Résumé

D. W. Cohen & E. S. A. Odhiambo — Ayany, Malo et Ogot : des historiens à la recherche d'une nation luo.
L'identité luo s'est constituée à travers des circonstances et des processus sociaux et idéologiques complexes, allant des formes de parole intime et de salutation aux façons dont des identités locales se sont développées au cours de conflits directement sociaux et politiques, et à la manière dont les historiens ont essayé de rendre compte et d'utiliser le passé de la population luophone de l'ouest du Kenya. Le concept anthropologique et luo de segmentation constitue un cadre de référence prééminent et problématique. Dans les études historiques sur le passé des Luo, le modèle de segmentation s'accorde avec une notion de « répétition » : les processus antérieurs de formation d'identités collectives et de groupements constituent une répétition des processus formateurs d'une identité régionale ou nationale de notre époque, en sorte que « la nation luo » est la famille luo au sens large. Ces idées sur l'histoire de l'identité luo ont leur propre histoire et leur propre sociologie de même que leurs propres contradictions. On note que les historiens luo ont utilisé les grandes collectivités luo (piny) de ce siècle comme des modèles pour la reconstruction historique de l'organisation précoloniale. Le modèle segmen-taire est présenté comme un modèle puissant et problématique dans l'élaboration des études historiques sur le passé et sur la société luo. Une identité luo étendue n'a pas été créée simplement par l'expansion segmentaire d'un groupe originel de pionniers, mais plutôt construite au cours du temps par des acteurs réels, à travers un processus de conflit et de contestation.

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Ayany, Malo, and Ogot:
Historians in Search of a Luo Nation*

'Of course, Odongo does not feel
at home because home is where the placenta is'.

People in Siaya, western Kenya, say that the weak and awkward are
those whose placentae were buried outside the homestead and, in par-
ticular, away from the lands of familiar people. They refer to these
individuals as jooko, the 'outsiders'. Indeed, people thought of as weak
and clumsy may be called biero ('placenta'), as in the remark 'Nene oyik
dhano to owe biero' ('We buried the human being and left alive the pla-
centa'). In contrast, those whose placentae are buried within the
homestead are seen to belong, to be upright, to be secure.

Biero then becomes part of the constitution of boundaries between
individuals born and raised on familiar ground and those unrecognized,
or coming from outside the lands of familiar people. Doubt is cast on
the claims of people not traceable to the homestead, the value of which is,
importantly, articulated in each discussion of biero. Tension is introduced
into the thinking of young people considering moving elsewhere to seek
work or new lands to settle; they are exposed to the likelihood that they
will be received as jooko there; and they are incited to discover and secure
the support of known relations in the new setting. The biero discourse

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coming. [E. S. A. Odhiambo formerly appeared as Atieno-Odhiambo; cf. infra
in Lonsdale's contribution. CEA]

also places pressure on young women to return to their country homes to give birth, and on young men to enhance the *simba* (the 'bachelor's house') and to make investment there. Intimate concerns and discussions thus feed into the construction of enduring social and ethnic boundaries, in Siaya and elsewhere. While composing an ideology reaffirming the country homestead, concepts such as *jooko* and *biero* are joined to other issues and interests.

Gestures and Salutations

There is a Dholuo saying: ‘*Ka Lang'o ok kun e kuon*’ (‘One cannot be coy, or choosy, about a *Lang'o* goodwill gesture’). This saying, or proverb, refers to the manners of association with others. If the *Lang'o* (‘the others’) offer you meat you do not hesitate in accepting. If you hesitate, the *Lang'o* will eat all of it. It is understood that the *Lang'o* does not invite you to ‘possess’; rather, he invites you to ‘share’. The realm of manners between ‘us’ and ‘them’ is exposed as different. The proverb reminds the ‘us’ that in this setting of tension, in the interaction with the other, one should accept the rhythm, the etiquette, the presentation of the other group. An implication is that to abstain is to lose all opportunity. The still deeper meaning is that ‘I’, as one of ‘us’, improve my position, or in difficult times survive, by acknowledging, accepting, the terms of the ‘other’. One’s identity as ‘us’ is articulated, reinforced, by accepting the terms, manners, routines of the ‘other’. There is marvelous and powerful paradoxy in the meanings and intentionalities of this proverb. It has its hidden history. The proverb exclaimed and instructed about the boundary between ‘us’ and the *Lang'o* even as, one to three hundred years ago, the Omolo, and other groups possibly referred to as *Lang'o* at one time or place, were brought within the fold of Dholuo-speaking communities. In another way, the proverb reiterates the power of everyday life in the constitution of ethnic boundaries and identities.

Today, the Siaya man or woman participates and derives his or her identity from a network of affective relations with brother, uncle, grandfather, in-law, friend, if not also from that little humunculus which resides on his own or her own shoulder.

‘A factor which restricts the [Luo] children’s mobility is the practice of Luo mothers or mother-surrogates of telling children that they will be taken by a lion or a *jalango* if they stray far from the homestead. The term *jalango*, in this particular area, was a reference term for Masai, who had a common territorial boundary with the Luo. The children are cautioned also to be wary of strangers who visit the homestead when the parents are away, again for the same reason, i.e. that the children may be stolen’ (Blount 1969: 27).1

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1. The historical borderland of Dholuo speech in western Kenya defies detailed mapping due to extensive intermarriage and clientelage among individuals
The individual's identity is crucial in terms of the structuring of communication, the language of discourse, civility, and cooperation. The salutation or greeting of one person by another provides the context for initial conversation. An assembly of elders playing Ajua at Boro will greet a returning urban salariat through all his simultaneous identities. The structure, in regard to a man coming upon this assembly, may run as follows:

'How are you?'

'The son of Gangu?' (referring to an ancient settlement—gunda bur);

'The son of Boro?' (the identification of a present locational reference);

'The son of Agutu?' (bringing notice of a respected mother);

'The son of Karuoth?' (referencing a clan identity);

'The son of the rulers?' (referring to the claims to ancient domination and present legitimacy of the lineage or clan of the traveller);

'The nephew to the Usonga people?' (referencing a prestigious pedigree);

'The cousin of Okoth the Night Runner?' (referring to the relevance of a shared story of bravado);

'The son of the people who roasted crocodile?' (a humoring and at the same time respectful glance at a brave reputation);

'The son of the brewers of the sausage tree?' (a joking reference to stories of revelry);

'Our son?' (a summary and empowering implication that the traveller is one of us).

Each one of these terms of address contains traces of history, deep or shallow, shared and individual. The returning salariat finds his locus by recognizing this repertoire. This web of salutation simplifies a complex situation, because it commences with the individual at the center of the greeting, but then it comes to envelop those present, those saluting; in reality, it is society saluting itself, or, better saluting its values and its present social categories through the greeting of new or old friends, in-laws or kinsmen. The village meets the man at the bus-stop born to different natal speech communities. The historical borderland is also marked by a much remarked bilinguality. That there were marriage, client, and exchange relations among groups of predominantly different speech does not lessen—in fact may enlarge—the scope for fierce stereotyping of others. For a fine discussion of this point, see HAY 1975.
and resocializes him into his people (yawa), his patrimony (dalawa), his physical and social past (thurwa), and to a sociable and discursive language. In the following two weeks or so, the traveller-come-home will traverse the landscape ‘greeting’ people, visiting his maternal kin, mourning those who had died in the interval when he was last home, and entertaining his friends, in the process perhaps searching out for a bride. This social and physical reproduction of his identity is squeezed into his period of vacation.

In Siaya the individual is synonymous with the stranger, an alien, possibly even an enemy. It is the stranger who has to answer to the question: ‘In ng’ar?‘ (‘who are you?’). You do not in an important sense exist until you reveal your networks and, more importantly, until this network can be verified by your interrogators: ‘Whose people are you?’ might be answered by the response ‘Sijeny’s people’; validation of your claims is required; then a recognition of the group. Identity then is the composition of oneself by others in a constellation.

In the 20th century, there have certainly been some reformulations of this ‘identity parade’. For one, the State has attempted to pin persons down to a sublocational identity, an ‘official identity’ inscribed on the Kenyan identity card. The Kenyan identity card registers individuals in terms of sublocations... as presumptive maximal lineages. For example, the Liganwa-Agulu people are listed as living in Koyeyo sublocation. In situations like that west of Boro, where there is a known, considerable mixing of descent groups, the State has created both a sublocation and an identity for them. In another way, the State has intervened to take areas of extreme heterogeneity of social identity and create identities, as with the two sublocations Ojwando A and Ojwando B in central Alego. Ojwando means, literally, ‘mixed bag’, a working and confabulated identity for anyone in need of one. The creation of sublocations for Ojwando groups in Alego, Yimbo, and Karachuonyo is itself a testimony to the conscious invention of tradition by the colonial State (Hobsbawm & Ranger 1983; Lonsdale 1977).2

What we also have is a situation where the Alego Karuoth clans have had to retrench their dominance by emphasizing their prior rights to land through the invention of their history. The emphasis on the owner of the land, won piny, can be seen to be at odds with our original construct of gunda bur. The distillation of one-time usage into permanent occupancy requires a reworking of history. One example will suffice. Within the space of the last one hundred and fifty years or so, the present gunda Warinda in Liganua has been occupied, in reverse order, by the Karuoth, Kakeny, Yiro, and Abakolwe clans of western Kenya. But the reworked history tends toward the suppression of the stories of these former

2. Of course, see the other contributions published in this special number and the next one, edited by Bogumi Jewsiewicki and Henri Momot.
occupants, and the heroic aspect of how Warinda and his patrilineage captured the *gunda* emerges as the most prominent telling of its past. Even his allies—the Uranga and Kagwa clans, who made possible the taking of the *gunda*—have, in Liganua, shed their specific, distinctive knowledge of their contributions to the events in favor of the Warinda episode.

In the case of the Ojwando ‘clans’, William Ochieng’ (1975) has demonstrated in his *History of the Kadimo Chiefdom of Yimbo in Western Kenya* how the Luo-Kadimo clan was forged as the ruling clan by the British at the beginning of this century:

‘The Kadimo people [...] aimed at excluding the Ojwando clans from all administrative posts in the location. By manning the administration they benefited from exemption from recruitment as porters, carriers, and very few of them were recruited to go out to work in European plantations, and those of them who could not afford taxes went scot-free, unlike their counterparts, the Ojwando people, who were usually caned, imprisoned or forced to work on the roads [...]; the Kadimo people also derived a lot of pride and pleasure from being “rulers over barbarians”’ (Ochieng’ 1975: 64).

This invention in turn has inspired the simultaneous invention of competing Kadimo and Ojwando versions of history in Yimbo, which quest has in turn involved the partition of location and an ongoing competition, at the level of education and in the building of community or *harambee* schools, between the Dimo and the Ojwando clans.

Among the issues which arise here is the subtle enmeshing of ideology, identity, and material concerns. In Yimbo, kinship values are not decaying in the contexts of changing communities. Rather, they are being reworked and reinforced in ways in which identity takes the form of economic ‘nationalism’ within the sublocation, where inequalities, differential access to opportunities, are attributed to social categories and identities which have been substantially invented.

But identity may also develop fortuitously: one patriarch may have, and have educated, ten sons, who in turn will have and possibly educate their forty to fifty sons and daughters. Given the patterns of accumulation associated with education, and also the fact that the educated elites have often married among themselves, a very rapid rate of ‘clan’ formation is produced. Observers of western Kenya recognize that the late Canon Jeremiah Awori has produced a ‘clan’ that spans from Samia, that is linked *via* marriage to families in Nyakach, Yimbo, and Bunyoro, Busoga, Buganda, Liberia, Malawi, and Britain, and that includes lawyers, financiers, real-estate developers, and journalists, with occasional dabblers in politics both in Kenya and Uganda. This pattern has been replicated many times in Siaya. The Luo refer to this process as *nyaa*, ‘spreading out’. Education is not the only opportunity structure implicated in the appearance and growth of new ‘clans’. Traders and wholesalers have met at the market place and created enduring linkages.
What one sees in these processes is the convergence of ideology and identity, but not necessarily through patrilineal relationships, and not necessarily towards the wider ‘tribal’ or ‘ethnic’ lines.

Another issue that arises has to do with the uses of history. The invention of sublocations has involved the invention of sublocational history. The legal processes of land adjudication and titling in Siaya have involved the reenactment of family and lineage histories of the 19th century, and perhaps from even earlier. The take-off point is itself contentious. Where the models of Luo society in the work of historians and anthropologists have been firmly patrilineal, in land litigation one’s identity is probed both patrilinearly and matrilinearly. In the process, history explodes silences. The one who was an uncle today is reconstituted as an outsider, ng’ado nono, tomorrow, with no patrimony, because in reality his ancestors were clients to a founding, self-legitimating lineage; or his ancestor was actually sired by an itinerant Sakwa or Maragoli medicineman, like the Nyamwanda cluster in Sakwa; or he was actually conceived premaritally, so he is the ‘child of simba’, with no claims to the patrimony, like the Kagilo cluster in Gem. Here is historical discourse in everyday life disaggregating and unscrambling strands and segments, valorizing this one, devaluing that one.

Western-trained historians may object to our usage of the word ‘history’ to refer to these situationally invoked memories. Yet the more generally used, and consensually understood term, tradition—particularly as defined by historians such as Jan Vansina and David Henige—does not sit easily with our sense—and with the presentation by the student of Luo sociolinguistics, Ben Blount—of historical accounts in western Kenya as intensely negotiated and arbitrated. For Blount (1975), the knowledge of individuals—read ‘elders’—is arbitrated. The arbitration is intense because the past is brought to bear upon the untangling and resolution of a variety of critical conflicts.

‘The Luo still think very much in terms of their history. When a dispute is being discussed, the whole historical context is brought out, and the relationships between

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3. ‘We are ready to define oral traditions as verbal messages which are reported statements from the past beyond the present generation. The definition specifies that the message must be oral statements spoken, sung, or called out on musical instruments only. This distinguishes such sources not only from written messages, but also from all other sources except oral history. The definition also makes clear that all oral sources are not oral traditions. There must be transmission by word of mouth over at least a generation’ (VANSINA 1985: 27-28). As restrictive as this definition may seem, in particular, distinguishing ‘tradition’ from other verbal forms of history expression — VANSINA’s earlier definition of tradition is more so (compare VANSINA 1965: 19-20).

4. ‘Strictly speaking, oral traditions are those recollections of the past that are commonly or universally known in a given culture. Versions that are not widely known should rightfully be considered as “testimony” and if they relate to recent events they belong to the realm of oral history’ (HENIGE 1982: 2).
The individuals examined. 'The object is to remove the source of tension, rather than to give a juridical answer to a legal problem' (Whisson 1964: 1).

The arbitration sessions in which elders frequently find themselves as actors are moments of 'workshop history'; and this is so whether the sessions are concerned with establishing lineage seniority, the priority of various non-kin relations, land usufruct, or genealogy generally. The yields of these workshops in turn depend on the models of society at hand. Without oversimplifying, this consensual model—the statist, harmonious, and enclosed model of the clan—is but one of the several available models. In such sessions, history is addressed, received, and presented as a material of power. There is an economy of history production, as well as a sociology of history production, and at every point identity, the constitution of a group, who one really is, are questions constantly addressed. What is clear is that there is real discoordination and contention in the holdings of knowledge on the Siaya past.

If the production of history in Siaya constitutes an important force, it is also being reconstituted as texts through specific processes of stylization. The genealogy or lineage chronicle produced in Blount's laboratory resembles closely the text of the guild historian's field interview in Siaya. The received and recorded text is cleansed of the debates and nuances which produce Blount's genealogy. The rich commotion of past, and the equally rich and commotional knowledge of history, escape the oral narration as nomenclature, and the simplified genealogical map gives structure to the oral text. Diverse and incongruent elements are condensed into, or suspended from, the text, and, perhaps in important ways, this text composition, with its exposed structure, comes to be naturalized as the archaic, classic, remnant, and, indeed, only form of historical exposition. This is not to mean that large, important reservoirs of knowledge of past 'disappear into oral texts'; indeed there is no reason to assume that memory is depleted as individuals recite or compose texts. But a characteristic form of exposition is affirmed, reified. A method, or methodology, is implicated. And it is a method full of closures and silences. The process of articulation of historical knowledge as lineage chronicle is reminiscent of the process of producing a photographic record of a collective activity in Siaya in which the subjects quickly recompose position, posture, and gesture into a formal group portrait... remaking the effort of the photographer to record a 'natural scene' into a conventional and, by routine, a naturalized portrait of kin and neighbors.

Piny and Nation

At another level, beyond the enclosure, neighborhood, sublocation, or clan, is the piny, the territory. The works of E. E. Evans-Pritchard (1949) and Aidan Southall (1952) imply that such territorial units were
fairly distinct by the end of the 19th century. Indeed, in 1949, Evans-Pritchard wrote (1965: 210) that ‘Each Luo tribe (piny), coterminous in the main […] with the present administrative location, was an autonomous unit’. There were, in this view—which many Luo today share—, Alego, Gem, Asembo, and Sakwa as examples of territories or domains; and there were, in this same view, individuals and groups identifying themselves or identified as Jo-Alego or Jo-Ugenya. The presentation of precolumial western Kenya as a collection of distinct peoples or territories produces a neat organizational structure and conforms to ethnological and ethnographic presentations of peoples elsewhere in Africa. It also fits an implicit logic of rehearsal, that these small ethnic units were 18th- and 19th-century rehearsals for the broadly inclusive ethnic unit of the Luo recognized in the colonial and postcolonial periods.

It is the very neatness of the apparatus, of the model of Evans-Pritchard, which generates an uneasiness about the verisimilitude of the construct. Contrary evidence is indirect, but powerful. Work by Olool Aringo (1969) on Alego suggests that there were at least three major rival clans for control of its general landscape at the beginning of the 20th century: the Karuoth, the Kaluo, and the Kakan. William Ochieng’s material on Yimbo (1969, 1975, 1976) suggests that the very nomenclature of Yimbo-Kadimo (Dimo’s Yimbo) was contested by the Ojwando clans, who argued that they were not Dimo’s people. The pronounced rivalry within Sakwa between the Nyaswa and Nyibinya groups likewise suggests a contested terrain. Northern Gem in the 19th century was really a war zone between Luo-speaking and non-Luo-speaking groups, while the boundaries of Ugenya contracted toward the southern bank of the river Nzoia through the last century. John Lonsdale and Michael Whisson (1976) have shown how the Asembo polity has been such a treacherous terrain that magic alone has held together the people around their chieftdom.

This brief collection of evidence from the past forces a review of the original construct. The piny were not simple or easy givens, were not of consistent shape or structure, and were perhaps experiencing processes of formation and deformation simultaneously. A question is raised: how did a Gem or an Asembo identity come to be? Ben Blount’s sociolinguistic reconstitution (1975) of a collective production of a genealogy—by a small group of elders—suggests part of an answer. The collective reconstruction—for example, the implication that ‘this land was originally Alego’s’—can be assumed to be adopted by all those present in the historical discourse, though perhaps assertedly so only by those present whose security was not felt to be threatened by the agreement. To yield to the prevailing position in the negotiation is not
necessarily a surrender to a point of view, for alternative versions can be carried back out of the discussion on the constitution and authentification of Alego as a piny.

Importantly, the Alego or Asembo identity was reinforced by the zoning of people into locations by colonialism. Some saw it in their interest to project this formalism back into the past; others to 'agree to agree' to this expression of the past. Moreover, the chief's court, or baraza, forged a new identity for people as the elders walked the main paths to Amoth Owira's baraza at Boro. The funeral associations in Nairobi, Mombasa, or Kampala served to reinforce these identities. As the piny were worked for their utility in the colonial and postcolonial period, so were they usable models for the simplification of precolonial spatial and social organization. The present remade the past, as reworked history legitimated the present.

One must also mention the influence of the outsiders: to the peoples of the highlands and Mombasa areas the migrants from western Kenya were in need of a name, and 'WaKavirondo', 'WaPagaya', 'WaRuguru', 'JaLuo', all these were tried. It is interesting to note that the first sixteen Luo words recorded in Western literature, in Charles New's Life, Wanderings and Labours in Eastern Africa (1873), were provided by the Isiria Maasai, who appear to have been then expressing the idea that Ugaya and Luo were separate, distinct entitiees. In Charles W. Hobley's book, published in 1929, the 'WaGaya' still appeared as a separate language group from the 'Nilotic Kavirondo'. At any rate, between 1873 and the early 1920s, a name tag for these peoples around the Kavirondo (now Winam) gulf was being forged by the Maasai in contact with travellers, traders, and agents. Here we have a period of about a half century when this population we now refer to as the Luo of Kenya was known by the outsiders, but not through its own address system.

'The great characteristic of the Wa-Kavirondo as a whole is their honesty; making war upon a neighbouring tribe to take their cattle is considered legitimate, but petty thieving is extremely rare, thus comparing very favourably with the inhabitants of Uganda and Usoga' (Hobley 1898: 370).

One thought is that the early Dholuo-speaking proto-elites began to identify themselves to outsiders as 'JoLuo' partly as an expression or signal of rejection of the other names.

But there is more to identity than names, and the political arena appears to be a critical motor in the production of identity. Here the work of David Parkin on the Luo in Nairobi is extremely valuable. Parkin (1978: 214-235) reconstructs the sometime struggles between two political wings of the Luo people in the 1950s and 1960s, which he asso-
iates with Tom Mboya and Oginga Odinga respectively. Ideas of *pinu*—a ‘people’, a ‘country’—were articulated and elaborated amidst these tensions.

‘That this division into two factions [Mboya and Odinga “constituencies”] with contrasting philosophies meant a great deal to ordinary Luo is instanced by the anger and violence exchanged between their respective supporters during and after the well-attended general meetings held by the Luo Union at Kaloleni Hall at the time. It is also interesting to note the consistency with which Luo report how in many cases the factions actually had a divisive effect on affinal and even sibling relations [. . .] the Odinga-Mboya contrast represented a summation of alternative ideological possibilities. Odinga ostensibly stood for the collective defence of the Luo community through both “corporate” radical thought and Luo conservatism. Mboya represented a Western-style meritocracy through the transcendence of ethnic conservatism and through individual achievement’ (*ibid.*, 221).

Factionalism and struggles within produced a context which produced concepts of broader community and identity, while particular claims of ideological priority pressed home to Luo, and to others, the notion of a global motherland. The early threads of an internally realized and broader Luo identity are likely traceable to the tensions within networks of political and social organizations like the Piny Owacho and the Kavirondo Taxpayers’ Welfare Association of the 1920s, the Kisumu Native Chamber of Commerce, the Luo unions of the 1930s, and the Luo Thrift and Trading Corporation of the 1940s and 1950s.

One could stand back from this plethora of complexity at several levels and in multiple contexts and suggest that while the British were busy creating ‘tribes’ the leading proto-elites were creating the Luo nation. The recurrent reaffirmation of the ‘Luo way of life’ and the Luo homeland in the latters’ discussions eventually defined the core values of this new society. Paul Mboya’s text *Luo Kitgi gi Timbegi* (1938) is a canonization of the asserted culture and behavior of this new nation. This text became part of the regimen for cultural education in the primary and intermediate schools throughout the 1950s. In the 1960s Oginga Odinga reiterated these core values in the first chapter of his book *Not Yet Uhuru* (1967: 1-10):

‘No marriage could be solemnized without the presence of the mother as well as the father [. . .] We were taught that a good statesman would not give precipitate judgement [. . .] Elders were men of substance and integrity [. . .] when they came from leading lineages they did not inherit leadership but had to demonstrate it [. . .] Diligence yielded prosperity and brought respect, but riches alone did not count for leadership [. . .] the authority of the elders was much respected, indeed it was never challenged [. . .] the Luo regarded the land as their mother and the tribe as a whole was the proprietor of all the land in its area [. . .] Common ownership of the land was accompanied by a system of communal cultivation’ (*ibid.*, 11-14).

One needs to add that all these tendencies evolved amidst Western missionary enterprise which situated itself in opposition to many cultural practices of the communities. In an important sense, these discourses over moral and modern practice selected and then reified as distinctive elements certain observed practices, for example in the compartmentalizing analysis of marriage arrangements. In turn, these discourses over cultural practice pressured the new elites to be more precise about what were being defined as core values or understandings, which we might term here, temporarily, ‘centerpieces’. By the 1940s, these centerpieces were widely shared in Luo-speaking communities broadly across Kenya.

Similarly, perhaps simultaneously, there emerged the concept of the typical man—JaLuo Asili—who was identified by his adherence to the ‘customs of the land’ (timbe jopiny) as opposed to the ‘customs of the outsiders’. In a crucial sense, the colonial period was a six-decade-long colloquy among all sorts of people about culture markers, boundaries, core values, ethnicities. The football clubs, the clan associations, and the Luo union branches all expressed these core values. During the 1950s and 1960s, John Cosmas Owade Bala Korguok, broadcasting on the Luo programs of the State radio, did more than any other person to reiterate these core values. An undoubtedly important institution was the Remington Cup, an interdistrict annual football competition that pitted the Luo of Central Nyanza against the Bantu Kavirondo (of North Nyanza) as no other ethnic vehicle could.

The outcome, a sense of a Luo nation within a nation, was not simply, or directly, the product of the rehearsals of previous stages of identity formation. As Parkin (1978) has suggested, and as we are arguing, this broad identity was sculpted by real people, in real time, articulating particular and secular interests as well as global ones.

What happens when we set these several points about fluidity and motility in the production, suppression, organization, and utilization of Luo historical knowledge against our received understanding of Luo ‘oral tradition’ from the guild’s professional historians? The terrain of discussion becomes complicated, difficult.

The Production of History

Published some twenty years ago, Bethwell Allan Ogot’s History of the Southern Luo (1967) was, and is, an impressive effort to write a history of what one may refer to as the ‘whole Luo people of eastern Uganda and western Kenya’. With two decades behind us, we can look back and see the Ogot volume among other works of Luo prose historiography, to try and catch its originality and its nuances, and the ways in which time has remade the book, from a dissertation published to a handbook on the Luo past heavily used by Luo in settling marriages and land disputes.
We can also now position other, and earlier, historians of the Luo alongside Ogot, and we can look to see how the principal works of early Dholuo and English prose historiography on western Kenya sit among the broader history production, among the people of the region and outside the scholarly guilds.

We have already noted how history producing in western Kenya is often and substantially about the constitution of identity, not just about a ‘Luo people’ or a ‘Luo nation’, but also about the constitution of other collective and individual identities, of which the ‘Luo nation’ is but one. An inquiry into Luo identity is an inquiry into the multiplicities of identity formation in innumerable contexts and at countless moments, from the ‘us and them’ of settlements in the ancient fortified enclosures of the *gunda bur* just north of lake Gangu to the ‘us and them’ in recent debates among Kenyan historians over their place in Mau Mau historiography.

John Lonsdale (1977: 132) has termed the constitution of ethnic identity ‘the [...] unfinished process of coming to be’; to unravel this unfinished process is, as we have discussed, clearly a complex if not impossible project. There is an incompleteness not only of its conclusion, but in the many twists and turns of intermediate and prior integument. There are different intentionalities to unravel and multiple and variably nuanced identities to be caught, decoded, understood. But there are elements to which the historian can have access—and the study of history and identity in western Kenya can help us understand, to plant our feet firmly upon, the broad and important field of history production, for there is no nuancing or expression of identity in western Kenya which does not represent the past or reference a knowledge of the past, and in so doing produces history.

Shadrack Malo is reckoned a founding father of Luo prose historiography. He wrote his *Dhoudi Mag Central Nyanza* (1953) from the chiefs’ *baraza* in western Kenya. For him, the locational council was the first rendezvous with modern historiography. He drew upon the expertise of individuals around the chiefs’ *baraza*. Malo’s was a history of the Luo people generally, but it was written from, and based upon, the knowledge, stories, testimony, of important men in the precincts and chambers of colonial administration. In this sense, we might term Malo’s work not so much a ‘tribal history’ but a ‘tribunal’ one, with the emphasis being upon the power of the tribunes to define their interests within his research.

‘When the Luo first arrived in their present homeland, a great number of them passed through Alego. Up to this day there are the fortresses of these sojourners. The early walls of these forts are still clearly visible.

Ramogi, the younger grandson to Ramogi the elder, first arrived at Ramogi Hill (in Yimbo) with his son Jok. He came via Ligala, where the Banyala now live. From there he came to Ramogi Hill, where Jok begat Imbo.
Imbo had nine sons: Mumbo, Nyinek, Rado, Nyikal, Dimo, Nyiywen, Iro, Magak, and Julu. Imbo's descendants are scattered as follows: Mumbo's descendants are in South Nyanza, Dimo's in Central Nyanza, Iro in North Nyanza, Nyikal in Seme location in Central Nyanza, and Julu in Kajulu location in Central.

Mumbo begat Muljwok and Uyawa. Muljwok begat Alego, Chwanya, and Omwa. The descendants of Chwanya and Omwa are the Karachuonyo and the Kanyamwa groups in Central Nyanza. Alego begat Seje' (Malo 1981: 27).

Malo's informants were the location elders and they in turn hammered out aggregate, consensual histories of the 'major clans' convenient for the time, and for themselves as the local notables. His work raises many issues; among them is the denotation of prime and ancient patrilineages—the Ugenya Kager, the Gem Kojiudhi, and the Alego Seje—running back to Podho and Aruwa in now northern Uganda. A chronology of nearly a thousand years is implicated in Malo's presentation of these patrilineages. It is an instance where the 12th and 13th centuries are clearer than the 19th century.

This distinction between the clarity of the remote and the obscurity of the near is observable in works on the Nilotic Luo, or 'River-Lake Nilotes' more broadly, for example in O. K. Odongo's and J. B. Webster's work *The Central Luo during the Aconya* (1976). Within the guild, and perhaps also outside it, certain agreements have evolved almost unconsciously on the principle elements and outlines of Luo history at a chronological distance; on the other hand, in periods near, no similar agreements have evolved or are available. Related to this is the canonization or formalization of a stylized and particularly framed Luo history—presented, importantly, as the Luo history, or the only 'knowing' of the accessible Luo past. The history of the 'tribune' was read as the history of the 'tribe' by Malo's audience.

The historian of the Luo Samuel Ayany, in his Kar Chakruok Mar Luo (1952), first published in 1948, took a path different from that of Malo (1953). Ayany sought a more 'popular' mode, in which potentially every Luo kinship collectivity would represent itself, or be represented, in the 'complete Luo history'. While writing at the same time as Malo, Ayany was looking past the latter's centering of the tribunes in his research and presentation. For him, the 'tribe' was produced and confirmed by the totality of segmentary kinship relations. History lay in aggregating the myriad histories of distinct lineages. The problem was not a model of historical process in the Luo past—for him, this was self-evident—, it was in the limitations of memory and the constraints on research effort which precluded reaching and reconstructing all segments of the 'tribe'.

In this respect, the type of treatment of the past represented by Ayany's work is generally viewed by a wide readership—but not here—as constrained by the social and cultural limitations on memory and orality rather than by a very selective and specific approach to rendering the
past. Early ethnological notions of what a people were and what a history should look like came into specific western Kenya literature through works such as Crazzolara’s (1950-54) and Evans-Pritchard’s (1949) on Nilotic peoples of northern Uganda and southern Sudan. Through them, the ‘tribunal process’ of history production in western Kenya was remade into a ‘tribal process’—the vision of the ‘tribe’ inscribed in the long, segmentary genealogies of lineage histories. In this sense, in this expostulated process of forming new groups yet remaining as one, the ancient Luo were seen to be rehearsing modern Luo nationalism, larger and more binding than any political, social, and economic divisions which might appear among them.

This recomposition of what a history should look like drew readers and historians into two critical traps: first, that history could only be the ‘history of the tribe’; and, second, that this history was ‘this tribe’s past’. Ayany belongs to the second generation of the Luo elites who have, from the 1920s, been continually both inventing a nation (in the Volksense of it) and giving this invented nation an invented ‘history’. Ayany’s work lies midway between Malo, a local administrator, and Ogot, the first Luo historian of the professional guild. Ogot inherited both the ‘tribunal’ version of Malo and Ayany’s popular version in which everyone had a historical place according to his or her position in a genealogy. To these two approaches—the second, in its incontrovertible segmentary logic, had the capacity to envelop the first—Ogot added a Whig interpretation which held that the Luo have always been marching toward Canaan. He also added a methodology, centering on the carefully constructed and recorded oral interview, which gave the mission of Luo historiography a doorway into academic discourse.

Ogot’s *History of the Southern Luo* (1967) is in a certain sense Janus-faced. It looks toward the academic shelves, where it has easily found ‘a place to feel at home’, for it has reintroduced the Luo man into the mainstream of the world history. But it also looks toward, yet not quite tackles, the *gunda bur*, the hardly understood, ancient fortified settlement of northwestern Siaya and the Uganda-Kenya borderland. The *gunda bur* was the contextual ground of early settlements of the ancestral Luo in western Kenya and its treatment has become the critical core of the entire logic of Luo historiography.

Ogot’s work offered not only a reworked perspective on the historical processes of segmentation of a ‘homeland’ people, but also an opening to the study of the turbulences and contests of the past of western Kenya and eastern Uganda. If Malo and Ayany saw the past as a rehearsal for Luo nationalism in the 20th century, Ogot’s work reads as a rehearsal for deeper inquiry into the scams, crevasses, and divides of the Luo past, often ancient and lingering disputes from which the historian of the guild, Professor Ogot, could not distance himself.

Malo and Ayany consciously and unconsciously suppressed the signs
and substance of discoordination and contention in the holdings of the people of Siaya on their past. Their objective was the projection of harmony, their presentation of the Luo past as rehearsals for cultural and political revival and nationalism. Malo and Ayany perhaps had no vision of another kind of history. Ogot disclosed tensions in the past but exposed readers to only a narrow band of the contentious material on the past held by the people of Siaya themselves. Ogot’s book does Malo’s and Ayany’s one better, for it offers the careful and patient reader a view of a people, a nation, Canaan, constructed out of critical tensions and conflicts over land, political domination, and domestic insecurity. That the Ogot volume has been used as a tome on local rights rather than national tradition is a reflection of the power of people in everyday Siaya to produce history and to make history work for them. Indeed, Ogot’s work has stopped one gate short of the dala, the contemporary Luo homestead, at the magistrate’s court. Among literate Luo, Ogot’s History appeals most readily to the lawyers and advocates as they unravel the migrations, settlements, and wars of the various named lineages and clans. This unraveling occurs within the courtroom, for the purpose of establishing the claims of their clients. That this work of historical scholarship has no other equally ready application in the lives of ordinary people speaks volumes about the processes of knowledge in Siaya.

Ogot is not alone in experiencing this unintended diversion of a historical text. Jomo Kenyatta wrote Facing Mount Kenya (1953) as a charter for Gikuyu nationhood. But its most ready function in Kikuyu society has been in the courts: as an authority on family law, particularly relating to dowry and divorce. Kenyatta and Ogot may indeed have felt that the primary chapters of their work were not being read closely, or at all, and certainly not as they intended them to be. But at minimum, their works are cited as authorities for a specific identity, namely Gikuyu or Luo. They participated in the invention of these ethnic communities—if they were not actually responsible as their foremost inventors. In turn, the communities invented are reworking the texts which contributed to their creation. And this is happening not in terms of the arena of the nation but most actively, densely, in the arena in which clan identities, lands, status, and individual identity are constantly referenced.

The ways in which Kenyatta and Ogot have been remade into usable works in everyday life brings us back to our initial Luo declaration with its implicit call for attention to the discourses and manners of everyday life, and it reminds us that the ‘unfinished process of coming to be’ is not the only purpose of the constant referencing of past. The discourses between a ‘progress’ of invented history and a knowledge of the past are extraordinarily difficult to map. But we begin to see how individual Luo, within their everyday lives, have referenced their past and affirmed their knowledge of it in constituting who they are. They invoke history
in a constellation of personal and collective 'addresses', identities. Even as the people of Siaya attempt to assert their interests, they extend the meanings, the content, of collective identity, working upon a very contemporary name 'JoLuo' and at the same time producing out of a sense of past an ancient collective identity, 'JoKanyanam', people of the rivers and lakes.

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