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Brendon Nicholls

Game Reserves, Murder, Afterlives: Grace A. Musila's *A Death Retold in Truth and Rumour*

At the end of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Petals of Blood*, a young woman called Akinyi visits Karega, a trade unionist imprisoned on suspicion of communism by the Kenyatta regime. Karega's incarceration is opportunistic. The police have been investigating him for a murder in which they know he has had no involvement. They have imprisoned him without charge for the entirely separate circumstance of his political beliefs and activities. Akinyi brings Karega news of immediate revolutionary reprisals. A 'very important person in authority' has been gunned down in his car while on an errand of extortion (1977: 343). We might understand this unnamed victim to be the political Big Man in his generalised form, and a proxy for Kenyatta in his specifics. Moreover, Akinyi claims that the perpetrators were no mere robbers:

'According to Ruma Monga it's more than that. They left a note. They called themselves Wakombozi [Swahili, metaphorically, 'those who rescue, ransom or redeem']¹ – or the society of one world liberation . . . and they say it's Stanley Mathenge returned from Ethiopia to complete the war he and Kimathi started . . . There are rumours about a return to the forests and the mountains . . .'
Mathenge back? He turned this over in his mind. It could not be possible. But what did it matter? New Mathenges . . . new Koitalels . . . New Piny Owachos . . . these were born every day among the people . . . (1977: 344)

Ruma Monga ('Rumour Monger') is a mobile site of articulation within the social, invoking an alternative interpretive apparatus with which to comprehend political events. One of these frameworks of intelligibility is 'Piny Owacho,' a 1920s Luo grassroots anti-colonial movement. 'Piny Owacho' translates as 'the land has spoken' (Masolo, 2010: 195) or "'the country (or land) says.'" Piny Owacho represented an alternative moral authority whose social legitimacy enabled the questioning of the might of the colonial regime.' (Nasong'o and Murunga 2013: unpaginated). 'Piny Owacho' took its name from a fatalistic expression of finality ('the land has spoken'),² except that the phrase is used ironically by its speakers. To say, for example, the land has dictated that you must be poor is to highlight that its authoritative pronouncement is guilty of closing down response. Ventriloquizing the land's authority ('the land has spoken'), one performs the very same response that

¹ See Johnson (1993: 218).

² For a superb discussion of Piny Owacho as juridical utterance and critical implication, see Masolo, (2010: 195).

was supposed to be closed down. To utter ‘Piny Owacho,’ once again, is to contradict. Thus, ‘Piny Owacho,’ is used in mock deference to absolute authority. It is a kind of mocking citation, re-articulating authority’s excesses in the dilutions of pastiche. ‘Piny Owacho’ tells us what power is rumoured to think, but in telling us this it speaks from a space outside of power itself. In the very moment that power is spoken again (‘Piny Owacho’), its sphere of influence withers. In this sense, ‘Piny Owacho’ is the afterlife of political decree.

Like ‘Piny Owacho,’ Ruma Monga cannot be embodied by a single person as such, but can only be hailed remotely into presence through acts of gossip and anonymized attribution.³ Ruma Monga offers a different spatial arrangement of history-making, accomplished by a ‘return to the forests and the mountains.’ In this space of return (‘to the forests and the mountains’) and repetition (‘new Mathenges,’ ‘new Koitalels’), Ruma speaks most clearly in distributed form, much like ‘Piny Owacho’s’ antic emphasis in which ‘the land has spoken.’ What Akinyi offers as recursive, repetitious history in the reappearance of the once-presumed-dead leader of Mau Mau, Stanley Mathenge, Karega understands as future-directed optimism. For Karega, Mathenge and Dedan Kimathi, an executed Mau Mau leader, live on, like ‘Piny Owacho.’ Their afterlives remain as a latent successive potential in the people. Living in history, as Akinyi reminds us and as Karega understands, is to work with one’s own progressive obsolescence. One’s present moment, one’s own self-interest, is subsumed in the larger, synoptic movements of political change. What is at stake in the Big Man’s power is the problem of his finitude. The only things that he cannot retain or legate within his totalising political systems are his life, and his decrees, themselves. By contrast, Ngũgi contemplates the distributed forces and spaces of democratic struggle. Its actors are extinguished within their own moment by the movement’s multiform instances of expression. Progressive actors always already allow for their own supercession. In this way, collective struggle makes viable a future of approaching promise.

In one reading, we might say that the Kenyatta and Moi regimes were, like Macbeth, always destined to be haunted by ghosts. Inspired by Birnam Wood, Ngũgĩ’s forested Abedare Mountains march on as Mau Mau once again. Understanding this, Karega concludes, echoed by his harbinger, Akinyi (literally, ‘one who is to come’):

He looked hard at her, then past her to Mukami of Manguo Marshes and again back to Nyakinua, his mother, and even beyond Akinyi to the future! And he smiled through his sorrow. ‘Tomorrow . . . tomorrow . . .’ he murmured to himself. ‘Tomorrow . . .’ and he knew he was no longer alone. (1977: 345)

³ For Spivak, rumour ‘evokes comradeship because it belongs to every “reader” or “transmitter.” No one is its origin or source.’ (1988: 213)

What Shakespeare once offered as the loneliness of individuated soliloquy and the terminal quality of ‘all our yesterdays’ (Shakespeare 1972: 83),⁴ Ngũgĩ recites once again as transhistorical companionship discovered in collective endeavour. Macbeth’s (and Kenyatta’s) murderous acts are recast as an ever-living, ever-renewing Kenyan popular struggle. Perhaps the ‘very important person in authority’ had a Macbeth-like realization as the gunmen encroached (‘To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow’)? If so, Karega and Akinyi wrest speech from the perpetrator of power (‘Tomorrow . . . tomorrow’) in a Piny Owacho-like act of antic deference. Reciting is re-siting, we might half-echo. The portentous speech of power dissipates into broader choral parts. Likewise, Karega’s imprisonment after a murder he did not commit is liberated by his awakening to ever-widening affiliations and afterlives. In this sense, the key method of struggle is that the personal circumstance of the activist is endlessly recontextualised by the incremental accruals of the collective-in-history.

Ngũgĩ’s novel was much in mind when I read Grace A. Musila’s *A Death Retold in Truth and Rumour: Kenya, Britain and the Julie Ward Murder* (2015), because in it Musila gives careful consideration to Kenyan political assassinations and their afterlives.⁵ In this sense, we might read Musila’s scholarly focus on the explanatory and reframing powers of rumour as one more iteration of Ruma Monga’s power to disclose. If that assessment is valid, then Musila’s study is a liberatingly unbound recontextualization of Ngũgĩ’s vision. Indeed, Musila acknowledges Ngũgĩ’s own fictional accounts of the assassination of J.M. Kariuki.⁶ For instance, Kariuki is fictionalised as the lawyer in *Petals of Blood*, ‘taken a mile or so from the Blue Hills and he was shot and left for the hyenas to eat’ (1977: 297). As Musila points out, Kariuki the former Mau Mau detainee⁷ retained strong ties with his Mau Mau ex-comrades (2015: 38). He was widely seen as a vocal critic of Kenyatta’s economic policies. In this way, I would argue, Kariuki was a Mathenge of a sort come back to political life through Ruma. Though close to Kenyatta and enriched for his allegiance, Kariuki still communed with the abandoned spirit of struggle and he was assassinated for those ideals.

Readers of Musila’s book will find that she expresses admirable sensitivity and care in respect of her primary subject matter, which she treats as a related political killing. This is the unsolved 1988 murder of 28 year-old British tourist, Julie Ward, whose partial remains were found in Kenya’s Maasai Mara game reserve. In addition, what Musila does so effortlessly is to show how any number of competing, invested narratives circulate around that particular, tragic event. Musila led my reading into reflections upon the currency of narrative within the social, as well as upon

⁴ Macbeth’s soliloquy, ‘To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,’ is spoken in Act V, Scene v upon the death of his wife and during the approach of Birnam Wood.

⁵ Musila uses this term following an anonymous peer reviewer (2015: 11). I find her term ‘afterlives’ useful, specifically, for thinking through popular narrative as the ghosting of the historical event, or popular narrative as the ghosting of political decree.

⁶ Musila’s focus is on Ngũgĩ’s novel, *Devil on the Cross*.

⁷ See Kariuki (1963).

narrative's explanatory limits. I would argue that the murder victim requires of us a narrative of how and by whom she came no longer to be. In my view, the investigation of murder might be understood as a quest for narrative. We deduce and articulate the moments, agents and causes leading up to death, in order to redignify the victim's last living moments with our informed sympathies and thus recall her to her once-lost humanity. Narrative persists as an afterlife, retaining the lost among the living.

What has beset any solution to the Julie Ward case – now older than the 28 years Ward herself lived to be – has been that many of the narratives of her death were already prefabricated and tailored in advance. These narratives were designed to serve vested political or cultural interests. In this sense, the Julie Ward murder poses a paradoxical difficulty. The narrative that she asks of us is forestalled in advance by readily available cultural frames, by theories of convenience. Ways of telling pre-exist Julie Ward, slanting what can later be told of her singularly unhappy fate. Accordingly, Musila addresses not only the construction of formal legal or political 'facts,' but she also shows how these so called facts derive from larger political imaginaries. In this sense, Musila has to negotiate not only the various 'cultural illiteracies' (2015: 119) of John Ward's and the British police's investigations, but also John Ward's own negotiation of Kenya's 'officially promoted rationalities' (2015: 112) or 'formalised truths' (2015: 113), and the British government's 'preferred truths' (2015: 140), as he fought to discover what had befallen his daughter.

There are at least four semi-official 'factual' versions of what happened to Julie Ward:

1) In the first version, animals mauled and ate Julie. This version is impossible because Julie Ward's body had been burnt, and animals cook their meals neither before, nor after consumption. The explanatory story blaming wildlife was actively fabricated in tamperings with the autopsy report produced by police pathologist, Dr Adel Shaker. Knowing in advance that this meddling would occur, Shaker signed his report in Arabic script in order to prevent forged countersignatures to any subsequent, fraudulent alterations (2015: 22). Shaker's report had initially detailed extensive man-made injuries to Julie's remains, supporting an initial finding of murder. The language of the report was later altered, by Chief Government Pathologist Dr Jason Kaviti (2015: 23), to imply that the injuries were caused by animals. In other words, there were active attempts to re-describe Julie's injuries, to draw misleading conclusions, and to suppress the autopsy's initial finding of murder.

2) In the second version of Julie Ward's death, the girl had many lovers (2015: 58, 83).⁸ She was depressed and committed suicide (2015: 10), or else her supposedly 'easy ways' resulted in her murder (2015: 82). This narrative was offered variously

⁸ I offer this uncomfortable phraseology in the attributive spirit of Piny Owacho-like pastiche.

by the employees under the command of Police Commissioner Kilonzo, by State Prosecutor Alex Etyang during the 1989 inquest (2015: 83), and even by Judge Abdullah Fidahussein in the 1992 murder trial of game wardens Peter Kipeen and Jonah Magiroi. The suicide theory is implausible because death by self-maiming, then setting fire to oneself, does not tally with the fact that Julie Ward's abandoned jeep contained a full jerrycan with 20 litres of fuel in it, positioned one mile away from where some of her partial remains were found. Julie had no reason to walk a mile in order to set fire to herself, if suicide had been her intention. Moreover, if the suicide theory is to be believed, Julie would have had to set her remains on fire after first decapitating herself. Then she would have needed to place her skull a mile from her jawbone – a physically impossible feat. Additionally, there is no evidential basis for Julie Ward's supposedly promiscuous sexual history, nor any factual basis for her allegedly depressed state of mind. The stereotype of the crestfallen lover, led into her disappointment by promiscuity, is a reconstruction by elements within the Kenyan authorities – especially the initial police investigator, Superintendent Muchiri Wanjau. However, as Musila tells us, Wanjau himself had been pressured into producing his misleading findings. He had previously presented findings of a prominent political figure's involvement in Ward's murder to his boss, Director of the Criminal Investigations Department Noah arap Too, but Wanjau was instructed to 'look elsewhere' (2015: 23).

3) Thirdly and contrastingly, we encounter in some commentators the possibility that Julie was murdered for perverse or opportunistic sexual motivations, including a gang-rape.⁹ Such speculations might prompt incautious readers to stray into the subliminal racist trope of the black rapist preying upon the metropolitan naïf. This is a very widespread trope, as Musila rightly observes. For example, the trope is familiar to anyone who has encountered colonial ideologies of the Black Peril (Pucherova 2011: 7, 74), who has read Wulf Sach's *Black Hamlet* (1947: 61-63) or who has compared V.S. Naipaul's essay on Gale Benson's murder in Trinidad (1980) with his novel, *Guerrillas*. In the latter, Naipaul violates Benson once more by introducing (anal) rape, gratuitously and inaccurately, into the scene of literary representation (1975: 244-244). I would remark further that there are cultural similarities between the afterlives of the Gale Benson and Julie Ward murders. Each prompts a succession of non-fictional memoirs or 'true crime' genre accounts.¹⁰ Additionally, there has been unfounded speculation that Benson was a British intelligence operative (an accusation also levelled at Ward), and more recently that Benson and Michael X had somehow been involved in procuring compromising photographs from Princess Margaret's holiday on the island of Mustique (which matches the theory that Julie Ward had taken compromising photographs of paramilitaries aligned with Moi in the Maasai Mara).

⁹ See Ward (1991, 381) and Gavron (1991: 183).

¹⁰ For true crime accounts, see Humphry and Tindall (1977) and Sharp, (1981). For a memoir of Athill (1993).

The stereotype of the black rapist and the stereotype of the promiscuous white sex tourist may seem politically or morally opposed. And yet, I would argue that there is a collusive cultural logic at work in their fantasized sexual pairings and in their supposed libidinal corruptions – recasting murder in the language of sexual accommodation. This is also a conversion of affect. The pain of being violently murdered is converted into the morally-censured pleasures of perversity. Both schemas are equally problematic – white sex tourist, black rapist. In both, we find a racial policing at work, whose prohibitions are centuries old.¹¹

4) In the fourth version, Julie Ward was struck by lightning. Musila records that this story was initiated by the Kenyan police, but when Julie Ward's father sought assistance in the British High Commission in Nairobi, he was invited to speak privately with a former police trainer who was accompanied by a British Secret Intelligence Service operative (2015: 177-178). The trainer told John Ward that Julie's injuries were consistent with a lightning strike, a story prepared in advance behind the scenes in correspondence with Secret Intelligence Service headquarters in London (2015: 177). Even if we were to accept the claims of the police trainer that lightning strikes may on occasion produce cuts resembling wounds (2015: 173), this narrative is implausible because Julie's skull was found about a mile from the seat of the fire that the lightning had supposedly sparked (2015: 137). In these ashes, her jawbone was subsequently found (2015: 25). The autopsy revealed the burning of remains after decapitation. So, for the lightning theory to work, Julie would have had to first decapitate herself, then be struck by lightning. Straining further against the laws of probability, the lightning would then have needed to transport and deposit her skull a mile away from her other remains. Later, Scotland Yard investigated the murder and seemingly focused on untrue evidence and misdirected lines of inquiry (2015: 174-175). When Ward complained to the Independent Police Complaints Commission, the subsequent Lincolnshire Police investigation of Scotland Yard was sealed under the Official Secrets Act. The wildly inconsistent explanation of a lightning strike offered within the walls of the British High Commission in Nairobi, followed by the sealing of the subsequent Scotland Yard investigation under the Official Secrets Act, points towards possible political collusion between the Kenyan and British authorities in trying to cover up a murder. The British Government had a diplomatic interest in not upsetting Moi's regime, not least because of British economic and strategic military interests in the region (2015: 181-182).

Within these four versions of the death, wider narrative inconsistencies point towards an organized cover-up and begin to take on an explanatory, circumstantial force in Musila's deft and restrained treatment of events. We might start to speculate as to why Kenyan police who found Julie's body prepared to leave it lying in its place of rest (2015: 25), and why it was left to John Ward to gather his daughter's remains and other forensic evidence at the scene (2015: 25). We might wonder why Ward's daughter's skull was returned to him in a plastic bag one night when there was a

¹¹ The canonical history of the desires at work in theories of race is Young (1995).

knock at his hotel room door (2015: 24). We might inquire as to the changed autopsy report, and ask why Adel Shaker was later forced out of his employment (2015: 145). We might ponder gate-keeper David Nchoko's visitor book entry and receipt claiming inaccurately that Julie had already left the Maasai Mara (2015: 143), or Chief Warden Simon ole Makallah's assertion that he did not know how to drive, and had never driven Julie's jeep (2015: 142). We might ask why Makallah reportedly refused the assistance of a Swiss camera crew in the search for Julie, how he knew so promptly and exactly where to find her remains when the search party scoured the reserve for her, and why he was supposedly summoned to see President Daniel arap Moi shortly after the murder (2015: 105). We might enter conjecture as to why the first police investigator Superintendent Wanjau refused to sign the Official Secrets Form when relieved of his post (2015: 145), or indeed why he was relieved of his post in the first place. We might deliberate as to why a representative of the British Foreign Office initially advised John Ward to leave it to the Kenyan police to give evidence at the inquest (2015: 171), or how Julie's jeep got 'lost' upon return to the United Kingdom and was very nearly disposed of entirely in a wrecking yard (2015: 179).

Against the Kenyan and British governments' official and complicit narratives, Musila's book argues that Julie Ward's death is comprehensible within a genealogy of political assassination in Kenya. Included among the victims are Pio Gama Pinto, Father John Anthony Kaiser, Bishop Alexander Muge, Robert Ouko, Tom Mboya and J.M. Kariuki. These killings exhibit common features with Julie Ward's murder – Ouko, for instance, was also set alight after death, but was initially alleged to have committed suicide (2015: 35). Some of these assassinations exhibit a similar organized cover-up, as when attempts were made in a mortuary to divert Kariuki's mutilated corpse to an anonymous grave were foiled (2015: 39). The first official claim in some of these assassinations was that it was not a murder, then the second claim was that some politically-unimportant person was guilty, but popular rumour has continued to assert that such cover-ups had been orchestrated so as to protect powerful vested interests and prominent political figures.

In like vein, Musila proceeds to show that, when the various unreasonable official denials of Julie's murder were exposed as being at odds with the evidence, a series of relatively low-ranking officials were charged with the murder, but acquitted. The most fascinating aspect of these innocents' defences in court is that they relied upon idiosyncratic forms of ethno-cultural explanation or make appeals to the highly delimited sphere of the defendant's concerns. In the 1992 trial, for instance, Peter Kipeen explained in his defence that a Maasai man is forbidden to kill a woman (2015: 133). In the 1998 trial, Simon ole Makallah claimed that he had lied about being able to drive a jeep because he did not have a driving license and might have been sacked had he ever admitted to this minor indiscretion at work (2015: 143).

Perhaps the most heartening element of the investigations into Julie Ward's murder is that ordinary Kenyans have come forward, at possible risk to themselves, to tell John Ward what they believe happened to his daughter. We have the secondhand clothes seller who passed John Ward a note naming the politically-powerful man responsible. During her trading activities, she had heard rumours both within the Maasai Mara and 'adjacent villages,' including allegations from the game reserve employees' wives (2015: 105). A second, anonymous eyewitness wrote to Ward in the United Kingdom, claiming that three men had dragged a white woman into the Government Guest House next to Keekorok Lodge, where the eyewitness was employed (2015: 105). Another anonymous eyewitness approached the British High Commission and named his former employer, the politically-powerful figure, who allegedly assaulted Julie and ordered her killing. He named other witnesses present at the incident. Finally, two Kenyans in exile, Valentine Uhuru Kodipo and Big Muhammed, claimed to have witnessed the murder, again inculcating the politically powerful man, while they were training in a paramilitary death squad in the Maasai Mara (2015: 99-101, 136-137). In Kodipo's and Muhammed's accounts, we have the rumour that Julie Ward was killed not for what she was, but for what she might have seen and photographed, and that this might have been the secret paramilitary force training in the Maasai Mara under the direction of someone closely aligned to President Daniel arap Moi. This secret paramilitary force was a death squad designed, some allege, to eliminate the Moi government's political opposition under cover of 'ethnic violence.' Kodipo's account claims that Julie was murdered with a Maasai club, then decapitated under order. Then her head was carried a mile from the scene by someone politically close to President Moi, because it is 'a Kalenjin ritual to walk with the head of your victim' (2015: 137). In these ethno-cultural forms of explanation, we are invited to ask who the Maasai was in that company, and who the Kalenjin?¹² In my reading, Ruma Monga is at work here, creating a conspiracy of circumstance to identify the Big Man at the heart of injustice. Contesting the power of the Big Man, multivalent narratives from different sources work collectively to inculcate him via shared regimes of cultural intelligibility. The signs of the Big Man's authority – his stately accommodation, his orders to Maasai employees and even his Kalenjin 'warrior' status – are converted Piny Owacho-like into communal forms of testimony and disclosure.

Readers of Grace Musila's book will find correctives to scholarly and popular conceptions of how one should read, and indeed write, Africa. And yet, in my view, Musila's book prompts a wider critique of the lure of the African gap year or safari tour in popular metropolitan imaginings. I want to argue that Julie Ward's killing highlights how the game reserve operates in British and Kenyan imaginaries. Itineraries of travel and of touristic desire, we come to understand, work to construct inhabited space and thereby fashion fleeting, escapist identity performances. Travelling, we escape our selves only the better to reconfirm their primacy. And yet,

¹² Allegations naming the supposedly responsible politically powerful figure were published in an article by John Ward, published in the Nairobi Law Monthly 62, March 1996.

the effect of travel is also to recontextualise us in ways that widen what our selves, despite themselves, are able to speak.

It is in this vein that I will offer a critical recontextualisation of the Julie Ward case in the manner of Karega and Akinyi, or ‘Piny Owacho,’ with whom I began. What does Julie Ward continue to say? What, indeed, does the land speak of her (‘Piny Owacho’)? Julie Ward bravely and benevolently traversed Africa overland – Morocco, Algeria, Mali, Burkina Faso, Cote d’Ivoire, Togo, Benin, Nigeria, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Zaire, Uganda, Tanzania and Kenya (2015: 13). Tragically, the Africa that Julie Ward ventured into was not the same space that she ultimately encountered. Ward’s death – alone, aside from her killers, in a game reserve – invokes not only a tourist dream gone awry, but also the limits of touristic desire, placed as it is in the midst of a multitude of competing narratives and possibilities. Narratives circulate, even in such a seemingly ‘reserved’ space, space arranged and set aside to produce the figure of the tourist in the first place. Ward’s motivation for her journey was wildlife photography. Specifically, she expressed a desire before travelling to ‘photograph the jumbos’ (2015: 162). A frontispiece of Musila’s book shows a smiling Ward cuddling an orphaned baby chimpanzee in Zaire, 3 June 1988 (2015: ix). Similarly, Ward’s journey through the Maasai Mara months later was intended to observe and photograph the annual wildebeest migration (2015: 14).

In the aftermath of Julie Ward’s murder, the circumstances of which were horrible, several books have appeared that amplify her environmental interest – her father John Ward’s *The Animals are Innocent: The Search for Julie’s Killers* (1991), Jeremy Gavron’s *Darkness in Eden: The Murder of Julie Ward* (1991), Michael Hiltzik’s *A Death in Kenya: The Murder of Julie Ward* (1991), and Nick Buckley’s *Julie Ward: Gentle Nature* (1998). This last is a coffee table book of photographs and letters to which Julie’s mum, Jan, contributes a preface (See Musila 2015: 3, 9-10). It was published by the Born Free Foundation and the proceeds were donated to a lion sanctuary in Uganda (2015: 165). I contend that there is a discursive pattern in these titles that merits reflection. Animals are innocent, nature is gentle, Kenya is deathly and Eden is dark (because sinful? Because sexualised? Because peopled with Africans?). Such tropes are neither new, nor personalised. They form part of a wider history of African imagery dating back well over a century. We might crystallize the discursive effects of these accounts even further. Nature pacifies, it seems, and humanity violates. This may be an accurate synopsis of the aberration presented by Julie Ward’s murder, but such extremity should not be discursively generalizable. Addressing Julie, Kenyans are collaterally constructed. As Musila so aptly expresses it, the published accounts of Julie Ward’s death and its subsequent investigation have been ‘narrated through the prism of discourses drawn from [an] archive of ideas about Africa’ (2015: 119).

Reliant upon the collective stock of language and tropes, discourse is always extra-personal. In this way, its site of address – like Ruma, like ‘Piny Owacho’ – is mobile. Once broadcast abroad, the compelling injustice of Julie Ward’s murder enters into a discursive logic of ‘Africa’ that invites contestation, not least in Kenya itself. There has been considerable recent attention in Kenya to how Africa should (not) be written and I want to focus on its recontextualizing possibilities. Binyavanga Wainaina’s pioneering caricature, ‘How to Write About Africa,’ advises caustically:

Readers will be put off if you don’t mention the light in Africa. And sunsets, the African sunset is a must. It is always big and red. There is always a big sky. Wide empty spaces and game are critical—Africa is the Land of Wide Empty Spaces. When writing about the plight of flora and fauna, make sure you mention that Africa is overpopulated. When your main character is in a desert or jungle living with indigenous peoples (anybody short) it is okay to mention that Africa has been severely depopulated by Aids and War (use caps). (2006)

In this passage, Wainaina delineates how global fantasies of Africa are of a wide, ‘natural’ and crucially empty space. Africa in such fantasies is ‘severely depopulated by Aids and War.’ Contrariwise, Africa has too many people in it. It is ‘overpopulated’ and the implication is that it should presumably lose or shed some of its people. Wainaina isolates a contradiction that is underpinned by, resolved by, a common desire. The fantasy at work here sees Africa as empty, because that is what is so natural about it, sees Africa as depopulated due to the fault of African people themselves (they have transgressed sexually into AIDS or politically into conflict), or sees Africa as overpopulated and in need of depopulation. At the root of all three, inconsistent, versions of Africa, there is a common thread. This is the common thread of wishing depopulation on Africa, not only to save Africans themselves from ‘overpopulation,’ but to save Africa too from its own peoples, to save landscape, flora and fauna from their human counterparts.

The idea of a pristine space, a space in which lions and wildebeest frolic bucolically, is unsustainable. Historically-speaking, humans were always present in this scene, hunting, scavenging, travelling, and more recently taking pictures. Leading on from this, the very idea of a reserve always contains an implicit fantasy of depopulation. In psychic terms, the fantasy of the reserve is a fantasy of ethnic cleansing, a space in which one’s projections may be worked through without interpersonal and intersectional resistances. Moreover, the desire to observe and preserve animals ‘in their natural state’ cannot be fulfilled without entering into a disturbing split axis of fantasy in which whole peoples are first absented from the scene. Therefore, the basic wish underpinning the reserve is, taken to its logical extremity, an unacknowledged

genocidal wish.¹³ It reveals the hidden desire to depopulate which Wainaina identifies at the heart of so many global media accounts, charitable appeals, travel programmes and wildlife documentaries. The key notion of self-making at work is of the heroic outsider in totemic silhouette against an empty backdrop, with only their goodwill and the stature of their benevolent intentions emanating through the scene. In my view, this form of self-making mythologizes good intentions, care and custodianship, but the limits of such ideals are readily discovered in their racially-insular premises. To widen these premises in Julie Ward's circumstance would be to acknowledge that the Maasai Mara reserve only exists because Kenyan peoples were removed from its territory by British colonialism (2015: 130). It is in the light of this population clearance that I understand Rob Nixon's insightful claim that game reserves are 'free-floating Edenic enclaves . . . [with the] blended aura of colonial time and prehuman natural time' (2011: 181). Eden led to banishment, and we know who played God in its colonial dramatization.

The reserve, furthermore, spawns a veritable multinational industry. In this way, the reserve is a scene of dedicated cultural manufacture and economic extraction, producing the celebrity conservationist while coincidentally disguising vested private interests.¹⁴ Wainaina advises:

After celebrity activists and aid workers, conservationists are Africa's most important people. Do not offend them. You need them to invite you to their 30,000-acre game ranch or 'conservation area', and this is the only way you will get to interview the celebrity activist. Often a book cover with a heroic-looking conservationist on it works magic for sales. Anybody white, tanned and wearing khaki who once had a pet antelope or a farm is a conservationist, one who is preserving Africa's rich heritage. When interviewing him or her, do not ask how much funding they have; do not ask how much money they make off their game. Never ask how much they pay their employees. (2006)

Wainaina's critique here is that the so-called conservationist or game rancher is nothing more than a big landowner who supports environmentalism for profit and who exploits their workers; workers to whom the land incontrovertibly belonged in the first place. There is a very weak justification for 'conservation' in this setup. Conservationists, Wainaina suggests, are in the saving game to make a profit, not to make a difference. The most insidious extension of this idea is that the image of the celebrity conservationist is in fact a further selling point on book covers. Wainaina is

¹³ For a brilliant environmentalist and psychoanalytic reading of genocide and national parks, see Hemsley (2016).

¹⁴ 'In the Maasai Mara Game Reserve, for instance, the majority of accommodation facilities were at the time [of Julie's murder] owned by multinational companies.' (Musila 2015: 181).

not simply making a social or political statement. He is also satirizing a tradition of conservation narratives that came out of Africa from the 1960s to the 1980s. I think that he has particularly in mind Joy Adamson's *Born Free* (1960), but also quite possibly Dian Fossey's campaign to save mountain gorillas memorialized in the Hollywood film, *Gorillas in the Mist* (Apted 1988). Wainaina would have been well aware of these sources. But I would also speculate further that Wainaina's time spent in South Africa, and particularly at University of Transkei in the Eastern Cape, resonates with this passage. The landscape of the Eastern Cape is itself in transition at the time of writing. Former dairy farms, first stolen in the Border Wars from the Xhosa and consolidated for white ownership under Apartheid, are currently being turned into 'game reserves.' This offers market opportunities for tourist safaris or canned hunting. But such 'game reserves' also have the political boon of fending off, in advance, Zimbabwean-style land claims. The animals were there first, goes the implicit argument, and they will not survive if people co-exist with them. The myth that is peddled in such arrangements is that Africans destroyed the indigenous species (whether hunting bush meat or poaching). In fact, the biggest impact on these species was via colonization, hunting and land enclosure in the first place, and industrialized agribusiness and the marketization of wildlife in the second. To seek to keep the land enclosed but depopulated of workers and communities is to compound the moment that produced hardship for both African people and African species in the first place. Whether despoiling or saving Africa, the primacy of global commercial interest re-surfaces in the construction of its objects. The game reserve naturalizes the act of enclosure, which in turn naturalizes the command of property. The work of critical recontextualization as a method is to undo the boundaries of enclosure, and to assign new properties to the known.

Grace A. Musila's account of Julie Ward's murder is attentive to the layerings of discourse and political interest into which it intervenes. It is characterized by meticulous research, a highly readable style and a steady and well-judged intensification of the argument. This is a book that exposes official legal fact as convenient falsehood; that offers rumour as a plausible version of the truth; that shows how both rumour and official versions of fact work within a wider matrix of colonial or ethno-cultural discursive constructions of Africa. But we ultimately arrive at much more than that in our reading, I would argue. Testing various theories of convenience or confected alibis against the scattered body of evidence, we come to recognize that Julie Ward will not allow her story to be forgotten until it finally fits within a larger scheme of truth. The evidence of what happened to her persists awkwardly, and obdurately. It asks us to return to causal disturbance with fresh questions. By necessity, such questions recontextualize. "There are rumours about a return to the forests and the mountains," says Ngũgĩ's Akinyi, re-peopling the landscape with activist intentions. In the popular imagination, Akinyi's return, Kimathi's afterlife and Julie Ward's disappearance are constellated around relatively few prime movers – a lineage of 'very important people in authority.'

Critique is something like the wayward afterlife of power. More precisely, a recontextualizing method is philosophically-rich because it lives on beyond its founding characteristics. The one thing that we are not supposed to see in a reserve is the act of symbolic murder and the spectacle of unsettled humanity upon which the reserve itself is constituted. Demanding of us a narrative, the Julie Ward case unsettles our humanity. It inadvertently discloses the murderous wishes propping up some of our own most treasured cultural imaginings. The postures of the body offer us a way of thinking what the land has spoken ('Piny Owacho'). They invoke not only the victim, but also her placement within the space of the reserve, in full view of the community of witnesses on its margins, as well as in its centre.¹⁵ In coming back time and again with wider histories and recontextualizations to that lonely, dismembered human body in a space where only happy animals play (and, no doubt, a few contented tourists too), we are all quite possibly referred to other scenes and wider crimes.

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¹⁵ Binyavanga Wainaina offers this imaginative framework of understanding: 'In Pokot, an essential word, korok, allows me to glimpse, in a small way, how this landscape is seen through Pokot eyes. The word korok is three things: the tibia, a unit of physical space, and a unit of social space' (2011: 198).

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