

# Local Responses to the Ethnic Geography of Colonialism in the Gusii Highlands of British-Ruled Kenya

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**Abstract.** In an effort to generate labor, protect European settler interests, and rationalize administration, the Kenyan imperial regime sought to impose a new ethnic geography on the African majority that confined communities to specific “native reserves” based on their supposed ethnicity. Theoretically, each “tribe” had a “homeland” that the state set aside for their exclusive use. Problems developed when more populous ethnic groups outgrew their assigned reserves and coveted the territory of European settler farmers in the “white highlands” and that of less populous tribes. The resulting “infiltration,” or illegal movement between the reserves, threatened the rationalizing ethnic geography of colonialism. This covert migration put British authorities in a difficult position. They wanted to encourage cross-border settlement to relieve population (and thus political) pressure in the overcrowded reserves, but the unchecked movement of people threatened to break down tribal divisions, thereby undermining a vital cornerstone of indirect rule. In an attempt to balance these conflicting commitments, colonial officials developed a policy of interpenetration in the late 1940s that allowed migrants to settle in sparsely populated reserves if they were legally “adopted” into the tribe of their hosts. This article shows how interpenetration proved unworkable in the Gusii reserve as illegal Kikuyu settlers and their Gusii hosts invented, adapted, and blurred distinctions of identity to circumvent and exploit the imperial regime’s official ethnic geography. This ethnic creativity in a specific community in western Kenya shows that colonial efforts to determine the physical and imagined tribal boundaries merely set the scene for African identity creation in the twentieth century. In practice, Kenyan identities in the late-colonial era were more flexible, adaptable, and informal than either tribally focused colonial ethnographies or the scholarly literature on identity formation would suggest.

South Nyanza District, Kenya Colony and Protectorate,  
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Standing out defiantly at a public gathering in the Gusii highlands of western Kenya in the waning days of 1948, Nashon Kamau and approximately fifty other men took a considerable risk, boldly declaring that they were outsiders and not members of the local Gusii community. Nashon Kamau openly proclaimed that he was a Kikuyu and a former squatter who had purchased a farm in the Gusii native reserve from a local chief for 1,190 shillings. This was technically illegal for a number of reasons. First, Kenyan colonial law marked out territory for the exclusive use of specific “tribes,” which meant that there was no room for Kikuyu interlopers like Nashon Kamau in the Gusii reserve. More significantly, British imperial doctrine held that African land was collective tribal property and could not be transferred to individuals, much less outsiders, by commercial sale. So although the Gusii themselves were busy enclosing what was supposedly tribal land at this time, Nashon Kamau had no legal claim to his farm and was technically guilty of tribal trespassing. Nonetheless, the British authorities were willing to overlook these transgressions if the small Kikuyu enclave became Gusii tribesmen through a process of adoption. Nashon Kamau was having none of it. Scorning the imperial regime’s tribal policies and alluding to its seizure of part of the Kikuyu reserves for European settlement, he brazenly declared: “[The] government should give me my father’s land in Kikuyu, if not, I will stay here, but I will not agree to do any kind of communal work nor be absorbed into the Kisii tribe.”<sup>1</sup>

The defiance of this highly vulnerable Kikuyu community raises a number of significant questions about the nature of identity in colonial Kenya. Nashon Kamau and his fellows could have acquired a significant measure of security by agreeing to become Gusii, but instead they loudly asserted an explicitly confrontational conception of Kikuyuness. In doing so, they risked criminal prosecution and deportation back to their own tense and dangerously overcrowded home reserves. Their insistence on defining themselves as Kikuyu suggests that the colonially sponsored assimilation process was more onerous than it appeared, but there is also convincing evidence that a much larger number of Kikuyu migrants did in fact become adopted Gusii. Consequently, it stands to reason that the fifty or so people who adamantly insisted on remaining Kikuyu had good reason for defying the ethnic geography of imperial Kenya. In rejecting collectivist Gusii tribal authority, they asserted their right to acquire and own land as private property and implicitly staked a claim to individual social and political rights on a par with those of the European settler community.

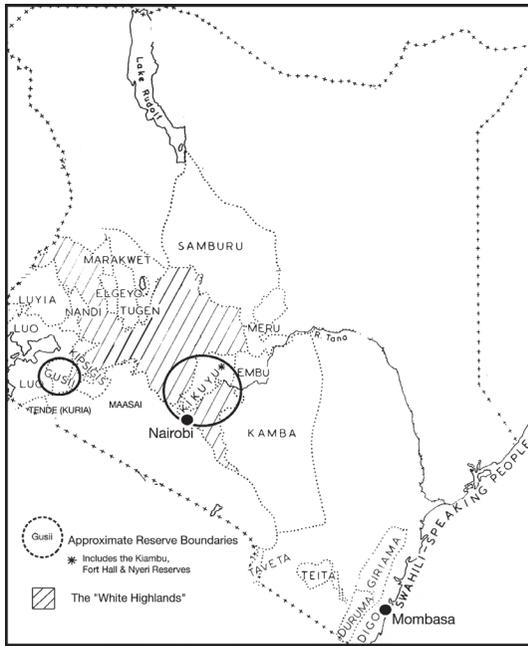


Fig. 1. Map showing British administrators' sharply defined and demarcated tribal units. Created by the author

### Imaging and Re-imaging Tribes in British Africa

At the very least, the experiences of Kikuyu migrants in the Gusii reserve called into question the imperial regime's most fundamental assumptions about the tribal nature of African identity and society. Faced with a range of fluid and often overlapping ethnicities after the British East Africa Company's conquest of Kenya in the late nineteenth century, British administrators sought to make imperial rule practical and rational by segregating their African subjects into sharply defined and demarcated tribal units (fig. 1). In theory, tribesmen lived in distinct and bounded native reserves. Although westerners often imagined that African identities were almost primordial in their rigidity and permanency, in reality the peoples of preconquest Kenya could acquire new identities via commerce, intermarriage, enslavement, adoption, or migration. By official imperial thinking, however, the primary basis of African identity was fixed, communal, and corporate rather than individual. This made tribes the basic building blocks of British rule

in Kenya. Ethnographically inclined district officers concluded that each tribe had a common language, uniform social institutions, and established customary laws arising from a perception of shared kinship. Assuming that African communities were inherently primitive, these classically trained British administrators, who tended to view twentieth-century Africans through the prism of imperial Rome, conceived of a tribe as a lower political and social order that was less than a nation.<sup>2</sup>

The African tribe was a useful fiction that legitimized the British policy of co-opting local institutions of authority. Making it the basic unit of administration, education, labor, jurisprudence, and most importantly, land tenure, compelled Africans from all walks of life to frame their aspirations for accumulation, social status, and security in similar terms. Chiefs, mission school graduates, and other ethnic brokers found sharply defined boundaries of tribal identity useful in disciplining members of the group and creating seductively powerful networks of patronage.

For the past three decades, historians have used the interlinked concepts of manufactured tribalism and invented tradition to explain this phenomenon of identity formation during the colonial era. Putting his finger on the cornerstone of British rule in Tanganyika, John Iliffe made the now famous observation that “the British wrongly believed that Tanganyikans belonged to tribes; Tanganyikans created tribes to function within the colonial framework.”<sup>3</sup> Yet there are risks in overstating the ability of both elite African cultural brokers and the colonial authorities to create entirely new ethnicities. Identity cannot be imposed exclusively from above. In an influential article in the *Journal of African History*, Thomas Spear rightly questioned the extent to which African tribal identities were entirely colonial fabrications by pointing out that many had prequest roots and survived in the national era. In noting that most communities believe strongly in the antiquity and coherency of their identities, Jonathan Friedman deemed the doctrine of invented tradition a “double-edged sword that criticizes the assumptions of cultural continuity while implicitly reprimanding those who would identify with such cultural fantasies today.” Furthermore, like-minded scholars have also emphasized that the “constructivist” assumptions that underpin theories of invented tribalism and tradition simplify the role of African individuals in identity formation and vastly overestimate the power and reach of the colonial state.<sup>4</sup>

Still, Nashon Kamau’s defiance suggests that identities were indeed reworked, reimagined, and sometimes even invented in colonial Kenya. Prequest markers of ethnicity were the raw material for the creation of tribes, but they also limited the scope of the processes of invention. New

tribes could not simply be whipped up from scratch; they had to have some relevance to the tribesmen themselves to be truly viable. The contrasting Kikuyu and Gusii identities that framed Nashon Kamau's defiance drew on languages, shared cultural institutions, and collective memories that were rooted in the nineteenth century. On the other hand, it is clear that pre-conquest Kenyan ethnicities acquired new, if not radically new, meanings under British rule, and much of the "tribal custom" that framed colonial-era conceptions of Kikuyuness and Gusiuness were recent innovations. In pointing out the blurred and often contradictory academic interpretations of identity, Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper advocate paying explicit attention to the processes "through which persons sharing some categorical attribute come to share definitions of their predicament, understandings of their interest, and a readiness to undertake collective action."<sup>5</sup>

In the Kenyan context, this means focusing on the ways in which vulnerabilities created by the colonial regime's dissolution of pre-conquest state systems and social institutions sparked a need for individuals—ranging from cooperative tribal chiefs to defiant outsiders like Nashon Kamau—to redefine themselves in new and much more sharply bounded ways to establish moral order in the new and more narrowly defined communities.<sup>6</sup> While the colonial state lacked the means to delineate tribal identities summarily, it created both a physical and a discursive arena for identity formation in which administrators, missionaries, European settlers, African elites, and ordinary people vied with each other to define the nature of colonial ethnicity. The British may have introduced a tribal vocabulary into Kenya by linking law, civil society, and most importantly, space with communal identities, but they did not and could not teach their subjects what to say.

The stakes in this contest were high; winning the privilege of defining the bounds and meaning of identity brought considerable rewards. The colonial Kenyan state needed neat and sharply defined ethnicities to facilitate native administration and justify its policy of granting rights to collective tribes rather than to African individuals. From the African standpoint, setting the boundaries of tribal identity disciplined members of the group, organized them to confront rivals, and formed the basis of social welfare. Conversely, these same identity traits could define and exclude strangers. As will be seen in the case of the Kikuyu community in the Gusii reserve, belonging became essential in an era when tribesmen had no legal standing as individuals in the eyes of the colonial state. The most secure people in the colonial era were those who were deeply ensconced within the safe folds of a state-recognized tribal community; the most vulnerable were wanderers like Nashon Kamau and his compatriots who strayed across physical and

ethnic boundaries. Those who would not or could not define themselves as tribesmen within an appropriate tribal space faced marginalization, if not outright persecution, by both the Kenyan state and its tribal allies.

### The Native Reserve System in Theory and Practice

Imperial rule explicitly linked physical space with identity and belonging. Creating a sharply defined geography of tribalism, the Kenyan authorities confined Africans to specific native reserves demarcated for the tribe's exclusive use. These tribal enclaves became ethnic niches that stimulated and nurtured the creation and reinterpretation of identity. Colonial officials claimed the native reserve system protected fragile and unsophisticated primitive societies from exploitation by preventing unscrupulous speculators from duping simple tribesmen into selling land that was actually the collective property of the tribe. The reserves thus allowed the imperial regime to depict itself as the enlightened trustee of backward peoples, but in reality their primary purpose was to facilitate colonial administration, protect European settler interests, and generate low-cost labor. In the early 1930s, 86 percent of all Africans were crowded into reserves comprising only 22 percent of the colony's arable land.<sup>7</sup> Those who could no longer make a living through agriculture or pastoralism had to leave the reserves as migrant laborers or squatters on European settler farms, but the state sought to ensure that they remained tribalized by requiring them to carry a registration certificate known as a *kipande* that listed their tribe and the precise spaces where they could live and work.

Problems developed in the 1930s and 1940s when the more populous communities outgrew their assigned spaces and began to migrate illegally to territory in less crowded neighboring reserves. Many senior Kenyan administrators were ready to abet and legitimize these population shifts as a way to stabilize and rationalize the reserve system by relieving pressure in the most densely settled native locations. Yet unregulated ethnic trespassing threatened to break down tribal divisions, thereby undermining a vital cornerstone of colonial control and administration. Moreover, the Kenyan government had painted itself into a corner when it assured the self-appointed humanitarian protectors of native interests in metropolitan Britain that it held the reserves in trust for simple tribal peoples who lacked the sophistication to manage their land by themselves. This meant that colonial administrators could not simply redraw reserve boundaries to better reflect the demographic realities of the interwar era. Their certainty that Africans lived in sharply bound tribal communities justified their enlightened despotism, but it also committed them to protecting tribal land. Western com-

mercial interests and entrepreneurially minded European settlers, who were not bound by the same paternalistic obligations, often complained that the imperial regime's insistence on holding the reserves inviolate blocked the economic progress of the colony by putting these lands off limits to development.

In an attempt to resolve these contradictions, colonial officials sought to introduce an element of flexibility into the native reserve system by developing a policy of interpenetration that allowed migrants to settle in sparsely populated reserves if they were legally adopted into the tribe of their hosts. This explains how Nashon Kamau and his fellow Kikuyu "infiltrators" could have gained legal permission to remain in the Gusii reserve by officially becoming Gusii. The Kenyan authorities thus tacitly acknowledged the fictive nature of colonial ethnicity. Their land policies were shaped primarily by worries that the free movement of people would lead to chaotic "detrribalization" that would complicate local administration, make nonsense of the collectivist legitimizing ideologies of British rule, and threaten the security of white tenure in the central highlands. They therefore urgently looked for ways to allow sanctioned migration without weakening the viability of the tribal units that were central components of Kenyan society. Their desperation was born from the realization that they lacked the means to bar large numbers of Africans from moving about the colony. While unfortunate individuals like Nashon Kamau might face criminal prosecution, the Kenyan authorities' only option was to resort to mass deportation when they encountered trespassing on a communal scale. This was a temporary measure at best, as individuals and groups invariably returned to regions that offered the greatest opportunities for a secure subsistence and economic advancement.

The collection of ethnicity-based land policies that British officials grouped under the heading of interpenetration were a pragmatic attempt to systematize what they could not fully control. To a large degree, they were caught in a trap of their own making. By linking land and tribe, they created a dangerously inflexible administrative framework that could not accommodate population growth, class formation, the commercialization of agriculture and pastoralism, and land privatization. Senior officials spoke optimistically about setting in motion a gradual process of social evolution that would eventually produce "a native of East Africa" who could find a home in any reserve.<sup>8</sup> But until this idealized generic tribesman came into being, interpenetration was their attempt to introduce a measure of controlled flexibility into the system by turning illegal migrants into sanctioned settlers through their adoption into host communities. As the chief native commissioner put it: "The process of assimilation [should] not cause indigestion.

We want alien tribesmen absorbed into the bulk of a tribe in slow degrees until the leaven introduced permeates the tribe.”<sup>9</sup>

Yet the Kenyan government could not have it both ways. By providing a legal means for individuals to change their identity, it created exploitable loopholes in the theoretically rigid tribal categories. Interpenetration offered the means for illegal migrants to buy time and claim a measure of security by declaring their willingness to be “adopted.” In practice, the requirements for this state-sponsored assimilation varied considerably from community to community. In the Maasai reserve, British administrators initially expected migrants to undergo a formal ceremony designating that they had been “reborn” into a host family and clan with a Maasai father and a new Maasai name. By the 1950s, however, Narok’s district commissioner defined a Maasai as “anyone whose name appears on the tax registers and who pays Masai [*sic*] African District Council rates.”<sup>10</sup> Similarly, although officials in South Kavirondo District initially expected the Kikuyu migrants to adopt the bride price and other cultural practices of their Gusii hosts, the Kenyan government eventually came to define a legal interpenetrator as a man who farmed in another reserve for two years without provoking complaints from the host community.

### The Kikuyu Problem

Although virtually every Kenyan community engaged in cross-tribal settlement in one form or another, the imperial regime developed its interpenetration policies primarily to deal with the mass movement of Kikuyu squatters.<sup>11</sup> With an annual population growth of 2.5 percent and a population density of over 280 people per square mile, by the 1920s the Kikuyu reserves had become dangerously overcrowded.<sup>12</sup> Ambitious or desperate, landless young men therefore had to seek their fortunes in less settled regions of the colony. District officers first noticed the vanguard of this mass Kikuyu migration in 1911, but the outflow of people from the reserves accelerated after the World War I. Seeking relief from taxation, forced labor obligations, and the appropriation of land by more politically influential kinsmen, some gravitated to the Maasai and Kamba reserves where there was available land for farming and grazing stock.<sup>13</sup>

Most migrant Kikuyu, however, became squatters on settler estates where undercapitalized European farmers used only 10 percent of their extensive holdings. Estimates vary, but British officials reckoned that there were approximately 110,000 Kikuyu living as tenants outside their home districts in the early 1930s.<sup>14</sup> The settler farmers thus lived precariously surrounded by squatters in the supposedly white highlands. These

Kikuyu migrants were particularly threatening to colonial security because they were so mobile. The Kenyan authorities hoped interpenetration would solve the squatter problem by settling the surplus Kikuyu population in less densely populated native reserves. Theoretically, they would cease to be Kikuyu once they were absorbed into the local population.

The formal interpenetration rules date from the late 1920s when a visiting parliamentary commission took the imperial regime to task for failing to live up to its paternal obligations to its tribal subjects by sufficiently guaranteeing the security of the African reserves. Mindful that unfavorable reports of mistreatment of natives led to politically embarrassing questions in metropolitan Britain, in 1928 the government created a Lands Trust Board to act as the custodian of African lands. The new Native Lands Trust Ordinance (NLTO) gave African community leaders sitting on Local Native Councils (LNCs) the power to block foreign settlements in their reserves and obligated the Kenyan government to replace any native land that it took for development purposes with parcels of equal size and value.<sup>15</sup>

The European settlers predictably found the NLTO unacceptable, and their ally, Governor Sir Edward Grigg, made the case for making the reserve system more flexible by asking: "Is it really in the interest of the tribes that these water-tight compartments should be set between Reserve and Reserve; that the help and example of the more advanced to the more backward, of the agricultural to the pastoral, should be permanently forbidden; that valuable agricultural land should lie uncultivated for generations; and that those for whom it is secured should be debarred from deriving any benefit from it?"<sup>16</sup> Grigg need not have worried, for the restrictive original version of the NLTO only lasted until 1932, when prospectors in western Kenya discovered gold in the Luhya reserves. Taking advantage of the British Empire's desperate economic straights during the Great Depression, investors and speculators succeeded in amending the NLTO to allow the Kenyan authorities to approve commercial ventures in the reserves without consulting the Local Native Councils and to compensate tribal communities with cash instead of land.<sup>17</sup>

This blatant violation of the principles of imperial trusteeship provoked a metropolitan humanitarian backlash and gave substance to African charges that the Kenyan government's land policies were unfair and exploitive. The Colonial Office tried to answer its critics by calling a special commission to investigate and establish the actual land needs of the native population. Consisting of a prominent Kenyan planter and two administrators with decidedly pro-European-settler sympathies, the Kenya Land Commission (KLC) revisited the reserve question in its 1934 report. Operating under an unspoken directive from the Secretary of State for the Colo-

nies to respect the integrity of the white highlands, the commission deemed the Native Land Trust legislation “administratively inconvenient” and too rigid in that it allowed for no inter-reserve migration or “peaceful interpenetration.” The commissioners observed that there was no reason to assume that Kenyan tribal identities would be permanent, and they judged that the NLTO’s “inelasticity” operated “to the detriment of the natives” by limiting private initiative and the overall economic development of the reserves.”<sup>18</sup>

Although many colonial theorists considered individualism and materialism a grave “detrimentalizing” threat to the continuity of native life, the KLC hoped that experiments in private land tenure would stimulate agricultural innovation and improve the carrying capacity of the reserves. In this the commissioners tried to walk a very fine line as the Kenyan government rejected Kikuyu appeals to turn their githaka land-holding system into formal title deeds. Moreover, the KLC’s main concern was to give the European settlers a firm legal claim to the white highlands, and it had no intention of undoing the ethnic realities of Kenya’s tribe-based land policies. Instead, the commissioners recommended that the government raise the “average level of attainment” in African communities by allowing members of more economically progressive tribes to migrate to underdeveloped reserves. Yet in calling for “maximum fluidity compatible with security,” they were also careful to note that the rights and wishes of “occupant tribes” had to be respected. This meant that the reserves remained inviolate, and interpenetration could take place only with the consent of the host community. The KLC therefore proposed that the government issue experimental short-term leases that would force migrants to accept adoption and assimilation.<sup>19</sup> The KLC report thus institutionalized the link between land and ethnicity in Kenya and “became a communal charter defining on a racial and tribal basis the amount of land each group possessed.”<sup>20</sup>

Rhetoric aside, the KLC report offered no specific guidelines on how peaceful interpenetration might take place, and senior colonial administrators resisted its development suggestions on the grounds that private land holding was contrary to communal native custom and would encourage class formation and the emergence of a landlord class on the Bugandan model. Certain that freehold land titles would allow Europeans and Asians to purchase African land, they defended the native-reserve system as necessary to protect Africans from themselves.<sup>21</sup> The KLC also affirmed that squatters had no legal claim to land in the white highlands but offered no practical recommendations on where they might go when displaced from European settler farms. Indeed, officials in the Colonial Office were shocked to learn of the vast numbers of squatters that would have to be expelled from the white highlands.

### Infiltration versus Interpenetration

These pressures drove many Kikuyu from Kiambu District to cross into the Maasai reserve to settle the relatively open land around Ngong. With over eleven thousand square miles of prime agricultural and grazing land and a population of less than fifty thousand people, the Masai Extra-Provincial District was a powerful lure to landless people throughout the colony.<sup>22</sup> District officers first noticed significant numbers of foreigners in Maasailand in 1935 when Maasai elders began to complain about Kikuyu encroachment. Richard Waller points out that this population shift had in fact been going on since the preconquest era when Maasai sections absorbed outsiders as sons and wives and played host to more temporary migrants who worked as traders and cultivators. In the 1930s, it appears that many migrants arrived at the explicit invitation of Maasai headmen and counselors who built “private fiefdoms” by finding land for Kikuyu sharecroppers in exchange for cash payments, labor, and marriageable daughters.<sup>23</sup> These Maasai leaders were less interested in adopting the newcomers, and it is most likely that they complained to the British authorities to block their Kikuyu clients from staking a permanent claim to lands that the Kikuyu had cleared and cultivated.

In 1936, the growing Kikuyu presence around Ngong sparked a debate in the colonial administration between what Waller has termed the “inclusionists” and the “exclusionists.” District officers stationed among the Maasai depicted the Kikuyu migrants as tax dodgers and miscreants and invoked the inviolability of the reserve system to justify their expulsion. Conversely, the district commissioner in Kiambu was adamant that there was no available land to accommodate them in the Kikuyu reserves and cited the KLC’s support for interpenetration as a precedent for allowing them to stay in the Massai reserve.<sup>24</sup> It was an argument in which simple physics carried the day for the inclusionists; there was simply no room for returned migrants or squatters within the bounds of the colonial version of Kikuyu tribal society. Moreover, news of the mass expulsions of squatters from settler farms embarrassed the metropolitan British government, thereby leading the secretary of state for the colonies to bar the government from enacting new laws until he could assure metropolitan parliamentary critics that the Kikuyu were receiving a “fair deal.”<sup>25</sup>

These political and practical limits on mass deportations gave the Kenyan administration a powerful incentive to make interpenetration work. Their squatter problem would theoretically disappear if landless Kikuyu could be turned into Maasai or other sorts of tribesmen living in the less crowded reserves. In 1941, the Kenyan provincial commissioners met to try

to turn interpenetration into a workable set of policy guidelines that would eventually produce their ideal generic tribesman. Further revisions of the Native Lands Trust Ordinance gave them the legal power to evict Africans caught living outside their native reserves on the condition that the interlopers received compensation for their crops and property and that there was space available for them in their home reserve.<sup>26</sup> This meant that the government had the legal power to remove trespassers only if they could find a place for them somewhere else in the colony. Thus, in practical terms the law was virtually useless.

The provincial commissioners therefore decided to encourage interpenetration with the provision that the migrants had to be accepted by their hosts and did not complicate the tribal geography of the colony by forming “alien enclaves” in their new reserves. This sounded better in theory than in practice, and the Kenyan governor took his field administrators to task for failing to develop a viable land settlement scheme for the less crowded reserves. World War II gave the exclusionist district officers cover to forcibly relocate many of the Kikuyu “infiltrators” in Maasailand to an experimental settlement at Olunguruone on less desirable forest reserve land. With the metropolitan British government’s attention elsewhere, Eliud Mathu, the African representative on the Legislative Council, had little success in making an issue of the evictions.<sup>27</sup>

Once the war drew to a close, colonial officials resumed their efforts to turn the principles laid down at the 1941 commissioners’ meeting into a realistic and viable interpenetration policy. They did so at the urging of the new governor, Sir Philip Mitchell, who cast an openly covetous eye on the vast Masai reserve:

Then there is of course the Masai Reserve which, treaty or no treaty, manifestly has got to take more people. It is, I suppose, in extent as large or larger than the White Highlands, and there is no reason why, in due course, it should not accommodate at least another quarter of a million Africans, and a means to bring this about will of course have to be devised, including some means of preventing officers in charge of the Masai virtually becoming more reactionary than the Masai themselves.<sup>28</sup>

In January 1946, H. E. Lambert, an expert on African land tenure, drew up a draft memorandum that turned Mitchell’s aspirations into policy. He defined infiltration as the insidious antithesis of interpenetration whereby trespassers retained their “original tribality (to coin a word on the analogy of ‘nationality’)” and sowed discord by demanding land rights, schools, and representation on local councils and tribal courts. By contrast, interpene-

tration was a kind of “naturalization” that led to the “ritual rebirth” of a migrant into a new tribe. Lambert acknowledged that the government should discourage infiltration, but he argued that placing too many limitations on interpenetration would unduly restrict the necessary population shifts needed to preserve the integrity of the native reserve system. The crux of his proposal was that migrants should be granted rights to land in foreign reserves if they harvested a single season’s crop without provoking objections from the local population.<sup>29</sup>

This was an explosive recommendation that reignited the inclusivist-exclusivist debate in the Kenyan administration. By this policy, infiltrators could acquire land rights if they managed to bring in a harvest without being detected by the authorities. The officer in charge of the Masai Extra-Provincial District led the attack on the draft proposal by charging that it amounted to the “straight forward theft of land” that would allow trespassing agriculturalists to destroy the district’s land and forests through overuse. The authorities in Nyanza Province were equally resistant to Lambert’s proposals and noted that Luo elders declared that their people would never agree to be adopted into another tribe. Even the commissioner of Central Province, which encompassed the Kikuyu heartland, had his doubts about the plan and suggested that tenancy only be granted after a migrant had harvested four crops without interruption.<sup>30</sup>

Yet these objections did little to resolve the problem of overcrowding in the colony’s most populous native reserves. The Kenyan government therefore pressed ahead with its interpenetration initiative and issued a pair of administrative circulars that laid out the conditions under which African migrants could become permanent residents in a foreign reserve. It required legitimate interpenetrators to reside for two years and harvest three crops without provoking complaints from the local populace. In doing so, the migrants tacitly agreed to be adopted into their host tribal community and surrendered all claims to land in their former reserve. They would be deemed infiltrators subject to expulsion and prosecution for trespassing if they committed an offense against “local custom” by refusing to take part in an adoption ceremony, forming separate native associations, demanding higher bride prices, bringing in more unauthorized immigrants, or violating local laws governing the use of land, forest, and water resources.<sup>31</sup>

Senior colonial officials hoped that these clear-cut guidelines for sanctioned interpenetration would facilitate orderly population flows between the native reserves. Ironically, the new rules had the opposite result. Many African migrants were not willing to accept restrictions on how they used their land, nor would they submit to the authority of alien chiefs in their “adopted” communities. Most of these resisters were Kikuyu, but large

numbers of Luo, Logoli, Kamba, and Kipsigis also began to move to less crowded neighboring reserves in the postwar years. Few of them followed the new rules, and by 1948 the chief native commissioner had to admonish overzealous district officers to stop using the interpenetration guidelines as an excuse to deport migrants back to their overcrowded reserves.<sup>32</sup>

The conflicting interpretations of interpenetration at the official level reveal a division in the Kenyan colonial administration over the necessity of respecting the ethnic geography of the colony. The governor and his senior staff were most concerned with relieving the dangerous population imbalances between the various reserves. They took a pragmatic, if not opportunistic, stance on tribal integrity and were more than willing to bend the rules on interpenetration to sanction the permanent settlement of migrants on open land in other reserves.

Conversely, field administrators were far more committed to protecting the coherence of the tribal societies in which they lived. Many of these men authored sophisticated anthropological treatises on their host ethnic groups and believed that the security of British rule required them to defend the viability of native law and custom.<sup>33</sup> This explains why Governor Mitchell grumbled that the officer in charge of the Masai Extra-Provincial District was more Maasai than the Maasai themselves. It was these junior officials, often acting on their own initiative, who zealously defended the ethnic boundaries of the reserves and gave real teeth to the government's abstract interpenetration policies.

### **The Realities of Interpenetration in Gusiiland**

Much of the scholarly work relating to interpenetration has rightly focused on the ways in which administrative attempts to deal with the Kikuyu squatter problem contributed to the Mau Mau rebellion.<sup>34</sup> Yet inter-reserve migration was a colonywide phenomenon that produced additional ethnic complications in a surprisingly large number of localities that British administrators tried to resolve with the interpenetration regulations. One of the most interesting and complicated of these ethnic collisions took place in the Gusii highlands of western Kenya in the colonial administrative unit known as South Kavirondo District.<sup>35</sup>

As was the case with most African communities in Kenya, the Gusii ethnic identity largely crystallized during the colonial era. In the nineteenth century, there was a group of people living in the Gusii highlands who shared a common language, marriage and circumcision practices, and the sense of a common history. Nevertheless, they identified themselves primarily as members of patrilineal clans rather than as members of a fixed

tribal community, and the label Gusii came from their Luo neighbors to the west. Moreover, they often incorporated outsiders from groups that also practiced circumcision.<sup>36</sup> It was only within the rigid ethnic boundaries of colonial Kenya that they became exclusively “Gusii.” British administrators helped give the Gusii community further definition by ruling through cooperative local allies. In time, many of these “chiefs” became powerful regional potentates despite the fact that all but one of the Gusii clans had no institutions of centralized authority in the preconquest era.

Although the Gusii highlands were not as underpopulated as Maasailand, they still offered tempting prospects for migrants from more crowded reserves. This was particularly true in the eastern border regions where the Gusii had settled in defensive and concentrated settlements in the pre-colonial era to deal with Maasai and Kipsigis cattle raids. The result was a no-man’s-land in the east that remained relatively open and underused during the first decades of British rule. By the early 1930s, the entire reserve had a population density of 135 people per square mile, a figure that was less than half that of the most densely crowded Kikuyu reserve in Kiambu.<sup>37</sup> There was also relatively little incentive for the Gusii to make permanent claims on land for commercial agriculture in the highlands, because the region was largely isolated from the colony’s road and rail network. Additionally, the violent British conquest of the region, the lingering strength of the millenarian Nyamumbo cult, and poorly staffed Catholic and Seventh-day Adventist mission schools meant that it took the Gusii longer to produce a class of educated, politically active, and entrepreneurially minded elites like those that had begun to monopolize land in the more commercially advanced reserves.<sup>38</sup> With most households engaged in subsistence agriculture, land was not a controversial issue in Gusiiland before World War II, which explains how Gusii elders could tell the KLC: “We are quite content, [our] land and boundaries are satisfactory.”<sup>39</sup>

Nevertheless, Gusiiland was not as economically dormant as colonial observers imagined. Beginning in the early 1930s, several chiefs and other politically connected “big men” recognized the opportunities presented by the Kenyan government’s decision to promote economic development in the reserves. Hoping that an expanded African tax base and agricultural exports might help close the serious budget gap brought on by the global depression, the chief native commissioner ordered administrators to map out a development strategy for each district. C. E. V. Buxton, the South Kavirondo District commissioner, recognized the potential of the Gusii highlands and took a personal hand in convincing the Kenyan government to allow local farmers to grow coffee on an experimental basis. Previously, the European settlers had used their political influence to claim a monopoly

on the production of this high-value cash crop. Musa Nyandusi, a former mission teacher and the chief of Nyaribari location, was one of the first local innovators to take advantage of this opportunity. By the end of the decade, he and a relatively small group of government employees and mission school graduates pioneered the commercialization of the highlands by investing in grain mills, producing for the market, and most importantly, claiming previously open land.<sup>40</sup> Population densities remained low, but the 1938 annual report for the district noted: "The Kisii have now occupied all the country up to their boundaries."<sup>41</sup> Consequently, short-term labor shortages also appeared in periods when crop prices rose high enough to convince young men that commercial agriculture was more lucrative than paid employment.

It is still unclear what exactly drew Kikuyu migrants to this seemingly underdeveloped but increasingly prosperous region. Europeans on neighboring Sotik farms in the white highlands believed that the first Kikuyu to settle in Gusiiland were some of their former squatters who used the Gusii reserve as a base to poach settler cattle, brew illegal liquor, and fence stolen goods.<sup>42</sup> While there probably was some truth to these charges, the scanty evidence on early Kikuyu settlement in western Kenya in the 1930s suggests that Gusii chiefs like Musa quietly welcomed settlers from the more crowded reserves. This might also explain why the Kikuyu migrant enclave was largely concentrated in Musa's Nyaribari location.

It also bears noting that the foreign "infiltrators" in the Gusii reserve included Logoli migrants from the densely populated North Kavirondo District. Popular accounts suggested that the pioneering members of this group initially found their way into the highlands as members of a celebrated soccer team. This was in contrast to the Kikuyu, who claimed to have actually purchased farms from powerful Gusii figures. Buxton seemed to have been largely unaware of these migratory shifts and land transactions and confidently told the KLC that Gusii custom made it impossible for individuals to acquire sole claim to land by purchase.<sup>43</sup>

Buxton was deeply committed to developing the highlands, but he failed to realize that Kikuyu migrants brought considerable entrepreneurial expertise to his district. As Njoroge Kagunda, one of the leaders of the Kikuyu community, later explained to Frank Furedi: "Nobody liked working for the settlers . . . . So in 1931 I went to Kisii. When I arrived . . . . the Kisii were friendly to us and we had a good life. We were the ones who started business there and we introduced new crops to the Kisii. Many Kikuyu sold to the Kisii. Some Kikuyu went to Nairobi to buy old clothes and sold it to the Kisii."<sup>44</sup> The Kikuyu settlers were highly industrious and could well have provided the economic spark that the Kenyan government

so desperately sought in the depression years had they managed to gain legal recognition of their land claims. Instead, officials in Nairobi rewrote the NLTO to give western speculators and developers access to the native reserves.

While the precise details of foreign settlement in the Gusii reserve are uncertain, it seems likely that entrepreneurial elites like Chief Musa viewed the vulnerable Kikuyu ex-squatters as an exploitable resource and a useful lever in local politics. There was a precedent for this, for in pre-conquest times powerful Gusii patrons often acquired clients by loaning cattle to unattached strangers. Musa also had a reputation for ruthlessness in dealing with local rivals, and it is also possible that he may have directed the settlers toward the lands of less powerful clans.<sup>45</sup> For their part, British officials tacitly tolerated these developments in the hope that they would help correct the population imbalance in the reserves. Officially, the district officers in South Kavirondo took no action against the migrants when they first discovered them in the late 1930s, on the grounds that the Gusii themselves did not complain about their presence; but it also seems that these officers were not entirely aware of the scope and implications of this interpenetration.<sup>46</sup>

In reality, it appears that the growing foreign enclaves in the highlands were a source of considerable tension within the Gusii community. While local elites profited from the land sales, the practice violated local convention that held that land belonged to clans rather than individuals.<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, the steady commercialization of agriculture in the reserve fanned even more popular resentment against the newcomers and their land claims. This hostility led many Logoli to move on to open land in the Luo reserves in the late 1930s, but the steady stream of Kikuyu migrants into the highlands threatened to turn into a flood during World War II as news of the availability of good land in Gusiiland reached the overcrowded reserves of central Kenya. British officials in the neighboring Kericho District noted overstuffed taxies headed toward the Gusii reserve crammed with Kikuyu migrants and their families. Many claimed to be visiting relatives who had already settled in the Gusii reserve.<sup>48</sup>

Not surprisingly, the sudden influx of outsiders sparked a backlash. Beginning in the late 1930s, local men burned Kikuyu huts, drove cattle over their fields, and pressed the colonial authorities to evict the Kikuyu as trespassers. The actual issues that provoked this aggression are unclear, but official reports of these incidents cite “young” men as the aggressors. This may mean that the entrepreneurially focused Kikuyu had begun to threaten the prospects of the more marginal and less secure members of Gusii society. Regardless of its immediate cause, this open hostility threat-

ened the ethnic geography of colonial rule by making peaceful interpenetration an impossibility. Consequently, exclusion-minded district officers were entirely unsympathetic to migrants' appeals for protection and ordered all Kikuyu "infiltrators" who had arrived after 1940 to return to their own reserves.<sup>49</sup>

Refusing to give up their investments in the highlands, twelve Kikuyu settlers hired a lawyer in October 1944 and petitioned the Kenyan government to rescind the eviction notice and recognize their legitimate claims to land in the Gusii reserve. They declared they had been living in the district for twelve years with the permission of three of the seven Gusii chiefs and the local administration, and they insisted that they had acquired their land by making 660 direct payments to the Gusii elders, some of which were over one thousand shillings.<sup>50</sup> The petitioners claimed to represent a larger Kikuyu community that now numbered 4,800 people. They also pointed out that they held South Kavirondo District kipandes and boasted that they had built eight hundred huts, three shops, and three schools. More significantly, they invoked the language of interpenetration to legitimize their case:

Our tribal system is very similar to those of the Kisii people. Many of our daughters are married to Kisii tribes. . . . Practically in a way we are detribalised in that we have no connection with the Kikuyu Reserve. . . . We have been living in the Kisii Reserve since a long time, that we have acquired certain rights and properties and it would be against all the rules of natural justice to deprive us of our rights and to drive us to a place [the Kikuyu Reserve] now unknown to us.<sup>51</sup>

While these declarations should have been music to the ears of the colonial authorities, British administrators on the ground in western Kenya were largely unmoved. They deemed the original Kikuyu settlers who arrived in South Kavirondo District in the early 1930s as "genuine interpenetrators," but they considered the more recent arrivals to be insincere "infiltrators." In their eyes, the Kikuyu ex-squatters tricked the Gusii into giving them access to land by claiming that they had official permission to settle in the district and had no real intention of becoming Gusii. The district officer responsible for the Gusii reserve dismissed Kikuyu claims that they had legitimately purchased their farms by pointing out that individual land sales were illegal under the terms of the NLTO.<sup>52</sup>

Although some migrants tried buy a measure of security by claiming that they had embraced Gusii customs, the distinctly Kikuyu influence in Gusiiland was hard to miss in the immediate postwar years. A government Native Affairs report noted: "A Sunday border market in Nyaribari

[Kisii] is like a scene from Kiambu, or more accurately all the ingredients of Kikuyu settlement in highland country are there—donkeys loaded with sacks of potatoes, lines of burdened women struggling in, . . . groups of young men . . . at the doors of numerous Kikuyu-owned tumbled-down hotels, above all, the clamour in Kikuyu language.”<sup>53</sup> Although the tone of this account is derisive, it nevertheless demonstrates that the Gusii reserve offered considerable opportunities for economic advancement to ambitious but displaced Kikuyu in the postwar years.

Yet this was also a time when the Gusii themselves were beginning to stake private and personal claims to land in response to the wartime economic boom. Consequently, it is easy to understand how the prosperity of a group that explicitly and intentionally set themselves apart provoked further resentment, leading to renewed attacks on the migrants’ farms and property in the immediate postwar years. The educated and politically sophisticated members of the Kisii Union were also well aware of the Kikuyu attempt to gain permanent tenure in Gusiiland and deployed the language of interpenetration as a countermeasure. In a letter to the editor of the newspaper *Baraza*, the Union rejected the Kikuyu infiltrators’ claims that they had settled with the permission of the Gusii and charged that the Kikuyu in fact refused adoption into the Gusii “tribe.”<sup>54</sup> Invoking the claustrophobia of the reserve system, John Kebaso, the Kisii Union president, demanded the eviction of the Kikuyu by declaring: “The soil is not enough, everybody must look after his own soil.”<sup>55</sup>

The Gusii response to Kikuyu interpenetration most likely represented divisions in Gusii society between politically connected elites who welcomed and exploited the vulnerable Kikuyu migrants, on the one hand, and the greater Gusii population, on the other hand, which felt threatened by Kikuyu attempts to claim private use of communally held tribal land. This was at a time when expanding opportunities for commercial agriculture were making that land more valuable. It may also be that chiefs like Musa made a public show of pushing the government to expel the migrants under the interpenetration regulations after the Gusii had quietly taken their money and profited from their labor.

The Gusii chiefs’ self-serving agendas help to explain why Nashon Kamau and a vocal faction of the Kikuyu settlers refused to become Gusii. Although accepting formal adoption, if that was really ever a viable option, would have brought them a measure of protection at a time when roughly one-sixth of the Kikuyu population was living outside the Kikuyu reserves as squatters, there were still powerful incentives for the migrants to remain Kikuyu.<sup>56</sup> Kikuyuness conferred an important measure of difference in Gusiiland that allowed the supposed infiltrators to reject the authority of

Gusii chiefs and claim exemption from tribally sanctioned forced labor obligations, taxation, and soil conservation rules.<sup>57</sup> Similarly, “becoming Gusii” would have most likely invalidated the migrants’ claims to farms they had acquired by purchase and ruled out any chance of claiming compensation from the government or the Gusii chiefs for their lost land. This was at a time when the wartime commodity boom and government development initiatives increased the value of these investments substantially. Furthermore, government-mandated soil conservation and reconditioning measures, which were highly unpopular in the Kikuyu reserves, barely applied to the highlands.<sup>58</sup>

There were also equally strong inducements for the migrants to retain their ties to the greater Kikuyu community. Some of the Kikuyu settlers did a good business exporting goats to the Kikuyu reserves, while others used connections in Nairobi to buy clothing and other goods for resale in Gusiland. Some men also set their wives up on farms in the Gusii reserve while they held jobs in other parts of the colony.<sup>59</sup> The lucrative returns from these ventures probably provided the resources for the Kikuyu to buy land from the Gusii elders. Finally, being Kikuyu kept the migrants in touch with the important political changes taking place in postwar Kenya. As Jomo Kenyatta drew ever larger crowds by attacking the injustices of British colonialism, many of the Kikuyu in Gusiland aligned themselves with his brand of confrontational politics by emphatically and militantly asserting their Kikuyuness.

Moreover, the migrants were clearly emboldened by the inability of the local authorities to expel them. Although the Kenyan government formally rejected their petition, powerful advocates like Leonard Beecher, the former representative for African interests on the Legislative Council, and Eliud Mathu, the sole African representative on the council, took up their cause. Mathu pointed out that the government had accepted the KLC’s endorsement of interpenetration, while Beecher offered to go to South Kavirondo District to mediate the controversy.<sup>60</sup> More significantly, Governor Mitchell was not willing to send five thousand more people back to the tense Kikuyu reserves. Accepting that there was no space for this surplus population in the reserve system, he overruled the district authorities’ general eviction order and mandated that they had to prove that migrants were guilty of bribing Gusii elders before they could be expelled.<sup>61</sup>

This official intervention embittered the field administrators in South Kavirondo District. W. A. Perreau, whom Beecher had rightly accused of being biased against Kikuyu, angrily noted: “It is obvious that the big battalions are on the side of the Kikuyu and any further action by us will result in further and ignominious defeat.” Noting that his personal prestige was

suffering, he asked to be excused from all further eviction cases and confirmed Beecher's allegations by frankly admitting: "I am prejudiced against these Kikuyu and regard them as bare faced liars."<sup>62</sup> Stymied by the reality of the situation, the best British officials could do was to try to spread the Kikuyu infiltrators more evenly throughout the reserve in the hope of facilitating their absorption by the Gusii.<sup>63</sup>

Confident in their security, the militant Kikuyu faction, which numbered about fifty household heads, including Nashon Kamau, began to openly flout the interpenetration rules. Njoroge Kagunda, one of the original migrants and a self-avowed member of the banned Kikuyu Central Association (KCA), emerged as their spokesman. Kagunda and his followers claimed to follow Gusii custom (which they conveniently left undefined), but they called for Kikuyu seats on the South Kavirondo Local Native Council and Gusii tribal courts to ensure that the assemblies knew how to handle Kikuyu issues. Kagunda's followers also protested the administration's decision to close their independent schools, arguing that their children did not speak Gusii. They also defiantly refused Chief Musa's call to marry their daughters to Gusii men. Musa's demand probably reflected the steadily rising bride price for Gusii women during the 1940s, but the Gusii also had a long history of using marriage to assimilate outsiders.<sup>64</sup> Far from trying to keep a low profile, the Kagunda faction refused to become Gusii clients, and they adamantly rejected the administration's insistence that they give up their right to trade, build schools, and follow Kikuyu land tenure practices as a condition for staying in Gusiiland. As Kagunda put it: "No Kikuyu would dare to stay under such conditions."<sup>65</sup>

Kagunda himself is an interesting figure. Furedi found him to be a resourceful but not particularly radical individual when he interviewed him in the postcolonial era, but Kagunda's willingness to openly court government retribution for flouting the interpenetration rules in the late 1940s led the colonial authorities to brand him "a most evil and dangerous force in Kisii."<sup>66</sup> Colonial intelligence reports listed him as the salaried leader of the Kisii/Nakuru branch of the Kikuyu Central Association. In 1947, he began a campaign to get the Kikuyu enclave to reject the authority of the Gusii chiefs and district administration by burning their kipandes. At this and later public meetings, he urged his followers to reject communal labor obligations and boycott the district commissioner's public meetings (*barazas*).<sup>67</sup>

The colonial authorities responded by prosecuting Kagunda and his followers for being members of a banned organization and holding meetings without permission. The central government in Nairobi, however, was still anxious to avoid dumping the Kikuyu infiltrators back into the politically restive Kikuyu reserves and dismissed the case for lack of evidence.

The attorney general advised outraged field administrators that they would have to catch Kagunda in the act of “preaching subversion.”<sup>68</sup> At a September 1948 baraza that the authorities called to tell the Kikuyu that they had to accept adoption as Gusii under the interpenetration regulations, Kagunda obliged the field administrators. When the district commissioner ordered all members of the Kikuyu Central Association to step forward, half of the gathering did so, whereupon the police arrested them on the spot. Kagunda, Nashon Kamau, and the rest of the resisters pleaded guilty and received sentences of two months in prison and fines of sh500 that would be returned if they kept out of trouble for one year. Once again, however, inclusionist authorities in Nairobi took the side of the migrants, and the Kenyan Supreme Court overturned the convictions and ordered a retrial. This time the defendants pleaded not guilty, which prompted the Kenyan government to withdraw the case entirely.<sup>69</sup>

The central government’s willingness to protect the insubordinate Kikuyu inevitably undermined the British district officers, who grew increasingly embarrassed over their inability to respond to appeals from Gusii chiefs and elders to take action against the Kagunda faction. While high officials in Nairobi looked for ways to keep five thousand Kikuyu migrants in Gusiiland, administrators in the highlands set about trying to evict them through a rigid application of the interpenetration rules. Every now and then they managed to acquire enough solid evidence to evict individual migrants on a case-by-case basis.<sup>70</sup> They recognized, however, that they needed a more potent weapon. Working with the Native Courts Officer they drew up a set of explicit questions intended to establish that Nashon Kamau and rest of the Kikuyu infiltrators formally rejected adoption into the Gusii tribe:

- Do you agree to obey the orders of your chief?
- Do you claim exemption from communal labor on the grounds you are a Kikuyu and not Kisii?
- Do you recognize the authority of Kisii elders?
- How did you gain entry to Kisii?
- Have you dropped demands for a Kikuyu headman, school, LNC representative?<sup>71</sup>

District officials recorded the responses to these questions in an open public meeting, but the Kikuyu militants were not intimidated. Instead, they seized upon the survey as an opportunity to publicize their land claims.

The Kagunda faction’s responses to these questions are telling. Karanja Kaguro stated that he had acquired his land by paying Chief Musa sh755, sub-headman Malario sh300, and another Gusii elder sh300. The

ex-squatter Nashon Kamau left a settler farm in Subukia upon learning that good land was for sale in South Kavirondo District. Most of the migrants claimed to have spent roughly sh1,000 each on payments to Gusii elites, which they insisted had to be repaid if the government expelled them. They declared their willingness to compromise on some issues like accepting local regulations on stock sales, but they refused to become Gusii. Kagunda insisted on the right to Kikuyu schools and representation on the Local Native Council and declared: "We do not want to drop our Kikuyu customs, our marriage customs, our circumcision rites, nor any of the customs which vary from Kisii customs." Jenandi Kathiri similarly asserted: "I will not allow myself to be absorbed into the Kisii tribe." And of course this is when Nashon Kamau boldly refused to become Gusii as well.<sup>72</sup>

Although it appeared that the questionnaire had enticed Kagunda and his people into making openly incriminating statements, the increasingly obvious reality that they had purchased land from Gusii elders complicated the legal case against them. Government legal experts warned that courts would probably consider the transactions to be enforceable contracts even though Chief Musa and his peers did not have the formal right to sell what was theoretically communal tribal land.<sup>73</sup> The Kikuyu in Gusiiland were not aware of this ruling, and it is not clear why they risked retribution by being so openly defiant. It seems likely that they were emboldened, perhaps recklessly so, by the central government's apparent willingness to accommodate them. Having been pushed from place to place in the Kikuyu reserves, settler farms, and the slums of Nairobi by a foreign power over the past two decades, it is also easy to imagine that some of the people who had finally found a measure of prosperity in the Gusii highlands simply decided that it was time to stand up to the imperial regime.

Eventually the Kagunda faction's luck ran out as they were squeezed between brazen physical attacks by their angry Gusii neighbors and openly hostile district officers who were busily laying the legal groundwork for their eviction.<sup>74</sup> John Kebaso and other members of the Kisii Union peppered the government with petitions calling for the expulsion of the Kikuyu from their "motherland," and in mid-1949 the Kenyan authorities used their frank answers to the questionnaire to convict Kagunda and sixteen of his followers of failing to assimilate into Gusii society under the interpenetration regulations. Invoking the Gusii identity as a legal category, the British Resident Magistrate ordered them out of the district and directed the district authorities to destroy their huts and sell off their crops.<sup>75</sup> The deportations had the added benefit of shielding Chief Musa, an increasingly important government ally in the late 1940s, from potential corruption charges.<sup>76</sup>

These measures brought the field administration in South Nyanza (for-

merly Kavirondo) District a measure of satisfaction, but they were politically embarrassing to the Kenyan government. Mathu again took up the cause of the Gusii Kikuyu and Kikuyu interpenetrators in other parts of the colony. Throughout the 1940s, he made an issue of their mistreatment in the Legislative Council. In January 1950, he introduced a resolution calling for a government review of the interpenetration regulations to ensure that they provided for a "reasonable distribution of population" in Kenya. Reminding the council that African groups had mixed more freely in pre-conquest times, Mathu blamed district officers for overzealously applying the rules on adoption and assimilation to evict migrants found cultivating or occupying land reserved for other communities. He agreed that interpenetrators could not demand separate schools or political representation, but he called on the government to create district interpenetration committees to facilitate and encourage the peaceful intermixing of Kenyan ethnic groups.<sup>77</sup>

As additional African members joined the Legislative Council, they too supported Mathu's resolution unanimously. Conversely, most of the European settler representatives opposed it on the grounds that it would open less advanced pastoralist communities to exploitation by more commercially aggressive agriculturalists like the Kikuyu. The chief native commissioner, E. R. St. A. Davies, supported the resolution while admitting that Mathu had "adroitly soft peddled" the adoption requirement that was central to the interpenetration regulations. He reminded the council that the government only expelled migrants when they refused to be assimilated into their host communities. Mathu did not push the issue, and his resolution only succeeded in getting the government to affirm publicly its support for interpenetration.<sup>78</sup> It did nothing to protect the remaining Kikuyu in Gusiiland.

In hindsight, it is difficult to determine how many of the Kikuyu in the Gusii highlands actually were willing to conform to the government's highly legalistic interpenetration rules. Indeed, district officers estimated that most of the five hundred Kikuyu families in the highlands were willing to give up their demands for specifically Kikuyu institutions and accept the authority of the Gusii chiefs. Musa certainly succeeded in acquiring a number of Kikuyu wives despite the Kikuyu militants' insistence that their daughters would not marry Gusii men.<sup>79</sup> It is also clear that Kagunda did not speak for the entire Kikuyu community. Informers within his ranks kept the colonial authorities abreast of his activities, and in 1947 a delegation of Kikuyu elders visited Chief Musa to disassociate themselves from the KCA faction. When the Kikuyu senior chief Koinange visited South Kavirondo

District one year later, he openly clashed with Kagunda over whether the Kikuyu migrants had to become “naturalized” Gusii.<sup>80</sup>

Unfortunately, the Mau Mau Emergency makes it impossible to determine whether the interpenetration regulations would have eventually forced the Kikuyu infiltrators to become Gusii. The Kenyan government became far less concerned with the niceties of adoption as the uprising by poor and landless Kikuyu against the colonial regime and its privileged allies in the Kikuyu community worsened in the early 1950s. The colonial authorities and the European settler community were so shaken by the ferocity of the Mau Mau attacks that they questioned whether assimilation could ever remove the “barbarous” streak that they came to believe lurked primordially within all Kikuyu.<sup>81</sup>

These new realities left the openly defiant Kikuyu in South Nyanza dangerously exposed. Faced with continued persecution by the Gusii, who placed much greater value on land as they saw commercial agriculture in the highlands became more lucrative, a committed faction of the community initially still refused to comply with the interpenetration rules.<sup>82</sup> They soon backed down, however, when it became clear that the government intended to use the Emergency as an excuse to deport and detain the entire Kikuyu community in Gusiiland. In 1953, even Nashon Kamau, the new leader of the Gusii Kikuyu, adopted a more accommodating attitude by petitioning the colonial authorities for permission to take the same anti-Mau Mau oath sworn by the Gusii.<sup>83</sup> At this point, however, it was too late for the Kikuyu migrants to escape the Mau Mau dragnet through assimilation, and the government specifically singled out the small pockets of Kikuyu who had penetrated Nyanza Province as a “menace.”<sup>84</sup> In November 1953, security forces detained all the adult Kikuyu men it could find in South Nyanza District on the grounds that they were security risks and had “breached the hospitality” of the Gusii. Three months later, the administration and security forces unleashed Operation Ball and Chain, which sent over two thousand Kikuyu women and children back to the Kikuyu reserves.<sup>85</sup> Having survived government harassment for over twenty years, the Kikuyu community in Gusiiland was no more.

Conversely, Mau Mau proved a boon to well-connected Gusii leaders. After Operation Ball and Chain, the colonial authorities set out to try to return the vacated Kikuyu lands to their rightful Gusii “owners.” The district officer responsible for the Gusii reserve noted that Musa Nyandusi had, “like Cassius, a lean and hungry look when the subject of these sham-bas [farms] comes up” and knew full well that the chief was going to add the land to his already extensive holdings.<sup>86</sup> After the end of the Emergency

in 1960, several members of the Gusii Kikuyu community tried in vain to regain their farms. Faced with a blanket rejection by the Kenyan government, a few openly invoked the language of interpenetration to buttress their claims. In petitioning the authorities to give him title to his father's former holdings in the Gusii reserve, Joseph Gathaku Mbugua asserted: "I have stayed in Kisii a good number of years since my youth, now I have forgotten my mother tongue, I know Kisii language far much better."<sup>87</sup> Taken at face value, his claim suggests that he might have escaped the Operation Ball and Chain dragnet by passing himself off successfully as Gusii. Nevertheless, none of the Kikuyu settlers succeeded in reclaiming their land through legal or administrative means.

## Conclusion

From roughly 1930 until 1953, there appear to have been two primary ethnicities in the Gusii reserve: Gusii and Kikuyu. Both had cultural standing in the highlands, but neither conformed neatly to the scholarly primordialist, instrumentalist, or constructivist categories that Spear outlines.<sup>88</sup> While both ethnic labels would have been recognized in the nineteenth century, it is questionable how much continuity and congruence there was between the preconquest and colonial versions of these communal identities. Under British rule the native reserve system established fixed boundaries for ethnicity that made tribal identities the legal basis for claims to land, government patronage, and political representation. The imperial regime never had any intention of fabricating entirely new identities, nor did it have the capacity to do so. Rather, colonial officials used communal tribal labels to deny individual rights to their subjects and to divide the African majority into manageable and comprehensible units. Although the political benefits of these tactics are obvious, the Kenyan government never followed an explicit policy of divide and rule in designing this system of "native administration." In fact, the reserves proved particularly constraining after World War II, and the government's interpenetration policies were actually a desperate attempt to create a legal and systematic way to blur ethnic boundaries. Indeed, even in 1934 the Kenya Land Commission anticipated a day when the reserves would no longer be necessary: "Tribalism cannot be considered as necessarily permanent in itself, but is merely a stage in evolution. When tribalism vanishes, land reserved forever for a particular tribe is meaningless."<sup>89</sup>

Although it was not their intention, British officials created incentives for Africans to adapt, refine, and perhaps even fabricate tribes to exploit the new realities of colonial society. Identity was indeed constructed during the

colonial era, but the interpenetration rules and the case of the Gusii Kikuyu demonstrate that this was a collaborative but contested venture between the colonizer and the colonized. Senior British administrators and increasingly desperate Kikuyu migrants had a vested interest in using increased mobility to relieve population pressure in the reserves by fudging the ethnic geography of colonial rule. They differed significantly, however, on the terms and conditions of this interpenetration.

Kikuyu and Gusii were definitely not entirely fabricated identities, but they took on new meanings within the native reserves. Drawing on the legitimacy of originality and indigeneity, Gusii elites invoked a narrow definition of Gusiiness to defend their resources while exploiting vulnerable Kikuyu migrants.<sup>90</sup> In many other colonial settings, migrants acknowledged the authority of their hosts and acquired a measure of security by making rent or tribute payments, but this was not the case in the Gusii reserves.<sup>91</sup> By insisting on retaining their own language, schools, circumcision practices, marriage and bridewealth institutions, and land tenure rules, Njoroge Kagunda, Nashon Kamau, and their followers challenged local big men like Musa Nyandusi by declaring their allegiance to a radical Kikuyuness that rejected British authority on a colonywide scale in the post-war era. In doing so they exposed a fundamental flaw in the government's interpenetration policies. Where precolonial communities had welcomed and absorbed women and relatively weak individual strangers, the Gusii Kikuyu were strong and confident household heads who refused to become Gusii clients.<sup>92</sup> In making migration a zero-sum game by closing pre-conquest frontiers, the interpenetration experiment was doomed to failure.

At the personal level, individuals in the Kikuyu migrant community had several options when faced with the state's insistence that assimilation was the prime condition for settling in the Gusii reserve. They could accept adoption into the Gusii "tribe," defiantly assert their Kikuyuness, or follow a middle ground of appearing to become Gusii, in the tradition of the sixteenth-century Spanish Moriscos who continued to practice Islam in secret after the Spanish Crown forced them to become Christians. There were specific benefits and disadvantages associated with each strategy. Becoming Gusii allowed legal residence in the Gusii reserve but reduced the interpenetrator to the status of junior tribesman under the authority of the autocratic and occasionally rapacious Gusii chiefs. In the pre-conquest era, Gusii communities often absorbed outsiders, but under British rule assimilation became more permanent, rigid, and exploitive, thereby entailing greater cultural alienation and personal dislocation. Remaining Kikuyu brought the risk of prosecution and expulsion from the Gusii reserve, but it protected migrants' investments in land and connected them to the larger

Kikuyu community through potent political and economic networks that crossed reserve boundaries.

We can never really know how many Kikuyu in the Gusii reserve tried to walk the fine line of becoming outwardly Gusii while remaining internally Kikuyu. It is telling, however, that while there were roughly five thousand Kikuyu migrants in Gusiiland in the late 1940s, the government only detained and expelled half that number of men, women, and children during Mau Mau. Some of the other twenty-five hundred people may have left the highlands, but it is likely that a significant number found a way to avoid the government dragnet and reach an accord with their Gusii neighbors. In these cases, who could say whether these people were “Kikuyu” or “Gusii”? Precise ethnic labels were largely a figment of the imperial imagination. Kagunda and his relatively small groups of followers publicly and defiantly affirmed their Kikuyuness, but the fate of the majority of the Kikuyu Gusii suggests that Kenyan identities in the late-colonial era were more flexible, adaptable, and informal than either tribally focused colonial ethnographies or the scholarly literature on identity formation would suggest.

## Notes

I am grateful to Richard Waller, Brett Shadle, John Lonsdale, and the anonymous *Ethnohistory* readers for their comments on earlier drafts of this article.

- 1 Kikuyu Responses to Absorption Questions, 2 November 1948, Kenya National Archives (hereafter KNA), OPE 1/460/204/3. Colonial-era records refer to both the Gusii people and the highland region in which they lived as “Kisii.”
- 2 Aidan Southall, “The Illusion of Tribe,” *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 5 (1970): 28; Richard Hingley, *Roman Officers and English Gentlemen* (London, 2000), 4, 9.
- 3 John Iliffe, *A Modern History of Tanganyika* (New York, 1979), 324; Leroy Vail, “Introduction: Ethnicity in Southern African History,” in *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa*, ed. Leroy Vail (Berkeley, CA, 1989), 11.
- 4 Jonathan Friedman, “The Past in the Future: History and the Politics of Identity,” *American Anthropologist* 94 (1992): 846; G. Carter Bentley, “Ethnicity and Practice,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 29 (1987): 26; Bill Bravmann, *Making Ethnic Ways: Communities and Their Transformation in Taita, Kenya, 1800–1950* (Portsmouth, NH, 1998), 9–12; Jonathan Glassman, “Sorting Out the Tribes: The Creation of Racial Identities in Colonial Zanzibar’s Newspaper War,” *Journal of African History* 41 (2000): 401–2; Thomas Spear, “Neo-traditionalism and the Limits of Invention in British Colonial Africa,” *Journal of African History* 44 (2003): 18.
- 5 Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper, “Beyond ‘Identity,’” *Theory and Society* 29 (2000): 9.
- 6 Peter Ekeh, “Social Anthropology and Two Contrasting Uses of Tribalism in Africa,” *Comparative Study of Society and History* 32 (1990): 683; John Lonsdale,

- “Moral and Political Argument in Kenya,” in *Ethnicity and Democracy in Africa*, ed. Bruce Berman, Dickson Eyoh, and Will Kymlicka (Oxford, UK, 2004), 77–78.
- 7 Kenya Colony and Protectorate, “Areas,” 31 December 1931, Great Britain National Archives, Public Records Office (hereafter PRO), CO 533/424/8.
  - 8 Provincial Commissioner’s Meeting, 2 April 1941, KNA, OPE 1/470/7.
  - 9 Chief Native Commissioner (hereafter CNC) to Kenyan Chief Secretary, 29 April 1941, KNA, OPE 1/470/7.
  - 10 DC Narok to the African Land Use Settlement Board, 22 May 1952, KNA, PC NGO 1/1/20/120.
  - 11 For the authoritative account of Kikuyu “interpenetration” in the Maasai reserve, see Richard Waller, “Acceptees and Aliens: Kikuyu Settlement in Maasailand,” in *Being Maasai*, ed. Richard Waller and Thomas Spear (Oxford, UK, 1993), 226–57.
  - 12 William Malcolm Hailey, *An African Survey: A Study of Problems Arising in Africa South of the Sahara* (London, 1938), 748.
  - 13 Marshall Clough, *Fighting Two Sides: Kenyan Chiefs and Politicians, 1918–1940* (Niwot, CO, 1990), 71.
  - 14 Kenya Colony and Protectorate, “The Problem of the Squatter,” 19 March 1946, PRO CO 1018/28.
  - 15 Native Lands Trust Ordinance (hereafter NLTO), 1930, PRO, CO 533/395/5/53.
  - 16 Kenya Governor Grigg to Colonial Secretary, 5 July 1928, PRO, CO 533/375/2/64.
  - 17 Priscilla Shilaro, *A Failed Eldorado: Colonial Capitalism, Rural Industrialization, African Land Rights in Kenya, and the Kakamega Gold Rush, 1930–1952* (Lanham, MD, 2008), 14.
  - 18 Great Britain, *Kenya Land Commission Report: Summary of Conclusions Reached by His Majesty’s Government* (London, 1934), 3–4; see Rita Mary Breen, “The Politics of Land: The Kenya Land Commission (1932–33) and Its Effects on Land Policy in Kenya,” PhD diss., Michigan State University, 1976.
  - 19 Great Britain, *Report of the Kenya Land Commission, 1933* (Nairobi, 1934), 374; Kenya Attorney General Minute to Chief Secretary, 11 May 1945, KNA, OPE 1/354/9.
  - 20 Carl Rosberg and John Nottingham, *The Myth of “Mau Mau”: Nationalism and Colonialism in Kenya* (Nairobi, 1985), 159.
  - 21 Kenya Governor Grigg to Colonial Secretary, 5 July 1928, PRO, CO 533/375/2/64; Ormsby-Gore to Kenya Governor Brooke-Popham, ca. 1937, Rhodes House Library, Mss. Afr. s. 1120/Brooke-Popham.
  - 22 Report E. A. Sweatman, 3 November 1947, CO, 1018/27/1.
  - 23 Waller, “Acceptees and Aliens,” 237; Kenya Secretariat Minute, 12 November 1940, KNA, OPE 1/460/4.
  - 24 Waller, “Acceptees and Aliens,” 240; Officer-in-Charge Masai Extraprovincial district (EPD) to PC Central Province, 29 October 1936, KNA, DC NGONG 1/1/22; DC Kiambu, “Landless Kikuyu,” memorandum, October 1936, KNA, DC NGONG 1/1/22.
  - 25 Colonial Secretary telegram to Kenya Governor, 21 November 1938, PRO, CO 533/488/5/26.
  - 26 Colony and Protectorate of Kenya, NLTO Section 49, Power to Order Removal, Ordinance No. 28, 1938, Ordinances, 1939.
  - 27 Minute by Kenya Governor Sir Henry Moore to CNC, 17 September 1941, KNA,

- OPE 1/470/10; Officer-in-Charge Masai EPD to Chief Secretary, 22 August 1945, KNA, OPE 1/354/23; Eliud Mathu MLC (member, legislative council) to Chief Secretary, 3 March 1945, KNA, PC NGO 1/1/13.
- 28 Confidential Minute of 27 November 1945, quoted in J. Pinney to OiC Masai EPD, 30 September 1951, KNA, PC NGO 1/1/15/88.
  - 29 Memorandum by H. E. Lambert on Draft Rules Under the NLTO, 10 January 1946, KNA, OPE 1/354/32; Kenya Secretariat Circular, Interpenetration and Infiltration in Native Land Units, 3 May 1946, KNA, OPE 1/354/47.
  - 30 District Commissioner (DC) Central Nyanza to Provincial Commissioner (PC) Nyanza, 7 June 1946, KNA, OPE 1/354/49c; OiC Masai EPD to Chief Secretary, 13 October 1946, KNA, OPE 1/354/56; PC CP to Chief Secretary, 30 January 1947, KNA, OPE 1/354/57.
  - 31 Kenya Secretariat Circular, Statement of Government Interim Policy with Regard to Interpenetration and Infiltration in Native Land Units, 13 August 1947, KNA, OPE 1/354/71; Kenya Secretariat Circular, Interpenetration and Infiltration on Native Land Units, 8 July 1948, KNA, OPE 1/354/107.
  - 32 P. Wyn Harris CNC to OiC Masai EPD, 6 August 1948, KNA, OPE 1/354/117.
  - 33 For examples, see H. E. Lambert, *Kikuyu Social and Political Institutions* (London, 1956); D. J. Penwill, *Kamba Customary Law* (Nairobi, 1986); G. S. Snell, *Nandi Customary Law* (Nairobi, 1986).
  - 34 Tabitha Kanogo, *Squatters and the Roots of Mau Mau, 1905–63* (London, 1988), 109; David Throup, *Economic and Social Origins of Mau Mau* (London, 1988), 122; Frank Furedi, *The Mau Mau War in Perspective* (London, 1989), 80; John Lonsdale, “Wealth, Poverty, and Civil Virtue in Kikuyu Political Thought,” in *Unhappy Valley: Conflict in Kenya and Africa*, ed. John Lonsdale and Bruce Berman (London, 1992), 336.
  - 35 In 1948, it became South Nyanza District. In 1961, the government carved out the Gusii highlands to create a separate Kisii District.
  - 36 Brett Shadle, “*Girl Cases*”: *Marriage Disputes and Colonialism in Gusiiland, Kenya, 1890–1970* (Portsmouth, NH, 2006), 5–6.
  - 37 Great Britain, *Kenya Land Commission, Evidence and Memoranda*, vol. 3 (London, 1934), 2352.
  - 38 Robert Maxon, “The Absence of Political Associations among the Gusii prior to 1940,” *Transafrican Journal of History* 10 (1981): 113–15; Robert Maxon, *Going Their Separate Ways: Agrarian Transformation in Kenya, 1930–1950* (Cranbury, NJ, 2003), 42.
  - 39 Great Britain, *Kenya Land Commission, Evidence and Memoranda*, 2406.
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  - 42 Native Intelligence Safari Report, September 1940, KNA, OPE 1/460/1; W. J. H. George to PC Nyanza, 3 October 1948, KNA, MAA 8/111/15/1.
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  - 44 Furedi, *Mau Mau War in Perspective*, 48.

- 45 B. O. B. Nyarango, "Biography of Chief Musa Nyandusi," unpublished student seminar paper no. 4, History Department, University of Nairobi, 6 December 1977, 15; Shadle, "Girl Cases," 17.
- 46 PC Nyanza to Chief Secretary, 18 October 1940, KNA, OPE 1/460/2.
- 47 Masese Rosana Eric, "Traditional Land Tenure," in *Ethnography of the Gusii of Western Kenya: A Vanishing Cultural Heritage*, ed. John Akama and Robert Maxon (Lewiston, NY, 2006), 254-55.
- 48 DC Kericho to DC South Kavirondo, 9 March 1944, KNA, PC Nyanza 3/1/491/9; DC South Kavirondo to DC Kericho, 14 March 1944, KNA, PC Nyanza 3/1/491/10; DC South Kavirondo to PC Nyanza, 8 December 1944, KNA, PC Nyanza 3/1/491/37.
- 49 DC South Kavirondo W. A. Perreau to PC Nyanza, 3 October 1944, KNA, PC Nyanza 3/1/491/12; PC Nyanza to Kinuthia wa Ngata et al., 24 October 1944, KNA, OPE 1/460/26; DC South Kavirondo to PC Nyanza, 8 December 1944, KNA, PC Nyanza 3/1/491/37.
- 50 DC South Kavirondo to PC Nyanza, 15 January 1945, KNA, PC Nyanza 3/1/491/48.
- 51 Kinuthia wa Ngata et al. to PC Nyanza, October 1944, KNA, OPE 1/460/25.
- 52 PC Nyanza to R. Black Malcomson, Advocate and Solicitor, 17 January 1945, KNA, OPE 1/460/48a; PC Nyanza to Hayes Sadler, Kenya Secretariat, 8 February 1945, KNA, OPE 1/460/71; PC Nyanza to CNC, February 1945, KNA, OPE 1/460.
- 53 Quoted in Kanogo, *Squatters and the Roots of Mau Mau*, 109.
- 54 Letter to the Editor of *Baraza*, by President of Kisii Union, 10 June 1946, KNA, OPE 1/460/150a.
- 55 J. K. Kebaso to *Habari* (newspaper), cited by Director of Internal Security to DC South Kavirondo, 18 April 1947, KNA, PC NZA 3/24/1273/274.
- 56 Kenya Colony and Protectorate, "The Problem of the Squatter," 19 March 1946, PRO CO 1018/28.
- 57 DC South Kavirondo to PC Nyanza, 19 August 1948, KNA, PC Nyanza 3/1/492/240.
- 58 Maxon, *Going Their Separate Ways*, 220, 251.
- 59 Note for CNC by PC Nyanza, March 1946, KNA, OPE 1/460/140; PC Nyanza to Native Courts Officer, 25 August 1948, KNA, MAA 8/111/11a; Furedi, *Mau Mau War in Perspective*, 48.
- 60 Leonard Beecher to Kenya Governor, 27 January 1945, KNA, OPE 1/460/54a; Eliud Mathu MLC to Kenya Governor, 31 January 1945, KNA, OPE 1/460/59.
- 61 CNC Minute to Chief Secretary Kenya, 2 February 1945, KNA, OPE 1/460/59; Eviction Order Under Section 12, Native Authority Ordinance 2/37, KNA, PC NZA 3/1/491/62; Chief Secretary to PC NZA, 24 February 1945, KNA, OPE 1/460/80.
- 62 Leonard Beecher to Kenya Governor, 27 January 1945, KNA, OPE 1/460/54a; DC South Kavirondo, W. A. Perreau, to PC Nyanza, 20 April 1945, KNA, PC Nyanza 3/1/491/88.
- 63 PC Nyanza to CNC, 18 June 1945, KNA, OPE 1/460/102.
- 64 Njoroge Kagunda, for Kikuyu in Kisii, to CNC, 28 July 1945, KNA, OPE 1/460/111E; Njoroge Kagunda to Education Director, 16 May 1946, KNA, PC Nyanza 3/1/492/163; Njoroge Kagunda to Kenya Governor, 30 April 1948, KNA, OPE 1/460/188/2; Director of Intelligence and Security to DC South

- Kavirondo, 29 June 1948, KNA, PC Nyanza 3/1/492/229; Shadle, "Girl Cases," 6, 86.
- 65 Njoroge Kagunda to Kenya Governor, 6 February 1947, KNA, OPE 1/460/162.
- 66 Frank Furedi, personal communication, October 2005; Furedi, *Mau Mau War in Perspective*, 48; Kenya Secretariat Minute by CNC, 15 October 1948, KNA, MAA 8/111/17.
- 67 DC Kisii to PC Nyanza, 19 August 1948, KNA, MAA 8/111/12/1; Director of Intelligence and Security to CNC, 6 November 1947, KNA, MAA 8/111/2/1; Director of Intelligence and Security to CNC, 4 February 1948, KNA, MAA 8/111/2.
- 68 DC Kisii to PC Nyanza, 19 August 1948, KNA, MAA 8/111/12/1; Kenya Attorney General to CNC, 27 August 1948, KNA, MAA 8/111/14.
- 69 DC South Nyanza to Kenya Attorney General, 7 October 1948, KNA, OPE 1/460/196/1; Testimony of Kikonge Osara, Kisii Tribunal Elder, KNA, MAA 8/111/12/1; DC South Nyanza to PC Nyanza, 1 October 1948, KNA, MAA 8/111/16/1; DC South Nyanza to PC Nyanza, 15 January 1949, KNA, OPE 1/460/213/1.
- 70 Eviction Notice for Kargese by PC Nyanza, 28 February 1946, KNA, PC Nyanza 3/1/492/143.
- 71 Native Courts Officer to CNC, 13 October 1948, KNA, OPE 1/460/195.
- 72 Kikuyu Responses to Absorption Questions, 2 November 1948, KNA, OPE 1/460/204/3.
- 73 DC South Nyanza to PC Nyanza, 18 May 1949, KNA, PC Nyanza 3/1/492/317.
- 74 Kikuyu Petition to DC South Nyanza, 16 May 1949, KNA, OPE 1/460/224; Nahashon Mwaura for Wakikuyu in Kisii to Kiambu LNC, 1 October 1949, KNA, PC CP 9/21/1/192a.
- 75 Washington Ondicho, Kisii Union Secretary to PC NZA, 25 October 1946, KNA, PC NZA, 3/24/1273/274; DC South Nyanza to PC Nyanza, 18 May 1949, KNA, PC Nyanza 3/1/492/317; DC South Nyanza to PC Nyanza, 14 March 1950, KNA, PC Nyanza 3/1/492/355.
- 76 I am grateful to Richard Waller for this point.
- 77 Kenya Colony and Protectorate, *Legislative Council Debates Official Report*, vol. 35, 4th Session, Native Land Units, 953–986, 18–19 January 1950.
- 78 *Ibid.*; Legislative Council Clerk to Chief Secretary, 23 January 1950, KNA, OPE 1/354/136.
- 79 DC South Kavirondo to PC Nyanza, 25 May 1948, KNA, OPE 1/460/188/1; Nyarango, "Biography of Chief Musa Nyandusi," 13–14.
- 80 DC South Kavirondo to PC Nyanza, 16 July 1947, KNA, PC Nyanza 3/1/492/209; Special Monthly Intelligence Report, no. 37, Kikuyu in Kisii, 1 October 1948, KNA, PC Nyanza 3/1/492/248; Karanja, son of Kagoso to DC Kisii, 14 October 1949, KNA, DP 1/65/41.
- 81 CNC to Officer-in-Charge Masai EPD, 3 January 1952, KNA, OPE 1/357/146; Sotik Settlers Association Secretary to Chief Secretary, 19 January 1953, KNA, OPE 1/460/255; Kenyan Legislative Council Debates, Hansard, 25 November 1953, excerpted in KNA, OPE 1/354/177.
- 82 John Mbugwa et al. to DC South Nyanza, 2 August 1951, KNA, OPE 1/460/245.
- 83 It is unclear whether this was the same Nashon Kamau who stood with Njoroge Kagunda in 1947 or a different person entirely. It is certainly difficult see how the

- earlier Nashon Kamau would have escaped deportation in 1950. Nashon Kamau for Kikuyu of Kisii to PC Nyanza, 30 June 1953, KNA, DP 1/III/39.
- 84 F. D. Corfield, *Historical Survey of the Origins and Growth of Mau Mau* (London, 1960), 211.
- 85 *East African Standard*, 26 November 1953; DC South Nyanza to DC Kiambu, 30 March 1954, KNA, DP 1/III/143; DC South Nyanza to DC Kiambu, 14 May 1954, KNA, DP 1/III/215.
- 86 DC Kisii to DO Kisii, 10 June 1954, KNA, DP 1/III/262.
- 87 Joseph Gathaku Mbugua to DC Kisii, 5 November 1960, KNA, DP 1/69/26.
- 88 Spear, "Neo-traditionalism," 18
- 89 Great Britain, *Report of the Kenya Land Commission, 1933*, 380.
- 90 Although the Gusii also identified themselves as migrants through their origin myths, they claimed precedence over the Gusii Kikuyu on the grounds that they had arrived in the highlands first. This distinction took on even greater meaning as land pressure increased in the postcolonial era. Gabrielle Lynch, "Negotiating Ethnicity: Identity Politics in Contemporary Kenya," *Review of African Political Economy* 33 (2006): 56; Peter Geschiere, *The Perils of Belonging: Autochthony, Citizenship, and Exclusion in Africa and Europe* (Chicago, 2009), 23.
- 91 Sara Berry, *No Condition Is Permanent: The Social Dynamics of Agrarian Change in Sub-Saharan Africa* (Madison, WI, 1993), 110–11.
- 92 I am grateful to John Lonsdale for this observation.