

Once the major success story of a troubled continent, Kenya came in the early 1990s to be regarded as its fallen star. This book challenges such images of reversal and the analytical polarities which sustain them. Based on several years of research in Kenya, the analysis ranges from telescopic to microscopic fields of vision – from national political culture, oratory, and the staging of politics to everyday struggles for livelihood among people in one rural locale during the past century. This sliding scale of analysis allows the author to experiment theoretically with a number of themes informed by contemporary analytical tensions among post-modernist “chaos,” historical contingency, and structural regularities. The result is a study which combines many disciplines and perspectives to give a rich and varied picture of the culture of politics in twentieth-century Kenya.

The culture of politics in modern Kenya

Cambridge University Press
0521595908 - The Culture of Politics in Modern Kenya - Angeliqve Haugerud
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Angelique Haugerud
Yale University



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Published by the Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RP
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA
10 Stamford Road, Oakleigh, Melbourne 3166, Australia

© Cambridge University Press 1993

First published 1995
First paperback edition published 1997

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress cataloguing in publication data

Haugerud, Angelique, 1952–
The culture of politics in modern Kenya 1890s–1990s / Angelique Haugerud.
p. cm. – (African studies series: 84)
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 0 521 47059 5

1. Kenya – Politics and government – 1978–
 2. Political culture – Kenya.
 3. Kenya – Economic conditions – 1963–
 4. Kenya – Social conditions – 1963–
 5. Embu (Kenya: District) – Economic conditions.
 6. Embu (Kenya: District) – Social conditions.
- I. Title. II. Series.

JQ2947.A2H38 1995
320.96762 – dc20 94–19810 CIP

ISBN 0 521 47059 5 hardback
ISBN 0 521 59590 8 paperback

Transferred to digital printing 2003

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Preface

This book began as a brief diversion from my prior focus on social and economic change in the Kenyan countryside. The global and African political upheavals of the early 1990s drew my attention to Kenya's vigorous new political contests, and to the heterodox political voices that now stormed the public domain – through popular music, theatre, sermons, court battles by human rights lawyers, and politicians' speeches. This recent tumult is not the central focus of this work, though it is the theme of chapter 2, and it inevitably affects readings of earlier processes of social change. The shifting political winds of the 1990s caught my attention as I was taking a new look at inventions of national political culture in earlier times, in an effort to connect rural livelihood struggles to the spectacle or staging of politics, especially as it occurred through public gatherings or *baraza*. I attended many of these political rituals while doing field research in rural Embu District, though at the time I did not imagine them to be particularly central to my work. They have turned out to be so, for reasons discussed in chapter 1. As I note there, though *baraza* are not the exclusive focus of this study, I take them as a revealing point of entry into the cross-currents of Kenyan life. From that entry point, I adopt a shifting angle of vision that captures interpenetrating domains of the local, the national, and the international.

I first visited Kenya during the summer of 1977, and returned for doctoral fieldwork in Embu District from mid-1978 through mid-1981. A number of shorter stays followed (in 1984, 1985, 1986, 1989, and 1993). This book draws on experiences from all of these visits. The academic interests that first took me to Kenya are most apparent in chapter 5. During several years of field research in one locality in Kenya's central highlands (Embu District) I focused on issues of land tenure, rural wealth differences, and social changes associated with processes of agricultural commercialization and economic diversification – considering, for example, who is rich, who poor, and how did they come to be so? Those economic interests widened to include political culture, partly because I began my field research at the start of the Moi era, a transition that saw

the invention and diffusion (especially through *baraza*) of new national political symbols and rhetoric. Over a decade later questions about convergences with and divergences from the earlier Kenyatta, colonial, and pre-colonial eras informed new readings of the Moi transition, whose celebratory early months I had experienced directly.

I thank the Kenyan government for granting me permission to conduct research in Embu District, and the University of Nairobi's Institute for Development Studies (IDS), where I was a Visiting Research Fellow, for a stimulating and collegial institutional sponsorship. Special thanks are due to several generous families in Nairobi who first offered intellectual, moral, and logistical support; I am particularly grateful to Patty and Bud Winans, Gail and John Gerhart, Audrey and David Smock, and Jean and Edgar Edwards. David Brokensha and Jack Glazier were helpful fellow researchers in Embu District. Arlene and David P. Shea provided invaluable assistance during the first months in the area. I thank my generous hosts in Embu District, as well as helpful administrative officers and talented research assistants.

Fieldwork in Kenya was funded by generous grants from the Social Science Research Council, American Council of Learned Societies, National Science Foundation (BNS 7902715), Northwestern University (Program of African Studies), Rockefeller Foundation, and Yale University (Center for International and Area Studies). Some audio-tape transcriptions were funded by a grant from the Social Science Faculty Research Fund of Yale University. I am grateful to Yale University for the Junior Faculty Fellowship that allowed me time to write the first draft of the manuscript.

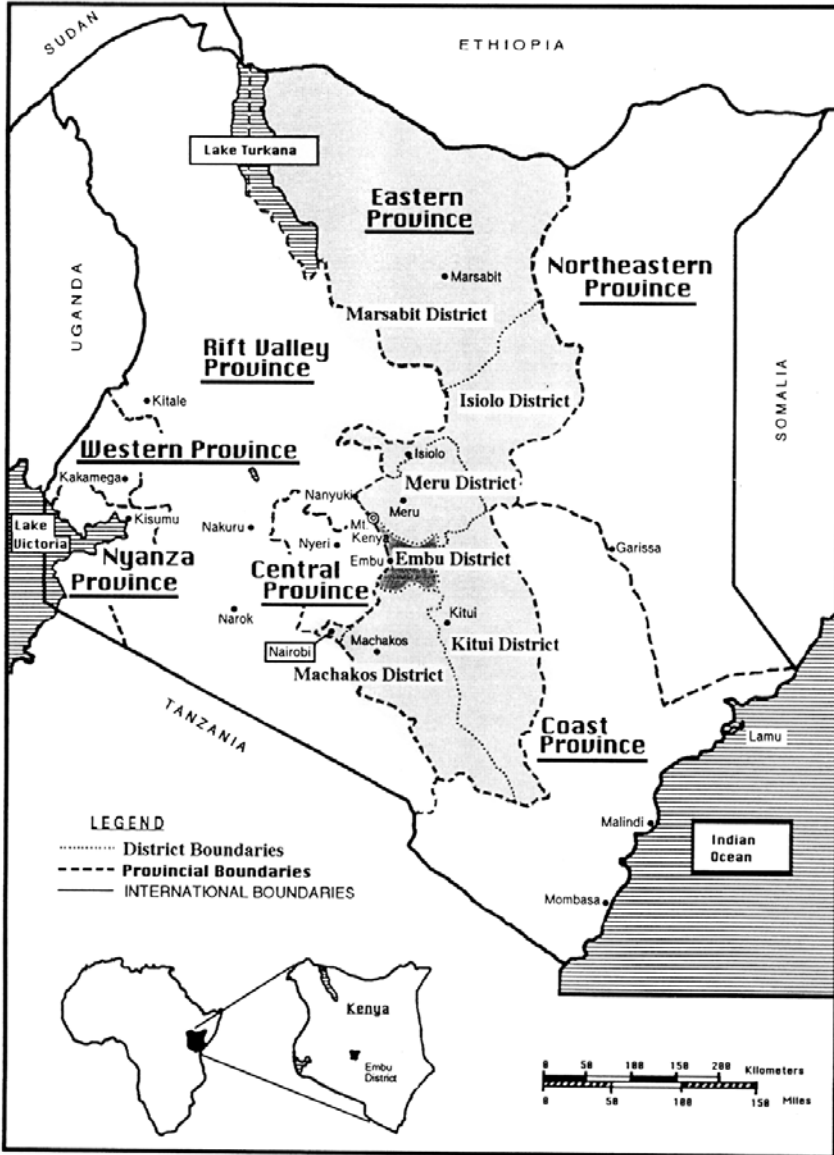
I thank the following individuals for helpful comments and suggestions on portions of the manuscript: Charles Ambler; Sara Berry; Niko Besnier; Ann Biersteker; Ben Blount; David William Cohen; Ronald Cohen; Micaela di Leonardo; Donald Donham; Marc Edelman; Joseph Errington; Gillian Feeley-Harnik; Robert Harms; Frank Holmquist; Ivan Karp; Deborah Kaspin; William Kelly; Frederick Klaitis; Corinne Kratz; Michael Lambek; Robert Launay; Kimani Njogu; David Nugent; Stephen Orvis; Donna Perry; Charles Piot; James C. Scott; Elizabeth Sheehan; Parker Shipton; Helen Siu; K. Sivaramkrishnan; Jacqueline Solway; Michel-Rolph Trouillot; and Diana Wylie. I am grateful to Donna L. Perry for skillfully preparing the maps. Thanks also to the three Press reviewers for their very helpful and perceptive comments. Senior editor Jessica Kuper provided welcome encouragement and assistance.

Portions of this work have been presented at annual meetings of the American Anthropological Association, African Studies Association, and Society for Economic Anthropology, and in seminars at Yale Univer-

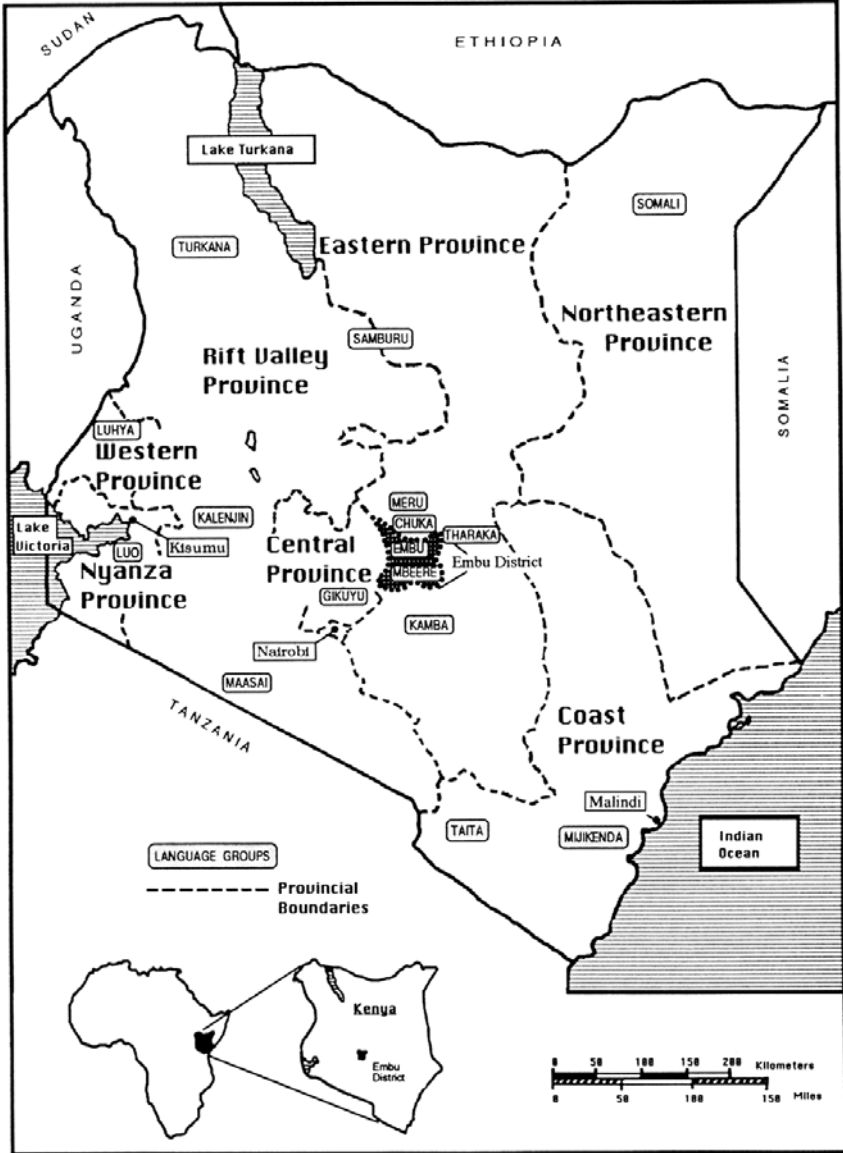
sity, Johns Hopkins University, Boston University, Harvard University, and Northwestern University. I thank participants on each of these occasions for helpful comments and suggestions.

A previous version of parts of chapter 3 appeared in Haugerud and Njogu 1991, coauthored with linguist Kimani Njogu who transcribed audio-tapes of some *baraza* I had attended years earlier in rural Embu. Niko Besnier, Joe Errington, and Kimani Njogu drew my attention to some of the linguistic literature that informs chapter 3. Previous versions of portions of chapter 5 have appeared in: *Africa* in 1989 (“Land Tenure and Agrarian Change in Kenya,” vol. 59); in Ronald Cohen’s 1988 edited volume, *Satisfying Africa’s Food Needs: Food Production and Commercialization in African Agriculture* (“Food Surplus Production, Wealth, and Farmers’ Strategies”), copyright © 1988 by Lynne Rienner Publishers Inc.: used with permission of the publisher; and in Christina H. Gladwin’s 1989 edited volume, *Food and Farm: Current Debates and Policies* (“Food Production and Rural Differentiation in the Kenya Highlands”). I thank Lynne Rienner Publishers and the University Press of America for permission to reproduce in chapter 5 tables and some text from my chapters in the volumes just cited.

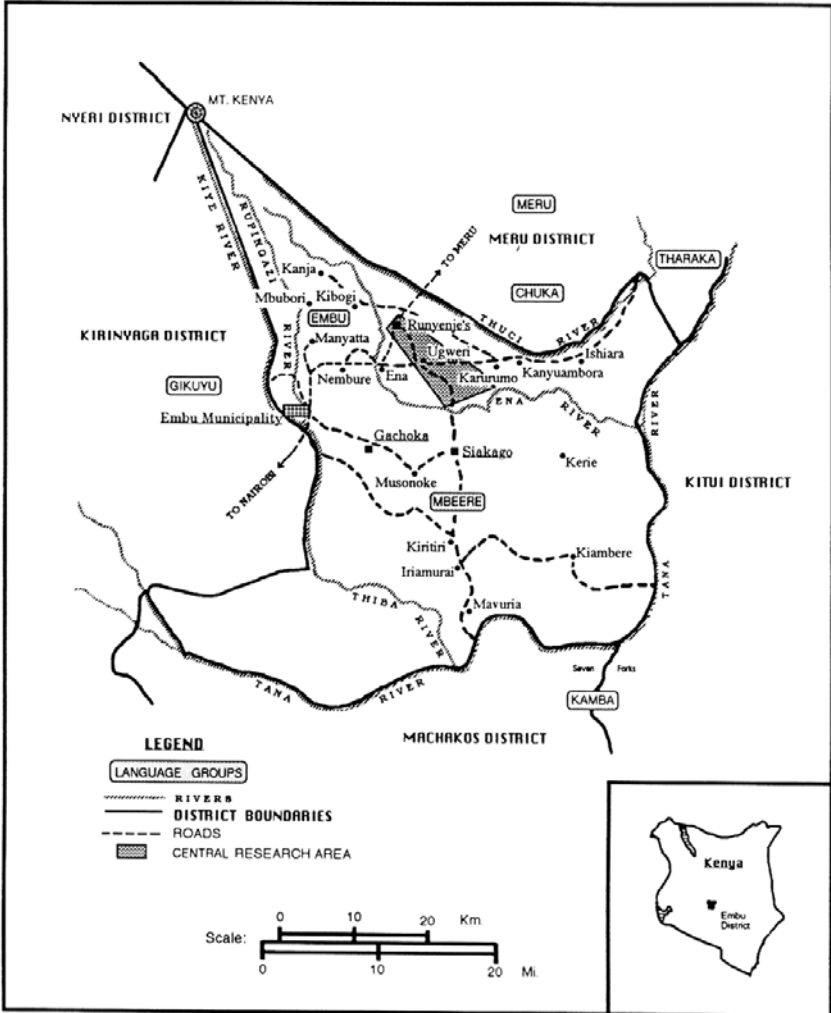
I am pleased to dedicate this book to the many friends in Embu District who warmly welcomed me into their homes (and who asked and answered many questions). With generosity and grace, they taught me much.



Map 1 Kenya (provinces, major towns, and districts in Eastern Province, mid 1980s)



Map 2 Kenya (provinces and some language groups)



Map 3 Embu District (towns, market centers, language groups, and central research area)