

**Maike Voigt**

# The Rise and Fall of Kenyan Entrepreneurs

Social Mobility in Kisumu



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Maike Voigt

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In an earlier draft version, this dissertation contained a chapter on entrepreneurial networks and social embeddedness. While I later decided to greatly condense this and integrate it into other chapters, I want to use this space to highlight the importance of networks once more.

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## Abbreviations

AfDB	African Development Bank
CBO	Community-based organisation
CPAN	Chronic Poverty Action Network
IMF	International Monetary FUN
KSh.	Kenya Shilling
KNBS	Kenya National Bureau of Statistics
LBDA	Lake Basin Development Authority
MSE	Micro and small enterprises
MSEA	Micro and small enterprise authority
MSME	Micro, small and medium enterprises
NGO	Non-governmental organization
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
ODM	Orange Democratic Movement
PNU	Party of National Unity
SAP	Structural adjustment programme
SCI	Solar Cookers International
YEDF	Youth Enterpirse Development Fund



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## 1. Entrepreneurship, social mobility and the Kenyan middle classes: An introduction

Today, I'm meeting with Ruth, a welder whom I have known since the previous August and who on this occasion has agreed to introduce me to two important business contacts of hers. One is the officer in charge of enterprise development for Kisumu county. Ruth knows him through her activities as chairperson of the innovators association, a group of business people who have come together because of their innovative business ideas. Ruth, for example, owns a welding workshop, a rather unusual business activity for a young woman like herself, and has specialized in the fabrication of irrigation sprinklers. As chair of the association, she is the contact person for the group and Kisumu's enterprise development officer will contact her to inform her about upcoming events which are of interest to small business owners.

The other contact she agreed to introduce me to is a colleague from her association, Charles, a farm owner and welder, who produces equipment for the processing of agricultural produce. In previous meetings, she had told me a lot about him and always spoke very highly of him. He supports her work by giving her access to one of his machines, which she needs for the production of her sprinklers. He seems to be her role model and she later confirms this by saying that the purpose of an association like theirs is to encourage all members because it shows them what others have already achieved and gives them their support. «If you're in a group the others become your mentors», she says. Like her, the owner of the farm had nothing when he came to Kisumu and today, he is doing very well. This is what she also aspires to. [...]

After our meeting with the enterprise development officer, we take a motorbike taxi out to the farm, which is situated on the outskirts of town. Upon arriving, Charles gives us a tour of the farm, showing us the different sections of his farm and the various activities he pursues there. We start off in his cricket section, which he has recently started constructing. When he started out this project, called «flying food», the Dutch development agency behind it financed him a travel to Thailand, so he could learn from them how crickets are farmed as human food. On returning, he found out that actually, his grandfather's generation also used to eat crickets, only he doesn't know why this habit was abandoned. So now he is trying to reintroduce it. Apparently they are healthy, too, containing different types of amino acids. And even if crickets won't sell as human food, he can still use them as chicken feed and thereby enhance the quality of his chicken because then the birds profit from the different amino acids and develop higher quality meat compared to other farmers' chicken. This is what he learned when he was taught about business, Charles says, if you are selling a product, there will also be someone else selling the same product. «So you need to develop an advantage over that competitor to be successful».

## *1. Entrepreneurship, Social Mobility and the Kenyan Middle Classes*

We continue through his poultry section and on towards a house where he has an egg incubator that he developed and constructed himself but has since started manufacturing for sale, too. He sees the hatching of eggs as value addition: if you sell an egg on the market, it can get you 15 Kenyan Shillings (KSh.), if you sell a day-old chick, though, it fetches 100 KSh. Even if you deduct the cost for the incubator and the time, you still remain with 70 KSh per chick, an added value of 55 KSh. The next section of his farm is the plant nursery where there are seedlings of different fruit plants. He explains the process of making them mature earlier to me, so that they can bear fruits after a shorter time span. At the moment there is a high demand for Papaya trees, which is why he has dedicated a large section of the garden to pawpaw seedlings. He also grows mangos, strawberries and oranges. Additionally, he has some large solar driers there that he uses to dry peanuts and amaranth leaves. The latter are then ground into powder and mixed into porridge flour, which is very healthy for young children and mothers. Behind the plant nursery he used to have a fish pond, however, it was badly constructed and has broken down. He will construct a new one, though. He also informs me that the whole farm has been piped, so that it can be irrigated at any time. He has a large pump with which he can pump up water from the nearby river and irrigate his plants. He also has his own generator, in case electricity is shut off.

In another section of the farm, he has a welding workshop, where his workers fabricate agricultural machines and equipment on order. For example, a machine to mix chicken feeds and a construction to boil off crickets and make them sterile and edible. He has also constructed a machine that peels peanuts. This, he shows us next. He doesn't grow peanuts himself, but farmers can come and bring their peanuts, from which he then produces peanut butter. I have seen jars of his peanut butter being sold in town. We pass by a section where he plans to keep cows and lastly walk past the orchard, where he has pawpaw and mango trees, as well as different types of citrus trees. We agree to meet again next week for an interview.<sup>1</sup>

All the topics relevant to this dissertation are condensed in this field work episode. For one, there is the importance of networks in the business (and research) context. As we saw, Ruth had agreed to introduce me to two important contacts of hers. One is a colleague of whom she thought very highly and whose business served as an ideal that Ruth herself was working towards and who had facilitated her work in the past. The other is a county government official, coordinating activities designed to support and uplift small businesses. This hints at the role micro and small enterprises (MSEs)<sup>2</sup> are currently ascribed in the development of the Kenyan economy. MSEs

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1 Excerpts from field notes taken on 25. and 29. February 2016.

2 A detailed account of my choice of this term to describe my sample will be given as part of chapter 4. Suffice it here to say that with this term, I wish to highlight the fact that all entrepreneurs in my sample employed between one to 20 persons.



are envisaged to further economic growth and create jobs for Kenya's unemployed. Associating herself with other entrepreneurs with innovative business ideas, Ruth hoped to benefit from programmes targeted at business development and increasing their marketing reach.

Further, the tour of her colleague's farm gives an impression of the diverse nature of MSEs in Kisumu and the approach entrepreneurs take toward business development. As we learn on the tour, various activities are combined in the farm and new ones (like the cricket project) are constantly added. This attests to the processual nature of entrepreneurship with businesses constantly evolving from an initial founding idea. However, not all of the new ideas work out, as for example the fish pond, which had broken down. Charles also mentioned the need to stay ahead of competitors, thereby hinting at the downside of constant business development: namely that continual innovation is necessary not only to make the business successful, but also due to pressure from competitors. So, one could hypothesize, if a business would stop developing, it would soon be replaced by others. Hence, in this observation we see the volatility entrepreneurs are faced with and a life course approach, which is followed in this thesis, serves particularly well to bring out both the highs and the lows in a business's history.

These business histories are closely intertwined with their founders' life courses and the excerpt also shows that they have experienced various highs and lows, as Ruth said that both herself and Charles came to Kisumu having nothing. From this situation, both have worked themselves up by virtue of founding their own business. In this thesis, I conceptualize such highs and lows as turning points in entrepreneurial biographies and will present a detailed analysis of their varied causes, which can be rooted in historical or political events as well as within the family or wider social network.

Both Ruth's and Charles's business are their main income sources and they had in the past invested no small amount of money in the creation of these businesses, through the purchase of machinery, materials and, in Charles's case, farm land. This, and the income they make from their businesses, sets them off from the majority of micro entrepreneurs running businesses that require low investments and generate low profits. However, we also see the shortcomings of the local infrastructure, which Charles compensated privately by setting up a generator, thereby countering power cuts in the electricity grid and protecting himself from disruptions in business. Such provisions are necessary to ensure a smooth running of the business in the absence of reliable public infrastructure but require private capital and can, hence, hinder smaller businesses unable to make such investments. I argue that entrepreneurs such as Ruth, Charles, and others in my sample,

have moved an important step ahead from the survival-type<sup>3</sup> micro businesses in that their businesses generate a notably higher income which allows them to lead a middle-class lifestyle.

All of these aspects will be addressed in great detail in the present book, with the aim to highlight the nature and activities of micro and small enterprises in Kenya. Beyond investigating the types of businesses such middle class entrepreneurs own and run, I look especially at the social mobility they have experienced. This approach brings to the fore the volatility which is inherent in any society and many life courses today. By focusing my study of social mobility on events which initiated mobility, I am able to show that the interplay of personal and familial characteristics with larger political and economic trends determine social mobility individually. This focus stands in opposition to debates on the social classes, which assume a stable social order, evidenced in the supposed norm that an individual belongs to one class for their whole life, while movement between classes happens only over the long-term. By contrast, this thesis highlights the short-term changes inherent in entrepreneurs' life courses, attesting to the insecurity they experience and the opportunities they seize. I show that there are various motives to start a business and that these determine, to an extent, the way the business is run and developed. In this way, it becomes clear that becoming an entrepreneur has different advantages for different groups of people. The business, in turn, influences the social mobility trajectory of its owner both in ways discussed in previous literature and in new, Kenya-specific ways, I argue. Thereby, this book contributes to an understanding of social mobility pathways in contemporary African societies and sheds new light on entrepreneurship as a middle-class profession.

As these propositions contain a number of contested and highly debated terms, it is to these that I will turn next. In the following section, I will explain the interlinkages of entrepreneurship and the middle classes in Africa, as they have been dealt with in the literature and academic debate, with social mobility, the central concept of this thesis. I will further clarify how I use the terms entrepreneurship and middle class in my work. This conceptual section is followed by an outline of my research site, the city of Kisumu in western Kenya, detailing why I chose it for my research and how this context influenced the research. In the last part of the introduction, I will give an outline of the book.

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3 In the entrepreneurship literature, enterprises are often distinguished according to their founding motivation, where survival-oriented businesses are perceived as stop-gaps by their founders and growth-oriented businesses are envisioned as a long-term career cf. 9.1, Akinkugbe and Wohlmuth (2016).

*1.1 Interlinkages of entrepreneurship, social mobility and the middle classes in Africa*

The social science debate around the middle classes in Africa was sparked in the early 2010s by the economist observation that middle classes and with them, consumer power, were growing on the African continent. The debate was quick to point out the shortcomings of a purely economic approach to this topic as well as the problems inherent in transferring a European conception of social classes to the African context (see Daniel et al., 2016; Kroeker et al., 2018; Melber, 2016). While no agreement has been reached with regards to an African class definition or the question if such a concept is useful at all in the study of social stratification of African societies, the debate has created increased interest in the lifestyles and surroundings of African middle income earners (Melber, 2016; Neubert, 2019).

Implicit in a debate on a growing middle class is, of course, the fact that these people have (recently) risen to this status, i.e. have been socially mobile due to a favourable economic climate. Up until recently, this social rise wasn't addressed in its own right, though the topic of social mobility figures more strongly in the volume on «Middle Classes in Africa» edited by Lena Kroeker and colleagues (2018). In this book, several authors address both the upward and downward trajectories of different middle classes. Jan Budniok and Andrea Noll (2018), for one, retrace the social mobility of a Ghanaian middle class made up of teachers and lawyers, from colonial times to the present. They show not only how these occupations uplifted their practitioners into middle class status, but also how the overall economic climate influenced the fates of these professions. Secondly, Lena Kroeker (2018) addresses the social mobility of a Kenyan middle class, specifically their strategies to maintain middle class status and make arrangements to cushion themselves against prospective shocks. She, thus, highlights the activities geared towards remaining in the middle class and preventing social downward mobility. Lastly, there is Rachel Spronk's Afterword (2018) to the volume, in which she points out that a closer look at the social mobility experienced by the middle classes highlights their instability and questions the notion of middle class as a stable category. Additionally, she mentions the changing class positions an individual can inhabit over the time of her/his life course, the central topic of Budniok and Noll's contribution. Finally, she adds to the security strategies focused on by Kroeker, the activity of running a business as a safeguard for precarious times.

In the social mobility debate, on the other hand, social classes are the units between which mobility takes place. As much of the classical social

mobility debate focused on educational and occupational achievements (Erikson & Goldthorpe, 1992; Lipset & Bendix, 1967 [1959], the classes, in this sense, are mainly defined by these and less by aspects of lifestyle, which have become central to the recent middle class debate. As the aim of this thesis is not primarily to contribute to conceptual thinking about class concepts on the African continent, I use the class terminology in the sense in which it is employed in the study of social mobility. When I speak of social classes in Kisumu, they are essentially the units between which my interlocutors have moved over the courses of their lives. However, to grasp the differentiations between these, I employ a different approach which is not limited to educational attainment and occupation. Rather, I follow an approach developed by Lloyd Warner and colleagues (Warner et al., 1960 [1949] for the study of social class in different communities. As I will show in greater detail in chapter 5, their methodology facilitates the generation of a locally specific, emic social class system. Hence, whenever I mention social classes and their characteristics in this book, I refer to the specific context of Kisumu as perceived by my interlocutors. That is to say, I am aware that social classes in other communities beyond Kenya, but even in Kenya's countryside or the larger cities of Nairobi or Mombasa can take different shapes and have distinct characteristics. As Warner and colleagues observed: «Class varies from community to community» (1960 [1949], p. 23) and it follows that a person forming part of the middle class in Kisumu might not be regarded as such if s/he moved to Nairobi, Turkana or Tanzania.

This brings us around to another keyword central to this book and its connections to debates on social mobility and the middle classes: entrepreneurship. While the middle classes might open small businesses as a security strategy, something which generates an income in times of unemployment or if salaries are delayed, they are also supposedly a «seedbed of entrepreneurship» on a larger scale (Akinkugbe & Wohlmuth, 2016). Entrepreneurial activity is seen by many economists as a key to economic growth and job creation, which is why it is a central topic in so many strategies of economic development put forward by numerous African governments (Ratten & Jones, 2018). Their vision being that the growing labour force which cannot be accommodated by employment will instead turn to create their own businesses and thereby provide employment for themselves and others (for Kenya see Kenya National Bureau of Statistics [KNBS], 2016; Micro and Small Enterprises Authority [MSEA], 2012). Many economic contributions in the entrepreneurship debate point to the fact that the middle classes are better educated and can make use of experiences from previous

employment to start their own productive businesses which answer to market demands (Ayadi & Ben Aissa, 2015). However, empirical evidence of an increased rate of productive entrepreneurship in African countries with growing middle classes is still missing. On the contrary, the few publications which combine the topics of middle classes in Africa and entrepreneurship are highly doubtful of the possibilities the middle classes have to create small and medium-sized productive enterprises (Akinkugbe & Wohlmuth, 2016; Kappel, 2016). Instead, they attest to the various institutional and infrastructural conditions holding entrepreneurship development in African countries back (Akinkugbe & Wohlmuth, 2016; Kappel, 2016; Ratten & Jones, 2018).

While the middle classes' role in entrepreneurship development remains doubtful, entrepreneurship definitely takes a central role in social mobility debates. As will be shown in greater detail in chapter 2, entrepreneurship has been found to constitute a unique means of social ascent, in that it makes social upward mobility possible for those who are denied it on the labour market due to lack of educational qualifications (Lipset & Bendix, 1967 [1959], chapter 6). Thus, entrepreneurship has been shown to enable social upward mobility, on the one hand, and to act as a cushion against social downward mobility, on the other. Hence, even though evidence in support of the hypothesis that the African middle classes are a seedbed of entrepreneurship is still lacking, it seems worthwhile to explore the effects entrepreneurship has on social mobility pathways in African countries. One reason for the dearth of publications relating African entrepreneurship to the middle class debate appears to be that permanent employment, possibly with the government, is still perceived as the typical middle class job. Lawyers and teachers are two examples, as discussed by Budniok and Noll (2018), additionally, medical professions and administrative jobs are often mentioned. Entrepreneurship is, thus, not seen as full-time employment for the middle classes yet, and this thesis aims to change that view.

## *1.2 A conceptual note on entrepreneurship in Africa*

Though recently the interest in African entrepreneurship has increased both from an economic and a social science perspective (see Akinyoade et al., 2017; Bellucci & Eckert, 2019, Part V; Dana et al., 2018; Ochonu, 2018a; Rösenthaller & Schulz, 2016), conceptual thoughts on the topic are quite rare. As in the case of social class terminology, the term entrepreneurship begs the question if it can be transferred from its European origin to the

African continent without requiring reconsideration of its characteristics. So along the lines of Scharrer et al. who ask us to focus on «what is uniquely African about them [the African middle classes]» (2018, p. 22), one needs to consider what is African about African entrepreneurship.

Certainly, the informal sector debate, which was very influential in discussions of African entrepreneurship between the 1970s and 1990s, is of importance here. While the phenomenon of unrecorded entrepreneurial activities was witnessed in all urban centres of the developing world and was not limited to African economies, the term was initially coined on the African continent. Scholars from the early 1970s on (Hake, 1977; Hart, 1973; International Labour Organization [ILO], 1972) recognized the economic potential of the sector, but African governments reacted to it mainly by criminalizing the various activities and frequently destroying the premises of such unlicensed entrepreneurs. Only in the late 1980s and 1990s did the official stance toward these activities change for the better. However, the dominance of the informal sector as part of African economies and the extensive scientific debate around it «abetted for a long time an insufficiently differentiated view of [African] micro entrepreneurs» (Orlik, 2002, p. 196)<sup>4</sup>. This debate, thus, had a lasting effect on the image of African entrepreneurship, tainting it with notions of illegality and a quest for pure survival as well as focusing the debate on micro enterprises.

Economic explorations into African entrepreneurship from the 2000s stress that the continent has a comparatively low rate of entrepreneurship which is attributed to various infrastructural and institutional inhibiting factors such as high transportation costs, difficult access to capital and high interest rates (Akinyoade et al., 2017; Opoku, 2010; Ratten & Jones, 2018). In light of this context, the more conceptual approaches point to several strategies developed by African entrepreneurs, enabling them to cope in their respective environments. Among these are the importance of personal networks and alternative sources of capital, i.e. capital in other forms than a bank loan or credit, as well as risk management strategies relying on diversification.

Moses Ochonu (2018a, pp. 5–9) especially stresses that the role of the entrepreneur in African societies is not a purely economic one, but is always complemented by social obligations and considerations. Likewise, the social relations of entrepreneurs play a prominent part in Sara Berry's (2019) chapter on entrepreneurial labour in a volume on African labour history.

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4 Translated from German by the author: «Die entwicklungstheoretische Diskussion um den «Informellen Sektor» [hat] lange Zeit Vorschub für eine wenig differenzierte Betrachtung der Mikrounternehmer geleistet.»

Additionally, Ute Röschenthaler and Dorothea Schulz (2016, p. 4) highlight the importance of various kinds of capital for African entrepreneurs: «These entrepreneurial figures straddle the dividing lines between economic profit and other kinds of «capital» (in Bourdieu's sense), and also between the domains of cultural, social, political, and religious activity.» African entrepreneurs, they argue, frequently translate economic capital into social capital to increase their social influence (ibid.: 6) and, following from this, often take on politically important positions (ibid.: 3).

In frequently volatile economic situations, social capital and relations become more important while risk management strategies differ from the European and North American contexts. Very prominent among these is the tendency of African entrepreneurs to diversify and invest in different enterprises rather than focusing on one, a strategy already observed by Keith Hart in his well-known study of «Informal Income Opportunities and Urban Employment in Ghana» (1973, p. 78). The literature unanimously agrees that this doesn't attest to a lack of commitment, but rather that African entrepreneurs can thereby cushion losses in one economic sector with earnings from another (Ochonu, 2018a, p. 20; Spring & McDade, 1998, p. 13). Darko Opoku (2010, p. 211) further highlights the insecure institutional environment which Ghanaian (and other African) entrepreneurs find themselves in and argues that this constitutes the central factor inhibiting business growth:

To cope with uncertainties, businesspeople adopted a variety of strategies that were unpropitious to firm expansion. Since these were designed to reduce the risks to investment, they were necessarily not growth-oriented. Though these are often erroneously construed as evidence of weaknesses or inadequacies, it is in fact more accurate to understand them as rational responses to difficult environmental conditions.

Aside from this institutional setting, poor economic conditions (Eijdenberg, 2017) as well as a small elite of big business owners (Akinkugbe & Wohlmuth, 2016) make life difficult for the majority of African entrepreneurs. These circumstances necessitate a «readiness for [...] purposefully fostering social connections», argue Röschenthaler and Schulz (2016, p. 8). «The ultimate aim of such [social connections] is not just to achieve personal advance and business success, but to remain or become a member of a broader social collective by redistributing some of one's own income and hence fostering webs of personal dependency» (ibid.).

This short literature review has brought together different strands of the academic debate on African entrepreneurship. It emphasizes the structural

context in which African entrepreneurship is embedded as well as the importance of social ties to facilitate business processes following from this. Rösenthaller and Schulz (2016, p. 4) aptly conclude: «We therefore need a concept of entrepreneur that [...] makes room for diverse activities initiated by African entrepreneurs, past and present, and also for the various kinds of value they generate in the process.» Hence, entrepreneurship in this thesis denotes the activity of founding and running a business<sup>5</sup>, while paying particular attention to the importance of social embeddedness.

### 1.3 *Kisumu as the research site*

I conducted the research for this book in the western Kenyan city of Kisumu between March 2015 and March 2018. I chose Kisumu, one of Kenya's major urban centres, in order to get an impression of the daily lives of the middle classes away from any capital city, in which most research on the topic has so far been conducted. In this sense, Kisumu constitutes a «secondary city» in Kenya (Ammann & Sanogo, 2017; see Unseld, 2017) and Carole Ammann and Aïdas Sanogo note that little research on any topic has been conducted in such smaller African towns (2017, p. 6) even though «they all have played a crucial role in the history and have central economic and political functions in their countries and regions» (ibid: 5). Indeed, as will become clear over the course of this book, middle classes in Kisumu differ very much from their counterparts in the capital Nairobi, and by implication, I would propose that the middle classes of any African capital city differ from those in the countries' smaller cities, let alone rural areas. Hence, to allow the reader to understand Kisumu's history as well as its economic and political functions within Kenya, I will, in the following, give a short account of its economic development and political significance as Kenya's longstanding opposition stronghold, taking account of the fact that both issues have been closely entwined since independence.

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5 As all of the entrepreneurs in my sample are the founders and owners of their businesses, I use the terms entrepreneur and business owner interchangeably.



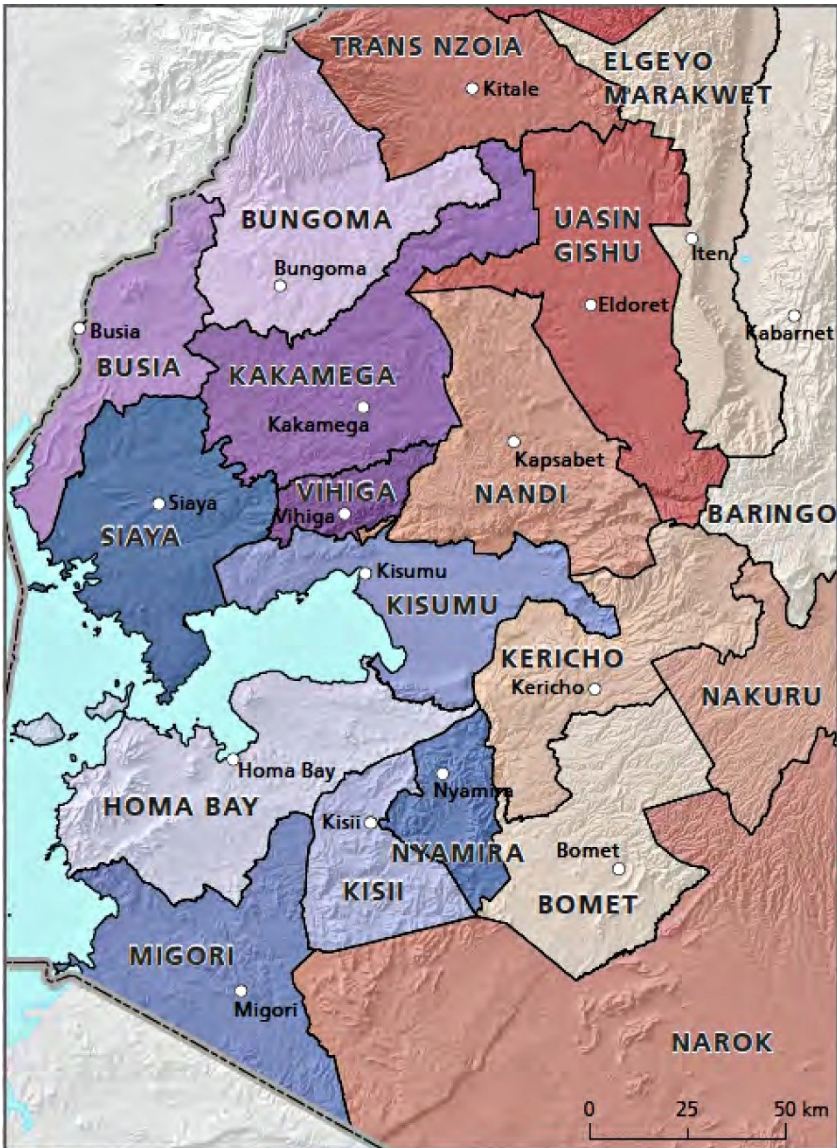


Figure 1 Kenya's Western Region. Counties making up the former Nyanza Province are shaded in blue. Map taken from Wiesmann, Kiteme and Mwangi (2016: 13).

Kisumu was founded under the name of Port Florence in 1898 as a railway terminus along the railway line from Mombasa on the Kenyan coast to Kampala in Uganda (Obudho & Waller, 1976, p. 11). It was the capital of the former Nyanza province (located around Lake Victoria) and since the constitutional reform in 2010 constitutes one of Kenya's 47 counties (see Figure 1).

Its connection to the early railway industry led to its becoming an important hub of trade in the western Kenya region in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with this trade being pursued mainly by Indian and Swahili immigrants (Obudho & Waller, 1976, p. 19). Under colonial rule, only European settlers and non-African traders were allowed to settle in the town, while the Africans working in town had to settle in the semi-permanent townships on its outskirts (*ibid.*: 20). Some industrial development took place with the construction of a cotton ginnery, an oil refinery and a sugar refinery in 1912 (*ibid.*: 22), and by the time of Kenyan independence in 1963 Kisumu was ranked the third largest industrial centre in the country (*ibid.*: 113). Up until independence, the Indian traders formed the backbone of the town community (*ibid.*: 33) but were then rapidly outnumbered by Africans migrating to town. Additionally, in line with the country-wide post-independence trend, many non-Africans left Kisumu, though Robert Obudho and Peter Waller maintain that Indians remained an important part of the population (1976, p. 106). Kisumu's importance as a railway terminus and, hence, as center of trade declined in the 1930s with the construction of a new railway line leading to Tororo in Uganda via Nakuru (1976, p. 40). Kisumu was the third largest urban centre in Kenya at independence, however, according to the most recent census of 2019 was recently overtaken in population size by Nakuru, Ruiru and Eldoret. It is therefore listed in sixth place with roughly 400.000 inhabitants (KNBS, 2020a, p. 241).

The town's fate post-independence was strongly influenced by the fact that it constitutes the country's opposition stronghold since the late 1960s. As political scientist Charles Hornsby (2012, p. 4) writes in his meticulous account of Kenyan history since independence, the economic and political development of Kenya have been closely entwined since independence. Moreover, politics are dominated by ethnic factions and especially the rivalry between three of the country's largest ethnic groups, Kikuyu, Kalenjin and Luo (*ibid.*: 9). This rivalry emerged shortly after independence and has been sustained since, as the country has seen Kikuyu- and Kalenjin-led governments, but no Luo has held the country's presidency. Kenya's political landscape is of interest here, as one of the groups mentioned, the Luo, originate from the Lake Victoria region. The region as well as its urban center

Kisumu are dominated by the Luo (Shipton, 1989, p. 16), the fourth largest ethnic group in the country according to the census of 2019 (KNBS, 2020b, p. 424).<sup>6</sup>

From the first national election in Kenya in 1961, «ethnicity [emerged] as the key driver of political preference» (Hornsby, 2012, p. 64) and «patterns of ethno-regional political alignment [...] would endure for decades» (ibid.: 66). The Kikuyu and Luo had the most established sense of an ethnic identity (ibid.: 24) and were led by two men whose families have remained in key positions in Kenya's political landscape until today. In the early 1960s, Jomo Kenyatta (for the Kikuyu) and Oginga Odinga (representing the Luo), together with others from a small educated elite formed the Kenya African National Union, which won the 1961 election and Kenyatta subsequently became independent Kenya's first president, with Odinga as his vice president. However, cold war tensions lead to the marginalisation of Odinga and his supporters within the ruling party (Branch, 2011, 35f.). Finally, in the late 1960s, they were driven out of the government and into the opposition. As Hornsby writes: «This conflict alienated the Luo community from the Kenyatta state and created an antipathy between Kikuyu and Luo that was to endure for decades» (2012, p. 156). This alienation led to the emergence of what I would like to call a Luo narrative of economic and political development from the late 1960s. This depicts the Luo and their home region of western Kenya as marginalised within the state and was supported, more or less strongly, by all my Luo interlocutors.

Following the exclusion of his erstwhile partners, Kenyatta subsequently strengthened the role of his own ethnic group in Kenya's leadership by channelling state employment and other resources their way (Branch, 2011, p. 98; Hornsby, 2012, 256f.). Importantly for national development, such job appointments had a significant trickle-down effect for the home regions of the respective employees, who invested their incomes there (Hornsby, 2012, p. 257).

The Luo, on the other hand, experienced increasing economic discrimination in government employment as well as of their home region. Hornsby finds that by the 1970s, the «Luo increasingly blamed their marginalisation, both real and apparent, on the Kikuyu, and built a mythology of resistance and social cohesion around opposition to the Kikuyu elite's political and economic goals» (2012, p. 257). I would further argue that, due to the fact

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6 The largest group are the Kikuyu, followed by Luhya and Kalenjin. It is noteworthy that up until the 2009 census, Luo were ranked as the third largest ethnic group but are now outnumbered by Kalenjin, partly due to AIDS-related deaths and high infant mortality Hornsby (2012, p. 776).