

Cartography and the Political Imagination

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INTRODUCTION

Mapping Political Communities in Africa

ON 25 August 2009, Perus Angaya Abura sat drinking her morning tea in her home, in the Amalemba Estates outside Kakamega, in Kenya's Western Province, anticipating a knock at her door from a "census enumerator." The 2009 Kenya census sparked controversy when government officials opted to resurrect a section on ethnic background on their questionnaires. Responding to concerns over ethnic violence, official manipulation, and minority rights, Kenyan officials expanded the list of forty-two "tribes" recognized in the last census a decade before to 114. The new list contained several tribes Perus had identified with at various points in her long life.¹ For the first time, "Kenyan" appeared as an option on a national census. "Luyia," the ethnic group ascribed to Perus since the first colonial census, in 1948, when she was but a teenager, also appeared.² Under "Luyia," a collapsible list of several different names unfolded for the first time: "Kisa," the administrative name given to the clans within Perus's home location during the colonial demarcation of 1909; and "Isukha," her husband's community and thus the community of her children, now appeared as official ethnic identities. Here laid out before Perus were some of the multiple identities she had come to wear: in Perus's words "Kenyan, Luyia, Kisa, Isukha, how can I choose? I am all of these."

Official inquiries into ethnic identity in Kenya threatened to pour salt on the fresh wounds of violence and political instability that engulfed the country after the 2007 national elections. The tightly fought campaign between incumbent Mwai Kibaki's Party of National Unity (PNU) and the opposition Orange Democratic Movement (ODM), led by Raila Odinga,

quickly gave way to allegations of electoral fraud and massive demonstrations. The violence that ensued was graphically depicted by both Western media and many in the Kenyan government as “tribal” or “ethnic” in nature: the evils of political tribalism—the pitting of tribal communities against each other in an all-out competition for political power and resources—again rearing its ugly head in postcolonial Africa.

The opposition party ODM was born out of popular protests against Kibaki’s proposed constitutional reforms in 2005 that did little to limit executive power or reform “Kenya’s ‘top heavy’ political system.”³ Headed by a “pentagon” of five leaders with prominent Luo politician Raila Odinga at the helm, ODM hitched its campaign onto deeply historical arguments, telling histories of lost sovereignty, prophesizing interethnic cooperation, and envisioning a devolved, federated state.⁴ Their strategy was a regional one: each of the five leaders in the pentagon represented a different regional polity, and their platform promised a more equitable “sharing of the cake” across the country. Debates during the campaign highlighted the multiple social inequalities, historical grievances, and regional disparities in development that cut across simplified “tribal” allegiances.⁵ The two months of postelection violence left over one thousand people dead and seven hundred thousand internally displaced and ended with a compromised coalition government, with Kibaki continuing as president and Odinga instated in the newly created position of prime minister. Ethnic arguments certainly played a role in voting patterns and in the subsequent violence, but to label the two-month conflict that inaugurated 2008 as merely the cyclical bloodletting of “age-old tribal hatreds” was to misread not only the deep social anxieties and urgent political questions at stake in these elections but also the complex histories of the making and unmaking of political communities in eastern Africa.

Ahead of the 2009 census, newspapers, blogs, and other popular forums filled with debates over the nature of identity in Africa. In an article for the *Standard*, Otuma Ongalo pondered his census choices:

I’m a son of a Luo man from Nyanza and Mnyala woman from Kakamega who migrated from Ugunja and established a home among the predominantly Bukusu in Bungoma in early 1960s. . . . Part of my family born before mid 1960s speaks fluent Luo, Kinyala and Kibukusu. . . . I’m married to an Isukha woman but our children cannot speak Kisukha, Kinyala, Luo or Kibukusu. So, when enumerators turn up in our homestead they will find a nation, not a tribe.⁶

Mama Ida, wife of Prime Minister Raila Odinga, drew laughs when she responded to the census question with, “I’m half-Luo, half-Luhya—you know, 50–50!”⁷⁷ With no provision for such mixed families, Ida Odinga was enumerated as a Luo, the community of her husband.⁸ One columnist jokingly pictured these plural families as products of a distinct moral economy: “exchanging goats for the tribe.”⁹ In western Kenya, as across the country, long histories of migration, intermarriage, and interethnic exchange complicated bureaucratic efforts to align people into neatly ordered columns of sanctified and unchanging tribal groupings. As Ongola’s response eloquently captured, the grammar of identity had a history and a geography that made sense of the plurality and multiplicity of identities in postcolonial Africa.

In response to petitions from “minority communities” in this minority nation, respondents for the 2009 census would be “at liberty to break away from the broader Luhya, Kalenjin, Mijikenda, Swahili or Kenyan Somali and identify with one or the other of the numerous sub-groupings under them.”¹⁰ The groups targeted in this process of disaggregation at first glance appeared quite diverse, and yet they shared a common history of ethnic imagination at odds with contemporary understandings of ethnogenesis. All extend across national and colonial borders; all have recent histories of confederal alliances among diverse communities; and all have been at the forefront of federalist debates and secessionist campaigns in postcolonial Kenya.¹¹ Of the Mijikenda, a confederation of nine communities along Kenya’s coast, Justin Willis has argued that their modern articulation of ethnicity was “a history, and an identity, of recent origin; a truth whose ambiguity is constantly reflected in historical presentation.”¹² It was this ambiguity, this plurality and dissent within territorially unbound ethnic bodies, that government officials in Kenya painted as potentially subversive and destructive to national stability.

The census enumerator never arrived at Perus’s door. Despite a projected success of 97 percent of households across the country, delays, errors, and confusion marred the census in the Western Province, returning only 79 percent of its recorded household data.¹³ Perus’s dilemma, though, revealed a deeper history of the multiplicity and ambiguities of belonging in postcolonial Africa.

In all these recent political developments in Kenya—the 2005 constitutional referendum, the 2007 elections, the 2009 census, and again in the 2013 elections—one question plagued officials and repeatedly grabbed headlines: how will the Luyia answer?¹⁴ With the second-highest voting numbers in the country, the Luyia represent a powerful regional power broker and crucial factor in any electoral contest. However, the political

plurality of Luyia constituents consistently defied the tenets of political tribalism, never historically voting as a bloc. Despite representing the most hotly contested, diversely populated, and historically oppositional province during the 2007 Kenya elections, the province did not witness the levels of violence and retribution that spread around its borders. Even with one of their “own,” in the form of Musalia Mudavadi, vying for the presidential seat in 2013, Luyia voters continued their tradition of defiantly plural politics, splitting the vote yet again between multiple candidates and parties.¹⁵

The political landscape of western Kenya is “slippery” terrain: “just as the Luhya’s favourite food, ‘mrere’ is slippery, so too is anyone that banks on the Luhya to vote in bulk for them.”¹⁶ Many have asked whether they were indeed a proper “tribe”: in the words of one Kenyan columnist, the Luyia were “created by the colonial administration some time in the 1940s. They did not exist before then and have no history as a ‘tribe.’”¹⁷ And this questioning of Luyia “credentials” as a tribe extends far beyond Kenya’s popular and political discourses: mentors, advisers, and colleagues at academic conferences and in casual conversations have similarly asked me, “but are the Luyia *really* a tribe?”¹⁸

These questions formed the original stimulus for this book, asking how and to what ends the Luyia community developed this seemingly plural and unpredictable ethnic identity. Indeed, the “Luyia” did not exist as a discrete ethnic appellation before the 1930s; precolonially, and well into the colonial era, they were instead multiple discrete and distinct political communities that defied ethnic categorization and crossed environmental, linguistic, and colonial boundaries. Nevertheless, in 1948, after four decades of British rule in Kenya, a previously unknown ethnic name suddenly appeared atop the first official census. From non-existence, the “Luyia” appeared with 653,774 enumerated and named constituents. By the 2009 census, Luyia numbers had risen to 5.3 million, the second-largest ethnic affiliation in the country. Despite their recent and self-conscious history of ethnogenesis, Luyia elders interviewed throughout my research described their community within the idiom of “tribe”: to be Luyia was to be “of the same blood,” to “gather together,” to “speak the same language.”¹⁹

This story, then, begins in this slippery terrain, in the undulating landscape of what would become western Kenya. From the shores of Lake Victoria to the foothills of Mount Elgon, the immense ecological and topographical variety of this compact region invited a complex mix of African settlers from divergent migratory routes and linguistic backgrounds. While European geographers and administrators mapped a singular, neat

territory to order this complex landscape, its diverse inhabitants proved resistant to would-be state builders. With the discovery of gold in their lands in the 1930s, a territorial crisis prompted local political thinkers to imagine, for the first time, an enlarged ethnic polity in western Kenya.

The threats to land and local moral economies brought by colonial rule prompted many communities across eastern Africa to imagine new ethnic polities. However, for the communities of western Kenya, no single vernacular language ever united their disparate speakers; no common narratives or mythic founding father bound their members within historical lineages; and no set of cultural practices defined their community membership. Lacking these traditional, or at least recognizable, reservoirs of ethnic politics, Luyia political thinkers instead mapped new limits of authority, moral accountability, and political community along territorial lines: they worked to territorialize custom and institutionalize plurality; they mobilized a civic language of territorial nationalism to rationalize their differences; they imagined a territory of cosmopolitan people bound not by common lineage or past myths but by a common geographic imagination. While narratives of ethnogenesis among the Luyia claim no common founding father or point of origin, they insist on a geographic identity. This geographic space, defined by the regional networks and exchanges made necessary by environmental interdependence and the multiplicity of communities, provided the most constant source of inspiration and mobilization for the creative re-imaginings of the Luyia community.

While framed, and continually frustrated, in the colonial terms of the ethnos, the creation of a plural and civic-minded Luyia identity proved impressively durable, and flexible enough to allow Luyia partisans to defend against encroaching European settlers and African neighbors, to productively navigate the politics of loyalism and dissent during the Mau Mau rebellion, and to foster a vibrant and fiercely plural political culture. Understanding this dynamic, confounding, and diverse political project requires a reassessment of current theories of ethnogenesis, prompts an investigation into the geographic imaginations of African communities, and provides a challenge to contemporary readings of community and conflict in Africa.

LINES OF ARGUMENT: IMAGINED POLITICAL COMMUNITIES

This book advances three lines of argument based on three intertwined concepts that while abstract and multiple in their meanings have material and situated implications and reflect the high stakes and changing

political economies of African political imagination. The first follows the argument of “imagined communities,” to use Benedict Anderson’s now famous phrasing, of understanding national and ethnic identities as thoroughly historical and intrinsically creative processes.²⁰ Such imagined communities formed on the basis of multiple impetuses: national, religious, linguistic, ideological, and genealogical. Yet while ethnos provided the language for much of this imagination in colonial Africa, what was imaginable had historically contingent limits. To address the constraints and possibilities of these imaginings, the second line of argument seeks to unpack the emergence of a particular form of ethnic patriotism that demonstrates the complex interplay of nativism and cosmopolitan pluralism within African political thought. Finally, I argue that these seemingly contradictory claims were made possible by the mobilization of geographic imaginations capable of articulating and at times enforcing the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion. At its analytical core, this study argues for a social history of cartographic political imaginations.

In colonial Africa, the European belief that all Africans belonged to timeless, bounded, primordial “tribes” meant ethnicity was the only framework recognized by imperial surveyors, missionaries, and colonial officials, and in turn became the dominant language of African culture and politics. But this does not mean that African imaginations of tribe, and later nation, were merely “derivative discourses” trapped in European constructs and ideologies.²¹ While most contemporary historians shy away from the term, due to its imperial roots and primordial implications, *tribe* has rarely represented a problem for self-description within African patriotic discourses. Indeed the idiom of “tribe” has proven incredibly resilient despite the vilification of its twin head, “tribalism.” While I hesitate to endorse a wholesale rehabilitation of the term, the language of *tribe* continues to hold great relevance and currency in the everyday political imaginings of self and society in Africa.

Until the late 1970s, these two analytical thrusts—one viewing tribes as primordial communities bound by blood kinship relations and the other viewing tribes as instrumental political identities, circumstantial and open to manipulation—governed both colonial and academic understandings of ethnic identity.²² Both these theories understood ethnic identity as a fact and their tenets continue to dictate popular representations of Africa, as witnessed in the aftermath of the 2007 Kenya elections. However, both failed to account for the continuing salience and changing meanings of ethnicity in contemporary African societies.

In the 1980s a new cohort of African scholars questioned the “fact” of ethnic identity and championed a new theoretical model that still

dominates today. In Leroy Vail's seminal edited volume *The Creation of Tribalism*, contributing scholars theorized the "invention of tradition" through the codification of customary law, the standardization of African languages, and the effects of migrancy on the construction of new lines of community under colonial rule. As John Iliffe argued, "Europeans believed Africans belonged to tribes; Africans built tribes to belong to."²³ For these constructivists, ethnicity was not a fixed condition but rather a modern expression of historical processes, socially constructed by colonial officials, European missionaries, and African political thinkers.

Postcolonial studies have largely endorsed these instrumentalist and constructivist approaches, picturing ethnicity as an industry, as a crisis of citizenship, and as a "shadow theatre" of historical production.²⁴ A new thrust seems to be reinvigorating primordialist arguments and debates around whether colonial regimes did, in fact, invent ethnic and racial hierarchies or rather simply added a new language for racial or ethnic thinking.²⁵ In global and transnational studies of ethnogenesis, there exists a growing trend toward examining the "entanglements" of ethnicity, the interrelationships of ethnicity, race, nationalism, class, gender, and sexuality.²⁶ In colonial contexts, these studies examine ethnogenesis both as a strategy of subaltern resistance and as a means of exercising and consolidating dominance.²⁷ Despite Richard Werbner and Terence Ranger's warning that the "story of ethnic difference in Africa threatens to overwhelm the larger debate about postcolonial identity politics," recent studies continue to emphasize instrumental political manipulation, lineage-based myth making, and the colonial legacies of the dichotomy between customary and civic models of belonging.²⁸

Fixated as the constructivists have been on the colonial moment, what they still fail to account for are the very real attachments to and emotive potential of ethnic identification witnessed in modern Africa. As John Lonsdale has argued, "Ethnicity can scarcely be invented, or warmly shared, in a historical void."²⁹ The limits of "invention" soon became apparent even to its founding thinkers.³⁰

More recent scholarship on ethnicity in Africa has heeded Lonsdale's call to interrogate the moral debates and imaginative processes marshaled by African communities in the making of ethnic identities. In his groundbreaking work on Kikuyu society and the moral economy of the Mau Mau rebellion, Lonsdale redirected scholarly attention toward the internal moral debates of ethnic polities.³¹ He argued that "moral ethnicity" was primarily a culture of personal and civic accountability: "To debate civic virtue was to define ethnic identity."³² Ethnicity thus represented a moral and political arena in which African communities

debated and continually reimagined notions of belonging and citizenship, social obligation and civic responsibility, and moral authority and political leadership. In doing so, Lonsdale opened up the timeline of ethnic invention and created a language that allowed scholars to interrogate ethnicity as a creative moral project: in the words of Thomas Spear, to shift scholarly focus to “the dynamics of traditions, customs and ethnicities; on the contradictions of colonial rule; on shifting resource endowments and access; on how African and European intellectuals reinterpreted traditions in the colonial and postcolonial context; and on why others believed them.”³³

While the “invention of tradition” school of thought and the more thorough accounting of “moral ethnicities” continue to offer important frameworks, both suffer from two interrelated shortcomings. First, scholarship in this vein too often takes the “inventors” of political communities at their word, elevating their versions of constructed community at the expense of the multiple, dissenting, and competing forms of community developed within and outside the linguistic and territorial confines of the “tribe.”³⁴ Just as “invention” was not limited to the colonial period, neither was it the sole domain of the African cultural brokers who wrote patriotic histories. Tim Parsons has recently shown the “diverse ways of being” for the Kikuyu in colonial Kenya by refocusing attention away from the “inventors,” who constructed the illusion of consensus toward the ordinary “people who crossed ethnic boundaries.”³⁵ As Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper argued in their oft-quoted but often misunderstood essay, an emphasis on identity, in its equally problematic “hard” and “soft” conceptions, can often mask the more complex, multiple, and mobile processes of identification.³⁶

Second, the focus on the singularizing political imaginations of these “inventors” has obscured or at least sidelined other forms of imagination, and in particular geographic imaginations, that helped make these political imaginations viable or attractive in the first place. While such “inventions” were subject to constant revision by multiple actors, they were not open to just any interpretation. The material and symbolic base available for such imaginations conditioned and constrained the projects of ethnic “inventors.” As will be seen throughout this study, regional processes of exchange and interdependence created what Paul Richards has called a “common grammar” of social experience, despite differences in language, culture, or political organization.³⁷ Across Africa, these “common grammars” emerged from common geographic visions and provided a mechanism for rationalizing plurality and managing dissent within ongoing projects of ethnogenesis.

ETHNIC PATRIOTISM: BETWEEN NATIVISM AND COSMOPOLITANISM

“Ethnic patriotism” provided a particular currency in the moral economy of colonial eastern Africa: “ethnic” because of the particular colonial investment in the language of tribe and “patriotic” because of the in-turn investment by African political thinkers in the construction of a patria, a fatherland with countrymen to feel kinship among and a territory to defend.³⁸ In the comparative politics of patriotism in eastern Africa, ethnicity offered a historically contingent and politically viable form of community building.³⁹

Despite presenting one of the clearest cases of ethnic “invention,” where the terms of a Luyia ethnic identity literally did not exist before the 1930s, the history of ethnic imagining among the Luyia has received surprisingly little scholarly attention, especially in comparison to the pioneering and voluminous scholarship on ethnicity coming out of Kenya.⁴⁰ Newly “Luyia” historians began writing partisan histories as early as the 1940s, in line with patriotic history-writing projects taking place across Africa in the late colonial era.⁴¹ After the impressive body of work by Gideon Were, however, the historical and cultural production emerging from western Kenya tended to take as its subject the so-called subtribal ethnonationalisms.⁴² While scholars in various fields have traveled to western Kenya for their case studies of socioeconomic, educational, and religious change, the majority of these texts focus on specific communities that fall under the Luyia banner, neglecting the complex tensions and negotiations of difference among the constituent groups who came to form and at times refuse this corporate body.⁴³

The most common explanation for the Luyia identity has fallen along constructivist lines, picturing the “Luyia” as a creation, either of colonial officials or of local political thinkers, “former students of Makerere College on analogy of BaGanda.”⁴⁴ Yet the framework of the “invention of tradition” fails to account for how these actors fashioned an ethnic project without a common stock of historical myths and without a founding father from whom to imagine a patria. Unlike the more maximal cultural projects of the Luo Union, the Kikuyu Central Association, and the Haya Union farther afield, or even the more federalist projects of the Mijikenda and the Kalenjin, the “invention” of Luyia ethnic architects was not of a unified traditional past but rather of a corporate present and an interdependent future. While ethnogenesis among the Luyia seems to provide a challenge to scholars of “invention,” which perhaps explains their omission from this historiography, the large body of scholarly work on ethnicity signals the particular value and competitive nature of ethnic patriotism in colonial Kenya.

Luyia ethnic patriots emerged out of a particular set of discourses and social experiences within the colonial world. Take for example the life and political work of Ephraim A. Andere. Born in 1920 in Namasoli, North Kavirondo, Andere had a typical, if fairly elite, education at the Alliance High School before distinguishing himself as a writer and political thinker at Makerere College in Uganda.⁴⁵ Upon his return to the district, in 1940, he gained a reputation as a respected schoolmaster at the prestigious Nyang'ori Primary School and later at Maseno School. But Andere's real achievements were in the realm of ethnic patriotism. As general secretary of the Abaluyia Welfare Association, Andere worked toward the federation of smaller locational and clan associations under a Luyia umbrella. In 1948 he spearheaded the campaign that would put the Luyia name atop the first national census in Kenya. Throughout the 1940s he worked tirelessly with the Luyia Language Committee, whose goal it was to create one Luyia language out of the multiple and stubbornly diverse dialects in the region. Throughout Kenya, language committees proved a common tool for ethnic patriots and a training ground for burgeoning political leaders. In 1947 all three nominations for the Legislative Council from western Kenya—Philip Ingutia, Paul Mboya, and B. A. Ohanga—played significant roles in their respective Luyia and Luo language committees.⁴⁶ The Kalenjin Language Committee similarly included future politicians Daniel arap Moi and Taita arap Towett.⁴⁷ While a Luyia language failed to materialize, for Andere this linguistic endeavor went hand in hand with his political and demographic work.

Andere's name would become most closely associated with the formulation of Luyia customary law in the 1950s. The project was ambitious and fraught. The overwhelming variety of customary practices among the constituent communities of the Luyia stumped early administrators, clogged local courts, and led to endless parochial conflicts among neighbors. For Andere, consolidating customary law seemed a natural extension of his earlier patriotic work. As secretary of the Luyia Customary Law Panel, from 1951 to 1954, Andere deliberately worked to bring in a diversity of panelists to avoid the appearance of favoritism or domination by particular communities that had doomed the Luyia language project.⁴⁸ He further petitioned for representatives to come not from elders and chiefly authorities but from young politicians, teachers, and ethnic patriots like himself. Together, these young technocrats set out to define a common set of principles usable in various fields of local governance, political organization, language, and moral discipline. In multiple customary law publications, Andere ordered and tabulated the plurality of Luyia customary practices into a seemingly singular, coherent

document.⁴⁹ These publications are, however, quite amusing to read, riddled as they are with complicated tables, competing terminologies, sections on “local variations,” and recurrent qualifications. In Andere’s masterful hands, plural and dissenting cultural practice became the defining rather than defeating feature of Luyia “customs,” allowing for a variety of readings and open to constant revision. The creation of Luyia customary law was a technocratic feat and a victory for Andere.

Ethnic patriots did not work in isolation; they were members of complex social networks that clustered around religious denominations, schooling, government positions, and experiences of urbanism and international schooling. Andere served as longtime committee member on *Muluhya*, a magazine published by Luyia students at Makerere, alongside fellow ethnic patriots W. B. Akatsa and J. D. Otiende, among others. It would be fellow nominee Otiende who would recommend Andere for nomination to the Legislative Council in 1948.⁵⁰ Ahead of the first national election, in 1957, the local council chose Andere to tour the district and collect testimony with the Coutts Commission alongside important politicians W. W. W. Awori and Pascal Nabwana.⁵¹ On panels, committees, and district councils, Andere worked alongside nearly every current and future political figure from western Kenya and made the work of ethnic patriotism into a profession.

Ethnic patriotism did not altogether offer a social identity as such. Rather, ethnic patriotism offered a self-conscious form of work, an occupation taken up in the context of a specific colonial context. While Luyia ethnic patriots shared similar biographies, and clusters did emerge, they also diverged and came from a variety of denominational and local filiations. Some, like Paul Agoi, moved in and out of these registers. After over a decade working in the native administration as a headman, councilman, and member on several boards, into the 1930s Agoi recognized the shifting tides and the growth of ethnic patriotism as a viable form of work. He became the president of the North Kavirondo Taxpayers’ Welfare Association, where he protested local land policies and called on the people of North Kavirondo to name themselves. Before the Kenya Land Commission in 1932, Agoi revealed the growing sense of territorial nationalism within this project when he pronounced that the “proper boundary of the Black man is Mombasa.”⁵² In 1940, Agoi capitalized the colonial administration’s attempt to coopt young ethnic patriots and became chief of the Maragoli. While progressive and well remembered for his visit to Kenyan troops serving in the Middle East in 1943, as chief, Agoi embarked on a different kind of politicking.⁵³ He began turning inward and fashioning himself along the lines of an invented royal tradition

using symbolic elements from the Logoli past. He wore a special robe of leopard skins and took the title of Owuluyali (His Highness). In response to the institution of the Locational Council, whose nominations rested outside his control, Agoi formed his own advisory council, the Bulindi bwo Woluyali.⁵⁴ Soon fellow ethnic patriots Lumadede Kisala and Solomon Adagala became suspicious of Agoi's dynastic ambitions. They charged Agoi with undemocratic behavior and forced his early retirement in 1950.

Agoi's miscalculations reflected a fairly unique quality and tension within the Luyia version of ethnic patriotism; Luyia leaders who made such parochial calls to past reservoirs of power soon found themselves out of step. While inventions of tradition and "tribal fantasies" were crucial components of the work of ethnic patriots across eastern Africa, Luyia ethnic patriots were also, from a very early stage, cosmopolitan patriots.⁵⁵ The tension between nativism, characterized by autochthonous claims to pure ancestry and rooted geographies, and cosmopolitanism, defined by cultural mixing and mobility, has marked modern African politics of identity. Some have argued that both were colonial imports.⁵⁶ Yet, both have much longer histories and wide currency in African thought. If we take Kwame Anthony Appiah's central principles of cosmopolitanism—pluralism, revisionism or "fallibilism," and an obligation to strangers—then the Luyia have always been cosmopolitans.⁵⁷ Across Kenya, eastern Africa, and out into an international diaspora, to be Luyia is to say *mulembe*.⁵⁸ As explored in chapter 1, for centuries this term greeted visitors and strangers alike by asking where they had been, where they were going, and entreating them to come and go in peace.⁵⁹ The formal call and response reflected the mutual obligation contained within such greetings.⁶⁰ What Appiah hints at, but never fully develops, is this long history of cosmopolitanism—of plurality, of mobility, of multilingualism, and of multiple identities—among African communities. This left Appiah open to criticisms that his "cosmopolitanism" was Eurocentric and available only to the privileged few.⁶¹ And yet it was in the confrontation between these local, historically rich cosmopolitanisms and colonial "modernity" that many of these communities became nativist, rather than the other way around; and the two were not mutually exclusive.

Nativist discourses of immutable, bounded tribes provided a certain capital within the colonial economy. Older cosmopolitanisms survived, however, and were mobilized within anticolonial politics and ethnic patriotisms alike, aiming not so much at eliminating differences as at recognizing and navigating through them.⁶² Cosmopolitanism, in Appiah's view, was precisely about this kind of conversation without the necessity

of consensus: “Even people who share a moral vocabulary have plenty to fight about”—a sentiment echoed in many Luyia proverbs.⁶³ So while Andere and others took up the ethnic work of linguistic consolidation and the codification of customary law, their culturalist projects revealed not the suppression of difference but rather their insistent pluralism. The direction of this work—the ability of ethnic patriots to navigate the tensions between nativism and cosmopolitanism and to subsume their constituents under patriotic discourses—was never entirely new, nor did it remain in their hands alone.

These ethnic patriots shared another common feature: they were all men. As Lonsdale has noted, “Patriotic history tends to be masculine history.”⁶⁴ While “patriotic” men formed the intellectual core of much of this work, they often called upon women to carry the weight of their inventive projects, to comport themselves as the bearers of children, of morality, and of their community’s cultural values. African women, by their biology and social energies, reproduced the moral communities these men sought to fashion. As scholars of the “invention of tradition” took the “inventors” of ethnic communities at their word, African women often disappeared in their studies of ethnic identity: as Leroy Vail put it, “Ethnicity’s appeal was strongest for men, then, and the Tswana proverb to the effect that ‘women have no tribe’ had a real—if unintended—element of truth in it.”⁶⁵ Though some impressive studies have looked at African women’s agency in subverting male authority, in carving out new spaces of work and morality, and in crafting nationalist agendas, these studies often placed women as a category apart from the study of ethnic imaginings.⁶⁶ Writing on this problem among Marakwet women in colonial Kenya, Henrietta Moore argued that “in such a situation, women are invisible, sunk, contained within the ‘naturalised’ domain of the dominant ideology.”⁶⁷ The reactive fallback notion of “the invisible woman” within ethnic studies has allowed for uncritical approaches to this subject.⁶⁸ African women often disappeared in histories of ethnic imagining precisely because “patriotic” men sought to subsume them.

Ethnic identity for Luyia women was not so much “invisible” or even “subsumed” as it was transformable. While culturalist projects like the Luo Union and the Haya Union sought to rein in the moral conduct and reproductive capabilities of their women, Luyia entrepreneurs shied from these cultural politics and instead integrated “Luyia” women strategically into their demographic projects through a progressive discourse of universal suffrage and ethnic diversity. In theory, intermarriage among Luyia groups required women to follow their husband’s customs and raise their children within the patrilineal culture. As Charles Ambler noted for the

nineteenth century, patrilineal absorption allowed women to move between groups with ease, without requiring the special initiations often demanded of foreign men.⁶⁹ However, with a private wink and a nod, wives and mothers transmitted many aspects of their former cultural identities to their children in language and custom.⁷⁰ That women could carry ideas, customs, languages, and networks throughout the territorial space of the Luyia underpinned the processes of interpenetration and intermarriage that defined the very plural nature of the late colonial Luyia discourse. Perus's dilemma before the census enumerator dramatized the tensions that existed for women in the production of ethnic communities.

For such women, cosmopolitan ethnic patriotism was then, in many ways, second nature. While Luyia political thinkers remained more concerned with electoral projects and census numbers than with any culturalist agenda, they still engaged in a gendered discourse of morality, movement, and home. The tension between a gendered nativist politics and a progressive cosmopolitanism proved a critical, if challenging, feature of Luyia ethnic patriotism. This cosmopolitan ethnic patriotism also proved potentially dangerous: patriotic competitors would decry such cosmopolitanisms as rootless, ungrounded, so much so that being "cosmopolitan" became an insult often hurled in their direction.⁷¹ As will be seen throughout this story, the limited and often failed cultural projects of Luyia entrepreneurs in language, gender discipline, customary law, and history writing prompted a more minimalist approach to the formulation of political community and revealed the attenuated character of this ethnic project.

Despite the recent historiographical emphasis on fluctuation, negotiation, and cultural production in the imagining of ethnicity, these models continue to rely on a teleological insistence on ethnic invention, enforced consensus, and exclusion. Gabrielle Lynch's recent work on the Kalenjin, whose composite communities, like those of the Luyia, came to be recognized by this appellation only in the 1940s, has argued that this ethnic alliance succeeded through the consolidation of lineage-based myths of origin and an "emotive (and inherently exclusive) narrative of territorial association."⁷² What is still missing is a way to understand the plurality and dissent not only at the borders but also within these patriotic discourses and the multiple and overlapping localities in which they evolved.⁷³ While the Luyia were not unique in this process, they were perhaps uniquely self-conscious. The imagining of a Luyia community reflects less an exception to the rules of ethnic invention and more the creative energies mobilized to rationalize plurality and dissent. Luyia ethnic architects grounded their patriotism within a distinct geographic vision. Lacking the consensus and consolidation of a more thoroughgoing culturalist agenda, they were left with a mapped outline from which to build a new form of demographically

inclusive, politically plural community. For Luyia cosmopolitans, territorial nationalism provided a language, a form of argumentation capable of tapping into the geographic imaginations, multiple sites of identification, and histories of regional interdependence and interaction among their plural and irrepressibly diverse constituents.

GEOGRAPHIC IMAGINATIONS:
MAPPING POWER, COUNTERMAPPING DISSENT

In an interview with the editors of the French Marxist geography journal *Hérodote* in 1976, Michel Foucault begins by defending his lack of interest in geography as a subject.⁷⁴ When confronted with the profusion of spatial and geographic metaphors in his work—position, displacement, terrain, archipelago, landscape—Foucault defends these terms as reflecting more historical and political power structures rather than geographic ideas in and of themselves. By the end of this exchange, however, the editors prompt Foucault into an about-face: “I must admit . . . Geography acted as the support, the condition of possibility for the passage between a series of factors I tried to relate. . . . Geography must indeed necessarily lie at the heart of my concerns.”

Geography and the encounters between communities and the landscapes they inhabit have long produced sites of imagination and contestation through which African communities expressed their histories, their moral economies, and the limits of their political communities. And yet, as Foucault realized, despite a profusion of geographic metaphors, very little scholarly attention has interrogated the geographic imaginations behind these metaphors that made possible the variety and durability not only of knowledge production and power structures but also of subaltern political imaginations.⁷⁵

The spatial turn in African history over the past few years has prompted a move away from restrictive, relatively recent, and colonially contingent national and ethnic units of analysis toward a focus on “regions”: geographic spaces defined by the extent of “networks of interaction, whether political, economic, social, or cultural.”⁷⁶ This regional approach not only breaks away from colonial timelines and boundaries but also exposes the diverse and dissenting interactions and exchanges within these spaces. This is not to suggest, as some have, a simple replacing of an “ethnic” grammar with a “geographic” one; rather, this approach responds to Achille Mbembe’s call for an investigation into the “*imaginaires* and autochthonous practices of space.”⁷⁷ These “*imaginaires*” revealed themselves in many forms: in the histories told; in the geographic work of language, customary practice, and demographic control; and in the spatial delimitation of land, movement, power, and belonging.

Social formations among the constituent communities of the Luyia reflected an “imbrication of multiple spaces” of belonging, exchange, and authority before colonial conquest.⁷⁸ While this geographic imagination continued to inform the organization of political relations and strategies of resistance into the colonial period, the territorial outline drawn by imperial surveyors offered a new coherence, a framework from which new political thinkers could claim the right to speak for an enlarged ethnic constituency. Contrary to instrumentalist understandings of colonial boundaries constructing ready-made ethnic territories from which African politicians mobilized their constituents, colonial maps did not invent new identities wholesale but rather introduced new tools in the visual illustration of history and community.⁷⁹ Mapmaking provided a way of “writing the world,” a way of making legible spatial relationships and territorial claims.⁸⁰ And while geography constituted social practice, cartography, as introduced in the colonial era, became political action.

A recent historiographical trend has focused on the importance of mapping and strategies of territoriality to the imperial project. For Lord Curzon, boundaries represented “the razor’s edge on which hang suspended the modern issues of war or peace, of life or death to nations.”⁸¹ Geography made possible the possession of distant territories, bringing “light” to dark, unknown places and peoples: “To govern territories, one must know them . . . unless a region is first conceived of and named, it cannot become the specific subject of a map.”⁸² Historians have made great use of geographer Robert Sack’s theory of territoriality to reconstruct the links between territory and power, geography and governance, and mapmaking and identity. In Sack’s terms, “territoriality . . . forms the backcloth to human spatial relations and conceptions of space. . . . Territoriality is the primary spatial form power takes.”⁸³ Territoriality was then a strategy of social interaction, of rule, and of state building.⁸⁴

Taking inspiration from Benedict Anderson’s seminal text *Imagined Communities*, two pioneering studies in this young field, Thongchai Winichakul’s *Siam Mapped* and Christopher Gray’s *Colonial Rule and Crisis in Equatorial Africa*, both emphasized the instrumental role of imperial mapmaking in the formation of new ethnic and national communities.⁸⁵ Both studies began by sketching the cognitive mapping of space that existed before the intervention of colonial geography.⁸⁶ Winichakul explored the sacred topographies of Buddhist thought alongside the ancient maps of Southeast Asia to demonstrate the “coexistence of different concepts of space.”⁸⁷ Gray, on the other hand, built on Jan Vansina’s theory of “cognitive *landscapes*” that spatialize ideology on an intimate scale.⁸⁸ For Gray, the cognitive mapping of kinship and clan hierarchies among the stateless communities of South Gabon allowed

for the development of a socially defined form of territoriality.⁸⁹ For both Winichakul and Gray, the introduction of colonial mapmaking constrained local practices of space, imposed imperial understandings of geography, and encoded boundaries as the delimiters of new ethnic and national bodies.

Historians of colonial territoriality have investigated the use of mapping in the spatial organization of gender relations, the micropractices of power and governmentality, and the relations and identities formed on frontiers and across borderlands.⁹⁰ Postcolonial studies have further looked at colonial boundaries variously as artificial barriers, as delimiters of citizenship, and as conduits of exchange and interaction.⁹¹ But the underlying argument remains virtually the same: the introduction of modern mapping technologies marked a radical break that displaced older forms of geographic knowledge and prompted new formulations of community and identity. By focusing too narrowly on imperial and “official” maps, these studies risk eliding the “cartographic anxiety” that such processes produced and occluding the ways Africans, or indeed subalterns across the colonized world, informed, contested, and appropriated these colonial impositions.⁹²

The introduction of cartography reflected broader histories of scientific exchange and literacy in the colonial world. Imperial state builders, according to James Scott, required spatial ordering to make their power legible, but these “state fixations” were often frustrated—unmapped lands were not blank spaces waiting to be filled, and local populations did not “stand idly by when surveyors came into view.”⁹³ Cartography represented a contested enterprise in which local communities, as much as European experts and scientists, worked to produce knowledge and constitute communities. In counterpoint to the work of Tim Mitchell and Scott, mapping was not the sole property of high-modernist imperial planners.⁹⁴ Mapping, as a tool of power, imagination, and dissent, was much more broadly distributed and proved to be a useful political strategy for subaltern activists and ethnic patriots alike. Whether by the state or in the hands of local amateur surveyors, mapping obliged both cartographers and readers to understand themselves in relation to the map.

The colonial obsession with territorial ordering and cataloguing incentivized the development of cartographic literacy and produced distinct modes of competition in local moral economies. Mapping, as with all colonial strategies of rule, was a negotiated, historically contingent process. Africans, serving as guides, porters, and assistants in the work of mapping of western Kenya, quickly learned lessons in reconnaissance, surveying, triangulation, and a whole host of cartographic techniques and languages. Missionary and later government schools held formal classes

in geography. In the 1940s, District Social Welfare Officer Ryland reported that geography was among the most popular subjects at his Development Centre.⁹⁵ Though the exact lessons and mapmaking exercises used by missionary and government teachers remain difficult to ascertain, mapping proved an indispensable tool in the emerging colonial economy.

In classrooms, in courtrooms, and before colonial land commissions, Africans practiced their cartographic skills and produced maps to defend their landholdings and household economies. The most explicit training ground for local mapmaking skills came from colonial courts. In her study of mapping in Mozambique, Heidi Gengenbach noted that “of all types of colonisers’ maps, cadastral maps impinged most directly and disruptively on the lives of Africans.”⁹⁶ Land cases called upon claimants to draw instrumental pictorial representations of their farms and surrounding environments. Native tribunals in western Kenya were constantly congested with land cases that often dated back over generations and included multiple overlapping claims.

Court cases were replete with competing maps that used increasingly sophisticated methods of representation. Symbols and legends guided the court’s readings of these maps. When “trespassers” entered the farmland of recently deceased Jeremiah Nabifwo, his sons created a detailed map of their father’s landholdings to present to the court.⁹⁷ A “key” guided the court through mazes of dotted lines, shaded spaces, and interlocking properties (fig. i.1). Nabifwo’s sons worked to prove the

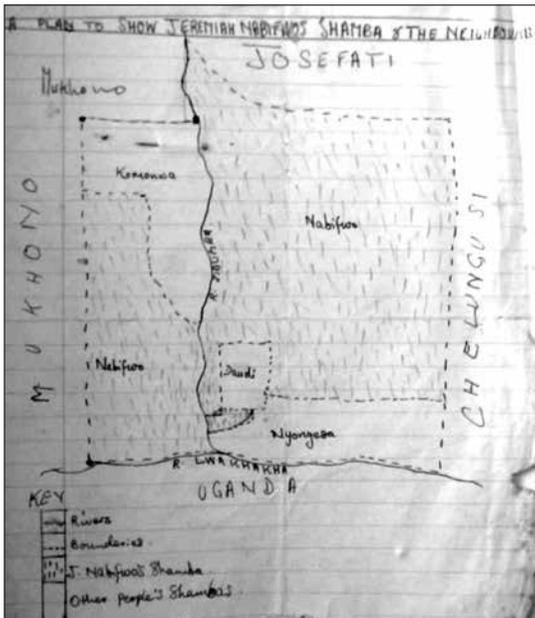


FIGURE I.1. Sketch map of Jeremiah Nabifwo’s property. 19 January 1959, KPA, WD/4/5.

As cartographic literacy gained prominence, new mapping techniques grafted onto older environmental and social negotiations on the ground. Claimants in western Kenya continually demanded that maps of landholdings be substantiated through reference to older measures of land tenure and asked for the intervention of elders “who know very much about our grand-grand fathers boundaries.”¹⁰⁰ Courts often required “proofs” of boundaries in the physical landscape and expert testimony alongside pictorial representations. Maps produced for the courts were taken out to the disputed areas, where lines on the page were matched to physical realities. In the case of Musa Mamai versus Jonathan Wepukhulu over land in Kolani, Chief Barasa called for observers from the surrounding population to witness the new boundary demarcation. At the site of the conflict, Mamai and Wepukhulu both agreed for the “boundary to run as drawn on the . . . map.”¹⁰¹ In other cases, maps were “drawn” on the floor of the court itself.¹⁰² Maps produced for these colonial land courts never provided the final word on landownership; rather, local communities debated, negotiated, and redrew these maps. While colonial mapping affixed land to the page as never before, these practices grafted on top of older environmental and social negotiations on the ground and encouraged the production of new cartographic metaphors and symbols.

The cases of Jeremiah Nabifwo, M. Mbango, Musa Mamai v. Jonathan Wepukhulu, and others illuminated a much larger trend. Mastering mapping skills was proving increasingly indispensable to local competitions over scarce resources. Chiefs and district officials often remarked on the quality of maps in their judgments. Further, these maps became part of a permanent record, an archival patrimony that was frequently called up in later land disputes. While geographic literacy served “symbolic, cognitive and pedagogic” roles, mapmaking itself became an instrumental resource for the reproduction of class, wealth, and power in the moral economy of western Kenya.¹⁰³

But the importance and uses of mapping went far beyond this instrumental function. Mapping also proved a critical tool for ethnic patriots, particularly for those ethnic patriots whose constituents were also cosmopolitan and plural. Maps could provide the engines to transform their “social energy into social work.”¹⁰⁴ Local cartographic practices, both on an intimate and on a patriotic scale, allowed for the development of what contemporary geographers term countermapping. Also called ethnocartography, countermapping refers to community-based mapping projects, particularly in postcolonial and indigenous land cases, used to “resist the power of the state.”¹⁰⁵ As contemporary legal systems, both

local and international, consider carefully drawn maps obligatory and often paramount evidence in questions of land rights, countermapping provided the means to make the land claims of indigenous peoples “legible” and legally viable.¹⁰⁶ In recent years, technological advances such as geographic information systems and the Global Positioning System have democratized the tools of mapping and aided these counter-mapping campaigns. While these new technologies have added to the “excitement” around such projects, countermapping also relies heavily on a much wider range of lower-tech and lower-cost techniques, such as sketch mapping and scale model constructions.¹⁰⁷ Countermapping offered the power, or at least potential, to transform individual land into property and communal land into territory. In this way, countermapping served both a counterhegemonic purpose—mapping against the state—and a generative purpose, capable of mapping new states of political imaginations.

The social work of countermapping has a much longer history than assumed in the literature on indigenous rights and community based activism. If defined as an essentially counterhegemonic practice, then countermapping preceded cartography, as local communities used spatial strategies to resist state-builders of all kinds. In a recent study, James Scott has demonstrated how “hill peoples” in central Asia used spatial strategies to escape state builders, taking refuge in remote hills that served as spaces not only of resistance but also of “cultural refusal.”¹⁰⁸ “Statelessness,” in this conception, should not be understood as disorganization or as a lack of social structures but as a strategy and an art form. Spatial analysis has opened new avenues for the study of social formations characterized by heterarchy, systems of organization exemplified by overlaps, multiplicity, and divergent yet coexistent patterns of relations, power, and authority.¹⁰⁹ Whether in parallel or in contest with hierarchal systems, heterarchy provided a strategy of “(horizontal) social complexification,” and a means of evading or checking centralizing political forces.¹¹⁰ While the kingdom of Buganda used spatial organization to order power and discipline their subjects, this same spatial ordering also allowed members of the court to allocate measures of accountability: through the complex spatial organization of different forms of religious and political leadership, citizens of Buganda “made their rulers accountable not by centralizing power but by keeping things complicated.”¹¹¹ Alternative sites of authority also provided overlapping mappings of power and strategies of resistance, as in healing sites and the territorial spirits of the Great Lakes region.¹¹² Absent the cartographic tools of mapping, states and local actors alike used spatial strategies to

organize and contest power, to assert and avoid obligations, and to define and redefine community.

The arrival of imperial cartography elevated the power of the map in Africa and offered new opportunities for countermapping resistance. Sumathi Ramaswamy has drawn attention to the geographic work of those she termed “barefoot cartographers”: amateur mapmakers who adopted the tools and symbols of “command” cartography to produce and reinscribe the mapped “logo” of the nation.¹¹³ While such terminology risks reifying an orientalist dialectic between the naked, unscientific nature of local geographic imaginations and the booted, scientific work of imperial cartographers, it does importantly dislodge the practices of mapping from its official uses and point to the popular and patriotic production of mapmaking cultures. The drawing of maps and the clerical work involved in defining and defending territory provided partisans across Africa with another avenue for self-representation, for recasting their histories, and for forwarding their political agendas. For Luyia ethnic patriots, mapping enabled them to order and naturalize the space of belonging, to marshal their plural and often dissenting constituents, and to minimally outline their political and cultural project along territorial lines. There was thus “no catastrophic erasure by the natives of ‘precolonial’ or ‘indigenous’ conceptions of land with the arrival of new modalities of visualizing territory ushered in by the colonial state through the mediation of the modern science of cartography.”¹¹⁴ Rather, mapping provided a concrete tool mobilized by local patriots in the articulation of new identities in a wider and increasingly crowded political arena.

In a recent study on the “spatial factor” in African history, Allen Howard and Richard Shain have suggested that “perhaps the ‘ethnic’ approach to African history has most determinedly blocked the application of spatial analysis.”¹¹⁵ The present study works to redress this gap, creating a dialogue between the voluminous historiography on ethnic identity and the growing literature on territoriality and geographic imaginations. Instead of understanding territory as solely part of high-modernist colonial projects or as simply a strategic resource of “political tribalism,” this study suggests a methodological shift toward exploring the multiple ways local communities and ethnic patriots adopted and reworked mapping strategies to their own ends. Linking the study of moral ethnicity with territorial politics, this study further investigates the ongoing debates over the meaning of the Luyia political community, debates often expressed as arguments over maps and borders. Boundaries, be they cognitive or geographic, both marked and managed the extent of political communities. Colonial mapping strategies produced new geographic imaginaries

and a form of “map-mindedness” appropriated by African communities in their reformulations of identity, community, and territory.¹¹⁶

A NOTE ON SOURCES

In a recent nonfiction piece on Kenyan visual artist Wangechi Mutu, compatriot Binyavanga Wainaina began with a historical declaration: “We are made by our archives.”¹¹⁷ In the context of a study of encounters—between people and landscape, between the colonial map and local geographic imaginations, between systems of knowledge and grammars of community—this statement rings especially true. The research for this project necessitated an engagement with multiple historical modes and my own encountering with a wide variety of sources—archival, vernacular, oral, and pictorial—across multiple times and spaces.

Researching a borderland that exists at the crossroads of several competing histories required archival work across three continents, from the borderlands of Uganda and Kenya through to Birmingham and Cambridge, England, and even across the Atlantic to Richmond, Indiana.¹¹⁸ Such archives included national, provincial, missionary, and personal holdings. Sources from the Uganda National Archives, in Entebbe, presented a relatively untapped and rich, if elusive, avenue for exploring regional and cross-boundary histories. Missionary records from across three continents, too often used only in missionary or religious histories, provided rich evidence of linguistic projects, political work, and the interaction of new religious ideas with the patriotic imagining of new communities. Newspapers, both vernacular and national, offered important insights into local and national transformations in political thinking and language. The present study also pays particular heed to the documentation of oral testimonies in court cases, in colonial commissions, and in local history-writing projects. While set within the performative theaters of colonial production, this kind of testimonial documentation allows the “voices” of African petitioners to be read in and through colonial documents.¹¹⁹

More exceptionally, this project makes extensive use of archival maps. Geographic literacy produced its own “tin-trunk” literature, to use Karin Barber’s terminology, found in the personal, hidden documentation produced by elites and nonelites alike that helped advance African political argumentation.¹²⁰ Maps drawn for local land courts, in partisan histories, in political tracts, and for colonial boundary commissions produced a vast archive of cartographic representations. These sources do, however, present challenges. As they are often viewed as addenda or supplements, they are particularly susceptible to disappearance and destruction. On a recent visit to the Kenya National Archives, I found that one

of the largest files of maps submitted to the Kenya Regional Boundaries Commission, which provided much of the evidence for chapter 9 of this volume, has now disappeared in the process of recataloguing. Maps mentioned in reports, petitions, land cases, and other correspondences were often impossible to trace. The material nature of maps, which require frequent handling and copying, also make these sources susceptible to deterioration. Many of the maps I consulted were falling apart, literally offering only fragments of the past. Still, the variety of maps drawn by official hands as well as those drawn by local landowners and ethnic patriots provide a particularly rich source base. As with literacy itself, these maps revealed the “hidden powers” of territory inscribed on paper.¹²¹ Long passed over or ignored entirely, the symbols and cartographic metaphors operating inside and outside the map itself provide a means of accessing and interrogating evolving arguments over geographic imaginaries.

In the tradition of social history, an extensive oral history project conducted over the course of 2007 and 2008 also sought to capture the testimony of elders from what is, in many ways, the last colonial generation. Since the pioneering work of Jan Vansina, oral history has privileged “tradition” and the ability of the historian to separate verifiable truths from the performative aspects of oral accounts.¹²² However, over the past twenty years or so, a major theoretical and methodological shift has moved toward the use of oral histories as important sources unto themselves, with all of their subjectivity, theatricality, and ambiguity.¹²³

Life histories have become a particularly popular means of accessing the social world and alternative histories. In my own work, early group interviews collecting oral traditions quickly gave way to more personal, life history–style interviews. My first forays into group interviews were often interrupted and at times hijacked by local political officials or self-appointed village experts. While these interventions produced valuable and insightful contestations, they took control of the interview process and setting away not only from me as an interviewer but moreover from the chosen interviewees, whose histories did not always match the priorities and privileged narratives of “official” figures. The life history format, though still embedded in wider familial and communal networks that meant interviews were rarely a one-on-one event, allowed for a greater degree of intimacy, privacy, and rigor.

The primary nucleus of informants came from the Luyia Council of Elders, a formal organization composed of twenty men, each representing a recognized constituent community within the Luyia fold. While representing themselves as the producers and guardians of this ethnic project, these men rarely subsumed their divergent narratives or personal

histories under a codified historical narrative. Rather, the variety of politics espoused by these elders revealed the diversity of political thought and the competing forms of community still debated within their council meetings. In interviews with these sanctioned male elders, wives, sons, daughters, neighbors, and onlookers often interjected, providing a wider range of engagements and new sources of historical perspectives. Other informants came from a broad cross-section of backgrounds, from former rebel fighters to local men and women who had never traveled outside western Kenya, and from the first female councillor to a former vice president.

The sheer number of different dialects and languages in the region was overwhelming. Every interviewee spoke multiple languages with great fluency. To clear this linguistic hurdle, I opted to allow informants to choose the language of the interview, and if necessary interpreters would be chosen in consultation with the informant. Many chose to speak in English, allowing them, as one elder put it, to control the “terms of their translation,” though debates on appropriate terms and translations were common. And yet, as explored in chapter 4, the choice of language may also reflect deeper concerns of the interviewees around political and intellectual positioning.

I was often amusingly reminded of my own position as a single, white, female, and specifically Canadian, researcher. When meeting with former rebels of the Dini ya Msambwa movement in Kimilili, I was asked why “white Canadian women always want to know about Dini ya Msambwa” —referring of course to the pioneering work of Audrey Wipper on the movement in the 1970s.¹²⁴ Msambwa followers had crafted very formal, if not always strict, gender discipline practices. My position as both an honored guest and as a woman caused some dissention among the group as to where I should sit: in outdoor meetings and formal gatherings, men and honored guests would be given the often-limited chairs while women customarily sat on the ground. A compromise of sorts was reached when a “chair” of animal skins was constructed on the ground for me to sit on—the “invention of tradition” in action. I was acutely aware in this context that the women in the group would not be able to add their voices freely, adding strategic silences, though not absences, that were only partially overcome with further, more intimate and informal interviews.

In another case, a prominent Bukusu businessman accompanied me to an interview with a well-respected elder on Bukusu customs, Mzee Mombasa as he was known to friends.¹²⁵ Mzee Mombasa made repeated pronouncements that outsiders, and more specifically women, could not

bear witness or be privy to the sacred inner workings of Bukusu customs. And yet the interview proceeded as usual, with my Bukusu interlocutor repeating my questions verbatim and Mzee Mombasa responding in my presence, though officially acknowledging only my male companion.

Perhaps the most impinging but also revealing context for this project was the political. The majority of the interviews took place during the 2007 electoral campaigns in Kenya and their direct aftermath in 2008. This heightened political context inevitably shaped the oral histories collected. Informants continually related and compared their life histories to the contemporary social and political issues being debated in the campaigns.¹²⁶ At times, the elections would directly intervene into the interview process: several interviews with important former trade unionist and independence leader Arthur Aggrey Ochwada had to be suspended and postponed when a fleet of black SUVs appeared on the horizon, indicating that Ochwada's close friend and political confidante, current vice president Moody Awori, had traveled home to seek his counsel.¹²⁷ Among the Dini ya Msambwa former rebels and family members of former leader Elijah Masinde, election time always proved frenetic as local politicians vied to sit on Masinde's stool in the Msambwa shrine—a sign of prophetic approval.¹²⁸ The atmosphere at these interviews was palpably charged, as former rebels and extended family members sought to position themselves as the guardians of this history and its political import for contemporary electoral contests. In this setting, the past refused to stay past: the pasts expressed were restless, mobile, and irrepressibly present.

These life histories are not left to tell an unmediated narrative. Rather, I treat these testimonies as social texts that, when read with and against documentary archives, provide important contexts, heated points of debate, multiple and often fragmented meanings, and critical historical interventions. Further, they helped me map a kind of intellectual and social network throughout western Kenya and beyond. Like the past itself, these interviews rarely stayed put: stories, and even actual interviews, crossed borders and traveled to urban centers. Daily I would travel by local bus, bicycle, and foot up to six or seven hours with my research aide, Henry Kissinger Adera (yes, his father was a great admirer of Kissinger). Henry provided a crucial service, not only as my point of access to many of the interviewees but also as an interlocutor and impressively diplomatic negotiator. As a Luo, and son of an important elder on the Luo Council of Elders, Henry stood somewhat outside of the political histories and tensions of the Western Province. Many interviewees encouraged him to join politics, saying he could win even in the Western Province. His introductions and interventions proved indispensable,

as did his company as a fellow traveler through unpredictable terrains. This study owes much not only to these formal interviews but also to the debates about politics and competing versions of history discussed with Henry and with a wide array of fellow passengers on long *matatu* bus rides across the country and on the backs of *boda boda* bicycles throughout western Kenya.

CHAPTER BREAKDOWN: A ROAD MAP

The imbrication of so many manifestations of geographic imaginations of community required this study to traverse a wide intellectual terrain. While following a chronological and thematic logic, each chapter builds on different kinds of geographic work, investigating the multiple meanings and uses of mapping: as activity, as metaphor, as colonial science, and as patriotic idea. Each chapter tracks episodes of geographic encounter that when read together comprise the intellectual architecture of the construction of and contestations over the making of the Luyia identity in colonial Kenya.

In Chapter 1 the diverse communities of western Kenya find their varied geographic imaginations confronted and eventually transformed by the power of the map. The ecologically rich and topographically diverse terrain of western Kenya taught its African settlers lessons in agronomy, social organization, and political authority. Using linguistic analysis, oral sources, and recorded narratives of migration and settlement, this chapter first reconstructs the evolving forms of identification and geographic practices that existed up to the late nineteenth century. These precolonial geographies of interpenetration, of itinerant territorialities, and of regional exchange were neither lost nor completely displaced by the arrival of colonial cartography; rather, local inhabitants reworked their spatial conceptions and geographic practices to countermap the tools of surveyors and contest imperial geographies. Some, like the Wanga, invested early in imperial cartography, providing men, supplies, and local, though self-promoting, knowledge to the British as they “beat the bounds” of these new boundaries. Others negotiated and subverted the work of imperial cartographers, pushing through colonial boundaries, sabotaging the symbols of surveyors, and drawing their own maps alongside older practices of space. In this encounter between different geographic imaginations, mapping became both the tool of territorial acquisition and the means of its subversion.

Chapter 2 traces the transformation of mapping from a novel tool in local competitions over resources, power, and patronage into a tool of patriotic imagination. In the early decades of colonial rule, internal

struggles over chiefly authority and local definitions of lineage and land rights fractured along clan and administrative lines. Local political actors reformulated kinship and invented ancestors to defend their diverse practices of land tenure and political authority from colonial hierarchies and bureaucratization. Boundaries became flashpoints in these contestations, and cartography became an instrument of political action.

Into this picture of competitive mapping, the discovery of gold in North Kavirondo threatened African land rights on an ever-larger scale. Conflicts over land and mineral rights encouraged local political thinkers to begin thinking of an enlarged ethnic polity in western Kenya as a means of defense against colonial interventions into their lands and competition with their African neighbors. Before the Kenya Land Commission of 1932, representatives from North Kavirondo consolidated their diverse practices of land tenure, suppressed recent internal fragmentations over political authority and kinship measures, and transformed local practices of mapping into a means of imagination. Before they had a name, these representatives declared themselves the spokesmen of a “tribe,” and the map provided the concrete evidence of their political existence.

While chapter 2 reveals the impetus for this patriotic investment in the map, in chapter 3 this investment pays dividends, informing innovations in the patriotic work of ethnogenesis and history writing. Having declared themselves a tribe, ethnic patriots in western Kenya went in search of name. In choosing Luyia—a term that translated for many as the fireplace where the elders of clans would gather—these young political thinkers turned away from the genealogical arguments created by naming communities after mythic founding fathers and instead chose a corporate name that privileged a horizontal drawing together of discrete, autonomous clans into one discursive and political space. This innovation would prove a larger trend: later ethnic projects, like the confederate Mijikenda or the Kalenjin who literally called to each other by naming themselves “I say to you,” employed ethnic names that similarly spoke to a new political ethos of kinship and community.¹²⁹ The interwar period proved a high tide for this kind of ethnic patriotism. Throughout the 1930s, Luyia patriots worked fill this mapped space with historical and “emotional” resonance through the creative work of writing histories, electing leaders, and defending the political, moral, and territorial borders of this novel community.¹³⁰

Chapters 4 and 5 then follow the emergence of a new, more self-consciously fashioned generation of Luyia ethnic patriots in the 1940s who embarked on patriotic work in multiple fields—linguistic, demographic, and customary—to rationalize the diversity among their disputatious

constituents and defend their work against the deconstructive politics of the locality. In Chapter 4 recent graduates from Uganda's Makerere College championed the work of the Luyia Language Committee to standardize one written Luyia language out of the multiple and distinct dialects of the region. The work of language consolidation created an environment of competitive linguistic work, often faltering precisely on the translation of terms that related to land, power, and belonging. This linguistic work threatened to undermine oral traditions of accommodation and flexibility and promoted defensive vernacular cultures. While no printed vernacular-Luyia linguistic culture ever materialized, "speaking Luyia" remained central to "being Luyia."

In Chapter 5 the moral anxieties of the early 1940s, manifested in crises over land, mobility, and gender discipline, prompted a turn to the locality that threatened to disaggregate the fragile work of Luyia ethnic patriots. As sons and daughters left western Kenya in ever-larger numbers, smaller-scale ethnic associations formed to defend diverse moral economies and to enforce a gendered discourse of male fraternity and female deviancy through the creation of urban football teams and "anti-prostitution" campaigns. By the late 1940s this turn to the locality and concern over movement and morality took its most dramatic form in a crisis over female circumcision. Controversy sparked when young women of the Tachoni were found to be engaging in secret circumcision ceremonies or leaving the district to be circumcised. These conflicts were about more than customary and gendered control: they were about the demographic health of the community and about the very frontiers of respectability.

The crisis over female circumcision brought home the limits of plurality and threatened the progressive and mannered values purported by Luyia cultural brokers. In response, the new generation Luyia politicians embarked on electoral and demographic projects that sought to make national politics consequential for local political thought. The duality and incompatibility of ethnicity and nationalism have dominated the study of African history in the twentieth century. Although local narratives of nationalism have challenged the national metanarratives reified in the postcolonial era, it is of equal importance to break down the national center—ethnic periphery model.¹³¹ Nationalism did not, as some have argued, necessarily represent a "mortal challenge" to the work of ethnic patriots.¹³² The circular movement of leadership and ideas created feedback and strategic borrowing between national and ethnic imaginings. Luyia leaders were, in some ways, ideal protonationalists—coming from a young ethnic project that privileged the language of territorial

nationalism and cosmopolitan patriotism over calls to genealogical depth or ethnic conformism.

With the cultural projects of the 1940s faltering, territorial nationalism provided Luyia entrepreneurs a language, a form of argumentation capable of tapping into the geographic imagination of their plural constituents. Through census campaigns, electoral projects, and cultural reforms, Luyia leaders in the late 1940s transformed the Luyia ethnic project from the messy, fractured politics of the locality into a vehicle of national politicking. They managed a careful balance between a cosmopolitan, territorial nationalism and a rooted ethnic discipline, mapping an ethnic homeland in western Kenya through the enforcement of customary control and the formulation of gendered and territorial belonging.

In chapters 6 and 7, the late colonial politics of loyalism and dissent prompted a remodeling of the Luyia idea and entrenched the map and the politics of territoriality as tools of dissent and imagination. While much of the research on national politics in Kenya has followed a teleological path tracing whether the Kenya African Union (KAU), the first national political party, eventually led to the militant Mau Mau rebellion, accessing the “deep politics” of late colonial Kenya requires a de-centering of this national history and an examination of the negotiated spaces not between binary poles but rather among the plural expressions and uses of territorial nationalism.¹³³ The national crisis posed by the Mau Mau rebellion polarized the political landscape of Kenya, between ethnic and national, educated elite and worker, and loyalist and radical. Too often administrators, political commentators, and historians have labeled those beyond the borders of central Kenya as unproblematically “loyal,” outside the conflicts and moral debates of the Mau Mau rebellion. In western Kenya, however, the politics of loyalism and dissent not only already existed but also prompted Luyia cultural brokers to forward an idea of plural political community capable of providing flexibility and opportunities to exercise agency in the late colonial era.

The religious and anticolonial Dini ya Msambwa movement challenged both colonial and ethnic patriotic geographies. Through their religious pilgrimages, cultural reforms, and anticolonial activism, these frontier rebels threatened to unground the progressive discourse and civic reputation cultivated by Luyia patriots. By the late 1940s both colonial officials and Luyia thinkers had come to organize law and culture territorially, fixing diverse communities to “tribal” geographies and disciplining those who moved beyond these territorial confines. Unwittingly, the Dini ya Msambwa movement acted as antecedent for later debates

around closed ethnic geographies and colonial counterinsurgency tactics later perfected during the Mau Mau rebellion.

In the 1950s, as the Mau Mau rebellion prompted a new kind of ethnic politicking, Luyia political thinkers fashioned a more flexible form of territorial consciousness. Chapter 6 traces the social history of this new Luyia idea that would allow Luyia cosmopolitans, farmers, and workers to move more freely through Kenya's polarized political landscape. The chapter does not aim simply to insert another region, another ethnic group, back into the history of Mau Mau and 1950s Kenya.¹³⁴ Neither does it assume that simple comparison or jockeying for position between Mau Mau and western Kenya's own rebellion, in the form of Dini ya Msambwa, is enough. Rather, it argues that the myopic study of Mau Mau and anticolonial dissent more broadly solely from the perspective of central Kenya has left a great deal of the story out, not only of Mau Mau itself but also of the larger context of social change in eastern Africa at the time. In the 1950s, Luyia political thinkers marshaled a theory of ethnic pluralism and mapped a moral geography of belonging to navigate the Emergency era politics of loyalism and dissent.

As decolonization neared, the Kenya Regional Boundaries Commission of 1962 witnessed the ascendancy of the map in debates over the terms of sovereignty and alternative models of political community. While many recent studies of African history have made an admirable and long overdue move away from the colonial/postcolonial periodization, the end point of this study, in chapter 7, comes in the 1960s precisely because of the self-conscious remapping of community that occurred during decolonization and that was subsequently suppressed, though not erased, in postcolonial discourses. During the Kenya Regional Boundaries Commission, mapping became the primary tool of dissent, as it was those African communities most invested in the reengineering of colonial boundaries ahead of independence that would engage in this competitive mapmaking. In countless memorandums and political tracts, Luyia organizations demanded their own territory by redrawing colonial boundaries, shoring up demographic numbers, and telling cartographic histories of lost sovereignty. Chapter 7, more than any chapter preceding it, turns to a more thorough examination of the literal, pictorial maps drawn by ethnic patriots to visualize their histories of community, sovereignty, and belonging and to contest spatial, territorial, and political relations on the eve of independence. Within these debates, the geographic imaginations explored through this study proved to be the most constant and most affecting doctrines of the Luyia ethnic identity. While often frustrated, such alternative political imaginations found in the map

a way of visualizing their claims. For both nationalists who sought to maintain colonial boundaries and dissenters seeking alternative political futures, the map became the fetish of postcolonial belonging.



In tracing the contested genealogy of cartographic political imagination in western Kenya one constant emerged: where land divided, territory united. Where the mapping of land enabled competitive claims to resources and locality, the mapping of territory enabled the imagining of a patriotic idea. Internal dynamism characterized the Luyia ethnic project and fostered an almost defiant history of cosmopolitan patriotism, federal belonging, and rooted pluralism. And yet, this is not to say the Luyia were entirely unique. As dramatized in Perus's dilemma before the 2009 Kenya census, the question for many Kenyans, and indeed Africans more broadly, was not so much one of identity but of the multiple and overlapping sites of identification; not so much of ethnicity but of the creative and unfinished process of ethnogenesis.¹³⁵ And while ethnogenesis provided the language, geographic work often provided the practice.