2015

Bhabha's Hybridity and Kenyan Development: A Close Look at Banking, Land and Health

Hannah F. Tuttle
Colby College

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Bhabha’s Hybridity and Kenyan Development: A Close Look at Banking, Land, and Health

Global Studies Honors Thesis
Colby College
Hannah Tuttle
May 2015

First Reader: Laura Seay
Second Reader: Chandra Bhimull
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Abstract

What happens when two distinct cultures come into contact? During colonialism, this resulted in the practice of "othering," or the separation of colonial identity, portrayed as positive, modern and good, from colonized identity, illustrated as backward, barbaric and sinful. In this paper, I discuss the ways that Homi K. Bhabha's concept of "hybridity," or the ways that the intersection of these two spheres caused a third "hybrid" culture to arise, manifests in contemporary development practice. Based on a month of field research in Kisumu, Kenya this past January, I discuss the ways that these "hybrids" have formed at the intersection of Western-funded development NGOs and the communities that they try to help, and the potential of these hybrid systems when conceptualizing future development. I focus specifically on language, banking, land and health.
Acknowledgments

Before delving to the true substance of this thesis, it is crucial that I thank the many people involved in getting it there. This is a long list of mentors, advisors, readers, fellow thesis writers and friends who have helped me throughout the year I’ve spent working on this project. I would like to thank Professor Patrice Franko, the always helpful and patient Global Studies director. From the lunchtime meetings throughout the fall term to walk us through the many important steps on our way to the month of field research all the way through giving us her comments on the final thesis defense this April, Patrice has been with us through it all, and I am immensely grateful for that. I would also like to express my appreciation for my trusted advisor Professor Laura Seay, who has also been with me every step of the way, reading every in-progress draft I threw at her and adding important and insightful comments that brought us to where I am today. Having an advisor who is intimately familiar with development in Africa was absolutely vital to this project, and I am tremendously grateful for her help. The insights of my second reader, Professor Chandra Bhimull, were also critical in the early stages to compel me to ask myself what I hoped to get out of this process, and again in the late stages to inspire me to push through the final editing stages. I am also grateful for the comments and questions posed throughout the year by the rest of the Global Studies board.

I am also indebted to all of my contacts in Kenya, for taking the time to meet with me (often very short notice!) and helping me navigate an entirely foreign land. First, I would like to thank my two primary contacts in Kisumu: Dolphine Dawa, whose advice and insights set the baseline for my understanding of Luo culture; and John, whose excitement to help a lost American in Africa led to many important encounters with Luo contacts and Westerners alike. I would also like to make special note of St. Anna’s Guesthouse, which kept me safe in the midst of a string of robberies in the Milimani area, and the employees who made me feel welcome every day. Furthermore, each and every one of my contacts and interviewees demonstrated patience and a willingness to help that dwarfs anything I could have imagined, and I simply could not have written this thesis without them.

Of course, I would have never made it to Kenya without the spectacular generosity of Mr. David Hunt who has made fieldwork in Global Studies possible. I am truly grateful for his support, and I am elated that future generations of Colby Global Studies honors candidates will have the opportunity to do the same. I am also indebted to the Dean of Faculty Grant, which not only helped to get to Kenya but also present my research at a conference in Chicago this April.

Finally, there is no way to express my gratitude for the friends and family who were there for me throughout his process. For my mother, Liza Tuttle, for supporting my decision to spend a month in Kenya despite the risks involved. For my roommates, Sydney Morison, Claire Regenstrief, Allie Martin and Spencer Traylor, I am afraid I pulled you along with me through this process, and I couldn’t have done it without your help. And to my fellow thesis-writers Katrina Belle and Carolyn Bennett: I am so grateful to have had you two with me this year; it made many a late night in Diamond much more enjoyable. And… we’re done!

To each and every one of you, and the countless ones not named, I offer you my most profound and heartfelt gratitude. Thank you all for the incredible experience this has been.
Introduction

The difficulty with the question is that there is no vantage outside the actuality of relationship between cultures, between unequal imperial and nonimperial powers, between different Others, a vantage that might allow one the epistemological privilege of somehow judging, evaluating, and interpreting free of the encumbering interests, emotions, and engagements of the ongoing relationships themselves. (Said 1989, p. 216-217)

When I first arrived in Kenya, I was planning to write this thesis on the way that development projects conceived in the individualistic cultures of the West failed to take the complex community bonds of Africa into account. This, I thought, must be one reason why development programs so often fail. But when I arrived in Kisumu, Kenya in January 2015, what I found instead was a context composed of constant shifting and overlapping of both Western and Kenyan systems and ideologies, some of which had potentially profound implications for the societies in which they operate.

Before I delve too deeply into this introduction, it is critical that I make clear what I mean by certain words that will come up constantly over the course of this thesis. Perhaps what is most important, given the topic of this project, is what I mean by “development.” To begin, I will borrow Katy Gardner’s definition used in her book Discordant Development (2012): development as “reliable infrastructure, a transparent and accountable state, and secure employment: inclusion, in other words, in the benefits of neoliberal capitalism,” an extremely
elusive goal (p.5). As Amartya Sen (1999) argues, development is not just about inclusion in this system, but also about freedom to pursue one's goals, commonly known in the field of economic philosophy as freedom of opportunity. Gardner also mentions that the term “development” is a “slippery” one, one whose definition changes depending on who is using it (2012, p.5), a theme that was brought up frequently during my interviews as well.

Another, perhaps even more problematic term is “Western.” When used in this paper, this word means coming from one of the countries of the Global North (namely the United States and Western Europe) where individualism and a business-minded entrepreneurial spirit are prized (see, for example, the work of famous Western philosophers such as John Locke and Adam Smith). “Western” is an extremely broad term, encompassing all manner of different locales, dialects, and lifestyles. My goal is not to insinuate that the Creole culture in New Orleans is the equivalent of the Welsh sheep farmer context, but rather capture the overarching value systems that generally hold true in the Global North region more so than others. The same goes for my usage of the words “African” or “Kenyan.” In using them, I am not implying that all the highly dynamic and various cultures of Africa or even within Kenya are the same, but simply that, on the whole, the values of community-mindedness, extended familial responsibility and maintaining traditional practices generally hold a higher value than the individualist characteristics listed for the cultures of the Global North. These are also by no means exhaustive lists of what makes a culture “Western” or “African;” these are simply the characteristics which I choose to highlight in my comparison of these two value systems, systems that come into contact in a deeply personal way in the context of development. Furthermore, I would like to be frank about the possibility that, during my sole month of fieldwork, I am accidentally attributing
decisions and behaviors to these generalizations when there could be (and I’m sure, in fact, are) other major contributing factors, personal or cultural.

I am very wary about the danger of these generalizations. As both the opening quote and the discipline of anthropology teach us, there is no shortage of difficulties in speaking about another, foreign, group. Ethnographies often take years of immersion to write, and even then come with disclaimers regarding the cultural context in which the anthropologists originate. I have neither the time nor the training to pursue such a lofty goal. But in lieu of paralyzing myself in the fear that I am undermining the very people, places, and processes I have spent the past year studying, I decide to move forward with the firm conviction that if we allow ourselves to be hamstrung by the potential dangers in speaking for a foreign world, the possible positive impact we can have in changing the deeply flawed system of development disappears immediately. As Edward Said wrote in 1989, “As citizens and intellectuals within the United States, we have a particular responsibility for what goes on between the United States and the rest of the world” (p. 215). I hope that the reader allows me these generalizations with this in mind.

That overview aside, development agents occupy a unique space in the world. Most of them, from the foreigners of the Global North to the locals, are often led by the altruistic desire to ease the suffering in the world or in their area. Additionally, as many of them work for non-governmental organizations, they often endeavor to avoid the sometimes powerful and often corrupt African governments. This creates a space in which people from the wealthiest parts of the world can interact directly and constantly with people from the poorest, generally without diplomatic niceties or extensive political posturing (although large NGOs might do this to some extent). The minds steeped in the individualism and social liberalism of the Global North and those more closely resembling the community-centric traditional values of Africa are united in
their desire to “develop” a given area, a word that might mean something different to each and every actor.

What is interesting about this arena is the way these two value systems collide. Who will get the upper hand? Is there an upper hand? What would an upper hand look like? Or is it more about what is created as the two value systems influence each other, coming together as something entirely new? Although it is not always a battle, it can often seem that way, especially in the case of NGOs that are designed to change ingrained cultural practices such as female genital mutilation, for example. But the boundary is not always so distinct: take, for example, the work of an American missionary couple who, though not fighting a cultural battle, work around their moral reservations about polygamy and levirate marriage in order to help orphans go to secondary school, and have for ten years (Interview 2). Or the example of the Permaculture Institute of Kenya, which works with communities who have sought out their help, never imposing on a society that doesn’t want them there while also requiring that the participants have the legal title to their land, a decidedly Western notion of land tenure (Interview 6). The boundary between these systems is porous and ever changing, even as the cultures themselves morph beneath our feet.

My aim is to study what arises at the boundaries and intersections of these systems as they manifest in the development sector. Although I begin with language as a way of illustrating the cultural hybridity that Bhabha envisioned, I focus primarily on the more institutional sectors of banking, land, and health. I also speculate as to what makes a hybrid effective and why they have yet to form in certain realms. My major hypothesis regarding this final point states that the reason why hybrids have not formed in these areas is because Kenyan influence is largely unable to break into the institutional levels, which is largely overpowered by Western controlled
development theory and practice. Simply put, if Kenyan influence is allowed to affect the institutional levels of a program, a hybrid is more likely to form. This is directly related to imbalances of power in development discourse: the West, as the source of funding for these programs, controls the form that they take and almost unerringly uses its own experience as a rubric. If allowed to mutate, I claim that hybrids have the potential to make a huge difference in finding systems that work in the developing world by combining what works in Western systems and what works in indigenous ones to create a hybrid that is uniquely suited to address local problems.

This thesis is organized into five chapters. In the first, I discuss the postcolonial scholar Homi K. Bhabha’s idea of hybridity and demonstrate the ways the term continues to be relevant in the Kenyan development context today. In the second, I outline a Kenyan example of Bhabha’s cultural hybridity as it relates to language, further explicating my usage of his term. The next three chapters are devoted to explaining sectors that illustrate different stages in the creation of a hybrid: banking, which has developed an effective hybrid; land tenure, which is currently composed of multiple systems existing side-by-side without a significant hybrid emerging; and health, a space decidedly conspicuous in its reliance on Western ideology and lack of hybrid systems.

**Why these sectors?**

Many of my readers might wonder why I have focused on the language, banking, land, and health sectors, sectors that are not generally the first that come to mind when development is mentioned. To some extent, this is a function of the group with whom I was able to connect while I was there, but on a more profound level I believe that they are part of the foundation
upon which other development efforts build. Language is an important factor to consider in any context, and in this case it serves to show the ways that contemporary Kenya can illustrate Bhabha’s ideas of hybridity. Land is also pervasive and inextricably linked (in the Western tradition) to banking, both of which are deemed critical to establishing a sound economy. Health, in building off of the other sectors mentioned, forms a baseline upon which other development efforts expand. Initiatives regarding education, for example, cannot succeed if children must stay home as a result of stomach worms or malaria for much of the year. Although the banking, land and health sectors might not be immediately evident as facets of development (an advisor mentioned that they might better fall under the heading of “globalization”) I maintain that they form the basis of other development efforts, and thus must be considered as part of the developmental whole through they are not always planned initiatives in themselves.

Beyond that, the order in which I’ve placed them does not reflect their importance in development, but rather a gradient of hybridization; the sectors (after language) with the most effective hybrids are placed first.

**What is missing?**

It might seem odd that given my inclusion of language, I have opted not to include hybridity in religion. This is in no part due to a lack of literature: on the contrary, there are a series of important African thinkers who focus expressly on Christianity’s role in Africa, notably John Mbiti, and even expressly on hybridity in religion, such as V. Y. Mudimbe. I have chosen not to incorporate hybrid religions in part because much has already been written, in part because my realm of development knowledge resides primarily with non-church actors, but also because I feel that as an agnostic I would misinterpret or otherwise offend those who are not. Instead, I
must hope that the section on language does a sufficient job in demonstrating cultural hybridity, and turn my focus instead to an exploration of institutionalized hybridity in the state-led or state-funded development projects.

For those familiar with development, it will soon become clear that there is another major noticeable absence in this work: that of corruption. Corruption in Kenya is the topic of Michaela Wrong’s book *It’s Our Turn to Eat: the Story of a Kenyan Whistle Blower* (2009); its existence was repeated to me by a volunteer with the German equivalent of the Peace Corps (Interview 11), discussed by an English development agent working to build power micro-grids in remote villages (Interview 10), cursed by an American missionary and CIA officer (Interview 21), noted by a Swedish worker with a sustainable development firm (Interview 6), bemoaned by an Australian missionary school headmistress (Interview 15) and lamented by an elderly Kenyan widow who runs an orphanage and school, to name only a few. My contacts agree: corruption is a major problem in Kenya, especially regarding development. One could even put forth the argument that corruption is a form of hybridity, in that it can be seen as the continuation of tribal social networks playing out in the originally Western political organization of democracy, but that is an argument for another time.
I have chosen not to include it within these pages because I decided to concern myself early on with the potentially positive effects of hybridity. Corruption often feels like an insurmountable issue, and due to the myriad of causes and effects it would be impossible for me to do it justice and still achieve my aim of illustrating positive changes taking place within the development sector. It is an obstacle, without a doubt. But in this moment, it is my goal to focus instead on the non-destructive hybrid systems springing up in Kenya’s development context.

Methodology

This paper is based on a month of fieldwork, much of which was spent learning what it means to be a young, white U.S.-American woman navigating a somewhat tense African political climate alone. My methodology is framed loosely around anthropological methods, but in the end reflects my own very multi-disciplinary background, probably most closely matching the Geography tradition. My sole goal is to illustrate a very brief moment in the history of the development of Kisumu and from the perspective of an outsider. I had no firsthand exposure to the world of “development” before I left and much of what went into this paper is what I picked up along the way, from chance interactions with strangers or from days spent with friends whom I never ended up interviewing. I listened and observed as much as possible, trying to absorb and understand everything I could.

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1 By “tense,” I mean that Kisumu is located in the heart of Luoland. Luos, as I will discuss in greater detail in later chapters, have been marginalized in Kenyan society as a result of the highly ethnicized politics in Kenya. The lack of opportunity in the formal sector (especially for non-Kikuyus and Kalenjins) combined with the government’s failure to provide public goods to areas in Luoland is the source of much political frustration, creating a somewhat tense climate.
When I did manage to set up an interview, it was somewhat informal. My interviewees fell into two major categories: Westerners working in foreign-funded NGOs and Kenyan community leaders in development. The Westerners category can be split into two further sections: relative newcomers, or those who had been working in the field for five years or fewer; and the well-established, who had been working there for over five years. I chose to break the Westerners group into smaller categories because of the very clear differences in outlook: the newcomers were generally much more aware of cultural respect and hoped to have as little effect on the local cultures as possible (unless certain traditions and norms ran directly counter to their programs), while the well-established Western agents seemed much more disparaging of the existing systems and advocated substantial changes. I depended largely on the “snowball method” of contact building: I depended on one contact to put me in touch with
others whom he or she thought might have an interesting perspective. My weeks in Kisumu were spent calling an even mix of new contacts and those from the list I compiled before I left. I recorded all my interviews and sent them back to the interviewees for approval when they expressed interest in seeing them. I have also changed the names of many of my contacts.

I would also like to bring up the possibility that my interviewees tailored their stories to better fit what they thought I wanted to hear. With the Westerners, this could be due to a deep conviction in the work they do and a desire that others should feel the same. With the Kenyans, it might be due to a long-standing tradition of white people entering communities with the intent to give away money, and the traditionally very hospitable nature of the Luo people. A trusted advisor told me to be wary of taking power away from my interviewees in this way, but I see this possibility not as power-underm ining but power-affirming: rather than waiting for a benevolent benefactor to bestow money upon static locals, they are exercising their own agency to assure that their family or their networks benefit.

Perhaps the most important aspect of my field research, however, was experiencing the context of Kisumu in as many ways as possible. Staying in St. Anna’s Guesthouse, a Catholic hostel in the wealthier neighborhood of Milimani, allowed me to meet many missionaries traveling through the area, all of whom, coincidentally, were American (a large factor in

**Figure 4. The neighborhood of Milimani. This is the road where St. Anna's is located.**
explaining their excitement at sharing their lives with me, a fellow American in Africa). They invited me to eat with them, they told me their stories and experiences, and one couple ended up driving me to the airport the day of my departure. Although I don’t have many official interviews of those interactions, they were invaluable in allowing me to feel out the norms and assumptions of that group. I had not planned to meet with any missionaries before I left, but I am immensely grateful to them for allowing me to see a piece of their worlds, and I’m confident that this paper is improved as a result.

I also availed myself of the local upper-middle class hangout, the Western-inspired Java Coffee House Nairobi. I met many contacts there for our interviews, but more importantly, it was where I worked up my courage to begin a conversation with an American man sitting beside me. John ended up being one of the most helpful contacts I made in Kenya; he let me drive around with him while he did errands, I spent the night at his house and met his Luo wife and her Luo daughter, and he connected me with several other Western ex-patriots working in the development field of Kisumu. That sort of personal viewpoint was not one I was expecting during only one month of fieldwork and it has helped me immensely.

Figure 5. The Java Coffee House Nairobi, located in Kisumu’s West End Shopping Mall.
Finally, one last brief note. My own experiences, like those of my interviewees, construct my version of reality, as Said’s opening quote describes. They form the lens through which I experienced my time in Kenya, just as it does for the people who live there, as foreigners or as natives. I rely heavily on the testimonies of those I interviewed, and much of this paper is made up of descriptions of who those people are and my understandings of them. My aim is far from trying to articulate the dilemmas of the Kenyan poor or some such goal. Rather, I have edited my experiences to create a coherent picture informed by my own beliefs and claims, a picture that portrays my understanding of the disconnects, overlaps and hybrids between Western ideologies and African ideologies within the development field of Kisumu, Kenya.
Chapter 1

Bhabha’s Hybridity and Contemporary Development

Interviewee: Most people like Africans, Kenyans, even the Luos, are culturally ambivalent. I don’t know what- what I mean by this, the colonial history, the education system that we received was a radical cut from our traditional culture. It was like, a sudden way was drawn between our traditional culture and a modern culture. So we lost a root, right? And we embraced a rootless culture. So this lack of continuity- so it is like I have my legs in two worlds. I’m having one leg in my traditional culture, which is my farm, and I’m one leg in the modern, predominantly Western culture, which is rootless.

Q: Yeah. Well in this part of the world at least.

Interviewee: Exactly. In this part of the world. (Interview 1)

This excerpt from an interview conducted during my first days in Kenya illustrates a dichotomy that is deeply embedded in postcolonial literature. As the interviewee states, the sudden and forceful imposition of British culture upon the indigenous Kenyan cultures created a significant rift in the cultural continuity of the colonies, a rift that has played a large role in postcolonial African governments to this day. But there is more to this story. As anthropology insists, cultures are ever changing, constantly adapting to internal as well as external stimuli, and the “modern” and “rootless” culture did not remain that way for long. The aim of this chapter is to suggest that Homi K. Bhabha’s conception of a hybrid, a culture arising out of two initially
separate loci of cultural power, is relevant in today’s development context. But first, it is necessary to spend some time exploring Bhabha’s ideas.

**Cultural hybridity and its creators**

In “Signs Taken for Wonders,” Homi K. Bhabha explains his theory of hybridity: the idea that out of the colonial asymmetry of power and the constant separation of colonial values from native values through discourse arose a new hybrid culture which was both produced by and a danger to the colonial cultural differentiation. “Produced through the strategy of disavowal, the reference of discrimination is always to a process of splitting as the condition of subjection: a discrimination between the mother culture and its bastards, the self and its doubles, where the trace of what is disavowed is not repressed but repeated as something different—a mutation, a hybrid” (Bhabha 1985, p.153). Although Bhabha discusses specifically the religious aspects of this idea, hybridity has been used in a larger sense to understand the effects of colonial versus colonized in terms of identity formation, a topic most notably discussed in Franz Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks* (1967).

Bhabha’s theory of colonialism involves two key players: a powerful, “dominant” culture or group and a second group, perceived as less powerful, over which the first group exerts its influence. He begins his argument with an explanation of what he calls the “rules of recognition:” “[If] transparency signifies discursive closure — intention, image, author — it does so through a disclosure of its rules of recognition—those social texts of epistemic, ethnocentric, nationalist intelligibility which cohere in the address of authority as the ‘recent,’ the voice of modernity” (Bhabha 1985, p.152), as opposed to the voices of “traditional” Other. The way colonial power established itself, he argues, was through these discursive “rules of recognition,”
which reflected the ethnocentric ideology that presented the colonizers as a civilizing force, bringing the colonies into the modern era. The imbalance of power between the colonizers and the colonized, as well as the unevenness of the power and pressure exerted across the boundary of the two, gives rise to the hybrid:

[The] unitary voice of command is interrupted by questions that arise from these heterogeneous sites and circuits of power which, though momentarily “fixed” in the authoritative alignment of subjects, must continually be re-presented in the production of terror or fear — the paranoid threat from the hybrid is finally uncontainable because it breaks down the symmetry and duality of self/Other, inside/outside. (Bhabha 1985, p. 158).

This “symmetry and duality” is a key feature of colonial thought and a feature of Edward Said’s *Orientalism* as well. The construction of the East (or in this case, African) as an oppositional Other to the West was central to colonial ideology, setting the stage for the “civilizing” mission. However, the power asserted on the East by the West is not as uniform as it first appears:

The place of difference and otherness, or the space of the adversarial… is never entirely on the outside or implacably oppositional. It is a pressure, and a presence, that acts constantly, if unevenly, along the entire boundary of authorization… The contour of difference is agonistic, shifting, splitting, rather like Freud’s description of the system of consciousness which occupies a position in space lying on the borderline between outside and inside, a surface of protection, reception, and projection. (Bhabha 1985, p. 152).

Even further, Bhabha argues that this exercise of pressure and power causes the identities to fracture. The identities are thus reimagined, giving rise to the hybrid. Similar discursive power dynamics are at play within contemporary development practice: that of the powerful, wealthy, program-shaping West, and the local cultures that are generally seen as unchanging and agency-less communities receiving the benevolence of the
Global North. The continuation of this dichotomy throughout Kenyan history is the topic of the next section.

**A brief introduction to Kenyan development history, colonial to present**

Before explaining my application of Bhabha’s ideas to the contemporary Kenyan context, it is important to connect the historical dots between Bhabha’s colonial focus and modern day development. The state of Kenya today, like all other states, is the product of its history: many long years of colonialism, over fifty years of independence, and many years as the host of international events and initiatives. By coming to terms with Kenya’s history regarding changing development ideologies, we can begin to trace the continuities between each form, drawing a thin but unmistakable line connecting the ideologies of colonialism through to the ideologies of contemporary development.

Before the advent of modern participatory development programs, development transitioned slowly through a variety of other frameworks. Beginning with resource extraction in the colonial era, it evolved into state-led development at the outset of independence, then into the debt repayment and government restructuring of the Structural Adjustment Programs and the Highly Indebted Poor Countries Initiative, next participatory “bottom-up” schemes, and finally into contemporary development. Today, microfinance and small-scale capitalism are touted as the new miracle drug to global poverty. Understanding these ideologies and the transitions between them provides important insight into where Kenya development is today. As Van de Walle (2001) writes, “… debates about Africa’s crisis have been largely atemporal, in the sense that they have not viewed reform as an evolving process, in which past events or decisions have
an impact on the present, which in turn will condition the realm of the possible in the future” (p.13).

It is my aim in the following sections to place the Kenyan development trajectory firmly within its history while pulling out continuations of themes and underscoring where the power to decide development initiatives has always lay. In doing this, I also hope to illustrate the ways the Bhabha’s conception of colonialism as separating Western culture and institutions from their African counterparts plays out throughout development history.

**Colonial development**

Kenyan Westernization (then thought of as “trusteeship”) first began in a significant way during the colonial era. Although Kenya had been incorporated into the world economy since the 1840s, it was 1901 that saw the true beginning of British-led development in the country (Leys 1975). Colin Leys, the author of *Underdevelopment in Kenya: the Political Economy of Neocolonialism* (1975) and one of the most renowned scholars on Kenya, writes from the perspective of underdevelopment theory. He writes that while building the railway from Mombasa to Kisumu to reach the strategic headwaters of the Nile on Lake Victoria, the colonizers realized that the best way to pay for the construction of the railroad and the administration of British East Africa was by making the land surrounding the railway productive. They did so by selling the seemingly unoccupied land to European farmers, who amassed large farms and employed

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2 By “underdevelopment theory,” I am referring to the ideas present in the book *Latin America: Underdevelopment or Revolution?* by Frank (1969). In this volume, Frank argues that the world is made up of the “metropolises,” or the highly developed urban centers, and the “periphery,” or the more rural areas that surround them. In the case of development, the “metropolises” are the countries of the Global North, and the “periphery” is composed of the Global South. Far from being a state of developed and undeveloped countries, Frank claims that the metropolises actively undermine the development in the periphery in order to “underdevelop” them, thus keeping cheap resources flowing into the metropolises. Leys was heavily influenced by these ideas, and although it is important to keep his bias in mind, his detailed account of Kenya’s early development is important to understanding the context of this research.
Africans to work them. In order to keep the cheap African labor on which the white farms relied, a system of strict economic discrimination was imposed. Although Africans paid the bulk of the taxes, Europeans received nearly all the benefits, including access to “railways, roads, schools, hospitals, extension services and so forth — in addition to being subsidized through the customs tariff (especially after 1923) and having privileged access to profitable markets, both external and internal” (Leys 1975, p. 31).

The basis of these policies was not only economic but also deeply racist, as we understand the term today. As Brantlinger (1985) notes in his article “Victorians and Africans: The Genealogy of the Myth of the Dark Continent,” it was the “imperialist ideology that urged the abolition of ‘savage customs’ in the name of civilization” (Brantlinger 1985, p. 166). The conviction that communities in Africa were “backwards” and “savage” justified British policies, which were seen as a way of bringing the light of civilization to the “Dark Continent.” This was not “racist,” according to the British; it was “humanitarian.” They desired that Africans achieve what they deemed as the “moral, religious, and scientific” high ground (Brantlinger 1985, p.167-8). Similar articles have been written on the French and Portuguese method of colonization, which mirrors the British approach in importing incongruous institutions under the guise of “civilizing” (see Rosenblum 1998, O’Harrow 1999, and Vieira 1994).

It is clear that colonialism drew firm lines between Western culture and African culture as civilized and barbaric, light and dark. The psychological effects of these lines should not be underestimated (see, for example, any of Franz Fanon’s works). As will be discussed in an upcoming chapter, the colonial era in Kenyan history, in addition to establishing a cultural

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3 I do not mean to justify the actions of the British colonizers by any means. I simply wish to echo Easterly’s claim in his book The White Man’s Burden; the motivations behind modern day development aren’t as disparate from the bloody and painful history of colonialism as we might like to believe. Contemporary “Big Push” ideologies still, though less pronounced, operate under the assumption that the Global North knows what the Global South wants and needs.
dichotomy still visible today, effectively established two Kenyas: the Kenya experienced by the indigenous Kenyans, now fighting to maintain their way of life under a foreign oppressor, and the Kenya experienced by the British expatriates, who enjoyed all the economic and political privileges of a ruling elite. Reconciling these two spheres, culturally, politically and economically proved a substantial challenge to the post-independence Kenya.

**Post-independence development**

A full sixty-nine years after the European powers decided to partition Africa in the infamous Berlin Conference of 1884-85, Kenya achieved independence from the United Kingdom. Benefitting largely from the volume of international aid money available during the Cold War and using the success of state-led development in Europe sponsored by the Marshall Plan in devising their development agendas, countries across Africa began large development projects. These plans usually involved policies that favored industrialization and infrastructure development over agriculture, which represented a major divergence from traditional Kenyan ways of life (Livingstone 1968). Kenya also received the help of the United States, which was interested in promoting regional stability and establishing a capitalist economy.

Donor countries were rarely pleased with the results of these state-led development projects. As Van de Walle (2001) mentions on the topic, “donor disenchantment with government planning was nonetheless almost immediate. Most plans were based on improbably optimistic assumptions, were often unrealistic about governmental capabilities, and were full of bad, poorly thought-out projects” (p.201). The trend of increased investment by both domestic and international governments in order to overcome obstacles to economic growth and the promotion of democracy was made famous by Walt Rostow in the 1950s. Termed
“modernization theory,” Rostow argued that there are in five stages of development: the traditional society, the preconditions for takeoff, the takeoff, the drive to maturity, and the age of high mass-consumption (Rostow 1990). The idea of the “Big Push,” a term made famous by other development scholars who believe that substantial investment is required to achieve takeoff and continue to maturity, is largely discredited now, perhaps most visibly by the economist William Easterly (2002). No matter whom you believe, it is impossible to deny that modernization theory left a large mark on the developing world, mostly in the form of debt (Ndikumana & Boyce 2011), and many argue that the mindset behind modernization theory has not changed much in the years since its heyday; the same conviction that the trajectory of the West (as opposed to the Rest) is the best and only option remains dominant today.

Another important facet of Kenya’s post development years is the influx of foreign capital (Leys 1975). When the colonizers left, foreign investors flooded Kenya, buying up a variety of lucrative businesses, from newspapers to security firms. Even today, ethnic minorities often own the majority of firms in a given country, especially the large and profitable ones (Easterly 2002; Ramachandran et al 2009). This is especially true in contemporary Kenya, where the prevailing understanding is that ethnic Chinese and Indians own most businesses, although these business owners might now be first or second generation Kenyans.4 Easterly (2002) argues that this is due in part to the government’s desire to keep the wealth and power away from those with a claim for political agency, as Kenyans could become a threat to the political status quo and those in power if they are allowed to prosper as certain other foreign ethnic groups have.

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4 This is an extremely important dynamic to consider in Kisumu especially. The main road of Kisumu is full of small businesses, most of which are owned by non-ethnic Kenyans. During the post election violence in 2007-2008, Luo looters targeted Kikuyu and foreigner-owned stores, leaving the Luo-operated businesses intact (Wrong 2009). Some formerly Kikuyu storefronts have yet to be rebuilt, even seven years after the violence.
The influx of foreign money was not entirely capital for investment as outlined above, but also large amounts of aid transferred from the Global North to the Global South every year. This practice began in the years immediately following independence. As Van de Walle (2001) writes,

Aid resources, provided to the state but in the form of distinct projects, could easily be coopted in a patrimonial context, with project benefits being distributed along clientelistic lines. The 1960s and 1970s were the golden years of this postcolonial system, in which the international community buttressed weak and highly vulnerable African states, which would probably not have survived without the legitimacy conferred by the international community of states, as well as economic and military aid. (p.17)

If one were to take a close look at Kenyan governments post-independence, it would become clear that instead of reconciling the African and the Western spheres within Kenya, those who took over from the colonizers instead set about establishing the same system for themselves (Leys 1974). I discuss this trend as it pertains to land later on, but what is important to note is that the inequality present during the colonial years is still very much a factor in current Kenya, but with a black ruling class instead of white (Interview 5). Many of same facets of the colonial government hold true, most notably that those who control the government receive all its benefits (Wrong 2009). A young Luo man with whom I spoke mentioned a government program that strove to give funding to entrepreneurial young college graduates in a country with a high rate of unemployment. When I asked if he would apply when he graduated, he laughed and told me that no matter how hard he tried, those grants would go to the sons of Kikuyu MPs, never a Luo. The power and exclusivity of the formerly colonial system remains.

5 The ethnicity of the current president, Uhuru Kenyatta, is Kikuyu. Uhuru (as he is known by most Kenyans) is also the son of Kenya’s first president, Jomo Kenyatta. One contact told me that the Kenyattas now own nearly a quarter
The era of Structural Adjustment

The crisis of the oil shocks in the late 1970s hit the developing world hard. Stuck with corrupt and inefficient governments, a sharp increase in the price of oil, and a population that was demanding the goods and services present in the West, developing countries turned to the International Financial Institutions (IFIs) and their now-infamous Structural Adjustment Programs. The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund blamed “what they viewed as the wrongheaded economic policies of African governments for the crisis. In particular, they blamed excessive government expenditures, overvalued exchange rates, various domestic price distortions, high levels of public ownership, and protectionistic trade policies” (Van de Walle 2001, p. 8). Their SAPs gutted government spending, devalued the domestic currency, liberalized and deregulated prices, rolled back social provisions, and privatized national industries. Although the lending governments and institutions lessened the debt burden with the onset of the Highly Indebted Poor Countries Initiative, “debt write-offs do not address the fundamental weaknesses in international finance that generated repayment problems in the first place. Debt relief can treat the symptoms, but not the disease” (Ndikumana & Boyce 2011, p. 37).

Critics such as Weeks (1989) and Rahnema and Bawtree (1997) label SAPs as the first practical forays into neoliberal development doctrine, an economic ideology founded on free markets and open borders. Inextricably linked to the economic and political context of the Reagan and Thatcher era in the West, SAPs sought to impose the same bare-bones economic policies of the developed world onto the developing world. By first offering the dollar-denominated credit and the ideology that allowed the state-led development of the post-

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of Kenya’s land, a claim I haven’t managed to substantiate elsewhere (Interview 5). It is also interesting to note that parliamentarians in Kenya go by the same job title, MPs, as their British counterparts.
independence governments to take place, the West then feared for the money it would lose if the developing countries were rendered unable to pay their debts, forcing policies on them that would allow them to repay them to the detriment of their increasingly impoverished populations (Weeks 1989). Once again, uneven power dynamics and the imposition of the Western experience as the “correct” one played out in the developing world. Packaged along with policies of Washington’s international lending bodies came assumptions that put the individual and not the community at the center of the development equation, a distinctly Western idea.

**Participatory development, international aid, and microfinance**

In the past few decades, some progress has been made in incorporating local knowledge systems and norms. Coming into vogue in the 1990s, participatory development schemes have proliferated across the Global South. Claiming to use indigenous participation and insight into which programs need doing and how, many NGOs embrace strategies of partnership and ownership. Although much has been written on the shortcomings of this practice (namely, that it strengthens existing social hierarchies, keeps the minorities and women silent, and increases the influence of the community “big man” [Karlan & Appel 2011]) it nevertheless represents a huge shift in development thinking as an attempt (however symbolic) to share the power between those doing the “developing” and those who are to be “developed.” Instead of entering a community assuming they know what the people need, development actors instead ask for local engagement, admitting that the community could have valuable insights into the nature and implementation of the project. Van de Walle (2001) offers this understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of participatory-based NGOs: “In the short run, they had the advantage of being less bureaucratic, less corrupt, and more responsive to donor needs; in the long run, they tended
to substitute themselves for government agencies” (p. 204). Accountable to the foreign donors as opposed to the target communities, the danger in placing themselves between the local government and the population is that instead of developing responsive government agencies, target communities are instead reliant on foreign groups and funding that may not be there forever.

The expansion of the aid trend that began in the years immediately following independence has sparked outrage from some who claim that aid is misguided and serves to undermine true sustainable development goals (most visibly, Dambisa Moyo [2009] and William Easterly [2002]), while others, such as the famous Columbia University economist Jeffrey Sachs, claim that the reason poverty hasn’t been alleviated is because the developed world hasn’t yet spent enough. Whether one believes that aid undermines government accountability and keeps dictators and their cronies in power or that it is necessary to allow the developing world to reach the standards of living present in the Global North, the proliferation and extent of aid has played and continues to play a huge role in shaping contemporary African governments.

For those who doubt the efficacy of aid and believe that participatory development is another form of paternalism, some claim that microfinance and enterprise are the answer. The Nobel Prize awarded to Muhammad Yunus, creator of the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh, illustrates the support these ideas have enjoyed worldwide. But many years after Yunus’s first loan was made in 1976, there are reasons to reconsider whether microfinance and enterprise are the miracle drugs they were believed to be only a few years ago. Roodman & Moruch (2013) have revisited key papers touting the benefits of microfinance, and find that the statistical analysis used contained key errors that could have exaggerated microfinance efficacy,
compounded by a lack of collaboration in the early stages of the paper that could have pointed out the study’s blind spots.

Karlan & Appel (2011) also explore whether these initiatives have the reach and power they are believed to have, and find, resoundingly, that they do not. Microfinance is seen as a powerful tool for two reasons: one, they “show loans improving borrowers’ material standard of living… Second, they suggest profound changes taking place — changes that extend… into the lofty realms of empowerment and transformation” (Karlan & Appel 2001, p. 58-59), namely, that disenfranchised women are the ones who gain the most from microloans. The truth according to Karlan & Appel (2001) is that women are rarely the ones who benefit; instead, it is the already business-minded men who benefit the most from these projects. In an illustrative example, a randomized control trial done by the MIT affiliated Poverty Action Lab in Hyderabad, India, showed that not only were there few “go-getters” who were convinced to take loans and invest them in lucrative and forward-thinking ways, but that “the surveys found no marked changes in women’s empowerment, children’s school enrollment rates, or spending on health, hygiene, and food” (Karlan & Appel 2011, p.79). They also measure how microlending operations compare with the traditional (often seen as illegal and exploitative) moneylenders, discovering that, in many cases, the moneylenders have terms that make more sense for the poor’s specific needs. Despite their critical look at microlending, they conclude the chapter of their book on a non-condemning note: “The problem with microcredit is the way it has been pitched: as a one-size fits all solution to poverty that can be adopted effectively even without careful impact evaluations, and as something that every poor person should want. For all its merits, it is not that” (Karlan & Appel 2011, p. 82). This is, in part, due to the cultural
complexity missed in the basic assumptions of Western-designed capitalist economic models (see Henrich [2000], Henrich et al [2005], and Baaz [2005] for example).

Even though participatory schemes and grassroots methods are no doubt a step in the right direction, they remain deeply flawed. First, NGOs that use participatory methods are still beholden to foreign donors, who want to see evidence of changes they would like to see such democracy formation. This limits the efficacy of the NGOs to pursue projects that might be more beneficial to the communities in which they work, such as education initiatives that are more long-term with less predictable returns. Second, the very basis of microfinance, capitalism, was conceived within the English cultural context, one that prizes individualism and social entrepreneurship and mobility in ways that might not be reflected in rural African communities. Once again, Western values are applied to African development practice, and as the donor partner with greater power Western donors can see their aims met.

There are a variety of critical observations to draw from this list of what are arguably over one hundred years of developmental failures. By “failures,” I do not mean that the programs that have been established over that time were a waste: undoubtedly many human lives have been made easier as a result--although it is impossible to say whether other lives were made more difficult, or even if those same lives were rendered more difficult in the long run. Nor were they a failure if the Western actors involved were interested more in regional stability or establishing capitalism in the developing countries instead of alleviating local hardships. But as for long-term, sustainable, non-internationally dependent development, it is clear that development agents have not yet arrived at their silver bullet for global poverty.
Continuity in development ideology

What do all of these stages have in common? What do colonial development, state-led development, economic-led development (the SAP era), and nonprofit development all share? At the most superficial level, they share the rubric of “development,” the use of the Global North development experience as a measure of the developmental progress in the countries of the Global South. Colonial development attempted to remake the territories in the colonizer’s image, but only to a certain extent, saving political and economic privileges for white people exclusively (a gap investigated by Fanon [1967]). This was done in an effort to exploit natural resources and expand the reach and power of the colonizers’ home country. Rostow’s modernization theory was based directly off the economic trajectories of Western Europe and the United States, a traditional and family specific context that, when hit with the Industrial Revolution, eventually gave rise to the economies we see in those countries today. State-led development was motivated by the success of the state-led policies of the Marshall Plan, which helped to rebuild Europe after World War Two and prevent Russian communism from gaining a foothold in the devastated economies. Economic austerity measures parallel the specific economic context of the Reagan and Thatcher era in the Global North, and nonprofit development continues to rely on Western donor conditionalities that reflect the current values and ambitions of the people who donate. As Baaz notes, “In order to be accepted as a partner [an organization who receives donor money] in the first place, the criteria set up by the donor must be met. One of the central criteria involved in selecting partners (also emphasized in the partnership policy) is that the partner shares the goals and objectives as the donor” (Baaz 2005, p. 74). The people who have an intimate knowledge of the area are forced to bend their objectives to those of foreigners thousands of miles away in order to receive funding, a serious problem in developing programs that work (Interview 17).
Fundamentally, the institutions and programs that the Global North espouses were and are designed with the people and the history of the Global North in mind, and the cultural values and context in which these programs operate often fall by the wayside. As Baaz (2005) writes about the development industry in Tanzania,

[The] economic inequalities characterizing the development aid relationship situate the donor in a privileged power position in the sense that it is the donor that sets up ‘the rules of the game’ of development cooperation, which partners, in one way or another, have to play by. Although partners are by no means passive victims, the unequal power relationship often means that expectations and goals that are not adjusted to, or go against, the ‘rules’ set up by the donor cannot be articulated. Instead they have to be downplayed or kept hidden. (Baaz 2005, p.75)

To Van de Walle (2001), these context-specific variables flummox the attempts of the conventional Global North to “develop” the Global South: “… a dummy variable for Africa is highly significant, suggesting that specifically African characteristics, not captured by any explanatory variable in the equation, account for much of Africa’s slower economic growth” (p. 10). Even the “economic growth” to which Van de Walle refers is a part of the modern economics that arose out of the specific social and cultural context of England and Scotland in the late nineteenth century. Modern development theory attempts to apply the experience of the Global North to the development rubric of the Global South, creating a disconnect that not only fails to grasp the intricacies of the context in which foreign-run “development” occurs, but can play a role in implementing programs that are thoroughly irrelevant to the “developing” area.

But on a deeper level, and as many postcolonial thinkers claim, the mindset and impetus behind development is not as distant from the colonial mindset as we might like to believe. Majid Rahnema, a well-known postcolonial thinker, makes the following claim in her introduction to the anthology The Post-Development Reader:
The leaders of the independence movements were eager to transform their devastated countries into modern nation-states, while the ‘masses,’ who had often paid for their victories with their blood, were hoping to liberate themselves from both the old and the new forms of subjugation. As to the former colonial masters, they were seeking a new system of domination, in the hope that it would allow them to maintain their presence in the ex-colonies, in order to continue to exploit their natural resources, as well as to use them as markets for their expanding economies or as bases for their geopolitical ambitions. The myth of development emerged as an ideal construct to meet the hopes of the three categories of actors” (1997, p. ix).

According to Rahnema, development was created primarily as a way for the colonial powers to continue their colonial endeavors, but behind new guise. Besides the practical problems associated with using the experience of the Global North to plan and execute development programs within the culturally distinct Global South, Rahnema brings to the forefront an even more troubling idea: that the mindset of the development endeavor is colonial at its very core, an idea that finds its justification within the historical stages of development, as we have just explored.

**Applying hybridity to the Kenyan development context**

We have a lot of resources being pumped in developing countries from developed countries but issues of poverty all that, but people are still stuck, because you know when you have brought a new thing you are struggling to learn the new thing. And after learning it sometimes you know learning is a process… To me, if the institutions of donors who are holding resources can be more open-minded in such a way that they don’t think that they hold the answer, but they tell the society: “If you can identify your problem, you can identify from which point did you start having this problem and what can you do to reverse it so that you don’t, you don’t continue with these types of challenges,” I think that can really work. (Interview 17)
Keeping Rahnema’s claim in mind, my use of Bhabha’s term to illustrate the way his ideas play out in the contemporary development context of Kisumu will feel less unexpected. In this thesis, I contend that Bhabha’s ideas of hybridity are relevant in our current temporal moment as a way of blurring the problematic dichotomy of the Western-centered development rubric, reimagining the historical image of Western powers acting upon agency-less natives (an understanding that continues to be prevalent in development today), and finally, forging a way forward that can incorporate the best of the Global North and the Global South in a manner that has the potential to mitigate the pervasive poverty of our twenty-first century world without the discriminatory power dynamics of West versus the Rest.

Bhabha’s theory of colonialism reflects many of the same players as contemporary development: a powerful foreign presence (or presences) influencing the social, political and economic condition of another region, whose existing presence responds in its own way. His idea of a wholly separate culture that arises out of the intersection two distinct ones can also be applied to the current development context in Kenya, with one important caveat: the distinction between the two cultures, institutions and values has become less clear in the years between colonialism and modern development. Fanon, writing in 1952, states regarding colonialism:

Overnight the Negro has been given two frames of reference within which he has had to place himself. His metaphysics, or, less pretentiously, his customs and the sources on which they were based, were wiped out because they were in conflict with a civilization that he did not know and that imposed itself on him. (1967, p. 110)

This is certainly true of the colonial era. As the opening quote of this chapter shows, colonialism had the effect of introducing a “rootless” culture to the colonies, but in the intervening years between colonialism and 2015, I argue that it has grown roots, and in those roots is the
contemporary manifestation of Bhabha’s hybridity in the development context. In other words, in the time since Fanon wrote, “the Negro” has “place[d] himself” between those two frames of reference, and it is a hybrid of “his customs and the sources on which they were based” and the foreign civilization.

One important final point in this chapter characterizing periods of economic change in Kenya is that the outrage and guilt I felt as a white woman of British descent witnessing what I perceived as the erosion of Luo culture in the face of development is both dangerous and misplaced. My initial reaction removed the agency of contemporary Kenyans and put the power right back in my own hands: it is my culture that is to blame for this, it is my ancestral fault that our culture has so uprooted this indigenous, otherwise “unchanging” one. That is certainly not the case. What struck me regularly throughout my interviews is that none of the Kenyans I spoke to seemed to be nearly as angry as I was that traditional practices such as polygamy or levirate marriage seemed to be decreasing in the face of Kenya’s “modernizing,” “developing” economy. As one of my interviewees put it: “If our cultural practices are in the way of our development, then our cultural practices must change” (Interview 20). Another interviewee put it this way:

We will cram some things to make you believe that we are really doing something, but the inner core of our existence is still stuck in either cultural beliefs, cultural issues, and also those ideologies that we need to work on. So bridging the gap between the more advanced development practitioners and the less exposed development practitioners is a challenge which the donor society should also focus on. (Interview 17)

This quote is particularly revealing. The language this Kenyan development agent uses is full of language couched in a belief that cultural systems are partly to blame for Kenya’s state of development: words like “stuck” and phrases such as “ideologies that we need to work on” suggest that this man believes that the Kenyan culture is holding his conception of development
back. Perhaps even more importantly, in his view it is the “more advanced development practitioners” and the “donor society” that have the power and the responsibility to change development in Kenya by bridging the gap between partners.

Nonetheless, this is not an example of a “dominant” culture once again visiting its power upon a “weaker” one: Kenyans have actively made the Western institutions their own in an attempt to gain “reliable infrastructure, a transparent and accountable state, and secure employment: inclusion, in other words, in the benefits of neoliberal capitalism” (Gardner 2012, p.5), or the perceived benefits of development. The tension between the apparent imposition of Western development approaches across different paradigms and the seeming acquiescence of the Kenyans I met led me to explore this unexpected contradiction in three main institutional areas: banking, land and health. It is with Bhabha’s concept of hybridity that I attempt to explain this phenomenon.

One important way that average Kenyans attempt to achieve access into the international economic fold is through language. As the world has become more and more English speaking over the past decades, it has become increasingly difficult for non-English speakers to get jobs. This is especially true in Kenya, where Kenyans with different ethnic backgrounds might not speak the same mother tongue or even the more common Kiswahili. It is to the issue of language we turn our attention next.
Chapter 2

Divisions and Intersections of Language: English, Kiswahili, and the Mother Tongue

The middle class in the Antilles never speak Creole except to their servants. In school the children of Martinique are taught to scorn the dialect. One avoids Creolisms. Some families completely forbid the use of Creole, and mothers ridicule their children for speaking it…. Yes, I must take great pains with my speech, because I shall be more or less judged by it. With great contempt they will say of me, “He doesn’t even know how to speak French.” (Fanon 1967, p.20)

Before discussing hybridity within development sectors, I want to begin with a clear illustration of Bhabha’s hybrid identities that extends between and throughout them: that of language. One of Bhabha’s key conditions giving rise to hybridity is the process of “othering,” of establishing lines between the practices of one group and another. In the colonial era, language was one of the key battlefields: speaking English was seen as the way to achieve entry to the “white,” privileged world, while remaining within the linguistic tradition of the colonized regions was something to be despised (Fanon 1967). Language is one of the largest aspects of culture: before religions, rituals, and traditions can take root and expand, language is used to bind a community together and establish the foundation upon which other cultural factors then build. Difference in language came to form the basis of the colonizing powers’ perceived superiority over their colonial charges, and through the aforementioned power disparity between the two groups, the conditions which cause Bhabha’s hybridity have been met.
Franz Fanon opens his influential book *Black Skin, White Masks* with a chapter on the importance of language. But before turning to his important work, it is critical to first discuss the linguistic context of Kenya and the languages in which the projects, and Kenya as a whole, operate. In Kenya, language is indicative of a variety of markers: mastery of English is largely a function of wealth and geographic location, proficiency in Kiswahili is tied to socioeconomic status and education level, and the mother tongue reveals the ethnic group to which an individual belongs. Beginning in the colonial era and carrying through to the modern day, language is a function of class, as the opening Fanon quote demonstrates.

English is heard throughout the streets of Nairobi, but as soon as one travels to one of the rural, ethnically homogeneous areas, even a fluent Kiswahili speaker is flummoxed without knowledge of the local languages. In Kisumu, most daily exchanges are done in the local Luo language, or, in the case of conversation with an unusual Kisii, Luhyia, Maasai or Kikuyu, one might hear Kiswahili or, more unusually, English. What is the history of this multilingual context? And what can be said about the hybridity that arises on the boundaries between the three?

**Language in the colonial era**

As Fanon and his contemporaries illustrate, colonialism created a rift in the identity of the colonized: the colonized individual finds himself or herself cut off from his or her native culture, which he or she is told is synonymous with sin and evil. Instead, he or she is told to embrace a new foreign culture, that of the white man or woman, which is portrayed as forward thinking,

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6 The Luo language is particularly noteworthy because of its Nilotic origins; unlike the majority of languages spoken in Kenya that belong to the Bantu language group. Sharing more linguistic markers with ethnic groups along the Nile, this incongruence is the result of the arbitrary boundaries drawn by the colonizers in the 1800s. This difference also helps to explain the alienation felt by many Kenyan Luo within their own country.
modern, and good. Language was one of the most powerful tools in the colonial toolbox: by equating how “civilized” the colonized person was with how well he or she spoke the colonizer’s tongue, a situation emerges in which the colonized person strives against his or her own linguistic heritage. Mastery of the foreign language, according to Fanon, confers a sort of non-blackness upon the colonized:

To speak a language is to take on a world, a culture. The Antilles Negro who wants to be white will be the whiter as he gains greater mastery of the cultural tool that language is. Rather more than a year ago in Lyon, I remember, in a lecture I had drawn a parallel between Negro and European poetry, and a French acquaintance told me enthusiastically, ‘At bottom you are a white man.’ The fact that I had been able to investigate so interesting a problem through the white man’s language gave me honorary citizenship. (Fanon 1967, p.38)

This statement is useful in understanding the Kenyan appropriation of the English language after colonization: the Kenyan state “[took] on a world, a culture” that was not its own, even after the colonizers had gone. English is the language the Kenyan “education system is based on, [it is] primate on English as the language of expression” (Interview 7).

But in modern Kenyan hands, it is no longer a symbol of oppression, it is a tool used to help the Kenyan state achieve the benefits of the global economic system, as the Garner quote explains. English, due in no small way to British colonialism and more recent American economic domination, has become the world’s leading language. Though it has colonial roots, the English spoken today in Kenya is no longer something to be lamented as a sign of colonial days. Rather, it can be interpreted as an intentional and productive re-appropriation of a former symbol of oppression, one that helps Kenyans navigate an increasingly Anglophone international realm.
Although this is a difficult point to prove outright, I base it off my experience interacting with both my contacts and strangers whom I came across, few of whom expressed any anger over past or present Western domination in their country. A Luo philosophy professor at the University of Nairobi expressed to me that colonialism, although horrible, was responsible for bringing Kenya into the “modern day,” (Interview 1) and another Kenyan health NGO worker mentioned to me the positive aspects of the colonially and developmentally imposed emphasis on individuality; namely, that it forces people to take responsibility for their own actions (Interview 7). At least on paper, Kenyans are no longer under the Western colonial thumb, and could choose to operate in local languages or Kiswahili if they chose. But instead, because English continues to be seen as the gateway to economic success, and although there is no longer forceful imposition of English education in schools (a topic discussed more fully in a later section), the number of English speakers continues to grow.

Classrooms, development and the hierarchy of language

One of my contacts, a Luo man named Madiang, works in a USAID-affiliated community health NGO by day and writes children’s books in his native Luo language in his free time. Most books available to Kenyan schoolchildren, he says, are either foreign or based on experiences from long ago. Foreign titles available to Luo children most notably include the British Lady Bird series and works by Charles Dickens, evidence of a clear and strong connection to the former colonizing power.7 Fanon discusses the problem of importing only foreign stories into the lives of the colonized: “The Tarzan stories, the sagas of twelve-year-old explorers, the adventures of Mickey Mouse, and all those ‘comic books’ serve actually as a

7 A connection that remains to this day in more obvious ways as well: Kenya continues to be part of the British Commonwealth.
release for collective aggression. The magazines are put together by white men for little white men. This is the heart of the problem…” (Fanon 1967, p. 146). Madiang and his fellow writers are evidence of a counter movement, a pushing back against the English language- and experience-based writing available in Kenya today by writing their own work.

But the problem is not exclusively related to the availability of texts in African languages. Madiang also described the history of language instruction present in the public school system of Kenya:

But about two years ago, two or three years ago, I might be wrong, the government for example is trying to push the culture of teaching in local languages at the lower primary levels up to a certain point. It used to happen a long time ago after independence to 70s I think, and early 80s. But after that, you wouldn’t find children in school for example, being taught the Luo, or in the Luo. (Interview 7)

The incorporation of different languages into the curriculum is clearly a function of outside conditions, both within and outside the Kenyan state. Politically, the changes can be tied, in part, to the history of Kenyan development. After the Mau Mau rebellion and subsequent independence, the anti-colonial spirit was especially strong and the government allowed local languages to be spoken and taught in schools. But when the debt crisis and the era of Structural Adjustment Programs began, one could argue that English came to be seen as the gateway into the benefits of the neoliberal economic system. As Madiang says, “You know, it’s kind of, the kind of worldview was that we need to read these books so that we know English, for example, and we teach English, English is taught in school, and the idea is to be able to communicate in English…” (Interview 7). Another facet to consider is the other side: not only which languages were taught but which languages were actively forbidden in school. As Madiang noted:
In other instances you would actually find situations where children are punished for speaking mother tongue. You know when you go in school- when I was in primary school, you had to speak English and there was a disk, and if you spoke mother tongue you would be given that disk and you would hang it on your neck, showing that this person spoke a language other than, you know, English. (Interview 7)

This forced separation from the mother tongue in schools is what Bhabha described when he wrote about “othering” in colonial discourse. By creating a rift between home life (dictated by the parents and social and cultural norms) and school life (dictated by the government and a foreign power), Kenyan identity was split in a similar fashion to Fanon’s experience in the Antilles. This “othering” gives rise to a hybrid identity, as discussed below.

In the past two years, there has been a major shift back to allowing the local languages in schools, as Madiang said. This can be seen in part as an attempt to lessen the linguistic rift that occurs when a child first goes to school:

So there is a move, that is pushing for local languages to, to be taught in school, being taught in school means that therefore children can communicate in them, and probably in the future it may be possible to, transcribe all the knowledge that we have in local languages, which will be really good. So, when I went to work with these children in their respective language- communities, and they are very fluent in their mother tongue, but they use it at home, which is where they spend most of their time. Then when they come to school, there’s a kind of shift, now they have to think in English, you know, and learn you know ABCD, you know write in English, write English composition, you know do English exercises, study maths and do all your other subjects in English. It may end up creating a type of elitism where somebody who speaks English is therefore a clever person. (Interview 7)

Language is once again seen as indicative of larger issues of class and intelligence, in both the colonial and post-colonial eras. The distinct separation between English and the mother tongue
mirrors the dichotomy between colonizer and colonized, even long after the official colonial era ended. The “clever person” mentioned also mirrors Fanon’s words, the colonized man who most wholeheartedly embraces colonizer culture (here meaning fluency in English) is the smartest man. Madiang adds:

But it would be really good if someone wrote in future explaining biology in the Luo, who knows. So this, this, this books that I intend to write, will be written in the Luo. And they will cover as many experiences as possible that they do have. This does not mean that there are no books in the Luo. There are. And uh, they are basically dwindling because they have not been pushed out for people to read. (Interview 7)

This desire harkens back to Fanon once again: “…I should like nothing more nor less than the establishment of children’s magazines especially for Negroes, the creation of songs for Negro children, and, ultimately, the publication of history texts especially for them” (Fanon 1967, p. 148). To Fanon, this wish comes from a deep desire for the “Negros” to have a body of literature all their own, situating them in history that was stolen from them during the colonial era. Written in the original French in 1952, *Black Skin, White Masks* is reminiscent of colonizer vs. colonized identities that are no longer as clear-cut over fifty years after the colonizers left. As I argued in the last chapter, Kenya’s history post-independence has represented a slow reclaiming of both native identities and colonizer tools, forming a new hybrid state of both colonizer and local institutions. In Kenya, nowhere is this more visible than the new language of Sheng.

**Sheng: where hybridity arises**

I meet a Russian or a German who speaks French badly. With gestures I try to give him the information that he requests, but at the same time I can hardly forget that he has a language of his own, a country, and that perhaps he is a lawyer or an engineer there. In any case, he is foreign to my group, and his standards must be different.
When it comes to the case of the Negro, nothing of the kind. He has no culture, no civilization, no ‘long historical past.’ (Fanon 1967, p.34).

The predominant language heard in Nairobi’s low-income areas is not English, not Kiswahili, and not the mother tongue. Kenya is composed of ethnically homogenized regions primarily as a result of British colonialism (a topic to be discussed further in the next section). As a result of the urbanization present throughout the Global South, cities are fast becoming extremely mixed. This is most prevalent in Nairobi’s slums, where a new language called Sheng has arisen beginning in the 1980s, directly related to the quickly urbanizing city centers and the proximity of ethnic groups to each other for the first time in Kenyan history (Wrong 2009).

Sheng, a mixture of English, Kiswahili, French, the forty-two ethnic mother tongues, reggae jargon, American slang, French and Spanish represents the unique cultural context of Kenya in the face of globalization. Bhabha’s hybridity is relevant here: out of two distinct sets of language, the colonizers’ English and the native ethnic tongues, as well as influence from abroad a new, third entity arises. One interviewee, a Swedish woman who has lived in Kenya for several years, explained Sheng to me in this way:

Sheng this like new language that has developed which is a mix of all the different tribal languages, and apparently evolves so fast that if you haven’t like been around for two weeks, like you’re gone for two weeks and you already don’t know which words, like it’s a really dynamic thing, but the development of Sheng which now has this like, I mean like there’s media happening in Sheng and you know like there’s kind of cartoons and I think TV stuff, has meant that there’s a kind of, this is an identity as a Kenyan, as a young Kenyan, rather than this is my identity as a Kikuyu or a Luo, a Kamba or whatever. (Interview 6)
Sheng, originating as a language for young people who wanted to discuss private matters without their parents or grandparents understanding, has now spread to cartoons and TV shows. The speed at which it evolves is one of its key characteristics, fitting the local ethnically heterogeneous context in ways that institutionalized English and the tribal languages cannot.

My interviewee mentions another topic, one of Kenyan versus tribal identity. One of the largest complaints voiced to me by local Kenyans is the prevalence of tribalism, or the favoritism exhibited by Kenyans towards their own ethnic group. In government, this manifests as an extremely powerful and difficult-to-eradicate form of nepotism and corruption. Michaela Wrong’s book (2009) discusses the topic at length, and concludes by the end that Kenya is quickly becoming less and less reliant on tribal divisions. One of the key examples she uses to support her claim is the emergence of Sheng, which, like my interviewee, she takes to represent a fundamental shift in Kenyan society, one that puts one’s identity as a Kenyan above one’s identity as a member of a certain ethnic group.

The opening quote illustrates the power a language can have on situating a population in history and the ways that colonization stripped Africans of their right to their own. Sheng is an excellent example of the hybridity that arises from such a rift and represents the uniquely Kenyan answer to the problems of language between Kenyan citizens. Whether Sheng will proliferate or not depends on its usefulness to the populations involved. While driving through Kisumu with an American missionary who has made the town his permanent home, he expressed his disapproval at a new trend of teaching a combination language encompassing both Kiswahili and English in schools. His argument, roughly, was that by teaching such a new language composed of two distinct and established languages, schoolchildren will end up speaking neither and have trouble in the outside world. To me, it seems that languages which arise organically
such as these present specifically Kenyan answers to specifically Kenyan challenges regarding
the sheer multitude of languages present. Forbidding the mother tongue in schools as a way of
enforcing a foreign language on young pupils is a thing of the past. The establishment of new
languages to suit the Kenyan context is just now beginning. They represent the emerging
character of postcolonial hybrid identities, as well as an important step in situating Kenya within
Fanon’s term, the “long historical past.”
Chapter 3

Social versus Institutionalized Banking: the Success of M-PESA

Now that we have established one example of Kenyan cultural hybridity, we turn to the more intentional hybrids with important applications in development. When traveling through various areas of Kisumu, it is difficult to miss the brightly colored signs that adorn the fronts of the sheet metal and thatched-roof huts which serve as part of Kisumu’s informal employment sector: hairdressers, convenience shops, motorbike taxi shelters. One of the most eye-catching advertisements is that for Safaricom, Kenya’s largest telecommunications firm. Look closer, and these bright green signs not only advertise the firm itself, but also the program for which it has achieved international attention: M-PESA.

What makes a successful institutional hybrid? A major foundation of my argument throughout this thesis is that in order for hybrids to form and be effective in solving local problems, the specific Kenyan context has to be able to break into the institutional level, affecting change on a larger systematic way. The clearest example of this trend is the popularity of M-PESA, a Kenyan hybrid success story.

Kenyan social banking and Western institutionalized banking

Before we discuss M-PESA itself, it is important to discuss the two established banking systems previously present in Kenya: conventional, institutionalized Western-style banking and
the Kenyan community networks that often function as banks. In the Western conception of banking, one invests their savings in a reputable banking firm, earning interest and paying annual fees, with the understanding that they can withdraw from their account whenever they need money. For most Kenyans, this is an illogical approach given the lack of bank branches (according to Aker and Mbiti, there is roughly one bank branch in Kenya per 100,000 people [2010]) as well as the prohibitive fees and minimum required balances of Western-style banks. Additionally, a study done by Morawczynski and Miscione (2010) suggests that Africans have little trust in banking systems run by CEOs with Kenyan tribal affiliations, because they believe those leaders give away the customers’ money to support electoral campaigns.

In the community conception of banking, there is either a council of elders who can decide when and where communal funds should go at a given moment, or community fundraising efforts to help a certain member with the understanding that they will help the community in return:

The community sometimes comes together in what we call *harambee*, a fundraising, even for schooling, education; my university education there was a fundraiser, which basically was the community, and during it you would hear statements like we are sending you there, to go gain that knowledge, then come back and help us. Are you seeing that interconnection? So once you have graduated and got a job, the community that helped you looks at you in terms of, it’s an obvious thing, that now if I have a problem, oh I’ll call Madiang. You remember me I’m the guy who contributed to your *harambee*? Now you have a job, look, I have a girl who has finished school et cetera et cetera. (Interview 7)

Another facet of this banking system is the idea of social investment: as one of my subjects explained, when one of the Kenyans he worked with received a windfall, usually by selling a motorbike or another one-time payment, they would often go to a local bar and spend it all
buying drinks for the people there. Aghast, the Western-raised interviewee asked why they didn’t save it as a buffer for future use. Those he talked to said that this was their way of investment: now, if that individual comes on hard times, he can simply go to one of the people for whom he bought a beer and ask for financial help, and the beer recipient will be obligated to give it (Interview 10).

Between these two systems, mutually incomprehensible to the proponents of each, a hybrid system has recently emerged: M-PESA, the focus of the next section.

**The emergence of the hybrid M-PESA**

Safaricom launched M-PESA in 2007. One year after its implementation, over nine billion Kenyan shillings had been transferred using the system (Morawczynski & Miscione 2010), and two years after its implementation M-PESA had reached approximately 65 percent of Kenyan households (Jack & Suri 2011). This is due in part to the proliferation of cell phone technology across sub-Saharan Africa, which has far exceeded expectations: in 1999, Safaricom projected that the mobile phone market in Kenya would have three million subscribers, but in 2009 Safaricom alone had over 14 million (Aker & Mbiti 2010). In much of Africa, the lack of infrastructure required for landline technologies has aided in the expansion of the cell phone market, one that has seen shocking growth as new and better mobile phone technology becomes available at lower prices.

But what does M-PESA do? Through the use of intermediary agents, M-PESA allows its users to exchange cash into e-float, or electronic currency, which can then be used to pay vendors or each other (i.e., without the exchange of cash or card). This sidesteps the prohibitive fees and minimum account balance requirements of Western-style banks, can be used anywhere
(in other words, is not dependent on having a bank nearby) and doesn’t require any new or expensive technology. But the potential positive effects of M-PESA extend even further than simply banking. Aker and Mbiti (2010), Jack and Suri (2011) and Mbiti and Weil (2011) have discussed the positive developmental effects of this system, not all of which are included here: it improves access to and use of information, improves coordination among agents and market efficiency, increases a firm’s productive efficiency, creates new formal and informal jobs (both as Safaricom agents and more informal airtime vendors), and perhaps most critically for development purposes, it increases the amount of remittances sent to rural areas.

In the West, this idea has only recently developed in the form of the smartphone applications Venmo and Snapcash, and in a much more limited capacity as most Westerners continue to utilize the conventional banking system. As Aker and Mbiti (2010) note, the emergence of mobile phone applications that go beyond voice calls and text messaging has “focused on entertainment applications (‘apps’) in wealthier countries” but provides “opportunities for disseminating agricultural price information, monitoring health care and transferring money in poorer countries” (p. 17). The potential of this system is astounding: although according to 2008 statistics, about a third of sub-Saharan Africa (or 376 million people) have a mobile phone subscription, the number could be much higher as sharing mobile phones is a common practice in Africa (Aker and Mbiti 2010), further increasing the reach mobile phone-based development projects and again reflecting the more communal nature of African societies.

M-PESA has revolutionized savings for average Kenyans and serves as an answer to the previous gap between Western and Kenyan solutions to everyday money exchange problems. Taking advantage of Western mobile phone technologies and utilizing them with strategies to suit the unique Kenyan context (lack of landline infrastructure, electric power unreliability, and
the lower income of average Kenyans when compared to their Western counterparts) is the perfect example of a hybrid that addresses specific African ills. Although perhaps slightly different than Bhabha’s conception of a hybrid arising organically and without intention as outlined in the first section, solutions like M-PESA are hybrids in their own right, emerging between two existing systems and functioning in ways the other two cannot.

**Illustrative example: M-PESA in power grid development**

One of my contacts, an Australian named Sam, started a small NGO focused on developing small power stations for individual remote communities. First, his organization would go in and find someone in the city willing to buy and be in charge of a renewable power station that the NGO would help build. Then, they would hook up the individual households to the system, and pay for power with their M-PESA accounts:

So they will text some money- have you come across M-PESA? -so they use M-PESA and they text money to our number, and the machine in the village recognizes that they’ve got credit, so it turns on their line automatically, they get power, um the same power you get in your house here so you use all standard equipment and if they’re running low, they get a warning message, to their phones saying do you want to top up, and if they don’t top up the line automatically cuts off… So it’s a way of them basically buying power, like micropayments, micro pre-payments if you like for power. (Interview 10)

Sam says that it became clear early on that they should focus on selling power, not technology, and M-PESA proved to be the perfect platform to do so. In a country where much of the population lives hand to mouth, small payments when they can be afforded is an innovative and context-specific way to improve the standard of living at the household level without using country-wide conventional Western power grid methods, which, additionally, are based on dirty
energy sources compared to Sam’s group’s renewables. M-PESA, beyond being an answer to
banking differences in itself, also represents a compelling means by which other development
initiatives can take place. Aker and Mbiti (2010) also find that M-PESA can be a powerful
development tool for a variety of reasons: firstly, by improving coordination among agents and
thus increasing market efficiency; secondly, as a creator of new formal and informal jobs as
sellers of cell phones and airtime; and thirdly, by facilitating the delivery of other sector services,
such as the one mentioned in this section. This program is still only in its early years; additional
new possibilities for this technology have yet to be discovered.

Now that we’ve discussed what a successful hybrid looks like, we begin our discussions
of those sectors that have not developed effective hybrids. First, we turn to land, where two
competing notions of land tenure each strive to protect their relevance while aiming to claim
more of Kenya’s geography for their system, instead of allowing space for a third option to
emerge.
Chapter 4

Luos and Land: A Hodge-Podge of Hybridity

The question of land is important to understanding former colonies. Although the methods differ slightly between colonizing powers, the forcible taking of native land pervades colonial history, and has set the groundwork for often violent clashes over land in the postcolonial era, including Kenya’s 2007 post-election violence. On a more institutional level, colonizing powers espoused (and forced) their own conceptions of what land tenure entails: private ownership and the ability to buy or sell land as the individual chooses. In a communal land ownership setting such as Kenya’s, the disparity between the colonizer institution and the local one has created a quagmire that is perpetuated by the government and privileges the privatized system over the indigenous ones, carrying on the colonial battle.

Land is also closely tied to development. For example, some have claimed that privatizing land tenure would allow landowners to borrow against the value of their land, freeing money for investment and other “productive” purposes. Many development agencies, especially in Africa, fight to strengthen local claims to their land in the face of international land grabbing, and one agency that I spoke to in Kisumu strives to increase food security through promoting sustainable agriculture, to name only a few land-related development projects. When it comes to development, questions of land are inescapable, and the space between Western understandings
of land tenure as manifested in development projects and local understandings on the part of the local NGO employees is the site of many battles between the two.

**Luo land tenure systems, past and present**

Before the land tenure reform instituted by the colonizers, Luo landholding was characterized by relativity, fluidity, and flexibility, both in the patrilineal kinship networks and the land claims that such belonging engendered (Shipton 2009). Like other areas of the developing world, land amongst the Luo is not only central to social belonging, but also to identity. Unlike in the West, where it is understood that “man” and “nature” occupy separate spheres, Luo identity and the inhabited land are inextricable. As Shipton (2009) writes: “People do not just own or inherit land, in an East African way of seeing things; they also belong to it. Belonging to land is part and parcel of belonging to other people – in groups, networks, or open categories” (p. 111).

The location of an individual’s homestead within the family compound pivots on a series of binaries: junior versus senior, downhill versus uphill, left versus right are all fraught with social meanings and hierarchical placements. Shipton (2009) notes that these binaries “structure family and social life as constant reminders of place in a process and on the land” (p. 107). Another important set of dichotomies presents itself related to the relative position of newcomers
to the land \textit{(jodak)} versus established families \textit{(wuon lowo)}: lending versus borrowing, strength versus weakness, permanency versus transience, and seniority versus juniority. These distinctions help structure Luo social hierarchies, as \textit{jodak} are often called upon to carry out the more unpleasant tasks of Luo community life, such as “purifying” a widow to be remarried through intercourse.

Another key misunderstanding between the colonizers and the Luo system regards what the Europeans call “fragmentation” (Shipton 2009). Luo landholders typically diversify their land holdings, growing different crops on different types of soil. This is done for ecological reasons, social reasons (others can be allowed to use them in exchange for favors), and political-economic reasons (numerous smaller landholdings are easier to hide from government officials). This “fragmentation” was seen as a major problem by the colonizers and instigated the titling and individualized land tenure program imposed during the colonial era. In the more industrialized agriculture in the West, large plots of land were better for commercial purposes, and the colonizing power saw an opportunity to consolidate the small landholdings in order to better fit their economic system.

But what is most important when discussing the immediate Luo reaction to the proposed colonial land tenure reform is the deep spiritual meaning Luo have to the land. Whereas trades and debts can take the form of livestock and even humans (historically, daughters were sometimes used as security in marriage pledges), the Luo response to privatization as a step to mortgaging and potential investment was astoundingly negative (Shipton 2009). The thought of borrowing against land ownership (and risking losing claims to land as a result) ran counter to local understandings of the meaning of land.
In a place as ethnically diverse as Kenya, the practices of one group must be situated in the larger context of other ethnic groups, often involving struggles over land. It is to this topic that we turn our attention in the next section.

**Ethnic clashes and land disputes**

It is important to note that ethnicity has played a key role in land debates since the colonial era. The conception of ethnic identity in Kenya today is inexorably tied to land. Although it has been argued that these divisions existed in minds of the indigenous occupiers of the land before colonialism, it is difficult to dispute that the British had a profound effect on shaping Kenyan ethnic divisions as we understand them today. Land tenure and practices are central to Kenyan ethnic groups and their connections to the state. As Boone (2014) writes: “Africa’s land tenure regimes produce ethnic identity and structure ethnic politics in subnational localities and jurisdictions… Comparative institutional analysis highlights the structuring effects of different land tenure institutions on the formation of ethnic groups, the establishment of political and economic hierarchy among groups, and the construction of differential ties to the state” (p. 13). This section consists of a brief overview of the effects of British land policies on ethnic identity and ethnic tensions in Kenya.

Establishing a land tenure regime was central to British colonialism. As Boas & Dunn (2013) mention: “Colonialism constructed rigid ethnic divisions and the claims of ethnic groups to ‘traditional’ land rights. Thus, in Kenya as elsewhere, the claim of territorial belonging — having innate rights to ancestral lands of origin — is a colonial creation that has become institutionalized and politicized first by the colonial state and then by the post-colonial neopatrimonial state” (p.58). Similar to other colonizing powers such as France and Belgium,
Britain used land rights to exacerbate the local ethnic divisions in order to govern more effectively. As Boas & Dunn (2013) write, “With the advent of British colonialism in Kenya, nature started to be demarcated as ‘territory,’ divided by international, regional and ethnic borders… As a consequence of colonialism in Kenya, ethnic identities became more salient, chauvinistic and based on territory” (p. 57). This idea is encapsulated by the term *majimbo*, a Kiswahili term meaning *regionalism* (Boas & Dunn 2013). As Boas & Dunn (2013) note, “The idea was that post-independence Kenya would be divided into three autonomous regions, governed according to ethnicity, with whites controlling the Rift Valley, Kikuyu the Western Province, and the Luo the coast” (p. 59). The term was sometimes accompanied by ethnic cleansing and roving paramilitaries such as the Kalenjin Warriors sent from their homes in the Rift Valley by the local MPs to evict non-Kalenjin from lands that the Warriors were then encouraged to seize. Although the plan was officially rejected, in practice, *majimboism* is still very much alive, though with groups occupying different sections than the colonizers envisioned.

An important single event in the British manipulation of ethnicity involved the transfer of land from Europeans to Africans post-independence, primarily in the late 1960s (Boas & Dunn 2013). Although Boas & Dunn (2013) and Leys (1975) differ on the original intention of the British (Boas & Dunn claiming that the British had initially meant to give the land back to its occupants freely and Leys claiming that the British always planned to have the Africans pay them for it), land was sold to Africans and the prevailing market rates (Boas & Dunn 2013 and Leys 1975). This allowed the wealthier ethnic groups (including the Kalenjin and Kikuyu) to push out the poorer native inhabitants. The tensions that resulted from this have extended even into the 2007 electoral violence, which one of my Luo interviewees claimed was tied to the Kikuyu politicians’ ambitions to seize more land for themselves (Interview 5).
One of my interviewees summed up the opinion held by most Luo in the area. By way of answering my question regarding the first Tanzanian president Julius Nyerere’s positive memory in the minds of Kenyans compared with that of Kenya’s first president, Jomo Kenyatta, he said this:

There is nothing positive you want to talk about, [Kenyatta] messed up this country. Yes. He messed up the country. In terms- you know we had the white settlers, then we have black settlers, you know we have the white colonialists and then we had the black colonialists. It’s just the same thing, yeah… But after the British left, um, some of the settlers remain in the land, those who left, it’s the people who were close to Kenyatta, took the land. So it never reverted back to the people whose land was taken away. It was taken by his people. (Interview 5)

Far from undoing the wrongs done during colonialism, newly formed independence governments found that they could better enrich themselves by following the status quo (Leys 1975). My interviewee laments this continuation, but due to the ethnicized politics of Kenya and the “our turn to eat” mentality discussed by Michaela Wrong (2009), these policies seem unlikely to change in the near future.

Contemporary communal ownership versus privatized individual land tenure

As discussed earlier, the Luo conception of “land ownership” before colonialism was very different from its Western counterpart and extremely dependent on tribe. Most systems were based on communal ownership of land, an understanding that is dramatically different than

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8 By the “our turn to eat” mentality, I am borrowing the Chinese proverb used by Michaela Wrong in her book *It’s Our Turn to Eat: the Story of a Kenyan Whistle Blower* to describe the prevalent corruption in Kenyan politics. According to Wrong (2009), the understanding in Kenya is that if a member of your ethnic group is elected as president, that ethnic group is allowed the benefits of a well-placed ally: preferential access to public goods, for example, or a position in a government agency. If the president is of a different ethnic group, you can assume that you will not receive those benefits, as it is the other ethnic group’s “turn to eat.”
the Western conception of
privatized, individualized land
ownership. Although a
generalization, this is the
conventional knowledge
regarding the different land uses
between four of the major tribes:
the Luo are fishermen on Lake
Victoria, the Kikuyu and
Kalenjin are agriculturalists in
the Rift Valley, and the Maasai are herders and nomads across Kenya and the surrounding states.

Thus, the existing systems of land tenure within Kenya form a hodge-podge in several ways:
both as a series of ethnically homogenous geographic regions, and as a battleground between
privatized versus communal conceptions of land tenure.

All of these systems have been forced to adapt in the face of colonialism, changing
ecological conditions, and the desires of NGOs working in the area. An interviewee described
the contemporary Maasai land tenure system in this way:

So the women we work with have been granted by the men, the elders in, in their clan in their
community, a piece of land as a group farm, to work on. But it’s not- they don’t own it, it’s like
they have a kind of paper that’s been signed that says they are allowed to work on it for ten years
or whatever, um so that’s how it works there, but at the same time these days it’s harder and
harder for the Maasai to move the way they used to. (Interview 6)

My interviewee, a young Swedish professional with a husband who is also a foreigner working
in Kisumu, is one of the few permanent employees of a sustainable agriculture NGO that
requires participants to own the title to their land. Although done for pragmatic reasons, this might also reflect the difficulty of individuals who have grown up in the West to design programs based on the existing land tenure systems, ones that are based off of complex and powerful interpersonal relationships. My interviewee also discusses the ways that these social hierarchies get in the way of what her organization is trying to accomplish:

One of the farmers that we funded, we thought the fencing went to his piece of land. It turns out later that his grandmother had decided that- who runs another project with women- had decided that the fencing and everything was going to be put around this woman’s piece of land and so, this, so while the money was locally there it was kind of somehow, it ended up on this woman’s piece of land that was fenced, and the water system was put in. (Interview 6)

And again:

We worked with a farmer, an older farmer in Rusinga, um, had his own piece of land but had been convinced by someone else on the island who is, you know is an elder, has quite a lot of power, and owns several pieces of land, to work his piece of land instead. You know, for probably a tiny you know compensation… so then we said no, if you want to be part of this project then you have to be focused on this farm because the other one can be taken away from you at any point in time, you can be kicked out because it’s not your land. (Interview 6)

Another important aspect to add here relates to Ferguson’s work in *The Anti-Politics Machine* (1990). As the government is vigorously promoting privatized land tenure, the work of the development agency here is actively aiding in expanding state power amongst these remote communities by enforcing the same system. It behooves us to remember that development is not a process beyond the reach of state politics, especially not in cases such as these.
These anecdotes are also important in that they reflect the boundaries between the two systems of land tenure. The proponents of each system strive against the other to make headway for their own system, which often creates situations like the ones described above. Forced to abide a privatized land system that was created in a context where social hierarchies hold much less weight, the communal system attempts to retain its hierarchical structure by applying parts of its own tenets to the foreign one. As a result, a porous and ever-fluctuating boundary is formed.

The land debates in Kenya were recently brought to the international foreground as a result of what is known as “land grabbing” by other powerful states or multinational corporations (or, in the case of Kenya, their own government and its supporters). As this debate has been discussed extensively elsewhere, I won’t go into detail here. But using that trend as evidence, I argue that because the international economic system is so predicated on privatized individual land tenure as a foundational block, hybrid systems of land tenure have not been allowed to arise as freely as they have in language and banking, for example. My interviewee articulated this idea as well:

I guess our rationale behind saying we need to have- not everyone has the title deed but you need to work with a piece of land that is yours, and, it’s behind if we’re eventually going to pursue things like you know, pursuing bigger markets and things like organic certification and so on then they need to have the title deed to their land, so if you want to be part of those systems that also is going to allow them to market their produce, both Kenya, East Africa-wide and internationally, then having the land title deed is going to be really important. (Interview 6)

What my interviewee is touching on is the fact that to participate in the international economic system, one has to buy in to a system that was created with the social and cultural context of the
West in mind. Whereas one can speak multiple languages, it is difficult for multiple systems of land tenure to exist together, especially when the international system favors a specific one. I include land ownership in this paper on hybridity because it is an area that encompasses both communal and privatized systems of land tenure without allowing them to blend together into something new, like with the Sheng example above. The idea of hybridity helps us understand the complex notions associated with land tenure. The Western system fails to take communal bonds and kinship into account, but it has important advantages that can help Kenyans gain access into the international economy. Is there a way for the communal nature of Kenyan society to find a way to make the globally recognized land tenure system work for them?

Hybridity could be the answer. Whereas at the moment, privatized land reform has been applied unevenly across Kenya’s geography and the community-based systems reign elsewhere, the lack of uniformity has aided in the exploitation of land by international firms and wealthy Kenyans via the process of “landgrabbing.” A hybrid system could bridge the gap between these two land tenure ideologies and create a system that works for both, the same way that M-PESA has. Now that we’ve discussed an example of two distinct systems existing in the same space, fighting for territory, we turn now to a sector where not only is there no hybrid system, but the two spheres (Western and traditional medicine) are actively separated from one another.
Chapter 5

Health: A Conspicuous Lack of Hybridity

Bhabha’s concept of hybridity describes a phenomenon by which as two distinct cultural spheres collide, a third entity arises between them. To further probe this idea in contemporary development practice, it is necessary to note the places where instead of engendering a third sphere, the meeting point of the two systems results in a disconnect, a gap between the two where a hybrid has yet to form. Nowhere, especially in the Luo cultural context, is this clearer than in the health sector.

Where organizations in the Global North can argue over what to teach in their new schools or how best to encourage youth participation in government, health is seen as the baseline upon which other initiatives can then build. There are two major actors in global public health in Kisumu: PATH, a Seattle-based global health NGO, and USAID, which funds their projects. PATH partners with APHIA+ (AIDS Prevention and Heath Integrated Assistance), a Kenyan NGO that visits villages to spread community health messages. This group has many functions, but for the purpose of this thesis I will focus on their work in trying to slow the spread of HIV and AIDS.
Western positivism

There is one key potential explanation for the conspicuous lack of a hybrid. Medicine, in the West, is often seen as outside of a cultural context. This encapsulates what is known as positivism: as the Merriam-Webster dictionary states, positivism is “a theory that knowledge is based on natural phenomena and their properties and relations as verified by the empirical sciences” (Miriam-Webster n.d.), in other words, devoid of cultural influence. This means that in the positivist view, medicine is a science, a sphere separate from the influence of culture. Although there is a field of medical anthropology, medical anthropologists and epidemiologists rarely collaborate during research. This is due to perceived divergences in topics of inquiry, epistemological assumptions, methods of data collection and notions of risk and responsibility (Inhorn 1995).

This positivism also has interesting applications when it comes to “Othering” and speaking of the Other as something static compared to the dynamic culture of the Self. As V. Y. Mudimbe wrote, “The dichotomy (concrete, mythical versus abstract, scientific) is problematic when it reduces the first set to a primitive genesis incapable of conceiving functional modes of observation, classification and interpretation” (1997, p.39). The unyielding nature of medicine and science in the West is one possible reason health institutions have been so slow to adapt to the cultural context of local developing areas. Part of this has to do with power dynamics within developing former colonies. Western-based institutions form the majority of the governing structures in these countries, a result of colonialism and the upheaval of local systems in favor of foreign, Western, ones. As stated in the opening chapter, these institutions have seen very little change as post-independence governments largely saw a continuation of the status quo to be in
their best interest. Thus, the donor conviction in the efficacy of Western positivist empirically based evidence is a major obstacle in the formation of a successful health hybrid.

The cultural context: Luo practices and HIV/AIDS

Sub-Saharan Africa has been disproportionately affected by HIV/AIDS, a trend that is doubly true for the Luo. In Kenya, where the percentage of the population living with HIV/AIDS hovers around 6.1%, the incidence among the Luo can often reach into the 20s (CIA World Factbook; Interview 13). Although part of the answer may lie in the highly tribal nature of politics in Kenya, where the lack of a Luo president\(^9\) has arguably led to a lack of federal interest in creating or maintaining public goods in Kisumu and its environs,\(^10\) the greater explanation lies in three key Luo cultural practices: the “Sex for Fish” trend, funeral discomatangas, and the practice of levirate marriage.

**Sex for Fish**

Let me give you an example of the fishing sector, where there is something we call sex for fish or fish for sex. Women who engage in fish business do not fish themselves. They do not get into the water to fish. It is the men who fish. Yeah? So on a number of situations these women have had to have sex with the fisherman so that they can be sold the fish. You get, because it is their livelihood, I mean if I don’t sell fish, then my children will not eat, if I don’t sell fish, then my children will not go to school, so what do I do? I give in to sexual advances, then I buy the fish. (Interview 9)

\(^9\) Over the course of my stay in Kisumu, several Kenyans I met joked that it was more likely for a Luo man to be elected President of the United States than president of his own country, referencing Barack Obama and his family homestead just north of Kisumu.

\(^10\) One of the most conspicuous absences in Kisumu, pointed out to me by an NGO worker in the area, is that despite being the country’s source of fish there is no fish processing plant in or around Kisumu. Instead, fish are caught, packed in trucks, and driven to fish processing plants in Kikuyu and Kalenjin territories, the nationalities of all the former presidents.
The phenomenon described above is also a large contributing factor to the spread of HIV/AIDS throughout Luo areas. Some Luo fishmongers on the beaches of Lake Victoria exchange sexual favors for the right to buy fish from Luo fishermen. In some cases, this is not simply a trade of sex for fish: sex in this case means that the women fish vendors have the opportunity to buy fish from a fisherman; if sexual favors are not forthcoming, the assumption is that the fisherman will find another female fish vendor. Another contact, a boat tour guide on the lake, told me the same story and pointed out several of the fishing villages where the exchanges take place.

Internationally funded health NGOs in the area have struggled to end this practice, one that is partially blamed for the pervasiveness of HIV/AIDS in Luo fishing communities. PATH, USAID and APHIA+ use a strategy they call “splashing the community with information” in the hope that once the community is “saturated,” a change will take place (APHIA+ employee, Interview 9). Starting by receiving permission from the “beach leader,” a well-respected Luo fisherman who is the head of decision-making within the beach communities, these organizations then try to spread information regarding safe sex practices and offering women alternative sources of money-making. Although successful in certain communities, these programs have yet to achieve a wide-range change in behavior. This
is due in part to the pervasive unemployment in the area and the need of most female fish sellers to support their families in a context that is generally unfriendly to female employment.

**Funeral discomatangas**

When you look at funeral ceremonies amongst the Luo, all right, it is an elaborate send-off, so to speak, that involves a lot of socialization, let me, let me say it… There is drinking alcohol, there is what people call here *discomatanga*, which literally I would translate into funeral dances or funeral disco, right, whereupon young people engage in sex a lot… they facilitate a ground for easy sex, it’s the misstated expectation that because this person has died, therefore we have to replace him or her. So that engagement in sex is given a reason. (Interview 7)

When someone dies within a Luo community, cultural norms dictate an “elaborate send-off”: donation boxes circulate through office spaces (another form of *harambee*), kin travel to support the family of the deceased and the immediate family is expected to spend large sums on the funeral ceremony and subsequent *discomatanga*, sometimes impoverishing themselves in the process. These parties often last several days, involve alcohol consumption, and extensive engagement in sexual practices. It is for this reason that both local and international health NGOs have named these funeral traditions as one of the major reasons for the high incidence of HIV/AIDS within the Luo population of Kenya.

One could argue that Luo funeral practices are their own blend of historic and contemporary practices: the emotionally fraught community consolation of earlier times has become a ground for loud music, copious alcohol drinking, and engagement in sexual intercourse with the introduction of Western adolescent cultural norms. As one interviewee said, “With our modernization, the contemporary setting, we are diluting many of the meetings of the culture that was set at that time and taking them as reasons for sex” (Interview 7). One contact, an American
missionary, expressed his disapproval of the ceremonies, calling them “backwards” for putting
the perceived needs of the dead before the needs of the living. That being said, there is little these
NGOs can do to end the unsafe sexual practices of the discomatangas besides attempt to educate
the partygoers. But given the cultural roots of this practice, they have had little success.

**Levirate marriage, or lako**

This means that widows and orphans is most societies reflected the most destitute
people… And I think even the Luo culture that was the assumption. Because the widow
and the orphans [have] lost at that time the main breadwinner. They become destitute.
And society had to come in, find a mechanism of coming in and mitigating against that.
(Interview 1)

The most important cultural aspect of this section is the practice of levirate marriage,
which encapsulates an explanation of high HIV/AIDS prevalence as well as the cultural answer
to the loss of breadwinners that accompanies the epidemic. It thus functions as a feedback loop.

The Luo practice levirate marriage, in which a distant cousin or younger brother of the
deceased takes the late husband’s place in the family. This tradition has multiple benefits,
according to the Luo: the “surrogate husband” helps socialize and rear the children, takes care of
the wife, and keeps the husband’s family and property within the kinship network.¹¹ The widow
often has a say in who her inheritor will be, she has few if any domestic obligations (such as
cooking and cleaning) for her new surrogate husband, and she may even choose to stay in the
homestead of her deceased husband (Nyambedha 2004). Although a sexual “purification” ritual
is required before the widow is remarried, the relationship between the newly remarried widow
and her husband is not necessarily a sexual one. Nonetheless, health NGOs have pointed to this

¹¹ There is significant debate regarding the acceptability of the rituals that accompany this practice, a debate I will
not discuss in detail here (see Nyambedha 2004 and Gunga 2009, e.g.).
practice as a possible explanation of HIV/AIDS proliferation. If the husband died of AIDS-related causes, it stands to reason that the wife may also have contracted the disease. If that is indeed the case, she exposes both her partner in the “purification” ritual as well as her new husband to the disease.

In the quote above, my interviewee discusses his views on the reasons why cultural practices arise: namely, as a way to address some societal ill. In the case of levirate marriage, or *lako* in the Luo, he believes that the practice came to be as way of caring for and protecting widows and orphans. In the highly patriarchal society of Kenya (where women were not legally allowed to own land until the new constitution passed in 2009) widows and children are often left destitute by the death of the breadwinner. The practice of levirate marriage fits within the communal cultural context: a woman and her children are seen as the responsibility of the kin network as a whole, who find one of their own to replace the deceased husband to allow as little disruption in community continuity as possible.

**Gaps and legal battles: Western and local institutions fighting for relevance**

In order to situate the battle between local traditions and foreign systems, it is necessary here to zoom out and consider the means through which these battles take place, especially in the case of levirate marriage. One of my contacts, an older Luo woman, expressed her frustration that her daughter refused to be inherited after her husband died. Instead, she remarried for love, although the children of her first marriage are aware that they are expected to go back to their father’s homestead as soon as they have finished their education in order to continue his family line. This is becoming more and more common as Kenya “modernizes” and adopts more
Western lifestyles. More importantly for the purposes of this paper, however, are the effects the HIV/AIDS epidemic has had on the effectiveness of this method.

As Nyambedha (2004) notes, female widowhood has become extremely common with spread of HIV/AIDS, a trend that is causing failures in the social insurance aspect of kinship groups. Overwhelmed by the sheer volume of affected families, the kinship groups simply don’t have the resources to support all their members. As the virus is most prolific amongst young Luo men, the extended kin, already impoverished by the same trend, are left to take care of the widows and orphans without the customary money-earner. This has forced many of the widows to seek other forms of support: unwilling to be beholden to a system that can’t support them, they often turn to church or other donor-funded organizations with more resources. This has caused extreme friction between the widows and their kinship networks, with traditional ties feeling undermined by the perceived infringement of their responsibilities by the generally foreign donor organizations. This underscores an extremely heated divergence of opinion between the often-overeager Western donors, who see the situation and try to help, and the indigenous networks that feel as though outsiders are undermining their cultural duties and norms.

Communities have attempted to adapt to these changing circumstances through the practice of *duol* (a communal eating arrangement) and *nyoluoro* (a rotating credit scheme aimed at helping destitute families regain their footing). However, since these practices are rarely sufficient, additional space is created for the foreign groups to step in. Church groups often enforce certain rules on the behavior of the widows and orphans as a prerequisite for aid, for example forbidding the woman to be “inherited” by levirate marriage, or requiring obedience to Christian beliefs, creating an even greater rift between the foreign groups and the traditional cultural networks. Nyambedha (2004) concludes by claiming that donor organizations *must* be
aware of the kinship networks in the areas in which they offer aid in order to make effective interventions as well as minimize the social and cultural suffering of the widows and children, lessening the tension between customary practices and foreign values.

Perhaps the most illustrative example of the struggle between traditional kinship practices and Western notions of modern institutions is the case of Wambui Otieno and her attempt to take control of her dead husband’s remains as outlined in the article “Burying Otieno: The Politics of Gender and Ethnicity in Kenya” by Patricia Stamp (1991). In this emotionally fraught and well-publicized court battle, Kikuyu widow Wambui not only refused to be inherited by her brother-in-law, but she also attempted to bury her Luo husband W. M. Otieno in Nairobi where the two had lived and raised their fifteen children. His Luo kin network contested her rights, and after twelve court actions and a Court of Appeal ruling, the court awarded custody to clansmen, who proceeded to bury him in their ancestral land. The heated and meticulously media-covered case demonstrates the tension between traditional institutions (customary law) and Western institutions (common law). Although Otieno had intended to be buried in Nairobi according to his wife, the power of the Kenyan courts sided with customary, or traditional, law.

Both NGO interventions and legal battles challenge cultural practices in modern day Kenya. This is true to an even greater extent in the health sector: as international actors seek to limit the spread and deadliness of HIV/AIDS, they often find themselves battling deeply rooted traditional customs, a problem that is compounded by the unyielding nature of Western medicine. It is for that reason that a hybrid in health is desperately needed, one that can take the best of Western medicine and combine it in a productive way with the local cultural context.
Hybridity in health: allowing institutional variation

The Western cultural context leans much farther to the individualistic side than the more communal Luo societies in Kenya. But many of the problems faced by individuals in both areas are universal: death of family members (including primary breadwinners), unemployment, and the difficulties associated with providing for families to name only a few. Each system has its own mechanisms for alleviating the stress of affected individuals: in more communal societies, assistance tends to be based upon more of a social and community effort, and in the more individualistic, it is insurance firms or the government that offers help. For example, in the case of levirate marriage among the Luo of Kenya, the family steps in to find a provider who can care for the widow and her children from within with community. In the West, by comparison, the proliferation of more institutional forms of insurance such welfare assistance, Social Security, or a life insurance policy can take the place of community networks, although family caregivers might also play a role (though not usually to the extent of the Luo tradition of levirate marriage).

There are a myriad of distinguishing factors between the Western and communal contexts that can account for these different mechanisms of assistance, only a few of which I will discuss here. One major difference between the two contexts is the relative trust Western populations have for their governments when compared with African populations; even the most distrustful individuals in the United States often benefit from public goods like schools, roads, Social Security or even Medicaid. The Luo individuals with whom I spoke in Kenya, on the other hand, shared nothing but frustration and disillusionment toward their own government. From the tribalism and corruption charges to the recent teacher strike for promised but unpaid wages, the transparency and responsiveness of the Kenyan government leaves much to be desired on the part of the Luo. Another huge difference is in gender equality: whereas women in the West can
often support themselves with jobs, land ownership, investment and other means, women in Kenya lack many of the same options, forcing them to turn to family and community means of supporting themselves.

How does this relate to hybridity? The HIV/AIDS epidemic has created a situation in which many Luo children have lost one or both of their parents. The mechanisms (both the local custom of levirate marriage and the government-backed programs used in the Global North) used to address societal problems like these are failing, either from overextension and abuse or from the government’s inability to institute such programs. At the moment, it is the development organizations and church groups that have stepped in to fill this gap, as illustrated in the above section. These groups establish education programs, fund hospitals, and start microbusinesses in order to help those affected. But these NGOs and church groups are largely dependent on international funds that fluctuate based on the domestic climate in the donor country, and many struggle to set up sustainable programs that can continue after they leave.

In a limited fashion, some hybridity already exists between Kenyan social norms and Western institutions in the health sector. Currently, these social bonds can both aid and detract from the efficacy of Western medical systems that were designed around the sick individual. On one hand, family support can be critical in assuring that the individual will come to doctor’s appointments and remain vigilant in taking their medications:

In designing strategies for example for care of people who have HIV, or are falling into AIDS, even our strategies therefore fall on that communal network accepted norms of helping…If I were to present myself in hospital with HIV and I am put on ARVs, it is important that I adhere to those drugs. The hospital should be able to follow up, so that in case of default or I have any issues they will come or can reach me. So some of the things that are got are like where do you live, who is your next of kin, where do you live could also mean who do you live with, you know, in terms of mitigating tuberculosis, TB, part
of the strategy in DOTs, directly observed treatment, was we rope in your family members to ensure that Madiang does take his daily dosage. (Interview 7)

Having a family support network present is also crucial in maintaining a stable and positive psychological state in the patient, something that is emphasized in the West as well. One Kenyan interviewee, while describing a friend of hers who was living alone in Nairobi with AIDS, described that once she convinced him to return to his family compound his condition improved immeasurably, even to the extent that he began considering a future career:

He came home and we talked but after one month, it was one, two months, he was a strong person. That is the power of the family being around you. And as we talk, I know he has been up and down, but he’s strong… you could feel that this person, he has moved from the state he was in, the state of where he would talk and I’m like I wish I could just die and leave you people to go on with your lives, to someone who can think positively, and is right now like if you hear of any vacancy, please let me know, I apply. (Interview 8)

On the other hand, existing cultural understandings of ailments and “miracle healers” and the ability of extended kin to check a patient out of a health facility has had disastrous effects on some HIV/AIDS patients:

If I give you an example, where people pull sometimes their patient from hospital to go back home to carry out a cultural thing which is said that, it is that which is making him or her suffer, you know. I can give an example of some time back, three four five years ago, where someone was taken from Sierra District Hospital and was a bedridden because uh opportunistic infections out of AIDS, and the explanation was that look, he constructed his house in the village, but the door was facing east where the sun is coming from, rather then where the sun was falling, west. So they were taking him back to reconstruct that house, and probably now his ailment will, you know, be dealt with. (Interview 7)
The combination of Kenyan social bonds with Western-style hospital pragmatics has led to both positive and negative outcomes for sick Kenyans. But so far, the Kenyan influence on the larger institutional practices has been minimal, consisting solely of a slightly heightened sensitivity to community influence. The success of M-PESA occurred when the Kenyan influence was felt on the systematic level, changing conventional banking into something that can be done entirely on a cell phone. The same influence has yet to be seen in health. Right now, neither the local nor the Western answers to caring for those affected by the crisis are sufficient. Although development agencies are doing the best they can, they are still reliant on external conditions. The solution to problems like these must come from the country itself in order to ensure its continued efficacy, and a hybrid system based on the medical technology of the West and the communal bonds of Kenya could address societal health ills in a successful and sustainable way.
Conclusion

I am not a prisoner of history. I should not seek there for a meaning of my destiny.

I should constantly remind myself that the real leap consists in introducing invention into existence.

In the world though which I travel, I am endlessly creating myself. (Fanon, 1967)

When we conceptualize the future of development practice, it is crucial that we take Fanon’s words to heart. We cannot continue to use the Western trajectory and experience as a rubric against which all developing countries are judged. We have not reached the “End of History,” as Francis Fukuyama famously claimed, far from it. As the success of hybrid systems such as M-PESA continue to demonstrate, programs that skip intermediary steps that were seen as crucial to Western development (namely, the building of extensive infrastructural systems that allow the creation of landline telephones, for example) are often the most successful. These programs base themselves on local priorities, as this interviewee states:

So there’s a lot, so much of the development surely, as you see it, the foreign perception of development, because people think that the values are the same, the values might not be same, developments are localized. And this is something that most development people overlook for long time. But I think people are realizing that development is definitely- is necessarily localized. Your priorities are not my priorities. You see? So if you think that the development should be a reflection of your priority, without understanding what should my priorities, it is going to fail. (Interview 1)
By “introducing invention into existence,” we have come upon a technological solution to the banking and market woes of average Kenyans. But this is only the beginning: hybrid systems can also emerge in land tenure, where a hybrid might incorporate social belonging, identity and a means to participate in the global economic system; and health, where a hybrid could encompass traditional modes of belief, Western health knowledge and traditional as well as infrastructural safety nets. This is possible only if the powerful Western agents lessen the stranglehold currently present in conventional aid and development practice.

One of the key features of Bhabha’s cultural hybridity is that the hybrid systems emerge organically out of a dichotomy. Culture is much more fluid than institutions tend to be for a variety of reasons, and my inclusion of language in this thesis is evidence of a cultural hybrid such as Bhabha would emphasize. The other three sectors are institutional, which is my addition to Bhabha’s work. In these cases, it is much more difficult for these solutions to arise organically: M-PESA, for example, required years of technological innovation, infrastructure development and programming in order to function how it does today. Thus, applying the idea of hybrids to institutions must be a much more intentional process, one that begins with the donors relinquishing some of the control they have over the process and creating space for a hybrid system to emerge.

Another critical point to keep in mind is that the colonial and post-colonial encounters affect both cultural and systemic spheres. For the purpose of this thesis, I studied these effects exclusively within the development context of Kisumu. But this is a tiny fraction of the spaces in which hybridity can emerge, spaces which span geographical regions, cultural intersections and infrastructural collisions. As Said wrote, “Despite its bitterness and violence, the whole point of Fanon’s work is to force the European metropolis to think its history together with the history of
the colonies awakening from the cruel stupor and abused immobility of imperial dominion” (1989, p. 223). This was clearest when discussing the experiences of the longest-term Western development agents present in Kisumu, many of whom said straight away that they can no longer imagine living in the US, that they can’t go back to the way they used to live at home before they came here. One American missionary, upon his fifth anniversary of living in Kisumu, said that he can no longer stand the fast-paced, methodical life he used to have just outside of Chicago. Many of these men and women intend to stay in Kenya, even after they retire.

There are a multitude of other directions to take this research. Firstly, much more could be done in detailing the hybrids that have formed and continue to form in each of these sectors. Secondly, the Luo are only one ethnic group out of Kenya’s staggering forty-two, and a separate paper could be written on these topics for each and every other group in Kenya, each of which have their own unique encounters with the colonizers, the Kenyan government, and Western development initiatives. Thirdly, there are many other sectors in which Bhabha’s idea of hybridity could be applied. As mentioned earlier, the current Kenyan government can be seen as an amalgamation of Western notions of democracy and Kenyan tribal allegiances. Another possibility is the education sector, which was only briefly discussed in this thesis and could also be expanded to include other non-institutionalized forms of education in addition to the government-supported curriculum. The sanitation sector could also be considered for study, as Western ideas of conventional hygiene and sanitation structures, which are dependent on pervasive and expensive infrastructure and involve reliable central planning and copious amounts of water are considered to be ill-suited to the sub-Saharan African context.

To conclude this thesis, I would like to share this quote from my very first interview, the one which set the stage for all of my proceeding field research:
What makes me happy is that that public negative description of different values and cultures is reducing. Or even if we have such kind of perceptions, we don’t publicly declare it, arrogantly, the way it was, sometimes back in the past in history, where we would go to a people and describe them as backward, and negative, primitive, what have you, without bothering to understand the underlying principles and explanations why these people look different. So this kind of development practice is still, is simply a perpetuation of a kind of a monolithic conception of the world and meaning of life, where they think that all that they know is the best that exists. But if you are introduced to a wide spectrum of knowledge of multicultural or cross-cultural knowledge you will rethink whether that is the best model. (Interview 1)

For all of the development industry’s past and present ills, this interviewee and Fanon both highlight the way forward: by constantly reminding ourselves that other ways of carrying out a life have much to teach us, we can invent new systems, incorporating aspects of each, that work for the betterment of all.
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