

# Introduction

IN 1961, A KENYAN FARMER petitioned John F. Kennedy for an agricultural loan. “I want to practice proper farming,” Zebedeo Omwando explained in his letter to the president, “but I do not know where to turn to get money.”<sup>1</sup> American consul general Richard Freund replied some months later, affirming Kennedy’s interest in the challenges facing Africa. “Unfortunately,” Freund wrote, “it is not possible for President Kennedy personally to consider problems of individual citizens in foreign countries.”<sup>2</sup>

Far from artless, Omwando’s decision to solicit the US president for a small loan suggests political acumen and keen awareness of the shifting global context. Omwando penned his petition four months after Kennedy signed the executive order establishing the Peace Corps and shortly after the Kennedy Foundation financed the transportation of East African students to American universities. By 1961, transnational organizations and foreign nations had begun to fund development programs that disbursed loans to Kenyan farmers. Both international development and African decolonization had gained momentum at this point, and Kenya was in the midst of independence negotiations with the British. Zebedeo Omwando likely was not a naive actor but a shrewd one, attempting to make use of a newly available channel for accessing development resources and services such as credit, land, health care, education, and roads. He was neither alone in his broad ambitions to acquire development through political elites nor unique

in his targeting of Kennedy as a potential political patron: White House correspondence just a month later records that in gratitude for American famine relief, a Kamba chief presented Kennedy with a walking stick, described as “a symbol of authority” in Kenya.<sup>3</sup>

Africans throughout the continent expected that independence would bring development. These expectations grew out of the postwar context and the passage of metropolitan development and welfare acts in the 1940s that expanded state-led development programs.<sup>4</sup> The promises of African nationalist leaders further contributed to widespread expectations for development. Postwar development programs and rising development rhetoric coincided with the establishment of the Bretton Woods institutions—the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD; the original World Bank institution) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).<sup>5</sup> The United Nations proclaimed the 1960s the “Development Decade,” the same decade that witnessed the rapid decolonization of much of Africa.

In Kenya, independence negotiations began in 1960, and the most heated political debates revolved around the structure of the postcolonial government, which would determine who controlled the distribution of land and development. These were especially contentious issues. Only a small proportion of Kenyan land is suitable for intensive agriculture and grazing, European settlers had taken the most fertile regions during colonial rule, and different ethnic groups articulated competing claims for land. In 1962, prior to the resolution of these issues, the British colonial government and the World Bank began implementing the largest land transfer and resettlement program in Kenya’s history—just one of many late colonial and early postcolonial programs aimed at restructuring tenure, redistributing land, and fostering agricultural development. These programs continued after Kenya gained independence on 12 December 1963, and they formed part of the broader emergence of mid-twentieth-century policies increasingly shaped by transnational institutions, which followed from land reform programs implemented in Latin America, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia.

By the mid-twentieth century, Kenyans had long relied on their relationships to access resources, and political institutions remained highly personalized. During decolonization, Kenyans directed some of their entreaties at international politicians like Kennedy, but more often they appealed to national or local actors. In late 1972, Kericho residents wrote to President Jomo Kenyatta, calling him “the eyes of our government,” and asking for assistance with education and health care in the western Rift Valley highlands where they lived.<sup>6</sup> Hundreds of other Kenyans composed letters to the president also requesting aid, frequently addressing Kenyatta as “Father,” while

representing themselves as his, or the nation's, figurative children. In these petitions depicting Kenyatta as patriarch, Kenyans endeavored to strengthen their ties to a national actor with the ability to distribute resources.

Emboldened by the promises the changing setting held, and motivated by aspirations to improve their lives, new citizens actively sought aid from the ever-widening array of actors participating in development. In a trove of petitions from the 1960s and 1970s, Kenyans tested new and old political relationships alike, exploring which actors and institutions might offer the aid they desired. This extended beyond Kennedy and Kenyatta, to government ministers, members of Parliament, and local bureaucrats. When Kenyans sought assistance, they also turned to nonstate institutions, such as nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) or, locally, to ethnic elders, churches, and women's organizations.<sup>7</sup> Women's microfinance groups offered small loans, the very same service Zebedeo Omwando sent a petition all the way to America to request. NGOs provided famine relief, just as Kennedy did. Church groups offered scholarships for children's school fees, and local elders coordinated the building and funding of health centers, the very development Kericho residents petitioned Kenyatta about. To pursue development resources was to dive headfirst into an increasingly entangled web of political networks, which extended outward neither horizontally nor vertically, but unpredictably. Kenyans thus came to imagine themselves as members of global, national, and local political communities simultaneously.

Rural engagement in, and impact on, decolonizing development programming went far beyond solicitation, and beyond the strengthening and reworking of patron-client networks. Nonelite Kenyans also helped determine the outcomes of development interventions. While most Kenyans could not directly influence the development planning negotiated behind closed doors in Nairobi, London, Geneva, or Washington, they could affect the form and success of development programming on the ground in their communities. Sometimes, as with requests for aid, Kenyans took up pen and paper to draft letters to politicians or bureaucrats, requesting the creation of a much-needed program, the modification of an unsatisfactory one, or the termination of a particularly unpopular program. On occasion, Kenyan groups also took matters into their own hands. In the absence of adequate assistance, they created their own development by building local schools and hospitals without first receiving government authorization. In more exceptional instances, Kenyan communities vigorously obstructed the implementation of international programs by vandalizing development sites and disrupting progress. New citizens then used their experiences of

development to construct and revise ideologies on political identity and political authority.

Clearly, decolonization and development were coterminous and coconstitutive historical processes.<sup>8</sup> Processes they truly were, occurring in fits and starts, heralding both continuities and changes, even after formal independence from British rule.<sup>9</sup> Given Kenya's overwhelmingly rural population and its economy's dependence on agricultural production, these processes unfolded in the countryside.<sup>10</sup> Development had national and transnational dimensions, to be sure, but centering on the actions and political imaginations of rural Kenyans—how they navigated the political transition, pursued access to aid, and sought to influence development programs in their own communities—exposes constraints on state power and reveals how average people fashioned citizenship in the postcolonial world.

After independence, the rural poor represented the vast majority of new African citizens and the main targets of development interventions. The 1960s offered extraordinary openings for political and economic innovation, as a recently established international development regime attempted to extend into the decolonizing world, and as transitional states set out to craft a new political order. This moment was primed for political experimentation, affording an expanding set of actors, who might have otherwise been more excluded, the ability to actively participate in political processes and development programming. The rural poor had a lot at stake; their material realities hung in the balance while politicians discussed development priorities and debated how to approach the distribution of state resources. Ordinary Africans intervened in these deliberations and, in doing so, helped to determine Kenya's development path.<sup>11</sup> Scholarship to date has highlighted—but perhaps overstated—the high-modernist logic of developmentalist states.<sup>12</sup> The discursive focus offers few insights into how development was carried out on the ground or how it shaped the material well-being of the poor, often consigning them to the backdrop.<sup>13</sup>

Most scholars have accepted that in the 1960s, international organizations transformed state actors into the exclusive agents of development and, in turn, presumed that these processes expanded and entrenched bureaucratic power.<sup>14</sup> It is often taken as axiomatic that during this period, the aim of development was economic growth.<sup>15</sup> In Kenya as elsewhere, neither development practice nor theory was ever coherent, fully constituted, or unanimously supported. Officials disagreed on how to achieve economic growth, and whether growth was even the ultimate goal, with some state actors arguing that wealth redistribution and economic equality were more telling indicators of societal health than gross domestic product (GDP).<sup>16</sup>

Rural Kenyans tended to link development to material prosperity as well as personal and communal well-being. Some expressed their ideas of development in abstract terms—as improvement, eradicating poverty, positive changes, or the introduction of new ideas.<sup>17</sup> Others defined development in terms of discrete, finite resources, such as land, or as having access to more intangible resources, such as education and health care.

The postcolonial state was divided over conflicting development models and limited by fiscal and personnel constraints. Unlike Frederick Cooper's widely cited notion of the “gatekeeper state”—which derives power and authority from regulating and distributing foreign aid—Kenya's independent state never achieved monopolistic, centralized control over the flow of aid or commodities.<sup>18</sup> Though the state might have been *an* agent of development, it was certainly not *the only* agent.<sup>19</sup> All developmentalist regimes did not inevitably produce a capacious bureaucracy that increased state power.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, in early postcolonial Kenya, Jomo Kenyatta's state governmentality lacked instrumental or institutional heft.

The 1960s development landscape brought together multitiered actors, transforming local development sites into cosmopolitan spaces.<sup>21</sup> Development programs were often internationally financed, state-led, and locally implemented.<sup>22</sup> Transnational institutions created the criteria, which privileged some, marginalized others, and delimited the possibilities of development. Central state actors shaped policies within—or without—the constrictions of donors. They also frequently distributed resources to rural supporters, who knew to negotiate developmental policy and implementation with the local elites and local bureaucrats facilitating the execution of development programs on the ground. At the same time, rural Kenyans sought alternatives to state-led aid offered by nongovernmental organizations and community institutions.<sup>23</sup>

Many scholars have suggested that nonstate actors and institutions did not come to play a pivotal role in development practice until much later. James Ferguson, for example, contends that two letters—one from Guinean boys to “the members of Europe” and another from a Zambian journalist to America—reveal “the limitations of the nation-state as the object of appeal or redress.”<sup>24</sup> Ferguson suggests that this kind of invocation of a supranational moral order can be understood only as part of the neoliberal world. Yet these letters bear a striking resemblance to Omwando's letter to John F. Kennedy in 1961, revealing both continuity and rupture. During the 1960s, state, nonstate, and civil society actors, together, established new modes of governance and an international development order, which served as a forerunner to the neoliberalism of the 1990s.<sup>25</sup>

The early independent Kenyan state, similar to other states, was marked by its cleavages and contradictions. Perhaps the most consistent characteristic of the postcolonial state was its inconsistency.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, rural Kenyans often recounted the unreliability of the state—an intentional mode of governance, but also an unavoidable effect of the transition, part and parcel of political experimentations during decolonization. The government was financially constrained, and Kenyatta's ongoing efforts to centralize power produced conflicts between central and local administrations, generating contradictory outcomes—physically present local governments were intentionally underfunded and eventually incapacitated, and the overextended central state entered into rural lives episodically and unevenly.

At times, the state relied on local bureaucrats—settlement, agricultural, veterinary, medical, and community development officers, among others—to implement programs and act as representative conduits to rural areas. A government mandate to carry out development work did not, however, assuage the practical impediments that understaffed ministries and undertrained bureaucrats faced. State expectations tended to exceed bureaucratic capacity, particularly in rural contexts where officials were tasked with covering broad regions and hundreds of households, by either foot or bike. Pressured by their superiors to perform, local bureaucrats were often forced to make tough decisions. Some chose to visit their assigned communities only occasionally, while others decided to focus their energies on more developed households to create model farms ready to show off to touring notables. The successful rural execution of many programs depended greatly on individual bureaucrats. Given that the abilities, training, and commitment of these officials could range considerably, the local operations of a single program also varied. Kenyans thus experienced the provision of services and developmental assistance irregularly.

The rural sense of state unreliability emerges clearly in oral histories, with Kenyans describing how bureaucrats and elected officials carried out their work inconsistently. Some rural Kenyans described how members of Parliament visited during election cycles and then vanished. Many said that after giving out sugar and cooking fat in exchange for votes, *wabunge* (MPs) often disappeared, presumably somewhere into the distant capital, Nairobi.<sup>27</sup> While a number of Kenyans complained about the invisibility of rogue elected officials, others recounted the devotion and supportive presence of their MPs, illustrating the climate of unpredictability. They noted how representatives helped secure funding for local development programs.

During moments of crisis, members intervened on behalf of constituents, joining disaffected citizens to protest an unwanted development program or helping loan defaulters avoid eviction.

The *baraza* (local public meeting)<sup>28</sup> was the most reliable place to encounter government officials and make claims, but the outcomes were similarly unpredictable. Many Kenyans explained that they simply made their complaints and waited, unsure of the exact process for resolution. When communities aired their grievances at *baraza*, there was little telling whether they would receive a response. This created a feeling of inscrutability about how messages passed from rural areas to Nairobi government offices, and confusion about why some grievances were addressed while others were ignored. Frequently, Kenyan communities awaiting an official response never received one, only adding to the abstruseness, and transforming the space between rural communities and Nairobi into a kind of erratic void.

To compensate for this inconsistency, and to win the loyalties of the population, Nairobi officials attempted to depict the state as a translocal institution through continual symbolic representations.<sup>29</sup> The presence of important officials at groundbreaking and ribbon-cutting ceremonies was commonplace. Jomo Kenyatta's portrait was "all over," his voice could be heard on the radio nightly, and chiefs read the president's speeches aloud at *baraza*.<sup>30</sup> An Office of the President memorandum makes clear that such depictions were an intentional strategy, arguing that "to meet the needs of these people effectively, Government must be personalized in one individual who is easily accessible, sympathetic, understanding and authoritative."<sup>31</sup> In the view of the Office of the President, Jomo Kenyatta represented the perfect embodiment of the government. The countless petitions Kenyatta received, addressed to "*baba taifa*" (father of the nation), indicate that such representations could produce the desired outcomes.

An aura came to surround Kenyatta, and many Kenyans described him as an almost omniscient figure. William Serem, a Nandi pastoralist who initially supported the opposition party, recounted "meeting" Kenyatta: "When the president was coming, we were invited and we could only go to a place like Kapkong Primary School. We waited for him there. Even though we could not see him, it was our pleasure to see the president. We would go; we had met the president. Even if the president could go by air, it was our pleasure to look and clap."<sup>32</sup> Serem's account reveals the ubiquitous role Kenyatta came to play in many rural imaginaries, which might diverge from experiences with other state actors and with the unpredictability of policy implementation. In this setting, rural Kenyans came to understand individual actors as inconsistent conduits to state resources. They also came

to understand the spatial reach of the state as selective and its workings as unreliable.

The postcolonial state was a bricolage of precolonial, colonial, and newly emerging modes of governmentality and political authority. Precolonial forms of patronage persisted, as personalized political networks continued to provide security, wealth, and prestige, though the terms of exchange in these relationships had altered. Former colonial officials transformed into development officers overnight.<sup>33</sup> The provincial administration—an administration of colonial origins—remained the most important government institution in local settings. While Kenyatta's image replaced Queen Elizabeth's, the khaki uniforms of local bureaucrats remained identical and continued to be integral to rural authority. Within subnational arenas, ethnic patriots debated and reworked moral ethnicities.<sup>34</sup> Throughout Kenya, new and old institutions—a blurred mix of state, parastatal, nongovernmental, and community—appeared and disappeared in local contexts, some changing dramatically during decolonization, others remaining more constant. Cooperatives, self-help groups, churches, and voluntary organizations—headed both by citizens and by nonnationals—took on legal, administrative, and developmental functions. Kenyans, in other words, were inundated with conflicting signs of power and authority.

These histories tell us not just about the inconsistencies of development provision, or the dissonance of the state, but, correspondingly, about the nature of postcolonial citizenship.<sup>35</sup> Sally Kogo's observations show how experiences of state unpredictability shaped rural political ideologies on the rights and duties of citizens, and on the obligations of the state. She remarked, "I wasn't disappointed in the *serikali* [government] because the place was bushy so it was understood that the government never knew that people were living there. So, it was our responsibility to go to the government and introduce ourselves, 'We have a place living somewhere there and we need your services.'" <sup>36</sup> At the time, Kogo lived in northern Uasin Gishu on a registered, titled, land-purchase cooperative, thirty-five miles from the district's capital of Eldoret, hardly the most remote or invisible location. This setting was marked by inconsistency, though, and some illegal squatter settlements became sites of development intervention, whereas some high-modernist development schemes became illegible to the very state actors who designed them. Kenya's director of Settlement, for example, had trouble confirming the regional location of a number of settlement schemes under his control in 1964.<sup>37</sup> This context obligated citizens to declare themselves, and their needs, to the government. In absence of such an announcement, state unpredictability often forced citizens to take on the labor of development

themselves or seek assistance from other institutions, revealing the uneven set of rights, duties, and obligations accorded to Kenyans.

This book inverts James Scott's notion of "seeing like a state" to "seeing like a citizen." In Scott's depiction, monolithic states, with symmetric, ordered aesthetic visions, enacted massive social engineering plans, while "prostrate" civil societies lacked the capacity to resist.<sup>38</sup> Indeed, Sally Kogo's ideas about the connections between technocracy and development sound remarkably similar to Scott's, though from a citizen's perspective. A technocratic authoritarian state never materialized in Kenya, though a developmentalist one certainly did. In this setting, Kogo wanted to make herself "legible" to the state, not because it would make her more "manipulable," but because it might offer her access to resources.<sup>39</sup> Seeing like a citizen allows for a disaggregation of the state, and of citizens, exposing the limitations of high modernism as practice and theoretical framework. It pushes scholarly understanding beyond the dualistic, rudimentary narrative of states infringing on impotent citizens, and reveals, instead, the texture of a series of more complex political relationships.

Seeing like a citizen entails shifting the optical positioning, moving from the cartographer or surveyor's airplane flying above to the footpaths below, uncaptured by aerial photographs or miniaturized models. From that vantage, it is clear that the state was an internally varied, dissonant institution in the making, composed of dissenting actors. The view from below also reveals that citizenries' parallel never existed—no singular, generic, representative individual emerges.<sup>40</sup> Rather, quite the opposite. Seeing like a citizen exposes no standardized vision, but many visions, often in conflict, often irreconcilable. It reveals uniformity only in citizenship's unevenness, multivalence, and pluralism.<sup>41</sup>

Citizenship defines membership in a society, and it mediates the relationship between individual and community, setting expectations for how individuals gain rights, what duties they have, and what society is obligated to provide in return. In decolonizing Kenya, such expectations remained nebulous, and even the more clearly outlined citizenship expectations were inconsistently applied. National citizenship was neither claimed nor imposed, but rather negotiated, particularly the extent of belonging and protection that it offered. The transactional nature of citizenship drove the creation of new inequality, and not all citizens gained the equal "right to have rights."<sup>42</sup> Some Kenyans possessed greater ability to participate in the public sphere and to acquire rights, while others—still citizens—remained restricted to the margins of public arenas, their rights often more circumscribed, even though their duties tended to remain substantial. The incommensurate

citizen-state relationships produced a spectrum of rights endowed to different individuals.

Citizenship's expansive framework—encompassing legal status; rights, entitlements, and duties; and a sense of identity and belonging—means that it can be enacted at various sites, on different terms, and that it is both open to contestation and prone to reconfiguration.<sup>43</sup> Through negotiations over development, Kenyan citizens, state officials, and development actors delineated a spectrum of national citizens' rights and duties, and an irregular set of state obligations, differentiated especially by ethnicity, gender, religion, region, and class. In the Rift Valley during decolonization, rights and duties tended to overshadow legal status, and to shape feelings of belonging in the new nation-state. Unresolved questions about the allocation of state resources, and who had rights to those resources, gained particular resonance. Ultimately, land resettlement played an outsized role in determining notions of citizenship, since many Kenyans expected land redistribution and conceived of land as an almost inherent right. Land access shaped feelings of national and ethnic rootedness at both an individual level and a communal level. Depending on the circumstances, landless individuals might feel excluded from both the nation and their ethnic community, and ethnic groups that made unsuccessful bids to land might protest their communal exclusion. Aside from land, Kenyans also expressed claims to education, health care, infrastructure, employment, and famine relief, often in the language of rights to personal security and self-determination, though national and subnational moral economies required they work hard to help themselves first. As with land, enduring exclusion from such services affected not only material realities but ideas about belonging.<sup>44</sup>

Though some believed citizenship granted every Kenyan inherent rights with minimal obligation to the nation, many Kenyan citizens willingly took on considerable duties. Kenyans tolerated state expectations that they contributed to nation-building, but they refused to accept that such duties could infringe upon their economic rights and liberties.<sup>45</sup> Thus, when state officials attempted to enact restrictive marketing policies in the name of national development, some Kenyan farmers—who interpreted these policies as unfairly limiting their individual economic freedoms—refused to adhere. In other instances, Kenyans—who advanced national development by providing free labor—used the fulfillment of their citizenly duties to try to obligate the state to contribute funding and resources to their programs. Some Kenyans even sought to take on citizenly duties, so they could become endowed with rights to state services. Nandi farmer Daniel Kebeney Bitok was landless and poor at independence. He said, “I wanted to be among the

taxpayers, to attend the *baraza* [public meetings], to be educated on how to develop the nation. In return, the government should give me services.”<sup>46</sup> At independence, the rights and duties of Kenyan citizens remained ill defined and in flux, and the forms of citizenship envisioned from below often countered those envisioned from above, provoking deliberation and negotiation at development sites.

Though citizenship in decolonizing Kenya was built through the promise of state resources, these promises were not delivered universally or equitably. As inequalities were remapped, Kenyans began expressing disparate ideas about citizenship in the new nation-state. Men who became landowners often defined being a *mwananchi* (citizen) in a possessive way—to be the owner of the land or the owner of the country. This idea underscores how citizenship came to be determined by rights to resources, particularly land—a resource that both materially and symbolically represented national belonging and a future premised on development.

Kenyans with limited access to land and development often felt those exclusions were tantamount to exclusion from citizenship. Women and landless men rarely used the language of rights, possession, or universalism, instead articulating their marginalization. Not only were most women excluded from landownership, but they were often barred from inhabiting public political spaces such as *baraza*, and they frequently recounted that rural bureaucrats refused to offer women the development services provided to men. Over the course of her adulthood, Eunice Tele Maiyo, a Nandi woman, lived on several different Rift Valley properties that her husband owned. As one of three co-wives, Maiyo lived only with her children and served as the farm caretaker. She participated in local groups and recounted meeting government officials through church. Despite this relatively privileged position, Maiyo defined citizens thus: “It was those who were among me, but it wasn’t me.”<sup>47</sup> Women’s broad exclusion from development, especially landownership, and from actively participating in civic arenas, shaped a set of political philosophies that emphasized their denial of full citizenship rights.

Landless men, too, recalled feelings of marginalization. Daniel Kebeney Bitok, the Nandi man who described his desire to take on citizenly duties, squatted in the forest for over a decade before acquiring a small piece of land. He said, “Before I settled anywhere, I didn’t recognize myself as a *mwananchi* [citizen]. But after getting this land, I called myself a *mwananchi*. I thought I belonged to somewhere else, not Kenya, before getting land.”<sup>48</sup> Bitok understood his belonging within the nation as directly correlated to landownership. He conveyed how he wanted to be legible to the state, and he believed his

legibility was dependent on a land title. Bitok added that after purchasing property, “it was easy for the government to trace my whereabouts, because of plot numbers, and to bring services to me.”<sup>49</sup>

Because citizenship could act as an exclusionary and unpredictable framework, and because nonstate institutions offered some of the services that the state inconsistently provided, Kenyans also looked to local and international bodies to preserve old relationships, construct new ones, and to create alternate, pluralistic forms of citizenship. Often, marginalized Kenyans responded to their exclusion by turning inward, by drawing on kin and ethnic networks.<sup>50</sup> These relationships produced another set of expected rights and obligations, also negotiated and differentiated. Though ethnic institutions generally subordinated individual rights to the advancement of the whole, multiple animations of ethnicity and ethnic citizenship existed, derived from divergent ideas about morality, community, and belonging.

Among the Nandi, the most populous ethnic group in the Uasin Gishu region, communal claims to the fertile Rift Valley highlands—an important site of development—eclipsed almost all else. Moral economies continually evolved through debate and centered upon egalitarianism and reciprocity, encouraging Nandi communities, when able, to protect their members from insecurities. The *tiliet*—Nandi who call one another by relationship terms—enforced these codes of behavior.<sup>51</sup> Village elders and *kokwet* (neighborhood) leaders coordinated food donations to widows, the elderly, and the poor. The community, in turn, expected individuals to contribute to the common good, and Nandi proverbs reveal some citizen-society relationship norms. “Ta ng’enam tany chotin kongeeet met” (When the hind legs hold a cow, it should support itself by standing on the front legs) reminded those who benefited from communal aid to give back. Indeed, when Nandi worked hard and contributed to shared success, they, too, could expect to prosper. The proverb “Makinamei beny birir ei buch” (One cannot touch the blood of an ox without eating the meat) confirmed that those who helped with slaughtering or communal work more generally would benefit individually as well.<sup>52</sup>

For the Nandi, as for other communities, ideas of authority and morality became highly contested during decolonization. Generational conflicts heightened as young, Western-educated nationalists entered politics, further upending the gerontocratic order. Christian elites continued to monopolize elected positions, but teetotaling evangelicals were ousted by less-rigid Catholics, who espoused populist politics. In the 1961 Legislative Council elections—contested by Jean-Marie Seroney and Shadrack Kimalel—Nandi voters demonstrated their investment in both ethnic and national

politics. Seen as the establishment candidate and already suspect for his abstention from alcohol, voters criticized Kimalel on cultural terms. He was condemned for not undergoing the rite of circumcision and for marrying a widow.<sup>53</sup> Seroney—an unmarried youngster who had not built a house in Nandi—hardly fulfilled “customary” requirements. Yet, as a Catholic and a drinker, Seroney’s candidacy signified dismantling the control of the deplored protestant elite and restoring traditional social relations around the beer pot. Indeed, when a Kimalel supporter called Seroney “*chemurandan*” (a pejorative term meaning variously lowly, filthy, a drunk), it only bolstered Seroney’s lead.<sup>54</sup> The Nandi elected Seroney in a landslide. In doing so, they demanded space within the national public sphere and, simultaneously, re-considered ethnic principles on expected sociality and good leadership.

Central to Seroney’s long-standing popularity was his articulation of autochthonous ideas about land and belonging. While many ethnic patriots found such positions attractive, Seroney’s platform also created tensions. By the time Seroney ran for elected office, the new Kalenjin ethnonym had gained resonance and relevance, bringing together the Nandi, Kipsigis, Tugen, Keiyo, Marakwet, Pokot, Sabaot, and Terik communities. Though the Kalenjin confederacy was founded on linguistic and cultural affinities, geography, and shared politics, divisions always existed. Many Kalenjin communities resented that missionaries used the Nandi language for translations of Bible passages and grammars.<sup>55</sup> The Kipsigis and the Nandi—the most populous and economically developed subgroups—fought for the first Bible translation to be completed in their respective dialects, and they also competed for the leadership of the Kalenjin. Though the Tugen ultimately won this contest, Daniel arap Moi’s ascendance created a lasting schism.<sup>56</sup> Divisions were not limited to the educated elite or to intergroup political rivalries. Disagreements over boundaries, land claims, mobile women, resource allocation, and stock theft continually divided the Kalenjin, as did differences between highland and lowland communities, rural versus urban dwellers, and between Catholics and evangelicals.<sup>57</sup> Such tensions were always latent, and as they waxed and waned over the late colonial and early postcolonial periods, so, too, did popular attachment to this broader political subjectivity.

During this period, Kenyans began thinking not only beyond their particular villages and ethnic groups, but beyond their nation, to the continent and even to the world. Some rural Kenyans saw all black struggles as inherently connected, and thus felt obligated to support the antiapartheid movement and the American civil rights movement, regarding Nelson Mandela and Martin Luther King Jr. as leaders.<sup>58</sup> At this same time, some Kenyans

recognized Kennedy and Nikita Khrushchev as patrons, along with other foreign donors and transnational institutions.<sup>59</sup> These more expansive political imaginations were the result not only of the provision of international development, but of improved media access and nationalist discourse.<sup>60</sup> The 1960 KANU manifesto critiqued apartheid as a component of its party platform, and Kenyatta spoke frequently about a united Africa.<sup>61</sup> Clearly, Kenyans participated in multiple publics and enacted subnational, national, and international citizenships simultaneously.

The political imagination of rural Kenyans might have been both narrower and broader than the geographic boundaries of the new nation-state as they looked both within and beyond their local communities to forge better futures. Ethnic patriots fortified their affinities, farmers formed links to black market traders, rural women made connections to create self-help groups, Kenyans of various backgrounds appealed to Jomo Kenyatta, and occasionally individuals—such as Omwando—petitioned international politicians. Over time, all of these actors started to possess firmer ideas about what constituted development, about the obligations of the government and other institutional bodies, and about the rights and responsibilities of citizens.

While there is a robust scholarship on the state and on rural resistance in colonial Kenya, there is little historical scholarship on Kenya's postcolonial politics.<sup>62</sup> Political scientists published the vast majority of research on independent Kenya in the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>63</sup> This literature focused almost exclusively on rural class differentiation, leaving many questions unanswered. Of the few historical works that examine Kenyan statecraft in the postcolonial era, most approach independent politics from elite perspectives.<sup>64</sup> Both the colonial and postcolonial historiographies have also centered primarily on ethnicity. Though ethnic identity has, undoubtedly, made a deep imprint on modern Kenya, it has never operated in isolation, but in conjunction with class, gender, kinship, generation, citizenship, and more.<sup>65</sup> Indeed, the coexistence of and subsequent tensions between these layered identities have contributed to the making of complex and contradictory political subjectivities. Building on Julie MacArthur's research on pluralist thinking, this study foregrounds the pluralist identities of ordinary Kenyans but expands the lens of analysis beyond the ethnos.<sup>66</sup> Examining identity at multiple scales and in multiple registers helps us to understand how Kenyans actually lived their lives and imagined their place in the world.

Uasin Gishu provides a particularly good case study for examining these questions. The district's population is, and was, multiethnic—composed of multiple subgroups of the Kalenjin, as well as Kikuyu, Luyia, Luo, and Kisii.

With the transition to independence, and the purchasing of former white settler farms, Uasin Gishu's population came to be marked by ethnic heterogeneity and by class diversity as wealthier Kenyans bought large farms in close proximity to smallholder settlement schemes and squatter villages.<sup>67</sup> During decolonization, Uasin Gishu was an important site of developmental intervention, and it thus became a site of resource competition and contested claims-making. Attending to the experiences of Uasin Gishu's residents not only reorients the scholarship away from ethnic paradigms and elite politics, but it reveals how a diverse set of Kenyans made claims by exploiting old connections while creating new ones, often drawing on multiple identities simultaneously.

#### UASIN GISHU AND THE WORLD

Uasin Gishu is a place that has at times been perceived as historically incidental.<sup>68</sup> The name Uasin Gishu comes from the eponymous Maasai subgroup (or *oloshi*), who, during various periods, lived in the area.<sup>69</sup> It also denotes two geographical regions—a plateau on the northwestern edge of the Kenyan Rift Valley highlands and a district (later, a county) in modern Kenya.<sup>70</sup> While the plateau developed close to a million years ago when tectonic plates pulled apart forming the East African Rift, the district is a human invention of more recent, imperial origins. As such, the district's boundaries—and geographical scope—have proved susceptible to change. In contrast, since its emergence, the Rift Valley has remained a steady and striking score on the landscape, running thousands of miles and cutting across the entire length of Kenya. On either side of the valley lie Kenya's famously fecund highlands, of which Uasin Gishu is a part. Surrounded by numberless rolling hills, the flat grasslands of the Uasin Gishu plateau are visually and environmentally distinct, “a pastoralist's paradise.”<sup>71</sup> The proximity of the two environments—fertile hills and drier plateau—has historically been complementary to agropastoral livelihoods and conducive to reciprocal trading relationships among agrarian and pastoralist communities.

Uasin Gishu constitutes the mooring for this book because it has been the mooring for a diverse and unique set of historical actors. With its fertile lands, assorted microecologies, and borderlands location, Uasin Gishu has unceasingly drawn varied groups whose encounters and innovations have propelled historical change. These same natural resources later transformed Uasin Gishu into a site of development intervention. More so than the region itself, the book centers on the changing people who have inhabited this place. Newcomers have not only sustained the region's pluralism but also

generated its dynamic encounters—of trading and raiding, integration and division, cooperation and conflict.<sup>72</sup>

Uasin Gishu's longer ethnohistory molded the years that followed, with three main threads emerging.<sup>73</sup> First, Uasin Gishu was the site of successive migrations—from its precolonial past where the political economy depended upon mobile livelihoods, to its colonial past where European settlers and African labor migrants moved in, to the postcolonial era where resettlement programs and a developmentalist order brought new African residents and temporary foreign “experts.” Second, these successive migrations have shaped contested, competing identities. Land is the final thread and must be read through the previous two: migration and political identity. Though people had been the means by which early African communities prospered, with colonial rule and the appropriation of Kenya's fertile highlands, land became the means by which communities aimed to sustain themselves, and the imagined ground upon which ethnic and national citizenships were adjudicated.

By the late first millennium, a group of Southern Nilotic peoples, who would later come to be called the Kalenjin, particularly the Nandi subgroup, migrated to the hills surrounding the Uasin Gishu plateau. They dwelled in small, scattered homesteads and assimilated the North Rift Cushites who preceded them.<sup>74</sup> Their neighbors would be Bantu and Nilotic, agriculturalist and pastoralist. The Nandi dual agropastoral economy meant they relied less on external trading relationships, and their military prowess and cattle raiding meant that they made some enemies, though they also cooperated with other communities.<sup>75</sup>

Nandi precolonial political institutions bore the marks of many East African societies. Leadership roles were not hereditary and were determined by seniority, gender, ambition, merit, and social position—based on personal attachments, obligations, and wealth. The *kokwet*, or neighborhood, was the most important political unit, and geographic proximity served as a foundation for Nandi relationships. The saying “Kii ibunegeey maat” (We get fire from each other) expresses the close bond of neighbors, who shared this vital element that warmed, illuminated, and nourished.<sup>76</sup> The Nandi had no chiefs. Decisions were made in councils, which any man could attend.<sup>77</sup> At this time, other Kalenjin groups called the Nandi the *Chemngal* (many words), on account of the vigorous deliberations that occurred.<sup>78</sup> Egalitarianism and mutuality underpinned Nandi moral ethnicity. These values, and the emphasis on spatiality, would remain central to Nandi ideologies, even after the political order transformed under colonial, then independent, rule.