

BECOMING INDIGENOUS PEOPLES: DIFFERENCE, INEQUALITY, AND THE GLOBALIZATION OF EAST AFRICAN IDENTITY POLITICS

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ABSTRACT

Although the term ‘indigenous’ implies a state preceding that which is foreign or acquired, indigenous movements in Africa are a recent phenomenon. Drawing from the author’s research of the Tanzanian indigenous peoples’ movement in the 1990s, this article argues that indigenous identity in Tanzania does not represent miraculously preserved pre-colonial traditions or even a special sort of marginalization. Rather, it reflects the convergence of existing identity categories with shifting global structures of development and governance. Specifically, it reflects a combination of ‘cultural distinctiveness’ and effective strategies of extraversion in the context of economic and political liberalization. The Maasai, who are ‘culturally distinct’, and who have a long tradition of enrolling outsiders in their cause, naturally dominate this movement.

BETWEEN 1991 AND 1997, I CONDUCTED ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH IN NORTHERN TANZANIA, primarily in Maasai herding communities. Throughout the twentieth century, Maasai communities have seen their territory taken over by national parks, large-scale commercial agriculture, and small-scale subsistence agriculturalists displaced from neighbouring highland areas. These transformations have made extensive livestock herding an untenable economic activity. My time in the field was one of especially intensive change, as Tanzania liberalized its economy. Throughout the 1990s, foreign investors flocked to Tanzania in pursuit of cheap land and other natural resources. They were joined by Tanzanian elites, finally free of the investment restrictions that had been imposed by Tanzania’s previously socialist government.¹

My research examined the cultural and political responses of Maasai communities to economic and political liberalization, especially grassroots

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1. United Republic of Tanzania, *Report of the Presidential Commission for Enquiry into Land Tenure Matters* (Government Publishers, Dar es Salaam, 1993); Issa Shivji, *Not Yet Democracy* (IIED, London, 1998).

social movements resisting the alienation of traditional grazing land. Responding to new opportunities presented by political liberalization, leaders of these movements established a variety of officially registered non-governmental organizations (NGOs).² I worked closely with these nascent organizations: attending their meetings and interviewing their leaders, staff, workers, and targeted constituents. I also spent time with Western donors: observing their expectations of and interactions with Maasai NGOs. Finally, I spent about half of my field time in the rural communities that Maasai NGOs represented and served, interviewing and interacting with their intended beneficiaries.

As an anthropologist interested in identity and globalization, I was increasingly struck by the ways in which Maasai NGO leaders were transcending local ethnic categories. By 1993, Maasai NGOs were no longer merely Maasai NGOs. They were part of a broader network of ethnically based NGOs, which made up the Tanzanian indigenous peoples' movement. This movement also included NGOs representing the Barabaig, a herding people whose lifestyle and material culture are similar to those of the Maasai, as well as an NGO representing Hadzabe hunter/gatherers. These organizations worked together through a forum called Pastoralist and Indigenous NGOs (PINGOs) — established in 1994.³

PINGOs leaders invoked experiences of indigenous peoples around the world to articulate their struggles and identities and described themselves as part of a global indigenous peoples' movement. In this capacity, they participated in the UN Forum on Indigenous Issues and sponsored high-profile public events celebrating the UN Decade for Indigenous Peoples (1994–2004). They engaged in exchanges with indigenous communities in Canada, Australia, and Latin America.⁴ PINGOs' office was decorated with posters of indigenous movements from East Timor, Chiapas, and the Circumpolar North. PINGOs was also networking with indigenous movements that were occurring throughout Africa.⁵ In 2000, PINGOs sponsored a regional gathering of indigenous peoples from eastern and southern Africa.

The recent self-identification of PINGOs members as indigenous, and their active promotion of African indigenous movements, highlights a central paradox of the category 'indigenous' as it is applied to Africa today. The term 'indigenous' implies a primordial state, necessarily preceding that which is foreign or acquired. And yet the idea of indigenous Africans does

2. Prior to legislative changes in the 1990s, Tanzanian NGOs were practically non-existent.

3. The term 'pastoralist' is used interchangeably with the term 'herder' in this article.

4. Jim Igoe, 'Ethnicity, civil society and the Tanzanian pastoral NGO movement' (Boston University, unpublished PhD dissertation, 2000).

5. See Hanne Veber and Espen Waehle, 'Introduction', in Veber et al. (eds), *Never Drink From the Same Cup* (International Working Group on Indigenous Affairs [IWGIA], Copenhagen, 1993); Alan Bernard and Justin Kenrick (eds), *Africa's Indigenous Peoples* (University of Edinburgh African Studies, Edinburgh, 2001).

not represent some sort of miraculously preserved pre-colonial existence. In fact, it is an identity category that would not have made a great deal of sense prior to the turn of the 1990s. This article begins by asking, therefore, why the indigenous category is salient in Tanzania at this particular historical moment.

Engaging with this question will contribute to two related areas of Africanist scholarship. The first is a body of historical and anthropological literature that examines the ways in which African ethnic categories have been shaped by colonial encounters and post-colonial state formation.⁶ This is a literature that is especially rich for the Maasai.⁷ It provides a nuanced analysis of how the formation and maintenance of Maasai identity worked in the past, but little about how these processes have continued into the present. The first contribution of this article, therefore, is to illuminate the continuities of East African identity politics from colonialism to the contemporary indigenous peoples' movements.

Its second contribution is to link the dynamics of African identity politics to a broader literature on the dynamics of African politics in general, especially the ways in which the power of African elites has been consistently tied to their adeptness at engaging in what Bayart has termed 'strategies of extraversion'.⁸ These strategies represent more than just external networking, a common part of most political activity; they are symptomatic of a political system that is externally oriented as a result of long-standing dependency on external resources. African elites have long derived power and authority from their access to external institutional structures, which frequently means access to resources that can be used to build and maintain patronage structures. This position is of course tenuous, because withdrawal of external support can frequently result in the decline of particular elites. It also means that African political systems frequently morph in response to external changes. For instance, Africa's recent NGO revolution may be viewed from this perspective as an opportunistic response to the changing structures of international aid.⁹

6. Especially Leroy Vail (ed.), *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa* (University of California Press, Berkeley, CA, 1993).

7. Works on the Maasai culminate with Richard Waller and Thomas Spear (eds), *Being Maasai* (James Currey, London, 1993) and Dorothy Hodgson, *Once Intrepid Warriors* (James Currey, London, 2001).

8. Jean-François Bayart, 'Africa in the world: A history of extraversion', *African Affairs* 99, 395 (2000), pp. 217–67.

9. Michael Maren, *The Road to Hell* (The Free Press, New York, NY, 1997); Patrick Chabal and Jean-Pascal Daloz, *Africa Works: Disorder as political instrument* (James Currey, London, 1999). While many African NGOs are not opportunistic, the popular perception is that they present an obstacle to more legitimate organizations: see Jim Igoe and Tim Kelsall, 'Introduction: Between a rock and a hard place', in Igoe and Kelsall (eds), *Between a Rock and a Hard Place: African NGOs, donors, and the state* (Carolina Academic Press, Durham, NC, 2005), pp. 9–10.

Definitions of indigenous, as applied to East Africa, implicitly stand outside of these historical and political processes. As such, they elide the relationships of African indigenous politics to broader political trends, funding shifts, and institutional transformations. Unpacking the current salience of the indigenous category in East African identity politics necessitates a close examination of these relationships and reveals two fundamental aspects of East African identity politics: first, the ways in which certain identity categories have become increasingly tied to a global network of institutions, ideas, and money; and second, the ways in which these categories relate to the formations of economic/social classes that are uniquely African, but which have their roots in experiences of colonialism and aid dependency.

The indigenous frame applied to East Africa

The global indigenous peoples' movement emerged primarily from the experiences of the first peoples of countries now dominated by majority populations of European descent. It was only in the early 1990s that this movement expanded to include peoples from Africa and Asia.¹⁰ This expansion in turn necessitated expanded definitions of the 'indigenous' category to account for the experiences of peoples who lived in places where descent could not clearly confer indigenous status.¹¹ The vast majority of Africans, for instance, are descended from the continent's original peoples, leading some observers to question the appropriateness of some African groups having special indigenous status. The ensuing debates have been discussed at length elsewhere and need not detain us here.¹² For the purposes of this article, I am concerned primarily with the central features of the definitions and conceptual frames that emerged from this process.

Because of its increasing diversity, the global indigenous peoples' movement has come to be defined as a movement of 'culturally distinct' non-Western societies. By virtue of their historical resistance to colonialism, state formation, and global capitalism, these societies have managed to remain connected to their traditional homelands, while maintaining their cultural traditions. The traditions and livelihoods that they have worked so hard to protect have become a stigma in the context of the modern nation-states in which they now reside. Anthropologist Ronald Niezen, a long-time observer of the global indigenous peoples' movement, describes its

10. Ronald Niezen, *The Origins of Indigenism* (University of California Press, Berkeley, CA, 2003).

11. See *Report of the African Commission's Working Group of Experts on Indigenous Populations/Communities* (African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights and IWGIA, Copenhagen, 2005), p. 87.

12. See especially, Julian Burger, *Report From the Frontier* (Zed Books, London 1987); Dorothy Hodgson, 'Introduction: Comparative perspectives on the indigenous rights movements in Africa and the Americas', *American Anthropologist* 104, 4 (2002), pp. 1037–49; Adam Kuper, 'Return of the native', *Current Anthropology* 44 (2003), pp. 389–402; and Niezen, *Origins*.

constituents thus: 'Their territories are imposed upon by extractive industries; their beliefs and rituals imposed upon by those who would convert them; and their independence is imposed upon by states striving for social and political control. They are those people whose position in the modern world is least tenable'.¹³

This description is consistent with the ways in which Tanzanian activists have come to identify with the global indigenous peoples' movement and define their own indigeneity. To quote Maasai leader Moringe Parkipuny, the experiences of the Maasai and other similar groups match 'the plight of indigenous peoples throughout the world', especially as they are denied their 'cultural identity and the land that constitutes the foundation of their existence'.¹⁴ African indigenous activists and their Western supporters describe indigenous Africans as 'distinct cultural minorities who have been historically repressed by majority African populations who control the state apparatus'.¹⁵ These groups, according to international observers, have become part of a 'self-ascribed polythetic class' that is global in scope.¹⁶ This class has emerged through the interaction of indigenous representatives at international fora promoting indigenous sovereignty. They attend these fora 'with little doubt about their own status as "indigenous", and few open doubts about the claims of others'.¹⁷

This process of mutual recognition apparently alleviates the need for pedantic discussions about which African groups are indigenous. However, the idea of indigenous peoples as a 'self-identified polythetic class' is only unproblematic so long as it ignores the question of access to these fora where claims to indigenous status are recognized. At the very least, this access requires an awareness that such fora exist, as well as knowledge of the indigenous category and its implications for local resource struggles. It also requires access to rather substantial monetary resources. In Africa, these kinds of resources are most commonly received as aid. In the context of the Tanzanian indigenous peoples' movement, aid is often tied to recipients

13. Niezen, *Origins*, p. 5.

14. Moringe Parkipuny, 'The human rights situation of indigenous peoples in Africa', *Fourth World Journal* 4, 1 (1989), p. 3. Also see Daniel Murumbi, 'The concept of indigenous in Africa', *Indigenous Affairs* 1 (1994), pp. 52–7.

15. Dorothy Hodgson, 'Precarious alliances: The cultural politics and structural predicaments of the indigenous rights movement in Tanzania', *American Anthropologist* 104, 4 (2002), p. 1086. Also see Parkipuny, 'The human rights situation'; Murumbi, 'The concept of indigenous'; Marcus Colchester and Larry Lohman, *The Struggle for the Land and the Fate of the Forests* (Zed Books, London, 1993); Gunvor Berge, 'Reflections on the concept of indigenous peoples in Africa' and Mohamed Salih, 'Indigenous people and the state', both in Veber et al. (eds), *Never Drink*, pp. 235–46; 121–39.

16. A polythetic class is defined in terms of criteria that are neither necessary nor sufficient. See Burger, *Report*, p. 7; Sadrudin Khan and Hassan bin Talal, *Indigenous Peoples: A global quest for justice* (Zed Books, London, 1987), p. 8; UN High Commission for Human Rights, *Convention no. 169* (Geneva 1989), p. 2; Marcus Colchester, 'Indigenous rights and collective consciousness', *Anthropology Today* 18 (2003), p. 2; and Niezen, *Origins*, pp. 18–23.

17. Niezen, *Origins*, p. 21.

meeting certain cultural profiles. As such, being indigenous in Tanzania is closely tied to strategies of extraversion and 'cultural distinctiveness'.

The idea of 'cultural distinctiveness' is in turn closely tied to the putative dichotomy between African indigenous minorities and national mainstream populations. This dichotomy is essential at the international level, where the idea of a 'national mainstream' presents an implicit analogy to European-descended majorities in countries such as Canada and Australia. As such, it presents a discursive common ground between indigenous Africans and indigenous peoples from other parts of the world. Unfortunately, it also flies in the face of much of the literature on African political systems. Most African states are not controlled by 'national majorities', but by elite minorities who frequently run roughshod over the politically and economically marginal peoples who constitute the majority of their citizenry.¹⁸

The recent history of Tanzania provides an instructive example of this relationship. Between 1973 and 1976, the Tanzanian government forcefully relocated millions of rural people as part of its socialist policy of villagization without regard for their customary land tenure practices.¹⁹ When socialism ended, the impacts of displacement remained and were greatly exacerbated by the explosion of foreign investment that quickly followed in its wake.²⁰ In the early 1990s, Tanzanian president Ali Hassan Mwinyi responded to this crisis by appointing a commission of experts to assess the country's land problems and make recommendations. The commission found that 'rural folk holding land under customary tenure have no security. Their lands are under constant threat of alienation by state organs ostensibly in "the public interest" but often in favor of well-connected outsiders'.²¹

Unfortunately, the plight of these millions of impoverished rural peoples cannot be brought into focus within the conceptual parameters of the 'indigenous' frame as it is applied to Tanzania. The Tanzanian indigenous peoples' movement represents only about half a million rural Tanzanians, and it is unlikely that more than a few hundred of them actually self-identify as indigenous through participation in NGOs and international fora.²² The members of this group have combined their 'cultural distinctiveness'

18. Jean-François Bayart, *The State in Africa* (Longman, London, 1993); Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject* (Princeton University Press, Princeton NJ, 1996); Issa Shivji, 'The politics of liberalization in Tanzania', in Horace Campbell and Howard Stein (eds), *The IMF and Tanzania* (Natprint, Harare, 1991), pp. 67–85.

19. Because this relocation happened so quickly and unsystematically, precise numbers are unavailable. Estimates range from 10 to 20 million people. See Kjell Havenick, *Tanzania: The limits to development from above* (Mkuki na Nyota, Dar es Salaam, 1993), p. 47, and United Republic of Tanzania, *Report of the Presidential Commission*, p. 43.

20. Jim Igoe, *Conservation and Globalization* (Wadsworth, Riverside, CA, 2004), pp. 106–9.

21. Shivji, *Not Yet Democracy*, pp. 11–12.

22. Cf. Hodgson, 'Precarious alliances', p. 1088.

with effective external networking to gain international support for the local land struggles in which their communities are embroiled. Over time, however, this external networking has come to represent a strategy of extraversion. A small group of NGO leaders has converted access to funding and other material resources into local political influence.²³ Even within this group, the ability to claim indigenous status is far from evenly distributed, much less the connections and ability necessary to translate these claims into economic and political capital.

Advocates of African indigenous movements argue that these aspects of African indigenous movements are less important than the fact that they bring international support to marginal rural communities and help them regain their land.²⁴ Unfortunately, recent events indicate that the pursuit of such strategies in East Africa has not been successful. Cases filed by Barabaig communities against parastatal wheat farms and a case filed by a group of Maasai challenging their eviction from the Mkomazi game reserve both resulted in disappointing outcomes.²⁵ More recently, the Kenyan high court rejected a bid by the Maasai Civil Society Forum to reclaim land leased to British settlers in 1884.

Whether or not a particular category or cultural marker enjoys currency in a particular context is influenced by changes in policies, institutions, and ideologies that are occurring at multiple and interconnected levels. Illuminating the ways in which these processes are obscured by category dichotomies will require an analytical approach that engages shifting relationships of identity and inequality in different times and places and multiple scales analysis. Such an approach is also essential for understanding the salience of the indigenous category in East Africa today. Such is the central task of the following section.

From categories to processes

Understanding the relationship of bureaucratic structures to indigenous identities in East Africa is greatly facilitated by the work of Fredrick Barth. Barth's seminal work on the production and reproduction of ethnicity has had significant influence on the historical and anthropological analysis of Maasai ethnicity. Spear, for example, talks extensively about the significance of Barth's work for studies of Maasai identity politics — concluding

23. Igoe, 'Ethnicity, civil society' and Jim Igoe, 'Scaling up civil society: Donor money, NGOs, and the pastoralist land rights movement in Tanzania', *Development and Change* 34, 5 (2003), pp. 863–86.

24. See responses to Kuper's 'Return of the native', especially that by Steve Robins.

25. Dan Brockington, *Fortress Conservation* (James Currey, London, 2002); Igoe, 'Scaling up', p. 879; and Jim Igoe, 'Power and force in Tanzanian civil society', in Igoe and Kelsall (eds), *Between a Rock and a Hard Place*, p. 126.

with Barth's central insight that 'ethnicity at its most basic establishes and controls access to critical resources'.²⁶

Critics of Barth's early work emphasize that it was too localized and placed too much emphasis on ecology. In response to these critiques, and in an effort to understand this increasingly complex order, Barth suggests that we conceptualize the reproduction of ethnicity as occurring on three separate, but interrelated, levels: the micro-, median-, and macro-levels.²⁷

The micro-level is popularly known as 'the grassroots'. Here, people's experiences and relationships are shaped by social demands and cultural values. The salient feature of this level is that it is characterized by face-to-face relationships, mediated through institutions and processes that people know and understand. Regarding the macro-level, Barth originally conceptualized this as including only the state. However, this should be expanded to include transnational institutional structures such as the United Nations, the World Bank, multinational corporations, and international NGOs. This level is characterized by bureaucratic structures that operate according to rules, regulations, and funding priorities. Actors at this level control money and information that are often crucially important to indigenous communities. They also generate ideologies and discourses such as nationalism, free markets, democracy, and indigenism. Knowledge and effective use of these discourses are often a prerequisite for gaining access to money and information.

Through colonialism, capitalist expansion, and state formation, indigenous communities around the world became more and more restricted, less and less self-sufficient, and more and more dependent on macro-level structures. Furthermore, micro-level institutions were usually not suited to the articulation of local communities to global networks. Median-level structures emerged in response to this need. In many cases, Europeans imposed these structures in their efforts to render indigenous communities more amenable to 'rational administration'. In others, they emerged from the efforts of indigenous activists seeking to engage with macro-level structures. Sometimes, both occurred simultaneously. Median-level structures include tribal governments, other kinds of local government structures, and indigenous NGOs. Median-level actors are often under significant pressure to simplify the complex problems of their constituent communities in terms that make sense to macro-level actors. Because of the linkages that this level provides between 'the local' and 'the global', its role in African indigenous politics is extraordinarily important.

Barth's model is especially useful for conceptualizing the central role of indigenous leaders faced with the task of mediating between the 'grassroots'

26. Thomas Spear, 'Introduction' in Spear and Waller (eds), *Being Maasai* (James Currey, London 1993), pp. 1-18.

27. Fredrick Barth, 'Enduring and emerging issues in the analysis of ethnicity', in Hans Vermeulen and Cora Govers (eds), *The Anthropology of Ethnicity* (Het Spinhuis, Amsterdam, 1994), pp. 11-32.

and macro-level structures. The possibility of people ‘becoming indigenous’ in Tanzania reflects a convergence of events at both the micro- and macro-levels, which called forth new types of median-level structures that were initially accessible to local people and amenable to international lobbying and fund-raising activities.

Before turning to the specifics of these histories, a final aspect of Barth’s work needs to be noted here. Several of Barth’s students, influenced by his ideas of ethnic reproduction, came to see indigenous activism ‘as a subject for research and action’ in the late 1960s.²⁸ Several went on to found the International Working Group on Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA) — thereby becoming part of Barth’s macro-level. The IWGIA played a central supporting role in bringing indigenous activism to the world stage in the 1970s, leading to the creation of the UN Forum on Indigenous Issues in 2003. The IWGIA is especially significant in the context of African indigenous movements. According to its own literature, one of the organization’s central missions is to ‘stimulate indigenous self-organization’.²⁹ In 1993, representatives of Maasai NGOs participated in a workshop organized by the IWGIA and funded by the Danish foreign ministry. The purpose of this workshop was to ‘explore the status and meaning of “indigenous peoples” in an African context’.³⁰

Significantly, definitions and criteria of African indigenous peoples that emerged from this exercise are substantially similar — if not identical — to the definitions and criteria used by African indigenous activists and their Western supporters to the present day. This would be unproblematic if these exercises were a neutral process of helping certain African groups to recognize their own indigeneity and to organize around this definition according to international standards and legal mechanisms.³¹ Unfortunately, this emphasis on international standards and universal human rights misses out on the production and reproduction of inequalities and social classes that are specifically African — and the role that the ‘stimulation of indigenous self-organization’ might play in these processes. Understanding the dynamics of the Tanzanian indigenous people’s movement requires examining the roots of identities that are currently considered indigenous.

Micro-level histories

The historical and anthropological literature on the emergence of Maasai identity — and its close association with a ‘pure pastoralist ideal’ — illuminates a great deal about the prominence of Maasai leaders in the Tanzania

28. François Morin and Bernard d’Anglure, ‘Ethnicity as a political tool for indigenous peoples’, in Govers and Vermuelen (eds), *The Politics of Ethnic Consciousness* (MacMillan Press, London, 1997), p. 161.

29. IWGIA, ‘Editorial’, *Indigenous Affairs* 3 (1998), p. 4.

30. Veber and Waehle, ‘Introduction’, *Never Drink*, p. 5.

31. *Report of the International Commission*, p. 101.

indigenous peoples' movement and even in regional indigenous initiatives for eastern and southern Africa.

The ideal of people living exclusively from livestock keeping has always been difficult to achieve and tenuous to maintain. Nevertheless, it remains an essential element of Maasai identity, especially as projected to outsiders. Significantly, definitions of indigenous Africans always stress that they are pastoralists and hunter/gatherers. In Tanzania, especially, there can be no doubt that the pastoral ideal dominates the movement, even though increasing numbers of Maasai now practice agriculture — and many have for generations. Although hunting and gathering are also invoked in definitions of indigeneity, hunter/gatherers are not well represented in the movement (discussed below).

This pastoral ideal emerged in the regional cultural economy of East Africa some time in the late eighteenth century. The possibility of specialized pastoralism appears to have emerged during this period through innovations in weaponry and social organization.³² These innovations gave some groups advantages in controlling coveted pasture and water resource in the central Rift Valley. It also allowed them to launch successful raids against neighbouring groups, thereby continuously increasing the size of their herds.

It is likely that Maasai identity began to emerge in the context of these struggles, as struggles between Maa-speaking groups culminated in a series of conflicts remembered as The Iloikop Wars.³³ Four central alliances (Kisongo, Purko, Loitai, and Kaputei) emerged victorious from these struggles. By the time of European contact, these central alliances had emerged as a single ethnic block known as the Maasai.³⁴ Maa-speaking groups excluded from the Central Rift had been consigned to the dubious category of agro-pastoral Iloikop.³⁵ Tanzanian descendents of the Iloikop include the agro-pastoral Arusha, who occupy the lower slopes of Mount Meru, and Parakuyo pastoralists and agro-pastoralists, who occupy the margins of the Rift Valley as far south as the Tanzania–Zambia border.³⁶

The Barabaig, meanwhile, paraded their status as 'pure pastoralists' under a different ethnic banner. As such, they represented an alternative locus of the pastoral ideal, beyond the control of the dominant Maasai. This unique position earned them the special status of *Il Magnati* (enemy),

32. J.E.G. Sutton, 'Becoming Maasailand' and John Galaty, 'Maasai expansionism and new East African Pastoralism', both in Spear and Waller, *Being Maasai*, pp. 3–60; 61–86.

33. Richard Waller, 'The lords of East Africa: The Maasai in the mid-19th century' (Cambridge University, unpublished PhD dissertation, 1976), p. 277.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 115.

35. Galaty, 'Maasai expansionism'.

36. The distinction between 'pure' Maasai and Iloikop remains a point of contention within the Tanzanian indigenous peoples' movement. This is somewhat ironic, because Kisongo groups, who have come to dominate the Tanzanian indigenous peoples' movement, have become increasingly dependent on agriculture.

a situation that culminated with the near extermination of the Barabaig by the Maasai in the nineteenth century.³⁷

At the time of European contact, in the mid-nineteenth century, 'pure pastoralism' represented the epitome of wealth in East Africa and livestock represented the central currency of exchange in the regional cultural economy.³⁸ The Maasai had emerged as one of the most militarily and economically dominant groups in the region. Influential men from agricultural groups strove to accumulate cattle and redefined themselves as Maasai through intermarriage or interethnic trading networks.³⁹

This situation resulted in what Spear has termed Maasai cultural hegemony. In the introduction to *Being Maasai*, he argues:

The symbolic opposition (between pastoralism and other livelihood systems) inherent in establishing Maasai cultural hegemony represented more than a simple means of identifying and reinforcing pastoral values; it also represented a way of controlling limited pastoral resources and the ability to manage them.⁴⁰

Significantly, this control also depended on access to resources and people outside the pastoral economy. It might be necessary to cultivate relationships with neighbouring groups for trade purposes and the recruitment of additional warriors. During a downturn in the pastoral economy, it might also be necessary to be absorbed by agricultural and hunter/gather groups. As such, the maintenance of 'Maasai cultural hegemony' depended on cultural exclusion and social inclusion: 'Hegemony and homogeneity thus operated hand in hand; the one controlling access to resources within pastoral society the other facilitating access to resources from outside'.⁴¹

The arrival of Europeans in the 1890s marked a major change in the micro-level dynamics of East African identity politics. Colonial policies of indirect rule profoundly transformed pre-colonial identity categories by segregating Africans into rigidly bounded 'native reserves'.⁴² Control of natural resources became increasingly dependent on connections to powerful outsiders, whereas the importance of natural resources dwindled over time as they became overshadowed by other resources doled out by the colonial state and the bureaucracies of international aid. Struggles within and between ethnic groups increasingly became struggles over the connections necessary for access to these kinds of resources. The relative position of

37. Charles Lane, *Pastures Lost* (IIED, London, 1996).

38. Gavin Kitching, *Class and Economic Change in Kenya* (Yale University Press, New Haven, CT, 1980).

39. Alan Jacobs, *The Irrigation Agriculture Maasai of Pagasi* (Makerere Institute of Social Science, Kampala 1968) and Richard Waller, 'Acceptees and aliens', in Spear and Waller, *Being Maasai*.

40. Spear, 'Introduction', *Being Maasai*.

41. *Ibid.*

42. Robert Tignor, *The Colonial Transformation of Kenya* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 1979) and Hodgson, *Once Intrepid Warriors*.

ethnic groups in contemporary East Africa therefore reflects to a large extent their effectiveness (or lack thereof) of pursuing strategies of extraversion over time.

In the 1920s, influential Maasai elders used their positions in the Maasai Native Authority to gain access to colonial water projects. Controlling these projects also allowed them to control other natural resources and to enrich themselves in the process.⁴³ Towards the end of the colonial period, elders groomed promising youth to become government leaders. One of them, Edward Sokoine, went on to become prime minister of Tanzania in the early 1980s.⁴⁴ As a member of parliament Sokoine wielded considerable power through the \$23 million Maasai Rangeland Project, which protected his constituents from the kind of gross displacement experienced by other ethnic groups during villagization in the 1970s.⁴⁵ Most recently, NGOs have become a new institutional vehicle for protecting natural resources and engaging in strategies of extraversion.⁴⁶

The Barabaig, by contrast, were not well situated to engage in strategies of extraversion. Because of their defeat at the hands of the Maasai, they were neither attractive allies nor a potential threat to colonial administrators. Consequently, the Barabaig were excluded from the ethnic bureaucracy set up by the British when they took over in 1916. Colonel George Wilson observed that this placed the Barabaig at a disadvantage:

Unlike their brother pastoralists, the Maasai, the Barabaig have no vast area protected and preserved for them by the government. This is obviously due to their wide scattering and lack of indigenous political organisation, which the Maasai have through their age-sets and Laibons (prophets).⁴⁷

This situation continued after independence. While the Maasai were targeted for a multi-million dollar rangeland project, the Barabaig had their land taken over by the Tanzanian government for large wheat farms that were funded by the Canadian government. In 1967 and again in 1976, they were subject to collective punishment, under which hundreds of Barabaig were incarcerated without trial solely on the basis of their ethnicity.⁴⁸ During villagization, they were resettled, their houses were burned, and according to one Barabaig leader, people 'were beaten like donkeys'.⁴⁹

43. Personal communication from anthropologist Alan Jacobs. Jacobs worked with the Maasai in both Kenya and Tanzania, from the late 1950s to the mid-1970s, including as senior anthropologist for the Maasai Rangeland Project. Also Hodgson, *Once Intrepid Warriors*.

44. Sokoine died in a car accident in 1984. Foul play is still widely suspected.

45. Alan Jacobs, personal communication.

46. For a full account, see Igoe, 'Ethnicity, civil society' and Igoe, 'Scaling up'.

47. George Wilson, 'The Tatoga of Tanganyika, Part One'. *Tanganyika Notes and Records*, 1952, p. 43.

48. Lane, *Pastures Lost* and Igoe, 'Power and force'.

49. Charles Lane, 'Alienation of Barabaig pasture land' (PhD, University of Sussex, 1991), p. 50.

In 1981, Barabaig leaders filed an unsuccessful suit against the Tanzanian government in an effort to assert their land rights against the expanding wheat farms. In spite of this activism, the Barabaig initially lacked the necessary connections and resources to establish their own NGOs.⁵⁰

This brief history presents an example of two groups who are today culturally distinct, but whose distinctiveness has emerged from very different historical experiences. Because of their position, the Maasai were sometimes able to use their 'cultural distinctiveness' to advantage in strategies of extraversion, while for the Barabaig it has always been a liability. In fact, culturally distinct groups, such as the Barabaig and the Hadzabe, have depended heavily on Maasai connections in defining themselves as indigenous over the past 20 years. As the following section will demonstrate, this situation represents significant continuity in Maasai strategies of including members of other ethnic groups in their fold in order to gain access to important outside resources.

Before turning to median-level histories, it is important to re-acknowledge the large numbers of people who fell through the cracks of the colonial project to pigeonhole Africans into ethnic boxes. These were usually people who were displaced by private estates and government development schemes, a process that continues today. According to non-Maasai elders in my research areas, members of these groups frequently wound up working for the Maasai in colonial public work projects. Maasai elders would pay them a wage to do their work for them, which reinforced the perceptions of colonial officers that the Maasai were noble and that non-Maasai peasants were of little account.⁵¹ This legacy of this historical displacement has been the proliferation of ethnically mixed landless or land-poor communities. These people lack the language, connections, and 'cultural distinctiveness' that would mark them as indigenous, but by no means are they 'modernized' or 'assimilated'.

Macro-level histories

In order to understand how all of these processes and trends culminated in the emergence of the Tanzanian indigenous peoples' movement, and why this movement includes some people but not others, it is necessary also to examine macro-level structures and how they have changed over time.

Colonial policies of indirect rule and assimilation armed select members of colonized groups with knowledge of the ideas and institutions that defined the terms of their colonization. Stung by the obvious contradictions

50. Igoe, 'Power and force'.

51. Cf. Hodgson, *Once Intrepid Warriors*. This arrangement continues to the present day, as Maasai in ethnically mixed communities contribute money instead of labour to village development projects.

between Western ideals of citizenship and legal rights, on the one hand, and the treatment of their people by European settlers, on the other, these 'native intellectuals' lobbied distant imperial authorities to resolve these contradictions and secure a better position for their people in emerging colonial societies.⁵² What makes African groups unique in this respect is the pervasiveness of extraversion and aid dependence in African politics, the types of median-level structures they have used to access the global indigenous peoples' movement, and the fact that they have only recently become part of this movement.

The global indigenous peoples' movement itself is in large part the product of persistent lobbying of international bodies by indigenous activists throughout the twentieth century. In the years following World War II, this lobbying influenced the creation of international laws designed to promote indigenous sovereignty.⁵³ In 1974, indigenous leaders from North America, Greenland, Colombia, Scandinavia, Australia, and New Zealand converged at a conference in Guyana that spawned The World Council of Indigenous Peoples (WCIP), the first of 11 indigenous NGOs with official UN consultative status.⁵⁴ These groups were instrumental in establishing the Permanent UN Forum on Indigenous Issues in 2003 as well as the International Decade of Indigenous Peoples (1994–2004).

African and Asian groups were notably absent from these early events and activities. According to the official history of the WCIP, African and Asian groups were 'omitted for practical organizational reasons' from the events that created this organization.⁵⁵ However, the leader of a team representing indigenous interests in the UN also noticed a 'disinclination by indigenous peoples in the Americas to recognize that tribal peoples in Asia share many of their demands'.⁵⁶ That African indigenous identity was not even on the map at this time reflected the very different trajectories of African activists during the formative years of 'indigenous internationalism'. African activists directed their efforts towards international audiences, but towards different ends.

This difference in trajectory is illustrated by the careers of Jomo Kenyatta and Julius Nyerere, the first presidents of Kenya and Tanzania, respectively. Throughout the 1930's, Kenyatta presented African grievances to the British government. He also wrote numerous articles in British newspapers, as well as his influential ethnography, *Facing Mount Kenya*, in which he argued that his ethnic group, the Gikuyu, was ready for self-government.⁵⁷

52. Douglas Sanders, *Background Information to the World Council of Indigenous Peoples* (Fourth World Documentation Project, Lethbridge, 1980).

53. See Niezen, *Origins*.

54. Sanders, *Background*.

55. *Ibid*, p. 200.

56. Burger, *Report*, also Niezen, *Origins*, p. 167.

57. Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya* (Secker and Warburg, London, 1937).

His efforts contributed significantly to the national movement that brought about Kenyan independence in 1964.⁵⁸ In neighbouring Tanganyika, Julius Nyerere was also busy lobbying distant international bureaucracies. Educated in Britain like Kenyatta, Nyerere was also a master of convincing international audiences that his people were capable of running their own affairs. He directed his efforts to the UN, which granted Tanganyikan independence in 1961.

Kenyatta and Nyerere were a source of inspiration to nascent indigenous movements emerging in North America in the 1960s. Leaders of these movements looked to newly independent third-world countries as beacons of hope for colonized peoples everywhere. George Manuel, president of the National Indian Brotherhood of Canada, travelled to Tanzania in 1971 as a guest at the country's tenth anniversary celebration.⁵⁹ He then became a founder of the WCIP and a key figure in the global indigenous people's movement.

Manuel enjoyed a personal audience with Nyerere and was profoundly influenced by his ideology of *Ujamaa* (familyhood). *Ujamaa* strongly influenced his conceptualization of an 'indigenous fourth world', which lies at the heart of the global indigenous peoples' movement. 'Neither right nor left', this world represents a unique path built exclusively on indigenous values and ideas.⁶⁰

It is ironic therefore that *Ujamaa's* imperative of national unity did not extend to the very Tanzanians who would later be recognized as indigenous. Manuel's visit to Tanzania coincided with the displacement of the Barabaig from their traditional homeland at the hands of the *Ujamaa* government. Although these actions clearly violated Nyerere's doctrine of equality for all Tanzanians, they were essentially invisible to outside observers.⁶¹

The invisibility of the Barabaig struggle in the early 1970s is indicative of a global ideological *zeitgeist* that looked to nation-states as a 'new source of identity, power, and dignity'.⁶² However, it was actually the decline of the Tanzanian state that opened the doors for the internationalization of the Barabaig struggle⁶³ and the later emergence of the Tanzanian indigenous peoples' movement.⁶⁴ By the early-1980s, growing concern over the apparent ineffectiveness of third-world governments was moving international policy away from state-centered development. These changes were reflected in

58. Oginga Odinga, *Not Yet Uhuru* (Hill and Wang, New York, 1967).

59. Sanders, *Background*, p. 14.

60. Raging Blakkindian Dub, *Understanding the Connections between Black and Aboriginal Peoples* (The Fire Next Time, Toronto, 2002).

61. Lane, *Pastures Lost*, and Igoe, 'Power and force'.

62. Niezen, *Origins*, p. 17.

63. Igoe, 'Power and force'.

64. Igoe, 'Ethnicity, civil society' and Igoe, 'Scaling up'.

new policy agendas, which brought significant pressure on the Tanzanian government to abandon *Ujamaa* in favour of free market capitalism. This shift simultaneously opened Tanzania's economy to foreign investors in ways that accelerated the alienation of land from local communities, while also opening new political spaces that allowed Maasai and Barabaig leaders to mobilize local people to resist land alienation. This resistance became the foundation for the Tanzanian indigenous peoples' movement.

The rise of the Tanzanian indigenous peoples' movement from the ashes of *Ujamaa* was therefore much more than the spontaneous expression of some sort of essential indigeneity. Rather, it represented a shift in the articulation of long-standing strategies of extraversion with a rapidly changing geopolitical context. This process was also facilitated by changes in progressive development theories that were abandoning ideas of the liberating state in favour of new social movements paradigms, which looked to diverse and scattered grassroots movements for the liberation of the world's marginal peoples.⁶⁵ Finally, it was ultimately made possible by the transformation of median-level structures, as aid to Africa became contingent upon the promotion of local NGOs.⁶⁶ These changes coincided with a flourishing of Maasai and Barabaig NGOs in the early 1990s.⁶⁷

Median-level histories

Africa's recent NGO explosion has created a new type of median-level structure, which is often more decentralized, accessible, and flexible than previous ones. In direct contrast to Nyerere's imperative of national unity and sameness, NGO structures allowed for movements based on conflict and diversity. 'Cultural distinctiveness' gained new currency in East African identity politics, as Western donors lined up to fund initiatives that were clearly outside the realm of the state.⁶⁸

Because they are so clearly outside of the realm of the state, however, Tanzanian indigenous NGOs are also at odds with the idea of indigenous nations. Leaders of indigenous NGOs in Tanzania are for the most part self-selected. They are not popularly elected and are usually not traditional leaders. As such, they do not officially represent specific peoples in the same way as the indigenous representatives who founded the UN Forum on Indigenous Issues.⁶⁹ Furthermore, they are not demanding special nation-to-nation relationships with the Tanzanian government. Unlike indigenous leaders from most parts of the world, who are demanding special treatment

65. D.H. Sheth, 'Alternative development as political practice', *Alternatives* 12 (1987), pp. 155-71.

66. Igoe and Kelsall, 'Introduction', in *Between a Rock and a Hard Place*.

67. Igoe, 'Ethnicity, civil society'.

68. Igoe, 'Scaling up'.

69. See Niezen, *Origins*.

for their peoples, indigenous NGOs in Tanzania are seeking equal treatment for their people as Tanzanian citizens.⁷⁰ At the international level, by contrast, indigenous NGO leaders do receive special treatment as a result of their 'cultural distinctiveness'. As such, they are able to bring crucial resources to local land struggles. NGOs have allowed Tanzanian indigenous activists to pursue strategies of bypassing the state directly to the international level.

As they gained recognition from Western donors, however, indigenous NGOs in Tanzania began to change. Urban workshops and international activism moved NGO leaders away from their communities. More and more of their time was taken up with grant writing, accounting, and managing increasingly large, bureaucratic NGOs. Local people complained that they were no longer connected to the NGOs that were ostensibly working on their behalf.⁷¹ As a result of this dynamic, the self-identification of NGO leaders at the international level has not translated neatly local perceptions of 'being indigenous' in the sense that Western human rights activists understand the term. This raises a fundamental question of whether people can be members of a 'self-ascribed polythetic class' without knowing it exists.

Furthermore, Western donors were looking to scale-up indigenous NGOs in order to make them more effective at what they did and easier to fund.⁷² NGO leaders also felt that they would be effective if they joined forces in their fight for community control of natural resources and cultural autonomy.

In 1994, Maasai and Barabaig NGO leaders established a forum known as PINGOs, which they described as a 'loose coalition of like minded pastoralist and hunter/gatherer community based organisations'.⁷³ Donors responded enthusiastically, funding the construction of a PINGOs advocacy centre in the city of Arusha. The centre became the main venue for meetings and donor visits. Barabaig leaders initially joined the Tanzanian indigenous peoples' movement as a branch of an established Maasai NGO. It was not until 1994 that they were able to establish an independent Barabaig NGO outside of Maasai control, the same year they joined PINGOs Forum. The Hadzabe, also members of PINGOs, had even more difficulty establishing viable independent NGOs.

Barabaig founders of PINGOs expressed concern that Maasai NGO leaders needed them in PINGOs in order to establish the forum as a 'legitimately indigenous' coalition but that this coalition was not an equal one.

70. Igoe, 'Ethnicity, civil society'. The situation is also slightly different in Kenya, where Maasai leaders demanded the government recognize their treaties with the British.

71. Igoe, 'Scaling up'.

72. *Ibid.*

73. PINGOs, 'Minutes of the session', 5 March 1994 (PINGOs, Arusha).

They complained that Maasai NGO leaders made a superficial show of interethnic harmony and participation, while dominating PINGOs and its activities. They felt that a handful of Maasai NGO leaders monopolized PINGOs' funding and communication with donor organizations. Finally, Barabaig leaders were dismayed to learn that the PINGOs newspaper was to be called *Voice of the Maasai*.⁷⁴ PINGOs has since been revamped and, by all accounts, is now more inclusive. However, Barabaig leaders still complain of their marginal position within the forum.⁷⁵ If Barabaig leaders felt themselves to be marginal in PINGOs, Hadzabe leaders were virtually absent. Observers of Hadzabe NGOs have expressed concern that Maasai leaders are exploiting these organizations to bolster their marketability as indigenous peoples.⁷⁶ San hunter/gatherers in Namibia have also complained of Maasai dominating regional indigenous events.⁷⁷

Ironically, it has actually become possible for indigenous elites to expropriate the marginalization of other groups to their own ends.

Conclusion

Like other indigenous peoples around the world, groups such as the Maasai and the Barabaig have experienced discrimination, displacement, and the loss of land and natural resources on which their cultural identities depend. At other scales of analysis, however, the description of these groups as part of an 'international underclass or underethnicity'⁷⁸ becomes more problematic. For example, it cannot account for the internal dynamics of median-level structures, where ideological 'package deals' of Tanzanian indigenism are produced and where some groups are more indigenous than others. It also cannot account for historical processes of ethnocide, which have created marginal groups who do not appear as indigenous. In short, it does not account for the complex interplay of difference and inequality in contemporary Tanzania, because those who lack a clear ethnic identity cannot even claim membership in an international underclass.

Some proponents of African indigenous peoples' movements argue that this type of analysis is destructive, because it undermines African indigenous struggles over land, identity, and self-determination. Unfortunately, this position obscures fundamental dynamics of power and inequality, especially the central importance of extraversion and aid dependence to

74. Igoe, 'Ethnicity, civil society'.

75. Cf. Hodgson, 'Precarious alliances'.

76. Ndagala and Woodburn, personal communication. Daniel Ndagala is the Commissioner of Culture for the Government of Tanzania. James Woodburn is an anthropologist who has worked closely with the Hadzabe Survival Council of Tanzania.

77. Personal communication by James Suzman, an anthropologist who has worked closely with San activists in Namibia. Also see James Suzman, 'Kalahari conundrums', *Before Farming* 4 (2002), pp. 1–10.

78. Niezen, *Origins*, p. 11.

politics throughout the continent. The most fundamental inequality in Africa is between the small minority of elites who are able to access structures of international aid and the vast majority of people who cannot. This class division, which frequently cuts across ethnic differences, is best conceptualized as the divide between development insiders and development outsiders, whose 'expectations of modernity' have been dashed to the point where they are no longer tenable.⁷⁹

While the value of cultural difference in East African identity politics has waxed and waned according to historical circumstance, effective strategies of extraversion have remained consistently important. Having the traditions and connections necessary to engage in strategies of extraversion has allowed the Maasai to turn their cultural distinctiveness into political and symbolic capital whenever the opportunity has arisen.

Significantly, however, Maasai have also been effective at gaining access to state structures, even during periods when cultural distinctiveness carries little political currency. Often this access is negotiated by strategically invoking the idea of Maasai as people who embrace modernization. Edward Sokoine, prime minister of Tanzania in the 1980s, is one example. Across the border in Kenya, in the late 1990s, two Maasai held prestigious posts in the presidential cabinet: Vice-President George Saitoti and William ole Ntimama.⁸⁰ It is important to note, however, that the success of individuals at gaining access to these structures does not benefit all — or even most — of the members of their groups.

Dichotomies invoked by strategies of extraversion effectively exclude large numbers of African people, while obscuring the divide between 'development insiders' and 'development outsiders'. In such a context, categories like 'indigenous peoples' do little to address, and sometimes exacerbate, relationships of power and inequality. Obviously, there are no simple solutions to such complex problems. However, addressing them will begin with choices that run counter to institutionalized relationships of dependency, hegemony, and exploitation. These will require more nuanced understandings of identity and inequality that may potentially undermine the kind of strategic essentialism that lies at the heart of indigenous politics and NGO fund-raising. Nevertheless, such understandings are a prerequisite for local control of decision-making structures and natural

79. James Ferguson, *Expectations of Modernity* (University of California Press, Berkeley, CA, 1998).

80. Professor George Saitoti, although raised in a Maasai area, is of mixed descent (Maasai and Kikuyu). As the historical material presented in this article illustrates that, however, many people who consider themselves culturally Maasai are not 'pure' Maasai. Saitoti's ambiguous ethnic status has been periodically used against him by Maasai politicians — including ole Ntimama. However, Ntimama was quick to support Saitoti in 2001, when it appeared that Saitoti would succeed Moi as president of Kenya. Both men are still actively involved in national politics.

resources, which would fulfill the spirit, if not the imagined constituency, of the global indigenous peoples' movement.

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