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Ethnicity and politics in Africa

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Cover photograph:
Two Yoruba Ifá priests discuss plans for the Ife traditional calendar; Ife, Nigeria, 1989. Photograph by Michael Di Blasi

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Chapter 1
Understanding Ethnicity

Images of Ethnicity

God has not created all these ethnicities. God created a single person. People created ethnicity later.
—1992 Christmas pastoral address, Biguku parish, Uganda

Ethnicity in Africa, for some, evokes searing images of genocidal violence, illustrated by the tragic communal conflagrations that have marked recent Rwandan and Burundian history, especially the 1994 Rwanda genocide and its aftermath so heavily covered in the media. In these images, ethnic conflict is a product of “ancient tribal hatreds,” and is thus an inescapable part of the natural order. A radically different perspective prevailed among African nationalists at the moment of independence; ethnicity, a form of backwardness to be erased by nation-building and rapid development, was destined for the dustbins of history. “In three or four years,” declared radical nationalist leader Sekou Toure of Guinea at the moment of independence, “no one will remember the tribal, ethnic, or religious rivalries which, in the recent past, caused so much damage to our country and its population” (Toure 1959: 28). At most, ethnicity was a politically illegitimate basis of public expression, which needed to be confined to the private realm. Yet another image dominated the colonial mind; Africa, for the European occupant, was quintessentially “tribal.” Thus the task of the colonial state was to discover, codify, and map an ethnic geography for their newly conquered domains, according to the premise that the continent was inhabited by “tribal man.” This ethnic template, as imagined by the colonizer, became the basis for administrative organization.

None of these images captures the essence of the ethnic phenomenon in Africa, or for that matter anywhere else. All of them are rooted in a primordialist premise, the notion that cultural identity is a timeless essence whose origins are outside history. Thus the 1994 Rwandan genocide (and comparable events in Bosnia and Kosovo) could be represented as merely one more episode in a historically determined infernal cycle, rather than an entirely modern tragedy. Or the Guinean leader Toure could perceive ethnicity as a badge of primeval backwardness that would be swept away by the revolutionary transformation his political vision promised. Or the colonial official could imagine that their
tribal cartography was naturalizing a historically formed African order, which could serve as the organizing vessel for the “civilizing mission” they proposed to undertake.

Today these visions all seem remarkably archaic. The “ancient tribal hatreds” thesis never had credibility among specialists, however current in some popular accounts, and has largely disappeared from serious media reporting. The phrase was most frequently encountered as an all-purpose explanation in Rwanda and Burundi during the 1990s. Although the ethnic labels that served as violent lines of cleavage in these nations have precolonial origins, they became comprehensive and rigidly ranked categories only in the colonial period; they were heavily influenced by imperial codifications and further transformed by politicized actions in the last half-century. Those commentators who took refuge in theories of primeval animosities were in part thrown off the scent by the fact that some of the protagonists themselves are prone to historicize\(^1\) the conflict, and to project it backward to time immemorial. Yet the fact remains that prior to colonial occupation, although warfare was frequent in the region, Hutu and Tutsi never fought each other as ethnic communities (see Newbury 2001)—nor for that matter did Serbs and Croats prior to World War II.

The illusion articulated by Sekou Toure and a number of his contemporaries that ethnicity belonged on a lower rung of a normative hierarchy of identities, destined for erasure by nationalism or at least relegation to residual forms of consciousness by the historical march toward progress, has also vanished. In this view, the higher civilizational forms of human solidarity, expressed in terms of nationalism, Pan-Africanism, and anti-imperialism, would be affirmed by the mass mobilization of the liberation struggle and by subsequent national integration. In part, this hopeful belief in the nation ascendant fed upon a linear mode of thought dominant in the world at large at the high water mark of the African conquest of independence in 1960; history was understood as a triumphant march from traditional divisions to modern national integration. The United States still held assimilationist “melting pot” notions as national dogma, and most observers took at face value Soviet assertions that the Lenin-Stalin nationality policy within the framework of state socialism had “solved the national question.” In Western Europe, claims of national minorities were perceived as the harmless chatter of local antiquarians, eccentrics, and clerical reactionaries (Young 1986: 440). The discourse of multiculturalism had yet to appear. Thus the anointed role of the newly independent states as nation-builders

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\(^1\) This very useful term here refers to attempts to give the appearance of historical reality to events or processes for which there is little evidence of their existence in earlier times.
appeared as a necessary and inevitable world historical venture. But such certitudes dissolved over the next couple of decades, replaced by an acknowledgment of ethnicity as an enduring attribute of African political dynamics. The late Nigerian scholar, Claude Ake, spoke for the contemporary intellectual era in his insistence that an authentic African democracy “will have to recognize nationalities, subnationalities, ethnic groups and communities as social formations that express freedom and self-realization and will have to grant them rights to cultural expression and political and economic participation” (Ake 1996: 132).

The third obsolete image of ethnicity in Africa, the illusion that colonial ethnic mappings were historically authentic, is likewise less frequently spotted at the turn of the century. The disposition of colonial and other states to impose a rationalized, systematized, and radically simplified representation of the social order in pursuit of their projects of high modernity is part and parcel of the exercise of hegemony. James Scott persuasively argues the case for this disposition in Seeing Like a State (Scott 1998). In the early and middle colonial years, this practice of official cultural codification found expression in a wave of often influential ethnic monographs, authored by missionaries and administrators as well as anthropologists, each one a standardized distillation of colonial knowledge about a particular named community, whose transhistorical existence and bounded differentiation was the (often inarticulate) major premise. What a leading anthropologist, Aidan Southall (himself the author of a widely cited ethnic monograph) later came to term the “illusion of tribe” (Southall 1956, 1970) first assumed importance when analysts began to note in the 1950s that identity categories in the newly swelling urban centers were strikingly different from the earlier colonial mappings. Subsequently, Leroy Vail and his collaborators, Terence Ranger, and many others have laid bare the extent to which ethnic maps were not merely a simplification but also a creation of classification schemes of external origin (see Vail 1989, Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). By the 1980s, a new school of theorizing about ethnicity began to take form, which stressed the social construction of identity, a theme to which we will return.

Indeed, the very vocabulary of analysis is relatively new. Nathan Glazer and Daniel Moynihan discovered that the first instance of the term “ethnicity” recorded by the compilers of the massive Oxford English Dictionary was only in 1953 (Glazer and Moynihan 1975: 1). In Africa until the 1960s, the term used to connote cultural identity was invariably “tribe” or “tribalism.” Inherent in this label was an association of ethnic consciousness with backward or primitive behaviors and values, sparking its denial by the independence generation of nationalist intellectuals. The gradual lexical displacement
of “tribalism” by “ethnicity,” which firmly situated African forms of cultural consciousness within universal patterns of greater sub-national self-assertion, was a semiotic event of major importance. The very vocabulary used to describe a social phenomenon had significant consequences.

Defining Ethnicity

In this monograph, I will begin with a discussion of various definitions of ethnicity. A conceptual grasp of this subject requires that we recognize the complexity of contemporary patterns of cultural consciousness: the layering of identities, the blurring of boundaries, the situational and sometimes fluid nature of identity, and the ambiguities arising from the tension between the group basis of visible ethnic action and the individual level at which collective identity is experienced and performed. I then turn to the relationship between ethnicity and other relevant types of social identity: religion, race, nationalism, gender, and class. Consideration of the three major approaches to the analysis of cultural pluralism that have become visible in the last couple of decades—primordialism, instrumentalism, and constructivism—offers a useful framework for summarizing the major debates within the field. Three contrasting case studies of ethnicity and politics will help illustrate how the ethnic factor operates in specific settings, and will also demonstrate the striking range of variation in the saliency of ethnicity and its modes of political expression. The examples chosen are Tanzania, Uganda, and Congo-Kinshasa. Finally, the study closes with comparative observations on the role of ethnicity in political process and conflict, comparisons of Africa with other regions on this dimension, and consideration of formulas for the accommodation of cultural diversity.

Definitions of ethnicity vary, but they converge around a central core of key elements. A 1964 definition suggests that ethnicity pertains to “a social group which, within a larger cultural and social system, claims or is accorded special status in terms of a complex of traits (ethnic traits) which it exhibits or is believed to exhibit.” Glazer and Moynihan detach the term from the implication of minority standing by preferring the simple formulation as “any group of distinct cultural tradition and origin.” Max Weber, in an early definition of ethnic group (a term long predating “ethnicity”) insists on “a subjective belief” in “common descent ... whether or not an objective blood relation exists”

Donald Horowitz stresses real or imagined shared ancestry, the centrality of kinship metaphors, a minimum size, and a sense of distinctiveness, whether or not this distinctiveness rests on unique cultural attributes (Horowitz 1985: 53). Harold Isaacs insists upon the nature of the consciousness arising from group identity, its ineffable significance to its members, and the deep sense of belonging that it inspires (Isaacs 1975). In a seminal contribution, Fredrik Barth refocused the debate by insisting that the critical element is "the ethnic boundary that defines the group, not the cultural stuff that it encloses" (Barth 1969: 15). The cultural content of an ethnic collectivity often evolves or even mutates over time, but the sense of shared identity remains, shaped importantly by the sense of difference from human communities that lie beyond the boundary.

I would extract three core elements to ethnicity from the available menu of definitions, and from my own observation of the politics of cultural pluralism: shared cultural properties, consciousness, and boundaries. Each of these dimensions requires a brief discussion. It is worth noting that the conceptualization of ethnicity that emerges is not specific to Africa, but rather universal in application.

A variable roster of shared cultural aspects provides a basis for group awareness. Language is one very frequent but not invariable element of that roster. A common speech code provides an instant basis for mutual recognition, as well as for the perception of difference from those speaking incomprehensible tongues. Language can become the focal point for intense emotional attachments, especially once it is equipped with a written form and published literature. In the words of a leading sociolinguist,

The beloved language represents the moral order. It functions similarly to that order in ennobling human life and, in addition, it is co-constitutive of that order.... It is also, for some, the heart of morality itself... (Fishman 1997: 20).

However, ethnic identity does not always require a distinctive language. The intense ethnic violence and polarization in Rwanda and Burundi occurs despite the fact that Hutu and Tutsi speak the same language (as do, in reality, Serbs and Croats). Indeed, one defining feature of the African sociolinguistic landscape is pervasive multilingualism, except in the Arabic language domain in the north. In much of Africa a large proportion of the population (and most urbanites) will command a regional lingua franca in addition to a maternal language, and products of the educational system will know the European language of high politics and government. The predominance of multilingualism explains why language identity lacks the sharpness of emotional attachment and conflictual potential encountered in many parts of Europe and Asia.
A sense of shared historical experience is another major element. In some cases, this has been crucially formative—among the Yoruba in Nigeria, for example, the Kongo in the two Congos and Angola, the Ganda in Uganda, or the Tutsi in Rwanda. The Yoruba and Ganda acquired enormously influential histories written by indigenous intellectuals at the beginning of the colonial era. The 1897 *History of the Yoruba* by churchman Samuel Johnson was a foundational statement of the cultural unity of the group. In the early 1900s the great Protestant *katikiro* (prime minister) of the Buganda kingdom, Sir Apolo Kagwa, published a series of historical chronicles in the Luganda language that long dominated historiography of the region and underpinned the intense cultural pride of the Ganda people. In Rwanda the many publications of a Tutsi priest, Alexis Kagame, transformed an oral court history into a powerful written idiom of Tutsihood. Belgian Father J. Van Wing performed a similar function for the Kongo. These instances, one must hasten to add, represent cases of particularly historicized identities. Not all ethnic groups benefit from the presence of an amanuensis who can play this role of historical authentication, an important factor in explaining the wide variation in the intensity of ethnic consciousness.

Shared cultural practices shape ethnicity, though not all elements may be present or salient in any given case. The mode of calculating kinship and descent (matrilineal, patrilineal, or bilateral) is one such feature. So are rules governing marriage and other rites of passage from one phase of life to another. Shared ritual practices give meaning to the annual cycles of life and livelihood. Common culinary traditions and other aspects of everyday living provide daily enactment and performance of collective attachments. Religion may be another domain of commonality, especially for those not affiliated with one of the universal religions; even where Islam and Christianity are implanted, localized understandings of the supernatural and the sacred may shape group consciousness.

Collective awareness, the second defining dimension of ethnicity, is a prerequisite for a group to exist as a social entity. The growing literature on ethnonogenesis in Africa provides numerous examples of group identities that play a powerful role in contemporary politics but did not exist in the mid-nineteenth century. The Yoruba and Igbo in Nigeria, to start with two potent ethnic actors in postindependence politics, did not have a significant shared consciousness in the precolonial era. Among many other possible examples let me mention the Ovimbundu in Angola, the Ankole in Uganda, the Kalenjin

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3 The body of scholarship that deals with the origin and evolution of races or ethnic groups.
or Luhya in Kenya, or the Ngala or Lulua in Congo-Kinshasa. Without group consciousness, an ethnic category cannot become a collective actor.

Consciousness is widely expressed in kinship terms, and is historicized as a theory of shared ancestry. Descent is notoriously malleable to serve contemporary social or ideological purposes. But once rooted in the social consciousness, mythology convincingly impersonates reality. Among the many examples that might be cited is the instance of Arab consciousness in northern Sudan. Francis Deng argues persuasively that small numbers of Arab migrants from across the Red Sea intermingled through marriage with indigenous African women. With the assistance of Arab social dominance and patrilineal descent norms, the African ancestry was erased from social memory and an ideology of authentic Arabhood erected (Deng 1995).

Boundaries are the third crucial dimension of ethnicity. Identity is formed not only by what is shared within the group, but critically by what differentiates it from those beyond the cultural border. "The Other" serves as an external negative defining referent for the self. Collective and individual consciousness is framed by who one is not, as well as who one is. Beyond the boundary lie groups that may compete for the same resources, and are often suspected of harboring designs of dominance. Relations are not necessarily hostile, but stereotypical representations of "the other" tend to impute negative characteristics. As one example among many, we may examine a sample of the collection of current stereotypes gathered by noted anthropologist Maxwell Owusu in Swedru, a south-central Ghana town in the Fante area:

the Agona are lazy, lack industry, are poor, and ... their girls are "encouraged" by their mothers to "prostitute" themselves to scrape a living.... The Ewe ... are thieves.... They dabble in sorcery and evil medicine.... They are murderers. The Ga are considered quarrelsome, big-mouthed, and bullies. The Hausa smell, and they are unclean.... The Ashanti are proud, boastful and unsophisticated compared to the coastal Fante (Owusu, 1970: 151).

Another dimension of the role of boundaries in sustaining collective consciousness is the significance of labeling by others in constituting a group. Ethnicity most frequently arises by conscious assertion. However, it can also emerge as a category ascribed by others that becomes internalized over time. The Kirdi in northern Cameroon are an example; the ethnic label originated as a term for various groups adhering to local religions by dominant Muslim Fulani. These groups did not originally regard themselves as sharing ethnicity. Over time, however, the designation became assimilated into the social consciousness of those thus categorized.
The Complexity of Ethnicity

With ethnicity thus defined as being grounded in shared cultural attributes, consciousness, and boundaries, some cautionary words must follow at once. A workable conceptual grasp of ethnicity must incorporate due recognition of its complexity. Ethnic groups are not closed, corporate communities behaving as unified actors who respond to a collective rationality, bouncing off one another like billiard balls. Southall’s admonition from three decades ago is still quite relevant: “To hammer home the importance of interlocking, overlapping, multiple collective identities is one of the most important messages of social and cultural anthropology” (Southall 1970: 44).

To begin with, cultural consciousness is usually multi-layered. A classic example is the Somali instance, dramatically revealed in the decade of civil strife following the collapse of central state institutions in 1991. Somali ethnonationalism is a strongly held form of consciousness shared by nearly all inhabitants of the Somalia state, precariously reborn in 2000, but also held by Somalis in the surrounding states of Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, and a now-substantial diaspora in North America, Italy, and the Arabian peninsula. A shared language, a resonant literary tradition of oral poetry, a common religion, and a shared sense of historical origins all sustain and reinforce a sense of Somalihood. But Somali society is organized on the basis of a descent-based segmentation from the cellular family unit through lineages, sub-clans, clans, and a half-dozen umbrella clan families. The complex patterns of the 1990s conflicts, and the warring militias that competed for control of resources and territory, were usually based on clans or sub-clans.

A different kind of example is provided by the Yoruba in Nigeria. A potent form of ethnic solidarity operates at the Yoruba level of consciousness, which began to take active form in the late nineteenth century with unification of the language based upon the Oyo dialect by churchman Samuel Crowther, and Samuel Johnson’s production of a history of “the Yoruba.” Pan-Yoruba consciousness also rests upon the mythology of an eponymous ancestor, Oduduwa, and a primeval creation story. It was sustained by the emergence of Yoruba cultural organizations such as the Egbe Omo Oduduwa in the 1940s, and in contemporary Nigeria by the militant Oodua People’s Congress. Yoruba consciousness also appeared in the important diasporas that are a product of the last decades of the slave trade, embodied in such religious cults as Candomble in Brazil and Santeria in Cuba. However, within Yorubaland an important subsidiary layer of identity is associated with dozens of ancestral towns and associated kingdoms, such as Ijebu, Ibadan, Oyo, Ife, Ijesha, and others. Close inspection of Nigerian political processes since
the 1950s reveals that the ancestral town rather than Yoruba solidarity has frequently served as the defining element in rivalries and competition.

For many social purposes, a level of reciprocal trust and solidarity more immediate than the large ethnic aggregation is critical in reinforcing group identity. Thus, in urban centers, one encounters innumerable hometown associations, burial groups, rotating credit clubs, and other shared endeavors directed at meeting everyday needs, based on a more proximate affinity than that supplied by ethnicity. This layer of identity is not in direct competition with the larger units of ethnic awareness commonly encountered in political discussion, but a full mapping of identity politics must include local dynamics as well.

Urban forms of identity often reflect enlarged identity categories as well, grouping closely related groups who come from the same general area under a common label. In Kinshasa, migrants from up the Congo River were frequently lumped together as “Ngala,” linked by the river trading lingua franca Lingala. Across the river in Brazzaville, those migrating from the north were collectively labeled “Mbochi.” In Lagos, settlers from the north who were Muslim became known as “Hausa,” whether or not this identity would apply in the northern region from whence they had come. The label was accepted for most Lagos purposes, and they operated as Hausa.

The sheer magnitude of the urbanization process in Africa constantly refashions the social settings in which ethnicity is defined. Until World War II, most African cities were small towns, few exceeding 100,000, and the overwhelming majority of the population was rural. Today such urban centers as Kinshasa, Lagos, Abidjan, or Nairobi are giant agglomerations with millions of inhabitants; in many countries, a third of the population or more is urban. A further dimension of the interface between urbanization and ethnicity appeared in the recent years of deep economic crisis. A number of formerly employed urban workers were forced to retreat to the countryside, where they had to renegotiate their identities and their relationships with home communities. James Ferguson shows, in the Zambian case, how difficult this might be (Ferguson 1999).

Communal identity is thus multi-layered. It is also situational, circumstantial, and contingent. Many routine social transactions do not evoke ethnic conflict: marketplace exchanges, sharing public conveyances, cheering the national football team. However, political disputes frequently lend themselves to understandings that are textured by ethnicity. When a situation is framed by the perception that a certain outcome has been determined by ethnic criteria, then communal consciousness is activated.
Competitive elections are one evident example. If the competing parties are identified in the public mind with different ethnic groups, then circumstances conspire to elevate ethnicity to a higher level of saliency. The very dramaturgy and rhythms of an electoral campaign serve to enhance this effect. As the campaign unfolds, there is a tendency for the rhetorical vehemence to escalate. Competing candidates are tempted to engage in a cycle of outbidding communal claims. In the eyes of the public, the electoral outcome can take on a winner-take-all quality, with defeat seen as catastrophic. The campaign itself may be accompanied by growing physical violence, raising the stakes for everyone. Election day itself is the final act of this guerrilla theater, becoming the apex of fear and uncertainty. The possibility that competitive elections may lead to violent ethnic confrontation was long invoked as a justification for single party or military regimes. The fatal flaws in autocratic governance discredited these arguments in the 1990s, but African democracy faces a major challenge in managing open competition in ways that avoid the scenario traced above, a point to which I will return in the conclusions.

Many other more banal events in everyday life may create situations in which ethnic identity is aroused. In many countries, some of the leading football (soccer) teams are identified with a given community. Matches pitting two such teams against one another are saturated with ethnic meanings. Control of a given land area, selection of a local office-holder, and access to employment or school enrollment are other examples where patterns of ethnic advantage may become widely perceived, inducing a situational response. At other moments, the absence of major events catalyzing ethnic awareness can mean a time of relative quiescence in ethnic contestations.

Situations hold significance in another sense: varying circumstances can invoke different levels of ethnicity. Here we might return to the Somalia and Yoruba examples mentioned earlier. In Somalia, the irredentist campaign for unification of all Somalis under a single sovereignty, bringing war with Ethiopia in 1963 and 1977, mobilized the solidarity of nearly all around the vision of a greater Somalia. The struggle for power within the Somali state foregrounded the clan family, clan and subclan divisions, with particular intensity during electoral competition in the late 1960s, the deepening opposition to the Siyad Barre regime in the 1980s, and the civil strife following state collapse in 1991. In Nigeria, in the 1960, 1965, and 1979 elections, Yorubaland was divided, with ancestral town identities and rivalries offering an opening for parties whose primary base was in other regions to penetrate the Yoruba zone. Yorubaland was united in 1983, and especially 1993, and the annulment of the 1993 presidential elections after they had been
won by a Yoruba candidate, Moshood Abiola, produced a powerful reflex of Yoruba solidarity in an abiding anger.

**Variations in Intensity**

Beyond the variability in the activation of ethnicity that is contingent upon such situations, there is an important range of differentiation in the intensity of ethnic consciousness over time. Some forms of ethnic consciousness are grounded in a thoroughly elaborated cultural ideology, powerful historical mythologies, and well-inventoried heritage. Other forms of ethnic consciousness lack a written language, codification of the tradition, and intellectual voices articulating that identity; in such circumstances, ethnicity remains more diffuse and is less readily mobilized. Some identities may acquire a degree of closure towards neighboring and rival groups that take an extreme form: “barricaded identities,” in the interpretation of Ken Jowitt. “Social, religious, ideological, cultural, and political connections among members who share a barricaded identity,” he writes, “are dogmatically and hysterically defined and defended, as are disconnections from nonmembers” (Jowitt 2001: 28). In the 1990s, Tutsi and Hutu identities in Rwanda and Burundi took on the quality of barricaded identities, as each came to perceive the other as a threat to its physical survival. The intensified conflict in the 1990s between Nuer and Dinka in southern Sudan, as a part of the larger Sudanese civil war provoked by culturally oppressive Khartoum policies, resulted in a comparable barricading of identities, well captured by Sharon Hutchinson and Jok Maduk Jok who perceive:

> [since 1991] a gradual sealing off of this once permeable inter-ethnic divide. Whereas women and children were more likely to be kidnapped than slain by Nuer and Dinka cattle-raiders in the past, the reverse is now true. Militarized segments on both sides of this ethnic divide have sought to rationalize their increasing viciousness as “retaliation” for abominations earlier experienced.... People’s concepts of ethnicity themselves have been mutating. Nuer fighters, in particular, appear to have adopted a more “primordialist,” if not “racialist,” way of thinking about their ethnic “essence” in recent years (Hutchinson and Jok 2001: 15).

Prolonged inter-group violence is one major vector in creating intense forms of identification. In the substantial zones of Africa torn by prolonged civil strife in the last decade, evidence grows that escalation in the lethal character of weapons used in such conflicts overpowers the cultural mechanisms available for reconciliation. Automatic weapons have become widely available and inflict far higher casualties than combat with spears or machetes; rituals of atonement that sufficed to restore peace after skirmishes
with a handful of deaths cannot cope with dozens of fatalities. In a study of ethnic violence in southwestern Ethiopia, one scholar concludes that “culturally sanctioned reconciliation, with elders and ritual leaders of the local ethnic communities involved, and an appeal to traditional moral values of co-operation, reciprocal exchange, and compromise” are overwhelmed by the “effects of the new, unprecedented exercise of violence itself: excessive in scale, cruelty, scorn for suffering and vulnerability, apparent joy or a sense of achievement in killing others” (Abbink 2000: 546).

The degree to which cultural entrepreneurs have woven ideologies of identity is another important factor. A written language is a crucial element, as it was in the rise of nationalism in Europe. The written form induces the standardization of a speech code and makes possible its utilization in the school system. A vernacular literature can emerge, which may confer a new prestige upon the language. The accumulation and diffusion of cultural self-knowledge is facilitated. Africa historical traditions, much more perishable if preserved only in oral form, become accessible to a larger number than if only recorded in a European language. The rediscovery or embellishment of a glorious past offers resonant resources for identity construction. The mythology surrounding the conquering hero Shaka, who transformed a minor chiefdom into a powerful state in the early nineteenth century, is a foundational event for Zulu cultural ideology in South Africa. Buganda ethnonationalism weaves a powerful narrative around the historical expansion of the kingdom; another component of the identity text is the 1900 treaty relationship with Britain, which was seen as joining near-equals, unlike the conquered status of other Uganda ethnic groups. Kongo ethnicity finds authentication in the achievements of the fifteenth-century kingdom, its early standing as a Christian realm in the sixteenth century, and its heroic struggle against Portuguese intrusion before its seventeenth-century demise.

Arab identity in northern Africa is in a class by itself in terms of its cultural resources, although it has been territorialized by the colonial partition and the current state system. Arabhood draws upon its historic association with Islam and the original Islamic conquest empire and upon the role of Arabic as scriptural and devotional language for Muslims. Arab identity also enjoys an international range and standing unique in Africa: there are seventeen states in Africa and West Asia in which Arabhood defines the cultural personality of the country and a global role for the Arab state system.

At the other end of the spectrum with regard to the saliency of identity are groups such as the Karimojong in northeastern Uganda, the Turkana in northwestern Kenya, various small groups in southwestern Ethiopia, or the Tuareg in northern Mali and Niger,
which have been relatively isolated from the political centers in postcolonial politics, weakly represented among the intellectual elites, and poorly situated in terms of economic openings. In such circumstances, the opportunity and resources to construct strong cultural ideologies were far more limited, and thus the expression of ethnicity has been less assertive.

Several decades ago, it was widely believed that some ethnic groups were differentially endowed with the psychological propensity for modernization; emblematic of this theory was the once-influential study of David McClelland, *The Achieving Society* (1961). “Differential modernization” was the result of an aggressive pursuit of new economic opportunity by some groups through a willingness to migrate or an eagerness to enroll in colonial mission schools, and a corresponding reticence to engage with modernity on the part of others. There is no doubt that some groups have far more members of educated elites than do others, and that tensions over such imbalances have been one driving factor in ethnic mobilization. However, the thesis that such differences can be explained in terms of culturally or psychologically determined innate differences has largely vanished. Opportunity did vary widely, however, partly shaped by colonial beliefs that certain ethnic groups were especially “open to civilization” and willing participants in the religious and administrative structures of the colonial state. Such calculations influenced the location of mission centers and related educational facilities, as well as recruitment by the colonial state into its auxiliary ranks. Conversely, missions—the principal sponsors of formal schooling until nearly the end of the colonial period—were discouraged from entering zones where Islam was well established or populations were believed hostile. Children of pastoral peoples, by virtue of their itinerant livelihood, had difficulty attending a stationary schoolhouse and thus acquiring the credentials for social ascension.

**Group Versus Individual Ethnic Consciousness**

Finally, in considering the complexity of ethnicity, we need to take note of the analytical contrast between group and individual consciousness. The very language of analysis tends to reify the collective dimension of ethnicity; the term “ethnic group” used in this volume and well-nigh universally carries the connotation that a constituted “group” exists bearing the ethnic label. Weber suggests the necessary qualification that “ethnic membership does not constitute a group; it only facilitates group formation of any kind, particularly in the political sphere” (cited in Jowitt 2001: 27). Yet the abundant
literature on ethnicity and ethnic conflict tends to privilege the group level where the operation of communal consciousness is most visible in its effects.

The group aspect is evidently fundamental. The existence of a form of consciousness shared by many individuals who acknowledge subjective ethnic membership gives rise to a collective reference point shaping and constraining behavioral choices. Others in the social environment readily perceive a group in action, and are quick to impute action by their neighbors as motivated by ethnic solidarity. To give but one example, a favor accorded by a state agent to a kinsman, which was dictated by an affinity much more immediate than ethnicity, is likely to be interpreted by those outside the group as yet another instance of ethnic nepotism.

But in the final analysis, much social action takes place at the individual level. Within a given group, individuals may experience and perform ethnicity in widely variant ways. Even in electoral contests where ethnicity becomes an influential factor, not all members of a given group vote according to the dictates of ethnic attachment. Nor do all individuals give equal importance to ethnic consciousness, in relation to such other social identities as gender, social status, occupation, generation, or residential unit. The multi-layered nature of ethnicity comes into play. So too does the possibility of multiple cultural identities, a product of intermarriage (fairly common in urban settings), migration, or the ambiguity of ethnic boundaries. The variety of identity meaning is eloquently captured in Jean Bazin’s summary of Bambara identity in Mali, in an essay well titled “To Each His Own Bambara”:

Misled by the reassuring rigor of the colonial taxonomies and their internalization as a form of knowledge widely shared within urban milieux and among educated elites in Mali today, one cannot imagine the extreme variety of those who in one way or another ... have found themselves designated, inventoried, honored, feared, insulted, mistreated, or exterminated under this name (Bazin 1985: 97).

In taking note of the element of individual choice in the enactment of ethnicity, one must also recognize that this flexibility is by no means unlimited. Ethnicity is in part asserted by the individual actor. However, it is also ascribed by cultural others. The individual is situated within the ethnic register that dominates in the larger society. Each person is constrained to respond to classifications imposed upon him or her. Whatever preferences in terms of privileging the ethnic dimension of identity an individual may have in a given setting, if the others with whom interaction occurs perceive his behavior in ethnic terms, the communal straitjacket is difficult to shed. In an ethnically sensitized
social environment, all persons are assumed to have an ethnic identity, which will usually be known by those in socially proximate locations. Even if one aspires to ethnic anonymity, numerous cues permit others to read one’s cultural attachment, including name, language, visible social practices, dress, or (in some parts of West Africa) facial scarification. Thus the choices open to African individuals in identity performance are far more constrained than the “ethnic options” documented for Euroamericans (Waters 1990).4

Related Identities: Religion

In further pursuit of the multiple layers of the identity repertoire, let us consider several of the major alternative forms of group consciousness in their relationship to ethnicity: religion, race, nationalism, gender, and class. Each of these patterns of social affiliation is best understood as an alternative form of identity, usually coexisting with ethnic consciousness. Each can have political importance, without implying the erasure of ethnicity.

In the religious domain, since the beginning of the colonial era there has been a radical transformation of the landscape of worship. Although Ethiopia as a historical kingdom had a Christian core and Egypt had a Coptic minority, mission Christianity had only a few beachheads at the time of colonial occupation. Islam was solidly implanted in the northern part of the continent, and along the East African coast. It was also the dominant religion in the congeries of kingdoms in the Sahel regions across the continent, but did not include many rural populations in this zone. Both Christianity and Islam have enjoyed massive expansion since the mid-nineteenth century, and the great majority of Africans today are at least nominal followers of one or the other of these universal religions.

The nature of Christian mission action intersected with ethnicity in several important ways. Evangelical campaigns were intensely competitive, with Catholics and Protestants viewing each other as messengers of perdition. The universal hierarchy of the Catholic church imposed a greater uniformity in its catechism, but the actual labor of conversion was assigned to different mission orders whose doctrines and strategies were not identical. On the Protestant side, sectarian divisions were transposed to Africa as the

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4 In the United States, persons of European ancestry frequently have scrambled ancestry, and often if immigration is not recent have only murky awareness of their national origins. See the engaging study by Mary C. Waters, Ethnic Options: Choosing Identities in America (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).
mainstream denominations conducted separate missionary campaigns. The colonial state mediated the rivalry by assigning particular territorial fields to the different Catholic orders and Protestant denominations. However, the competition between the local Catholic order and Protestant mission was often intense.

Thus the form of Christian religious identity was often a product of the accidents of mission territorial assignments. In Nigeria, for example, the rivalry between Yoruba and Igbo was partly experienced in the religious realm; Anglican missions predominated in Yorubaland, while Catholics were stronger in Igbo country. The divisions of the Angolan national liberation movement into three mutually hostile movements—the Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola (MPLA), União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola (UNITA), and the Frente Nacional de Libertação de Angola (FNLA)—were demarcated both by different ethnic and racial bases, and by the distinct mission attachments of their leadership (respectively Catholic, Methodist, and Baptist). In addition, the sharp animosities dividing Protestant and Catholic missions seeped into the consciousness of their flocks; Ugandan politics since the 1950s remain marked by the Protestant-Catholic division.

Christian evangelical endeavors required biblical translation. This in turn compelled the early missionaries to create a written form for local languages. This very act was an ethnolinguistic creation. In rural societies without a standard written version, speech codes tended to phase gradually into one another, in the case of a similar language family, and to exhibit substantial dialectical variation. Bible translation was an expensive undertaking and necessitated strategic decisions maximizing the cost effectiveness of the exercise. In turn, the languages chosen for biblical translation had major impact on the subsequent evolution of identity. Standardization of closely related speech codes created both an enlarged potential evangelical audience and the possibility of an amalgamated identity revolving around the newly written language. Conversely, the creation of alternative versions by competing missions of what had normally been considered a common language contributed to the enhancement of subgroup identities. Terence Ranger and other scholars have shown that the saliency within the Shona ethnic group of such subgroups as Manyika, Zezeru, Ndau, and others is closely linked to the multiple standard forms developed by different mission societies (Ranger 1989). Not least important was the sacralized meaning that the scriptural role of the language conferred upon identity. Here one encounters a formative role in ethnic consciousness analogous to the impact of the holy word transcribed in the emergence of nationalism in Europe. As Adrian Hastings argues, “Biblical Christianity both undergirds the cultural and political
world out of which the phenomenon of nationhood and nationalism as a whole developed and in a number of important cases provided a crucial ingredient for the particular history of nations and nationalisms" (Hastings 1997: 4).

Not all language standardization projects succeeded. An intriguing case in point is the repeated failures of mission schemes to introduce a standard version of Igbo. The first experiment in distilling a written form, known as “Union Igbo,” was based upon informants among the Igbo emigré community in Freetown, Sierra Leone. The dialect upon which the unification was erected was distant from the speech forms in the major centers of Igboland, and despite energetic mission promotion this version was never accepted. Not till much later was a more successful written standard created. In the meantime, early generations of Igbo schoolchildren were educated in English and regarded this language as their vehicle of uplift. This pattern sharply contrasted with Yoruba language development, whose Oyo form used by Crowther as the basis for a common standard won quick acceptance. The linguistic dimension of Yoruba consciousness was subsequently far more central.5

Christian identity is for the most part experienced through the congregation and does not usually stand apart from or override ethnicity. The older mainline Protestant congregations had church structures that operated at the territorial level, while Catholicism had a global structure. Conflicts pitting Christians against Muslims—recently evident in Nigeria and Tanzania—can produce a reflex of religious solidarity, but most frequently the ethnic congregation ties religious experience to ethnicity. The greatest degree of Christian religious energy in recent years is expressed through diverse evangelical and pentecostal churches, by their nature localized and fragmented.

Islam relates to ethnicity somewhat differently. The theology emphasizes the importance of the umma, or the world community of Islam, in ways that have no contemporary Christian counterpart (although having a parallel in the res publica christiana of medieval times). The central liturgical and scriptural role of Arabic meant that there was no motivation to allocate a sacred role to other African languages, although some such as Swahili or Hausa had transliterations in the Arabic script. Here and there ethnicity determines where the Friday prayers will be observed; southern Nigeria is an example where one finds the ethnic mosque. But more than Christianity, Islam has been a vessel of identity that can partially mute ethnic differences. In northwest Africa, the relatively subdued

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5 See the detailed history of early Igbo standardization efforts in van den Bersselaar 1997.
difference between Arab and Berber populations is partly explained by the shared Islamic culture. As well, the elevation its liturgical status confers upon Arabic explains the gradual Arabization of Berber groups over the centuries. In Eritrea, coastal populations (few of whom are of Arab ethnicity) feel a strong affinity through their shared Islamic identity and insist on an official status for Arabic rather than their indigenous languages. South of the Sahara, in those countries where the Muslim majority is very large (such as Senegal, Mali, or Niger), the role played by ethnicity in politics is more diffuse than in the lands further to the north.

Islam is not a monolithic form of religious identity. In a number of countries, affiliation with one or another of the major Sufi orders, such as Qadiriyya, Tijaniyya, Khatmiyya, Ansar or the Mourides, which are not closely tied to ethnicity, provides a significant differentiation of identity. So too does the militant form of Islamism reflected by such movements as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Sudan, or its counterpart in Algeria. But there are also practices in the repertory of Islamic ritual through which shared attachment to the umma is performed, such as the five daily prayers. Particularly influential is the obligation, if possible, to undertake the haj, or pilgrimage to Mecca. This journey, once an arduous adventure requiring years of travel, is brought within the reach of the multitude by air transport, and in several countries by the public subsidy of the expense. The emotional impact of this encounter with tens of thousands of fellow Muslims from all over the world is immense, revealing a comradeship in religious devotion far transcending ethnicity.

Racial Identity

Racial identity provides another trans-territorial and pan-ethnic constitution of the self. To grasp its origins and significance, we need to recall its early connection to the Atlantic slave trade, the swelling of African diaspora populations in the Western hemisphere, and their hostile categorization in racial terms by dominant society. By the time that colonial occupation was imposed upon Africa, racism was firmly implanted in the European psyche. The physically visible differentiating attributes of skin color, facial features, and hair texture were merely the external markings of a comprehensive inferiority in the eyes of the colonial occupant, who saw indigenous peoples as primitive, savage, pagan. A whole new dimension to the virulence of racism came from the late nineteenth-century addition of a pseudoscientific theory of racial hierarchy. The supremacy of Europeans in warfare, power, and technology was believed to reflect a Darwinian survival of the fittest, and to prove the racist premise of a biological European superiority.
With the partition of Africa and political organization of European occupation, the colonial state constituted its African subjects along three axes: racial, territorial, and ethnic. All Africans fell within the racial classification, upon which the colonial state erected a comprehensive array of discriminatory regulations. The premise of inferiority and backwardness of subject peoples justified systematic segregation, characteristic of all colonial systems, and a battery of arbitrary controls enforcing imperial hegemony and translating African labor into a revenue stream for the colonial state (through the imposition of head taxes, forced labor, and coerced recruitment for European enterprises). The presumed primitivity of the subject instilled in colonial minds the premise of the perpetual childhood of the Africans, justifying in turn a pseudo-parental tutelage that extinguished all rights.

There is no evidence that racial categories of identity existed in Africa prior to the slave trade and colonial rule. However, for both diaspora Africans and colonial subjects, the massive imprint of racial classification compelled an internalization of blackness as an identity (or a sense of racial otherness for light-skinned North Africans). Even though the rigidity of the racial divide began to relax in the final years of colonial occupation, the consciousness linked to race was by then deeply implanted. In riposte, initially under the intellectual and political leadership of diaspora Africans, particularly from the Caribbean and the United States, the stigmatization of race was transformed into an ideology of solidarity and liberation in the form of Pan-Africanism. This doctrine held strong sway among African intellectuals of the diaspora, whose ethnicity was mostly erased by the generations of separation from the continent, and whose territorial origins were unknown. The series of Pan-African conferences organized between 1900 and World War II, which helped give doctrinal definition to the idea of African racial solidarity, were all dominated by diaspora Africans.

With the 1945 Manchester Pan-African Congress, leadership in the Pan-African movement passed to the emergent nationalist intelligentsia in Africa. The struggle for liberation from colonial subjugation initially was cast in the form of continental liberation, implicitly building on the “We are all Africans” notion of racial solidarity, with as corollary the vision that Africa had a vocation of political unity. The Manchester Congress excoriated “artificial divisions and territorial boundaries created by the Imperialist Powers.” The 1958 All-African Peoples’ Congress in Accra denounced “artificial frontiers drawn by the imperialist Powers to divide the peoples of Africa,” demanding “the abolition or adjustment of such frontiers at an early date” (cited in Touval 1972: 22–23).
Territoriality, one soon learned, was not so easily dispensed with; independence was won through the frame of the colonial partition. But the dream of African unity, which originated in the shared experience of racial oppression, remained a vital factor in African politics. In 1963 the vision of Pan-Africanism found institutional expression in the Organization of African Unity (OAU). Despite the many disappointments in the limited frame for inter-state cooperation embodied by the OAU, Africa as an idea is well implanted in the popular consciousness. Evidence of its resiliency appeared in 1999, when a new proposal for radical acceleration of the process of African unification was launched by Libyan autocrat Muammar Qadhafy. The African Union project to supplant the OAU with a greatly enhanced structure of African integration was formally launched in 2001, although the practical difficulties of full implementation will doubtless limit full realization of its aims.

Identity cast in racial terms thus has a powerful resonance. Although the diasporic African populations cannot directly participate in the political pursuit of integration or unification on the continent, in the intellectual realm discourses of racial solidarity and liberation originating in the diaspora continue to play a constitutive role in notions of African solidarity. The decades of active struggle for African liberation from colonial occupation and white racial rule rolled southward from Sudan, Tunisia, and Morocco in 1956, Ghana in 1957, eighteen countries in 1960, down to the final overthrow of apartheid in South Africa, finalized with the transition of 1994. The strongly racialist texture to white rule in the final redoubts of Zimbabwe, Namibia, and South Africa itself kept the theme of racial solidarity and liberation in the political foreground.

From the vantage point of the Pan-African perspective and some of its spinoffs (such as the Afrocentricity debate in the United States), ethnicity is apparently an identity of secondary worth. The manipulation of ethnicity as an apartheid weapon in Namibia and South Africa, suggesting through the “homeland” policy that the ethnic structure was the sole acceptable site for subordinate participation by Africans, linked ethnic consciousness to the apparatus of apartheid oppression and channeled southern African liberation ideology in the direction of African solidarity. Although racial consciousness did not necessarily stand in contradiction to ethnic pride, the more exalted ambitions of African solidarity and unification implied a subordination of ethnicity to the higher purposes of a Pan-African perspective.
Territorial Identity

The African subjects of the colonial state were also imprinted with a territorial identity. The specific legal and governmental framework within which colonial oppression was experienced was the given territorial unit. Though the colonial state invested no resources in fostering a sense of territorial solidarity, the formulation of grievances and the organization of protest necessarily addressed the unit of governance through which colonial sovereignty was exercised. Even in the interwar period, growing numbers of Africans came to experience colonial occupation in the emergent multi-ethnic urban centers, or reflect upon its misdeeds in secondary boarding schools or eventually universities that operated outside the ethnically defined rural units of “native administration.” Particularly after World War II, resentments at colonial injustices congealed into the ideal of political independence as the imperative remedy. Effective challenge to the colonial state could most effectively occur at the territorial level. In turn, the framers of African nationalist ideologies had to rebut the colonial dismissal of their claims as the irresponsible agitation of a tiny educated elite who ignored the ethnic diversity that made self-government impractical. While the mobilization of a mass following was indispensable to realizing the dream of independence; asserting the primacy of a territorial solidarity was necessary to this end.

Thus, while ethnicity played an important role in the struggle for independence in a number of countries, at the ideological level its moral value was denied. Anticolonial nationalism incarnated a higher level of solidarity; the political expression of ethnicity played into the hands of the malevolent schemes of the colonizing powers to delay or avert independence by fostering division. After independence was won, the new rulers engaged in a vigorous process of “nation-building”: instilling in the subject-became-citizen the belief that the supreme form of solidarity belonged to the sovereign territorial state. The ideology of the nation-state, then ascendant throughout the world, shaped the identity strategies of newly independent states. National integration was a crucial prerequisite to achieve the other goals of independence, above all rapid economic transformation.

The resources available to the state were considerable. The educational system, over which new states invariably reinforced their control and rapidly expanded, was a powerful pedagogical instrument. School curricula were revised and infused with nation-building content: national histories, focus upon territorial geography and culture, localization of illustration and example across the board. The schoolhouse was a favored site for everyday performances of national identity: flag-raising, singing the newly created
national anthems, celebrating national holidays. To grasp the importance of these seemingly banal practices, one needs to recollect the enormous influence of the common school in the United States in propagating the idea of an American nation to successive generations of immigrants, or to recall that until the advent of mass education in nineteenth-century France, only a modest fraction of the rural French population had some active consciousness of French identity (see Weber 1979).

The postcolonial state had other nation-building weapons in its arsenal. Until the 1990s, the major media were government monopolies. Radio, television, and the government newspaper were conscious instruments of nation-building. So too was the national football team in its participation in such major international competitions as the World Cup or the African Cup of Nations. In subliminal ways, “nation” was also communicated through postage stamps and the coinage. This everyday, unreflected notion of a national attachment is well captured by Michael Billig as “banal nationalism”:

In so many little ways, the citizenry are daily reminded of their national place in a world of nations. However, this reminding is so familiar, so continual, that it is not consciously registered as reminding. The metonymic image of banal nationalism is not a flag which is being consciously waved with fervent passion; it is the flag hanging unnoticed on the public building (Billig 1985: 8).

The cumulative impact of this internalization of a territorial consciousness described as nationalism is demonstrated by the fact that, even in countries where states had degenerated into venal predators and public order had dissolved over extended periods in the 1990s (for example, Congo-Kinshasa, Sierra Leone, and Somalia), there is little call for a territorial fragmentation that no existing force could avert if ethnic or other demands for breakup resonated.  

Although territorial nationalism in Africa represents itself as a higher order of affiliation than ethnic solidarity, the architects of the nation in recent years have carefully avoided confronting ethnicity. The illusion of possible erasure of ethnicity, implied in the Toure quotation at the beginning, quickly vanished. In its place came a sometimes reluctant acknowledgment of the enduring affective power of ethnic solidarity, combined with the desire to cage it in the private realm and ban its invocation in the public square. In

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6 The emergence of a functioning Somaliland may appear an exception to this proposition. However, Somaliland is essentially the restoration of a prior colonial unit, British Somaliland; if a viable and inclusive government for Somalia can be institutionalized, there is reason to believe Somaliland would ultimately rejoin.
contrast with most European and Asian states, the concept of the nation had to be rigorously territorial and ideological, separate from any ethnic referent (save in the Arab states, Somalia, and the small southern African states with a single dominant group, Lesotho, Swaziland, and Botswana). On the one hand, this denies “nation-building” projects the powerful resource of language and ethnic culture as integrative instruments. On the other, it explains why claims of ethnonational self-determination have been infrequent in Africa, in sharp contrast to Eurasia. Separatist movements that have arisen in Africa (for example, Casamance in southern Senegal, southern Sudan, Biafra in Nigeria) have almost invariably grounded their claims upon some existing administrative subdivision, not ethnic self-determination. In most cases today, ethnic self-awareness is not perceived as standing in contradiction to national identity, a pattern strikingly dissimilar to much of Eurasia. The “nation” represents itself as a purely political and territorial identity, without ethnic content; as such, it can claim allegiance of the citizenry without implying any renunciation of ethnicity.

Finally, the postcolonial state, in its nation-state project, confronts the legacy of the third leg of the triple classification of the subject (racial, territorial, ethnic) by its colonial predecessor. Ethnicity was deeply embedded in the structures of rule by colonial imposition of its ethnic codification upon the structures of local administration. Only those who escaped the grid of rural governance could partly elude ethnic subject status, an observation central to the influential study by Mahmood Mamdani:

more than any other colonial subject, the African was containerized, not as a native, but as a tribesperson. Every colony had two legal systems: one modern, the other customary. Customary law was defined in the plural, as the law of the tribe, and not in the singular, as a law for all natives.... roughly as many sets of customary laws [existed] as there were said to be tribes (Mamdani 1996: 22).

Although a number of states have endeavored to dissolve or dilute the ethnic containers serving as a basis for local administration, the familiarity of long usage may create obstacles. For example, Uganda—a key case in the Mamdani study—has divided the 12 ethnic districts of colonial administration into 45, with more promised in the 2001 electoral campaign. The main goal was to break the larger and more assertive groups into multiple units, thus reducing their capacity to act as ethnic collective advocates. But agitation persists to return larger groups to a single administrative jurisdiction, or to create new ones for small groups.
Gender and Ethnicity

Gender intersects and overlaps with identity in a very different way. Here the problematic query is whether gender holds any significance for ethnicity. Otherwise put, the question is whether men and women experience and enact ethnic identity differently. The universality of patriarchy, albeit in varying forms, frames the issue. The heart of the matter, then, lies in whether women, given the asymmetries in the gender matrix, find their unequal status shapes their relationship to ethnic consciousness in any way.

The subject has arisen only recently, as feminist scholars began to interrogate the relationship between gender and nationalism (see Peterson 1995; Yuval-Davis 1997). In its strongest form, the thesis is that nationalism (and by implication ethnicity) is inherently gendered. Its historic association with warfare and violence irremediably links its language and symbolism with masculinity. The potent claims to exclusive loyalty imposed by militant forms of nationalism silently enhance the authority of the male leadership of the movement. The woman is merely protector of the home and producer of new children to fill the nationalist ranks. Nationalism thus becomes one more strand in the fabric of patriarchy.

These arguments only partly translate into the language of ethnicity. However, there are several social domains where ethnic practice may implicate gender inequality. Particularly where descent is patrilineal—the most frequent norm—the social ancestry of the female becomes largely erased in subsequent generations. In interethnic marriage the male ethnic identity normally prevails. In many areas, bridewealth payments escalated in monetary value, creating a male disposition to preserve the investment and limit female autonomy. Other kinds of female disadvantage, in land rights, inheritance, and property control, were asserted as cultural heritage intrinsic to ethnic ideologies. As a consequence, Vail argues that:

an emphasis on the need to control women and a stress on the protection of the integrity of the family came to be intrinsic to both ethnic ideologies and the actual institutional practices.... 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 (Vail 1989: 15).

In suggesting that gender may produce differential experience of ethnicity, one needs to qualify the point by recognizing the important ways in which any distinction may be effaced. Within the context of ethnic polarization, situational constraints lead men and women to react in similar ways. The necessary reciprocities of shared household induces an avoidance of ethnic distinction within conjugal units. Still, Aili Tripp docu-
ments the striking finding that women in Uganda are far more successful than their male counterparts in sustaining effective cooperation within associations that cut across ethnic lines, implying that ethnicity is less pivotal in social action for women (Tripp 2000).

An intriguing example of the female rejection of ethnicity as a legitimate principle of distribution is found in the passionate denunciation of politics as an ethnic competition for shares of the “national cake” (a metaphoric representation I examine in more detail below) by Winnie Byanyima, a leading political figure, in Uganda’s 1994 constitutional debates:

Most of us born to work in kitchens know that, where a cake is, there must be a baker. So, I find discussion around sharing and eating the cake childish at the very least and irresponsible, selfish and parasitic at worst.... Struggling for the trappings of power is now at the center stage, it has become acceptable and even fashionable. Values which we women care about such as caring, serving, building, reconciling, healing, and sheer decency are becoming absent from our political culture. This eating is crude, self-centered, egoistic, shallow, narrow and ignorant.... a culture which we must denounce and do away with if we are to start a new nation (cited in Tripp 2001).

Ethnicity and Social Class

Finally, one may ask whether ethnicity bears any relationship to identities linked to social class. The rich stew of debates over understanding social class in Africa cannot be adequately sampled in these pages. Suffice it to say that class in Africa cannot find adequate understanding through imported categories derived from Marxism or Western sociology. Despite claims of a number of the independence generation of political leaders that social class did not exist among indigenous Africans, there is a keen sense in the popular mind of structured inequality, of “big people” and “little people.” This closely reflects a postcolonial reality; whereas in most colonial territories Africans had few possibilities of accumulation (giving rise to the theory that Africans were not divided by social class), since independence a small minority has acquired great wealth. The most important postcolonial avenue to unequal enrichment and the social status that accompanies it is through access or proximity to state power.

There is some degree of consciousness of shared status and common interest on the part of those who have accumulated wealth and power since independence. However, this group is also firmly linked to ethnic communities through networks of clientele. In return for some flow of resources and influence, the patron can rely upon the social and
political backing of the clientele. These webs of patron-client linkages honeycomb political society, and through their reciprocities constitute one of the building blocks of ethnic community. In a number of countries, their importance has doubtless increased with the spread of informal markets and a parallel economy.

In the urban centers, economic decline or stagnation in many countries has produced some other social strata whose common material situation creates a sense of shared interests. Substantial numbers of public sector employees, who once enjoyed a comfortable middle-class existence, find the real value of their salaries sharply eroded by inflation and their well-being undermined by the harsh economic reform medicine of structural adjustment programs. The status attached to relatively high levels of educational attainment that qualified them for the positions they held persists, but their impoverishment labels them, to borrow a Ghanaian term, as “the respectable poor.” Urban workers—and especially the large numbers of officially unemployed who find precarious survival in the informal sector—share the marginality but not the residual status of the respectable poor. Even more volatile and discontented are the huge cohorts of urban youth who face dismal prospects for social advance.

The social turbulence in capital cities that provided important impetus to the wave of democratization in the early 1990s came in large measure from these categories. Urban street action was not normally marked by ethnicity at the beginning of the democratic transitions, although later in the decade armed ethnic youth militia appeared in several countries (Congo-Brazzaville in 1993 and 1997, Nigeria in 2000). Although collective social action organized around the shared discontents of material deprivation can occur, the anthropology of anger can also easily flow along ethnic lines.

In rural areas, the defining issues of social competition tended to pit communities against one another. The most frequent of such disputes revolved around land rights, intensified by growing population densities, the dislocation of groups by civil violence or drought, or migration patterns. These kinds of conflicts at the turn of the new century were particularly salient in the Great Lakes region, resulting in a complex mosaic of ethnic clashes. Rural populations are well aware of their relative poverty and their distance from power; however, a common sociological location does not necessarily crystallize into an active form of common “peasant” consciousness reaching across the boundaries of ethnic consciousness.

In sum, social class consciousness in Africa is indisputably present but diffusely held and weakly articulated. The categories through which inequality is popularly under-
stood are not the same as those commonly used in Western class analysis. To unravel the class factor in African politics, one needs to interrogate the social consciousness to discover the language through which hierarchies of well-being are understood.

Whatever its African categorizations, class lacks the powerful affective properties associated with ethnic awareness. Ethnicity readily supplies a discourse of collective self-hood immediately recognizable to its members. The emotive attachments readily evoked by ethnicity have no counterpart in class consciousness in Africa. The ultimate tragedy in human encounters is genocide, to which Africa has had tragic exposure in Rwanda and Burundi. Genocide is the attempted liquidation of an ethnic community, a word originating as a descriptor for the Holocaust. No comparable word has been coined for lethal class conflict, because it lacks the psychic properties to rise to genocidal levels.

**Approaches to Understanding Ethnicity**

To conclude this chapter, I turn to the three major schools of analysis of ethnicity, which have taken clear form in the last two decades: primordialism, instrumentalism, and constructivism. Most analysts draw upon all three theoretical streams, but they are distinctive perspectives. Each of these conceptual orientations sensitizes us to important dimensions of the complex social phenomenon of ethnicity.

Primordialist approaches stress the deeply held nature and psychological properties of ethnicity. Older understandings of ethnic identity tended implicitly towards a primordialist stance, although without using the term. Ethnicity tended to be perceived as a timeless essence, whose origins and dynamics did not require close interrogation. However, a fuller brief for this approach found expression when its premises were challenged by the other perspectives. It was necessary to explain not just the existence of ethnic consciousness, but the singular intensities of emotional attachment it might evoke. In the words of A.L. Epstein, purely instrumental interpretations of ethnicity fail to explain “the powerful emotional charge that appears to surround or to underlie so much of ethnic behavior; and it is this affective dimension of the problem that seems to me lacking in so many recent attempts to tackle it” (Epstein 1978: xi). In one of the most systematic elaborations of a primordialist approach, Harold Isaacs stressed the “ineffable significance” and “peculiarly coercive powers” of ethnic identity, whose social energy derives from their psychological essence: “a desperate effort to regain the condition of life in which certain needs were met, to get behind walls that enclose them once more, if only in their minds, in a place where they can feel they belong, and where, grouped with their kind, they can regain some measure of what feels like physical and emotional
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safety” (Isaacs 1975: 28). Human beings had a basic need for social anchoring, a reticence before moral aloneness.

Other scholars of a primordialist persuasion stress the innateness of cultural understandings. Humans, argued Clifford Geertz, are born as incomplete animals, who fulfill themselves through the culture they create, which becomes a primordial “given” of social existence (Geertz 1975). Culture becomes linked to ancestry; ideologies of descent tie the ritual and social practices of the group to generations past extending back into the mists of history.

Yet another dimension of primordiality identified by its most enthusiastic proponents goes beyond culture into sociobiology. Ethnic solidarity, in this view, is “an extended form of kin selection,” arising as basic instinctual response (van den Berghe 1987). An even extended claim for the biological basis of ethnicity is entered by Paul Shaw and Yuwa Wong, who argue that the propensity to group consciousness and solidarity is imprinted in the genetic code, as a result of the prehistorical imperative of small human groups to cooperate to subsist, and to maintain a mutual recognition of the kindred as a condition for survival in an environment when attack by others was a constant threat (Paul and Wong 1989).

Although sociobiological theories attributing ethnicity to our genetic properties take us further than we need to go here, some aspects of identity politics require recourse to the corpus of primordialist theory. The power of the emotional attachments attached to ethnicity and the force of the animosities towards a hostile ethnic other in a polarized setting call for attention to the psychological properties of identity. Put another way, an inescapable social fact is that ordinary ethnic actors tend toward a primordialist assumption, rarely interrogating the origins of the identity or reflecting on whether their communal action may be merely circumstantial.7

A second approach, instrumentalism, centers upon the use of identity as a weapon in the competitive pursuit of material advantage. Here one may evoke a widely encountered metaphorical representation of politics originating in Nigeria. The essence of politics, in this view, is “slicing the national cake.” In this delicious and quintessentially instrumental imagery, the object of ethnic action is eating, a proposition that triggered the

7 Interesting evidence on this point is provided by Gil-White’s 1999 essay, “How Thick Is Blood?” The responses of people in the Kazakh-Mongol ethnic border zone of Mongolia to an array of questions on kinship and identity clearly demonstrated that his rural respondents were natural primordialists.
wrath of the Ugandan feminist leader cited earlier. The meal must come from the resource pool controlled by the state. Nigerian oil and other revenues, by imaginative metamorphosis, assume the form and properties of a cake: sweet to the taste, desired in the largest possible serving. The relative size of the slices is visible to all; those disappointed by smallish portions look in hungry anger at those whose plates hold outsized, icing-laden slices. These relative inequities lead in turn to ask whose hand holds the knife; one may presume that the ethnic affiliation and preferences of the slicer will influence the size of the portions served to different groups.

The “national cake” metaphor points us towards the two crucial faces of instrumentalist politics: distribution and domination. Ethnic competition is powered by the desire to maximize group returns. Relative shares of material benefits are determined in the political realm and outcomes are strongly influenced by the relative power of the ethnic contenders. Securing political dominance assures that the material interests of the group will be safeguarded. Furthermore, ethnic solidarity in competition permits overcoming the “free rider” problem in social action: the disposition of some to remain aloof from group action because they will share the benefits whether they participate or not. When instrumental ethnic mobilization takes place, the visibility of membership permits the communal leadership to monitor and enforce group involvement, preventing “free riding” (remaining on the sidelines in the expectation of receiving the benefits of group action whether or not one participates).8

Instrumentalist analysis, although not labeled as such until the 1980s, quickly gained momentum in the 1970s. The kinds of ethnic politics that became visible in Africa as independence approached were closely tied to competitive struggles for political power and the access to resources that went with it. Listening to ethnic voices in the political arena, one could hardly escape the conclusion that ethnicity was utilized as a mobilizing weapon in the competitive pursuit of material advantage.

The dramatic speed with which instrumentalism elbowed primordialism aside for a time has other explanations in the sociology of knowledge. Instrumentalism permitted the incorporation of ethnicity into two powerfully influential paradigms, Marxism and rational choice, which for different reasons were allergic to the acknowledgment of cultural pluralism. The password opening Marxism and rational choice to instrumentalist ethnicity was the materialist premise common to all three approaches. For Marxism, if

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8 For examples of instrumentalism in pure form, see Rothschild 1981; Olzak and Nagel 1986.
ethnicity was essentially about material competition, then communal mobilization became "real," just misguided. Ethnicity could be seen as a form of false consciousness, which stood in the path of the more fundamental basis of solidarity constituted by social class. For the rational choice theorist, the core premise of the self-interested, rationally calculating individual unit of politics could be extended to a group logic. In the words of one of the leading rational choice practitioners, Russell Hardin, "self-interest can often successfully be matched with group interest" (Hardin 1995: 5).

A third perspective emerged in the 1980s, constructivism (sometimes called "constructionism"), which to some extent grew out of instrumentalism. One of the assumptions of an instrumentalist perspective was that ethnicity was situational. Its activation and saliency depended upon circumstances that evoked ethnic identity in popular perceptions of the social situation. This suggests the value of further exploring the sources of ethnic consciousness, if the assumption of a timeless quality to the phenomenon is breached. A particularly seminal work pointing in this direction was Benedict Anderson’s classic work, Imagined Communities (1983). Anderson’s creative reflections on the novelty of a form of consciousness that instills a robust belief in shared community among millions of individuals who cannot have personal knowledge of each other stimulated a new concern with the question of its origins. Once ethnicity is understood as a collective human act of creative invention rather than a timeless essence, many important new questions emerge. If ethnicity is at some point "invented," and evolves over time, then the premise of its necessary stability and permanence vanishes. Identity can become understood as contingent, fluctuating, and fragmented, as well as circumstantial.

By the 1990s, constructivism had become established as a mainstream model of ethnicity, perhaps the most influential of the three streams. Even scholars once associated with a mainly primordialist orientation, such as Anthony Smith, conceded ground to constructivism. The rapid diffusion of constructivism, as with instrumentalism earlier, finds partial explanation in a predisposing intellectual climate. The appearance of diverse currents of postmodernism, and their potent influence within anthropology, was important in the reception of constructivism. Postmodernism, like constructivism, privileged the contingency and fragmentation of meanings in human agency. With the collapse of Communism demolishing the credibility of Marxism as a political doctrine and damaging its standing as social theory, many of its erstwhile practitioners migrated to some form of

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9 Among the many works by this distinguished scholar, as a statement of his earlier views we may cite Smith 1986.
Also worth noting is the parallel emergence in the field of international relations of an influential approach of "constructivism"; although its content was somewhat different, many of its assumptions were similar.

However, most contemporary analysis of comparative cultural pluralism avoids exclusive commitment to any of the three approaches described above. At the same time, the explicit recognition of these alternative paradigms influences current scholarship in important ways. To grasp the dynamics of such catastrophic mass ethnic killings as those in Rwanda and Burundi in 1993–1994, merely instrumentalist perspectives cannot suffice. Some understanding as to the reasons behind the emotional content of ethnic attachments—the deep fears and anxieties that may in settings of intense conflict escalate into hatred and demonization of the ethnic other—is indispensable to deciphering the tragedy. But at an earlier phase of the Tutsi-Hutu ethnic encounters at the beginning of the 1990s, group relationships did closely fit with an instrumentalist interpretation of a struggle over distribution and domination defined by ethnic consciousness. And a complete interpretation of the genocidal disasters necessitates an examination of the origins of Tutsi and Hutu as social categories (see Newbury 2001), and how they hardened as collective representations during the colonial period under the constructivist impact of administrative and mission policies, then degenerated into "barricaded identities" in Jowitt's telling phrase, "dogmatically and hysterically defined and defended" (Jowitt 2001: 28).

In the closing chapter, I return to consider some particular aspects of ethnicity and politics in Africa. Also awaiting our consideration are formulas for the accommodation of ethnic diversity. But first, we turn to scrutiny of ethnic politics in three countries, to offer some empirical content to the comparative discussion presented in this chapter.
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Chapter 2

Ethnicity at Low Intensity: The Tanzanian Case

Ethnic Geography

Tanzania stands out in the African firmament as a state in which cultural pluralism has played only a subdued role in the political process, in spite of pronounced ethnic diversity. The sharp contrast with most other African states beckons explanation. By way of example of the strikingly low saliency of ethnicity, I may note a recent effort to ascertain the ethnic origins of Tanzanian President Benjamin Mkapa. Although he has been in office since 1995, various informants who were queried—Tanzanian specialists and citizens—although familiar with his regional roots, could not recite his Makua ethnicity. One wonders whether any citizens in neighboring Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi or Congo-Kinshasa would be unaware of the ethnicity of their head of state.

Tanzania is composed of two distinct components. By far the largest in area and population is the mainland territory formerly known as Tanganyika. In 1964, this territory incorporated the previously separate adjoining islands of Zanzibar as an autonomous region. The country was renamed “Tanzania” to reflect the amalgamation.

Some invoke geopolitical factors in explanation of the low intensity of ethnic conflict on the mainland, and these are certainly significant. The continental part of Tanzania has an unusual population distribution, with areas of higher density strung around the borders, and a relatively sparsely populated central core. Groups such as the Chagga, with precociously large intelligentsias and an early sense of their group identity, lived in a particularly fertile and productive border region around Mount Kilimanjaro, and were not motivated to migrate in large numbers to the capital for employment. The Zanzibar segment of Tanzania has intense identity conflicts, but the separation of the islands ensures that their impact does not spill over onto the mainland to any great extent. The capital city in many African states is a cockpit of ethnic conflict and very diverse in population; in Dar es-Salaam, the diversity is diluted by the strong overlay of the coastal Swahili Muslim culture, not attached to any given ethnic community. However significant these unusual geographical determinants may be, we need to look further in

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historical sociology to unravel this puzzle. In so doing, we need to take note of the racial and religious dimensions of cultural identity as well as ethnicity in this and the following two country cases. These cognate forms of consciousness played decisive roles at particular moments in the patterns of identity politics, interacting in complex ways with the ethnic dimension.

**Precolonial Baseline**

To set a precolonial baseline for identity mapping, one may note that the social landscape on the mainland before colonial occupation was dominated by localized descent groups. Also important was the village residential unit, although in many areas people lived in scattered homesteads rather than villages. Some sizable kingdoms existed, especially in the north, that also served as a focus for identity. Some of the ethnic categories that became predominant later existed in the precolonial period, but were loosely held and weakly articulated. The notion of ethnicity would have provided little value in understanding the complex patterns of conflict and cooperation among these populations soon to be enclosed together within a colonial jurisdiction.

Zanzibar had a different history. Long an Indian Ocean trading trade entrepot, in 1840 the islands came under the rule of an immigrant Omani Arab dynasty. A period of significant Arab immigration followed, joining a small but prosperous Indian mercantile elite. The bulk of the population was African, whose numbers swelled after Arab clove plantations led to large-scale slave importation from the mainland. Over time, a degree of mixing of Arab and African occurred, and the dominant language became Swahili. The Zanzibar sultanate had loose suzerainty over the East African coast.

In the decades immediately preceding colonial occupation two important identity forming processes emerged. Zanzibari merchants, often called “Arabs” but in reality mostly Swahili-speaking Afro-Arabs, began extending slave and ivory trading networks into the interior, reaching as far as Malawi and eastern Congo-Kinshasa. A string of trading outposts emerged, which became nodes of Swahili diffusion and Islamic conversion. A handful of Christian missions also began functioning in some coastal and interior locations, attracting small clusters of converts around their stations.

**Colonial Rule and Cultural Identity**

In 1885, Germany proclaimed sovereignty over mainland Tanzania (then including Rwanda and Burundi). In 1890, Zanzibar became a British protectorate. An
entirely novel form of governing structures was imposed upon the mainland population, while Britain ruled indirectly, through the Arab dynasty. In German East Africa, the key African intermediaries were drawn from coastal Muslim Swahili-speaking elites, mostly posted in areas to which they were not indigenous. The earlier Afro-Arab trading centers became garrison towns, along with newly created state outposts; the already established pattern of diffusion of the Swahili language and Islam around these nodal points, both again associated with power and wealth, was reinforced. Christian mission action redoubled, with steady growth of Christian clusters around the missionary centers. The early availability of Swahili as an emerging lingua franca meant that there was less imperative to reduce local languages to written form with dictionaries and grammars for biblical translation than in most other African states. The appearance of a white settler population and the dispersion of Asian traders into the mainland interior added a racial dimension to evolving patterns of consciousness. However, the Germans were less driven to employ an ethnic template in the organizing their colonial occupation than most colonizers in Africa.

After the German defeat in World War I, German East Africa (minus Rwanda and Burundi) became a British mandate. A very different administrative philosophy took hold, with important consequences for African identity in Tanganyika. The British found particular value in the notion of a “tribal Africa” awaiting classification and organization. The Swahili agents of German rule were set aside in favor of “natural rulers” drawn from ethnic agglomerations discovered by the colonizer. Such major ethnic categories as “Chagga” (an amalgamation of seventeen distinct identity categories) or “Maasai” (ten linguistically and culturally related groups) gained familiarity.

Whereas the theory and practice of “native administration” helped constitute ethnicity, British language policy tended to dilute it through the energetic promotion of Swahili as an administrative language and medium of education. By 1930, an effective standard form of Swahili with a Latin alphabet was agreed upon (as opposed to the writing of Swahili in Arabic script in earlier centuries), and its use in primary education was promoted. As a result, as early as 1942, 52 percent of the Tanganyikan population spoke Swahili, a remarkably high figure.

In terms of religious identity, both Islam and Christianity swiftly expanded their numbers. From the relatively small clusterings around administrative centers and mission stations in the interior, Christian converts numbered some 25 percent of the population by the late colonial period, with 30 percent Muslims. Zanzibar, in contrast, was entirely Muslim. Islam was also particularly well implanted in the coastal regions of the
mainland, with Christian communities best established in the hinterland. The ethos of intensely competitive conversion, observable in a number of countries and frequently entangled with ethnicity, played little part in Tanzania.

However, in the racial realm, cleavages sharpened in the British period. Though white settlers—some remaining from the German era as well as newcomers—were never numerous (only 21,000 at the end of the colonial period), they were obstreperous in asserting their racial superiority and demanding a political voice. Asians, almost 100,000 in late colonial times, also demanded a role in the colonial consultative machinery. A clear racial hierarchy existed in both state and market; Europeans ruled and ran major enterprises, Asians occupied the intermediate mercantile and professional niches, and Africans were farmers, workers, or subaltern (subordinate) state agents.

Meanwhile in Zanzibar, identity dynamics took a different form. Arab identity ranked at the top of a status hierarchy. However, Swahili now largely eclipsed Arabic as a language, and racial mixing was extensive between Arab and African (but not Indian). Thus, some blurring of the racialized Afro-Arab line of division took place. "Arab" became more of a status than a visibly recognizable category, and was defined by politically and socially dominant rank. Meanwhile, status differentiation also took on deepened meanings within the African majority. Those of longstanding Zanzibar residence adopted "Shirazi" as a label, signaling an imagined distant Persian connection. At the same time, three quasi-ethnic labels were current: Pemba for those located in the island bearing that name, Tumbatu for those from a neighboring small island but also settled on Zanzibar Island, and Hadimu for those native to Zanzibar Island who had been the principal targets of Arab land seizures in the nineteenth century; At the bottom were the "Africans," descended from the former slave population. Status, race, and ethnicity thus interacted in an unstable brew in a population joined linguistically by Swahili and religiously united by Islam (except for a portion of the Indian category), held in thrall by an Omani ruling house by now thoroughly domesticated (and ultimately discredited) as British clients.

**Independence Struggle and the Creation of Tanzania**

The politics of decolonization in both Zanzibar and the mainland turned the racial hierarchy on its head, but in very different ways. In both cases, the introduction of electoral politics and the logic of numbers radically altered the dynamics of identity. In mainland Tanzania, the politics of independence brought to power a leadership
committed to inclusive concepts of nationhood. In Zanzibar, upending the racial hierarchy meant a bloody revolution and the unanticipated incorporation into Tanzania.

On the mainland, the initial British strategy for Tanganyikan self-government was erected upon a preposterous philosophy of racial partnership imported from southern Africa. The polity, in this bizarre vision, was essentially composed of three racial segments, European, Asian, and African. Thus conceptualized, the notion of "partnership" implied equal standing for each racial segment, in spite of numerical proportions of 1:4:430. Naturally this formulation was unacceptable to the African majority, which insisted on a principle of representation grounded in an equal weighting of each individual. Peaceful and rapid decolonization, to which British policy everywhere in Africa was committed by 1960, ultimately required that the British abandon the mantra of racial partnership. Before they had done so, however, political mobilization crystallized around the imperative of African solidarity to fend off British schemes to entrench a preponderant voice for immigrant racial communities.

Two competing visions of the nation to be created existed in the period immediately before independence. The dominant perspective, articulated by future President Julius Nyerere and his Tanganyika African National Union (TANU), offered in place of racial partnership nonracial citizenship to those European and Asian residents desiring to remain. The more radical Africanist view held that only the indigenous population could claim rights. The new state thus should belong exclusively to its original inhabitants.

Accordingly, political discourse revolved around race as prime identity category in the competitive elections leading to independence; religious difference played little role. A wide range of ethnic associations had appeared when colonial restrictions on African organization eased in the 1950s. Initially these were welcomed by TANU as party building blocks. In the final phases of independence struggle, however, party ideology sanctified the territorial nation, whose unification and integration was a sacred vocation. Racial division would end with the absorption of the small European and Indian minorities as equal individual citizens, with some visible representation in the structures of rule. Religious division was confined to the sphere of worship, and ethnicity was relegated to the margins of private affiliation. The state, and its associated public realm, were purely national space.

2 The Tanganyika African National Union was later renamed Chama cha Mapinduzi, or "revolutionary party" (CCM).
In Zanzibar, the ascendant Arab minority and ruling dynasty had British support, in their attempts to adapt to the rules of access to self-government: creating representative institutions on the basis of a universal franchise. The earlier soft language of deferential acceptance of British overrule was replaced by a militant discourse of assertive nationalism. The discursive strategy of the Arab ruling elite—to deploy the language of liberation in militant form to channel independence aspirations of less favored racial strata in support of the postcolonial preservation of existing status hierarchies—did succeed through the moment of power transfer in 1963. However, in January 1964 a racial uprising swept away the old system.

Led by Ugandan John Okello, a tiny band of African insurgents overthrew the Arab regime and unleashed a wave of racial vengeance striking at Arabs and Indians. Some 500 people were killed, and heavy property damage was inflicted upon Arabs and Indians. Some 80 percent of the Indians fled Zanzibar, along with 20 percent of the Arabs. Arab identity suddenly became a dangerous liability rather than a badge of social privilege.

The threat of sustained racial violence and its spillover effects, the disconcerting risks of great power involvement, and fears of chaos led Tanzanian President Nyerere and a small coterie of Zanzibar African politicians furtively to negotiate the immediate incorporation of the islands into mainland Tanganyika, rebaptised Tanzania. However, Zanzibar was accorded broad autonomy and disproportionate representation in Tanzanian central institutions, concessions that would become a source of repeated friction in the years ahead. Nonetheless, the amalgamation survived and permanently altered the parameters of identity within the newly reconfigured state.

**Nyerere and Nation-building**

In the Nyerere period (1961–1985), nation-building was a cornerstone of policy. The key vehicles for achieving this supreme purpose were TANU/CCM as a single party, African socialism as a unifying creed, Swahili as the sole national language, and the ascendant personality of Nyerere as “mwalimu” (teacher) of nationhood. The effectiveness of this package of instruments is beyond doubt with respect to the mainland; Zanzibar, however, has remained a distinct entity, and only partly shares the affective attachment to Tanzanian nationhood.

The single party system in its Tanzanian version (extended to Zanzibar in 1977) enjoyed a much more sustained legitimacy than did most of its African counterparts. The
vitality of the ruling party was reasonably preserved for more than two decades by a Tanzanian innovation (subsequently copied by some other single parties) of permitting a party-structured and limited competition for seats in the national legislature. Two party-screened candidates competed in each constituency, resulting in the frequent defeat of incumbents. The autocratic inner essence of party operation was also mitigated by the prolonged appeal of its ideology of populist socialism and a higher order of engagement in its precepts by national leaders, especially Nyerere himself, than was typical of socialist orientation in Africa. In the end, Tanzanian socialism failed to deliver economic uplift, and indeed the doctrinal rigidity of Nyerere so long delayed an inevitable liberalization that the economic dislocations of his utopian blueprint became severe by his retirement in 1985. His economic miscalculations notwithstanding, Nyerere remained a revered leader, whose death at the turn of the century unleashed an overwhelming wave of popular grief. He retained an austere and populist style, and was never suspected of gross corruption, unlike many of his fellow rulers.

Nyerere continued his battle to contain ethnicity to the end. The ruling organs of state and party reflected a careful regional balance, and state agents were customarily posted outside their region of origin. No more serious charge could confront a minister than “tribalism,” or ethnic nepotism. Ethnic terms were banned in the media and in electoral speeches, and ethnic associations dissolved.

Swahili was a crucial instrument of cultural statecraft. By the independence years, well over 90 percent of Tanzanians could use Swahili. The language was required for all government and national businesses whenever possible. English remained as a language of international contact, but Tanzania went much further than most African states in elevating an indigenous lingua franca as the dominant language in most domains. Among younger generations, Swahili begins to become a first language. A plaintive voice is sometimes raised warning that indigenous languages are threatened with extinction. But if national integration is perceived as the supreme mission, Swahili must be recognized as a potent instrument of social unification.

The over-sized and under-performing state that resulted from Tanzania’s socialist orientation eventually undermined Nyerere’s egalitarian visions. Indeed, even before populist socialism was officially abandoned in 1985, it had been eaten away from within by the transfer of popular energies to parallel markets and the informal sector. But among the many critics of government policies by the 1980s, one rarely heard ethnic language used to denounce their shortcomings.
The one community that believed itself targeted by Tanzanian socialism was the Asian. A 1971 act virtually nationalizing urban real property hit Asians especially hard. Within three months, half the Asian population had emigrated. The systematic hostility to private endeavor that characterized populist socialism, although not racially motivated, did have an unmistakable racial target, since Asian enterprise predominated in the private sector.

Liberalization and Its Impact

Since 1985, Tanzania has moved towards both political and economic liberalization. There is little doubt that reform in both domains was indispensable. However, some new kinds of communal tensions have appeared. Asians, who had been the principal victims of socialist orientation, are the primary beneficiaries of market capitalism, bringing resentment about Asian commercial practices and commitment to Tanzania to the surface. Muslim grievances claiming serious under-representation at the administrative summit come into the open. Muslim intellectuals charge Nyerere and the CCM with imposing a Christian concept of the state, marginalizing Muslims, and erasing their central contribution to the anticolonial struggle.\(^3\) The status of Zanzibar is another source of discord, with its perceived excessive representation in central organs and (for Christians) its Islamic external connections. Zanzibar is also seen as an international embarrassment for its political repression. The competitive elections in 1995 and 2000 were generally well conducted on the mainland, but were marked by serious thuggery and violence on the islands. Conversely, one may note that communal tensions on Zanzibar are barely contained within the shared state; were Zanzibar to split away, the potential for violent confrontation among identity groups on the islands would be high.

In Tanzania, the liberalized political order strives to avert the prominence of ethnicity in politics by prohibiting party organization on the basis of ethnic, religious, or racial identity. Some argue that this proscription unduly circumscribes democratic choice. However, most Tanzanians appear to support this restriction, and wish party competition to retain its national orientation, structured by policy choice.

Ethnicity is more openly expressed in contemporary Tanzania than during the single party era, but there is little sign that it is in the process of intensive politicization.

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\(^3\) Mohamed Said, *The Life and Times of Abdulwahid Sykes (1924–1968)* (London: Minerva, 1998). Sykes was really the creator of the Tanganyika African Association, according to Said, and a crucial figure in its transformation into TANU in 1954; however, the CCM official party history does not even mention him.
The national ethos instilled in the Nyerere era is robust, and not in question. The upsurge in expressions of racial and religious conflict and even antagonism remain within manageable limits.

The forms taken by ethnicity in Tanzania, then, must be understood in the context of the particular historical trajectory of that polity. The dramatically divergent pathways of ethnic politics in the neighboring states of Uganda and Kenya, also under largely similar patterns of British rule, illustrate the importance of the sequence of different experiences of identity formation, and the significance of path dependency. Constrained by the parameters established by the previous epoch, each of the successive historical moments created a distinctive set of arrangements, which in turn limited the range of possible outcomes in the succeeding period. In larger historical terms, I would suggest that the long Nyerere reign was especially influential. Ethnicity was not erased, and is becoming more public. Yet this trend occurs within a framework of deeply instilled consensus on a Tanzanian nation, within which ethnic patterns of identity may find expression without aggressive manifestations. Ethnicity in Tanzania, in its instrumentalist form, operates in subdued fashion. This in turn will influence the unfolding dynamics of its future constructions.
Chapter 3

Uganda: Ethnicity and the Problematic of State Revival

To reduce it to its crudest form, the pull of the tribal force does not accept Uganda as one country, does not accept the people of Uganda as belonging to one country, does not accept the National Assembly as a national institution but as an assembly of peace conference delegates and tribal diplomatic and legislative functionaries, and looks at the Government of Uganda as a body of umpires or referees in some curious game of “Tribal Development Monopoly.”

—former President A. Milton Obote (cited in Kasfir 1976: 209)

Being a tribalist to me means undue, hopeless, and morbid loyalty and allegiance to one’s tribe. It must be emphasized that I am not against tribes but rather against tribalism.

—former President Idi Amin (cited in Turyakihayo-Rugyema 1998: 131)

A leader should show the people that those who emphasize ethnicity are messengers of perpetual backwardness. This process of undermining a sectarian mentality of “my tribe, my religion” is linked with the process of modernization and overcoming underdevelopment.... Eventually, the society will be transformed and modernized. The moment that process takes place, one’s tribe or religion cease to be of much consequence.

—President Yoweri Museveni (1997: 189)

The Different Itinerary of Uganda

Uganda provides a very different and more complex illustration of the politics of ethnicity in Africa. Although its colonial era was relatively tranquil, the structure of British rule placed ethnicity far more squarely in the center of the political equation than in Tanzania. Christian evangelization was intensely competitive and its linkage to Buganda political warfare at the beginning of the colonial era deeply embedded a religious line of cleavage. The pact by which decolonization took place proved fragile, and political instability led to the catastrophic Idi Amin tyranny from 1971 to 1979, followed by a failed transition with several more years of horrendous violence. Only in 1986 did a new era of relative stability begin, which is now visibly fraying at the edges as illustrated by the disconcerting level of violence and flawed conduct of the 2001 elections (see Young 1976, 216–73; Young, Forthcoming). Furthermore, stabilization in the core regions of Uganda is not matched by tranquility around its periphery; insurgent militias in
northern and western Uganda, operating across the Sudan and Congo-Kinshasa border, bring endemic insecurity in these zones, and the acquisition of automatic weapons by more than 30,000 warriors in the northeastern zone of Karamoja makes the long-standing practice of cattle-raiding far more lethal (see Mirzeler and Young 2000).

Race as Vanishing Factor

The politics of ethnicity in Uganda are intertwined with historic cleavages of race and religion, which require a brief discussion before we turn to the ethnic realm. Colonial Uganda, like Tanzania, functioned on the basis of a clear racial hierarchy: Europeans ruled, Asians traded, and Africans farmed. However, European settlement was only briefly encouraged, and at the time of independence there were only 10,000 resident Europeans, mostly officials, missionaries, or business and other professionals, few of whom regarded themselves as permanently rooted. Although the tiny European minority enjoyed significant influence in colonial politics, this rapidly vanished in the 1950s.

The Asian presence was more consequential after independence. By 1970, Asians in Uganda numbered 83,000, of whom 43,000 had citizenship status and most others intended long-term residence. Their hopes for some form of “racial partnership” in government were extinguished in late colonial politics, but some prosperous Asian business figures played an important part in financing political parties as a means of purchasing security. Their dominance in rural trade and urban business engendered strong antagonisms among Africans. In the last years of the first Obote regime (1962–1971), a leftward drift, especially rhetorical, created nervous reactions among the Asian community. However, few anticipated that military despot Idi Amin, claiming that a dream had instructed him that “the Asian problem was becoming extremely explosive and that God was directing me to act immediately to save the situation,” would follow this divine inspiration by the sudden expulsion of the Asian minority (cited in Mittelman 1975: 229). This racial cleansing eliminated all but 10,000 Asians from Uganda and was accompanied by the confiscation of an estimated $1 billion in property. Under President Museveni, an invitation was extended to former Ugandan Asians to return, with the promise of return of seized property; a modest number responded to this opportunity, but few now regarded themselves as a permanent segment of the citizenry as before. Thus racial division as a politically important communal cleavage, very significant in the late colonial period and into the first independence years, had largely disappeared.
Origins of Religious Divisions

Religious divisions were more enduring, however, although sectarian politics have been less salient under President Museveni since 1986. But the particular patterns of colonial evangelization implanted a deep consciousness of religious division, which became powerfully politicized in the 1950s. Uganda stands out in Africa for the political importance of sectarian divisions, interfacing in complex ways with ethnic politics.

World religions first appeared in Uganda in the 1860s and 1870s, initially at the court of the Buganda monarch (or kabaka), Mutesa I. Muslim merchants from Zanzibar were first to arrive, followed by Catholic and Protestant emissaries tied to France and Britain respectively. Mutesa expressed great curiosity about these novel theologies, attracted in good part by their potential use as ideological ramparts to strengthen his kingship. He carefully restricted proselytization to the royal court itself. However, this limitation still offered access to the crucial future elite—hundreds of royal pages, placed in the court as candidates for subsequent appointment in the service of the Kabaka.

The Protestant, Catholic, and Muslim factions that emerged at the court then gave ideological shape to the complex Buganda civil wars, which raged from 1886 until the establishment of British rule (in alliance with a Protestant Ganda faction) in 1893. The colonial settlement under British tutelage created a form of religious consociationalism; the chiefly posts in the twenty Buganda counties were divided up in terms of the relative political strength of the three factions; Protestants were allocated ten, Catholics eight, and Muslims two chieftaincies. A substantial population movement occurred to align settlement patterns with the religious partition.

Buganda then became the epicenter of Christian evangelization, with Ganda catechists playing a key role. Massive conversion took place in Buganda in the 1890s, spreading more slowly to other regions. The Anglican Church Missionary Society benefited from the informal patronage of the colonial state, but the two main Catholic orders—French White Fathers in the west, Italian Verona Fathers in the north—competed energetically.

Islam spread much more slowly, from three nodal points. The two Muslim chieftaincies in Buganda were one such base of diffusion. Kakungulu, a Muslim Ganda general who subdued much of eastern Uganda on behalf of the British, formed a second

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1 A brief note on terminology may be useful here. The Ganda people called their territory Buganda, "the land of the Ganda," and their kingdom was referred to as the Buganda kingdom. The British colony, which included many other peoples in addition to the Ganda, was named Uganda.
cluster around his final settlement near Mbale. A third embryo of Islam took root in the northwest, originating in a “Sudanese” detachment of the Egyptian army expanding into Uganda in the 1870s. Cut off by the Mahdist rebellion in Sudan in 1885, they were eventually recruited as colonial auxiliaries. Of mixed, mainly southern Sudanese origin, they had adopted the Islamic religion of their mostly Egyptian officers. Lacking the leadership of religious specialists, their Islamic practice was perhaps rudimentary, but the religious identity was implanted. Idi Amin traced his ancestry to this group, which acquired the ethnic label of “Nubian” within Uganda.

At the time of independence, Catholics appeared to have a numerical majority, and Muslims were only about 5 percent; by this time the great majority of the population observed one of the universal religions. Protestants, however, enjoyed colonial favor in chiefly appointments and other forms of preference, a source of deepening resentment by Catholics. Far more than in Tanzania, the sectarian scramble for converts had been intensely competitive. By the 1950s, Uganda had a numerous elite imbued with sectarian attachments, a large contingent of African teachers socialized to religious loyalty, and a solidly developed indigenous clergy. For the great majority of the citizenry, religious affiliation was a core element in the repertory of identities.

Independence and Sectarian Party Divisions

Political space opened for parties in the 1950s, with the religious line of division crucial in determining alignments. Catholics and Muslims harbored an acute sense of sectarian injustice arising from religious nepotism of the mostly Protestant chiefs in such issues as land, taxation, and the administration of justice. To add insult to injury, the first political parties to emerge were perceived to have Protestant leadership. The law of numbers that electoral politics would introduce provided an irresistible incentive to Catholics to organize in response; in 1956 the Democratic Party (DP) was launched with firm support from the Catholic hierarchy. The first competitive elections that took place in nine of the then twelve districts in 1958 were marked by ferocious religious rivalry. Despite active Catholic mobilization, Protestant candidates won seven of the ten legislative seats at issue.

The winning candidates formed a new party, the Uganda Peoples Congress (UPC), with a distinctly Protestant hue, though less direct church involvement. The UPC also reflected resentments in other districts at Buganda pretensions to special status. Throughout the country, there was a degree of antagonism to Buganda, seen as economically and socially advantaged by colonial policy, and now demanding autonomy.
Two more elections occurred before independence, in 1961 and 1962. The sectarian dialectic unleashed by the electoral process then intertwined with two other critical dimensions of late colonial politics: their enclosure within the ethnic districts, and the polarity of Buganda versus the rest. The competition between the Uganda Peoples Congress and the Democratic Party pitted candidates of the same ethnic group against each other; thus their political contest tended to follow religious lines. The 1961 election took place at a moment when Buganda was indignantly resisting a proposed constitution of a unitary nature; the kingdom establishment ordered a boycott of the election, observed by all but 3 percent of the electorate. The DP won an apparent victory, rendered fragile by a parliamentary majority that was dependent on its Buganda contingent, who had been elected by a tiny minority of the electorate. DP leader, the Ganda Catholic Benedicto Kiwanuka, was installed as provisional premier, to the burning anger of Buganda. The mood is captured by the late Kabaka Mutesa II in his autobiography, who wrote that the DP “gained lasting hatred. They were seen as traitors to Buganda, trying to grab office at the expense of loyalty” (Kabaka 1967: 158–59).

The British could not transfer power to a government of such debatable legitimacy and thus insisted on new independence elections in 1962, with a semi-federal constitution giving partial satisfaction to the demands for Buganda autonomy. The royal establishment in Buganda launched a monarchist party (Kabaka Yekka, or “the king alone,” KY) to counter the Catholic imprint of the DP and the anti-Ganda sentiments of the UPC. The UPC won 33 seats, the DP 22, and KY took all 22 Buganda seats. The deep animosity towards the DP outweighed the Buganda suspicions of the hidden agendas of the UPC, and thus KY joined an uneasy coalition with the UPC to permit accession to independence.

One must underline the critical role that sectarian division played in the actual conduct of the electoral campaigns. As noted above, the competition between UPC and DP took place within the ethnic districts; thus the contenders, usually of the same ethnic background, were differentiated in the eyes of many voters especially by their religious attachments. This pattern was reinforced by the intensity of UPC–DP struggles for political control for local government of the ethnic districts, which also had heavy sectarian overtones. These competitive dynamics further embedded religious identity in the political consciousness of the electorate.

The UPC gradually tightened its hold on power through the 1960s, inducing carpet crossings by growing numbers of DP and KY parliamentarians, the military occupation of Buganda in 1966, and the banning the DP by 1969. By the end of the
decade, a virtual single party system was in operation. The significance of religious identity as a defining element in politics was by no means erased at this point; even after the decade of Idi Amin’s tyrannical rule during the 1970s, the DP and UPC instantly sprang back to life, although perhaps with their sectarian clienteles diluted.

During the years of lethal Amin rule, Islam enjoyed a moment of official favor for the first time since colonial occupation began. Amin enforced a unification of Muslim leadership and attracted significant resources for the flourishing of Islam, especially from Libya and Saudi Arabia. Islam, however, had limited numbers of followers and even fewer among the intellectual elite. In spite of divine inspiration to Islamicize Uganda purportedly received during a miraculous thunderstorm at Mecca while he was making the haj (or pilgrimage), Amin had only a modest impact on religious demography: by the 1990s, the Muslim population of Uganda had only grown to 10 percent. The most important new element was access to material support from the world Islamic community for mosque construction, overseas training in Islamic theology, the subsequent creation of an Islamic university in Mbale, and expanded opportunities for performing the haj.

The years of terror under Amin did not weaken the Christian churches, despite the assassination of leading clerics. The progressive dereliction of the state by default thrust responsibility for survival of the educational system and such social services as could continue back upon religious congregations. But the traumatizing effect of the Amin tyranny, whose victims may have totaled 500,000, probably did diminish the saliency of sectarian divisions. The DP, argues a Ugandan scholar, had become “truly national and cut across regional, religious, ethnic and other boundaries” (Mutibwa 1992: 144).

The political experiences since the fall of Amin in 1979 appear to have further reduced somewhat the centrality of the sectarian division. Obote’s return to power in a 1980 election widely regarded as rigged was soon undermined by a burgeoning set of armed revolts, mostly centered in Buganda; these coalesced into the National Resistance Army (NRA) led by Museveni. The bitter struggle cost 300,000 lives and was carried out by insurgents whose recruitment crossed sectarian lines. The war raged mostly in Buganda, though many of the fighters were westerners and 20 percent were Rwandan Tutsi refugees.

The National Resistance Movement (NRM) in power since 1986 staked its claim to legitimacy on inclusiveness and the rejection of identity-based divisions. Over time, the Movement became increasingly viewed as dominated by westerners but has largely escaped charges of sectarian orientation, though Museveni is of Protestant background. In
both the 1996 and 2001 presidential elections, his principal opponents (Paul Ssemogerere and Kizzi Besigye) were Catholics, but the religious cleavage did not visibly shape the discourse of electoral combat. The dynamics of Protestant identity have become more diverse and diffuse in recent years, as the Anglican Church of Uganda has lost ground to flourishing evangelical and pentecostal sects. Within the Islamic community, a radical Tabliq movement has emerged with an appeal to marginalized urban youth, although it lacks any evident overlap with ethnic identity.

Thus new layers of identity-shaping historical experience appear to have partially effaced the political importance of religious cleavage. Protestant ascendancy in local institutions is no longer evident, as the colonial chiefs have given way to five tiers of elected councils. The primary line of political division opposes Movement supporters and supporters of multipartyism, the latter uniting DP and UPC partisans. New patterns of regional tension and the nature of NRM-era politics serve to subdue and push into the background the memories of the bitter sectarian struggles of the 1950s and 1960s.

**Buganda as the Pivot of Ethnic Politics**

As the patterns of religious division originated in Buganda, so also did the nature of ethnic politics. British construction of a colonial realm began in Buganda, silently absorbed in the personality of the state through the projection of its name upon the entire territory (U/Ganda, with the Swahili form of the prefix, literally means "country of the Ganda"). The colonial occupation was consolidated through the British creation of an alliance with the political, religious, and military elite of Buganda, who then served as crucial allies in extending political rule over the rest of the territory. Until the 1920s, Ganda chiefs were appointed in many non-Ganda areas to create "native administration," and Ganda catechists did the legwork of Christian evangelization throughout the colony. Buganda constituted a pole of reference for the crystallization of ethnic consciousness elsewhere. On the negative side, Ganda privilege and perceived partnership with the colonizer bred envy and animosity; on the positive side, the high status enjoyed by Buganda was a model for emulation.

On the eve of the colonial partition, Buganda was an expanding, predatory state absorbing flows of captured populations and new territories. The kingdom was unusually integrated, centered upon its monarchical institution, a powerful reservoir of shared symbols, and an historical narrative tracing kingship back many generations to a mythological founder named Kintu. The first European visitors left flattering portraits of the sophisticated structures of the kingdom and the intellectual curiosities of its king. The
American explorer Henry Stanley, a master craftsman of ethnic stereotypes, wrote that the Ganda were “an extraordinary people, as different from the barbarous pirates of Uvuma, and the wild, mop-headed men of Eastern Usukame, as the British in India are from their Afridi fellow-subjects, or the white Americans of Arkansas from the semi-civilized Choctaws.” Kabaka Mutesa I, he added, was “an intelligent and distinguished prince, who, if aided in time by virtuous philanthropists, will do more for Central Africa than fifty years of Gospel teaching unaided by such authority, can do” (Stanley 1878: 225).

A critical factor in the consolidation of a Ganda historical narrative and its inscription in the popular consciousness was the early emergence of a literate Christian elite at the beginning of the colonial occupation. The Protestant faction, which assumed a leading role in alliance with the British, included some remarkable cultural architects, in particular Sir Apolo Kagwa and Ham Mukasa. Kagwa composed a court history at the beginning of the twentieth century, including a king list stretching back to Kintu, which became a foundational text for all subsequent histories. Its influence as a bible of identity is impossible to exaggerate; nearly a century later, Wrigley notes, copies of the Kagwa history of the kings can be found in most villages (Wrigley 1996: 8). Mukasa published a collection of proverbs attesting to the invincibility, strength, and terrifying power of the kabaka, the Ganda king.

The mystique of the omnipotent king as paragon for the kingdom translated into a sense of Buganda’s historical superiority. In the words of Kabaka Mutesa II, “we were accepted as the most civilized and powerful of the kingdoms.... It was through the qualities of Baganda that Europeans were attracted to the country, hurrying through Kenya and Tanzania to reach the ‘pearl of Africa,’ as Stanley called Buganda” (Kabaka 1967: 78–79). A Ganda scholar recounted childhood memories, from a period in 1953–1955 when the kabaka had been deported to Britain for refusal to cooperate with London plans for decolonization, that “it was common gossip in my home and school areas that while in exile the Kabaka was seduced by Queen Elizabeth II but had refused her” (Gukiina 1972: 99). Embedded in this salacious anecdote is the implicit assertion of Buganda equality with Britain, and a more submerged corollary that other Uganda groups fell short.

Another crucial milestone in the construction of Buganda ethnonationalism was the 1900 agreement with the colonizer, which codified a colonial settlement between Buganda and Britain. In the Ganda historical imagination, this accord inscribed an equality of status between the signatories; Kabaka Mutesa II would later write that, “The
integrity and superiority of Buganda was fully recognized” in this treaty (Kabaka 1967: 64). The accord included a land settlement that also entered the register of Ganda identity. This unique system, which originated with a grant of land title to 8,000 square miles to 3,700 princes, chiefs, and courtiers (“mailo land” referring to the square mile allotments, mailos, which have been much subdivided since), became transformed into a defining attribute of Buganda.

Language was another pillar of identity. Together the early missionaries and the Ganda Christian elite produced a written standard for Luganda (the language of the Ganda), which became the initial vehicle for education, local administration, and evangelization throughout southern Uganda. A substantial vernacular press and literature soon followed, a storehouse of cultural expression enjoyed by no other Ugandan language.

Geographically, politically, and economically, Buganda was the pivot of colonial Uganda. The central institutions of the territory were situated in the heart of Buganda. The core of the colonial economy was located in Buganda, where cash cropping of cotton and coffee first began. The social infrastructure grew outwards from Buganda, which through the colonial period had by far the densest educational infrastructure, and the first generation elites were overwhelmingly Ganda, although Buganda contained only a quarter of the total population.

Other Ethnic Discourses

Elsewhere in Uganda, at the time of colonial occupation, the ethnic identities that later assumed political importance were much less clearly formed. One other major kingdom, Bunyoro, existed, imparting a collective consciousness to its subjects. Bunyoro resisted colonial occupation, however; Buganda encroachment on Bunyoro, a pattern of precolonial politics, found support from its British allies. Nyoro identity, feeding on a brooding resentment at the favor enjoyed by Buganda (and at their own lost territories), drew on important resources of historical glory but lacked the reinforcement of cultural entrepreneurs such as the Ganda Christian elite.

In other regions, the administrative organization imposed by the colonizer, shaped by the British reading of ethnicity, played a crucial formative role. Based on districts shaped around and named for ethnic groups, this framework of governance seeped into the social consciousness, and meaningful self-awareness crystallized around the nomenclature of territorial subdivision. Administrators and missionaries penned ethnic
monographs, which conferred the inestimable dignity of the printed word on what were often novel forms of consciousness. The summary by Joan Vincent of the crystallization of a Teso collective identity could be transposed to most other groups:

It was clear that a Teso awareness, as opposed to ongoing social interactions between culturally related groups, came about only with the establishment of British overrule, and so one may profitably inquire into how this awareness was created. There were many centralizing procedures. During the first twenty years, boundaries were constantly changed until linguistic homogeneity was achieved and the Ngoratok dialect recognized as that of the District, this vernacular being used in schools. Statutory distinctions were made between the "natives of the district" and "settlers"; exchange of cattle bridewealth was required of all natives of the district apart from Muslims; cotton growing was made compulsory regardless of primary occupations of different ethnic groups; District by-laws were molded upon Teso tribal customs relating to Clan elders, witchcraft accusation, the adoption of children... The culmination came with an effort to provide Teso with a symbolic figurehead like that of the western kingdoms (Vincent 1971: 259).2

In the first years of independence, a larger regional identity transcript was superimposed over ethnicity itself, a transcript that emphazized south versus north, often characterized as "Bantu" versus "Nilotic." The southern groups were part of the huge Bantu family of languages, and readily accepted Luganda as lingua franca; however, "Bantu" corresponded to no historical frame of identity. In the north, a couple of major language families were represented. The "Nilotic" reference strictly speaking applied only to those groups with a loose affinity to a Luo dispersion myth (including Acholi, Padhola, Alur, Lango, Labwor). But there was in reality little operative sense of shared community, even of momentary political convenience, apart from a common resentment towards Buganda in particular.

Set against this background, the structure of ethnic politics in late colonial Uganda seems pre-ordained, though complicated by the religious factor which cut across the ethnic affiliations. The first nationalist political parties were led by Ganda. At the same time, the royal establishment sought to preserve the special status of Buganda in any independence settlement. Leading an all-Ugandan anticolonial nationalism was evidently incompatible with claiming a special autonomous status for the Ganda kingdom. Ganda claims catalyzed the emergence of an anti-Ganda coalition, the UPC,

2 The British administrator who codified the Teso identity and tradition was J.C.D. Lawrence; see Lawrence 1957 for his account.
which as noted above also had a Protestant coloration. Since the Buganda establishment was Protestant, the DP could mobilize some Catholic Ganda support in implicit opposition to the Protestant court elite, as well as a national following mobilizing Catholics from other regions.

The First Obote Regime

Buganda restiveness was marked on the eve of independence. The law of numbers in democratic representation made it impossible to preserve the ascendant role the kingdom had enjoyed in colonial times. For this reason, the kingdom elite insisted on federal autonomy in the independence settlement, and even momentarily declared its own independence in December 1961, though without taking any steps to give effect to that threat. To prevent absorption into the national political parties and the rallying of Catholic Ganda to the DP, a separate Ganda party was formed around the symbols of the monarchy for the independence elections of 1962, the Kabaka Yekka or KY. The potency of the appeal to ethnic solidarity, invoking the threat to kingdom integrity posed by the national parties, assured a KY sweep of the Buganda seats. As noted earlier, outside of Buganda, the 1962 election was essentially a district-by-district battle fought largely along the sectarian line of division, rather than invoking ethnicity per se. The election results created a situation where no party had a parliamentary majority; the UPC and KY detested the DP more than they distrusted each other, so independence was achieved with a UPC-KY coalition. Buganda retained a symbolic primacy with the award of the ceremonial presidency of Uganda to the Kabaka, while UPC leader Milton Obote, a Lango from the north, became prime minister. To secure consensus on the independence constitution, a lesser semi-federal status had to be conceded to the three western kingdoms of Bunyoro, Ankole, and Toro, and the district of Busoga.

Obote, however, shared the doctrinal commitment to the ideal of a unitary nation that animated most African leaders of the independence generation. He set about inducing the defection of DP and even some KY members of parliament, achieving a majority without KY by the middle 1960s. A new line of fracture then appeared, along north/south regional lines within the UPC, translated in popular discourse as "Nilotic" versus "Bantu". The shadowy alliances that took form loosely overlapped a division between more radical intellectuals and those of more moderate disposition, a contrast in political sensibilities that found some sociological rationales in the relative underdevelopment of the north as opposed to the greater prosperity of the south.
The factional struggle burst into the open in 1966, when Obote struck a preemptive blow by arresting five “Bantu” ministers accused of plotting his ouster through parliamentary means. He suspended the constitution, removed the kabaka from the presidency, and assumed full executive powers. In response, Buganda issued an abortive declaration of secession; Obote responded by ordering the army to seize the royal palace, depose the kabaka, dissolve the kingdom, and occupy Buganda. This fateful decision sealed in blood Buganda’s unyielding and bitter antipathy to Obote, and made the army the arbiter of power. In turn, the ethnic composition of the security forces became pivotal to politics. In the final years prior to his 1971 overthrow, Obote sought to exclude ethnicity from politics by making the UPC a de facto one-party state and to win popular support by a radicalization of Ugandan policy. The denial of public space to cultural difference made ethnicity less visible, but the sullen, brooding defiance of Buganda, a broader subliminal sentiment of “northern domination,” and the silent discontent of the DP constituency made Obote’s position precarious and increasingly dependent on the army.

After an initial period when the British relied upon the Nubian soldiers stranded from the Egyptian army, Ganda auxiliaries, and some Indian troops to consolidate their occupation, the small colonial army had shifted its recruitment to the north. A military model developed in India was imported into many other British colonial territories, which focused recruitment upon “martial races”—identified by their physical bearing, warlike qualities, and reliable fidelity to the imperial estate. In the Uganda case, recruitment came to privilege the Acholi. Though there is some dispute over the degree to which the “martial race” theory applied in Uganda (Omara-Otunnu 1987: 32), some 50 percent of the military personnel may have been Acholi by 1962. Other northerners, such as Lugbara and Teso, were also fairly numerous in the military, while southerners were relatively few.

Once the ruler comes to depend on the armed forces for survival, the logic of what Cynthia Enloe terms “the ethnic security map” comes into play (Enloe 1980). The political security of the regime is perceived as requiring control of the armed forces through officers with ethnic affinity to the ruler. The 1966 Uganda crisis coincided with a wave of military coups across the continent (Algeria, Nigeria, Ghana, Benin, Central African Republic, Congo-Kinshasa); thus Obote knew he was hostage to the personal fidelity of the army, especially its top commanders. Accordingly the military command structure required the painstaking application of an “ethnic security map.”
Although Obote purged most southern officers or those with Buganda connections from 1965 on, his ethnic security map proved to be flawed. Idi Amin, a northerner of alternate Nubian and Kakwa identities, had been named commander. His loyalty was solid in the move against Buganda, but by 1970 had become uncertain. Sensing Obote was about to replace him, Amin struck first with a preemptive coup in January 1971. Amin at once applied his own ethnic security map, massacring hundreds of Acholi and Lango troops suspected of ethnic loyalty to Obote and purging the officer corps. Subsequently, the bounds of Amin’s security narrowed to exclude the Lugbara as well and to rely on the mass recruitment of Kakwa, Nubians, and those from related groups across the Sudan and Congo-Kinshasa borders.

Amin’s Tyranny

The 1979 overthrow of Amin by the Tanzanian army in support of an Ugandan exile militia led to the complete disbanding of the Amin army, a number of whose fragments later reappeared with diverse militia. Obote returned to power in 1980 on the basis of a rigged election and set about building a new army, this time based even more explicitly on an ethnic principle. As Ugandan military historian Amii Omara-Otunnu observed, the new Uganda National Liberation Army (UNLA) “highlights the ethnic-based nature of all the forces in Uganda and the entrenchment of ethnic cleavages within Ugandan politics.” The UNLA was “fairly homogeneous in terms of linguistic affiliation—being largely from the [Luo]-speaking peoples” (Omara-Otunnu 1987: 158). However, for Obote Luo solidarity was insufficient; he insisted on a commander, David Oyite Ojok, from his own Lango community. When Ojok perished in a helicopter crash in 1984, Obote sought to impose a junior Lango officer as commander, passing over several more senior Acholi. This triggered a 1985 coup by Acholi officers, who in turn were driven from power in January 1986 by the NRA of Museveni.

Once again regime change was accompanied by the dissolution of the existing army and a new ethnic security map. Museveni, an Ankole, had built his insurgent army from southern recruits, mostly Ankole and Ganda, as well as Rwandan Tutsi long resident as exiles in Uganda. The top military command today, rebaptised as the Uganda Peoples Defense Force (UPDF), has an inner Ankole core, and a predominantly southern, especially southwestern, rank and file.

The Amin and second Obote regimes were times of terror for many Ugandans; an estimated half-million people met violent death under Amin, and 300,000 under Obote. The Amin tyranny was above all arbitrary and capricious, not especially marked by
ethnic targeting. Under the second Obote regime, however, the bulk of the fatalities occurred in the Luwero triangle northwest of the capital, Kampala, where NRA insurgent action was concentrated. The victims were largely Ganda.

The searing memories of terror and violence, and the ethnic images they evoke, became defining elements in shaping the communal perceptions of the present. Nubians and Kakwa today pay a high price for their association with the brutalities of the Amin years. The Acholi are victims of the Obote policy of assigning front-line duty in the Luwero triangle mostly to Acholi soldiers, assigning to Acholiland a virtual collective guilt in the eyes of the south. The associated trauma was well captured in a 1987 Easter pastoral address by the late Catholic bishop of Acholiland, Mgr. Cipriano Kihangire:

Many joined the army with the hope of getting rich overnight, and were used by unscrupulous political leaders who sent them to carry out “operations” in areas of political unrest. These operations involved atrocious acts of violence against innocent civilians, including children and women, who were subjected to unspeakable mistreatment. A lot of looting was done... When the loot was brought home, parents and relatives welcomed it in their homes, knowing that it was looted. Instead of correcting their children and condemning their actions, many parents had only praise for them... We can now see that these present sufferings are the result of their own sin (quoted in Gersony 1997: 9).

The dissolution of existing military forces in 1979 and 1986 had severe consequences for public security, as remnants of the dissolved armies sprang back to life as militias. In Acholiland, a religiously inspired movement, the Holy Spirit Movement of Alice Lakwena, emerged in the traumatized environment of the collapse of the Obote army and formed its own militia, which marched on Kampala in 1987 and was stopped only a few dozen kilometers from the capital. The Lakwena movement eventually became the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA), operating from Sudan. Its personnel were mostly Acholi, often abducted children, but its religious character faded and it became a plundering militia sowing terror in Acholiland itself. In the Karamoja region in northeast Uganda, pastoral warriors were able to sack the well-stocked armories of the Amin garrisons in 1979 when his army evaporated, injecting a large supply of AK-47s into local patterns of cattle-raiding, both within Karamoja and against neighboring groups. The far more lethal conflicts that emerged sharpened ethnic tensions with neighboring communities such as the Acholi, Teso, and Gisu, and transformed the dynamics of identity conflict within Karamoja.
Museveni, the “Movement,” and Ethnicity

The texture of ethnic politics has changed in the Museveni years. The political framework for his regime, based upon the National Resistance Movement or NRM, differs from its predecessors. Like earlier proponents of single party systems, Museveni claims that multiple political parties sow ethnic and religious discord. Instead of a party, he offers a “Movement,” which claims to be an inclusive idea around which all Ugandan citizens can unite, but not a party. The UPC and DP are permitted to exist, but not to campaign or to organize political meetings; the same restriction applies to a Conservative Party in Buganda occupying some of the same political space as the former KY.

The Museveni regime is the first postcolonial government to enjoy substantial Ganda support. However, conflicts remain over the permissible extent of Buganda claims to autonomy. Buganda remains eager to gain full restoration of the kingdom. Museveni curried Ganda favor early on by permitting the return and formal coronation of Ronald Mutebi as kabaka, a position that had remained vacant since the 1969 death in exile of Mutesa II. However, Museveni resisted demands for the restoration of constitutional federalism when a new basic law was completed in 1995. Kingship is permitted only as a “cultural institution,” shorn of its claim to official power.

The Movement regime was broadly representative in its early years and enjoyed genuine support for the more secure conditions it brought, and for the renewed economic growth it achieved. However, over time a southern and especially western predominance has become more visible. The north, especially Acholiland, feels neglected and marginalized.

A final aspect of ethnic politics in Uganda deserves mention: the significance of cross-border ethnic dynamics, and the interpenetration of conflicts. Southern Sudan rebels in the 1960s found sympathy and support among neighboring groups in northern Uganda. After insurrection reignedited in 1983, the Sudan Peoples Liberation Army (SPLA) again occasionally enjoyed facilities on the Uganda side. In turn, the Acholi-dominated Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) was armed and sheltered by Sudan, especially after 1994. Beginning with the 1959 Hutu uprising in Rwanda, substantial numbers of Tutsi refugees fled to Uganda in several waves; by 1980 these Tutsi refugees numbered 100,000, and as noted earlier played a key role in the NRA, occupying a number of top command positions after the Museveni triumph. Anti-Tutsi sentiment flared up in 1982, when 45,000 were driven back to a homeland that was very reluctant to receive them. By 1989 Museveni felt growing pressure to purge the army of its Tutsi officers; those
affected, who had earlier counted on promises of naturalization as Ugandans, formed the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) to fight their way back to Rwanda. In 1996, another insurgent militia appeared on the western frontier, the Allied Democratic Front (ADF). Operating on both sides of the Congo-Kinshasa border in the Ruwenzori mountains, the ADF is a bizarre assortment of Konjo dissidents along the border, Muslim Tabliqs from the urban centers, Hutu rebels from Rwanda, and former Mobutu soldiers. The degradations of the ADF, which has no apparent political program, became Museveni’s official justification for the deployment of the UPDF in the Congo from 1996 on, first in support of the Laurent Kabila ouster of Mobutu, later to overthrow Kabila himself when he seemed unable or unwilling to oust the ADF from its Congo bases.

In comparison with Tanzania, ethnic and religious divisions have played a much more central role in Ugandan politics. Whether one takes the instability prior to 1986 as a cause or an effect of communal division, the degree to which fear and insecurity became embedded in the popular consciousness and now informs historical memory has no Tanzanian counterpart, except in Zanzibar. The militarization of ethnicity is another significant difference between the two cases. The period of relative stability since 1986 has lowered the temperature of ethnic and sectarian rivalry, but the challenge of accommodating cultural diversity remains.
Works Cited in this Chapter


Chapter 4

Congo-Kinshasa:

Ethnicity Faces the Disappearing State

A Brother or a Friend

“Between a brother and a friend, the choice is clear.”
— former President Mobutu Sese Seko, 4 October 1973

President Mobutu in his 1973 address to the United Nations General Assembly was referring in this phrase to his spectacular decision to rupture relations with Israel in solidarity with Arab states, a decision that triggered a cascade of African nations’ severance of ties with Israel.¹ As a mere friend, Israel had to give way to solidarity obligations for the Arab brother. However, the popular interpretation of this phrase in Congo-Kinshasa was quite different: the president was seen as merely articulating a daily practice of ethnic nepotism in the exercise of power.

Congo politics have indeed been marked by the distinction between brothers and friends. However, how this occurs, and the social meanings attached, has evolved over time. In the decades since the word “independence” was first used publicly in 1956, the country has experienced a succession of political arrangements of dramatic contrast, each of which has left a distinctive imprint on the character of ethnic politics. The colonial state under Belgian rule was exceptionally dense in its occupation and forceful in the assertion of its hegemony. “Bula Matari” (or “Crusher of Rocks”) was the everyday popular term used to label the colonial state. From this point of departure, there was a sudden deflation of state capacity that accompanied an aborted decolonization; then after an extended interlude of restored central power in the first Mobutu decade, a slow, then accelerating decomposition of public institutions. By the turn of the century, Congo lay in four fragments with six African armies deployed in support of the contending factions. In this itinerary, Congo experienced a number of distinctive political moments, during which the configuration of ethnicity took on particular definitions.

¹ The material in this chapter is drawn in part from Young and Turner 1985: 138–63. Although the country was officially known as “Zaire” from 1971 to 1997, I use “Congo” throughout. With a different spelling, the term “Kongo” refers to one of the major ethnic groups in the Congolese nation, one of the first groups encountered by early European visitors.
In contrast to Tanzania and Uganda, Congo stands out in terms of its sheer geographical dimensions. With 900,000 square miles, Congo equals in size the United States east of the Mississippi. Although Algeria and Sudan slightly exceed Congo in area, substantial parts of their land surface are uninhabitable desert. All of Congo is well watered and peopled; in this sense, it is by some distance the largest African state in its social geography.

Although the sharpness of racial categories in colonial Congo was even more pronounced than in the other cases, and the Belgians once imagined they could create a Eurafrican state tied to Belgium on the basis of a European-African partnership, these illusions were fading fast by the time African nationalism visibly emerged in 1956. The instant Africanization of army and bureaucracy resulted from the flight of Belgian officers and functionaries within days of independence following a mutiny of the Congolese troops. In turn most Belgian settlers departed in the early 1960s. Although the Belgian resident population was substantial (at around 100,000) on the eve of independence, their swift exodus blurred the racial dimensions of late colonial politics.

In contrast to Uganda especially, religion never became an important factor interacting with ethnicity. The colonial state threw its weight behind the Catholic missions, with mostly Belgian personnel; Protestant missions, mostly British, American, or Scandinavian, were merely tolerated. As a result, roughly 80 percent of the Christian converts were Catholic. Unlike the East African instances, the colonial state and Catholic missions actively combated Islam, largely succeeding in preventing expansion of the small communities of converts around the Zanzibari slave-trading stations established in the late nineteenth century. Although there was some degree of competition between Catholic and Protestant missions, this did not become embedded in the popular consciousness as it did in Uganda. Thus in Congo identity politics revolves essentially around ethnicity.

**Colonial Impact on Ethnicity**

Ethnicity operates at multiple levels. Social understandings and the everyday vocabulary of ethnicity in Congo revolve around a number of large, aggregate ethnic labels: Kongo, Luba, Mongo, Lunda, Shi, and a substantial number of others. However, the multiple layering insisted upon in Chapter 1 is well illustrated by a close examination of these examples, each of which contains subordinate echelons of identity that have sometimes been politically important. Hovering above the ethnic categories are broader patterns of self-awareness defined by the five major lingua franca—Kikongo in western
Congo; Lingala in Kinshasa, along the Congo river and in the north; Swahili in the eastern third; Tshiluba in the south central region; and Lomongo in the central basin. At a more local level are many smaller groups with some degree of recognition in conventional classification schemes. The number of different ethnic groups is commonly estimated at around 200. Any precise figure is inevitably misleading, for the reasons given in the opening chapter. The distinction between a group and a sub-group is often unclear, and the delimitation of a given ethnic category may be an arbitrary reduction of an ambiguous reality. But the sheer geographic scale of the country inevitably adds to the ethnic complexity of Congolese society.

The Belgian colonial state was formative in a number of respects, not only through the influence of its own ethnic classifications, but also from the social geography resulting from its hegemony. The location of major mission stations and educational facilities, the emergent urban social nodes, the routes of migration that took shape, and labor recruitment patterns all played their part. So also did the colonial stereotypes attached to ethnic categories: hard-working or indolent, “open to civilization” or hostile to the Belgian presence. The ethnic labels employed on identification cards and in census categories fed back into the popular consciousness.

One may detect a trace of ethnic imperialism in some early ethnographic writings by administrators or missionaries. The political concept of Mongohood really originates in a massive two-volume work published in 1944 by a former provincial governor (Vanderkerken 1944). A cluster of missionary-scholars based at the Sacred Heart station at Mbandaka tirelessly promoted Mongo language and culture, sharing the expansive views of Vanderkerken as to the geographic dimensions of Mongo country. A comparably broad definition of a Luba zone was provided in a classic monograph by former administrator Edmond Verhulpen (1936).

Ethnonationalist sensitivities in Belgium itself also had significant effects on definitions of Congolese identity. In the final colonial decade, tensions between Walloon and Flemings in Belgium sharpened, and spilled into colonial policy, a phenomenon closely observed by the African elite. On the Catholic mission side, Flemings were predominant. Of those who served as surrogate cultural entrepreneurs for Congolese ethnic consciousness, such as the architects of Mongohood, a number were themselves active Flemish nationalists.

In other instances colonial action favored the strengthening of sub-group identities. In the lower Congo, different mission congregations created competing
versions of Kikongo (the language of the Kongo people) based on the regional variant in their zone of operation. These in turn both influenced the shape of local cleavages within the Congo zone and made the unification of the Kongo language a major objective of Kongo cultural politics. The drawing of provincial boundaries could also influence ethnic categorizations; the Kasai-Kivu border split a zone of shared language and culture into “Tetela” in Kasai Province and “Kusu” in Kivu Province.

First Political Moment: Urban Elections

The timing of the belated opening for African political action substantially affected subsequent party organization. In contrast to Uganda, where voting first took place within rural ethnic districts, the initial competitive elections in Congo took place in seven major cities in 1957 and 1958. Political parties were not permitted, so the social infrastructure of ethnic associations provided crucial organizational resources for the candidates. The particular definition of each urban social field fixed in the public mind a salient understanding of the key cleavages. Candidates in turn learned how invaluable ethnic vote banks could prove. Thus ethnic politics in 1957 were perceived as “Kongo” versus “Ngala” in Kinshasa, “Lulua” versus “Luba” in Kananga, “Mongo” versus “Ngombe” in Mbandaka, or by regional labels of “Kasaian” versus “authentic Katangan” in Lubumbashi. The logic of competition tended to reduce broader urban social fields to a polar opposition between the two most visible, best organized, and numerous groupings.

The urban institutions had only a brief moment of high visibility before the sudden acceleration of decolonization in 1959 shifted the center of political gravity to the provincial and national level. However, this interlude was long enough to make apparent the opportunities for rewarding ethnic clienteles that institutional control could provide. The victors enjoyed the advantages of allocating urban lots and other favors. The lesson was clear: ethnic mobilization was an imperative for self-defense.

The abrupt Belgian concession of immediate independence in January 1960 transformed the calculations and redefined the political arena. Elections for national and provincial assemblies, which in turn would choose central and regional governments, were scheduled for May 1960. Independence would follow in June. Now the stakes were enormous and uncertainty was total; at issue were no longer parcels of city land but the entire political system. Millennial hopes jostled with nightmarish fears.

The dramaturgy of the competitive election in circumstances of high unpredictability and an environment of pronounced ethnic sensitivities, noted in Chapter
1, permeated the popular imagination. Although political parties had begun to take form, their constituencies were undefined, and their electoral potential was difficult to read at the outset of the campaign. Political discourse operated at two levels. At the formal level, the categories of anticolonial African nationalism were used, with varying degrees of radicalism. The official political debate appeared to revolve about the degree of animosity towards the Belgian rulers, and the choice between unitary or federal institutions. However, a more subterranean language of identity and its ambiguous demands suffused the campaign.

Second Political Moment: Independence Elections

The urban social fields of the municipal elections were a point of departure for electoral organization, but the cities were numerically eclipsed by the 80 percent of the voting public in rural areas and small towns. Some of the ethnic categories central to the city elections had a rural hinterland that could be mobilized; others had relied upon primarily urban classifications (like those of the Ngala in Kinshasa, or the Kasaians in Lubumbashi) that were not readily translatable to rural areas. The ambiguity of a number of ethnic categories was illuminated in this process, as was the uncertainty of their relative proportions. Any number of political organizers trooped to consult anthropologists at Lovanium University (now Kinshasa University) to seek expert opinion on how large their groups were, and what the effective boundaries of their ethnic zones might be.

The law of numbers imposed strategies more complex than simple appeal to a given ethnic unit. In much of the country, the basic rural identity units were much too small to command electoral weight alone. Thus the game required weaving together blocs of votes through coalitions. In some cases, this might be accomplished by ethnic stretching: expanding cultural identities to their outermost limits around such aggregated entities as “Kongo” or “Mongo.” In other cases, it might suffice to build a regional alliance of groups presumed to share an interest and some affinity.

These schemes enjoyed differential success. Kongo party organizers, for example, were stunned to discover that groups they believed to belong to “their” cultural cluster had voted for competing parties. Especially in the cities, the competitive impact of the more radical, unitary Congolese nationalist message was important in the outcome, in interaction with more localized themes. The party most analysts declared victorious in the elections, the Mouvement National Congolais–Lumumba (MNC–L), led by the charismatic Patrice Lumumba, deployed a political language mirroring the themes of
such luminous heroes of African independence as Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana or Sekou Toure of Guinea. Though its progressive ideology attracted radical intellectuals in urban centers throughout the country, and the party was the only effective competitor on a national scale, the MNC–L itself won only 33 of 137 seats in the national assembly (though eight additional seats were won by closely allied parties). Closely inspected, the Lumumba constituency had two main components: the large rural hinterland of Kisangani, where Lumumba emerged as a leader, a city not polarized by the 1957 elections; and Lumumba’s own Tetela-Kusu ethnic homeland.

Following the elections, a tortuous compromise was reached just prior to independence on 30 June 1960 by which Lumumba became prime minister, with Kongo leader Joseph Kasavubu as president. Five days after independence, the army mutinied and its entirely Belgian officer corps was removed. In the ensuing disorder, within a week most Belgian administrators fled the country and the richest province, Katanga, seceded with Belgian complicity. I will not follow in detail the turbulent events of the 1960–1965 period here. Suffice it to note that a UN operation from 1960 to 1964 reunified the country, brokered by 1962 a compromise government under Cyrille Adoula, and forced Katanga back into the national orbit through military action. The disorder by that time had subsided, but broke out again in 1964-65 as a wave of rebellion swept a third of the country. The rebellions fragmented and collapsed by 1965, under attack by national army units spearheaded by mercenaries with Belgian and American military advisors. This set the stage for the military power seizure by Mobutu Sese Seko in November 1965.2

Third and Fourth Political Moments: New Provinces and Rebellions

Two distinct political moments in the 1960–1965 period reshaped the ethnic dimension of Congolese politics. Political and administrative decentralization took place in 1962, as a response to the crisis, as the six colonial provinces (whose assemblies were polarized and paralyzed) were divided into twenty-one smaller units. These generally followed the lines of the former colonial districts, the administrative echelon below the province. However, the discourse of advocacy of the new provinces resonated with claims of ethnic self-determination. Partisans of the new units argued that they were based upon natural affinities, grouping populations that naturally belonged together. But the affinity claims thus advanced proved less evident in primordial terms than their

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2 The “Congo crisis” generated a vast literature. For details and references, see Young 1965 and Young and Turner 1985.
partisans believed. Heated boundary disputes arose involving the provincial allocation of groups such as the Kanyok, the Rega, or the Bobangi, ethnonyms that had never appeared on the public register in the earlier political moments.

Within the new provinces, the hypothesis of ethnic homogeneity swiftly dissolved as well, as previously submerged lines of sub-group division surfaced. In the apparently Luba province of South Kasai, factional struggle revolved around Bena Tshibanda (downriver) and Bena Mutu wa Mukuna (upriver) groupings. In Sankuru, Eswe (savanna Tetela) struggled for dominance over an Ekonda (forest Tetela) faction. Here again we encounter the importance of the multilayered character of identity.

The wave of rebellion challenged social consciousness in a very different way. The discourse of the rebellions drew upon Third World revolutionary themes, incorporating themes from Marxism and Maoism. The social enemy was imperialism and its local agents, the “reactionary” elements who held state office. For government forces, the rebels and their sympathizers represented demonic forces that had to be exterminated. When the insurgents captured a town, they often rounded up the white-collar state employees, as an enemy bourgeoisie, and executed many of them, demonstrating exemplary vengeance against a social class. In recapturing the same community, the national army retaliated with executions of real or imagined rebels for a treasonous uprising against state authority.

These perpetrations of atrocity did not overtly follow ethnic divisions. However, the traumatizing fears and insecurities that took hold in the vast regions affected by this warfare inevitably summoned an ethnic map to the mental screen. As insurgent units approached, local populations anxiously watched for cues as to the ethnic composition of rebel forces, which might be placed in the cognitive matrix of “friend” or “foe.” When government forces returned, apprehensions took hold as to whether the army might target the community for suspected collaboration with the insurgents. Although the social adventure of the rebellions was not marked by ethnic killings, the extreme insecurity experienced by many—numerous villagers hid in the forests for months—profoundly imprinted historical memories and became a crucial factor in the quiescence of the Congolese population in the face of the deepening corruption and oppression of the Mobutu regime in its last two decades. There was a generalized psychosis of insecurity, always posing at least subliminal queries as to precisely where and in the company of what groups safety was assured.
Intriguing insight into the ethnic dimension of these rebellions is found in the diaries of the Cuban revolutionary Ernesto “Che” Guevara, who with a band of 120 Cubans sought to revive a flagging insurgent group on Congo’s eastern frontier from April to November 1965. Guevara used ethnicity to explain his failure to mobilize “peasant” solidarity along Marxist-Leninist lines:

The peasants belong to different tribes, of which there are many in the area. If we look at the enemy army’s report on its general plan of attack, we notice that it always specifies the tribe to which people belong; this is an important piece of information for political work. Relations between the tribes are usually cordial but never truly fraternal, and there is serious rivalry between some of the tribal groups. This phenomenon may be seen between the Rwandans [Banyamulenge] and the rest of the Congolese tribes, but it is also clearly visible between tribes belonging to the North Katanga ethnic area (who occupied the southern part of our guerrilla territory) and tribes belonging to the ethnic area of Kivu province (who occupied the northern part of our territory). (Guevara 2000: 221).

Fifth Political Moment: The Mobutu Regime

The new regime imposed by Mobutu in 1965, lasting more than three decades until 1997, dramatically altered the rules of the political game. The unitary design of the colonial state was restored, the twenty-one provinces were recentralized into eight plus the capital district of Kinshasa, political parties and ethnic associations were banned, and existing representative assemblies were soon dissolved. A single national party, the Mouvement Populaire de la Révéolution (MPR), was launched in 1967 and was represented as “the nation politically organized,” incorporating all Congolese from birth., unconstrained by Despite his own complicity in the January 1961 assassination of Lumumba (along with Belgian and American intelligence services), Mobutu revived the unitary symbolism of Lumumbist discourse, now described as “authentic Congolese nationalism” and subsequently as authenticité and Mobutism.

Mobutu’s strategy of asserting nationhood and delegitimating political ethnicity initially enjoyed wide acceptance. “Tribu oui, tribalisme non” (Tribe yes, tribalism no) became the mantra of the regime. Ethnicity belonged solely to the private realm; only the nation had a right to a public presence. The endless political factionalism and fragmentation of the first half-decade of independence discredited the class of politicians, as did the evident decline in state effectiveness. Above all, all sections of the Congolese public shared an immense fatigue with disorder and insecurity. The First Republic, in popular parlance, had been a disgraceful pagaille (disorderly shambles). The promise of a
new beginning under a Second Republic, resurrecting the centralized, unitary authoritarian legacy of the colonial state, joined together with a discourse of African nationalism, resonated broadly with the citizenry. At an abstract level, everyone is against “tribalism”—the political use of ethnicity by others—while in personal action everyone faced the necessity of using identity as a social resource.

The recentralization of state power and the concentration of personal authority in the presidency fundamentally changed the arena in which ethnicity might operate. The ethnic factor in national life was now subject to patrimonial management from the summit. In the ruling organs of the party and government, Mobutu maintained a calculated ethnic balance; the data on top office-holders in the first decade of his regime demonstrate a closely proportionate dosage of regional representation (Young and Turner 1985: 151). However, those who enjoyed high office were expected to be merely symbolic ethnic delegates and not active advocates for their regions. Patrimonial fidelity assured opportunities for personal enrichment; action as an assertive ethnic ambassador often provoked speedy exit from office. For an extended period, before the degeneration of the state undermined Mobutu’s personal ascendancy, the regime posted regional administrators outside their region of origin.

These measures notwithstanding, ethnicity as political factor in the Congo was reconfigured rather than erased. Although Mobutu never made public reference to his own ethnic antecedents, these did not escape public notice and were a constant theme in the informal banter of bar and workplace. Perceptions of Mobutu’s communal attachments recognized several layers. In lingua franca terms, Mobutu was a Lingala speaker, and indeed quietly endeavored to enthrone it as supreme indigenous language. In regional terms, Mobutu (and the presumed privileged beneficiaries of his rule) was from Equateur Province. In ethnic categories, Mobutu was an Ngbandi.

The Ngbandi are a group of modest size along the border with the Central African Republic in the north. This region was relatively isolated in colonial times, lacking educational infrastructure, and remote from the main migration routes to the major cities. Thus the Ngbandi group had little visibility, and its ethnonym played no part in the identity discourse of the late colonial elections. Indeed, when Mobutu first became politically visible in Kinshasa in the late 1950s, references to him in published sources attributed several different identities (Ngala, Mongo), but not Ngbandi.

Although regional proportionality was reflected in the top offices, as time went on an Equateurian inner core to the regime became increasingly evident. This was
particularly true of the security forces, whose top command was securely in the hands of leaders whose regional affinity guaranteed their personal loyalty to Mobutu. In the later Mobutu years, the orbit of reliable loyalty appeared to shrink, and a key Ngbandi inner circle became evident. As in Uganda, the ethnic security map was crucial to military politics.

Ethnicity intruded into the informal political realm in other ways. The authoritarian nature of state operations, as well as its growing everyday ineffectiveness, made access to government difficult. For the many routine purposes in which some state action was required—obtaining an identity card, a building permit, a license—an impersonal visit to a government office was unlikely to meet with immediate success. In such circumstances, the more productive avenue was to channel the contact through someone with the same ethnic background, with a social obligation for reciprocal service. When state decay advanced, the solidarity of cultural affinity became all the more important as a social resource.

For its first decade, the regime presided over an epoch of stabilization and economic recovery. The substantial economic and social infrastructure of the colonial state remained largely intact, and the seeming restoration of an effective government produced a large flow of external assistance and foreign investment. The extraordinary venality associated with Mobutu’s patrimonial management of politics only gradually came to light. The success image of the regime began to fade in the later 1970s, as corruption, a sharp decline in export earnings, and a swelling external debt undermined the economy and began to erode the resource base required for Mobutu to continue his manipulation of the political class. Both state and regime entered a spiral of decline in the 1980s, which accelerated in the early 1990s. By the time a coalition of small rebel groups took arms against the regime in October 1996, with decisive support from Rwandan, Ugandan, and Angolan detachments, sweeping across the country to capture Kinshasa in May 1997, state decay was total and the populace thrown back on their own resources for survival.

Sixth Political Moment: Demise of Mobutu

The distant origins of the demise of the Mobutu regime reflect gradual changes in the character of that regime but also exemplify the growing importance of interlocking cultural identity issues spilling across African borders. We have already encountered these in the Uganda case. Near the eastern border of Congo, in two locations there were concentrations of people of both distant and recent Rwandan origin. Some had been
dissidents who had resisted the expansion of centralized royal power in the kingdom of Rwandan during the nineteenth century or before, and who had migrated beyond its reach. Beginning in the 1920s, there was active recruitment of mostly Hutu Rwandan workers for the emerging European plantation and mining sector in Kivu. Growing population densities also propelled a voluntary exodus from Rwanda into neighboring Congo, including both Tutsi herders seeking pasture and Hutu farmers. The episodic ethnic turmoil in Rwanda beginning in 1959 produced several waves of mostly Tutsi refugees. Then, following the 1994 genocide, nearly a million Hutu fled to refugee camps in Kivu.

Belgium had ruled Congo and Ruanda-Urundi as a common unit, and the social significance of the boundaries was muted in colonial times. But with the separate independence of Congo and the introduction of democratic elections, the issue of who might claim Congolese status came onto the agenda. The initial provision was that all Africans continuously resident in Congo since 1950 enjoyed such rights. But the question of Rwandan political rights was a heated issue in North Kivu provincial politics in the early 1960s.

With parties dissolved and competitive elections out of the picture under Mobutu, the issue subsided. A 1972 ordinance confirmed citizenship status for all Rwandans who had established residence in the country before independence. In keeping with the personalist nature of rule at the time, this beneficial measure was not achieved through collective ethnic action; rather it reflected the individual access to the ruler of a Tutsi of Rwandan origin, Bisengimana Rema, long-time personal secretary to Mobutu and a courtier of legendary efficiency.

By the beginning of the 1980s, regime decline meant that Mobutu was more open to quietly expressed ethnoregional claims. In 1981, at the behest of North Kivu populations hostile to the Rwandan presence, a new law was adopted radically altering the criteria for citizenship; proof was now required that one’s ancestors were established in Congo at the time of its colonial creation in 1885. In 1992, the 2800 delegates to a national conference assembled to create a new constitutional order reaffirmed the exclusionary 1981 law, on the insistence of North Kivu representatives.

In Congo, all those of Rwanda origin were referred to as “Banyarwanda,” or people from Rwanda; no sharp distinction was drawn between Tutsi and Hutu, although this difference was important within the Rwandan community. The southern pocket consisted of mostly Tutsi pastoralists in the mountains southeast of Uvira; the northern
concentration, in the Masisi area, was much larger, perhaps close to a million before the 1994 flood of refugees, was composed of both Tutsi and Hutu. Land rights and control of local positions were at the heart of the tensions that evolved. Particularly in Masisi, other local groups passionately believed they held historic claims to the land, and that the Rwandans were interlopers bent on displacing them from their ancestral rights.

New geographic ethnonyms emerged in the 1980s, distinguishing the two pockets. The southern group acquired the label of Banyamulenge, named after the mountains in which they herded; some of them fought alongside Guevara and his Cuban detachment. The northern group, near Goma, began to be termed Banyamasisi. With the 1994 holocaust in Rwanda, the subsequent power seizure by the Tutsi-dominated Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), and the Hutu refugee exodus, the Tutsi-Hutu distinction became clearly drawn among Congo/ese.

At this point Mobutu had been all but abandoned by his former Western supporters. Desperately clutching at any expedient to remain in power, he latched onto the international crisis created by the Hutu refugee situation. Positioning himself as protector of the Hutu refugees and indispensable intermediary in the regional turbulence, in the eyes of the new Rwandan regime he became responsible for sheltering the Interahamwe (Hutu militia involved in the genocide) and former Rwandan army elements who were launching deadly cross-border raids from the sanctuary of the refugee camps. The final provocation for Rwanda was an incendiary demand in October 1996 by the governor of South Kivu that all Banyamulenge, as “foreigners,” had to return immediately to their ancestral home in Rwanda.

Banyamulenge trained by the Rwandan army then became the fighting core of the Alliance des Forces Démocratiques pour la Libération du Congo/Zaire (or AFDL, the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo/Zaire). A coalition of four small movements, the AFDL could not have mounted an effective challenge on its own even to the now-enfeebled Mobutu regime. But Rwanda and Uganda had well-trained and effective armies to sponsor the AFDL, with Angola entering the fray later. Rwanda in particular was determined to drive the Hutu refugees and the militia mingled among them far away from the border.

The demoralized Mobutu army was unable to mount a sustained opposition, fighting only a few serious skirmishes. The AFDL-Rwandan force quickly put an end to the Hutu refugee camps, pushing nearly a million refugees back into Rwanda, but more than 300,000 fled westward deeper into Congo. The great majority perished before
reaching another border, either from military pursuit, sickness, or starvation. In May 1997, the AFDL marched into Kinshasa, with Rwandan troops a highly visible partner.

Seventh Political Moment: Kabila and His Challengers

The politics of ethnicity in the post-Mobutu shambles thus took on entirely new dimensions. The lethal escalation of ethnic conflict in neighboring Rwanda (and Burundi) now became embedded in the heart of Congolese politics. AFDL leader Laurent Kabila initially was burdened in Congolese eyes by the Tutsi sponsorship. The Rwandan hand was evident in his emergence as AFDL leader; ironically, his party, the Parti Révolutionnaire du Peuple (PRP, or Revolutionary People’s party), was the only faction that contributed no fighting men to the alliance. In his first year, the security aspect of the Kabila regime was under substantial Rwandan influence.

Kabila declared himself president of a virtually defunct state. He had mixed ethnic antecedents; his father was a Katanga Luba and his mother was a Lunda. But neither group was prominent in the Kinshasa population. His vehicular language, Swahili, was much less widely spoken in Kinshasa than Lingala or Kikongo. He had almost never set foot in the capital, had spent most of his time out of the country since 1965, and had no potential support networks in the western part of the country. His one trump card—and that one an ace—was the overwhelming public joy at the overthrow of Mobutu.

By July 1998, Kabila distanced himself from Rwandan tutelage by expelling the Rwandan elements from his army command and entourage. Anti-Rwandan Tutsi sentiment in Kinshasa by this time was intense, so this move won public applause. Then Foreign Minister Abdoulaye Yerodia, in a chilling summons to ethnic hatred, declared on national radio that Tutsi were “vermin that must be methodically eliminated,” a statement that led a Belgian magistrate to bring an indictment against him in Brussels in early 1999 for advocating genocide.

The expulsion of Rwandans by Kabila triggered a further invasion by Rwandan and Ugandan troops in support of a new insurgent alliance, the Rassemblement Congolais pour la Démocratie (RDC). Kabila appealed to the Southern African Development Community for military support, and Zimbabwe, Angola, and Namibia answered the call. Their swift intervention stymied a lightning strike at Kinshasa by the RDC-Rwanda alliance, but created a military stalemate. The RDC split into two factions, respectively backed by Rwanda and Uganda; a third group under Ugandan tutelage emerge in the
north, the Mouvement pour la Libération du Congo (MLC). The Burundi army also entered the fray, in pursuit of Hutu opposition militias operating from Congo.

These developments have left the Congo's eastern border region in turmoil. Ethnic militias, which began to emerge in the early 1990s, have grown in number and in scale. These movements, generally known as Mai Mai, are mainly directed against the Tutsi; they are armed by Kinshasa and serve as uncertain allies of the Kabila army. Their principle object is to assert control over areas to which they lay ancestral claim. Rwanda and Burundi Hutu ethnic militias also operate with government support and occasional arms. Rwandan and Ugandan detachments provide military cover for the two RDC factions and the MLC.

Despite the spillover of ethnic conflict in Rwanda, the civil war is by no means reducible to ethnicity. None of the four major armed factions have a specific ethnic coloration, and none employ an ethnic vocabulary of solidarity. Their military presence may be regional, but their ambitions are national.

However, the militarization of local ethnicity along the eastern frontier reflected in the Mai Mai militias will doubtless have long-term consequences. In the wake of the pervasive insecurity, other localized conflicts have flared up, such as that between Lendu and Hema in the Bunia area. Rivalries over land have long existed, but not to the point of violent confrontation between the communities involved. The Hema, in the popular catalogue of ethnicity, become framed as an ally by extension of the Tutsi; because Museveni is a Hima from within the Ankole group (internally divided between Hima herders and Iru cultivators), a localized dispute is situated in a larger design in the eyes of a segment of the Congo public. The conspiratorial scheme perceived by many is the creation of a Tutsi-Hima empire. The UPDF is viewed as naturally partial to the Hema cause, as a component of this plot.

One paradox emerges as counterpoint to the insecurity in important parts of the country, and economic devastation everywhere. The country lies in four fragments, each led by an individual who had been living in exile for many years. It is occupied by six foreign armies. Yet the one point upon which all seem agreed is that Congo is one country, and should remain so. The cross-border flow of ethnic tensions from Rwanda and Burundi, and the internalization of these antagonisms into a mosaic of violence in much of eastern Congo does not seem to weaken people's attachment to the idea of one country, one day to be restored. Nor did the long period when the governing institutions
of this nation operated in a largely predatory fashion, and ceased providing any valued services to the citizenry.

Indeed, the conflicts of the seventh political moment appear to reinforce a national attachment. The animosity to Uganda and especially Rwanda is virtually universal; they are viewed as illegitimate intruders. A new theme emerges of a natural “Bantu” solidarity, based on an underlying linguistic and cultural unity originating in an imagined distant common origin. The proposition that there was a common world view among “Bantu” populations, reflecting a fundamental cultural commonality, was first given intellectual formulation by a Flemish missionary, Placide Tempels, in a work first published in 1944, translated in French in 1945 (Tempels 1945), then reprinted for international distribution in 1948. Tempels projected his reading of Luba-Katanga religious belief upon a vast canvas.

The thesis of a natural Bantu cultural unity was given new impetus by a distinguished Congolese historian, Isidore Ndaywel è Nziem, in his massive history of Congo (Ndaywel è Nziem 1998). The Nadywel revival of the Bantu unity theme had instant and potent resonance within the Congolese intelligentsia. Ethnic groups along the northern frontier, belonging to a different linguistic family, were said to be in process of Bantuization. The hostile “other” was other linguistic families—Nilotics, “Hamitics”—associated with hostile neighboring states, and especially Rwandan Tutsi. The notion that languages identified by linguistic specialists as related betoken ancestral affinities or meaningful historical identity is dubious; the Bantu thesis is a modern social construction. But like many other constructed identities, it may well implant itself in the nested layers of Congolese ethnic consciousness.

In this exploration of the complex ethnic chemistry of Congo as its changing elements interact over time, and the comparison with Tanzania and Uganda, several conclusions emerge. The configuration and expression of ethnicity are framed by the larger structure of politics at any given moment. The sequences of politics play a large part in determining such configurations; in other words, there is a path dependency to ethnic politics. Tanzania followed a very different itinerary than Congo, even though they were both one-party systems for an extended period. Ethnic consciousness exists at multiple levels; situations and circumstances determine which will shape social choice. The nature of ethnicity itself can evolve; the categories of consciousness respond to changing circumstance, as exemplified by the recent separation of Banyarwanda in eastern Congo into Hutu and Tutsi, the constitution of “Tutsi” as an alien, threatening, and negative force among many Congolese, and the recent thesis of Congolese Bantu
unity. An imponderable factor is the impact of sustained ethnic violence upon social interactions. The extreme insecurity experienced along Congo's eastern frontier since the early 1990s and the multiplication of youth militias affects notions of ethnic identity in ways that bring its primordial dimensions to the fore. Meanwhile, other parts of the country not affected by armed combat involving insurgent militias or local armed factions enjoy a relative ethnic peace despite the inability of post-Mobutu rulers to improve their economic well-being. The curious resiliency of a popular attachment to preservation of the country keeps alive the possibility of a political settlement within which ethnic diversity can find accommodation.
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Chapter 5

Conclusions

The Accommodation of Ethnic Difference

Living with Cultural Pluralism

Of the 189 member states of the United Nations, only a handful are fully homogeneous. The existence of cultural diversity within a national community is not a problem to be eliminated by vigorous national integration, but rather a natural condition of the modern state. The African experience of ethnic diversity within the territorial unit of sovereignty has a number of special features, but it is a part of a global phenomenon.

Some of the attributes of ethnicity bear the potential for lethal escalation, in given circumstances. These attributes, which fall within the primordial field of understanding, relate to the emotional charge which can attach to identity, the fears and anxieties that can arise when group insecurity is at issue, and the corresponding capacity to demonize a hostile other. This possibility finds all too many illustrations in the last couple of decades: Bosnia, Kosovo, Chechnya, Rwanda, Burundi. But such an outcome is by no means inevitable; careful quantitative measurements of the incidence of ethnic warfare around the globe by Ted Gurr (2000) show that it has declined in the world at large (but not in Africa). He attributes this decline in part to a process of global political learning in the last two or three decades, when older illusions about eliminating multiculturalism through national integration lost their hold. As the world wrestles with its multicultural realities, the opportunities for sensitized statecraft and accommodative policies become more apparent. Indeed, most of the time, in most places, everyday interactions among identity groups are peaceful, and most individuals learn to manage their relationships with ethnic others in harmonious fashion.

In the African case, the challenge of accommodating ethnicity at the turn of the millennium takes place within exceptionally difficult circumstances. Since the 1980s, African states have struggled to find an exit from the economic decline associated with the failed effort to create command economies and enforce state-dominated development. In the 1990s, the stunning wave of democratization (though it has clearly ebbed) nonetheless leaves in its wake an urgent need to find some liberalized form of politics to replace the utterly discredited single-party autocracies or military dictatorships. The cumulative effect of economic stagnation and political decay, in the 1990s, was a
spreading pattern of political disorder, which currently affects a third of the states. The weakened condition of the African state as an institutional domain makes it more difficult to mount an effective response to armed challenges by diverse militia. The disorder does not necessarily reflect ethnic divisions. The four military factions in Congo all resist ethnic classification. In northern Uganda, although the LRA is predominantly Acholi, the Acholiland population now fear and detest this rebel militia for the insecurity and violence that it sows. But an environment of disorder and pervasive insecurity creates circumstances in which ethnic violence can readily occur.

The possibility for constructive partnerships among culturally diverse citizenries in Africa is illustrated by the many polities where this has been largely sustained. The Tanzania chapter provides one such example, but a number of others might have been chosen to make the same point: Senegal, Mali, Mauritius, Benin, Zambia, among others. In some respects, although Africa presents along with the former Soviet Union the most severe challenge to statecraft in defining viable political and market institutions to compete effectively in a globalizing world, its cultural pluralism might be seen as more manageable than that in parts of Europe and Asia. Ethnicity in Africa, while belonging to the same species of identity as its counterparts in other world regions, has some particular characteristics that may make it more compatible with stable politics than communal differences elsewhere.

**Lack of Ethnonationalism**

With few exceptions, ethnicity in Africa is distinct from nationalism. At the core of the doctrine and ideology of nationalism is a political claim: the right to sovereignty. As the idea of nationalism took root in Europe in the nineteenth century, it fused with the doctrine of self-determination. A nation, as a human community with shared history and common destiny, had a natural entitlement to claim political independence.

Nationalism, in its European origins, took form around existing states with a dominant cultural personality mirrored in the name of the country, or as a claim to form a sovereign state on the basis of an ethnolinguistic community. Ethnicity was thus intimately joined to nationalism. The African itinerary of ethnicity and nationalism, however, was very different.

The ideology of nationalism was appropriated by anticolonial liberation movements in Africa, especially after World War II. However, it was formulated (as Chapter 1 suggested) as a territorial and political concept. The historic struggle for
African freedom could not be conducted on an ethnic basis; any effort to do so would only play into the hands of the colonizer by validating the argument that the innumerable ethnic divisions made alien rule indispensable. Thus the doctrine of nationalism with its corollary of a sacred right of self-determination was appropriated and naturalized as a territorial concept, following the precedent of Western hemisphere nationalisms, with the crucial difference that its assertion came from indigenous rather than settler populations (except, initially, in South Africa).

In the vast stretch of Eurasia where most states have a dominant ethnic nation whose identity names the country, other groups become “national minorities.” African states, however, do not have “national minorities,” but only a multiplicity of ethnic communities that stand in at least theoretical equality in their relationships with the territorial state. In this setting, ethnicity is everywhere but ethnonationalism is rare. The only exceptions, in the large number of ethnic entities mentioned in this study, are Buganda and Somalia. The careful reader may have noticed that Ganda identity was characterized as ethnonationalism; Buganda retains a strong sense of itself as an historic kingdom equipped with language and culture requiring federal autonomy at a minimum; twice the kingdom has declared its secession, but has yielded to superior force. Somalia is a country whose ethnic personality is reflected in the country name, and where the Somali ethnonationalist claim refers not only to the existing territory but to the ambition to expand the frontiers to incorporate Somali populations in neighboring states.

But ethnicity as nationalism—that is, joined to the political claim for a separate state—remains the exception for Africa. Beyond the ethnic examples encountered in this volume, Ethiopia stands as the only African state to explicitly acknowledge in its constitution an ethnic right to self-determination, and to redraw its provincial subdivisions in function of this principle. Ethiopian exceptionalism is partly explained by the rule from 1974 to 1991 of a regime that adopted Marxist-Leninist ideology and a state model borrowing Soviet nationality theory.

Thus African states, in contrast to many of their Eurasian counterparts, do not confront potent ethnonational separatist movements. Buganda is an oddity in the African context in the ethnic definition of its episodic separatist aspirations. As indicated in the opening chapter, separatist movements have occurred in Africa and will doubtless emerge again. Sovereignty claims, however, are almost always advanced on behalf of a formerly distinct colonial territory (Eritrea, Western Sahara) or an administrative subdivision thereof (Biafra, Anglophone Cameroon, southern Sudan, Katanga, Casamance).
Accordingly, Africa escapes the intractable wars of ethnonational self-determination movements that afflict other areas (Chechnya, Kosovo, Tamils, Aceh).

Ethnicity in Africa also lacks for the most part the hard, chauvinist edge encountered in zones of intense ethnonational conflict, such as the Balkans or the Caucasus. The degree to which aggressive ethnic ideologies have taken shape also is less pronounced. Cultural entrepreneurs have sprung up around some of the more salient ethnic categories, contributing the historical, literary, and linguistic ligaments of identity ideology. But only Arabs have the kind of historicized ethnic assertiveness tinged with chauvinism found, for example, in Serb and Croat school textbooks, which lead to such oddities as the 1989 Serb ceremonies commemorating the “field of blackbirds” where a Serb army lost an epic combat with invading Turks in 1389.

An important reason for the more diffuse role of ethnicity in the social landscape is the predominance of multilingualism. Language, in many settings a core element in the primordial dimensions of identity, is almost entirely an instrumental issue in Africa. The existence in a number of countries of lingua franca such as Swahili which serve as a culturally neutral medium for intergroup communication (without recourse to the European languages of colonial occupation accessible only to the educated) permits language policies that do not require linguistic subordination. Acquiring multilingual skills is an adaptation to a language market separated from connotations of dominance of “the other.” Each language domain—ancestral, lingua franca, European—has links to given social settings and requirements. The mother tongue serves as household and local community medium. The lingua franca operates as link medium in the marketplace and everyday urban social transactions. The European language services the higher echelons of the educational system, high politics, and international contacts. Mastering these linguistic skills asks no identity sacrifices and offers evident advantages. Thus language politics, so contentious in many multiethnic settings, have been remarkably devoid of conflict in Africa. With the multilingual pattern now well established, its reproduction occurs by the natural operation of the social market.

**Statecraft and Accommodation of Diversity**

Statecraft informed by sensitivity to cultural diversity can achieve positive results. Leadership makes a huge difference. A careful reading of the Tanzania case of low intensity ethnicity will surely credit the late President Nyerere with an historic legacy of fostering harmony. Even though his economic policies fared poorly, his personal integrity
and selfless commitment to fostering Tanzanian nationhood instilled in the popular psyche an affective attachment to the territorial polity. By maintaining an entourage of diverse regional antecedents, and avoiding both the appearance and the reality of reliance upon an inner ethnic core of key advisors, Nyerere projected a nationalizing image of the exercise of rule. The only area that experienced significant ethnic and racial tensions was Zanzibar, where his capacity to shape or influence social interactions was limited by the islands' autonomy. Conversely, in Uganda the tyranny of Idi Amin and the shortcomings of Milton Obote both left in their wake divisive historical memories and regional antagonisms that could only slowly be effaced.

In the last three decades, governments throughout the globe have become aware that cultural pluralism does not dissolve through processes of modernization nor yield to forceful assimilationist projects. The world of nations has become a laboratory for the accommodation of cultural pluralism. The political learning that has taken place is one plausible explanation for the declining number of violent ethnic conflicts in the world at large in the last decade. Africa has been an avid pupil.

The surge of democratization that swept the continent a decade ago, however incomplete, did compel a review of constitutional arrangements in most countries. This in turn impelled an explicit confrontation of the ethnic question: how could a liberalized political order, necessarily including some degree of electoral competition, be framed in ways that averted the dynamic of escalating ethnic polarization described in the opening chapter? There were several responses to this dilemma of finding an electoral system that minimized the likelihood of polarization.

**Managing Electoral Competition**

One widely employed device, mentioned in the Tanzania chapter, was to proscribe political parties that were explicitly based upon ethnicity, religion, or race. Such a requirement exists, for example, in countries such as Nigeria or Eritrea. However, as the Rwanda and Burundi cases demonstrate, parties that are not ethnic in their formal designations may become so through the dialectic of competition.

Another mechanism is a requirement that, for presidential contests, the winner must not only secure an overall majority, but also demonstrate support distributed through the country. Kenya and Nigeria have experimented with such a policy, in which a winning candidate must have a stipulated fraction of the vote in a majority of the provinces as well as a national plurality. In Uganda, a particularly intriguing design was
proposed for parliamentary elections that were aborted by the 1971 Amin coup. The country was divided into four zones; candidates were required to compete not only in their home area, but in constituencies assigned in each of the three other zones. In this way, they would have been compelled to appeal for votes not simply as ethnic ambassadors to the legislature, but also as representatives of other interests. We will never know whether this scheme would have served its integrative purposes, or supplied new incentives for sectarian campaigning.

A large menu of electoral systems is available for translating citizen votes into legislative representation (see Reilly and Reynolds 1999, de Silva 1998). The two major alternatives are single-member district majoritarian systems and proportional representation; however, there are a number of variations on each of these types, and combinations of them. The global sweep of democratization in the two decades following the demise of dictatorship in Spain, Portugal, and Greece in the mid-1970s coincided with a heightened sensitivity to multicultural realities; thus experimentation (and political learning) with electoral formulas took place with a new awareness of ethnic accommodation as prime objective. In Africa, the independence constitutions were faithful replicas of the institutional arrangements of the colonizer. In the 1990s, however, constitutional debate gave careful attention to electoral arrangements conducive to ethnic comity.

On the whole, the African trend is towards greater reliance on variants of proportional representation. Particularly visible and influential was the South African option in its 1995 constitution for proportional representation calculated on a national basis. In both national elections conducted under its provisions, this has provided for a reasonable reflection of racial and ethnic difference as well as party affiliation, which has helped legitimate the institutional frame of post-apartheid governance. In Senegal, a mixed system is employed; at the present time, 55 seats are allocated by proportional representation, with 65 reserved for single member districts. This type of system, also used in Germany and Russia, has the advantage of retaining a direct constituency link between some members and a home community, a link that is lost in a proportional representation system with national lists established solely by the political parties.

An important debate has pitted advocates of an electoral system structured to create incentives for candidates to appeal beyond their ethnic clientele, against proponents of voting arrangements aimed at mirroring the ethnic proportions in the national representative institutions. Donald Horowitz, the leading advocate of the former
strategy, argues that incentives for interethnic electoral cooperation will avoid campaigns that inflame communal sentiments and thereby create a more conducive environment for collaboration in subsequent governance (Horowitz 1991). He proposes the alternative vote system, by which voters in single-member districts rank candidates; thus contestants in an ethnically polarized setting are induced to seek second or third place ballots from voters outside their own ethnic constituency. The argument has theoretical appeal, but the alternative vote system has been too infrequently used to be certain of its consequences (mainly in Australia and at times in Papua New Guinea and Fiji).

Arend Lijphart, an influential partisan of proportional representation, links his preference for this system to a larger theory of consociational democracy for divided countries. Ethnic proportionality, he argues, leads to a government of cultural coalition, wherein electorally legitimated delegates of the communal segments can use summit diplomacy to find equitable resolutions to public policy challenges (see Lijphart 1977). Consociational theory in its African application is open to the criticism that it relies too greatly on the premise that ethnic representatives will wish to form national coalitions rather than narrower ethnic combines to muscle through policies advantageous to one segment of the nation. It also fails to capture the complex, fluid, multi-layered nature of African ethnicity stressed in the opening chapter. However, the ethos of an imperative of ethnic inclusiveness in governance, and the importance of distributive equities in the legitimation of rule, have enduring value.

On close inspection, many African elections in the democratization decade of the 1990s took place without the inflammation of ethnicity or voting patterns determined by communal solidarities. To cite two critical elections in 2000, in Senegal and Ghana rulers who had held power for two decades were ousted by opposition parties, with little discernable ethnic bloc voting in either case. Of the numerous competitive elections across the continent in the past decade, only three countries experienced catastrophic ethnic polarization partly attributable to the tensions born of communally defined party competition:

- Congo-Brazzaville in 1993 and again in 1997, when parliamentary elections were followed by savage combat in the capital between ethnic militias;
- Burundi in 1993, when electoral triumph by a Hutu-dominated party was overturned by a military coup by the entirely Tutsi army, provoking in turn deadly ethnic combat that has yet to end, and
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- Rwanda, where the fears and uncertainties surrounding a possible election and regime change were exploited by a genocidal Hutu clique that unleashed the 1994 holocaust.

Other Formulas

Decentralization is another institutional mechanism for managing diversity. In its most robust form, this takes the form of federalism. However, only Nigeria and Ethiopia have formally federalist institutions in 2000; Uganda and South Africa explicitly rejected this option in their mid-1990s constitutional debates. In the largest and most diverse polities, only some form of federalism can give sufficient reassurance to the ethnic, religious, and regional groups who fear marginalization at the center to enable stable and peaceful politics. In Sudan’s 45 years of independence, for example, the only peaceful decade in the south was 1972–1983, when a quasi-federal autonomy was in place. In Congo-Kinshasa, no imaginable formula for reconciliation of the warring factions could restore the centralized, unitary state of the Lumumbist vision or Mobutu rule in its early phases.

Decentralization in practice has proved difficult to fully implement, notwithstanding its advantages in providing political space for ethnic self-awareness. Decentralized authority and responsibilities have not been matched by delegated resources sufficient to meet these obligations. The major sources of state revenue—taxes on external trade, rents from natural resources such as oil, and external assistance—accrue to the central institutions, who are reluctant to make sufficient allocation to regional units of government.

More broadly, while constitutional engineering is of substantial value, it cannot alone respond to the challenge of accommodating cultural diversity. Formal institutions matter, but rarely function in the manner that abstract public law or political theory might suggest. The challenge to statecraft posed by a multicultural citizenry requires a continuous adaptation to an evolving social reality. The current generation of leaders has a much more sophisticated grasp if the subtleties, shiftings, and shadings of the ethnic landscape they encounter than did their 1960 predecessors. Long gone is the earlier illusion that cultural pluralism was a “problem” that awaited a “solution.” Rather, ethnic diversity is a permanent condition of changing parameters, which invites constant sensitivity but continuous and creative responsiveness to reconfigured cultural circumstance.
There is no easy path to the effective accommodation of ethnicity. Nor can this political purpose be abstracted from the larger imperatives of building a more prosperous economy and discovering a democratic mode of governance rooted in Africa’s cultural heritage. But the global process of political learning regarding multicultural politics in the last couple of decades does provide some basis for cautious optimism. So also do the achievements of Tanzania, South Africa, Mauritius, or Senegal in sustaining intergroup harmony. If our image of Africa is drawn from such instances as these, rather than deformed by the most severe cases of protracted civil disorder, then we may better appreciate the capacity of statecraft, joined to the social adaptability of African citizenries, to achieve creative coexistence with difference.
Works Cited in this Chapter


Suggestions for Further Reading and Resources

Entries are grouped under the following categories:

Websites
Journals
General Reference Books
Comparative and Theoretical Works
Country and Regional Studies

Note: Items marked with an asterisk (*) are important books or resources that will be particularly useful for non-specialist readers.

Websites

African Conflict
http://www.africanconflict.org
Excellent UCLA site specializing in conflict situations, covers current events and reference information; useful links provided.

African Newspapers
*http://allafrica.com
Entries for all African states, with access to major newspapers.

African Studies Programs
http://www.sas.upenn.edu/African_Studies/About_African/ww_afstd.html
Contains two dozen links to African Studies Programs and Centers at national and international universities; several have links to other bibliographic resources.

Country-specific Pages for Africa
Has page with links for each African country.

Current News

http://africanews.org
Useful for current news in Africa.
Ethnologue

http://www.sil.org/ethnologue/

The Ethnologue is a catalogue of more than 6,700 languages spoken in 228 countries. The Ethnologue Name Index lists over 39,000 language names, dialect names, and alternate names. These can be retried by country, language name, language family, or region. Some maps of language usage are included.

Ethno-national Conflicts: Research Sources


An extensive on-line bibliography of article and book sources on ethnonationalist conflicts around the world compiled by Dr. Timothy L. Sanz of the Foreign Military Studies Office of the United States Army training center at Fort Leavenworth.

Homelands: Secession, Independence, and Nationalist Movements

http://www.waivefront.com/~homelands/

A listing of major websites for separatist movements around the world.

INCORE guide to Internet sources on conflict and ethnicity in Africa

http://www.incore.ulst.ac.uk/cds/countries/africa.html

This is a guide for Africa in general, with information available on individual countries.

Minorities at Risk Project

http://www.bsos.umd.edu/cidcm/mar/

One of the best sites available, managed by Ted Gurr at the University of Maryland. Gives extensive background on hundreds of ethnic and nationalist conflicts around the world. Organized by region of the world, country, and group. Includes chronologies of conflicts and bibliographic sources.

Perry-Castenada Library Map Collection

http://www.lib.utexas.edu:80/Libs/PCL/Map_collection/Map_collection.html

One of the best internet sites for maps of all regions of the world, including ethnic maps. Site contains extensive linkages with other map-providing sites as well.
United Nations High Commission for Refugees

*http://www.reliefweb.int

Coverage of major emergency situations, extracted from local and international press and other sources; includes items for Great Lakes and Sierra Leone.

United Nations Refworld

http://www.unhcr.ch/ref.world/refworld.htm

Includes extensive information on situation of refugees throughout the world, including refugees from nationalist and ethnic conflicts. Contains current country reports, legal and policy-related documents, maps, and literature references.

Journals

The following journals cover contemporary Africa and may contain articles or book reviews relative to ethnicity:

Africa

Africa Today

African Affairs

African Studies Review

Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines

Canadian Journal of African Studies

Ethnic and Racial Studies

Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Studies

Journal of Modern African Studies

Modern Africa

Politique Africaine
General Reference Books


Encyclopedia of Nationalism. 2 vols. 2001. San Diego: Academic Press. Contributions from many leading scholars in the field; contains a number of African entries, both thematic and particular countries, groups or leaders.


Morrison, Donald George, Robert Cameron Mitchel, and John Naber Paden. 1989. Black Africa: A Comparative Handbook. 2d ed. New York: Paragon House. Although now dated, this comprehensive work has extensive data on sub-Saharan African states, including demographic figures on ethnic groups; also contains information on earlier elections, and other demographic data.


Theoretical and Comparative Works


Anderson, Benedict. 1983. Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism. London: Verso. Landmark work influential in the emergence of the constructivist approach; though its focus is nationalism, its logic is applicable to ethnicity.


Vail, Leroy, ed. 1989. *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa*. Berkeley: University of California Press. Outstanding collection of essays employing constructivist approach to ethnicity in southern Africa, showing how contemporary ethnic units were reshaped or even created by colonial contact.


Country and Regional Studies


Fukui, Katsuyoshi, and John Markakis, eds. 1994 _Ethnicity and Conflict in the Horn of Africa_. London: James Currey. Valuable essays, several covering little-known parts of the Horn, mainly by Japanese and British scholars.


Lele, Jacques Kago. 1995. _Tribalisme et exclusions au Cameroun_. Yaounde: Editions du CRAC. Examines what author perceives as exclusionary policies towards such groups as Bamileke and Kirdi.


SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING AND RESOURCES


About the Author
