Hyde Villiers to Clement Hill, August 12, 1903, pp. 330-331.
[99] Sana Aiyar, *Indians in Kenya*, 33.

the methods of the Indians, and are growing various things, their cotton being most successful."[100] It was only when confronted by the success of these Punjabi farmers that colonial administrators began to conceive of "schemes" to subsidize them with cattle, ploughs, and seed as well as posting a British officer near the settlement to act as a liaison and encourage the farmers to take up experimental agriculture. By 1907, colonial administrators had begun to actively incentivize Indian colonization in low-lying areas on a "village community system" analogous to what had taken shape at Kibos.[101]

The Punjabi settlement at Kibos reveals the settlement schemes which have been the subject of this chapter for what they were: not only business proposals or requests for land, but cultural expressions. Though only a few miles distant from the railway tracks Kibos was still far away from the as-yet undefined borders of the "white man's country" in the highlands. The settlers at Kibos demonstrated that the soil was fertile and that labor was available, all while themselves having a fraction of the capital of a man like Lord Delamere or even Robert Chamberlain. Yet, its colonists had arrived on their own initiative and thus had not needed to submit any formal settlement scheme. Because they had not formally articulated the reason for their presence, the colonial government's support of them posed less of a challenge to the idea of British East Africa as "British" or "white" or any other label one might have wished to apply to the colony. Their race, their national identity, their class, none of these prevented the settlement at Kibos from being retroactively claimed as a government settlement scheme because the Kibos settlers had never presented a formal claim of what their presence in the colony *meant*, so colonial administrators were able to interpret their presence as benign. There were no outcries in The East African Standard of a "Punjabi Invasion" at Kibos, no explosive rhetoric about "alien paupers" stealing valuable agricultural land on the shores of Lake Victoria, no claims that a shadowy conspiracy between the Foreign Office and "Punjabi Financiers" was fleecing the honest British small man. The settlement at Kibos grew from the old Indian Ocean networks of exchange and migration which the Uganda Railway had stamped onto the interior (Chapter 1). Yet it would not be until the European settler population in Kenya had grown and solidified as its own lobby that it would consider East Africa's Indian Ocean connections and the Indian colonization those connections facilitated as an existential threat to their identity (Chapter 4). At this early stage, the land the Kibos colonists occupied was not understood as imparting upon them imperial citizenship, nor whiteness, and crucially the Kibos colonists did not advance a formal settlement scheme to claim that it did.

Conversely, the settlement schemes analyzed in this chapter were so controversial because they represented so much more than demands for land or requests for government subsidies. They were expressions of identity and claims upon the essential nature and purpose of the British Empire itself. The East Africa Syndicate demanded not only land and concessions but recognition as a "pioneer," placing itself in the lineage of other public-private colonial partnerships like the East India Company, the British South Africa Company, and the IBEAC. In doing so, the Syndicate implicitly claimed that this model of colonial development was the correct one for East Africa and for the Empire at large. By contrast Robert Chamberlain defended his land grant on the grounds of his imperial citizenship, his "service" to the Empire by attracting white settlers to the colony, and his Britishness, all the while contending that the Syndicate's grant was conspiratorial and racially suspect. Finally, the Zionist settlement scheme represented a

[100] BL: IOR/L/PJ/6/654, File 2721, Enclosure 1 in No. 1, D.D. Waller to Charles Eliot, October 16, 1903.
[101] Aiyar, *Indians in Kenya,* 33-34.

completely alternative vision for East Africa: where deserving colonists could espouse multiple national identities rather than just embody Britishness, where deserving colonists could merit land on humanitarian rather than purely commercial grounds, and where whiteness and Britishness were not synonymous. In each case so much more was at stake than which parcels of land would be granted to whom, whether the land would be owned on leasehold or freehold, or what the tax rate might be.

Especially at this early period in the colony's history, with the armed conquest still ongoing, these settlement schemes were an attempt to stake a claim upon a new colonial society and determine its essential foundations, to negotiate the imperial government into agreeing with one's own vision for the colony's—and thus the Empire's—*raison d'être*. All of these schemes took place against the backdrop of an ongoing conquest which they refused to acknowledge because all settlement schemes must necessarily presuppose that the state is in a position to grant the desired concessions. This presumption that the conquest is complete—when in reality it *never* was—is the violent lacuna at the heart of every single settlement scheme, past and present. Yet the nascent Protectorate had been embroiled since its inception in a chain of costly wars and punitive expeditions, with the War Office having files on sixteen separate military operations in the region just between 1899 and 1905, mostly against the Nandi.[102] And though the Maasai did not resist the first relocation with armed force, many simply refused to move onto the reservations and in 1913 some mounted a first-of-its-kind legal campaign attempting to regain Laikipia. Though my focus here is on settlement schemes, a fuller analysis of these settlement schemes must reckon with the fact that settlers were not the only ones litigating claims and counter-claims to East African lands during this period. Africans themselves were doing the same, both violently and peacefully, even as settlement schemers speculated upon the lands they called home. These settlement schemes, for all of their tremendous diversity, still represent only a fraction of the claims being made on East Africa during this time.

After 1907 the white European population of East Africa would grow further, consolidating into a more cohesive (though far from united) lobby dominated by the voices of aristocratic, plantation-owning settler-investors like Delamere. Yet these early settlement schemes show that this was a contingent and highly contested outcome. It was contingent because there were other settlement schemes which represented substantially different political economies, conceptions of whiteness, and conceptions of Britishness which commanded substantial support both within and beyond the imperial government. The white aristocratic plantocracy which has become so synonymous with the image of colonial Kenya was distilled from a storm of other possibilities. Yet as these settlers grew entrenched, they would come to see not only East African land but control over East African labor as signifiers of their whiteness and their Britishness, an understanding which would fundamentally alter the settlement schemes to come.

[102] For records of these operations see TNA: WO: 106/5992.

Chapter 3

Right to Workers: Race, Labor, and the Imagined Alternatives of Soldier Settlement in Kenya, 1907-1920

There's been a great fuss about labour,
And what we are going to do;
On the Labour Board, with great accord,
They are fighting the battle through.
Each man is outpaying his neighbour,
For we must have the boys to work.
And there's never a black, who will bend his back,
If there's ever a chance to shirk.
--Korongo, "Labour." Poem published in The Leader of British East Africa.[1]

If a man have money today
People don't care if he have *kokobe*.
He can commit murder and get off free,
live in the governor's company,
but if you are poor, the people tell you 'Shoo!'
A dog is better than you.
-- Neville 'The Growling Tiger' Marcano, "Money is King."

Since they had established themselves in Kenya, the European settler lobby had come to demand with increasing fervor that the colonial government proactively affirm not only their right to own land in Kenya, but to dominate African laborers as they saw fit without fear of legal consequences. Most infamously, this demand manifested in the form of lynchings. Claude de Crespigny, when his servant had brought him a warm beer before he set off on his pig hunt, was so incensed that he stabbed the man to death with his hunting spear. Though the facts of the case were not disputed, like many other murderers in Kenya de Crespigny was hastily exonerated by a jury of his white peers. Then in 1907 Ewart Grogan had publicly flogged three Kikuyu servants in the courtyard of a town magistrate, ostensibly because they had "insulted" a white woman, yet

[1] Korongo, "Labour," *The Leader of British East Africa,* January 4, 1912, 1.

also to show his contempt for the colonial government.[2] These acts of violence were also acts of political theatre, ones with multiple intended audiences: for Africans they were meant to instill terror and obedience, while for colonial officials in Kenya as well as humanitarians back in Britain they were meant to cow them into inaction. In the white man's country, each lynching argued, it was the duty of Africans to work and the privilege of Europeans to make them work by any means necessary.

Yet settlers' routine dependence on corporal punishment also confirmed a deeper truth: that without coercion and violence, Africans could not be compelled to work for their colonizers, and even then coercion only worked intermittently. As the settler population grew from about 5-600 Europeans in 1905 to 2,000 in 1907, they began to increasingly complain of a "labor crisis."[3] Settler plantations required cheap African labor to function. Yet despite extremely employer-friendly labor laws, burdensome hut and poll taxes meant to force Africans into wage labor, and outright press ganging by chiefs and private labor recruiters, settlers routinely complained that they were unable to secure sufficient labor to turn a profit. Indeed, as Berman and Lonsdale observed, one of the central paradoxes of Kenya's colonial economy was that despite the many efforts made to force Africans out of peasant production and into wage labor, "peasant commodity production, far from being 'destroyed', continually expanded," as it not only "nourish[ed] the expanded reproduction of a wage-labour force outside capitalist relations of production" but also "dominated the domestic cereals market as a whole."[4] The colonial state risked sparking costly rebellions by working too closely with the settlers to compel Africans into the labor market, yet it also jeopardized its legitimacy by not doing enough to—in the words of the settlers—"encourage" Africans to work for wages. This crisis would only worsen with the onset of World War I, when the colonial state itself found it needed vast numbers of African laborers to work in the dreaded Carrier Corps, thus intensifying the competition between the colonial state and European settlers over labor.

As we saw in Chapter 2, settlers had successfully argued that they deserved massive concessions in Britain's last directly administered colonial frontier by dint of their capital, their Britishness, and their whiteness. Yet once established, they quickly found that none of these could consistently compel the requisite labor to develop those vast concessions, sparking both an economic crisis and a crisis of self-perception. The massive concessions which typified much of the initial wave of settlement were held by large companies or undercapitalized (and often absentee) landlords who, rather than developing them, held them in the hopes of later selling at a markup. Though the initial concessions had been crafted with an eye towards compelling the concessionaires to develop the land as settler-investors, by the outbreak of World War I settlers had successfully lobbied to have many of these restrictions removed from their land titles: "Big capital was allowed to amass land unhindered; by 1912 some 20 per cent of the alienated area was held by just five individuals and consortia." The only restriction which remained was the governor's ability to veto land transfers between parties of different races. Simultaneously, between 1908 and 1914 land values ballooned by 4000% as some initial concessionaires sought

[2] Brett L. Shadle, *The Souls of White Folk: White Settlers in Kenya, 1900s-1920s* (Manchester University Press, 2015), 129-131.
[3] Opolot Okia, *Communal Labor in Colonial Kenya the Legitimization of Coercion, 1912-1930* (Palgrave MacMillan US, 2012), 39.
[4] Bruce Berman and John Lonsdale, *Unhappy Valley: Conflict in Kenya & Africa* (J. Currey, 1992), 84.

massive profits subdividing their own concessions and selling to new settlers.[5] As C.J. Duder noted, "Land was not only a status symbol, but was also possibly the one area in East Africa in which Europeans could make money quickly and easy as speculators," making it their "chief means of acquiring wealth," shielded as they were from both Indian competition and the inherent hazards of farming.[6] Because settlers often struggled to develop their land due to labor shortages, it was imperative that land values not diminish as that was their sole asset of value; speculation galloped *because* development stalled.

Yet this dynamic was not sustainable beyond a few years. Without any organizing scheme or outside intervention, there quickly came a point when land values were too high for further subdivision to occur naturally. This produced two things: the prevalence of African squatters on European estates and calls for new "closer settlement" schemes aimed at further subdividing the large concessions on behalf of new European settlers with less capital. Squatters could not purchase the land—it was, after all, land which had been stolen from Africans and redistributed among settlers—yet they augmented its value by developing it through their labor, allowing the speculative bubble to remain un-popped. As Europeans speculated on the monetary value of their land to a hypothetical future European settler, it was largely African squatters who more closely *settled* the lands in question despite their lack of title. Yet this position was untenable in what was ostensibly the white man's country. If land in Kenya truly was, as men like Robert Chamberlain had claimed to defend their concessions, a reflection of imperial citizenship in the British Empire, what then did it mean to have that land squatted upon by African peasants while heroic British veterans couldn't afford it?

These 'empty' or 'undeveloped' lands were not only instruments of financial speculation, or sites of accumulation by squatters, but also a blank canvas for cultural speculation. Speculation in colonial Kenya was both an economic and cultural process, and the land's true worth was never reckoned solely in pounds and shillings. The Kenyan labor crisis produced more than a coercive labor regime and acrimony between settlers and the colonial government. It also sparked a new wave of speculative settlement schemes which often sought to both resolve the labor crisis and reimagine the white man's country and its place in the British Empire. Many of these settlement schemes came to concentrate on the figure of the British ex-soldier, imagined as the ideal savior for Kenya's nascent white settler population. Where African laborers and squatters were seen as indolent, selfish, and disloyal, prospective soldier-settlers were imagined to be hard-working, loyal to the Empire, capable of both competing with African peasants economically and reproducing whiteness in the colony. This debate would culminate in the 1919 Ex-Soldier Settlement Scheme, "the largest single allocation of land to white settlement in the Colony's existence."[7]

However, my interest here is less in 1919 scheme itself than in its imagined alternatives. This chapter focuses on some of the many alternate visions for closer settlement which poured into the East African press and the letterboxes of colonial officials alike during the chaos of World War I. These schemes were many things at once. Often they were attempts at patriotic philanthropy, to find good land as a fitting reward for the British Empire's most loyal protectors;

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[5] Berman and Lonsdale, *Unhappy Valley*, 89.
[6] C.J. Duder, "The Soldier Scheme of 1919 in Kenya" (PhD diss., University of Aberdeen, 1978), 127.
[7] C.J. Duder, "'Men of the Officer Class': The Participants of the 1919 Soldier Settlement Scheme in Kenya," *African Affairs*, 92, no. 366, 70.

just as often they were attempts at personal enrichment, calibrated to entice the government into granting free land, or development loans, or a more coercive labor regime, or even just to swindle unsuspecting investors. They were usually scant on details, early drafts always with the promise that the details would be sorted out later if only those with power and capital would agree to the principle of the thing. Yet this is precisely what makes these schemes so useful to the historian. More than schemes for colonial development or demands for free land, these settlement schemes—whether they intended to be this or not—were also declarations of principles, claims upon the essential purpose of the British Empire and whom it was meant to serve.

This chapter is divided into four parts. In the first, I will provide a historiographic overview of Kenya's "labor crisis" and the methods used by both European settlers and the colonial state to try to solve it. The work of scholars like Tabitha Kanogo and Opolot Okia is especially relevant here because the debate surrounding closer settlement in East Africa was inextricably bound up with the labor crisis; even if few could admit it, much of the work imaginary closer settlers would theoretically do was already being done by African squatters. In the second and third parts, I will turn my attention towards the demand for "closer settlement." I argue that these settlement schemes represent acts of cultural speculation: attempts by Britons both within and beyond Kenya to imagine their way out of both the colony's labor crisis and the state of imperial precarity brought about by World War I. Then, in the final section of this chapter I will turn to the 1919 Ex-Soldier Settlement Scheme, the largest single white settlement scheme in the history of colonial Kenya. My interest here is less in the minutiae of the 1919 scheme itself as this has already received a full treatment by C.J. Duder in his magisterial doctoral thesis *The Soldier Settlement Scheme of 1919 in Kenya*. Here I am more concerned with how the 1919 scheme collided with the alternate visions for closer settlement which emerged at the same time it did. This collision was a violent one, as the 1919 scheme functionally rejected the vision of East Africa as a small man's colony which many of these other schemes endorsed to a greater or lesser degree.

Yet regardless of the success or failure of these schemes, the debates surrounding them posed fundamental questions over the essential nature of the colony and its purpose in the British Empire writ large. Was Kenya to be a British colony or simply a white one? Could white settlers be laborers as well as employers in the white man's country? Could land in the white man's country be conferred as a reward to a poor soldier who had served the Empire valiantly, or was a significant reserve of capital still necessary to deserve a place in the colony? Were established wealthy planters nationally or racially obligated to use some of their capital to support new and poorer settlers in reproducing whiteness? Sparked by the labor crisis and World War I, these questions became woven through each of the settlement schemes to follow and culminated in the 1919 Ex-Soldier Settlement Scheme, which unsuccessfully sought to broker a compromise between colonial Kenya's competing interests by selectively incorporating elements of each of the closer settlement schemes which preceded it.

Settlement Without a Scheme: British East Africa's Labor Crisis

The nascent settler plantation economy was dependent upon forced labor sourced from the African reserves, with appointed chiefs, private labor recruiters, and colonial administrators serving as intermediaries to compel Africans into the labor market. Beyond the floggings, laborers could be detained for weeks without trial for refusing to work, wage theft was common,

and poor provisioning by both government and private employers routinely led to workers dying of starvation or disease on the roadside when returning from their work. Yet it must be recognized from the beginning that though colonists usually described the "labor crisis" as a crisis of supply (i.e. that there were not "enough" Africans willing or able to satisfy the labor demands of estate production), in reality the labor crisis was just as much a dispute over authority, prestige, and identity. Conflict over who—if anyone—possessed the authority to force Africans into the labor market, and what work—if any—could be done by Europeans themselves without jeopardizing the colony's social hierarchy, would ultimately define colonial Kenya's political economy. As Dane Kennedy put it, the "demographic imperative" to increase the number of white settlers "collided with the economic imperative imposed by the *abundant* [emphasis mine] indigenous labor."[8] So to understand the competing settlement schemes which proliferated within Kenya during WWI culminating in the 1919 Ex-Soldier Settlement Scheme, we must first understand the unique labor regime which these schemes were meant to resolve.

In 1906 Kenya's first Masters and Servants (M&S) statute was promulgated. The M&S statute wove Kenya into a lineage of British labor law which stretched back to medieval labor law and across the whole of the Empire by the mid-nineteenth century, "linking workers in South Africa, the Caribbean and Australia in a common system for the regulation of labour." However, as David Anderson notes, the last time the M&S laws had been updated in Britain was in 1867, and in 1875 campaigning by organized labor in the metropole resulted in the Employer's and Workmen Act which removed the M&S laws most punitive elements. Thus, "the application of M&S laws in East Africa after 1900 […] arose from a deliberate decision to impose a particular type of legislation that was by then already considered outmoded in the metropole."[9] The Kenyan M&S regulations had been largely drafted by the Colonist's Association and rubberstamped by the Colonial Office. The settlers based their draft on similar laws from the Transvaal and the Gold Coast, justifying the anachronistic law on the grounds that "Labour at a 'primitive' stage of development was thought to require 'primitive' forms of labour law."[10]

As their name implies, the Masters and Servants laws heavily favored employers over laborers. The defining characteristic of M&S laws throughout the Empire was that while laborers found in breach of contract were subject to criminal penalties, employers were liable only to civil penalties.[11] The M&S laws sought to reconstruct in colonial Kenya a labor regime which was quickly dying in the metropole, and whose death would in fact drive many of Kenya's wealthy, aristocratic settlers to settle in the colony. It was to be a labor regime of landlords and bondsmen, where the hewers of wood and drawers of water were bound to their liege's will by the strictest threat of punishment whereas employers could be expected, by dint of *noblesse oblige*, to treat their wards benevolently without the threat of criminal prosecution. The laws were a legal embodiment of the claims which many of the initial concessionaires had made to justify their vast concessions in the colony. Whereas Jews, Indians, and syndicates were too poor, too alien,

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[8] Dane Kennedy, *Islands of White: Settler Society and Culture in Kenya and Southern Rhodesia, 1890-1939* (Duke University Press, 1987), 4.
[9] David M. Anderson, "Master and Servant in Colonial Kenya," *The Journal of African History* 41, no. 3 (2000), 460.
[10] Anderson, "Master and Servant in Colonial Kenya," 461.
[11] The Kenyan M&S statutes muddied the water even further by stipulating that while no unwritten contract could last more than one month, such verbal contracts were automatically renewed if the laborer stayed on site. This meant that employers could indefinitely prolong their verbal contracts through deceit yet still criminally prosecute any laborer who 'deserted.' Anderson, "Master and Servant in Colonial Kenya," 463.

too rapacious, or too racially impure to both properly develop the land *and* civilize its inhabitants (Chapter 2), wealthy, white, British settlers could be trusted to be benevolent masters of grateful African servants.

Yet the M&S laws were only the one part of a vast web of overlapping tactics designed to force Africans into the labor market on terms suitable for their colonizers.[12] Another major instrument designed to push Africans into wage labor was taxation, specifically hut and poll taxes. Direct taxation of Africans comprised 85% of government revenues, while wages for Africans were so low that for those who did pay their taxes through wage labor the taxes alone would consume 75% of their pay.[13] By contrast a 1922 pamphlet from the Kenya Land Settlement Advisory Committee gleefully advertised Kenya to prospective white settlers as "The Colony without Income Tax", and Europeans would only begin paying a light income tax beginning in 1936.[14] As the years marched on more pieces of legislation were introduced to further compel Africans into the labor market. As early as 1908 European settlers appeared to have every possible advantage when it came to securing cheap labor. The hut tax (1902) combined with the poll tax (1908) meant that Africans would be heavily incentivized to seek cash year after year whereas Europeans went comparatively untaxed; the M&S laws effectively gave Europeans an unquestioned authority over their employees with no threat of criminal prosecution. Why then did they complain so frequently of a labor crisis?

First and foremost, the labor crisis stemmed from the fact that the tools of coercion outlined above were imperfect and susceptible to both active and passive resistance by Africans themselves. Though the M&S laws guaranteed that Africans who were mistreated by their employers could not pursue meaningful legal remedies, this only further incentivized similar acts of resistance as occurred prior to European settlement during the construction of the railway (desertion, theft, etc.). The arbitrary violence settlers deployed to maintain their prestige made them—unsurprisingly—unattractive as employers. The 1912 Native Labor Commission abounds with testimony of forced recruitment and brutal treatment, such as that of Haji Mohamed of Mombasa who told the committee of a time when "about 45 Kamba, who had been working for a European, had been landed at Mombasa some four months ago from the Tiwi side in a starving condition and begging for food. They were in Mombasa for some days and five of them died […] and but for the action of the Indian Community they would have been stranded without any means of subsistence."[15] By contrast Jadevjee Dewji, an ivory and produce trader in Mombasa, testified that he "was paying the same rate of wages now as he did ten years back, and had never been troubled by shortage of labour."[16]

Even accounting for the different labor requirements of a Mombasa ivory trader and a highland planter, we can see that the "labor crisis" was partially driven and sustained by the very methods of coercion settlers relied upon to resolve it. Many district commissioners also testified to this effect, though usually only obliquely for fear of offending settler sensibilities. M.W.H.

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[12] Indeed, even though European settlers had authored Kenya's M&S laws, well into the 1920s they rarely availed themselves of them by taking labor disputes to court, preferring instead the immediate "rough justice" of the lash. Anderson, "Master and Servant in Colonial Kenya," 472.
[13] Okia, *Communal Labor in Colonial Kenya*, 45-46.
[14] SOAS: IMC-CBMS/01, Box 236, File E, "Kenya: The Colony without Income Tax." (The Kenya Land Settlement Advisory Committee, 1922); Okia, *Communal Labor in Colonial Kenya*, 46.
[15] J.W. Barth, *Native Labour Commission, 1912-1913. Evidence and Report* (Government Printer, 1913), 105.
[16] Barth, *Native Labour Commission, 1912-1913*, 100.

Beech, assistant district commissioner of Dagoretti, testified that "There was a golden mean between 'the poor colored brother' and 'the bally nigger' standpoint, and this was what should be aimed at. At the risk of appearing ludicrous he desired to state that he would like to see every employer of labour compelled to pass an elementary language test. The personal element could not be left out."[17] European settlers lacked the requisite language skills to participate in the labor market without the aid of private recruiters, government officials, or chiefs as middlemen. And their reliance on the rough justice of the lash, what Beech and other administrators euphemistically called the "personal element," made them extremely unattractive employers.

Opolot Okia described forced labor in Africa as a "multiheaded hydra," with the three primary heads being "forced labor for private interests, government forced labor, and coercion in the interests of community."[18] In Kenya, what settlers dubbed the "labor crisis" partially stemmed from the fact that the hydra's many heads often quarreled with each other. Settlers complained that forced labor for the government unfairly disadvantaged them on the labor market. They argued that the government, having already invited settlers to the colony, was now obligated to help those settlers turn a profit. Indeed, as Elspeth Huxley demonstrated, it was a common conviction among Kenyan settlers that the colonial government, when it "admitted [its] obligation to provide [the settler] with land," effectively ceded its ability to be a neutral regulator of the labor market. Any district officer was automatically guilty of "check[ing] the flow of labour by doing nothing to stimulate it."[19] The colonial state had a positive duty to guarantee the supply of labor rather than simply ensuring that conditions were legally favorable to European employers. Senior colonial officials, particularly Kenya's revolving door of governors during these years, often agreed with the idea that African labor was best directed towards private European employers and thus "instructed chiefs to assist in labor recruitment" and imposed labor quotas.[20]

Conversely, more junior colonial administrators, liberal missionaries, and metropolitan humanitarians, such as John Ainsworth and J.H. Oldham, saw forced labor for private employers as a violation of the civilizing mission. To compel Africans to work directly for the profit of European farmers "pulled Africans into closer contact with European civilization in a negative way that was seen as a shadow of slavery."[21] Ainsworth was the most prominent advocate within the colonial government for this position. When he testified before the 1912 commission he argued "natives must in the first instance be taught to work in their own locations so that they could begin to associate work with their normal existence. Once such ideas were inculcated, natives would of themselves seek the labour fields."[22] Many district commissioners argued that, rather than it being their responsibility to "encourage" Africans to labor for private employers, it was the responsibility of private employers to entice Africans to work for them through more benevolent behavior.

According to this view, the colonial government's responsibility vis-à-vis African laborers working for European employers was to ensure that the laborers were medically fit to

[17] Barth, *Native Labour Commission, 1912-1913*, 72.
[18] Okia, *Communal Labor*, 9.
[19] Elspeth Huxley, *White Man's Country; Lord Delamere and the Making of Kenya* (Frederick A. Praeger, 1968), 215; 216.
[20] Okia, *Communal Labor*, 47.
[21] Okia, *Communal Labor*, 33.
[22] Barth, *Native Labour Commission, 1912-1913*, 136.

work and aware of their putative right not to be coerced. Hence the frequent settler complaint that district commissioners discouraged Africans from estate labor by asking them whether or not they were being hired willingly prior to them setting off from the reserve to take up a job on an estate. According to the settlers, Africans were incapable of understanding the nuance of this question, making it "tantamount, having regard to Africans' mentality, to saying that the Government did not wish the native to work at all."[23] Yet in practice even junior officials—the ones settlers believed were the most responsible for interfering with the labor supply—acted more as middlemen than as barriers to recruitment. For instance, medical officers freely admitted that the mandatory medical checks laborers needed to undergo were easily evaded by private labor recruiters.[24] Norman Leys, himself having served as a medical officer, admitted that "twice I have been so hindered in examination by the malingering of unwilling men that I sent them to the Administrative Officer. Both times the gangs consented to go, before him. But when they came back to me each man tried to get me to let him off."[25] Settler complaints of administrators wielding their supposedly dictatorial power in the reserves to check the outward flow of labor were baseless. Even if it was true that many colonial officials expressed misgivings about Africans being compelled to work on privately owned estates, they did little to stop the practice and most encouraged it.

And indeed, for all their complaining about government administrators subverting the labor market, settlers themselves also worked to furnish the colonial government with African laborers. Take the case of a settler named Mr. Thomas, as relayed by A.C. Hollis, then Secretary for Native Affairs in 1908. According to Hollis, Thomas had applied to the government for "300 men to work on his homestead near Nairobi," yet when the men arrived at his estate Thomas "transferred them to a Railway contractor named Godwin who took them to Maungu more than 200 miles from Nairobi to break stone for the Railway […] and they consequently had to eat their food half raw and suffered severely from intestinal complaints." After these men concluded their contracts they ultimately had to "walk to Nairobi without food and without pay."[26] Okia's hydra metaphor is apt. The hydra's heads often squabbled, yet nevertheless they were parts of a single organism; the colonial government and settlers often squabbled over access to African labor, yet both recognized that the other's authority over African labor could not be reduced without a parallel reduction of their own. This system ensured that each of the hydra's heads was sustained yet could never be sated.

Ultimately, the labor crisis stemmed neither from administrative meddling nor settler cruelty, but from a backfiring of the very coercive techniques meant to secure labor. As Berman and Lonsdale observed, "taxation encouraged domestic production as much as wage employment."[27] Meaning, Africans with access to sufficient land and resources could not only support themselves but produce enough goods like cereals or beans for local consumption which would find an eager market. Others entered wage labor only temporarily to augment the wealth they already had, working just long enough to achieve relative self-sufficiency. The 1912 commission even recognized this as one of the primary causes of the labor shortage in its final

[23] Huxley, *White Man's Country*, 225.
[24] KNA: MOH 1/501, A.D. Dilue to Provincial Commissioner, Nyeri, February 25, 1913, p. 9
[25] Barth, *Native Labour Commission, 1912-1913*, 271.
[26] "'Deplorable' labour conditions revealed by A.C. Hollis, Secretary for Native Affairs", April 1908, in G.H. Mungeam, *Kenya, Select Historical Documents, 1884-1923* (East African Publishing House, 1979), 378.
[27] Berman and Lonsdale, *Unhappy Valley*, 92.

report, stating "there are practically no natives who need to work for wages in order to live, and those who do work are, broadly speaking, animated by a desire to accumulate stock for the purchase of wives, who are again a potentially more productive form of wealth."[28] Indeed, these wealthier African peasants were producing the same goods as many of the white "small men" of the colony, who were often forced to buy from their African competitors to provide rations for the laborers they hired. Thus, each step forward taken by the estate economy was matched by two steps from the wealthier African peasantry, further disincentivizing them from ever willingly submitting to the precarity and torment of working on settler estates. The new taxes forced only the poorest into the labor market, those who did not already have—or could not quickly buy—a sustainable position within the peasant sector. Thus, "the needs of estate production differentiated Africans between those who could produce, those whom the labour market pulled, and those who could be pushed."[29] No amount of coercion or lopsided labor laws could change the fact that the number of Africans who could be "pushed" was finite, and the more successful the chiefs were in "pushing" the more their authority—and with it the colonial state's authority—in the reserves eroded.

As the years wore on, all the various weaknesses and inefficiencies of settler production came to be embodied by the African squatter. Ironically, as settlers struggled to hire adequate labor they began to secure it by trading access to the one asset they claimed *only* they could responsibly steward: the land itself. The squatting system in Kenya had its roots in South Africa in the system of 'Kaffir farming,' wherein a European landowner sold access to some portion of his land to Africans for grazing or farming in return for milk, manure, stock, or crops. As Tabitha Kanogo observed in her authoritative study of squatters in Kenya, though this system was a great benefit to absentee landlords who could not otherwise develop their vast estates, "the more successful European settlers and colonial administrators saw Kaffir farming as negating the whole purpose of European settlement."[30] It enabled an African peasant economy to develop outside of the reserves, weakening the authority of appointed chiefs and enabling African peasants to accrue wealth without resorting to wage labor or chiefly patronage. Further, it was unpopular among many settlers because of its association with the colony's "big men," or wealthy (and often absentee) landlords who had the land to rent out.

Squatting, by contrast, was initially perceived as a potential solution to the labor crisis, even as the squatting system ultimately exacerbated it. The squatting system began as a mutually beneficial compromise between African (predominately though not exclusively Kikuyu) peasants and European landowners. Compared to wage labor, squatting was significantly more appealing. Squatters would be permitted to build their shambas anywhere they liked within a prescribed area on the European's farm in return for about five months of labor per year and sometimes also compulsory purchase of a portion of the squatter's harvest. Kikuyu squatters were accompanied by their families, who by providing labor on the shamba insulated the squatters from the worst of the labor market, improving their profits. Furthermore, until 1918 when the RNLO attempted to reclassify squatters as 'labor tenants' squatters like Kaffir farmers were largely unregulated compared to contract laborers. Ensconced on European estates, they existed apart from both the

[28] Barth, *Native Labour Commission, 1912-1913*, 321.
[29] Berman and Lonsdale, *Unhappy Valley*, 92.
[30] Tabitha Kanogo, *Squatters and the Roots of Mau Mau, 1905-63*, (J. Currey, 1987), 15-16.

power of chiefs on the reserves and the coercive regime of the M&S laws. Squatters provided labor, but the hydra remained unsated.

Ultimately, the squatting system is crucial for understanding the settlement schemes of this period because squatting was in effect settlement without a scheme. The European settlers who had seized the highlands and forced the Maasai and others into reservations to accommodate their new concessions were not the only ones eager to speculate on the value of these lands. As Kanogo observed, squatting grew from a synthesis of the demands of the new colonial political economy and an extant "Kikuyu expansionist dynamic," one wherein landless Kikuyu (*ahoi*) acquired wealth and built families by breaking new land on the frontier (*rutere*). The force of colonization had significantly disrupted but not destroyed this system, redirecting the *ahoi* towards the Settled Areas where they, "like the European settlers […] anticipated easy and immediate prosperity in the White Highlands," and at least until the early 1920s, "looked upon themselves and the settlers as the joint heirs to the Settled Areas."[31] Squatters were "squatters" only insofar as they did not possess a legal title for the lands they occupied cognizable for the colonial state.

Yet something similar could also be said for the European settlers, if to a lesser degree. The so-called "Elgin Pledge" which settlers insisted was the founding charter for the white man's country was actually quite circumspect. The original pledge in 1906 stated simply that "a reasonable discretion will be exercised in dealing with applications for land on the part of natives of India and other non-Europeans," and the reaffirmation in 1908 stated only that "it is not consonant with the views of His Majesty's Government to impose *legal* restriction on any particular section of the community, but as a matter of administrative convenience grants in the upland area should not be made to Indians."[32] Though settlers would often seek to present these as ironclad promises with the force of law, particularly during the crisis years of the early 1920s (Chapter 4), in practice the very idea of the white man's country was justified on little more than "administrative convenience" and a racial distinction between British subjects which the imperial government never wished to explicitly articulate. Yet surely from the perspective of a Maasai herdsman brutally evicted from his traditional grazing lands, both the European landlord who 'owned' the land and the Kikuyu peasant farming a portion of it were 'squatters' on lands not their own. The inability of European settlers to secure labor on their own terms created, in effect, a mirror-class of African settlers. They were central to the colonial economy—indeed both their labor and produce subsidized it at every level—yet they could not be conceptualized by the colonizer as being a true participant in the colonial project, as 'developing' the land, as being a true 'settler,' even if they were doing the labor constitutive of settlement.

Thus, the labor crisis created a two-sided dilemma which by the onset of WWI many colonizers felt could only be resolved with a new variety of settlement scheme. On the one hand was an essentially economic problem. Despite the fact that their "badly needed labour-force was actually resident in the Settled Areas as illegal squatters," settlers could not consistently "offer the kinds of conditions that would attract their labour" due to lack of capital or local knowledge, and competition between government and private employers on the labor market.[33] This called into question the reason European settlers had been invited into the colony to start with: as

[31] Kanogo, *Squatters and the Roots of Mau Mau,* 26; 27.
[32] "The Elgin Pledge," 1906, in Mungeam, *Kenya, Select Historical Documents,* 333-334.
[33] Kanogo, *Squatters and the Roots of Mau Mau,* 26.

settler-*investors* meant to shoulder a portion of the financial burden of developing the colony after the government's costly construction of the railway. If the government truly did have a positive duty to act as a labor recruiter for private estates, then many of the claims made to justify the initial wave of concessions came to ring hollow. Yet by 1921 Norman Leys observed that "Europeans in Eastern Africa consider that Africans are under a moral obligation to work for them."[34] This moral obligation for Africans entailed a costly new obligation for the colonial government, as the purported stewards of African's wellbeing, to enforce it no matter the price.

Squatting initially appeared to resolve this problem. Indeed, in its final report the 1912 commission recommended "the [encouragement] of squatting in every possible way," provided that "the squatter goes on to the farm for the purposes of labor."[35] Yet squatting only exacerbated the other, more cultural side of the dilemma produced by the labor crisis. With each successful harvest reaped by the squatters, with each bag of maize or manure sold by African peasants to their European neighbors, the squatter system revealed the white man's country to be what it was: a fiction maintained by the colonial state out of "administrative convenience." Squatters embodied the fact that the entire colonial project in Kenya depended upon African labor. Worse yet, African accumulation threatened the prospect that the white man's country might ever be more than a place for a few influential investors to profit. As one settler complained in The Leader:

> If the colony is to be treated in a half-hearted fashion we may as well close up, send our wives and families home, and take to the veld as trappers and *voyageurs*—à la Fenimore Cooper. Either the British Government is 'playing' at colonisation—a very expensive game—or she is very earnest in her intention to make of British East Africa a European settlement, with the absolute conviction, based upon expert report, that this land is a fit and proper one for the propagation of the British race in a tropical region.[36]

East Africa would never be truly the white man's country if the white population consisted of a thin dusting of cash-strapped absentee landlords overseeing relatively autonomous African peasants and pressgangs of corvée laborers. In the eyes of many settlers the only way to resolve the problems created by white settlement was through *closer* white settlement. The time had come to fight fire with gasoline.

"The True Source of All Wealth:" Walter Sidney Bromhead and the First Draft of Soldier Settlement in East Africa

Once the colonists were confronted by the intractability of the labor crisis, some began to reimagine the colonial project in Kenya and proposed new "closer settlement" schemes. These schemes were meant to continue a process which had begun as restrictions on land sales in the highlands were removed and land values soared. Prior to the shock of WWI and the attendant blows to the colonial political economy, this speculative inflation of land values facilitated an alliance of sorts between the colony's big men and small men, as outlined by Berman and Lonsdale. Big landowners could make handsome returns subdividing their lands and selling to

[34] SOAS: IMC-CBMS/01, Box 248, File A, Norman Leys to J.H. Oldham, May 31, 1921.
[35] Barth, *Native Labour Commission, 1912-1913*, 334.
[36] "A Question which has to be Decided", *The Leader of British East Africa*, June 6, 1908, 4.

new settlers, while smaller homesteaders "shared their speculative interest" as "rising land values gave them the collateral needed to secure mortgage capital."[37]

Yet once this initial wave of *ad hoc* closer settlement passed, neither of the ways to continue it were palatable to the colonial or metropolitan governments: either more African land needed to be seized, or the state would need to subsidize closer settlement with its own land or funds. The former was unappealing because the bloodiest period of the colony's conquest had only recently concluded, and the state recognized that any further land seizures would doubtless produce both costly rebellions (such as the Nandi Resistance and the Giriama Risings) and shameful humanitarian disasters (as occurred during the forced relocation of the Maasai). Worse yet, further annexation of reservation land would only diminish the power of the chiefs upon whom the colonial government depended to secure labor and taxes. The latter was unappealing simply because of the cost. As C.J. Duder observed, "White settlement in the East Africa Protectorate could still be termed an experiment in 1914."[38] Why would the state see fit to furnish even more land, let alone financially subsidize settlers, when the extant settler economy was already so precarious?

Ultimately, World War I provided the requisite shock to force all parties involved to rethink what was possible in colonial Kenya. It did so in three ways. First, the war suddenly introduced threats of invasion and occupation from German East Africa which required a massive mobilization both from within the colony and beyond its borders (i.e. India and South Africa). Second, this massive military mobilization depended heavily upon African labor, particularly the Carrier Corps. Lacking extant railways to the frontlines, all military operations in the East African campaign were dependent upon African porters, and as a result the colonial state often resorted to trickery and force to recruit them. In 1915 the the Native Followers' Recruitment Ordinance (NFRO), enabled the state to forcefully recruit Africans into the Carrier Corps through local African and Arab officials overseen by district commissioners. Resistance was widespread, most notably among the Giriama who had already been resisting attempts to compel them into the labor market prior to the war. This resistance escalated into open rebellion in 1914, requiring multiple costly punitive expeditions from the K.A.R.[39] Yet it was not lost on the settler lobby that the NFRO was just a few steps short of what they had been demanding for years: a system of forced labor recruitment overseen by the colonial state. If the colonial state was willing to spill blood and treasure to force Africans to work for the Carrier Corps, why not do the same to force them to work on settler estates? The war demonstrated that the government could, under sufficient pressure, still be compelled to make significant and destabilizing interventions in East Africa's fragile political economy. Yet it also further confirmed that Kenya's extant white settler population was small and experimental, dependent upon a colonized population of suspect loyalties for both labor and security.

Third and most importantly, the war provided a new figure around whom closer settlement schemes could coalesce: the white soldier. Though "closer settlement" simply meant the subdivision of larger plots of land into smaller ones to accommodate more settlers, during World War I many in Kenya came to believe that the ideal closer settler would be a veteran. The

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[37] Berman and Lonsdale, *Unhappy Valley,* 89.
[38] Duder, "The Soldier Settlement Scheme of 1919 in Kenya", 129.
[39] Donald C. Savage and J. Forbes Munro, "Carrier Corps Recruitment in the British East Africa Protectorate 1914-1918" *The Journal of African History* 7, no. 2 (1966), 318.

idea of setting aside land for soldiers in East Africa as a reward for their service long predates World War I and would continue well after the 1919 Ex-Soldier Settlement Scheme.[40] For instance, in 1903 General Manning proposed a settlement scheme wherein retired Sikh officers and their descendants would till the soil in times of peace and work as soldiers in East Africa during times of conflict (Chapter 2). Indeed, as Kent Fedorowich observed in his study of soldier settlement throughout the Empire, "soldier settlement was already deeply subsumed within the backward-looking and archaic ideology of the yeoman farmer and the agrarian myths which flourished in Britain before World War I."[41] The most ardent supporters of soldier settlement were conservative imperialists with a strong distaste for Britain's swelling population of urban poor, believing that the colonial frontier was the perfect sink for the surplus population of Britain's industrial cities.

The war poured further fuel on this fire in both metropole and colony. The large South African expeditionary force on the East African front appeared to many in Kenya as a pool of potential settlers, and German East Africa appeared to be prime real estate for another massive wave of settlement. Even in the heat of war, speculative fever ran high as settlers in East Africa imagined a white settler frontier stretching from Kenya through Tanganyika and down to the Cape.[42] As the war dragged on it became clear that its end would require an unprecedentedly large demobilization scheme throughout the entire Empire. In Britain this gave rise to the idea of 'homes fit for heroes' and eventually the Addison Act, and indeed many in the metropolitan government were skeptical of the idea of ushering veterans towards the colonial frontier when it was felt that they would be needed at home to reconstruct the metropolitan economy.[43] Conversely private interest groups, particularly the Royal Colonial Institute (RCI) began lobbying the government to consider some organized scheme for soldier settlement overseas, particularly with an eye towards Australia and Canada. The idea of soldier settlement gained steam when in 1916 H. Rider Haggard, a fellow of the RCI, embarked on a fact-finding mission throughout Canada, South Africa, and the Antipodes which proved "a tremendous public relations victory for the RCI over an intransigent British government."[44] Haggard's tour spurred attempts at soldier settlement throughout the dominions, yet ultimately these soldier settlement schemes proved to be a "spectacular disaster," with just over 2,000 ex-imperial settled between the Australia and Canada and none in South Africa and New Zealand.[45]

Crucially however, Haggard's mission never reached East Africa. Instead, Kenya's soldier settlement proposals would grow parallel to the larger intra-imperial debate surrounding soldier settlement, shaped just as much by the deluge of schemes proposed by settlers themselves

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[40] Indeed, though the main focus of this chapter and of most soldier settlement schemes was white veterans East Africa would also see a number of soldier settlement schemes for African soldiers of the K.A.R., specifically for so-called 'detribalized natives', meaning Africans who were not culturally, economically, and/or socially under the authority of a chief on one of the reserves. See KNA: AG 1/585A.

[41] Kent Fedorowich, *Unfit for Heroes: Reconstruction and Soldier Settlement in the Empire Between the Wars* (Manchester University Press, 1995), 2.

[42] Ultimately German East Africa would become a League of Nations mandate, foreclosing the possibility of a large white settlement scheme. C.J. Duder, "The Soldier Settlement Scheme of 1919 in Kenya", 145.

[43] For a more thorough account of the imperial history of the 'Homes for Heroes' program and of public housing in Britain, see Claire Wrigley, *Family, Nation, Empire: An Imperial History of Public Housing in Britain, 1890-2017* (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2024).

[44] Fedorowich, *Unfit for Heroes*, 53.

[45] Fedorowich, *Unfit for Heroes*, 191.

as by metropolitan organizations like the RCI. A skeptical Colonial Office relented in 1917 and allowed the formation of an East African Land Settlement Commission to devise a scheme for soldier settlement on the grounds that it was necessary to both show "some appreciation of the services of the white men who have fought for us in the arduous East African campaign" and "increase the white population of the Protectorate in the face of the overwhelming native population."[46] However, the Land Settlement Commission was strictly instructed that any scheme it contemplated could not involve any financial subsidies from the government for incoming settlers. This stipulation opened the door for a wave of soldier settlement proposals from a wide variety of private individuals and organizations because it effectively mandated that either the settlers themselves be wealthy, or that some unorthodox system be devised to finance poorer ones. Ultimately the Land Settlement Commission's report would serve as the foundation for the 1919 Ex-Soldier Settlement Scheme. It is unsurprising that Kenya, whose settler population was about as "backward-looking and archaic" as could be, would see so many proposals for soldier settlement. Far more surprising perhaps, is how radically some of these proposals reimagined the British colonial project in East Africa.

Indeed, one of the most radical soldier settlement schemes proposed in British East Africa was also the first: that of a globetrotting confidence trickster named Walter Sidney Bromhead. Prior to settling in East Africa Bromhead had lived a colorful life, one characterized by his promotion of bogus insurance and land development companies in Britain and Australia.[47] Upon arriving in East Africa in 1914 Bromhead purchased a homestead for himself in Dagoretti, and during the first years of the war he would also serve as a veterinary officer in the army. Yet he also worked as a journalist, publishing mainly in The Leader and occasionally in the more widely read the East African Standard. Bromhead quickly began to establish himself as one of the most vocal advocates for closer settlement in East Africa by any means necessary. Critically, Bromhead became the foremost evangelist for a new vision for East Africa as a small man's country, rather than a big man's country. His solution to the labor crisis was that the colony did not need more wealthy settlers, but rather more white settlers who were willing to engage in manual labor themselves. It was the prevailing wisdom among most of Kenya's settlers that it "would not do for a white man to engage in dirty, demeaning, unskilled labour. The white man's job was to command."[48] Because the early concessionaires had been invited into East Africa as settler-investors, with the presumption that Africans would serve as the colony's labor force, the presence of truly poor whites was seen by most as a serious threat to white supremacy in East Africa.

Bromhead aggressively challenged this prevailing orthodoxy at every turn. Throughout the war he would argue that the purpose of the colonial project in East Africa was neither to civilize Africans nor to profit wealthy planters, but to reproduce whiteness itself. We see this in his first soldier settlement scheme, which he sent to the Colonial Office on 11 September 1915 while serving as a veterinary officer near Kabete. The proposal consisted of two letters and an attached pamphlet titled "Fraternal Agriculture," though only portions of the first letter survive. The letters outlined a particular scheme for soldier settlement in East Africa to be carried out at the close of the war, while the pamphlet put forward a much more radical system upon which the

[46] Duder, "The Soldier Settlement Scheme of 1919 in Kenya", 151.
[47] For a more extensive account of Bromhead's life, see Calvin Scott Paulson, "'All the Marks of a Swindle': Walter Sidney Bromhead and the Dividends of Whiteness" *Modern British History* 37, no. 1 (2026).
[48] Shadle, *Souls of White Folk*, 62.

soldier settlement scheme would be based. In the scheme Bromhead proposed the government set aside approximately 100,000 acres of land and an accompanying fund of £200,000 per 1,000 settlers. This land grant would be subdivided into farms of several hundred acres apiece, and settlers would work "on generous Profit-Sharing terms."[49] On its own this scheme would be ambitious, but not unprecedented. The most unusual part of it was Bromhead's idea that the farms be organized cooperatively, yet as we will see later in this chapter many of the alternative visions for soldier settlement in East Africa were imagined as cooperatives. Where Bromhead truly distinguished himself was with his larger vision for a new form of racial capitalism.

At its core, what Bromhead called "fraternalism" was a comprehensive social program of white overseas settlement rooted in agricultural cooperatives. In brief, in a fraternalist system all participants would purchase shares in an agricultural cooperative company and be compensated by the dividends on the shares they owned. Rather than a division between big and small men, under Fraternalism there would be "self-financed men" and "men financed by others." Meaning, one could either purchase their own shares and thus receive all the dividends, or a man without capital could have his shares purchased for him by a philanthropically minded capitalist or "nominator," who would receive a portion of the dividends in return despite not working at the cooperative. Theoretically, this would eliminate class conflict among settlers throughout the Empire by substituting wage labor for cooperative capitalism such that "the interests of Capital and Labour, investor and worker, are sympathetically intertwined when they are not identical."[50] Thus, fraternalism conveniently solved the labor crisis as well. Under this system white men could engage in agricultural labor without losing the prestige of whiteness because the cooperative structure placed them on the same level as investors, and since fraternalism purported to eliminate wage labor entirely the constant competition between settlers over African wages could finally end. Under Fraternalism there would be no more small men, no more poor whites, and no more squatters, just men who needed to be "financed by others."[51]

Bromhead's vision for closer settlement along cooperative lines reflected an astute appreciation for East Africa's uniquely complicated political economy. Consider Bromhead's definition of the program in the foreword of his pamphlet:

> Fraternalism, to define it briefly, means the investment of capital in and through working humanity—the true source of all wealth—rather than in its means of existence; thereby calling into being a very desirable fellowship between the members of those contending classes that the present economic system seems more and more to embitter and estrange.

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[49] TNA: CO 533/164, W.S. Bromhead to General Officer Commanding, September 11, 1915, 93.
[50] TNA: CO 533/164, Bromhead, "Fraternal Agriculture," 99.
[51] Critically, the pamphlet stipulated that fraternalism would consist of two parallel organizations: a "registered federation" and an "institute." The federation would organize and oversee farming communes throughout the entire British Empire, each consisting of four to five working members focusing on mixed agriculture and ranching; the "Fraternal Institute" would maintain a technical library in Britain on matters related to overseas settlement and "co-ordinate by every means in its power the interests of land-owners, farmers, small-holders, and land-workers." Bromhead is quite clearly cribbing here from the structure of the RCI, of which he was a fellow. The RCI maintained an extensive library collection of agricultural and economic data explicitly meant to aid imperial businesses and promote imperial investment. However, the federation would be registered as a cooperative company, as would each of its farming cooperative subsidiaries, as had Empire Builders Limited before it. In light of Bromhead's recent experiences in Australia, the program outlined in "Fraternal Agriculture" appears to be the same grift extended to global proportions. TNA: CO 533/164, W.S. Bromhead "Fraternal Agriculture" (London, 1915), 103.

> It possesses all the advantages of the co-operative movement, with which, as also with ordinary business organisations, it is able to work sympathetically, while providing an opportunity of greater profits for the investor and ensuring for its workers, whom it is incapable of sweating, a better status and a permanent interest in their life's occupation. This in its turn must make for racial progress and, by placing a premium on efficiency and capacity, evolve a more contented and loyal spirit of citizenship.[52]

Rather than try to parse each item of this "brief" definition, we must read it for what it was: a sales pitch, one calibrated to be equally resonant in both metropole and colony by synthesizing the concerns of each. For a colony dominated by resentment between big and small men and competition between settlers and the government for control over African labor, Fraternalism offered the dream of resolving class conflict within the white settler population *and* resolving the labor crisis with one stroke through a system of cooperative racial capitalism. Bromhead would iterate upon this scheme for the rest of his life (Chapter 4), yet the particulars of each iteration are less significant than the overarching vision of cooperative closer settlement as a panacea for capitalism's social ills and a bulwark of global white supremacy. Critically, this proposal was sent nearly a whole year before Haggard's 1916 global fact-finding tour to promote the idea of soldier settlement in the dominions, a tour which never came to Kenya. Meaning Walter Sidney Bromhead was likely the first person to ever advance a concrete scheme for closely settling British WWI veterans in East Africa.

Unfortunately for Bromhead, Colonial Secretary Bonar Law was disinterested in fraternalism and rejected it out of hand. Yet this was only the beginning of Bromhead's advocacy for closer settlement in East Africa. In the litany of articles Bromhead published between 1914 and 1919 in East African newspapers he argued that the solution to the intractable labor problem was not the compulsion of more African labor, but rather the importation of more white labor through closer settlement. To him, "if we rely on [African labor] entirely, to the atrophying of our own hardiness and working capacity, we simply become parasites that the country sooner or later can and will do without."[53] This was a complete inversion of the thinking which had characterized the initial wave of concessions, yet it was not an entirely new idea (e.g. Israel Zangwill had imagined Jewish colonists working the land themselves). Whereas previously the white concessionaires had justified their concessions by dint of their having sufficient capital to not work, to Bromhead this meant that they were actually living parasitically.

Bromhead's advocacy for closer settlement did much to broaden the term's meaning in East Africa. For him and for those who came to agree with him over the course of World War I, closer settlement meant far more than a simple subdivision of concessions. Note how he tactically expands the meaning of "closer settlement" here:

> CLOSER SETTLEMENT MEANS primarily a far greater concentration of capital and skilled human industry on a given area, and, secondly, a much greater increase both in land values and profit production than have existed before: and it is due inevitably to one or both of two causes (a) a demand on the part of a growing population for an opportunity to develop agricultural potentialities laying idle, and (b) to the desire of a discerning landowning class for a larger number of inhabitants, *preferably of their own race*

[52] TNA: CO 533/164, W.S. Bromhead "Fraternal Agriculture" (London, 1915), 97.
[53] W.S. Bromhead, "Closer Settlement: A Survey of the Problem," *The Leader of British East Africa,* July 15, 1916, 14.

> [emphasis mine], on whom they may rely for mutual purposes of defence and wealth creation. Happy is the country where both these classes see eye to eye and progress from strength to strength by graceful concession and mutually equitable arrangement.[54]

He cannot admit it, but clearly the figure of the African squatter is inextricable from Bromhead's advocacy for closer settlement. The greatest "demand on the part of a growing population for an opportunity to develop agricultural potentialities laying idle" was not from Afrikaner homesteaders and certainly not from British soldiers, but from Kikuyu peasants.

But because this is inconvenient for his purpose—to reconceptualize the colonial project in Kenya as one of reproducing whiteness—Bromhead must shift the meaning of closer settlement through implication. Because Kikuyu squatters had already been closely settling European estates for years, Bromhead amends that a truly "discerning landowning class" would seek inhabitants "preferably of their own race" because they could be relied upon "for mutual purposes of defence and wealth creation." The relationship with African squatters was not "mutual," and never could be in the colonial mind because they were Black and the landowners white. Whereas the Giriama Rebellion and the difficulties of coercing men into the Carrier Corps showed the precarity of white settlement, Bromhead presented white closer settlers as the ideal defenders of the discerning landowners. If the initial wave of settlement was premised on the trinity of class/nation/race, Bromhead's ethno-populist vision for a second wave of closer settlement was premised on folding class into nation and race. According to this view the purpose of white capitalists in East Africa was not to produce more capital, but more whiteness, by subsidizing closer settlement.

Growing Britishers: The Imagined Alternatives to the 1919 Ex-Soldier Settlement Scheme

Yet Bromhead's was not the only early vision for closer settlement in East Africa. While Bromhead was likely the first to suggest a WWI soldier settlement scheme for East Africa specifically, his was a vision tailored for the small men of the colony. Meanwhile East Africa's more influential settlers had capitalized on the tumult of the war to seize greater political influence in the colony, beginning with the formation of the War Council in 1915. Founded on the heels of a fiery mass meeting in Nairobi led by E.S. Grogan, technically the War Council was only an advisory body. However in practice it effectively operated as "a committee of public safety" during WWI and its membership was primarily elected from the colony's most influential settlers.[55] In December of 1915, just a month after Bromhead's first Fraternalism scheme, the War Council forwarded its own soldier settlement scheme. This scheme called for free grants of 320-acre farms throughout the East Africa Protectorate, Uganda, and German Tanganyika to all European soldiers who had served in the East African campaign. The War Council's initial scheme justified itself on the grounds that farm rents would help to repay war debts, that it would supplant German influence in East Africa with British influence, and because "Even if but a few occupied their holdings in person, a great Imperial purpose would be served by focusing such widespread attention on the country."[56] Unsurprisingly, the vision of soldier settlement proffered by the colony's big men was much more tolerant of absentee landlords, large grants, and land speculation than Bromhead's ethno-populist vision for a cooperative military yeomanry. Indeed, as C.J. Duder noted, many settlers "looked to soldier settlement to extend their frontier and

[54] W.S. Bromhead, "The Closer Settlement Problem" *The Leader of British East Africa,* July 8, 1916, 17.
[55] Duder, "The Soldier Settlement Scheme of 1919 in Kenya"*,* 138.
[56] Duder, "The Soldier Settlement Scheme of 1919 in Kenya"*,* 139.

develop their country" rather than as a matter of imperial security or of racial reproduction.[57] Though there was agreement among these early schemes that soldiers would make ideal closer settlers and that the frontier of settlement should be expanded to include Tanganyika, there remained significant disagreements over the ultimate purpose of soldier settlement, and thus what form it should take.

Many of the alternative visions for soldier settlement in East Africa came from private citizens, such as Henry Kitchener's scheme. Like Bromhead, Kitchener was a zealous advocate for closer white settlement in East Africa and laid his own scheme before the land settlement commission. Unlike Bromhead, Kitchener's scheme conceptualized soldier settlement as a means of defending the colony militarily rather than as a means of reproducing whiteness. Kitchener requested four miles of agricultural land on which he proposed to settle thirty English soldiers and advance them 6% of the necessary funds for development. Yet intriguingly, unlike many other closer settlement schemes of the period, Kitchener's made explicit provisions for Africans in his imagined settlement. He requested permission to "be allowed to recruit sufficient voluntary labour" for the settlement, as well as "to build a school and provide a native teacher for the children of the labourers." Beyond this, his new soldier settlement would "keep at least 100 of the above labourers trained as askaris […] with one European non-commissioned officer to every 10 men," these askaris to be "called out at times of national emergency."[58] So rather than understanding soldier settlement as a reward for military service, Kitchener imagined it as a continuation of military service. Kitchener's scheme was essentially a Euro-African version of General Manning's earlier Sikh settlement scheme (Chapter 2), an attempt to use colonial land to create a class of loyal yeomen soldiers.

Compare this with another settlement scheme proposed back in London by the Artists' Rifles Association in early 1918. Lobbying the Colonial Office directly, the Artists' Rifles framed their settlement scheme as an expression of patriotism. They proposed that the scheme would be carried out entirely "on a co-operative basis," with shares in the scheme's cooperative company to be owned either by settlers themselves or "those who, from a patriotic motive would take up a £100. Founders' share and sell it to a potential settler." Like Kitchener's scheme, the Artists Rifles saw in East Africa an ideal setting for a British officer, as he would be "of a suitable type to become the master of native labourers." However, more like Bromhead, the Artists' Rifles framed their cooperative settlement scheme as a means of reproducing Britishness, taking great pains to deprioritize the commercial aspects of their scheme in their proposal. In the prospectus sent to the Colonial Office, the Artists' Rifles argued that land companies of the past were animated solely by "the desire to make money out of the development and sale of land, but the more general principles of Imperial development and the well being of the individual have only been brought into consideration in a very minor way." By contrast, their cooperative company would prioritize the increase of "the pure British population."[59] Thus there is no mention of a school for Africans in the Artists' Rifles scheme, but rather "an Agricultural Training School for B.E.A. settlers" because the Artists' Rifles saw the purpose of soldier settlement as the

[57] Duder, "The Soldier Settlement Scheme of 1919 in Kenya", 141.
[58] J.W. Barth, *Report of the Land Settlement Commission*, (Government Printer, 1919), 104, from British Online Archives: Kenya Under Colonial Rule, in Government Reports, 1907-1964, "Settlement Commission, 1919-1964", ISBN 73228D-22, accessed 23 July 2026, https://britishonlinearchives-com.libproxy.berkeley.edu/documents/7464/settlement-commission-1919-1964.
[59] TNA: CO 533/204, pp. 90-106.

reproduction of Britishness itself. The cooperative structure allowed the Artists Rifles' scheme to contemplate a settler society without Africans, and so to frame their scheme as a step towards increasing "the pure British population."

And yet, what really counted as a "pure British population?" Virtually all the settlers and colonial administrators alike assumed in discussions of an East African soldier settlement scheme that the soldiers in question would be white Britons. Yet theirs was not the only word on the subject. On September 21, 1918, at the Palace Theatre in Nairobi a mass meeting was held with delegates from Indian Associations from throughout the colony, with "some 30 of the leading East African Indians" on the stage. The very first resolution they passed demanded that:

> …in view of the uncomfortable, unsatisfactory and unhappy position in which Indians are unfortunately placed in the Collective Colonies and in view of the splendid services rendered…to the British Empire by India at a critical time in this Great Struggle of righteousness, freedom and liberty of men, money, munitions and materials and as a partial recognition thereof German East Africa in whose conquest the Indian troops have played a very prominent part be reserved for Indian Colonisation and administration of that country or country be placed under the direct control of the Government of India.[60]

The prospect of a British conquest of German East Africa provided Indian leaders in British East Africa an opportunity for compromise. They had been lobbying for desegregation and access to the highlands for years unsuccessfully, yet now they saw an opportunity to make German East Africa an "America for the Hindu" while British East Africa could remain the white man's country. Ultimately this didn't come to pass for a variety of reasons: German East Africa being made a League of Nations mandate foreclosed any soldier settlement schemes there, and the massacre at Jallianwallah Bagh in Amritsar made the (sub)imperial citizenship pursued by the Indian merchants of the Indian Association deeply unpalatable to the nationalist movement in India itself.[61] Yet this scheme, like the Artists' Rifles scheme and like Bromhead's, further reveals the underlying tensions between nation, class, and race which shaped the closer settlement debate in East Africa. The ethno-populist demand to whiten the Kenyan highlands with Anglo soldiers could be met with a demand to reward the sacrifices of Indian soldiers with plantations in conquered German East Africa, and both of these schemes could claim—using much the same rhetoric and reasoning—to be "British."

These tensions were put on full display in the debate surrounding one of the most controversial closer settlement schemes of the WWI years: Baron Bror von Blixen's "Swedish Scheme." Though he is now mainly famous for being the philandering husband of Karen Blixen (penname Isak Dinesen), Blixen was an influential figure among Kenya's settlers and a close friend of Delamere's. On 14 February 1918, as the land commission was still hearing testimony, Blixen wrote to Delamere to propose a closer settlement scheme of his own. In Blixen's initial proposal, the colonial government would freely grant 100,000 acres of coffee land in the highlands to a new company founded by Scandinavian capitalists. This company would then subdivide the land into 300-acre farms and install government-selected settlers (presumably ex-soldiers) on them as employees under five-year contracts. These company settlers would be required to use 100 acres of their farms to grow some cash crop chosen by the company

[60] KNA: MAC EAI 29/1, "Meeting of the Indian Association Held at the Palace Theatre Nairobi on Saturday 21st September 1918", 3.
[61] Sana Aiyar, *Indians in Kenya: The Politics of Diaspora* (Harvard University Press, 2015), 65.

(presumably coffee or sisal) with all profits from those 100 acres going to the company, but they could dispose of the remaining 200 acres as they wished, with a further option to supplement their incomes with wage labor at £10 per month. The company would also be responsible for developing the area buy building bungalows for the settlers, roads, water infrastructure, and "central factories, school, hospital, creameries, stores, also all on co-operative lines." At the end of their five years settlers in the scheme could buy out their farms at the price of five times the fifth year's net profit from the company's 100 acres.[62] Failure to meet that payment meant that the land would revert back to the company.

Like Bromhead's scheme, Blixen's scheme imagined closer settlement facilitated by a public-private partnership wherein the colonial government provided free land, private promoters provided capital, and white settlers provided labor. Unlike in fraternalism however, the distinction between investor and settler was much sharper in Blixen's scheme with the settlers being clearly subservient to the company. The farms themselves would be operated privately, with only the central factories, creameries, and stores operating cooperatively. In both his letter to Delamere and in his subsequent testimony to the Land Commission Blixen, like Bromhead, presented the scheme as an ideal way to settle small men in East Africa on the cheap. Also like fraternalism, the figure of the African squatter loomed over the Swedish scheme: the company's settlers would effectively be squatting on the company's land with the company as both their employer and their landlord, with the right to purchase only after five years and at a nigh-unattainable price. Like Bromhead's scheme, the Swedish scheme imagined a closed loop where white capital would flow to white settlers and then circulate among them through cooperative businesses, thus reproducing whiteness in the colony and lessening its dependence upon African labor and businesses. It was a sweet deal for the company, yet it also satisfied the Land Commission's stipulation that settlers not receive any financial support from the government by outsourcing that responsibility to the company, such that "British soldiers are helped by foreign money."[63] Ironically, this is also what made the Swedish scheme so controversial.

As word spread of Blixen's proposal, it was greeted with fiery condemnation within and beyond East Africa. The primary objection raised by critics was that the scheme depended on foreign capital, and Germanic capital at that. Sweden, though neutral in the war, was seen by many as pro-German due to Swedish trade with Germany despite Allied blockades. This is why the Army Council strongly objected to the scheme, declaring it was "far from satisfied as to the exclusion of enemy influences from these [Scandinavian] agencies and undertakings."[64] The Swedish scheme was yet another attempt by "alien" capital, in this case an "Alien Company," to infiltrate and control a British colony just as the Zionist settlement scheme or the East Africa Syndicate had been years earlier (Chapter 2).[65] For many, the fact that the capital came from outside of Britain outweighed the fact that the settlers would be British soldiers. In the words of one settler, H.M. Barberton:

> When you have got so good a thing to give away, divide it amongst those who have shed their blood and limbs for us. Let us have men in our midst who have the empire at heart

[62] "B.E.A. Land Development With Swedish Capital," *The Leader of British East Africa,* May 25, 1918, A.
[63] "B.E.A. Land Development With Swedish Capital," *The Leader of British East Africa,,* May 25, 1918, A.
[64] TNA: CO 533/202, B.B. Cubitt to Foreign Office, May 15, 1918, p. 160.
[65] Robert Kerr, "Land Settlement: The Proposed Scheme for B.E.A: A Protest," *The Leader of British East Africa*, May 25 1918, 18.

> and who know its worth and cost. These will build up a people for us worthy of our ancient fame and lineage. To the maelstrom with the Swedish scheme.[66]

To critics like Barberton it did not matter if the settlers were British if the capital and the land were not; even if the settlers indisputably had "the empire at heart," the landowners would not.

The controversy surrounding the Swedish scheme brought with it a burst of alternative closer settlement schemes from everyday settlers in East Africa which sought to recenter Britishness in the closer settlement debate.[67] Take for instance Austin Cooke, a New Zealand-born settler who had served in the South African War prior to settling in East Africa. He was so galled by the proposal that "foreign capital will kindly use this—the land we live in—as a nursery bed to let it germinate, until it can be transplanted elsewhere" that he wrote to The Leader with policy suggestions of his own:

> If we are to pursue a definite aim, it is necessary to have an unmistakeable [sic] Banner. Shall it be (please lend me some big capitals)
>
> **TO GROW BRITISHERS**
>
> To grow them in British Africa because this is the very last chance of doing so on our own ground, and with our own money. Of course the result will be that we keep the men, and the money, and future generation 'in the family.'[68]

For Cooke the purpose of closer settlement was to reproduce *Britishness* above all else, a conviction which stemmed from the losses of the war. To allow foreign capital to make that investment would be a betrayal not only of the British colonial project in East Africa but of the sacrifices British soldiers made during the war: "While they keep off the U-Boats and Jack Johnsons, we can keep off the insidious attack of foreign capital." Thus, it was imperative to harness British capital to settle British soldiers on the land, or at least to alloy any Swedish capital with British capital in a joint development fund, as was proposed at a mass meeting in Nakuru to protest the Swedish scheme.[69]

Indeed, critics like Cooke saw in the Swedish scheme a conspiracy analogous to the one Robert Chamberlain saw in the East Africa Syndicate to filch Britain's colonial patrimony from its loyal subjects (Chapter 2). The imperial government's willingness to countenance the Swedish scheme ran directly contrary to the nationalist zeal which ran so rampant during WWI. Hence Cooke's complaint that "Capital can't acquire our land, soldiers can't get in. But Hey presto! I combine the two and the trick is done. Nothing up our sleeve, please *do* believe that."[70] W.R. Smith, in an open letter to the Nakuru Maize Growers' Association, was even more explicit in his condemnation of the scheme decrying that "at the present moment the alien is living in security and comfort under British rule and protection, accumulating wealth and power; whilst the real British are fighting and laying down their lives by the thousands to hope to protect aliens who are ever ready to abuse and bite the hand that feeds them."[71] Whereas Charles Eliot saw

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[66] H.M. Barberton "Soldiers on the Land," *The Leader of British East Africa,* June 8, 1918, 16.
[67] Many of these schemes found their way onto the pages of The Leader, which unlike the more widely read East African Standard devoted proportionally more of its pages to the closer settlement debate in the colony.
[68] Austin Cooke, "'The Land We Live in'," *The Leader of British East Africa*, June 1, 1918, 16.
[69] "Time and Money," *The Leader of British East Africa,* June 15, 1918, 13.
[70] Austin Cooke, "Soldier Settlement," *The Leader of British East Africa*, June 15, 1918, 5.
[71] W. Rooken Smith, "Soldiers' Land," *The Leader of British East Africa,* June 22, 1918, 4.

himself as salesman, obliged to inveigle as many capitalists as he could into investing in East Africa, the jingoist tidal wave of WWI made it a far more fraught proposition to simply hawk land to the highest bidder even if doing so made sound financial sense for the imperial government.

Yet we cannot reduce the controversy surrounding the Swedish scheme to merely Germanophobia and the average colonist's distaste for large land companies.[72] Ironically, the Swedish scheme was threatening to so many settlers for the same reason closer settlement writ large was so appealing: the imagined resolution of the labor crisis. Unlike in fraternalism, the Swedish scheme offered no direct solution to the labor crisis. It did not propose that the settlers engage in farmwork directly, and only obliquely addressed the labor crisis with its cooperative factories and stores. This meant that settlers under the scheme would arrive simultaneously as employees of the company and as prospective employers of African labor.[73] And as one correspondent of The East African Standard observed, "Settlers are apt to combine and pull together. Not so companies. If they want the labour, they will get it regardless of the cost and of their neighbours' feelings."[74] A land company would be just as unaccountable as an African squatter to the tightknit social order which dominated all life, politics, and labor in colonial Kenya, if for very different reasons. Settlers could not invite a Swedish company to join them for a sundowner, could not storm its house when it overruled their will, could not flog it when it was disobedient, and could not pressure it to join them in wage-fixing. This is what made Baron Bror von Blixen a well-respected member of colonial society while the company he proposed was the vanguard of alien infiltration. Yet it was difficult for settlers to voice this objection just as they could not fully admit that many of the niches they imagined closer settlers filling were already being filled quite ably by African squatters. To do so would be to fully admit to the precarity of their 'pioneer' status.

For many, the soldier was an ideal closer settler because during a period of unprecedented national crisis his loyalty and devotion to the nation were beyond reproach. The soldier was unimpeachably one of "the real British," both the protector of the Empire and one who needed to be protected by the Empire. It was imagined that he would integrate seamlessly into the social world of white settlerdom, and indeed his presence could only augment and strengthen it. So like the East Africa Syndicate before it, this Swedish company was surely just another vehicle for "aliens" to rob the Empire. It had to be, because many simply could not believe what the imperial government had already stated when it allowed the formation of the Land Commission: that it was unwilling to financially subsidize closer settlement, even for Britain's heroic soldiers. In a letter to the editor of The Leader Blixen identified one of central questions which dominated the debate surrounding his scheme as, "Do we want neutral capital to develop *our* [emphasis his] land?"[75] Yet really the debate was animated by a deeper unresolved question: to whom did the

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[72] Duder, "The Soldier Settlement Scheme of 1919 in Kenya", 170.

[73] This fact alone was enough to convince some settlers that the Swedish scheme was a foreign ploy. Take for instance W. Rooken Smith, who wrote "Therefore skilled labour and supervision will be required, and if this is to come from Sweden or any of the Central European nations, then I say that every Britisher and every man with a spark of British sentiment or sympathy ought to expose the scheme by every means in his power." W. Rooken Smith, "Soldiers' Land," *The Leader of British East Africa,* June 22, 1918, 4.

[74] "The Swedish Scheme," *The East African Standard,* June 6, 1918, 21, from the University of Nairobi Digital Repository, "The East African Standard (Mombasa Times & Uganda Argus) Daily & Weekly Edition – 5th January 1918 to 21st June 1919 – Part 13" accessed July 28, 2026, http://erepository.uonbi.ac.ke/handle/11295/158866.

[75] Bror von Blixen, "Two Questions," *The Leader of British East Africa,* June 8, 1918, 21.

pronoun "*our*" refer when talking about the white man's country? As one settler roared to a cheering crowd at the Nakuru mass meeting to protest the scheme, "Are you going to sell the men who are giving so much as this—sell them to alien capitalists?"[76] The scheme contemplated only the granting of land, yet the land had come to mean so much more than could ever be reflected by a deed of ownership. Like the Zionist scheme before it, the Swedish scheme asked whether the white man's country could accommodate another hybrid identity: a settler who was unimpeachably British yet beholden to non-British capital in a way his neighbors were not.

Both Bromhead's and Blixen's schemes reimagined the colonial project in East Africa by somehow recalibrating the class/nation/race trinity which had conditioned belonging in the white man's country. Fraternalism mainly did this by making class subservient to race, harnessing cooperative capitalism to obliterate the distinction between big and small men by synthesizing both into the category of "Fedritor." As shareholders in a cooperative company they were capitalists, investors, "men financed by others" but certainly not "poor whites;" as laborers on their estates they were pioneers, and replacements for inconvenient African squatters. By contrast Blixen's scheme deprioritized nation in favor of class and race. So long as the settlers were British and the landowners white, did their nationality truly matter? After all the British colonial project in East Africa had initially been understood as a commercial enterprise: the metropolitan government had made a significant investment to extend Britain's commercial sphere of influence in the western Indian Ocean further inland, with the idea of mass white settlement in the interior largely being regarded as a pipe dream (Chapter 1). Blixen's scheme asked whether or not East Africa, now that it did have a small yet vocal population of British settlers, could continue to be regarded mainly as a commercial enterprise. For many in the colony the answer was a resounding no. To them the purpose of the white man's country was now "TO GROW BRITISHERS," and the investment of colossal sums of taxpayer money into the territory forbade—rather than justified—selling it off to the highest bidder. To remain a truly British colony, East Africa would need to be settled and developed by those deemed truly British themselves.

"The Economic Valuation of Personality:" The 1919 Ex-Soldier Settlement Scheme and its Discontents

While the debate surrounding the Swedish scheme, Bromhead's fraternalism, and other models for white settlement swirled in the East African press, the Land Settlement Commission finalized its report before publishing it in January 1919. In all the commission had heard testimony from thirty-four witnesses and discussed three significant private settlement schemes in its appendices (Bromhead's, Kitchener's, and Blixen's). Though the meaning of "closer settlement" and its relationship to soldier settlement had become capacious due to the actions of men like Bromhead, the commission's terms of reference were designed by the unenthusiastic Colonial Office to be as restrictive as possible. The commissioners were meant to investigate "the practicability, without financial assistance from the Government, of settlement on land in the Protectorate of soldiers of European extraction who have served in His Majesty's Forces in the present War," along with how any such scheme might impact the local economy and labor market. The witnesses themselves, regardless of region, generally concurred that any prospective settler would require a significant amount of both land and capital to have any hope of profiting

[76] "Soldiers' Debate," *The Leader of British East Africa,* June 22, 1918, 5.

as a colonist.[77] Nevertheless, the commissioners themselves were among the colony's most vocal advocates for further European settlement, including Lord Delamere and Robert Chamberlain, making the commission a henhouse guarded exclusively by foxes.[78]

The witness testimony before the commission also made it abundantly clear that any settlement scheme would be constrained by East Africa's racialized labor regime, and many "sought to use soldier settlement as a lever on the Government" to inflict further coercive labor laws on African subjects.[79] Indeed, many of the witnesses imagined that any settlement scheme would reproduce the sort of settlement which had already occurred rather than—as men like Bromhead had done—seeing the settlement scheme as an opportunity to remake colonial society in East Africa. Claude Watson, a Nairobi coffee planter, worried that too many small farms would exacerbate the labor crisis and only farms of 500 acres or more would enable "each man…to keep squatters as the nucleus of his labour," while Claud O'Hagan, a Nyeri settler, agreed "that the great difficulty the small man will have to face, will be the labour problem."[80] Others were even more explicit, going so far as to say that the government "would have to guarantee labour," or that "Government should compel the Wanderobo and other tribes to come out and work…They should be encouraged to come out and bring their wives." Any large settlement scheme, and especially any scheme which contemplated settling men with limited capital, could not be considered apart from the labor question.

W.E. Perry, the manager of Kitchener's Songhor Estate at Muhoroni, even went so far as to suggest a sort of doubled closer settlement scheme, arguing that for any closer settlement to succeed "labour settlements should be established for such areas in order to avoid the necessity of a man having to keep his labour on his small holding."[81] Any mass settlement of white farmers would need to be mirrored by a settlement of African laborers. Even a witness like W.H.A. Caine, a Limoru tea planter, who was unconcerned about closer settlement destabilizing the labor supply, felt that "the right kind of man will make good on a 160 acre farm," and firmly believed that "it is nonsense to assert that a white man cannot perform manual labour in the highlands of British East Africa," nevertheless suggested "that Government should devise a scheme whereby labour can be made available for a settlement scheme." The idea that closer settlement could be seamlessly synthesized with soldier settlement—as Bromhead had been arguing—broke down in the testimony before the Land Settlement Commission. It was understood that even if there were a large influx of settlers each would only have three ways of

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[77] Duder, "The 1919 Soldier Settlement Scheme in Kenya", 162-163.

[78] The bureaucratic tug-of-war between Colonial Office administrators in the metropole and the colonial government in British East Africa during this period is given a full treatment in Robert Maxon's *Struggle for Kenya: the Loss and Reassertion of Imperial Initiative*. Though there were some Colonial Office policymakers who hoped that allowing this local commission might defuse demands for a soldier settlement scheme, as Maxon notes "Any possibility that a local commission, on which present settlers were represented, would return a negative recommendation with regard to additional white settlement was clearly absurd." From the time the Colonial Office allowed this commission until the promulgation of the Devonshire White Paper in 1923, the Colonial Office in London was often informed after the fact of major policy decisions in British East Africa, with the design and execution of the soldier settlement scheme being done largely by the "man on the spot:" Governor Edward Northey. Northey, in turn, was a strong advocate for settler production and the settler lobby in East Africa. Robert Maxon, *Struggle for Kenya: The Loss and Reassertion of Imperial Initiative, 1912-1923*, (Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 1993), 97.

[79] Duder, "The 1919 Soldier Settlement Scheme in Kenya", 163.

[80] Barth, *Report of the Land Settlement Commission*, 17; 34.

[81] Barth, *Report of the Land Settlement Commission*, 36; 35; 40.

getting sufficient labor to develop his estate: a government program to force Africans into the labor market, payment of inflated wages, or possessing an estate which was sufficiently large and fertile to attract squatters. It's no surprise then that nearly every witness before the Commission who deigned to mention the "small man" did so to clarify precisely how doomed he was in East Africa.

Accordingly, the commission's final report took a dim view towards the prospect of synthesizing soldier and closer settlement in East Africa even as it sought to throw nearly every available acre of land open to settlement. The commission resolved that every prospective settler must have at least £500 to £2,000 depending on location and the type of estate they intended to develop. This price tag alone would all but forbid the soldier without capital from participating. The commission recommended dividing nearly all the remaining surveyed land in East Africa (roughly two million acres) into approximately 1,000 farms large estates, most of which were far from the railway and which would require significant capital and labor to develop. Additionally, the commission recommended alienating yet more land from the Kikuyu, Kamba, and Pokot reserves along with forest reserves for settlers. Critically, some of the only lands the commission felt were suitable for closer settlement were those they proposed annexing from the Kikuyu and forest reserves (approximately 415 farms of 100-300 acres apiece). Finally, the commission made no recommendations regarding any sort of government labor scheme despite the testimony of its witnesses, only going so far as to state that the 1915 Registration of Natives Ordinance should be fully enforced. In summary the commission, chaired as it was by the colony's extant powerbrokers, did not contemplate in its final report any significant revision to the colonial project which would accommodate closer settlement.

There were only two significant exceptions to that rule. The first was that the commission stipulated that no soldier who already owned land in the Protectorate could receive land through the scheme. This proved the most controversial part of the commission's report and after an outcry from the settlers the new governor Edward Northey—himself a veteran and very sympathetic to the settlers—would do away with this proviso in the final version of the scheme. Indeed, by the time the dust had settled at the end of 1919 one fifth of BEA's population had applied for land in the scheme.[82] Yet it is revealing that in the initial draft of the 1919 scheme the commissioners, despite many of them having much to gain, chose to prioritize bringing new settlers to the colony instead of rewarding extant settlers with more land. Secondly, the commission endorsed a modified Swedish scheme, granting that while "it would perhaps be more desirable if the capital to be used were British…the great need of this Protectorate is capital and it would in our view be a mistake to turn away capital offered on such favourable terms if it be proved that its source is above suspicion."[83] Bromhead's and Kitchener's schemes were curtly rejected as "impracticable of carrying into effect," and hastily buried in their own appendices at the back of the report.

The qualified endorsement of the Swedish scheme reveals the extent to which the commission prioritized capital above all else when drafting its own soldier settlement scheme. Advocates for closer settlement tended to link their schemes to national reproduction ("TO GROW BRITISHERS"), or racial reproduction (Bromhead's fraternalism). Thus, their schemes tended to be more radical; the current political economy in the Protectorate could be remade if it

[82] Duder, "The Soldier Settlement Scheme", 215.
[83] Barth, *Report of the Land Settlement Commission*, 81.

were necessary to put more settlers on the land, whether that meant the allocation of smaller farms, government subsidies to poorer settlers, large-scale cooperatives, or even white settlers eventually replacing Indians and Africans in the labor force at higher wages. Settlers who were already wealthy were obligated by their duties to their nation and their race to use their capital to subsidize closer settlement because, as Bromhead put it, working humanity was "the true source of all wealth." By contrast the commissioners clearly were more interested in figuring out how any soldier settlement scheme might best reproduce the system which already existed across a greater swathe of territory—the system which had brought *them* into British East Africa—because to them "the great need of this Protectorate is capital." Ironically, this entailed the very precarious dependence on African labor they so despised. The bulk of the farms would need to be large because how else would the new settlers be able to engage in the colony's rampantly speculative land market, or attract squatters to develop their estates? The soldier settlement scheme the commission envisioned was an expansion, not a redefinition, of British East Africa's political economy with all its contradictions intact and unresolved.

Yet legally the commission's report was only a suggestion, not policy, and it fell to the still-quite-unenthusiastic Colonial Office to actually implement any soldier settlement scheme. The publication of the commission's final report in January 1919 incited a frenzy of both lobbying and speculation to determine the true shape of that scheme. The man being lobbied was the newly-arrived governor Northey, while the lobbying was done mainly by two organizations: the Convention of Associations, the quasi-governmental body which generally represented the interests of the colony's big men, and the newly established Ex-War Service Federation, which for the duration of 1919 claimed to represent the colony's small men and poorer veterans. Both were united in their demands that the scheme be expanded to include soldiers already residing in the colony, and Northey quickly acquiesced to this demand.[84] In the final version of the scheme soldier settlement farms were divided into two classes: Class A (of less than 160 acres) and Class B (greater than 160 acres). Class A farms were those meant specifically for closer settlement by men of limited capital, who would pay a nominal annual rent yet would not be required to purchase the land. The vast majority of farms however were Class B, which Northey—in a flagrant contradiction of the original principles of the entire scheme—insisted needed to be purchased. Northey, like Elliot before him, had come to see his role as Governor as that of a salesman.

By the time the dust settled at the dawn of 1920 the soldier settlement scheme would allot most of the 250 Class A farms to small men already residing in the colony, reserving only 53 for non-local applicants. Of the Class B farms 206 went to resident settlers and 722 to putatively non-local applicants.[85] However, the practice of "dummying" skews these numbers even further; it was a very common practice to apply for land in the name of someone else without any intent to take up residence there, and many of the farms allotted during 1919 were granted to dummy

[84] Northey was himself a military man and had "no experience in colonial administration at all," and—ironically—it is possible the Colonial Office had appointed him in the hopes that his military background would mean that he would be less susceptible to settler browbeating than his predecessors. If so, the Colonial Office had failed to anticipate that Northey would require no such browbeating and would eagerly side with the settler lobby, whereas his superiors in London "had not given him a list of prescriptions to carry out or specific policies to implement. The initiative was left entirely with the new governor, and he would indeed take it." Maxon, *Struggle for Kenya*, 126-127.

[85] Duder, "Men of the Officer Class," 71-72.

applicants. Duder, in his forensic analysis of every successful applicant of the 1919 scheme, provides a comprehensive picture of the scheme's "typical participant," writing:

> He was male, 35 years old, married with 2.4 children, had served as a Captain in the Royal Artillery in World War I and had £2,122 in capital resources. He was at least of lower middle status in terms of income and more usually of at least upper middle class status in terms of employment, education and social standing. He was also what was later realized, when the locusts and the Depression had taken their toll, as one of the most likely to fail as a settler, 'middle aged men with some capital and no training.'[86]

Many were Anglo-Irish, Anglo-Indian, or South African, colonial elites fleeing from colonies where Britain's dominance was weakening following World War I. They were not yeomen farmers, nor were they pioneers. They were an expansion and a reflection of East Africa's extant political economy, not a challenge to it.

Yet we cannot let this final tally obscure the imagined alternatives which had been brought to the fore by men like Bromhead and Blixen, which did foundationally shape both the soldier settlement scheme itself and life in colonial Kenya writ large. Following the Commission's final report the cause of closer settlement in East Africa was championed by the Ex-War Service Federation, established in Nairobi in December 1918 with Bromhead as its secretary. Ostensibly, the Ex-War Service Federation was a veteran's association, and indeed within a few months of its establishment it quickly grew to become the largest British veterans association in East Africa with a membership between four and six hundred and branches in Nairobi, Eldoret, and Uganda. The Federation was organized around Bromhead's fraternalist principles, and at one of its earliest meetings in February 1919 Bromhead "advocated a standardised system, the principal of which should be uniform to all […] which had every appearance of being sound and profitable to the financier and as attractive as the so-called Swedish scheme to the ex-soldier without means."[87] They were adamant that ex-soldiers already residing in the Protectorate should be allowed to purchase land through the scheme so long as they also employed other ex-soldiers "on a permanent profit-sharing basis on the farm." Later that same month the Federation grew even bolder, passing a resolution urging Northey "to officially adopt a standard agreement embodying Mr. Bromhead's economic valuation for ex-soldiers," and that "the Federation be entrusted with the work of organizing this system on the basis of a 5 per cent charge in favour of the Federation's funds."[88] As the soldier settlement scheme rapidly transformed before everyone's eyes from an opportunity to make East Africa into a new Canada, or a new Australia into yet another in a long chain of land grabs by influential investors, the Ex-War Service Federation's embrace of Bromhead's fraternalism provided a ready-made rebuke for the small men who felt themselves cut out of the picture despite their service to the Empire.

In the first few months of its existence, as soldier settlement gathered steam, the Ex-War Service Federation amassed a remarkable amount of influence for what was, with the benefit of hindsight, likely little more than one in a globe spanning daisy chain of Bromhead's fraudulent

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[86] Duder, "Men of the Officer Class," 80.
[87] "Ex-Soldiers", *The East African Standard*, February 8, 1919, 13, from the British Newspaper Archive, accessed July 28, 2026, https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0001838/19190208/134/0013.
[88] "Old Soldiers Discuss", *The East African Standard*, March 8, 1919, 21, from the British Newspaper Archive, accessed July 28, 2026, https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0001838/19190308/171/0023.

shell companies. It did this in two ways. First, the Federation sought to graft itself onto the administrative and informational infrastructure of the actual 1919 Ex-Soldier Settlement Scheme itself. The Federation was authorized by the colonial government to sign as an applicant's representative for the scheme's land lottery, the results of which determined who would select their plots first, in which capacity it attracted many new members to its ranks. Bromhead, recognizing that in a dysfunctional colonial bureaucracy access to information was itself a great power, made the Federation a clearinghouse for information relevant to which lands were available for allotment and how to apply. For instance, in October 1919 HR Jate, a provincial commissioner, passed a prospective applicant's letter to Bromhead and wrote "The interests of ex-service men in British East Africa are in the hands of the Secretary of the Ex-War Service Federation who possesses fuller and more up-to-date information than is in my possession at date and I have therefore forwarded your letter to him for reply."[89] Jate, without even knowing it, had just admitted that a man who had fled two continents after being unmasked as a fraudster was not only a better source of information for the largest single colonization scheme in Kenyan history than a government official, but that he in fact held the interests of all the British ex-servicemen of East Africa in his hands.

The second and more significant method by which Bromhead grew the Ex-War Service Federation's influence in 1919 was by seizing upon nearly every other closer settlement scheme which had proliferated in the previous years and claiming them for itself, from the Swedish scheme to the idea of cooperative plantations in conquered German East Africa. Bromhead did this with a familiar tactic: he convinced the members of the Ex-War Service Federation to incorporate a second organization with a nearly identical name, a company called the Ex-War Service Federation Limited, again with Bromhead as its secretary.[90] There was only one Federation member present on the board of Federation Limited besides Bromhead, meaning that the Federation's financial arm was almost completely unaccountable to the Federation itself.[91] Crucially, whereas the Federation was simply a veteran's organization, Federation Limited as a company which marketed itself as an opportunity for anyone interested in investing in the closer settlement of the worthy veteran. In its "Abridged Prospectus," Federation Limited proudly announced that the money used to purchase its shares would be reinvested in "orphanages and boarding schools […] and to finance suitable young people in Federative enterprises," along with "Co-operative Companies embracing cheese, butter, bacon, flax, coffee, sisal," "establishing markets and agencies for the disposal of settlers' produce," developing the colony's mineral resources, and, of course, "Fire and Life Insurance."[92] Federation Limited also began advertising its new "Employment Register" for newly arrived ex-soldiers, and a "Brokerage Department" to buy and sell "anything."[93] If the government was unwilling to subsidize the small man, then it

[89] KNA: PC CP 9/6/1, HR Jate to C.E.H. Coles, 24 October 1919, 124.
[90] In Britain Bromhead had used a similar strategy of incorporating two companies with similar names to create confusion among regulators and to secretly shuttle assets between them. Paulson, "'All the Marks of a Swindle'", 6.
[91] Duder, "The Soldier Settlement Scheme of 1919", 579.
[92] "Abridged Prospectus of Ex-War Service Federation Limited," *The East African Standard*, August 2, 1919, 21, from the British Newspaper Archive, accessed July 28, 2026, https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0001838/19190802/251/0024.
[93] *The East African Standard*, November 6, 1919, 2, from the University of Nairobi Digital Repository, "The East African Standard (Mobasa Times & Uganda Argus) Daily Edition – 1st November 1919 to 26th October 1920 – Part 2" accessed July 28, 2026, http://erepository.uonbi.ac.ke/handle/11295/158927; *The East African Standard*, August 2, 1919, 10, from the University of Nairobi Digital Repository, "The East African Standard (Mombasa Times &

fell to the Ex-War Service Federation/Ex-War Service Federation Limited to organize the sort of settler society the imperial government would not. All one needed to do was buy a share at the low, low price of fifteen shillings!

Federation Limited wasted no time seizing on its newfound influence. At a mass meeting of the Federation in May 1919 Bromhead announced to a cheering crowd that the Government had agreed to allow the company to act as representatives for ex-soldier applicants from Britain as well as from East Africa, and that Governor Northey himself had put his name down as a guarantor for £1,000 in Federation Limited shares.[94] At one of its earliest meetings the Federation passed a resolution "that the government be asked to entrust the Federation with the secretarial and administrative control of the Swedish scheme in conjunction with the nominees of the capitalists and a Government trustee," a responsibility which would presumably be shouldered by Federation Limited.[95] In addition to trying to graft itself onto the Swedish scheme, Federation Limited also lobbied the Colonial Office directly in London to try and acquire "for ex-soldier settlement […] the estates in enemy custodian hands" in German East Africa, which would have profoundly expanded the frontier for European settlement in East Africa.[96] Ultimately both of these attempts were unsuccessful. German East Africa, despite widespread settler lobbying, was not added to the British East African settlement frontier due to its status as a mandate under the League of Nations and because of the shortage of African labor in the colony.[97] The Swedish scheme, meanwhile, though it had been endorsed by both the Land Commission and Governor Northey, collapsed quietly as the land which had initially been intended for the scheme was instead allotted as Class B farms. Yet the uncertainty surrounding both schemes was itself a speculative opportunity for Bromhead and his fellows to sell shares in Federation Limited. Paradoxically, because soldier settlement in Kenya had been imagined to be so much more than what it ended up being, this enabled men like Bromhead to materially profit more from the fantasy of closer settlement than from any actual attempt at it.

Uganda Argus) Daily Edition – 1st February 1919 to 31th [sic] October 1919 – Part 13", accessed July 28, 2026, http://erepository.uonbi.ac.ke/handle/11295/158919.

[94] "Ex-War Federation," *The East African Standard,* May 10, 1919, 10, from the British Newspaper Archive, accessed July 28, 2026, https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0001838/19190510/062/0010.

[95] "Old Soldiers Discuss," *The East African Standard*, March 8, 1919, 21, from the British Newspaper Archive, accessed July 28, 2026, https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0001838/19190308/171/0023. The Federation's embrace of the Swedish Scheme was hardly unprecedented, even if it is still remarkable given how controversial the scheme had been. Prior to founding the Ex-War Service Federation Bromhead had attempted to graft himself onto the Swedish scheme, publicly offering "the hospitality of my own registration to contract under trustees, one appointed by the [Swedish] financiers and one by the Government […] on a commission basis of 5 per cent establishment and 5 per cent profits per annum." And it should be noted that Bromhead was not the only one to see in the scandal surrounding neutral capital in British East Africa an opportunity for personal enrichment. For example, in the very same issue of the East African Standard a few pages earlier the representatives of one Sandy Macdonald took out a big bold advertisement declaring that he "Would like to acquire a Partnership in the business portion of the SWEDISH SCHEME if it goes through." *The East African Standard*, June 8, 1918, 9; 22.

[96] TNA: CO 691/22, W.S. Bromhead to Lord Milner, August 15, 1919, 354.

[97] Colonial Office officials knew the Germans had long struggled with their own labor crisis in G.E.A., with one official commenting on Bromhead's letter that "the Germans had closed down settlement because it had stretched the labour supply." The German reliance on slavery and forced labor, particularly on the coastal plantations, did much to spark the Maji Maji Rebellion of 1905-1907, which like the Giriama Risings and the Chilembwe Uprising did much to caution colonial officials throughout South/East Africa against an overreliance on compelled African labor despite settler lobbying. TNA: CO 691/22; Thaddeus Sunseri, *Vilimani: Labor Migration and Rural Change in Early Colonial Tanzania* (Heinemann, 2002), 28.

The Ex-War Service Federation/Federation Limited must be understood as more than a footnote to the soldier settlement scheme in East Africa, or as the attempt of one fraudster to enrich himself. Though it was both those things, this short-lived movement was also a cultural one, and it was uniquely reflective of a broader shift in how the relationship between race, nation, and class was understood both in British East Africa and in the Empire writ large. They demanded a white man's country that was more than a matter of "administrative convenience" or of attracting wealth to a cash-strapped colony, but where the reproduction of whiteness was understood as the highest goal, and where whiteness was reckoned in value comparable to pounds and shillings.

That the 1919 Ex-Soldier Settlement Scheme repudiated this idea gave rise to an ethno-populist backlash championed by the Ex-War Service Federation. They were incensed that, despite there being a supposed moratorium on further land grants during the war, "306,000 acres of land had been alienated by the Government during the War, including almost thirty thousand acres to Lord Delamere," seeing it as further evidence of wealth being prioritized over whiteness.[98] Though the 1919 scheme allowed for both syndicates and individuals to apply for land, the wealthy and well-connected syndicates were able to evade the land lottery and receive contiguous allotments.[99] By contrast, the land lottery made it nearly impossible for the Ex-War Service Federation's planned syndicates to materialize as even if settlers wished to combine into a cooperative their farms would be disconnected. Ultimately, "only twenty-one of the 204 successful 'A' applicants used the Federation as their agents in applying for the scheme", and the land lottery left all such cooperative applicants "utterly out in the cold."[100] When it became clear that the Swedish scheme had fallen through, Bromhead continued flogging the dead horse even after Blixen and his promoters had apparently abandoned it, furiously writing that all settlers in British East Africa should "seriously consider what potential injury may be done to them individually should this money and these settlers be lost to the Protectorate."[101] And in Federation Limited's letter to the Colonial Office demanding a share in the conquered German East Africa, Bromhead asserted that British veterans ought "to participate materially in the wealth that their valour and loyalty have safeguarded or secured to the Empire; instead of making room, as was notoriously the case after the S.A. war, for swarms of aliens and Peruvian Jews, who are ever ready to overrun countries that British arms have thrown open for colonisation."[102] Each disappointment further confirmed for Bromhead and his fellows that British East Africa was not truly being administered as a white man's country.

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[98] Duder, "The 1919 Soldier Settlement Scheme", 215.

[99] Because Northey was *de facto* permitted by his superiors in London to dictate the shape of the entire scheme, syndicates of "prominent persons" were able to jump the queue of the land lottery and receive large land concessions directly from the governor. As Dane Kennedy notes, "Cloaked by claims of 'semi-philanthropic' status, sixteen syndicates circumvented regular procedures to obtain generous land grants." The British East Africa Disabled Officers' Colony (BEADOC) was one of these (discussed later), but the Ex-War Service Federation's populist resentment must be understood in the context of the other large concessions which Northey's soldier settlement scheme enabled. Kennedy, *Islands of White*, 56.

[100] Duder, "The 1919 Soldier Settlement Scheme", 231.

[101] W.S. Bromhead, "The Swedish Scheme," *The East African Standard*, May 15, 1920, 9, from the British Newspaper Archive, accessed July 28, 2026, https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0001838/19200515/044/0009.

[102] TNA: CO 691/22, W.S. Bromhead to Lord Milner, August 15, 1919, 354.

So the Federation also promoted, with Bromhead's fraternalism as its base, a new brand of colonial ethno-populism. Federation Limited proposed that it would establish "a monetary valuation on the essential skill and industry contributed by those actively engaged in [its cooperative] enterprises; such sum to rank for dividend with capital invested as long as they are personally occupied…A man may thus participate both by cash and personal effort or either; and get a dividend on both or either."[103] This system, called "The Economic Valuation of Personality" by Federation Limited and renamed "Human Capitalisation" in Bromhead's later works (Chapter 4) was effectively a claim that white settlers did not need capital to settle in East Africa, and that the basic assumptions which underwrote the white man's country were false. It is no coincidence that Federation Limited fixed the "capitalisation of the vital energy that each individual puts into any concern" at around £1,000 for the average adult and £2,000 for more skilled men. After all, an applicant for a Class B farm was required to have at least £1,000 in capital. According to the largest European veteran's association in East Africa in 1919, every white man was worth at least £1,000 regardless of what was on his bank statement. White settlers did not require capital, they *embodied* capital.

This "economic valuation of personality," and the success of the Ex-War Service Federation in East Africa more generally, both reflects and complicates Brett Shadle's contention that white settlers "were of one soul," such that when settlers disagreed "they did so in a common language" of white supremacy.[104] While Europeans in British East Africa were broadly united by the concept of white supremacy, "supremacy" is a relative term; supremacy means only that someone is superior to someone else. For a man like Lord Delamere, or for any of the colony's big men, it was easy enough to allow their whiteness to be one among many assets in their burgeoning portfolios, its exact value unspecified so long as they were assured that it would appreciate with time. For the many ex-soldiers who saw their opportunity to grab a piece of the frontier evaporate before their eyes in 1919, the *exact* value of their whiteness, down to the last shilling, took on a great significance. At the heart of the matter, beyond all the symbolic formulae and harebrained economics, Bromhead's contention was that whiteness should be a sufficient rather than simply a necessary condition to profit in the white man's country.

The collapse of the Ex-War Service Federation should not be taken to mean that all its ideas were completely rejected by the wider colonial society. As Governor Northey's guarantee of £1,000 to Federation Limited demonstrates, especially early in 1919 the cause of the Ex-War Service Federation was broadly popular and could even attract elite support. Though they were not the only ones lobbying for it, Northey's decision to open the scheme to resident applicants can be partially attributed to the Federation's campaigning. The settler press reported on Bromhead's economic proposals with remarkable credulity, and at least some colonial administrators were comfortable referring prospective applicants directly to Bromhead. The Ex-War Service Federation and its associated movement was not successful, nor was it long-lasting, yet neither was it relegated to the fringes of colonial society. This movement was an early instance of a demand which would reach a boiling point a few years later during the so-called "Indian Crisis" of the early 1920s, where European settlers in East Africa would demand more forcefully than they ever had before that the colony be explicitly reorganized around the

[103] TNA: CO 691/22, "Abridged Prospectus, Business Programme and Policy of Ex-War Service Federation, Limited," 366.
[104] Shadle, *Souls of White Folk*, 18.

reproduction of whiteness itself, above any other economic, national, or imperial interests (Chapter 4).

Indeed, in 1919 the truly fringe figures were those who advocated *against* the expansion of white settlement in the name of African welfare. Missionaries like the Bishop of Zanzibar Frank Weston, who wrote that "Whoever has a just claim to the conquered territory [German East Africa], surely the Africans themselves have!" Because "East Africans are very backward," he argued that it was the responsibility of the colonizer to protect them from rapacious commercial interests both European and Indian.[105] As most settlers raged over the colonial government's ultimate refusal to alienate land from the Kikuyu reserve for more Class A farms, it was more fringe voices like Harry Leakey who criticized "newcomers to the Protecroate like Mr. Bromhead" for "glibly stating that the children of these have at least as much right to the country…as those of the Akikuyu themselves." Leakey even went so far as to mail to the East African Standard a list of forty-seven Kikuyu families residing in the area proposed for closer settlement, and argued that closer settlement at their expense would be a betrayal of Britishness rather than an extension of it: "To thus reward the 'Kukes' for taking a good share in carrying our leads and ammunition in the late campaign, and so helping us to drive out the enemy would, in my opinion, be only worthy of the Huns themselves, and utterly impossible for Britons whose glory all the world over is that *they always keep their pledged word* [emphasis his]."[106] In both instances these men's desired policies were upheld—German East Africa was not included in the soldier settlement scheme and the Kikuyu reserve did not lose land to Class A farms in 1919—yet it was not because of their advocacy. It was instead because the colonial government was constrained either by the mandatory status of German East Africa or by the threat of further African resistance. The principle of benevolent trusteeship they advocated was not popular among most settlers and would only be begrudgingly accepted by them following the crises of the early 1920s and the promulgation of the 1923 Devonshire white paper (Chapter 4).

Conclusion

We can see how reflective the alternate visions for European settlement analyzed here truly were of broader currents in colonial East Africa by considering one final soldier settlement scheme: the British East Africa Disabled Officers' Colony (BEADOC). In December of 1918, just as Bromhead was founding the Ex-War Service Federation in Nairobi, Lieutenant-Colonel Hughes Ridge wrote to the Colonial Office in London with a plan to place "some fifty-five disabled or wounded 'ex-officers and men of the Public school type'" on a parcel of land in East Africa. Amidst the flurry of applications in early 1919 Northey hastily approved BEADOC's application for land and allotted some 25,000 acres near Kericho for the project (including over 4000 acres illegally seized from the Kipsigis reserve). Like the Artists' Rifles scheme BEADOC would be a cooperative ex-officer colony growing flax. Like Bromhead, Hughes was a dilettante with "a none too savoury reputation behind him" and with "little real knowledge of growing flax," who enriched himself with a salary of £1,000 from the common fund before being booted from BEADOC for embezzlement. Like Kitchener's scheme, BEADOC was organized along "quasi-

[105] SOAS: IMC-CBMS/01, Box 2, File C, Frank Weston, "Africa: And the Blight of Commercialism," pp. 1077; 1086.
[106] Harry Leakey, "Kikuyu Reserve," *The East African Standard*, February 15, 1919, 13-14, from the British Newspaper Archive, accessed July 28, 2026, https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0001838/19190215/146/0013.

military lines," and even "regulated its working day by bugle calls."[107] Yet unlike all these other schemes, BEADOC was fully approved, was widely acclaimed throughout colonial society, and even managed to survive a few years before finally collapsing under its debts in 1923. Given all of these similarities we must ask why BEADOC was even attempted when the Swedish scheme, Bromhead's scheme, Kitchener's scheme, and the Artists' Rifles scheme were not?

To answer that question we must draw together each of the themes this chapter has sought to lay out: the role of both economic and cultural speculation in shaping the colony, the inability of European settlers to economically compete with the African peasants upon whom they relied for labor, and the fraught intersection of class, nation, and race which conditioned access to the white man's country. BEADOC was an inherently speculative enterprise, founded as it was on the incorrect assumption that flax would remain at its inflated wartime price. Yet it also perfectly corresponded to what many wanted to imagine when they contemplated soldier settlement, as the BEADOC settlers were practically tailor-made to appeal to the sensibilities of the extant settler population. As disabled veterans their loyalty to the Empire was unquestionable; as officers, suited to command, they would surely be the ideal men to control African labor. Situated in Kericho, far from the railway line, it was easy to see them as pioneers forging a self-sufficient community at the very threshold of civilization. Unlike in the closer settlement schemes discussed above, each BEADOC settler was required to invest £500 into the cooperative company, ensuring that he was not a "man financed by others." They were, in the fawning words of the local press, a "collection of high-brow and horny-handed soldier settlers," living in a colony "where swords are being turned into ploughshares."[108] That is to say, they were men of sufficient capital and class to profitably engage in the supposedly hard work of managing the hard work of others. Unlike the closer settlement schemes BEADOC did not question the role of the white settler as a manager of labor; instead, BEADOC's cooperative structure suggested an equality among managers, setting an example for other settlers to follow.

Indeed, though BEADOC never made any profits from flax production, what little profits the cooperative did earn came from its efforts to replace the labor of Indian settlers in the colony, not African peasants. BEADOC was heavily dependent upon African labor at every turn. C.M. Dobbs, the District Commissioner, was one of the last to know of the scheme and so when the settlers began arriving he scrambled to secure porters to clear the bush for their tents and carry their supplies.[109] Once the settlers were established they relied heavily on skilled Lumbwa labor, and one of the main ways they supplemented their income was by establishing two labor recruitment agencies for other nearby settlers, a task often relegated to Indians.[110] Though they were managers of labor, the smaller scale of BEADOC meant that the settlers worked in closer proximity to Africans than the colony's big men, which presumably gave them an advantage in the labor market. We see this in the reminiscences of some of the BEADOC wives, collected by Marion Watson Dobbs in an unpublished memoir. One, a Mrs. Daly, recalled of her time at BEADOC that "Since I was born racially colour-blind, I got on well with our servants, and

[107] C.J. Duder, "Beadoc—the British East Africa Disabled Officers' Colony and the White Frontier in Kenya," *The Agricultural History Review*, 40, no. 2 (1992), 143-145.
[108] "Upline Notes," *The East African Standard*, September 24, 1921, 15, from the British Newspaper Archive, accessed July 28, 2026, https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0001838/19210924/118/0013; "Kericho Colony," *The East African Standard,* July 31, 1920, 27, from the British Newspaper Archive, accessed July 28, 2026, https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0001838/19200731/208/0027.
[109] Bodleian: Mss. Afr. s. 504., Marion Watson Dobbs, *Recollections of Kenya,* Manuscript, 131.
[110] Duder, "Beadoc," 147.

treated them as I would have treated white servants if I ever had any. And the Boys liked me, I think."[111] Even allowing for some nostalgia, very few European settlers in East Africa would have ever thought it sane—let alone laudable—to claim any sort of racial colorblindness, nor to suppose that African servants ought to be treated the same as European ones.

Yet BEADOC sought to capitalize on this perceived familiarity with local Africans by usurping yet another traditionally Indian role in the colony: that of the dukkawallah, or shopkeeper. Just as European settlers struggled to compete with African peasants in the domestic agricultural market, so too did they struggle to compete with Indian merchants in the import and retail trades. Dukkawallahs, particularly those in upcountry locations like Kericho, often lived in their shops, traded at small margins in produce and imported goods, and supplemented their income as moneylenders. These dukkas enabled many Africans on the reserves to pay their hut and poll taxes as they were some of the only places they could exchange their produce for cash, making them an intimate "intermediate space between their homesteads and the colonial state."[112] In 1921, as the 'Indian question' raged in the colony, BEADOC opened the first "European duka" in Lumbwa township, explicitly with the intention of "[cutting] out the Indians in European and native trade" and "[putting] a Roman Candle under the Indian question locally."[113] Whereas Bromhead's insistence that white men ought to work the land lest they become "parasites" was seen as impossible, the BEADOC dukka was a more acceptable expansion of the purview of whiteness in the colony because it maintained the link between whiteness and capital. Perhaps white men could be petty capitalists in the white man's country, so long as they remained capitalists.

Yet this too was unsuccessful, as a European dukka was incapable of filling the same intermediate socio-economic niche as an Indian dukka. As Sana Aiyar observed, Indian dukkas were "intimate spaces" characterized by constant negotiation and verbal bargaining rather than fixed prices. Though the relationship between African peasants and Indian dukkawallahs was often antagonistic and dishonest business practices were common, each relied on the other for survival.[114] The BEADOC dukka, constrained as it was by the colonial racial hierarchy, could not sustain the sort of negotiated intimacy which sustained the East African retail trade. A month after the BEADOC dukka opened, The East African Standard reported:

> They say they are losing on the native trade because the Lumbwa shopper, after long years of suffering from mathematical struggles at the Indian counter, cannot get into his savage mind the fact that an hour's chiffering over a fifty-cent purchase is not *de regle* at a Msungu shop. When the Beadocs' goods are marked down well below the Indians', the native still believes that room is left for cutting the price again to half. When he pretends to walk away in disgust he gets an agonizing pain in his intellect on failing to find the Beadocs run after him, as the Indian would, and burst into tears on his breast, and lead him back to the sacrifice.[115]

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[111] Bodleian: Mss. Afr. s. 504., Dobbs, *Recollections of Kenya,* 131.
[112] Aiyar, *Indians in Kenya*, 76.
[113] "Upline Notes," *The East African Standard*, September 24, 1921, 15.
[114] Aiyar, *Indians in Kenya*, 75-76.
[115] "An Upline Letter," *The East African Standard*, October 15, 1921, 25, from the British Newspaper Archive, accessed July 28, 2026, https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0001838/19211015/211/0025.

Just as it was felt that a white man engaging in strenuous manual labor would diminish his prestige, so too was it felt that a white man bargaining with an African would disrupt the colony's racial hierarchy. The colonial labor regime was designed expressly to prevent Africans from negotiating with their colonizers in any way, yet negotiation and bargaining were what made the dukka viable at all. Even if European settlers liked to imagine a world where they could supplant Indian petty capitalists in the retail trade, actually doing so would require a reconceptualization of the place of white settlers in the white man's country; it would require that the *mzungu* consent to "an hour's chiffering" and somehow remain *mzungu*.

Though they were rarely intended to do so, the flurry of closer settlement schemes which proliferated in British East Africa in this period often radically questioned the boundaries of belonging in the white man's country. The colony's racialized labor regime produced two mutually exclusive incentives. Materially, it required that the white settler population be kept small and wealthy to minimize competition over African labor and enable a regime of socially enforced wage fixing. Yet culturally, it required that the vast majority of people the colony was purportedly meant to profit (i.e. white Britons) be kept out of the colony, no matter how deserving they were. It required that much of the hewing of wood and drawing of water traditionally associated with pioneering a new land be done by African laborers and squatters. Thus any attempt to more closely settle the colony was also, paradoxically, an attempt to redefine the colony. Soldier settlement, despite being a deeply conservative idea motivated by the desire to fashion out of Britain's veterans a new cohort of colonial yeomen, nevertheless poured gasoline on a raging debate over what precise ratio of class, nationality, and race was necessary to merit a place in the white man's country. Though the 1919 Ex-Soldier Settlement Scheme itself was ultimately calibrated to avoid rather than answer these questions, its many imagined alternatives reveal how little agreement there truly was over the purpose of British colonialism in East Africa and whom it was meant to benefit. British East Africa's unique position within the Empire made it a lightning rod for these irresolvable tensions, and a laboratory where administrators, colonists, and prospective colonists alike sought to imagine their own solutions to settler colonialism's animating paradoxes. As soldier settlement wound down and British East Africa entered the interwar years, both the labor crisis and the unresolved questions over the true role of race in the colony would reach a boiling point. The resulting conflagration would force yet another new crop of schemes, as the colony's concessionary model of development was hastily laundered to suit a new era.

Chapter 4

"If I could only get within range of you I would blow your brains out and throw you to the lions!" Crisis, Laundering, and Dissimulated Development in Colonial Kenya, 1919-1939

> Therefore I lie with her and she with me,
>
> And in our faults by lies we flattered be.
>
> --William Shakespeare, *Sonnet 138*.

> No roads, no water, no electricity. They're selling an invisible lake. Y'know, and that ain't all. Out there where there's nothing but sand and jackrabbits, this guy tried to sell me a boat!
>
> --Joseph "Rocky" Rockford, *The Rockford Files.*

On January 6, 1930, Lieut. Col. James Scott was having a rather bad day. In fact, to hear him tell it he'd been having a rather bad decade. During the Great War, while stationed in Egypt, he'd learned via a pamphlet from the Overseas Settlement Office about Kenya's Ex-Soldier Settlement Scheme. He'd excitedly attended meetings with other soldiers to learn more, and when the time came he eagerly applied for his own parcel of land: Farm L.O.No.2888 (Cat.No.882 B). Yet like many soldier settlers, Scott's stint in Kenya would prove an unhappy and an unprofitable one. His farm was poorly surveyed and poorly irrigated; his cattle died *en masse* from rinderpest; a fire damaged his property; he quickly racked up several thousand shillings in back taxes and over six thousand pounds more in debt. Facing the repossession of his farm he eventually fled to Edinburgh, whereat the colonial government in Kenya sought to compel him to pay his back taxes lest his farm be repossessed. This would prove to be a mistake.

What followed was a yearslong onslaught of epistolary abuse which not only showcased Scott's prodigious talent for invective, but also how colonial Kenya had become a metonym for the Empire's instability.[1] Every letter from the colonial government seeking the repayment of Scott's debts would be met with several letters from Scott, wherein he would allege that the entire scheme had been a "most gigantic swindle." Scott's crushing debts were "your plan from the beginning" for "you saw that you would never lose even though your victims should be ruined and that their ruin would pay you better than if they succeeded." The commissioner of

[1] Many of Scott's letters to the colonial government can be found at the Kenya National Archives: BN/15/3. The earliest in the file is from 1927 and the latest is dated 1931, yet Scott's letters indicate that these exchanges had been ongoing since at least 1924. And Scott's talents for invective were remarkable indeed! One of his letters even provided me with the title or this chapter: "[…] I for my part place no higher value upon you than that of food for lions. I have not one grain of mercy for you nor would I give you quarters. <u>If I could only get within range of you I would blow your brains out and throw you to the lions,</u> what were you thinking when you concocted such a fraud?" Few men more thoroughly embody the sense of embittered, conspiratorial rage which animated the politics of so many white settlers in Kenya.

lands, beyond being a "damned, infernal, cursed, inhuman monster" who had conspired to murder Scott's cattle using "vaccines…of too high a virulence," was also "like the promotor of a bogus company." Yet on January 6, 1930, Scott would deliver his *coup de grâce*. His losses represented far more than the suffering of a single British subject. Instead, Scott's tribulations reflected the precarious state of the Empire itself:

> In 1924 I wrote you stating that you were creating a revolution which is going to break out with a magnitude and a force that no powers will stop. It will run its course and many thousands of guilty and innocent people too will be put to death. Since 1924 you have heard of the outrages in the Parliament of India, the attempt on the life of the Viceroy; the revolution in Egypt with the loss of that most valuable possession, and recently the massacres of innocent people in Palestine. Every one of those sad events has been brought about by the injustices of Government officials. They are only the reflex actions of corrupt stimuli—Nature's revolts. Within the next ten years you are to hear of greater revolts with more serious consequences. Far clouds are being formed in many parts of the world, every one pointing towards Britain…Your selfish ends and the money that you have procured by dishonest means, your life of luxury and ease have corrupted your brains so much that you cannot see a consequence of your actions.[2]

Ironically, Scott's prophecy here actually understated the case. Ten years to the date after he penned this letter Britain would be a participant in the largest conflict in human history, one where many millions of "guilty and innocent people" were put to death, and one which its Empire, ultimately, could not survive.

Scott's letters reveal more than the personal crisis of a single settler. His fears of bogus companies in league with corrupt bureaucrats, of revolutions in Palestine, Egypt, and India, and even his incandescent rage all reflect how interwar Kenya had become an epicenter of imperial crisis. Following World War I Kenya entered a sustained period of instability which would last until the start of World War II. It would witness labor unrest in the form of Harry Thuku's mass movement against the *kipande*, and a crisis over the political status of Indians which nearly sparked a coup by hardline white settlers. There were crises at the imperial level as well, whether the humanitarian outcry in Britain over Governor Northey's labor circular of 1919, or the agitation of the Indian nationalist movement for greater rights for British Indians living abroad. On top of all this the settler economy, which "had never really learnt to stand on its own feet…called for constant government subsides and received attention out of proportion to its productivity," would suffer the shock of two depressions.[3] As one missionary lamented, "Nor will the Ship of State necessarily reach a safe haven if a wise course is steered between a white Scylla and the black Charybdis, for a dark wave of racial feeling has swept across the Indian Ocean and threatens fresh calamity in Kenia colony."[4] The "far clouds" Scott warned about—

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[2] KNA: BN 15/3, Document 24a., James Scott to The Commissioner for Local Government, Lands and Settlement, January 6, 1930.
[3] Tabitha Kanogo, "Kenya and the depression, 1929-1939" in *A Modern History of Kenya*, ed. W.R. Ochieng (Evans Brothers, 1989), 115; Robert Maxon, "The years of revolutionary advance, 1920-1929" in *A Modern History of Kenya*, ed. W.R. Ochieng (Evans Brothers, 1989), 79.
[4] SOAS: IMC-CBMS/01, Box 247, File A, H.D. Hooper to J.H. Oldham, "Summary of the Situation in Kenya Colony with Reference to the Future of Missionary Work," December 12 1920, 4.

administrative mismanagement, corruption, racial violence, anticolonial resistance—were indeed billowing towards Britain, yet they would find in Kenya a lightning rod.

The crises of the interwar, the status of Kenyan land as a metonym for imperial citizenship, and the shift from a Chamberlainite towards a Lugardian doctrine of development forced yet another reconfiguration of colonial Kenya's concessionary model of claim making through settlement schemes. Specifically, during this period settlement schemes in Kenya underwent a process I have dubbed 'laundering.' By 'laundering' I am referring to two intertwined processes. First, that settlement boosters now needed to plausibly dissimulate the cultural, racial, or political stakes at the heart of their settlement schemes to convince policymakers that these schemes would not ignite further crises; prewar boosters tended to wear these stakes on their sleeves as a way of pressuring policymakers, sometimes even manufacturing a crisis if their scheme was not granted. Second, that both imperial policymakers and settlement boosters now needed to obfuscate any continued material support for closer settlement, whereas in prewar settlement schemes these subsidies would just have been requested/disbursed openly.

Thus 'laundering,' as I use it here, is both a rhetorical and an institutional practice of dissimulation. It encompasses both the efforts of closer settlement boosters to dissimulate the political, cultural, and racial stakes of their schemes, and of imperial policymakers to dissimulate the material support they begrudgingly provided for a project many were coming to view as antithetical to proper colonial development. This ambiguity is deliberate; laundering was not one thing because development was not one thing. The modern language of development, at least as it manifested in interwar Kenya, was so protean because the colony—and the Empire—had become so precarious. It came to encompass a wide variety of controversial, even conflicting claims in ways that appeared technical or apolitical. As Cowen and Shenton remind us, "an intention to develop becomes a doctrine of development when it is attached, or when it is pleaded that it be attached, to the agency of the state to become an expression of state policy."[5] During the interwar the gulf widened between those policymakers holding the purse strings and those doing the 'pleading,' such that even if their intentions were largely the same as in years prior (to convince the state to subsidize further settlement in East Africa), they now had to learn to plead differently if they were to stand a chance of having their intentions be realized through the agency of the state.

This chapter will proceed in three parts. In the first, I will provide brief historiographic sketches of interwar colonial development policy and of imperial citizenship as they relate to East Africa. Then I will trace how two intertwined crises which roiled Kenya from 1919-1923—the "Indian question" and Harry Thuku's anti-*kipande* movement—effectively ensured that decisions made about Kenya were now globally recognized as *imperial* decisions and therefore reflected upon the Empire as a whole rather than simply upon one insignificant colony. Thus, any subsequent settlement scheme would need to be calibrated to avoid controversy. In the second part I will juxtapose the failure of schemes which did not sufficiently launder themselves with those savvy enough to present themselves as developmental or apolitical. In the third part I will analyze the Plough Settlements Association Limited as the ultimate example of a laundered settlement scheme, as it managed to successfully settle Jewish refugees with minimal capital in

[5] M.P. Cowen and R.W. Shenton, *Doctrines of Development* (Routledge, 1996), VIII.

Kenya without exciting anything near the controversy and fury of the colony's earlier Zionist settlement scheme (Chapter 2).

Taken together, all these schemes demonstrate that despite the shortage of capital, land, and political will colonial Kenya remained rooted in speculative schemes and concessionaire development. Yet the crises of the interwar required that what had once been said openly now be said quietly. What would in time be accepted as "development" stemmed, in Kenya, from a constellation of speculators and would-be concessionaires grasping for new words to articulate old intentions. Capital, land, people, and ideas alike would all need to be laundered to avoid disturbing a precarious status quo which depended on the colony's boundaries, hierarchies, and purpose remaining essentially undefined.

"Know When to Hold 'Em:" The Devonshire White Paper and the Laundering of Crisis

In an undated and incomplete draft of private correspondence Robert Coryndon, then governor of Kenya, compared the colony's simmering political crisis over its so-called "Indian Question" to a poker game.[6] More specifically, Coryndon compared himself to a Californian sheriff in the 1880s who was able to "[hold] down his rather hazardous official position amongst a turbulent community" because he treated both politics and poker as games of skill. Yet one rule Coryndon's sheriff never veered from was that "If the pool was worth winning before the draw and holding a strong original hand himself, he never hesitated in his attempt to prevent others drawing cards […] by lumping in the heaviest stake at his disposal." In other words: if the pot was big enough, one ought to try and bluff their opponents into folding as quickly as possible. This sort of bluffing may be "crude" Coryndon conceded, yet "in those days, his was a crude country and primitive methods wholly admirable." Coryndon, now finding himself in charge of another "crude" country, decided to apply the same strategy as his Californian sheriff. First he took stock of the other players at the table: "(1) White Kenya (2) The local Indian (3) The foreign Indian (4) the Colonial Office and (5) the Indian office." Then he cast his eyes towards the pot, whereupon he concluded: "The pool is Kenya, Empire, and Western civilization in Africa."[7] Given the stakes then, it stood to follow that there was about to be a lot of bluffing at the table. From the construction of the railway through World War I colonial Kenya's concessionaire model of development produced a chaotic scramble, as prospective pioneers tripped over each other to stake their claims even before the gunsmoke of conquest had cleared. Yet following the war the scramble had transformed into a tense poker game. What had changed?

One factor behind this last reconfiguration of Kenya's model of claim making via settlement schemes is the shift from a Chamberlainite to a Lugardian doctrine of development which, though it was neither discrete nor uniform, amounted to a grave intellectual challenge for

[6] The titles of each of the subsections in this chapter are adapted from the chorus of an American country western standard titled "The Gambler." Written by Don Schlitz and most famously recorded by Kenny Rogers, the song is a ballad wherein a wizened, failed gambler offers life advice to a young stranger he meets at a bar. The chorus runs: "You got to know when to hold 'em / Know when to fold 'em / Know when to walk away / And know when to run. / You never count your money / When you're sitting at the table / There'll be time enough for counting / When the dealing's done." Though it is unlikely Don Schlitz penned this song with interwar Kenya's precariously speculative political economy in mind, I felt the song's chorus spoke thematically to the actions of closer settlement boosters and policymakers alike in the colony. Kenny Rogers, "The Gambler." Track 1 on *The Gambler.* United Artists, 1978.
[7] Bodleian: MSS Afr. s. 633, 3/2, Robert Coryndon, pp. 14-15.

the policy of settlement-as-development.[8] Settlers were initially brought into East Africa to 'develop' the colony during a period when development was understood as something separate from, rather than constitutive of, human welfare.[9] Chamberlain had famously likened the British Empire to a negligent landlord for failing to develop its "great estate" around the world, an agrarian metaphor which nevertheless justified substantial investments in large infrastructure projects (such as the Uganda Railway), violent mobilizations of colonized labor (Kenya's M&S laws and regime of corvée labor), and state concessions to speculative private capital. African rights and welfare were necessary sacrifices because whatever trustee obligation Britain may have had towards them it did not extend to any imagining of colonized Africans as material beneficiaries of the development process.[10] Yet following the South African War many had come to associate Chamberlain's interventionist approach to colonial development with greed, mismanagement, a corrupt marriage between speculative capital and the state, costly punitive expeditions, amateurish colonial officials, and boondoggle public works projects.[11]

More appealing then was the dual mandate expounded by Frederick Lugard and embraced by the League of Nations and liberal reformers. Africans would still need to be 'guided' by expert Europeans towards greater productivity in service of metropolitan economies. Yet the desiderata of that guidance gradually shifted to encompass education, health, sanitation, and even African land ownership as part of what Joseph Hodge called the post-World War I discovery of the "'human side' of colonial development…The development of the empire's human resources, especially through the extension of state responsibilities for health and education in rural areas, came to be seen as integral and even prerequisite for its material development."[12] This shift would not be fully realized until after 1945, when Britain's colonies were subjected to a "second colonial occupation" by technocratic development experts alongside metropolitan and American capital.[13]

So, between 1919-1939, Kenya existed in a liminal stage between the more pro-settler Chamberlainite doctrine of development which had given rise to the 1919 Ex-Soldier Settlement Scheme (Chapters 2 & 3), and the post-1945 doctrine characterized by technocratic state interventions to stimulate rural African production for metropolitan consumption as a fulfillment

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[8] The literature on development is vast, and by referring to these two doctrines as "Chamberlainite" and "Lugardian" I am simplifying them for the purpose of legibility. For more thorough accounts on the intellectual history of colonial development, and the shift between these two doctrines, see Michael Havinden and David Meredit, *Colonialism and Development: Britain and its Tropical Colonies, 1850-1960* (Routledge, 1993); Anne Phillips, *The Enigma of Colonialism: British Policy in West Africa* (J. Currey, 1989); H.W. Arndt, *Economic Development: the History of an Idea* (University of Chicago Press, 1987); Cowen and Shenton, *Doctrines of Development*.

[9] Frederick Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society: The Labor Question in French and British Africa* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), 67.

[10] Chamberlain once admitted "you cannot make omelettes without breaking eggs. You cannot exercise control over barbarous countries, which previous to your arrival have been in a state of constant anarchy and disorder, without occasionally coming into conflict with their savage rulers and having to shed some blood." Joseph Hodge, *Triumph of the Expert: Agrarian Doctrines of Development and the Legacies of British Colonialism* (Ohio University Press, 2007), 46-47.

[11] Hodge, *Triumph of the Expert*, 50**;** Cowen and Shenton, *Doctrines of Development*, 277. Importantly, this shift of colonial development policy in East Africa to encompass human welfare was both the result of an intellectual dissatisfaction among policymakers with the failures of Chamberlainite development and of extensive negotiations between the Colonial Office and the Treasury. For a thorough account of these negotiations as they pertain to East Africa, see Stephen Constantine, *The Making of British Colonial Development Policy, 1914-1940* (F. Cass, 1984).

[12] Hodge, *Triumph of the Expert*, 118.

[13] Hodge, *Triumph of the Expert*, 209.

of the dual mandate.[14] Yet crucially, these developments took place amidst the fallout of soldier settlement, which not only significantly increased the scale of white settlerdom but did so by distributing the land among an amateur population disposed towards violence. The ascent of a doctrine of development premised on the authority of technocratic experts and African agricultural production was, itself, a crisis for a settler plantation economy founded on the unquestionable authority of the settler "master" over African "servants." Thus, to keep their place at the table settlement boosters would increasingly need to bluff in a way they hadn't when the project of settlement was more aligned with the prevailing doctrine of development. Now settlement boosters either had to claim that the subsidized importation of even more settlers reliant on African labor would paradoxically foster the development of independent African production or, more feasibly, launder their settlement scheme to at least appear nonthreatening to that goal.

And yet, however poorly continued support for closer white settlement fit into the dual mandate, to admit as much publicly would be dangerous. Take for instance the reaction among Colonial Office officials in London to a scheme advanced by one Major Cawthorn, an officer of the Punjab Regiment, that retiring officers from India with at least £1,000 of capital be granted free farms in the colony. Though Cawthorn's scheme was supported by the colonial government and white settlers, the Colonial Office was privately livid:

> I am sorry that the mildest thing that I can say about this proposal is that it is sheer lunacy. The economics of the business have simply not been considered at all. Everything that I have been able to find out about Kinya [sic] over the last two or three years goes to show that most of the settlers now there are all doomed to bankruptcy + we are asked to help, help! more people without experience + without capital to swell the existing confusion.[15]

Another official commenting on Cawthorn's scheme noted that, though farming in Kenya was "a fluky business," nevertheless, "The settlers are in favour of this kind of thing (1) because it shows that Kenya is regarded as a white man's country, (2) because more settlers mean more political weight, and (3) because of the money which the new arrivals will spend in the country. I do not regard any of these points as strong arguments for the scheme but they make it undesirable to turn it down."[16] To publicly disavow closer settlement would be as suicidal as it would be to publicly embrace it.[17] To disavow closer settlement would be to admit that there was

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[14] This shift in development doctrines was driven by an emerging class of colonial development 'experts' whose authority and ethos contrasted sharply with the amateurish conservatism of Kenya's white settler class. See Hodge, *Triumph of the Expert*; Helen Tilley, *Africa as a Living Laboratory: Empire, Development, and the Problem of Scientific Knowledge 1870-1950* (University of Chicago Press, 2011); Timothy Mitchell, *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity* (University of California Press, 2002).

[15] TNA: CO 533/461/17, 1a., December 12, 1935, p. 5.

[16] TNA: CO 533/461/17, 1a., December 6, 1935, p. 4.

[17] The commentary of bureaucrats in the Colonial Office and the Treasury is suffused with a sense of palpable helplessness on the matter of closer settlement. Phrases like "This is a very bad time to raise this issue" and "We cannot refuse altogether" are illustrative. One case surrounding the allocation of funds from the Oversea Settlement Department for a nurses hostel in Nairobi produced a phrase which aptly summarizes the Colonial Office's view on closer settlement in Kenya during the interwar years writ large: "In all circumstances the case seems now to have gone rather beyond the stage when it can be considered solely upon its merits." TNA: CO 533/398/6, 5a., "States as to Schemes B and C and as to position of grantees", May 9, 1930; CO 533/386/2, 10, H.T. Allen to Colonial Office, August 31, 1929, 57.

a fixed, low cap on the number of white men the "white man's country" could support. Yet to embrace closer settlement would require throwing even more public money to the precarious settler class, to annexing even more African land from the reserves, and to committing to putting down the widespread resistance which was sure to follow. For the cash-strapped, war-weary British Empire, neither option was acceptable.

The second motivating undercurrent for this interwar reconfiguration of Kenyan settlement schemes was that Kenya had become the stage for a battle between mutually incompatible conceptions of British imperial citizenship. Like development, the concept of 'imperial citizenship' has always been protean. Sometimes rooted in a universalist claim of human rights, sometimes in a more particular claim rooted in "service, education, and civic self-fashioning," sometimes in an appeal to the shared bonds of whiteness. Throughout the Empire those who advanced claims of imperial citizenship were engaged in a narrative process designed to "provide a social and political contract between the subjects of Empire" and in so doing fashion "more concrete bonds to ensure that the Empire could resist dissolution."[18] Thus claims to imperial citizenship were simultaneously claims upon some version of full belonging within the Empire and demands for some sort of mutual obligation between citizens and the Empire itself.

In interwar Kenya, the friction between Indian settlers' and white settlers' claims to imperial citizenship escalated to a crisis because they were, both intellectually and materially, irreconcilable. White settlers in East Africa had come to fully embrace an ethnic conception of citizenship, a shift which reflected the Anglo world more broadly during the first third of the twentieth century.[19] Jan Smuts's vision of imperial citizenship, as described by Bill Schwarz, rested on "the idea of the citizen as 'an ethnic', such that the citizen came to public life with a pregiven set of dispositions which derived from his or her unspoken allegiance to the way of life bequeathed by a history ordained by providence. This coupling together of citizenship and ethnicity was perhaps the most powerful single feature of democratic theory in Britain at the time, in the 1920s and 1930s, when mass democracy stabilized."[20]

Yet in Kenya's white settler community such an ethnic conception of imperial citizenship had roots stretching back to the opening of the frontier, because it had justified white settlers' pride of place in the colony's political economy. It enabled prospective concessionaires like Robert Chamberlain to pressure imperial policymakers into granting him free land on the grounds that he was "one of the pioneer settlers in British East Africa" rather than "a Hebrew financier" (Chapter 2). It was the foundation for demands that the colonial government solidify white settler dominance over African labor. For in the words of Elspeth Huxley, "the

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[18] Sukanya Banerjee, *Becoming Imperial Citizens: Indians in the Late-Victorian Empire* (Duke University Press, 2010), 18; Daniel Gorman, *Imperial Citizenship: Empire and the Question of Belonging* (Manchester University Press, 2006), 206.

[19] For more on white settler identity in Kenya, see Dane Kennedy, *Islands of White: Settler Society and Culture in Kenya and Southern Rhodesia, 1890-1939* (Duke University Press, 1987); Brett Shadle, *The Souls of White Folk: White Settlers in Kenya, 1900s-1920s* (Manchester University Press, 2015). For more on the wider shift throughout the Anglo world towards ethnic conceptions of citizenship, see Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men's Countries and the International Challenge of Racial Equality* (Cambridge University Press, 2008); Duncan Bell, *The Idea of Greater Britain: Empire and the Future of World Order, 1860-1900* (Princeton University Press, 2007); Duncan Bell, *Dreamworlds of Race: Empire and the Utopian Destiny of Anglo-America* (Princeton University Press, 2020).

[20] Bill Schwarz, *Memories of Empire: The White Man's World*, vol. 1 (Oxford University Press, 2011), 315.

Government had a certain obligation to the European farmer…They admitted their obligation to provide him with land. But land was no good without labour. They had, therefore, an obligation to help him to obtain native workmen…to urge the natives out to work."[21] It justified the 1919 Ex-Soldier Settlement Scheme, which embraced the precedent of granting land in East Africa to white men as a reward for their service to the Empire (Chapter 3). Thus, the ideal of imperial citizenship which united East Africa's white settlers was materially rooted in a monopoly over finite resources: African land and labor.[22]

Conversely, Indian subjects throughout the diaspora had long advanced more civic claims upon imperial citizenship rooted in service and loyalty to the Empire, claims which had been frustrated for decades in both the crown colonies and the white dominions. Racialized immigration restrictions, urban segregation, and the condition of Indian indentured laborers each confirmed the unequal status of Indian subjects throughout the Empire regardless of their loyalties or embodiment of Victorian ideas of 'character.'[23] Yet as Sukanya Banerjee's work on Indian imperial citizenship reminds us, "when Indians were purportedly denied citizenship, it was not a legally defined code of citizenship that they were deprived of, or desired. Rather, it was the *potential* of their position as subjects that was at stake," a potential which, in Kenya, was reflected by access to land and the ability to elect Indian representatives to the colony's quasi-government bodies on the same grounds as white subjects.[24] As one protest memo from the East African Indian National Congress argued, reserving the highlands for white settlers "would be to set a precedent of preferential treatment for one class of His Majesty's subjects, which openly violates the first principles of equality of treatment which the Imperial Government is solemnly pledged to preserve…Could anything be a greater outrage upon the rights of British citizenship which Indians are supposed to enjoy?"[25] So, Indian demands for imperial citizenship and white demands for imperial citizenship—even as they reflected fundamentally different understandings of the term—had become staked to the same thing: land in Kenya.[26]

Between 1919 and 1923 these competing visions of colonial development and imperial citizenship would, when combined with the destabilizing pressures of economic depression and anticolonial resistance, explode in a crisis which would fix the eyes of the Empire on Kenya and thus complicate any subsequent attempts to make a claim on it through settlement schemes. What came to be called the colony's "Indian Question" was bound up in much wider Indian Ocean, imperial, and global contexts. Protests against racial discrimination in Kenya "were heard on the

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[21] Elspeth Huxley, *White Man's Country: Lord Delamere and the Making of Kenya* (Praeger, 1968), 215.

[22] The paradoxical expectation that the colonial state simultaneously act as a trustee of African interests and also the guarantor of white capitalists' dominance in the labor market is the focus of Bruce Berman and John Lonsdale, *Unhapy Valley: Conflict in Kenya & Africa* (J. Currey, 1992).

[23] For a global account on how the conflict between Indian conceptions of imperial citizenship and white supremacist conceptions of imperial citizenship came to focus on immigration restrictions, see David Atkinson, *The Burden of White Supremacy: Containing Asian Migration in the British Empire and the United States* (University of North Carolina Press, 2017).

[24] Banerjee, *Becoming Imperial Citizens*, 5.

[25] KNA: MAC EAI 29/7, 1923, "Memorandum submitted to the Right Honourable Stanley Baldwin, Prime Minister on 18th July 1923 by the Indian Delegation to London", 4.

[26] Though I have argued that colonial Kenya held a unique place in the larger British Empire as the hinge between its South African, Indian/Western Indian Ocean, and metropolitan spheres, it remains but one example in a long chain of settler colonies where, in the words of Brenna Bhandar, "property ownership was central to the formation of the proper legal subject in the political sphere." Brenna Bhandar, *Colonial Lives of Property: Law, Land, and Racial Regimes of Ownership* (Duke University Press, 2018), 4.

streets of Bombay and Allahabad," as East Africa became a front in the larger noncooperation movement.[27] Similarly, the demand for a "white man's country," like the Indian demands it sought to vanquish, was both local and extraterritorial. The East African Standard warned that "The problems of Kenya to-day, will be the problems of the Union to-morrow, or at least the problems of a United States of British Africa, all inter-dependent one upon the other."[28] Both the Indian and European settlers in East Africa understood themselves as representatives of far larger camps.

Yet the "Indian Question" quickly became inextricably bound up with the colony's longstanding labor crisis, and thus with the ongoing debate over what role settlers would play in colonial development. During the war the army's need of men for the dreaded Carrier Corps led to mass conscription of Africans through armed raids.[29] The Carrier Corps set a dark precedent, such that by the war's end "Europeans were now hoping to secure both a permanent supply of conscripted civil labour and also a formal recognition from Britain that Kenya was a white man's country."[30] To that end, the close of the war saw several controversial interventions to further institutionalize the dominance of European employers in the labor market. The most controversial of these in Britain itself was Governor Northey's "labour circular" which amounted to an official endorsement of forced labor for African women and children.[31] This galvanized a protest by British humanitarians and missionaries, spearheaded by the Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society (ASAPS), and helped to establish Kenya as a lightning rod of controversy.[32]

And within Kenya itself, the attempt to secure white settler dominance over the labor market was met with widespread African resistance in the form of Harry Thuku's East Africa Association (EAA). The EAA represented a unique phenomenon in colonial Kenya: though predominately Kikuyu, it was a genuinely pan-ethnic grassroots movement against the racialized labor hierarchy. It was not long before the organizers of the EAA and newly militant Indian political leaders began to cooperate against their common enemy.[33] The EAA's mass meetings

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[27] Sana Aiyar, *Indians in Kenya: The Politics of Diaspora* (Harvard University Press, 2015), 72.
[28] "BE PREPARED: Kenya Must Remain a European Stronghold," *The East African Standard,* January 13, 1923, from the British Newspaper Archive, accessed July 28, 2026, https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/BL/0001838/19230113/438/0031?browse=true. See also "Indian Bogey and African Peril," *The Outlook,* May 12, 1923, 380.
[29] "In the more populous districts of Kenya, Kenia and Ukambani Provinces, approximately 50 to 70 percent of the able-bodied adult males in the population were conscripted." Opolot Okia, *Communal Labor in Colonial Kenya the Legitimization of Coercion, 1912-1930* (Palgrave MacMillan US, 2012), 58.
[30] Donald C. Savage and J. Forbes Munro, "Carrier Corps Recruitment in the British East Africa Protectorate 1914-1918," *The Journal of African History,* vol. 7 no. 2 (1996), 336.
[31] "Labour Circular No. 1, October 23, 1919. (First of the "Northey Circulars")" in G.H. Mungeam, *Kenya, Select Historical Documents* (East African Publishing House, 1979), 394. In truth this was little more than an explicit reaffirmation of a longstanding policy, as many colonial administrators had already been acting as labor recruiters for private. "Northey's mistake in regard to the infamous labor circular would be his decision to publish it in the *Government Gazette* and not to inform the Colonial Office of his actions." Opolot Okia, "The Northey Forced Labor Crisis, 1920-1921: A Symptomatic Reading," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies,* vol. 41 no. 2 (2008), 275.
[32] Robert Maxon, *Struggle for Kenya: The Loss and Reassertion of Imperial Initiative, 1912-1923*, (Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 1993), 157.
[33] "Codlin's the Friend' Who Inspired the Native Resolutions?" *The East African Standard,* July 23, 1921, 14, from the British Newspaper Archive, accessed July 28, 2026,

and its vocal cooperation with the colony's Indian community ultimately led to Thuku's arrest on March 10, 1922. Yet the Colonial Office had underestimated the strength of Thuku's movement. There was a strike from the street sweepers, and over 7,000 people gathered outside the police station to demand his release. When this failed, a group of women led by Mary Muthoni Nyanjiru exhorted the crowd not to disperse, with Mary purportedly pulling up her dress and shouting "You take my dress and give me your trousers. You men are cowards. What are you waiting for? Our leader is in there. Let's get him." Mary was the first to die. When the police opened fire sixteen men and two women were killed, twenty-two men and nine women were injured, and Kenya had its own Jallianwallah Bagh massacre.[34] White settlers had insisted that the Empire owed them exclusive control over both the highlands and the colonial labor market; the massacre of Thuku's supporters and the Northey forced labor scandal revealed to the world the bloody cost of this vision of imperial citizenship and colonial development.

Ultimately, Kenya's white settlers were only able to prevent a public disavowal of their status by threatening a coup. In response to the Wood-Winterton proposals, which allowed for some concessions to Indians on electoral representation and the elimination of racial segregation in townships, there was a wave of white mass meetings throughout the colony, and their rhetoric grew increasingly intransigent and violent.[35] At one of the mass meetings in Eldoret, settlers unanimously resolved "to resist by every means in our power, including armed force in the last resort, the enactment or operation of any legislation" which might open the door to greater Indian rights in the colony.[36] The settlers also began to organize militarily, forming militias, and stockpiling ammunition.[37] In February 1923 the Convention of Associations passed an even stronger resolution, reaffirming their loyalty to the crown yet warning that settlers were contemplating actions "prejudicial to His Majesty's peace and abhorrent and ruinous to themselves."[38] The resolution had been adapted from the Ulster Covenant, a similarity noted by Hooper when he warned a friend, "I'm dreading a little Ireland in Africa."[39]

Now the imperial government had been backed into a corner and could no longer consider Kenya in isolation. Decisions made about Kenya were now globally recognized as *imperial* decisions, and therefore reflected upon the Empire as a whole rather than simply upon one insignificant colony. Shams-ud-Deen, an Indian political leader in the colony, asked "If you treat us (British Indian subjects) as you are doing within the British Empire what will our position be and how will the world look upon us in other countries?"[40] Coryndon told his superiors "I am desperately anxious to maintain a sane view, to hold the scales, to effect an agreement and to avoid the deluge. That deluge would be very harmful to what I've heard

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https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0001838/19210723/117/0014; Harry Thuku and Kenneth King, *Harry Thuku: An Autobiography*, (Oxford University Press, 1970), 23; Aiyar, *Indians in Kenya*, 93.

[34] Audrey Wipper, "Kikuyu Women and the Harry Thuku Disturbances: Some Uniformities of Female Militancy" *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute,* 59, no. 3 (1989), 315. For comparison to the Jallianwallah Bagh massacre see Aiyar, *Indians in Kenya*, 100.

[35] "BE PREPARED: Kenya Must Remain a European Stronghold," *The East African Standard,* January 13, 1923.

[36] Bodleian: MSS. Afr. s. Box 633, "The Indian Question During the Governorship of Sir Robert Coryndon," p. 11

[37] Christopher P. Youe, "The Threat of Settler Rebellion and the Imperial Predicament: The Denial of Indian Rights in Kenya, 1923" *Canadian Journal of History* vol. 12, no. 3, 350.

[38] Bodleian: MSS. Afr. s. 633, Box 3, "The Indian Question During the Governorship of Sir Robert Coryndon," p. 35.

[39] SOAS: IMC-CBMS/01, Box 247, File A, H.D. Hooper to Miss Gollock, March 27, 1923, p. 3.

[40] Bodleian: Mss. Afr. s. 633, Box 3, Shams-ud-Deen to Colonel East-King, January 26, 1923, p. 3.

Rhodes call 'the flag.'"[41] Settlers in East Africa had long argued that their status was coextensive with that of "the flag," yet only now did the rest of the world agree with them.

Ultimately, rather than resolve the crisis the Colonial Office opted to defer it through some clever sleight of hand: the Devonshire White Paper. The White Paper is best known for its proclamation of African "paramountcy" in the colony: "Primarily, Kenya is an African territory and His Majesty's government think it necessary definitely to record their considered opinion that the interests of the African natives must be paramount, and that if, and when, those interests and the interests of the immigrant races should conflict, the former should prevail."[42] This reflected an attempt by the Colonial Office to preserve as much of the status quo pre-crisis as it could by laundering it to suit a new present. Because both the European and Indian settlers had claimed—with varying degrees of sincerity—throughout the crisis to have the best interests of African subjects at heart, neither could publicly dispute this policy without having their bluff called.

Yet the doctrine of African paramountcy also entailed a rejection of the attempted globalization of the conflict by both camps. If indeed "Kenya is [primarily] an African territory," then the desire of Indians in Kenya to make it a front in the larger noncooperation movement or to have it be governed by the India Office was impracticable. Similarly the white settlers' desire for a "United States of British Africa," or at the very least for a "little Ireland in Africa" would also be incompatible with the White Paper. The White Paper closed the door on white settler self-government and represented a recognition "that the African mode of production could not be completely ignored and relegated to unimportance if the colonial state was to survive."[43] Genuine African interests and voices would continue to be ignored by policymakers, yet African *production* would now be prioritized, at least rhetorically. As such, the entire model of concessionary claim making which had defined the colony's development to this point would need to be reconfigured.

"Know When to Fold 'Em:" The Laundering of Closer Settlement

The dream of establishing a white yeomanry in Kenya through closer settlement was not killed by the White Paper's declaration of African paramountcy. 1923-1929 saw a new rush of closer settlement schemes cast in the mold of the 1919 Ex-Soldier Settlement Scheme. Edward Grigg, alongside many in the Legislative Council, embraced the prospect of settling men of "small capital" and even "no capital at all" in the colony. By 1928 Grigg's push for closer settlement crystalized into three separate schemes lettered A, B, and C, with preference to be shown to landless ex-soldiers who had failed to secure concessions in the 1919 land lotteries.[44] Yet while these schemes did closely resemble their pre-1919 counterparts in both intent and structure, they also selectively appropriated elements from the Lugardian dual mandate to better secure official approval.

The clearest example of this is their inclusion of "demonstration farms." In *The Dual Mandate*, Lugard allowed for the importance of "small 'model farms'" and "Private estates conducted on scientific principles and under skilled European direction [as] models for

[41] Bodleian: Mss. Afr. s. 633, Box 3, Coryndon to Masterton-Smith, January 18, 1923, p. 5.
[42] Bodleian: Mss. Afr. s. 633, Box 3, "Indians in Kenya: Memorandum Presented to Parliament by Command of His Majesty the King," in *The Official Gazette of the Colony and Protectorate of Kenya*, August 17, 1923, 694.
[43] Maxon, "The Years of Revolutionary Advance," 89.
[44] C.J. Duder, "The Soldier Scheme of 1919 in Kenya" (PhD diss., University of Aberdeen, 1978), 302-303.

natives".[45] Though Lugard understood demonstration farms as instruments to encourage African production under European expert supervision, the policy was capacious enough to be appropriated by closer settlement boosters.[46] Scheme A, encompassing forty-eight concessions near Kitale, was meant to attract "settlers of the mechanic, smith, carpenter, mason and wrights generally, possessing small capital" and included plans to establish "a small training and demonstration farm near Kitale" to "guide *settlers* [emphasis mine] in the development of their properties."[47] Scheme B, encompassing thirty farms in the Trans Nzoia and forty-five around Thomson's Falls, was intended for settlers with greater capital (appx. £1,500) engaged in mixed farming. The concessions near Thomson's Falls would be granted to non-local applicants since they were "approximately in the same locality as 'A' newcomers so that reference to the demonstration farm…at Kitale might be possible."[48] Scheme A's artisanal settlers were clearly intended to replace the labor of Indian artisans while Scheme B's settlers were mainly meant to infuse the colony with more capital, yet the imagined Kitale agricultural school would ensure that both groups would be trained together, alloyed into a single cohesive white settler bloc despite their class differences.[49] The scheme's inclusion of a "demonstration farm" lent it a certain 'developmental' legitimacy, laundering the old dream of establishing a state-subsidized white yeomanry in Kenya by imagining an institution where established settlers would convert incoming settlers into agricultural experts.

Another way to illustrate this is by comparison to an unlaundered closer settlement scheme proposed at the same time: the 1927 Uasin Gishu closer settlement scheme. Whereas the schemes outlined above received official support from the colonial government, the Uasin Gishu scheme did not. In 1927 a delegation of Afrikaner settlers in Uasin Gishu advanced a closer settlement scheme "confined to Dutch people" with minimal capital. The Commissioner of Lands saw merit in the scheme, writing that "While I am opposed to racial distinctions normally the proposed scheme would in my opinion solve to a considerable extent the problems of the poorer class of Dutch settler". Yet colonial administrators and the Land Advisory Committee saw the matter differently: "The Laikipia Land Extension Scheme was based on economic grounds. In this case the Dutch, who were mainly the first white inhabitants of the Uasin Gishu, have done so little development and have multiplied so extensively that the community now realises that it is unable to compete for land in the open market with more enterprising settlers."[50]

Neither the Laikipia extension nor the Uasin Gishu scheme were "based on economic grounds." Both had emerged from the agitations of disappointed would-be concessionaires, yet

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[45] Frederick Lugard, *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa* (William Blackwood and Sons, 1922), 504.
[46] Just as model farms could speak to the colonial Kenyan desire for a space which simultaneously produced white settlers, disciplined African workers, and maximized agricultural yields, so too did it speak to American and Soviet high modernist aspirations. For more on this global trend see James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition have Failed* (Yale University Press, 2020); Deborah Kay Fitzgerald, *Every Farm a Factory: the Industrial Ideal in American Agriculture* (Yale University Press, 2003).
[47] KNA: BN 46/11, Document 1, Director of Agriculture to Ag. Colonial Secretary, August 20, 1927, pp. 1-2.
[48] KNA: BN 46/12, Document 13, "Minutes of Meeting of the Kenya Advisory Committee," May 12, 1928, pp. 5-7.
[49] Administrators in London recognized that the purpose of these agricultural schools was social reproduction: "It seems clear, therefore, that local opinion in Kenya regards these proposals for training as essential to local conditions […] Provided they are men of the right type, e.g. Public school, or men with farm experience of a good type but not rough, there is apparently no difficulty in placing pupils on such terms with local farmers." TNA: CO 533/386/2, March 6, 1929, p. 7.
[50] KNA: BN 46/7, Document 1, Commissioner of Lands to Acting Colonial Secretary, April 13, 1927, pp. 1-2; Document 2.

the former was eventually laundered with economic language whereas the latter—with its explicit racial carveout—could not be laundered so easily. Ultimately the Advisory Committee folded the lands proposed in the Uasin Gishu scheme into Scheme B, laundering an Afrikaners' demand for a reward for imperial service into a scheme "based on economic grounds." Grigg's closer settlement schemes were also deeply concerned with the reproduction of whiteness, and the resolution of white class conflict in the colony through closer settlement. Yet this project was laundered into a Kitale agricultural school to "guide settlers in the development of their properties," and imagined "demonstration farms" where "an experienced settler" could inculcate the values and practices of white settlerdom into the new arrivals.[51]

Refusing to Fold: The Unlaundered Closer Settlement Schemes

Even after the Great Depression struck in 1929 there remained those who refused to accept that the old concessionary model had been reconfigured, yet their demands were doomed to failure. In 1935 a "nice lady of a certain age [with] eccentricity in dress which goes well with her state of mind and her projects" by the name of Miss St. John Wileman walked into the Colonial Office in London and informed them "that she wished to talk about 'Empire'."[52] She had in mind a closer settlement scheme ripped straight from the pre-1919 years, hoping to "settle trained units of farming families on the land in East Africa with a view partly of enabling the said units to become productive and self-supporting, partly of counteracting the alleged German menace in Tanganyika and elsewhere, and partly also of maintaining what she thinks the proper proportion between white and black."[53] Not content with a mere training farm, Wileman proposed the establishment "in Britain of Model Factory Farm Training Stations…where whole family units parents and children alike, can be suitably trained…to provide successful continuous flow of the right class of permanent Overseas Settlers," which she believed were those of the "black coat technical" class and the "professional workless class" now burdening the metropole.[54] Though those in the Colonial Office saw her as a "nuisance," Wileman's schemes would not have looked out of place twenty years prior. As late as 1935 there were many who wanted what she wanted, yet she was an eccentric nuisance because she could not—or would not—launder this old demand to suit the post-Devonshire moment.

Similarly unwilling to concede an inch was Walter Sidney Bromhead, whose last major closer settlement scheme for Kenya reveals for the historian the extraordinary mental gymnastics necessary for hardline supporters of white closer settlement to sustain their dream by the 1930s.

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[51] KNA: BN 46/12, Document 4, Meeting of the K.A.C., April 3, 1928, p. 4.

[52] For the full extent of Wileman's communications with the Colonial Office, see TNA: CO 822/66/9; CO 822/73/3. Colonial office administrators were uniformly dismissive of Miss Wileman, yet awestruck by her persistence. Comments like "I let her talk—indeed I could not stop her," or "Miss Wileman has the habit of going away from an interview with the firm impression that the person whom she has seen has become an enthusiastic convert to her schemes," or, "Miss Wileman is of course well known to us, and it is clear that she wishes to obtain the names of these retired Governors and other officials in order to seek their support for her crazy schemes" show both how disillusioned the Colonial Office had become by the late 1930s with closer white settlement in East Africa and how fervently some still clung to the dream.

[53] TNA: CO 822/66/9, Document 2., January 12, 1935.

[54] TNA: CO 822/66/9, Document 6., "Memorandum on Creating and Developing Arrangements For Providing the Most Efficient Suitable Class of Trained Family Units Drawn Both from the Middle Class – Black Coat Technical and Professional Workless Class and the Urban Ex Industrial Machie [sic] Minded Artisan and Manual Working Classes to Prepare them for Land Settlement, and Permanent Occupation of a Steadt [sic] Economic Profitable Kid [sic], Settled in Family Groups in S. Rhodesia, Kenya Tanganyika and Nyassaland [sic]," E. St. John Wileman, April 1935, p. 2.

Following his departure from the Ex-War Service Federation due to accusations of embezzlement (Chapter 3) Bromhead had continued his career as a self-proclaimed "expert in overseas settlement" and con-artist, bouncing back and forth between Kenya, Britain, and Australia promoting fraudulent land settlement companies as he went.[55] In the twenty years since his proposal for "Fraternal Agriculture" in 1915, Bromhead had developed a theory he called "Human Capitalisation," rooted in eugenics, whereby he argued that labor and capital were fungible. Meaning, he claimed to have developed a mathematical formula to calculate a person's "theoretical capitalisation" based on their levels of work experience, health, and education, in pounds sterling. Then through a system he called "Wisbian Finance," he claimed his companies could "employ that asset as an instrument of finance and credit on parity with the capitalist's securities," and thus liberate "the human atom's individual credit potentialities." All one needed to do to participate in this miraculous process was buy a share in one of Bromhead's companies, which would then value their human securities in a "new form of popular fiduciary currency" called "Wisbies," while it reinvested the pounds into the development of cooperative farming settlements throughout the Empire.[56] Bromhead was advancing a version of the 'rain follows the plough' argument often used by colonial boosters using fictive financial jargon: if one put settlers on the land they would, themselves, produce capital because they would *be* capital. This was something advocates for closer white settlement already *tacitly* believed, yet never articulated explicitly.

In 1935 Bromhead published "Fedritive Land Settlement: A Fellowship of Adventure," outlining a utopian scheme for closer settlement in Kenya based on the principles of human capitalization.[57] He claimed—dubiously—to have acquired possession of the elderly Henry Kitchener's Kapsambeya Estate (KAPSA).[58] At KAPSA Bromhead declared he would build a self-sufficient confederacy of white settler communes with its own currency, its own culture, and effectively with its own government. He claimed an army of "Fedrists" and "Fedritors" awaited the capital to construct a litany of new ventures. There would be a "Kapsa Home Farm of approximately 800 acres," there would be "factory sites" to deal with the estate's produce, "Fedritive Firms" as well as "Kiths" divided into "Kins" (self-sufficient industrial communes of "young white men of good physique and character"). There would be no wages, for all would live off the dividends of their capitalized humanity; there would be no classes, for all would be "as students and triers dedicated to exploring a new technique in racial expansion…while helping to create on the Kapsa Estate an acclimatised homogenous white self-supporting community."[59] Of all the competing visions for white closer settlement post-1923, none were as ambitious—and thus as unlaundered—as Bromhead's scheme for KAPSA.

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[55] Calvin Scott Paulson, "'All the Marks of a Swindle': Walter Sidney Bromhead and the Dividends of Whiteness" *Modern British History,* 37, no. 1 (2026).

[56] Walter Sidney Bromhead, "A Secular Encyclical on Humanising Finance and Revitalising Humanity" (London, 1934), 5; 9; 12.

[57] The pamphlet was published by "The Rational Economic Federation Ltd," which in keeping with Bromhead's earlier pattern of fraud (Chapter 3) had a sister society, the "Trustee Order of Fedritors Limited."

[58] Kitchener was already 88 years old by 1935 and was apparently in very full health. His declining mental and physical state casts serious doubt on the idea that he ever gave Bromhead his estate, or if he did, that he was of sound mind when he did so. University of Nairobi Digital Repository: CO-533-R476-005, A.L. Griffith, 'Re Lord Kitchener', May 13, 1933, 11; TNA: CO 1073/232, cover.

[59] TNA: CO 1073/232, Walter Sidney Bromhead "Fedritive Land Settlement: A Fellowship of Adventure" (Rational Economic Federation Ltd, 1935), pp. 2; 4; 7.

This was a scam, yet it was also a dream. The scam grew from and expressed the dream already held by the many Britons who wanted to continue closer white settlement in East Africa. Bromhead's claim that a hard-working white settler could produce capital just as he might sweat from his brow was simply the most explicit rendering of the assumption which underlaid all white closer settlement schemes. Bromhead's problem was that his schemes required such a herculean suspension of disbelief that they revealed just how much of their disbelief mainstream boosters had suspended *already*. When Bromhead's pamphlet trickled back to the Kenyan government and the Kenya Association it was met with "the utmost disapproval," and the Kenya Association took great pains to warn the Colonial Office of "the inestimable damage which misleading pamphlets of this nature may do, not only to individuals who might be induced to give credence thereto, but also to the good name of the Colony." Governor Byrne included an itemized list dismissing each of Bromhead's inflated claims about the fecundity of Kenya's soil and the commercial profitability of its agriculture, and Colonial Office administrators concluded the scheme had "all the marks of a swindle."[60] Bromhead's swindles were dangerous not because he was untethered from reality himself, but because he revealed just how far from the shoreline everyone else had drifted.

Each of these schemes recognized closer white settlement post-1923 required a continuous infusion of capital from somewhere to create the necessary infrastructure both for settlement itself and for white social reproduction. White settlerdom still could not stand on its own, neither economically nor culturally. Small holders would need credit and loans to establish themselves on the land, yet they would also need some institution to enculturate them into Kenya's particular racial-labor hierarchy. All these schemes envisioned the creation of subsidized "demonstration farms," "Model Factory Farm Training Stations," or some system of pupilage/apprenticeship for newcomers because they implicitly recognized that settlers needed to be *produced*, and that such social reproduction could not be entrusted to the market. They also recognized that funds would not be as forthcoming from the imperial state going forward, and sought to find new words that might keep the tap from being shut off entirely. For Bromhead the principle of human capitalization enabled him to assert that he could conjure capital from thin air. For those slightly more tethered to reality, they searched for ways to launder what previously would have been direct subsidies from the state for white settlers into indirect subsidies.

Laundering Funds: Land Banks and Pensions

Because both the imperial and colonial states were now less willing to allocate funds to directly sponsor closer white settlement in East Africa, closer settlement advocates during the interwar reconfigured their schemes to include more indirect forms of sponsorship. This was done primarily in two ways. First, closer settlement boosters began to advocate more forcefully for the creation of a land bank. Second, closer settlement boosters such as the Kenya Association began to market the colony directly to pensioners retiring from military/civil service. Both the land bank and pension funds represented pools of imperial capital which could be infused into the colony without anyone needing to publicly acknowledge the subsidy. In effect, they laundered the Empire's continued material support for white settlement even as the Colonial Office recognized and resented the dissimulation.

[60] TNA: CO 533/461/18, Document 3., Joseph Byrne to Malcolm Macdonald, November 8, 1935, pp. 1-3; J.E.W. Flood to C. Bottomley, July 6, 1935.

One of the most significant legacies of Grigg's 1928 closer settlement schemes was the establishment of Kenya's Land and Agricultural Bank (hereafter "land bank"). Land banks have a long history in British settler colonies, having been widespread in the American colonies, while Kenya's was modeled after land banks in South Africa and Rhodesia. Fundamentally, a land bank is a public or public/private bank created to issue notes or low-interest loans on the security of mortgages on land. Such institutions were useful in agricultural settler colonies because they were intended "to create both credit and currency out of thin air, providing the perfect solution for economies lacking either."[61] All of Grigg's 1928 closer settlement schemes would be dependent on funds from the Oversea Settlement Department, yet they specified that "All sums contributed by the Oversea Settlement Department should be paid over to and be entirely administered by the Land Bank."[62] As in Rhodesia, the land bank was explicitly understood as a vehicle for development. Advances were to be made to farmers for "infrastructural improvements" such as buildings, fences, and irrigation: "No advances were to be availed to cover existing debts."[63] In the A and B schemes the land bank would provide funds for fencing, water pumping, housing, and "advances for development." In effect, these would be subsidies to settlers in the form of cash advances and low interest loans. Yet because the imperial money would be laundered through a colonial institution, it would not have the appearance of a direct subsidy. As one correspondent to the Times of India put it, "the impression which first got abroad that all the eight and ten per cent overdrafts, which hamper the luckless farmers at the moment, were going to be immediately paid off by a generous Government, and that everyone would once more be able to sit in the shade of his thorn-tree or of his maize-crib, and drink his glass of beer free from the harassing letters from his bank manager, has been rudely disposed of once and for all."[64] In practice, that impression was essential to the existence and operation of Kenya's land bank.

Within Kenya the land bank possessed significant cultural valence. Walter Sidney Bromhead's Ex-War Service Federation had made the establishment of a land bank one of its founding demands.[65] As one correspondent of The East African Standard declared in 1923, "A Bank in Kenya, call it by what name you will, Land, Government, Commercial, or Settlers…cannot be anything else but a success…For such a bank perhaps the most suitable name would be The Commonwealth Bank."[66] Settlers who supported the land bank keenly understood that its very existence would attract more prospective settlers to the colony. The secretary of the Trans Nzoia Farmers Association giddily told the Commissioner for Lands and Settlement that since the announcement of a land bank "I have received letters from China,

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[61] Aaron Graham, *Bills of Union: Money, Empire and Ambitions in the Mid-Eighteenth Century British Atlantic* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 28.
[62] KNA: BN 46/12, "Summary of Closer Settlement Proposals 1928," p. 4.
[63] Tinashe Takuva and Bernard Kusena, "An economic history of the Land and Agricultural Bank of Southern Rhodesia, 1924-1963" *Southern Journal for Contemporary History,* 49, no. 2 (December, 2024), 17.
[64] "Kenya Land Bank Bill. Criticism by Land-Owners" *Times of India,* December 9, 1930, 6, from ProQuest Historical Newspapers, accessed July 28, 2026, https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/kenya-land-bank-bill/docview/751335959/se-2?accountid=14496.
[65] "Abridged Prospectus of Ex-War Service Federation Limited," *The East African Standard*, August 2, 1919, 24, from the British Newspaper Archive, accessed July 28, 2026, https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0001838/19190802/251/0024.
[66] Floreat Kenya, "Land Bank," *The East African Standard*, February 10, 1923, 19, from the British Newspaper Archive, accessed July 28, 2026, https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/BL/0001838/19230210/214/0019?browse=true.

Australia, America, South Africa, Austria, Belgian Congo, and many from England. Many have insufficient capital to buy land and/or start farming with money at 8% and 9%. A Land Bank that could lend at a reasonable rate of interest would enable many new settlers to come to Kenya."[67] The land bank was desired not only for the capital it would bring to the colony but also for the publicity it would provide, a declaration to the whole world that Kenya was still open for settlement and the Empire was still invested in it. For its most ardent supporters a land bank was a synonym for a 'settler bank' or a 'home bank', yet the euphemism dissimulated these demands for subsidies and home rule with a veil of economic developmentalism.

And even as officials in London saw through the euphemism they still felt the need to entertain it. As one memorandum noted, "although there is little objection to local people speculating if they wish it, they would equally need help from here…the Governor suggests that these areas could be disposed of without any State Agricultural Bank assistance, but is it clear that they could carry on in the future without the help which an Agricultural Bank, if established, could afford?" A marginal comment agreed: "Yes. It looks very much like a device to get rid of the land with the anticipation of help from the Land Bank later."[68]

This suspicion proved correct, and after Kenya's land bank was established in 1931 settlers immediately began using it to alleviate their extant debts.[69] The bank's first annual report frankly admitted that "While the proportion of the total money advanced or approved which goes to meet existing mortgages [as opposed to new development] is larger than the Board had hoped, it should be noted that in many cases this money has gone to meet a loan made by another farmer, who in turn has been hit by the bad times and needs the money for expenses and development on his own farm."[70] Meaning, the bank had used 'development' money to help settlers meet their existing mortgages on the grounds that their mortgagees, since they were also settlers, might use the money to develop their own farms! And by 1938 the Trans Nzoia District Association went even further, recognizing that "The success of Closer Settlement is largely dependent upon this 'Cheap Money'" and submitting a scheme wherein the colonial government would "hand over to the Land Bank, as a free gift, all the unalienated lands still in its possession" while also using land bank bonds to purchase privately held undeveloped lands to then redistribute them among a new crop of settlers on easy terms.[71] Though this scheme was rejected, that it was suggested at all confirms the role settlers always expected the land bank to play in the colonial economy. The language of development was sufficiently capacious to enable

[67] KNA: BN 46/10, 37., Honorary Secretary of Trans Nzoia Farmers Association to Commissioner for Local Govt., Lands and Settlement, September 26, 1930.
[68] TNA: CO 533/398/6, 2a, "Memorandum," April 24, 1920, 21.
[69] Kanogo, "Kenya and the Depression," 118; As Takuva and Kusena established, Rhodesia's land bank played a similar role: "Therefore, the bank's major achievement in these early years of its existence was to serve settler agriculture from the imminent collapse brought by the depression." Takuva and Kusena, "An economic history of the Land and Agircultural Bank of Southern Rhodesia," 19.
[70] H.H. Rushton, *Report of the Board of the Land and Agricultural Bank of Kenya For the Year ended 31st December, 1931* (Board of the Land and Agricultural Bank of Kenya, 1932), pp. 5-6, from British Online Archives: Kenya Under Colonial Rule, in Government Reports, 1907-1964, "Land and Agricultural Bank, 1931-1963", accessed July 28, 2026, https://britishonlinearchives-com.libproxy.berkeley.edu/documents/7461/land-and-agricultural-bank-1931-1963.
[71] KNA: BN 46/39, Document 1, "Closer Settlement, Cheap Money, & the Land Bank," Trans Nzoia District Association, Kitale; KNA: BN 46/37, Document 17., July 4, 1938; "Settlement Committee Report," pp. 7-8.

the bank to largely abandon the original program of subsidizing infrastructural development on debt-free farms and instead become a pool of public money to bail out the white man's country.

Another way of dissimulating the necessity of direct government subsidies for further settlement in Kenya was to design closer settlement schemes around those who were already receiving government money for different reasons: pensioners. The interwar years saw a raft of closer settlement schemes for pensioners, mainly retirees from civil or military service in India or Africa. 1928's Scheme C was designed exclusively for "retired servants of the Crown (of all branches of the service—military, naval or civil)" desirous of taking up small "residential and small-holding allotments" near Nairobi, Kitale, and Limoru on either 999- or 99-year leases.[72] Each pensioner reflected a steady drip of capital into the colony which would not fluctuate with the market.[73] Furthermore, by making Scheme C specifically a *pension* scheme (rather than an officer's scheme) it could be preserved as "a scheme for Europeans only, [as] it is the European officers who can commute their pensions."[74] The Kenyan transport administration also advanced a nearly identical scheme for "Railway and Harbour Servants," again calibrated to ensure that the many Indian employees of Kenya's railways and harbors be excluded.[75] These schemes were also dealt a fatal blow by the Great Depression, yet they reflect the search by advocates of closer settlement for new ways to launder old demands and ensure the faucet of imperial money into Kenya was not shut off.

Indeed, after the Great Depression hit settlers doubled down on their efforts to attract pensioners to Kenya despite the protests of the Colonial Office. As early as 1930, Mr. Powys Cobb proposed a scheme to the Kenya Advisory Committee wherein he would "[lease] a portion of my property at Mau Narok for closer settlement by Army Officers and Government Officials," a rather safe bet as his tenants ability to pay their rent would be effectively guaranteed by their pensions.[76] As the 1928 closer settlement schemes fell apart both settlers and the colonial government increasingly turned their attention towards organizing a global advertising campaign.[77] Much of this advertising focused on officers in India, with advertisements in a range of Indian newspapers and even a sponsored tour by Colonel C.F. Knaggs to spread awareness of the wonderous prospects for settlement in East Africa. In time this campaign culminated in

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[72] KNA: BN 46/12, "Summary of Closer Settlement Proposals 1928," pp. 7-8; Appendix II.

[73] As one article in The East African Standard put it, "If only a quarter of these officers decided to settle in Kenya, a sum of approximately £100,000 would be added to the internal spending power of the Colony. It is not suggested that they would be in a position to take up large areas of land, as their settlement would be mainly of a residential nature." "Efforts to Popularise the Colony," *The East African Standard*, July 21, 1934, 31, from the British Newspaper Archive, accessed July 28, 2026, https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0001838/19340721/413/0033.

[74] TNA: CO 533/386/2, Grigg quoted by J.W. Allen, January 29, 1930, p. 13.

[75] TNA CO 533/386/2, Document 18, Grigg to Office of the High Commissioner for Transport, November 16, 1929, pp. 27-32.

[76] KNA: BN 46/45, Document 2, Powys Cobb to C. Kemp, November 19, 1930.

[77] Though the Kenya Association's marketing campaign is beyond the scope of this chapter, its scale should still be emphasized. The KAC mainly targeted Britain, India, and South Africa with a barrage of editorials, newspaper spots, brochures, travel films, and other forms of propaganda. The Kenya Association also founded the "East Indian Association of Kenya" and the "South African Society of East Africa" to coordinate with settlers in those places for advice on emigration. It also appointed unofficial members to the Kenya Advisory Committee which oversaw closer settlement schemes, meaning that those responsible for marketing Kenya abroad were also in charge of regulating its closer settlement schemes. Kennedy, *Islands of White*, 83-84. The records of the Kenya Advisory Committee housed in the Kenya National Archives reveal the deep entanglement between closer settlement regulators and the colony's marketing campaign. See KNA: BN 46/54; BN 46/43; BN 46/44.

Cawthorn's scheme for retiring war block officers discussed earlier. Cawthorn's report was widely covered in the press and caused great embarrassment to the Colonial Office, particularly his finding that "I cannot help feeling that basically the official attitude towards further White Settlement is not one of definite encouragement…It may be that they feel that the country is not suitable, or that as many people in Kenya think, Colonial Office policy is overshadowed by India Office policy, which is said in principle to support the view…that Kenya should become a colony of India."[78] Cawthorn, knowingly or not, had punted a hornet's nest squarely into the Colonial Office's parlor.[79] His words were perfectly calibrated to destabilize the fragile post-1923 balance, thus positioning the scheme as a solution to the problem his report had created.

And so, despite their better judgement, the Colonial Office approved a smaller form of Cawthorn's closer settlement scheme. Despite thinking it was "sheer lunacy," despite believing "that on the whole the project of putting individual small white settlers into Kenya has failed + will continue to fail," the Colonial Office approved the scheme because they felt backed into a corner. As J.E.W. Flood put it:

> I don't want to minute this much more. We are now up against the politics of it. "Closer White Settlement" has been urged by the settlers in Kenya for years and lip service has been paid to it by Governors, Government officials, politicians here and Secretaries of state. If we now turn round and say the whole policy of advertising Kenya has got to be reconsidered it will provoke, rightly or wrongly, an enormous outcry in Kenya with the usual dog's abuse of everybody. Can we risk it? I think not. In my opinion the only thing to do is to take a sort of half-way course and tell the Governor that, in the circumstances, the S. of S. will not refuse to allow the adoption of Scheme B…[80]

Cawthorn's scheme and the controversy surrounding it reflect how white settlers could launder the concessionary model of years past to suit the post-Devonshire moment. Cawthorn's scheme was not approved on economic grounds but rather in spite of economic reality. Cawthorn's settlers would be subsidized by the state, yet these subsidies were laundered through the commutation of their pensions and the land bank so that policymakers could continue to insist that they were not *directly* subsidizing any settlers. Similarly, Cawthorn's scheme was a *white* settlement scheme calibrated to exclude Indian settlers. Yet this racial exclusion was laundered by making it a pensioners scheme, allowing it to avoid the controversies of soldier settlement and preventing the imperial government from having to explicitly recognize that it valued the military/civil service of white men over that of non-white men. In Kenya, anodyne financial institutions helped redefine the material support given to closer settlement as either apolitical (in the case of pension schemes) or developmental (in the case of the land bank), whereas previously such support had been avowedly political and more explicitly racial (Chapter 3).

Laundering Land: Transfers of Land Between Europeans and Asians

Indian settlers also found unique ways to launder their earlier claims in the colony to suit the post-Devonshire moment. Crucially, the white man's country had no legal definition, and the boundaries of the white highlands were never specified; the only legal restriction on Asian land

[78] TNA: CO 533/474/5, "Notes of the Week," *Kenya Weekly News*, March 20, 1936, p. 34.
[79] The Colonial Office file on the Cawthorn scheme is filled with newspaper clippings detailing the deluge of unfavorable coverage which followed on the heels of Cawthorn's report. CO: 533/474/5.
[80] TNA: CO 533/474/4, J.E.W. Flood, March 27, 1936.

ownership beyond the racial restrictions on specific plots of land was that any transfer of land between parties of different races could be vetoed by Kenya's governor.[81] It was presumed that the presence of Indians on or near one's lands would cause all surrounding land values to depreciate, yet Asian capitalists were sometimes the only buyers available with the requisite capital to purchase at all. Europeans who wanted to sell thus found themselves in a prisoner's dilemma, simultaneously incentivized to sell or lease to Asians and to prevent their neighbors from doing the same.

Because Kenya's racialized land policy was enforced *ad hoc* by administrative fiat, whether a given piece of land was allowed to transfer from European to Asian hands depended less on fixed policy and more on whether the transfer could escape notice. Despite the purported unity of whites in Kenya against the "Indian bogey," records of Kenya's Land Department often tell a different story: white settlers desperately pleading with the colonial government to have the racial restrictions on their lands removed so they might sell or lease them. Most often this occurred in Nairobi or other urban areas where a concession originally granted with a racial covenant had since become subdivided by white settlers, yet had also become surrounded by plots which allowed Asian occupation. Once a given plot of European land had become surrounded by plots of Asian land, Europeans often concluded that they would be unable to sell their land to anyone but an Asian buyer, and so would petition the government to waive the racial restriction.[82]

For an example of Europeans and Asians working together to quietly transfer land *out* of the white man's country, take the case of Wybrant's Estate (Plot No. 118) in Nairobi, which had been subdivided and sublet into over thirty plots for Europeans. Wybrant's Estate was bordered to the northwest, southeast, and east by Asian plots, while to the north and south it was bordered by European and crown land. In December 1927 the lessees of Wybrant's Estate formed the "Ngara Road Syndicate" and petitioned the government to revoke the racial covenant of the original concession "owing to the incursion of Asiatics into this area [rendering it] increasingly difficult to let buildings erected on this property to Europeans and the rental value of the buildings has according [sic] depreciated."[83] When a single petitioner (Mr. Pollock) withdrew his name the government denied the petition, fearing controversy. In response, at least five lessees started subleasing their plots to Indians anyway. Whether these subleases actually were for purely commercial purposes was unclear, though officially no Indians were residing on the land.

This led to a domino effect of Europeans on plots adjoining Wybrant's Estate to also petition that *their* racial covenants be waived so they might sublease them before property values dropped. By 1931 Mr. Pollock sensed which way the wind was blowing and reattached his name to the original petition. Less than ten years after the colonial government stared down the threat

[81] The exact boundaries of the 'white highlands' were a perennial debate throughout the history of the colony, yet colonial officials in both London and Nairobi recognized—despite the objections of colonists—that the highlands were primarily an "administrative" rather than a geographic area. When the Morris-Carter Land Commission in 1932 resolved that the highlands should be formally defined, this proved to be a very challenging task, exasperating the Colonial Office which preferred that the boundary remain undefined. J.E.W. Flood described the delineation of the highlands as a "gentleman's agreement" which would be "quite impossible to enshrine […] in any kind of legislative document and the only way to do it is the way which has been adopted, namely, to say that that is to be the policy." TNA: CO 533/476/5, Document 34., J.E.W. Flood, December 30, 1937, pp. 11-12.
[82] For cases following this pattern, see KNA: BN 30/1; BN 30/2; BN 30/4.
[83] KNA: BN 30/2, Document 1a, Messrs. Gailey & Roberts to Land Office, December 14, 1927.

of a rebellion whose stated aim was to ship Indian settlers back across the sea, some of those same settlers had pressured it to allow them to lease their land to Indian occupants. Yet crucially, this was only possible because the transfer was justified on 'purely economic grounds.' It required no discussion of Indians as pioneers or imperial citizens, nor did it require their landlords to conceive of themselves as anything other than shrewd businessmen. A group of white settlers had formed a syndicate and successfully lobbied for an Indian closer settlement scheme on their lands, and it worked.

Yet there were also cases where Indian investors themselves took a more direct role in forcing this process rather than waiting for European lobbying to take its course. Take the curious case of Farms 32 and 33/2 six miles outside Nairobi. Like many of the interracial transfers in the Land Office's records this one began with a widow.[84] The prior owner of the farms had received conditional permission to sell the land to Indians in 1919 so long as he exchanged his title for a township title yet he did not act upon it, and in 1926 Anna Ortlepp received confirmation that the same conditional permission was in effect.[85] Then in 1928 Ortlepp sent another petition to request that her prospective buyers, Maula Dad and Khan Bahadur, would have no legal obstacles in purchasing and subdividing her lands "as I am so badly in want of the money to pay off death dues etc." and "the Indian is not keen on buying unless he is allowed to subdivide the farms into small holdings."[86] Thus from the very beginning this was an Indian closer settlement scheme, yet the only subsidy required from the state was its permission. Even still, this would prove hard to come by.

As the colonial government continued to stall Ortlepp's petition, Maula Dad and Khan Bahadur retained the services of Shapley & Schwartze, a Nairobi legal firm, to quietly pressure them to relent on the issue. Crucially, unlike Wybrant's Estate, Ortlepp's farm had never been designated township land and thus, through a clerical error, the colonial government had accidentally opened the door to Indians buying a parcel of land in the white highlands for the purposes of closer settlement. Recognizing that the legal situation was murky and the political situation unstable, Dad and Bahadur's solicitors presented their case in terms calibrated to assuage the colonial government:

> We may say that, whilst it is very likely, and perhaps probable, that the Purchasers will, at a later date, submit a scheme of sub-division for approval, they are, quite naturally, not prepared to bind themselves to this at this juncture, and, pending their deciding to submit some scheme of sub-division later on, their intention, for the present, is to utilise the land largely for grazing purposes for the oxen of Maula Dad, who is a contractor in a very large way, and although this land will, in all probability, with the expansion of Nairobi, and the improvement of roads, become valuable and necessary for sub-division in the future, it is obviously not quite ripe for this at the moment, and it, therefore, would not be reasonable to seek to insist upon the great expense, and the inevitable consequential loss,

[84] For another interracial land transfer case involving a widow, see KNA: BN 30/78.
[85] By insisting that the present titles be exchanged for "township" titles the government was insisting that the farms be administratively transferred out of the white highlands and into the realm of townships which were presumed to be multiracial spaces.
[86] KNA: BN 30/5, Document 2, Anna Ortlepp to Mr. Mortimer, September 24, 1928.

> of sub-division and development before such land was reasonably ripe for such purpose.[87]

This was a masterstroke of dissimulation, keeping the door open for a privately organized Indian closer settlement scheme while assuring the colonial government that permitting the transfer would not threaten the racial status quo. Maula Dad was a "contractor" before he was an Indian, his right to this piece of the highlands was guaranteed by his status as a capitalist and *not* by his status as an imperial citizen. By vaguely gesturing towards the idea that, eventually, "development" in the surrounding area would make this farm part of Nairobi, Dad and Bahadur's solicitors could argue that they should be allowed to anticipate that process and buy the land now. Ortlepp went forward with the sale and the colonial government found itself powerless to stop the transfer.

The borders of the white man's country had grown so difficult to define that two farms had slipped through it because of a clerical error. Petitions rolled in from nearby European farmers protesting the transfer, similarly laundered in economic rather than explicitly racial terms: "The terms, on which all this land is held, do not permit the transfer to Indians, and as we have invested considerable sums in development and making homes for ourselves, we strongly resent this application for transfer and ask his Excellency to protect our interests."[88] Panicking, the colony's Attorney General concluded that "To refrain from exercising the right of veto, would be in opposition to the principles of the Command Paper on the Indian question and would meet with strong objections from the European community."[89] Yet it was too late, the sale had already gone through, and so the Land Advisory Board recommended "that Government should re-acquire the farm by purchase," meaning, the colonial government should endeavor to buy the land with public funds and hold it undeveloped rather than permit an Indian to develop it.[90] If government money couldn't be used to directly subsidize white closer settlement, it might at least be deployed to directly prevent Indian closer settlement.

Yet Dad and Bahadur had no interest in selling and they were savvy enough to continue presenting their acquisition of the land as an apolitical *fait accompli*. Rather than argue that the purchase needed to be respected on ideological or racial grounds, instead they tiptoed up to an acknowledgement of the precarious political situation in the colony:

> Our Clients recognise that it may be that certain difficulties have arisen for the Government in regard to the policy as to alienation of land in the Highlands to Asiatics, and they have instructed us to inform you…that they do not want either themselves, or their interests, to become embroiled in any sort of political discussion, or contention, and it is for this reason that they have agreed to instruct us to state that they would be prepared at present to accept £5,000 for their interests. It is our Clients' intention to start the establishment of a camp and boma, and the construction of certain small buildings, immediately, and they, therefore, do not wish to keep the offer of £5,000 open for any

[87] KNA: BN 30/5, Document 15, W.T. Shapley to Commissioner for Local Government, Lands & Settlement, March 27, 1929, p. 2.
[88] KNA: BN 30/5, Document 26a., April 22, 1929; See also Document 25., Tyson Brothers, Limited to Colonial Secretary, April 15, 1929.
[89] KNA: BN 30/5, Document 30., "Farms Nos. 33/1 and 33/2 – Nairobi River. Proposed Transfer – European to Asiatic," 1.
[90] KNA: BN 30/5, Document 34., "Extract from Minutes of Meeting of the Land Advisory Board," May 11, 1929.

> length of time…unless the Government should wish to accept the offer of £5,000 within two weeks from the date hereof, our Clients will assume that Government are no longer interested in wishing to acquire their interests in the property.[91]

This was a ransom note. Dad and Bahadur had purchased the farm for £1,750, had not had the chance to develop it at all, and now insisted that if the colonial government wanted to avoid getting "embroiled in any sort of political discussion" they had two weeks to cough up approximately 186% more than the land's market value. Like with Cawthorn's settlement scheme, Dad and Bahadur had correctly identified that post-1923 the best way to get land or money out of the state was to present one's demands as a means towards development and away from controversy. Could the colonial government truly afford to spend £5,000 just to prevent these men from constructing a camp and boma? Ultimately the government refused to pay the £5,000 and let them keep the property. Maula Dad and Khan Bahadur had at last conquered their own slice of the white highlands in the name of development and Indian closer settlement, all without firing a shot.

Though the Devonshire White Paper effectively closed the door on any further directly subsidized closer settlement schemes, during the interwar years both European and Asian settlers were able to quietly advance their own dissimulated programs of development in the colony. Though more strident boosters like Bromhead, Wileman, or the Afrikaners of Uasin Gishu were unsuccessful, those who were willing and able to launder their schemes both rhetorically and financially still stood a chance. The land bank, pension funds, the redesignation of highland estates into township lands, and even the occasional clerical error, all enabled European and Asian settlers to continue the program of closer settlement despite the imperial government's grave misgivings. These institutions and rhetorical sleights of hand laundered closer settlement by covering it with a developmental veil, making it appear that closer settlement was not what so many in the colony circa 1919 understood it to be: the fulfillment of a cultural/racial/imperial duty to either the white race or the Empire's citizens more broadly (Chapter 3). Now a given scheme lived or died on its promotor's ability to avoid rather than stoke controversy, to present their scheme as apolitical rather than as the fulfillment of politics, to launder a cultural claim with 'purely economic' terms.

"Know When to Walk Away": The Plough Settlements Association and the Laundering of Life

The mission to launder white closer settlement in Kenya as an apolitical, 'purely economic' enterprise is clearest in the case of one last settlement scheme: The Plough Settlements Association (PSA). In the Plough scheme we see each of the patterns discussed in the preceding section in miniature: the dissimulation of government subsidies for closer settlement, the fluidity of the boundaries of whiteness in the highlands, and the necessity of laundering larger political/cultural/racial claims surrounding settlement with 'purely economic' language to avoid controversy. Though the scheme's private backers were motivated by a sincere desire to help as many Jewish refugees as possible, they were consistently pressured by the imperial government to launder this humanitarian scheme as an economic development scheme even if it meant sharply curtailing the number of refugees who could be helped. Meanwhile, settlers who a generation earlier had slammed their doors in the faces of "pauper alien Jews" now welcomed a

[91] KNA: BN 30/5, Document 36., W.T. Shapley to Acting Commissioner for Local Government, Lands & Settlement, June 1, 1929, pp. 3-4.

scant few refugees into the colony in the hopes that they might be used to dispose of unprofitable land, as mules for capital from the metropole, and as quasi-indentured "apprentices" on their estates.[92] Within a few years of their arrival, most would be interned in British concentration camps as "enemy aliens." The settler community which had fought against the Zionist settlement scheme did so on the grounds that Kenya was to be a *British* colony and not just a *white* one, and so it could not accommodate a Jewish *imperium in imperio* (Chapter 2). Yet this racial/national conviction was intertwined with material conditions such that when the colony's political economy changed so too did the boundaries of whiteness.

Testifying before the Peel Commission on November 25, 1936, Chaim Weizmann reported that European Jews now lived in a world "divided into places they cannot live and places where they cannot enter."[93] Yet because Kenya's main immigration barrier was one of capital, this made the colony one of the more feasible destinations for Jewish refugees. Ultimately Kenya received the largest number of German Jewish refugees of all the East African territories, between 650-800; had its settlers been less successful in inflating its land values, it could have accepted many more. These refugees arrived through a variety of overlapping initiatives, some spearheaded by Kenya's small Jewish community itself through the Kenya Jewish Council for Training and Settlement, others by Jewish philanthropists in Britain like Lord Bearsted. As such, while the PSA scheme analyzed here was not the only means by which Jewish refugees entered the colony it was the scheme organized in closest partnership with both the colonial and imperial states.[94]

The PSA emerged from a fraught and accidental intersection of interests. The *Halutz* Zionist youth movement had fostered by the 1930s a global constellation of training farms and agricultural schools for young Jews interested in *Hachshara* (literally "preparation"), to settle in Palestine as farmers.[95] Then, the passage of the Nuremberg Laws in 1935 gave rise to the UK-based Council for German Jewry (CGJ) dedicated to helping Jews escape Nazi Germany and settle elsewhere, a mission made more urgent by the November Pogroms in 1938. By 1938 in Kenya Colonel Knaggs was reporting to London that "settlers had not been coming forward in Kenya in sufficient numbers recently and that the Government of Kenya were anxious to prepare

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[92] In order to qualify for support most refugees were required to "sign a paper promising full cooperation with the Jewish Relief Organization" on the boat prior to entering Mombasa, and "One of the conditions was that men had to agree to work on a farm, if they did not get employment elsewhere." Jutta Vinzent, "The British Internment of Refugees from Nazi Germany in Kenya During World War II," in *Refugees from Nazi-occupied Europe in British Overseas Teritories*, eds. Swen Steinberg & Anthony Grenville (Brill, 2020), 164.

[93] Paul R. Bartrop, *The Evian Conference of 1938 and the Jewish Refugee Crisis* (Springer International Publishing, 2018), 2**.**

[94] Ultimately a full treatment of the lived experiences of Jewish refugees in Kenya is beyond the scope of this chapter, which remains focused on the contested development of the settlement schemes themselves. For a significantly more thorough account of the lived experiences of Jewish refugees in Kenya, see Natalie Eppelsheimer, *Roads Less Traveled: German-Jewish Exile Experiences in Kenya, 1933-1947* (Peter Lang, 2019). See also Jutta Vinzent, "The British Internment of Refugees from Nazi Germany in Kenya During World War II," in *Refugees from Nazi-occupied Europe in British Overseas Teritories*, eds. Swen Steinberg & Anthony Grenville (Brill, 2020), 159-182.

[95] The connection between *Hachshara* and Zionism is much more ambiguous than this brief summary allows. For a more robust overview of the school's curricula and development under Weimar and Nazi rule, see Verena Buser, "*Hachsharot* after 1933 – Welfare, Child Care and Educational Aspects" in *Jewish Horticultural Schools and Training Centers in Germany and their Impact on Horticulture and Landscape Architecture in Palestine / Israel* eds. Tal Alon-Mozes, Irene Aue-Ben-David, Joachim Wolschke-Bulmahn (Akademische Verlagsgemeinschaft München, 2020).

a scheme to attract more."[96] This was hardly new, yet it coincided with the coming Evian Conference convened by President Roosevelt to mount a global response to the growing refugee crisis. It was, in the words of historian Paul Bartrop, "a joint global effort which had as its major objective the quest to do nothing."[97] This made it very much like the closer settlement lobbying in Kenya, another situation wherein the imperial state's major quest was doing nothing. Hence, when Lord Bearsted and the CGJ both separately approached the Colonial Office with settlement schemes to settle trained Jewish agriculturalists in Kenya, Colonial Secretary Ormsby-Gore wondered if "it may be possible to 'kill two birds with one stone'" while his subordinates still worried "that the two birds are of such widely different character that they will hardly fit into one scheme."[98]

From the beginning, the settlement schemes proposed by Lord Bearsted and by the CGJ reflected substantially different visions for Jewish closer settlement in Kenya and the PSA would ultimately be a hybrid of the two. Bearsted, having been the founder of the Shell Transport and Trading Company (later Royal Dutch Shell) and served as Lord Mayor of London, was a capitalist through-and-through whose vision for closer settlement aligned closely with that of Kenya's big men. In his discussions with the Colonial Office he emphasized repeatedly that he "was not a Zionist, and indeed thought the Zionists had done a great deal of harm" and that he "was opposed to anything like a large settlement scheme in one block" preferring instead settlement on "individual holdings here and there."[99] Bearsted's initial vision was a "purely private" scheme which would have no direct government subsidies yet would include indirect government support in the form of relaxing the capital requirements for entry and facilitating establishment of a "training farm" on private land.[100]

Yet the CGJ was the more forceful lobbyer. In cooperation with the Kenya Association and Colonel Knaggs, they convinced Colonial Office to allow Asaph Grasovsky to conduct a brief tour of Kenya to study its prospects for Jewish closer settlement from January 15 through February 15. Grasovsky was a Senior Horticultural Officer of the Palestine Department of Agriculture, selected for his experience overseeing Zionist settlement projects in Palestine. The Colonial Office allowed Grasovsky's tour only so long as it remained "strictly confidential" recognizing that any whiff of support from the imperial government for the closer settlement of a particular category of persons could reignite the crises of 1919-1923.[101] In particular, likely remembering the controversy surrounding the earlier Zionist settlement scheme, officials in both London and Nairobi were keen to avoid any question of "mass settlement" or a "Jewish enclave" in the colony.

Yet Grasovsky and Kenya's local Jewish community advocated for a significantly more radical vision, one which drew deeply from the cooperative vision of closer settlement which had

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[96] TNA: CO 533/497/7, p. 2. The East African Trade and Information Office was a settler-dominated carveout from the Department of Overseas Settlement, which Kenyan settlers felt focused too much on the dominions and did not sufficiently promote white settlement in Kenya.
[97] Bartrop, *The Evian Conference of 1938 and the Jewish Refugee Crisis*, vii.
[98] TNA: CO 533/497/7, Document 1., July 9, 1938, p. 4.
[99] TNA: CO 533/497/7, Document 14., July 1, 1938, pp. 13; 11.
[100] TNA: CO 533/497/8, Document 17., July 1, 1938, pp. 242-245.
[101] The insistence on "confidentiality" and secrecy is rampant in the pre-Evian discussions of Jewish closer settlement in the Colonial Office records. TNA: CO 533/497/8, A.J. Dawe to Sir C. Bottomley, January 4, 1938, 4; Bartrop, *The Evian Conference of 1938 and the Jewish Refugee Crisis*, 26; 98.

long animated settler politics in Kenya. Ultimately Grasovsky concluded that because settlement in Kenya was so capital intensive it "should be as close as possible," with settlers being tightly clustered and organizing every facet of their lives cooperatively. Grasovsky argued for the necessity of cooperative stores, creameries, motor pools, the communal ownership of farm equipment and livestock, and the formation of cooperative societies. Regarding labor, Grasovsky concluded that African laborers and squatters were an unavoidable hinderance. They did their work "unintelligently [with] much idling," introduced malaria and plague into the highlands, and broke machinery. However, this could be mitigated with closer settlement on small plots where Africans would work under "the direct supervision of the farmer." And indeed, the dependence on African labor was further proof of the necessity of closer Jewish settlement: "If the 'White Highlands' are to remain white, it is necessary to have more European settlers, closer European settlement and less native labor."[102]

In his report Grasovsky synthesized his experience overseeing settlement in Palestine with the longstanding tradition of Kenyan closer settlement boosters advocating for cooperative settlement schemes as a way of circumventing strict capital requirements for entry. Yet unlike Bromhead or Wileman, Grasovsky did not advocate for cooperative closer settlement in predominately cultural or racial terms. It was not an expression of Jewish fraternity, nor did he envision a Jewish state in Kenya as had been contemplated in 1907 (Chapter 2). Rather, cooperative closer settlement was presented in as 'purely economic' terms as he could muster. This way it would not directly contradict the claim that Kenya was first and foremost an African country ruled according to the principle of African paramountcy. Nevertheless his report implicitly advanced the same argument which Zangwill had advanced decades earlier: that the closer settlement of European Jews in the highlands should be encouraged by the British Empire because they were white, and thus their presence would cement *white* control of the highlands and *white* control over African labor.

Ultimately the CGJ synthesized Bearsted's scheme and Grasovsky's scheme into the PSA scheme, calibrated to present the settlement of Jewish refugees as an act of development. All Grasovsky's discussion of cooperation was scrubbed from the final proposal. Instead, the PSA would be formed with an initial capital of £15,000 fronted by wealthy Jewish philanthropists in Britain such as Lord Bearsted and Anthony de Rothschild. Then in collaboration with white Kenyan closer settlement boosters, they would select twenty-five men between the ages of eighteen and thirty from Jewish agricultural schools in Germany, who would be settled on extant Kenyan farms for a further period of "6 to 12 months training." The company would then purchase "five or six farms" on which blocks of the settlers would be placed when they completed their training, and eventually it would fund the construction of a central training school. The farms would be selected with a mind to ensure "the assimilation of the emigrants into the general social structure of the colony. Every effort will be made to prevent the formation of a Jewish enclave in the Highlands."[103] Indeed, the PSA's articles of incorporation made no

[102] TNA: CO 533/497/8, Asaph Grasovsky, "The 'White Highlands' Its Settlement Possibilities", pp. 56; 58-59; 53; 49-50.

[103] Indeed, because word had already spread throughout the colony of this scheme courtesy of the Winterton's statements at Evian, arrangements would be made to have the emigrants arrive in groups rather than a single party to avoid the perception of "large numbers of refugee settlers" arriving in the colony.

mention of Jews, refugees, or Kenya at all.[104] Colonel Knaggs went off to Germany to begin looking for recruits, arriving on October 30, 1938, ten days before *Kristallnacht.*

In reality, the PSA was a shell company. It existed to launder a fundamentally humanitarian project as a developmental one to secure the grudging approval of policymakers and Kenya's big men. The PSA was incorporated not with £15,000 of initial capital but with a mere £100, a purely nominal sum. Though it provided guarantees that the emigrants it sponsored would not become public charges, the PSA itself had to be guaranteed by the Central British Fund for German Jewry, a nonprofit operated by the CGJ founded explicitly to assist Jewish refugees.[105] In time it's issued capital would grow to £10,000, supplemented by £5,000 from the CGJ, demonstrating that the PSA's and the CGJ's finances were effectively coextensive. This worred policymakers who recognized that the CGJ's finances were barely adequate to provide for the Jewish refugees in Britain let alone to purchase farms, train settlers, and develop land in Kenya. During his trip to Germany and the Netherlands to recruit settlers for the PSA, Knaggs was accompanied by a Mr. Stephany, who was both Secretary of the PSA and secretary of the CGJ, two different organizations with different stated aims which were, in effect, the same organization with the same aim. Similarly, the Kenyan branch of the PSA was effectively coextensive with the Kenya Jewish Council for Training and Settlement, a charitable organization drawn from Kenya's Jewish community. The land development company was a necessary fiction, a way of laundering a fundamentally cultural claim as an economic one.

The selection process for the first thirty refugees during Knaggs' mission reveals the intertwining of humanitarian and developmental motivations in the PSA scheme. Knaggs and Stephany visited Berlin and two Jewish training farms, Landwerk Neuendorf and Werkdorp Wieringermeer in Holland. Knaggs assured the Colonial Office that most of those he selected "are well educated and of the upper middle class, whilst others are of small-farmer stock of good type." And indeed, the vast majority of Knaggs' comments on the candidates concerned their agricultural acumen. Yet his precis of the candidates also shows how cultural, humanitarian, and personal convictions sculpted the selection process. The original scheme was intended only for young single men and a few married couples, yet the third name on Knaggs' list was Mrs. Lachman, mother to Alfred Lachman, whose qualification for Kenyan settlement was being a "good housewife and extremely nice woman." Herman Neustadt, eighteen years old, was "recommended as being reliable." Horst Baer and Ellen Posner were a "nice couple." Dr. Martin Wohlgemuth was a "national economist" and a "keen flower and market gardener" whose sole agricultural experience was working "during holidays for three months for three years," and yet "Owing to his circumstances and the urgent need for his leaving Germany it was difficult to exclude him."[106] Just beneath the surface of their agricultural qualifications we can see Knaggs wrestling with their "circumstances" and "urgent need," weighing their "character," grappling with how much humanitarian sentiment this 'purely economic' development scheme could accommodate.[107] The fundamentally cultural question of who *deserved* to be a pioneer in the

[104] TNA: CO 533/497/8, "Memorandum and Articles of Association of Plough Settlements Association Limited" August 17, 1938, p. 122.
[105] TNA: CO 533/497/8, "Memorandum and Articles of Association of Plough Settlements Association Limited" August 17, 1938, p. 128; TNA: CO 533/497/8, Document 45., S.W. Campbell to M. Stephany, September 21, 1938.
[106] TNA: CO 533/497/8, Document 72., C.F. Knaggs to Colonial Office, November 14, 1938, pp. 40-43.
[107] This dilemma was explicitly recognized by Kenya's governor as the PSA—particularly Kenya's local Jewish community—began to lobby for the expansion of the scheme: "Humane considerations make it extremely difficult to resist pleas for the admission of intending brides and close relatives" a dynamic he likened to "Our experience in

white man's country was just as acute when Knaggs visited Landwerk Neuendorf as it was when the Uganda Railway first opened the land to mass settlement thirty-seven years prior. For the thirty-one people on Knaggs' list, it was a question of life or death.[108]

Within Kenya itself, European settlers also showed a conditional willingness to encourage closer Jewish settlement, motivated by an antisemitic perception of Jews as vectors for capital which they dissimulated with a developmental veil. Among European settlers there was the revival of some of the old fears from 1907 of the colony being "[flooded] with the poor type of Jew." Yet while in 1903 the East African Standard printed dire warnings of an "invasion" of "long-greasy-frock-coated gentlemen […] of the worst kind" and sardonically remarked "Agriculturalists, forsooth!" by 1934 the paper reported on the prospect with a cautious optimism noting "The amazing story of the development of Palestine by Jewish immigrants suggests that the Jew can make good as an agriculturalist on small holdings developed on a cooperative communal group system."[109] By 1937 when the PSA scheme was before the Convention, they cautiously approved it on the grounds that a Jewish closer settlement scheme would surely bring "the useful immigration of people such as doctors and veterinary surgeons." One delegate even declared that he felt his district "*lacked* a Jewish element [emphasis mine]" and that "South Africa was nothing until the Jewish people came along and made it," a whiplash-inducing *volte face* from a community which just three decades prior had pointed to South Africa as a case study for why Jews needed to be kept out of the colony at all costs (Chapter 2).[110]

Ultimately the most vocal opposition to the PSA scheme in 1938-9 came from the Indian community, which during the crises of 1919-1923 had been racialized as antithetical to colonial development. A series of memoranda issued by the East African Indian National Congress

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this colony with Dutch settlers…that while they are able to make a living for themselves, they are in many cases unable to save enough to be able to set up their sons on farms, and the avoidance of the growth of a poor white population is a problem which I fear will become increasingly urgent in the near future." Colonial Office administrators in London were even more blunt: "The Jews have made their usual stupid mistake of taking the ell. If they had not opened their mouth so wide and suggested say 60 young settlers instead of 150, it might have produced a different reaction from the Governor." Again, the *modus operandi* of the Colonial Office surrounding Kenyan closer settlement was dissimulation above all else. TNA: CO 533/511/2, Document 48., Robert Brooke-Popham to Colonial Office, May 9, 1939, p. 3; TNA: CO 533/511/7, March 24, 1939, p. 16.

[108] Almost immediately after Knaggs finalized his first list, all his candidates were put into concentration camps and his list was seized by the Nazis. Yet it was their presence on this list which enabled the CGJ to lobby the Home Office for the requisite visas to enable most of them to leave Germany and come, eventually, to Kenya. TNA: CO 533/497/8, November 29, 1938, 19.

[109] "The Threatened Jewish Invasion," *The East African Standard*, September 12, 1903, 1, from Readex African Newspapers, Series 1, accessed July 28, 2026, https://infoweb-newsbank-com.libproxy.berkeley.edu/apps/readex/doc?p=WHNPAFR1&t=pubname%3A12BE6F7A2FFCBE88%21East%2BAfrican%2BStandard%252C%2BMombasa%2BTimes%2Band%2BUganda%2BArgus/year%3A1903%211903/mody%3A0905%21September%2B05&year=1903&docref=image%2Fv2%3A12BE6F7A2FFCBE88%40WHNPAFR1-12BF5686B1D971B0%402416363-12BF1623AD0738C0%404&origin=image%2Fv2%3A12BE6F7A2FFCBE88%40WHNPAFR1-12BF5686B1D971B0%402416363-12BF161E67C3B000%400; "Jewish Settlements," *The East African Standard,* May 12, 1934, 42, from the British Newspaper Archive, accessed July 28, 2026, https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0001838/19340512/122/0011.

[110] "Jewish Settlers: Principle Approved" *The East African Standard,* October 20, 1938, clipped in KNA: BV 7/42, Document 22. The Convention's lukewarm willingness to accept "Jews with sufficient capital to take up land" into the white man's country was reflected in a proposed amendment to change the word "Jewish" in the resolution to "Non-Aryans of Alien Origin." Ultimately the amendment was withdrawn "after Major Cavendish-Bendick had asked if anyone could define 'Non-Aryan.'" Presumably, nobody present could do so.

(EAINC) in 1938 argued that the PSA scheme was approved by European settlers "not out of love for the destitute Jews, but mainly to swell the number of white settlers to such an extent as to justify and bring about a statutory reservation of the Highlands to be able to exploit more vigorously the natural resources of the land" whereas Indians, "a subject race [were] in a better and more sincere position to offer their sympathy to an oppressed race." While European settlers of the 1930s had decided that Jews could be conditionally accepted into the white man's country so long as they did not enter it as Jews (but rather as atomized bearers of capital), the EAINC—while they sympathized with the plight of Jews as such—resolved such settlers must be understood first and foremost as "aliens." Thus, the government subsidizing their settlement in the highlands while rejecting Indian settlement thereon entailed a denial of Kenyan Asians' full imperial citizenship.[111] The Morris-Carter Land Commission's recommendation that the highlands be defined in policy added further urgency to this issue for the EAINC because the importation into the colony of any settlers who could be racialized as white would necessarily expand the boundaries of the highlands and make the policy of racial segregation harder to repeal.

To advance this objection to the PSA scheme the EAINC alloyed the language of the Devonshire White Paper, colonial developmentalism, and the threat of imperial crisis. The PSA scheme was a violation of African paramountcy because "their influx would dislocate the economic life of the [native] inhabitants of the country" without their consent, thus creating "new vested interests which may result in a forced partition of Kenya, as in Palestine, with the consequent unrest and misery for millions."[112] Furthermore, they pointed to how by 1938 only 10% of European-held lands were under cultivation, leaving "no doubt that European settlement at present is economically a complete failure." Surely then, Indian and African cultivators would do better with the land than if European refugees were settled upon it? The EAINC labeled the PSA scheme as a manifestation of the "menace of alien settlement," drawing a sharp contrast between their status as British subjects capable of profitable development and the refugees' foreign status:

There is hope that so long as the lands are uncultivated and the number of European Setters [sic] does not increase by leaps and bounds, the British Government may abandon its present policy of excluding natives and Indians from developing the lands that the English Settlers are unable to cultivate…But the European settlers are aware of this threat to their present unjust usurpation and are supporting the idea of grants to develop the vast and fertile lands that lie fallow at present. This policy of flooding the Highlands with aliens who have never contributed to the building up of the Colony nor faced the hardships of pioneering work done by Indians is most

[111] Here again we see the political and cultural importance of laundering in closer settlement schemes in this period. Though the one EAINC memorandum vocally objected to how "it is also proposed that in addition to permitting Jews to immigrate into this Colony, they are to be given economic subsidy in the shape of facilities for acquiring land, financial assistance and waiving of deposit or security under the Immigration Restriction Ordinance. Ultimately these concessions mean *either directly or indirectly* [emphasis mine] a charge on the finances of the Colony." Yet in response the colonial government retorted that this was false because "it is not the intention that an 'economic subsidy' in any shape or form should be furnished by this Government, which is taking all possible steps to provide that the entry into Kenya of persons concerned shall result in no charge falling on public funds." TNA: CO 533/498/1, East African Indian National Congress, "Immigration of Jewish Refugees into Kenya," September 7, 1938, p. 3; Document 6., October 24, 1938, p. 1.

[112] TNA: CO 533/498/1, East African Indian National Congress, "Immigration of Jewish Refugees into Kenya," September 7, 1938, p. 3.

improper. Once the Jews acquire interests in the Highlands the natives and Indians are doomed to be left out of the rich Highlands for ever unless they resort to violence as the Arabs are forced to do in Palestine.[113]

The EAINC's protests against the PSA scheme further confirm that the language of development in colonial Kenya could cut any number of ways. It could be used to justify the inclusion of Jewish refugees in the white man's country just as it could be used to deny their entry, to further double down on closer settlement or to reject it entirely. They also reveal the extent to which Kenya had become an imperial lightning rod following 1919, a colony which could no longer be considered in isolation due to the sheer concentration of overlapping intra-imperial interests therein. Kenya, like Ireland and like Palestine, had become a 'problem' which reflected on the British Empire as a whole.

Ultimately, the PSA scheme fell apart with the start of World War II. On September 3, 1939, any German and Austrian Jews hoping to escape Nazi territory became enemy nationals, further complicating their claims for refugee status. Yet even before then the cracks had been showing. By April 1939 the PSA had acquired no farms on which to put its settlers, nor did it have the funds to do so. Efforts by the PSA and Kenya's local Jewish community to lobby for an expansion of the scheme were roundly rejected by all major stakeholders: if the refugees were not carrying capital with them from the metropole, then they were not wanted.[114] One of the PSA's last effective acts was to lobby the Kenyan government to rescind the rule forbidding its settlers from seeking waged employment in the colony, effectively acknowledging that many would not become the yeomen farmers they'd promised.[115] Ultimately only a few new farms were acquired for Jewish families, scattered throughout the colony and mostly purchased either with their own capital or with backing from Kenya's Jewish community. With the outbreak of the war the PSA settlers were interned along with other "enemy aliens" in British concentration camps throughout Kenya, namely around Kabete, Nairobi, and Nakuru.[116]

Was this scheme a failure? Judged by the developmentalist logic which ostensibly justified its existence, it was. Little capital was brought into the colony, few refugees were established as farmers, and few if any permanent improvements were constructed. Yet I argue that the PSA scheme, like the plethora of other closer settlement schemes which proliferated in interwar Kenya, cannot be understood in the 'purely economic terms' which were used to justify them. From October 1938 to September 1939, a committee of settlers was empaneled to advise Kenya's Principal Immigration Officer "on all applications that could be regarded as 'refugee.'"[117] In a retrospective report on the committee written in 1946 one finds a partial list of the pleas for asylum which the committee denied, each summarized in just a few words: "60 to 70 Hungarians" "40 Czechs" "Two groups of Hungarians—5,000 each" "30 Hungarian Czechs"

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[113] KNA: MAC EAI 28/2, East African Indian National Congress, "Reservation of Highlands of Kenya for Europeans," October 7, 1938, p. 7.
[114] TNA: CO 533/511/7, Document 43., Plough Settlements Association Ltd. to Colonial Office, March 31, 1939, p. 141.
[115] TNA: CO 533/511/7, Document 60., Plough Settlements Association Ltd. to Colonial Office, 19 July, 1939, 109-p. 113.
[116] Vinzent, "The British Internment of Refugees from Nazi Germany in Kenya During World War II," 168.
[117] One of the chief results of the EAINC's lobbying surrounding the PSA scheme was that this committee had an Indian representative, effectively an acknowledgement that such immigration *did* in some unspecified way impinge upon their rights as imperial citizens.

"Several thousand 'Hungarian Jews'" "300 to 500 families of Carpatho-Ruthenians" and so on, ending with a simple, sickening, "All the above applications were refused."[118] The list encompasses thousands of people who couldn't climb over the colossal wall presented by Kenya's decades of land speculation and the instability of its racial politics. Yet the PSA got a few people over that wall.

The PSA existed not to develop Kenya, but to launder Jewish refugees fleeing for their lives into instruments of development to facilitate their escape. It existed to provide plausible deniability for the policymakers who could not admit to directly subsidizing closer settlement without contradicting the post-1923 status quo yet were forced to do so by a lobby which was determined to attract a new generation of settlers to take up the lands they'd proven unable to develop. Like every other closer settlement scheme of the interwar, it existed to place yet another sacrifice of capital upon the altar of the colony's speculative land market. It existed to sustain both the dream of a "land where life was still worth living" and the reality of a racialized political economy which had since its inception always valued land above life. It existed to launder a claim to asylum—a claim to life—with 'purely economic' terms. It existed to, as Walter Sidney Bromhead put it, capitalize humanity.

For thirty-one people, it succeeded.[119]

Conclusion

Following World War I and the implementation of the 1919 Ex-Soldier Settlement Scheme, Kenya entered a prolonged period of crisis culminating in the 1923 Devonshire White Paper. This crisis drew the eyes of the Empire and even of the wider world to Kenya, popularizing a claim for which Kenyan concessionaires had long argued: that because Kenya was ruled directly from London its economy, its labor regime, and its racial politics all reflected upon the British Empire as a whole. It could not be understood in isolation, for its lands, landowners, and laborers were meant to reflect the *values* of the British Empire. Yet the conjunction of the Indian crisis and the protests of the EAA simultaneously revealed the extreme precarity of Kenya's white settler community economically, politically, and even culturally. Despite constant subsidies and a coercive labor regime, settlers were consistently unable to fulfill the mandate which had brought them into the colony: to develop it. Generations of concessions, settlement schemes, and land speculation had failed to produce much viable development while also creating a political powder keg which, if it exploded, was now globally understood to reflect upon the British Empire's credibility and values.

To delay that explosion, policymakers and closer settlement boosters gradually began to launder their older claims on colonial lands and the full imperial citizenship they represented with 'purely economic' terms. They could not publicly dissuade further closer settlement

[118] KNA: BN 46/63, Document 11., "Re Central European Immigration – Pre-War Period" November 23, 1946.
[119] This is not to minimize the trauma inherent to resettlement. As Verena Buser reminds us, "Many of those who were so 'lucky' to migrate to Palestine or other destinations would endure lifelong consequences, such as the survivors' guilt for having outlived their families, friends, loved ones, children, or partners. This critical approach acknowledges the fact that *Hachshara* and retraining were cornerstones of Jewish emigration efforts under Jewish leadership, but were far from being a story of good fortune and of smoothly adopting a new homeland." This was eminently the case in colonial Kenya, where those evacuated from Nazi concentration camps shortly found themselves in British concentration camps, and those fleeing forced labor in Germany were forced to accept a condition of indentured servitude to escape. Buser, "*Hachsharot* after 1933," 36.

schemes for fear of acknowledging that the British Empire those schemes represented—an Empire of 'deserving' yeomen farmers and settler-investors—was no longer the north star of imperial policy. Yet neither could they publicly subsidize a particular category of settlers without renewing the crisis the White Paper had shelved without solving. Those who persisted in the old model of concessionary claim making—appealing to their Britishness, imperial service, race patriotism, etc.—were now largely thwarted.

Conversely, those who managed to launder their schemes for closer settlement by presenting them as apolitical, or who dissimulated the subsidies their schemes depended upon, were able to achieve a modicum of success. Kenya's land bank and direct marketing to imperial pensioners enabled closer settlement boosters to secure state sponsorship for a policy which—in private—its policymakers knew was doomed to failure. Meanwhile the undefined nature of the highlands enabled some cash-strapped white settlers to have the racial restrictions on their estates removed, and even enabled Indian settlers to exploit the occasional clerical error to advance their own private closer settlement schemes. Lord Bearsted and the Council for German Jewry were even able to advance a humanitarian scheme to facilitate the escape of Jewish refugees from Nazi persecution by laundering it through a shell company. What Theodor Herzl and Israel Zangwill had failed to achieve decades earlier by appealing to humanitarian and nationalist sentiments, the PSA achieved (on a much smaller scale) by way of vague appeals to development.

The language of development was, on the ground in colonial Kenya, vague and capacious enough to dissimulate what remained deeply cultural claims upon the nature of imperial citizenship, what British subjecthood entitled one to expect from their government, and the role of the imperial state in propagating whiteness. Kenya's concessionaire model of development persisted long after 1923—long after it was materially possible to grant more concessions—because the settlement scheme in Kenya was so much more than a demand for free land. It was a method of claim making, of worldbuilding, each scheme containing within it a vision for what it meant to be a British subject, for what Britain's subjects were owed by their Empire, whether the Empire could justly maintain a 'white man's country' within its borders, and if so, who *deserved* to live there.

Epilogue

> They began to feel that all this country was unreal, and that they were stumbling through an ominous dream that led to no awakening.
>
> --J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*.

> "Look, we fought to keep *one* country in Africa white-run"—she stops pointing her finger at our surprised guest to take another swallow of wine—"just one country." Now she slumps back in defeat: "We lost twice."
>
> --Alexandra Fuller, *Don't Let's Go to the Dogs Tonight*.

The story of failed settlement schemes in colonial Kenya did not end with the outbreak of World War II. Just as the first world war had done, the second poured gasoline on the fire of Kenya's speculative political economy. The existential pressures of the war diverted the attention of both metropolitan administrators and metropolitan humanitarians away from Kenya. The colony's "illusory wartime prosperity" was further buoyed by newly forceful state interventions into the labor market calibrated to "mobilize and recruit labour for the army and services designated as essential, [and] also to ensure that private farmers and employers received sufficient labour."[1] Between the mass state conscription of African labor for both the military and settler estates, the 1937 Resident Native Labourers Ordinance (RNLO) which granted European settlers such unprecedented authority over squatter cultivation that it effectively "confirmed the settler community's co-optation into the colonial state machinery", European settlers during the war effectively carried out a "clandestine *coup d'état*" which secured them "virtual self-government."[2] This is unsurprising given that the 'white man's country' had always owed its existence to a combination of forceful interventions from the colonial state and salutary neglect from the imperial metropole. World War II produced both to an unprecedented degree.

Thus, the settlement scheme remained a powerful vehicle for the dreams of both settlers and colonial administrators well into the postwar years, even as their visions were often mutually incompatible. On the one hand, between 1948 and 1960 the white settler population exploded from 1,700 to 3,600 driven by a profusion of closer settlement schemes. These schemes were orchestrated by the Agricultural Settlement Board (founded in 1946) which "bought all the remaining crown land and any uncultivated land that the existing settlers cared to sell, and distributed it to the new arrivals", most of whom were British veterans.[3] These schemes were sustained by boatloads of cheap money from Kenya's land bank, from the Colonial Development

[1] Tabitha Kanogo, *Squatters and the Roots of Mau Mau, 1905-63*, (J. Currey, 1987), 98; Tiyambe Zeleza, "Kenya and the Second World War, 1939-1950", in *A Modern History of Kenya*, ed. W.R. Ochieng (Evans Brothers, 1989), 147.
[2] John Flint, "Last chance for the White Man's Country: constitutional plans for Kenya and East Africa, 1938-1943", paper presented to History Seminar, Dalhousie University, February 1983, 14-15, quoted in Tiyambe Zeleza, "Kenya and the Second World War, 1939-1950", in *A Modern History of Kenya*, 147.
[3] Zeleza, "Kenya and the Second World War", 158-159.

and Welfare program, and increasingly from international (i.e. American) investors. Racially discriminatory 'guaranteed minimum return' policies protected settler estates from the rising threat of African production, such that "settler estates therefore, continued to be essentially parasitic on the rest of the colony's economy with the profits of the individual farmers achieved by the marketing system and extensive state services only at cost to the rest of the population."[4] And building on the lessons they had learned during the interwar years, these settlers proved increasingly adroit at using the language of colonial development to displace African squatters and thus make room for their subsidized new arrivals. For instance, settlers "shrewdly played the soil conservation card by pointing at the badly eroded African Reserves and emphasizing the need to take action against squatter cultivation and grazing before it was too late."[5] Mass seizures of squatters' land and livestock followed, driven by "sentiments of truly monumental self-deception, complacency and utter contempt for Africans."[6]

Yet this windfall of postwar settlement schemes could not achieve the goal which sat silently at the heart of every East African settlement scheme going all the way back to Theodor Hertzka and Freeland: imagining away the African. The tensions which produced all the laundering and bluffing of the interwar years hadn't gone away post-1945. The war had just temporarily resuscitated—with all the requisite violence and state subsidies—the illusion of the estate sector's viability. Yet as colonial development increasingly embraced a vision of state-guided human welfare, as Kenya's African working class grew increasingly militant and organized, and as a class of African capitalist farmers increasingly rivaled European estates despite all the restrictions against them, new settlement schemes emerged from within the colonial administration which finally sought to somehow alloy *African* rational self-interest to the colonial project.

In 1942 Harold Macmillan, then Under-Secretary at the Colonial Office, "devised a scheme […] to buy up the freehold lands of the larger farmers and turn their owners into managers or tenants, and for the purchase of the smaller farms, with a view to reselling them to Africans so that the worsening problem of land shortage for Africans could be arrested before it was too late."[7] Then there was the ill-fated Olenguruone scheme, commenced in 1939, wherein the colonial government distributed around 52,000 acres of the Maasai land unit to Kikuyu squatters displaced from the highlands following the 1937 RNLO. Intended as a model settlement controlled directly by the government, it was instead the site of a decade-long standoff between the squatters-turned-settlers and the colonial state which fueled the bitter resentments which eventually exploded with Mau Mau. Then in 1954, amidst the Emergency, the Swynnerton Plan made a last ditch effort at further consolidating lands in the Central Province in the hands of a loyalist cohort of wealthier African peasants. Land consolidation practices in the reserves had already been prone to widespread "cheating and fraud", and the Swynnerton Plan ultimately couldn't forestall independence for more than a few years.[8] And finally when independence came, it came with "loan-financed schemes for buying land in the White Highlands [which] pre-empted widespread distribution of free land to the landless, including ex-freedom fighters and

[4] Bruce J. Berman, *Control & Crisis in Colonial Kenya: The Dialectic of Domination* (James Currey, 1996), 267.
[5] Kanogo, *Squatters and the Roots of Mau Mau*, 106.
[6] Zeleza, "Kenya and the Second World War", 159.
[7] Zeleza, "Kenya and the Second World War", 146.
[8] Kanogo, *Squatters and the Roots of Mau Mau,* 164; Berman, *Control & Crisis,* 369-371.

squatters", thus ensuring that "settlers were fully compensated and that British metropolitan interests in Kenya were safeguarded."[9]

I have argued throughout this dissertation that the imperial project in British East Africa was essentially an attempt at realizing the fantasy of a European settler colony where all settlers live as employers through a combination of state intervention and rampant land speculation. I have argued that within this system, settlement schemes were often vehicles for attracting more capital into the colony by pressuring the colonial and/or imperial governments into subsidizing the introduction of new settlers on lands they otherwise could not afford to purchase, develop, or rent. And yet, even as this was the material role settlement schemes played in sustaining colonial Kenya's speculative political economy, these schemes were also cultural artifacts through which a wide range of actors could articulate new demands, new visions for the Empire or for colonial development, and new identities as imperial citizens, deserving entrepreneurs, white men, or loyal asylees. Each settlement scheme was the seed of a new society, of a new social order, and of new forms of self-identification. It is unsurprising that we should see a rash of settlement schemes during and after the war which sought to mold some segment of the colonized population into productive, loyal yeomen and/or entrepreneurs. The goal of the settlement scheme had always been to construct such a population—or at least fabricate the appearance of one—from 1894 with the Freeland expedition all the way to the Plough Shares Association in the 1930s. Yet as scheme after scheme failed over decades, the tool of the settlement scheme remained even as its use changed. The Olenguruone and Swynnerton schemes were imposed upon the colonized just as the 1919 Ex-Soldier Settlement Scheme had been, the difference lying in who was supposed to assume the mantle of the colonial state's loyal entrepreneur. After decades of white settlers claiming they would fill that role and then failing to do so, the colonial state in a last gasp of desperation decided that Africans would be made do so, willingly or not.

In time, these schemes failed too. They failed because people refused to perform the requisite labor to sustain the fantasies which produced them. The dreams and fantasies which sit at the core of every failed settlement scheme require labor to be realized. Both cultural and economic speculation are ultimately sustained by labor, and thus the withholding of that labor has proven to be one of the most powerful forms of resistance whether by porters, "coolies", or squatters. In training my focus on failed East African settlement schemes, I have often thought of E.P. Thompson's seminal effort to "rescue" his working-class subjects "from the enormous condescension of posterity." Though Thompson's subjects and mine were profoundly different in almost every way, his description of them aligns remarkably well with my own: "Their hostility to the new industrialism may have been backward-looking. Their communitarian ideals may have been fantasies. Their insurrectionary conspiracies may have been foolhardy […] Their aspirations were valid in terms of their own experience; and, if they were casualties of history, they remain, condemned in their own lives, as casualties." Unlike Thompson I have no desire to rescue most of my subjects from "condescension", and indeed I can only hope that much more condescension may be heaped upon the names of all those who sought in Kenya to fuse a rapaciously violent colonial state with their own predatory self-interest. Yet like Thompson I contend that the ultimate value of this project is to find in the "lost causes" of the past "insights into social evils which we have yet to cure." Within the vast archive of colonial Kenya's failed settlement schemes one can find a dizzying array of "communitarian ideals" and "insurrectionary

[9] Kanogo, *Squatters and the Roots of Mau Mau,* 163-164.

conspiracies", along with fantasies, foolhardiness, and plenty of "lost causes". Yet however misguided the fantasies analyzed here were, each nevertheless speaks to the violent ongoing processes of settler colonialism which today are devastating Kenya and Palestine alike, to the "social evils which we have yet to cure".[10]

Nicola Fuller, quoted by her daughter Alexandra Fuller in the epigraph above, was raised in colonial Kenya, lived as an adult in Rhodesia, and then later in Zambia. In Fuller's memoirs she recalls how her mother would often spiral into resentful, drunken tirades mourning the dead dream of the white man's country. For Nicola that dream was killed twice: first with Mau Mau and Kenyan independence, then with the Second Chimurenga and the dissolution of Rhodesia. Yet with each drunken bender the dream was briefly revived again, so often that her daughter could recite it by rote.[11] And the dream still refuses to die. In 2005 Thomas Patrick Gilbert Cholmondeley, the great-grandson of Lord Delamere, killed an undercover Kenyan wildlife officer on his estate yet was never prosecuted. A year later he shot and killed Robert Njoya Mbugua on his estate and was acquitted of murder, receiving a manslaughter charge instead. Dylann Roof, the white supremacist mass murderer who killed nine people at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in 2015, maintained a blog he titled "The Last Rhodesian" and frequently posted photos of himself wearing patches of the flags of Rhodesia and apartheid South Africa.[12] The fantasy of the white man's country, then as now, is but a prologue to theft and murder.

And on February 7, 2025, President Donald Trump issued Executive Order 14204, "Addressing Egregious Actions of the Republic of South Africa" which laid the groundwork for a settlement scheme of his own. In this scheme, the resources of the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program are used to launder Afrikaners into refugees fleeing nonexistent racial persecution in South Africa. Executive Order 14204 explicitly mandates that the government "prioritize humanitarian relief, including admission and resettlement through the United States Refugee Admissions Program, for Afrikaners in South Africa who are victims of unjust racial discrimination."[13] And despite the ongoing war in Ukraine, and the ongoing genocides in Darfur, Myanmar, and Palestine, in May of 2026 Trump announced he would raise the "record-low refugee admissions level of 7,500 to 17,500, reserving the additional openings for Afrikaners".[14] Between October 1, 2025 and June 30, 2026, the United States reported admitting 7,730 refugees, all but three of whom were Afrikaners.[15] As Sagie Narsiah observed, the mendacious framing of Afrikaners as refugees "is a tool to facilitate a transfer of public wealth into private hands", part of a larger white supremacist, authoritarian, neoliberal program "accomplished through *fiat*, *faits accompli*, and dismantling of legislative and policy structures of accountability and their replacement by legislation which promotes unfettered pillage."[16] At first blush this may

[10] E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Pantheon Books, 1964), 13-14.
[11] Alexandra Fuller, *Don't Let's Go to the Dogs Tonight: An African Childhood* (Random House, 2001), 19.
[12] Too Black and Rasul A. Mowatt, *Laundering Black Rage: The Washing of Black Death, People, Property, and Profits* (Routledge, 2024), 173.
[13] Executive Order 14204, "Addressing Egregious Actions of the Republic of South Africa," *Federal Register* 90, no. 9497 (February 7, 2025), 2025-02630.
[14] Zolan Kanno-Youngs and Hamed Aleaziz, "Trump Moves to Admit 10,000 More White South Africans as Refugees" *The New York Times,* May 18, 2026.
[15] Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration, *Refugee Arrivals by State and Nationality Fiscal Year 2026* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Department of State, July 6, 2026).
[16] Sagie Narsiah, "Empire and Land Reform in South Africa" *Human Geography* 19, no. 1 (2025), 155; 153.

seem distant from colonial Kenya, but the boundaries of the white man's country have always been porous and vaguely defined. In colonial Kenya the white man's country was also "accomplished through *fiat* [and] *faits accompli*" rather than explicit legislation, and what legislation the Legislative Council passed was usually done to promote "unfettered pillage" of both the colonial state and the lands it had conquered.

By weaving these many failed schemes back into the historiography of colonial Kenya we can better understand how and why the dream of the white man's country can continually reinvent itself down to the present day. This fantasy persists first because the state (especially the colonial state) is to the schemer a pot of capital which can, if the right magic words are spoken, be pillaged. The 'open sesame' might be 'development', or 'patriotism', or 'pioneering service', or 'the expansion of the white race', or even occasionally 'aid to refugees', yet so long as the scheme is sufficiently calibrated to address the Empire's crisis *du jour*, the purse strings of the state will be loosened and a concession secured. Yet the fantasy is also continually reinvented because it can contain the enticing promises of a resolution to the social question, of limitless wealth (on paper), of achieving the social position one has been unjustly denied, of finally practicing one's "national life", or even just of escaping persecution with one's life. A settlement scheme could be the vessel for all these promises and more. The white man's country can be anywhere, because it is nothing more than a dream. The dream exists only so long as land can be made to look empty, and people can be made to labor in its name. For colonial Kenya's many settlement schemers it was, to borrow a phrase from Tolkien, "an ominous dream that led to no awakening."[17]

[17] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings* (Harper Collins Publishers, 1994), first published 1954, 119.

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