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Towards Multispecies History

Introduction: Ethnic Formation with Other-Than-Human Beings

David L. Schoenbrun and Jennifer L. Johnson

Abstract: Literature on ethnicity in Africa meets literature on multispecies ethnography to their mutual benefit. Multispecies ethnography considers people together with other-than-human beings, insisting the figure of the human is an interspecific one. We explore the ways in which multispecies ethnography needs history as part of a story about power and politics. But, the burden of the essay argues that historians of ethnicity need multispecies ethnographers' embrace of a broader canvas of life, in motion at many scales. Historians of ethnicity need a greater awareness of change and continuity in the presence of other-than-human life forms, over time. Those same historians also might adopt the readiness of multispecies ethnographers to recognize other than the descent metaphor at the heart of thinking and making groups.

Résumé: La littérature sur l'ethnicité en Afrique rencontre la littérature sur l'ethnographie multi-espèces pour leur avantage mutuel. L'ethnographie multi-espèces

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considère les personnes avec des êtres autres qu'humains, insistant sur le fait que la figure de l'humain est interspécifique. Nous explorons les façons dont l'ethnographie multi-espèces a besoin de l'histoire dans le cadre d'un récit sur le pouvoir et la politique. Mais, le point principal de cet article est que les historiens de l'ethnicité ont besoin que les ethnographes multi-espèces embrassent un cadre de vie plus large et dynamique à plusieurs échelles. Les historiens de l'ethnicité ont besoin d'une plus grande conscience temporelle du changement et de la continuité de leur sujet en conjonction avec d'autres formes de vie que l'humain. Ces mêmes historiens pourraient aussi adopter la disposition des ethnographes multi-espèces à reconnaître autre chose que la métaphore de la lignée au cœur de la pensée et de la constitution de groupes.

Introduction

Why ask readers to think again about ethnicity, this time with beings other than human? Many have written incisively on ethnicity, unpacking some of the freight it has carried, particularly in Africa's twentieth century.[1] Another strand of scholarship, which practitioners call "multispecies ethnography," considers people alongside other than human beings.[2] It builds on earlier work in science and technology studies, posthumanism, political ecology, and animal studies, which decenter the figure of the human in a broad array of disciplines.[3] This scholarship tackles thinking and making groups or species, insisting in particular on their multiple forms in specific times and places. They foreground the challenge of writing about such protean processes without reducing the change and continuity at their core to claims about agency, multiples, overlaps, and fuzziness. Exploring the politics of groups and of writing about groups, multispecies ethnographers ask

[1] For a crisp, insightful review of this literature, see: Jonathon Glassman, "Ethnicity and Race in African Thought," in: William Worger, Charles C. Ambler and Nwando Achebe (eds.), *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Modern African History* (Hoboken NJ: John Wiley and Sons, 2018, forthcoming).

[2] S. Eben Kirksey and Stefan Helmreich, "The Emergence of Multispecies Ethnography," *Cultural Anthropology* 25–4 (2010), 545–576; Julie Livingston and Jasbir K. Puar, "Interspecies," *Social Text* 29–1 (2011), 3–14; Laura A. Ogden, Billy Hall and Kimiko Tanita, "Animals, Plants, People, and Things: A Review of Multispecies Ethnography," *Environment and Society: Advances in Research* 4 (2013), 5–24; Bawaka Country, Sarah Wright, Sandie Suchet-Pearson and Kate Lloyd, "Co-becoming Bawaka: Towards a Relational Understanding of Place/Space," *Progress in Human Geography* 40–1 (2016), 455–475.

[3] Donna Haraway, "'Manifesto for Cyborgs:' Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s," *Socialist Review* 80 (1985), 65–108; Molly H. Mullin, "Mirrors and Windows: Sociocultural Studies of Human-Animal Relationships," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 28–1 (1999), 201–224; Eduardo Kohn, "Anthropology of Ontologies," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 44 (2015), 311–327. Kohn critiques this "turn" as (1) too structural; (2) obsessed with difference; and (3) wanting of politics. It has also strangely forgotten the habits of historians, and not only their historicist urges.

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who benefits and who is exploited through the dynamics of power making groups.[4] Perhaps it is the dizzying challenge of accounting for the communicative practices of all involved in that work that pulls historians and multispecies ethnographers apart. Multispecies ethnography needs history as part of a story about power and politics.[5] Historians of ethnicity need multispecies ethnographers' embrace of a broader canvas of life, in motion at many scales. Historians need a greater awareness of change and continuity in the presence of other-than-human life forms, over time. Those same historians also might adopt the readiness of multispecies ethnographers to recognize other than the descent metaphor at the heart of thinking and making groups.

Historians and Ethnicity

Scholars of ethnic process – categorization, discreteness, belonging – have come to see it in greater time depth and as emergent within specific contexts. They have explored people *constructing* ethnicity and lending it an *instrumental* function. Historians tend to orient such accounts toward "ethnic entrepreneurs" working in a colonial or postcolonial context of institutional power.[6] Less often, they study ethnicity in the contexts of eighteenth or nineteenth century forces of violence, commodified slaveries, diaspora, and their gendered, class, and racial dynamics.[7] They have also shown that

[4] Susan Leigh Star, "Power, Technologies, and the Phenomenology of Conventions: On Being Allergic to Onions," in: John Law (ed.), *A Sociology of Monsters: Essays on Power, Technology, and Domination* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 26–56; Thomas C. McCaskie, "'As on a Darkling Plain:' Practitioners, Publics, Propagandists, and Ancient Historiography," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 54–1 (2012), 145–173.

[5] A challenge taken up in Anna L. Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015).

[6] See, for instance: Jean-Loup Amselle and Elikia M'Bokolo, *Au Cœur de l'Ethnie: Ethnies, Tribalisme et État en Afrique* (Paris: Le Découverte, 2005); Gérard Prunier and Jean-Pierre Chrétien (eds.), *Les Ethnies ont une Histoire* (Paris: Karthala, 2003); Carolyn Hamilton, *Terrific Majesty: The Powers of Shaka Zulu and the Limits of Historical Invention* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1998); John D.Y. Peel, *Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yoruba* (Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, 2000); Derek R. Peterson, *Ethnic Patriotism and the East African Revival: A History of Dissent, c. 1935–1972* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

[7] Sandra E. Greene, "Family Concerns: Gender and Ethnicity in Pre-Colonial West Africa," *International Review of Social History* 44-S7 (1999), 15–31; Carola Lentz, *Land, Mobility, and Belonging in West Africa* (Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, 2013); Bill Bravman, *Making Ethnic Ways: Communities and Their Transformations in Taita, Kenya, 1800–1950* (Portsmouth NH: Heinemann Publishers, 1998), 9–17, 32–27; J. Lorand Matory, *Black Atlantic Religion: Tradition, Transnationalism, and Matriarchy in the Afro-Brazilian Candomblé* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 40–64; Paul Landau, *Popular Politics in the History of South Africa* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

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a common (and potentially pernicious) feature of ethnic formation involves promoting and appealing to a-historical, primordialist ideas and "traditions," in the course of inventing and using ethnicity in any given historical context.[8] Other scholars have detailed the historical processes by which viewing the world through categories of ethnic belonging becomes concrete as more people use it to conduct their social, political, and inner lives. The best work studies people elaborating discourses of difference and belonging, but does not assume that belonging required difference, and does not assume that discourse automatically generated concrete action. These refinements now have a deep bibliography.[9]

John Lonsdale, and the scholars influenced by his scholarship, have refined that view through the formulation of moral ethnicity. Moral ethnicity is not devoid of tensions of difference, but its tensions are oriented toward the in-group. Struggles over gender, generation, wealth, decorum, and the like, unfold in a manner that describes what Lonsdale calls "ourselves-ing," without necessary reference to other groups.[10] This work often has a strongly emic core; the list of categories over which people struggle in defining belonging hover on the borderlands between unquestioned hegemony and contentious ideological territory. Pushing them further in one direction

[8] Kairn Klieman, *"The Pygmies Were Our Compass:" The History of West Central Africa, Early Times to c. 1900 C.E* (Portsmouth NH: Heinemann Publishers, 2003); Jan Vansina, *Antecedents of Modern Rwanda: The Nyiginya Dynasty* (Madison WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004), 126–139; Carola Lentz and Hans-Jürgen Sturm, "Of Trees and Earth Shrines: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Settlement Histories in the West African Savanna," *History in Africa* 28 (2001), 139–168, 143.

[9] John Lonsdale, "The Moral Economy of Mau Mau: Wealth, Poverty & Civic Virtue in Kikuyu Political Thought," in: Bruce Berman and John Lonsdale (eds.), *Unhappy Valley: Conflict in Kenya & Africa. Book Two: Violence & Ethnicity* (Oxford: James Currey Publishers, 1992), 315–504, 315–317; Hamilton, *Terrific Majesty*; Peel, *Religious Encounter*; Carola Lentz and Paul Nugent (eds.), *Ethnicity in Ghana: The Limits of Invention* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000); Paul la Hausse de Lalouvière, *Restless Identities: Signatures of Nationalism, Zulu Identity and History in the Lives of Petros Lamula (c. 1881–1948) and Lyman Maling (1889–c. 1936)* (Durban: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2001); Derek R. Peterson, "The Intellectual Lives of Mau Mau Detainees," *Journal of African History* 49–1 (2008), 73–92; Tom Spear and Richard Waller (eds.), *Being Maasai: Ethnicity and Identity in East Africa* (Oxford: James Currey Publishers, 1993); Jean Davison, *Gender, Lineage, and Ethnicity in Southern Africa* (Boulder CO: Westview Press, 1997); Jan B. Shetler, "Gendering the History of Social Memory in the Mara Region, Tanzania, as an Antidote to 'Tribal' History," in: Jan B. Shetler (ed.), *Gendering Ethnicity in African Women's Lives* (Madison WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2015), 31–56.

[10] John Lonsdale, "Moral and Political Argument in Kenya," in: Bruce Berman, Dickson Eyoh and Will Kymlicka (eds.), *Ethnicity & Democracy in Africa* (Oxford: James Currey Publishers, 2004), 73–95, 76; Lynn Thomas, "*Ngaitana*: 'I Will Circumcise Myself:' The Gender and Generational Politics of the 1956 Ban on Clitoridectomy in Meru, Kenya," *Gender & History* 8–3 (1996), 338–363.

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or the other may be key features of change over time, raising questions about the ways in which that might occur and the forces prompting it. This instability emerges from the mix of the indispensability of categorization to the conduct of social life, on the one hand, and its inherently dangerous nature as a tool for pursuing aspiration, protecting against risk and threat, and so forth. For these reasons, ethnic formation and identification persist but change.

Scholars now routinely treat ethnic identification like the sociologist Rogers Brubaker and his colleagues do: as ways of seeing rather than as objects seen.[11] Their work shares the conviction that one must think of particular historical contexts when exploring claims of "multiple, shifting, and overlapping" collectivities in Africans' lives, past and present.[12] For example, Lonsdale finds in twentieth century colonial dispossession, racial disrespect, and violence the prompts for Gikuyu men and women to convert older arguments over the virtues of adult, gendered self-mastery and control over households into something worth risking life to defend or pursue.[13] Success or failure in pursuing such aims were cast in the Christian language of virtue and vice, but the aims themselves were older parts of moral belonging in Kenya's highland forests which Africans had been making into farms for centuries. Sandra Greene translated Fredrik Barth's foundational recognition that the cultural "persistence" of ethnic formation is not just situational but is also "an implication or result rather than a primary and definitional characteristic" of ethnic formation.[14] Greene shows that senior men and women designed the categorical discreteness of clans in Anlo-Ewe ethnic formation. They invented this technique of social life to meet familiar political-economic challenges unleashed by commodification, warfare, and enslavement, set on a more stable ground of environmental realities on the Upper Slave Coast, at the turn of the eighteenth century.[15] Narratives about masculine control and gender comportment figure in both Lonsdale's and Greene's work. They took shape through the flexibilities and rigidities of the metaphor of descent, the only one Glassman finds shared in

[11] Rogers Brubaker, Mara Loveman and Peter Stamatov, "Ethnicity as Cognition," *Theory and Society* 33 (2004), 31–64.

[12] Glassman, "Ethnicity and Race," 6.

[13] Lonsdale, "Moral Economy of Mau Mau," 405–468. See also: Jacob F. Ade Àjàyí, "Nineteenth Century Origins of Nigerian Nationalism," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 2 (1961), 196–211; Emmanuel A. Ayandele, *The Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria, 1842–1914: A Social and Political Analysis* (London: Longman, 1966), chapter 8. Both publications discussed in: Peel, *Religious Encounter*, 279ss.

[14] Fredrik Barth, "Introduction," in: Fredrik Barth (ed.), *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference* (Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 1969), 9–38, 11.

[15] Greene, "Family Conerns," 19–25.

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making race, nation, and ethnic formation.[16] As he argues, that metaphor's appealing primordialisms must be explored in particular historical contexts, contexts that we argue necessarily include other-than-human beings.

Glassman draws together this sprawling literature by arguing that the family resemblances shared by ethnicity, race, and nation emerge from the common intellectual reliance upon a capacious metaphor of descent. The aura of descent is often the main technique of constituting a "collective" as an abstraction, for discursive use, though it may also order or echo concrete assembly.[17] The common reliance on that metaphor makes it "difficult if not impossible (…) to distinguish them in an analytically coherent manner."[18] This, in turn, implies that scholars like Lonsdale, Greene, and Carola Lentz actually study "the historical processes by which ethnic forms of apprehending the world sometimes succeed in constituting groups, in taking on substance."[19] Historical particularity promises greater control over all of these unruly qualities of belonging – their tendency to veer quickly from moral belonging to othering or their shifting debates over gender comportment. By bearing down on a particular region's history, other dimensions of ethnic process gain detail and precision. To the extent their sources allow, scholars must join those specifics to the dynamics of making meaning and communicating it. That is the only way to take account of ethnic formation as a common way of seeing the world, with an uncommon ability to take concrete form.[20]

The weightiest conclusions we draw from the literature populating the footnotes concern its appeal to the deeper past in accounting for the fuzzy or overlapping qualities of ethnic formation. Multiplying ethnicity's forms is a worthy political project. Doing so offers additional conceptual tools to dilute the susceptibility of today's ethnic formations to friction and manipulation. If that diversity both revealed the historical particularity of the political tribalisms driving the violence of politics in Africa's recent past and offered political alternatives for making future groups, the first kind might be resisted or avoided.

But we harbor no illusions about the reach of our writing. Life's vulnerability to fear is fertile ground for a politics of difference. Instead we find

[16] Jonathon Glassman, "'Slower than a Massacre:' The Multiple Sources of Racial Thought in Colonial Africa," *American Historical Review* 109–3 (2004), 720–754, 726–728; Lentz, *Land, Mobility and Belonging*.

[17] Max Weber, *Economy and Society*: *An Outline of Interpretive Sociology* (Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich [eds.]) (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 2013), 385–398; Ronald Cohen, "Ethnicity: Problem and Focus in Anthropology," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 7 (1978), 379–403, 387.

[18] Glassman, "Ethnicity and Race," 1.

[19] Glassman, "Ethnicity and Race," 11.

[20] On political othering, see: John Lonsdale, "Moral Ethnicity and Political Tribalism," in: Preben Kaarsholm and Jan Hultin (eds.), *Inventions and Boundaries: Historical and Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Ethnicity and Nationalism* (*Occasional Paper 11*) (Roskilde: International Development Studies, 1994), 131–150.

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in the appeals to deeper pasts, rooted in the continent, blended with nineteenth and twentieth century Islamic and Christian thought, Africa's intellectuals themselves making the diversity of ethnic forms on offer here. They teach scholars that the affective, experience-based charges in belonging were not automatic. Entrepreneurs of belonging plugged them into sockets of meaning and valuing that articulate complex axes of past, present, and future in which other-than-human beings figure prominently.

We are, therefore, *not* interested in the "origins" of any particular ethnic formation, even if this is precisely the question that generates the greatest interest today in many parts of Africa.[21] We are interested in crafting capacious intellectual and social histories of as broad a range of ethnic identifications with as precise a set of contextual specifics as our evidence allows. Paying close attention to people's actions and performances in settings where groups are under construction – at shrines, at the moments when children are named, in the hurly burly of political opposition, in the course of being healed – reveals multiple sources of thought and action that enlist the movements, materialities, and metaphorical possibilities of other-than-human beings in projects of ethnic formation. Such study increases the chances of recovering earlier histories of other-than-human presence in an area. Other-than-human beings assist us with their insistent presence to that work. Research and writing about them expands the discursive fields of people's ethnic thought. It highlights the ways in which ethnic formations become concrete, durable collectivities.

Multispecies Ethnography

Multispecies ethnographers study and write about "life's emergence within a shifting assemblage of agentive beings." They seek "to understand the world as materially real, partially knowable, multicultured and multinatured, magical, and emergent through the contingent relations of multiple beings and entities."[22] They find in the agency of other-than-human beings

[21] Carola Lentz, "Of Hunters, Goats and Earth-Shrines: Settlement Histories and the Politics of Oral Tradition in Northern Ghana," *History in Africa* 27 (2000), 193–214, 197.

[22] Ogden *et al.*, "Animals, Plants, People, and Things," 6. The "magical" in this list follows from the proposition elsewhere in it that "the world" is only "partially knowable." A cognitive reality that does not separate natural from supernatural, as increasingly became the habit among *literati* and others, in post-fifteenth century Europe, does not work with notions of "magic" and so forth because objects of occult forces, just like other objects such as "tools, practices, cultigens, and animal species" [one might add weather phenomena], are all "objects of positive knowledge." See: Wyatt MacGaffey, "A Central African Kingdom: Kongo in 1480," in: Koen Bostoen and Inge Brinkman (eds.), *The Kongo Kingdom: Origins, Dynamics and Cosmopolitan Culture of an African Polity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 19–32, 21–22.

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a sustained crossing of divides separating species or nature from culture. In the words of Anna Tsing, "human nature is an interspecies relationship," which is to say, it is impossible to be human without beings other-than-human.[23] The course of these relationships across time and place alters the figure of the human. So, multispecies ethnographers also ask: "Which beings flourish, and which fail, when natural and cultural worlds intermingle and collide?" These approaches decenter people in accounts of place, region, or network by asking a profoundly processual question "What is the human becoming?"[24]

Readers of this journal are familiar with scholarship on ethnicity and ethnography. They may not be very familiar with multispecies ethnography. Thus, this section offers a tour d'horizon of the emerging field, as defined by the topics just listed. But, we keep an eye peeled for traditions of scholarship antecedent to the main concerns of today's multispecies ethnographers. The result, we hope, is to provide readers with a brief but broad overview of multispecies ethnography and suggest its value and limits for historians, not only those who study ethnic formation.

Multispecies ethnographers make a positive case for a decentered humanism, one that environmental historians should find particularly agreeable.[25] Laura Ogden takes animals, plants, and people together as collaborative agents acting on each other interdependently in her ethnography of the Everglades to reexamine histories of that region that are at once cultural, political, and ecological.[26] New ways for considering how other-than-human beings experience and enact their own worlds, in part in relation to humans, emerge from Heather Swanson's collaborations with natural scientists studying salmon life histories through otoliths, stones of calcium carbonate located behind a fish's brain that can be read like the rings of a tree.[27]

[23] Anna L. Tsing, "Unruly Edges: Mushrooms as Companion Species," *Environmental Humanities* 1 (2012), 141–154, 144.

[24] Eben Kirksey, Craig Schuetze and Stefan Helmreich, "Introduction," in: Eben Kirksey (ed.), *The Multispecies Salon* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 1–24, 1, 3. See also the website companion to the volume; http://www.multispecies-salon.org/

[25] In addition to items in footnote 2, see: Tim Ingold (ed.), *What Is An Animal?* (London: Routledge, 1994); Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

[26] Laura A. Ogden, *Swamplife: People, Gators, and Mangroves Entangled in the Everglades* (Minneapolis MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).

[27] Swanson notes that anthropologists and scientists ask different questions of otoliths, with scientists primarily concerned with inner rings highlighting the early moments in a fishes' life while she was fascinated by what the outer rings might tell us about the end of it. Heather A. Swanson, "Methods for Multispecies Anthropology: Thinking with Salmon Otoliths and Scales," *Social Analysis* 61–2 (2017), 81–99.

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Those who have wrestled with the chosen forgetting of people's presence in the environment work similar analytical paths.[28] They refute the notion of a part of the environment free of people in order to deconstruct the idea of "wilderness," revealing the politics behind its ideological life.[29] Among other things, this move had the contradictory effect of making people ubiquitous in environmental processes, as the precondition for seeing people's entanglement within – not separateness from – broader environmental dynamics.

Vegetation ecologies have deeper ties to this work, emerging as dynamic "markers" of human-environment interactions, disrupting the fantasy that people somehow existed outside the environment. Most historians emphasize the positive, empirical value of these "markers" as "non-narrative sources" that may be brought into conversation with the politicized oral claims at the heart of settlement histories.[30] Others recognize a variety of agency among the plants in farmers' fields. In a rich study, Michael Sheridan explores the social ecology of the plants farmers use to mark the boundaries of their fields in Tanzania. Qualities of growth blend with the meanings people use those qualities to negotiate in making groups and place.[31] Still others attend to which beings "flourish, and which fail" when people's cultural worlds intersect with vegetative ones.[32] The collapse of human and natural histories that characterize multispecies ethnography has antecedents and parallels.

The value of a multispecies approach to these topics lies in the many scales at which its methodology requires thinking historically in

[28] Among many, see: Jared Farmer, *Trees in Paradise: A California History* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2013) and https://jaredfarmer.net; James Fairhead and Melissa Leach, *Misreading the African Landscape: Society and Ecology in a Forest-Savanna Mosaic* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Roderick P. Neumann, "Stories of Nature's Hybridity in Europe: Implications for Forest Science and Policy in the Global South," in: Susanna B. Hecht, Kathleen D. Morrison and Christine Padoch (eds.), *The Social Lives of Forests: The Past, Present, and Future of Woodland Resurgence* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2014), 31–44. On the "wild," see: Roderick F. Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967); Raymond Williams, "Ideas of Nature," in: Raymond Williams (ed.), *Problems of Materialism and Culture* (London: Verso, 1980), 67–85.

[29] William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness: Or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature," *Environmental History* 1–1 (1996), 7–28.

[30] Lentz and Sturm, "Of Trees and Earth Shrines," 144–146. Many have argued similarly.

[31] Michael Sheridan, "Boundary Plants, the Social Production of Space, and Vegetative Agency in Agrarian Societies," *Environment and Society: Advances in Research* 7 (2016), 29–49.

[32] Fairhead and Leach, *Misreading the African Landscape*; Peter R. Schmidt, "Archaeological Views on a History of Landscape Change in East Africa," *Journal of African History* 38–3 (1997), 393–421; David L. Schoenbrun, *A Green Place, A Good Place: Agrarian Change, Gender, and Social Identity in the Great Lakes Region to the 15th Century* (Portsmouth NH: Heinemann Publishers, 1998), 68–74.

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order to grasp the ways in which people and the environment are mutually interacting agents. The result displaces the environment from its roles as canvas or overseer, as either passively receiving the marks or actively shaping people's lives, channeling them in some manner akin the influence the grain of wood imposes on the choices a furniture-maker has of where to cut it. Yet, few raise questions about the ways in which the human in these accounts of interaction, of becoming, might have changed.[33]

The figure of the human begins to shift shape when multispecies ethnographers embrace the tiny. As we learn more about the ways in which microbial life in our bodies affects health, we come to see that the conventional idea of an embodied person actually entails many other bodies. For example, the microbiome of bacteria in a person's gut has both unique and common features across individual bodies. In effect, separating "good" from "bad" microbes in one's body depends less on ontology than on "particular situations."[34] So, the health a rich microbiome affords is unavailable to everyone, a general claim that social historians of health and healing have long argued, because different social conditions shape the situations their bodies inhabit.[35]

Yet, when zooming into the molecular scale and considering forms of toxic exposures, differences of "situation" fade. Meaning "that there is not one group of healthy human beings living without toxic – or potentially toxic but untested – chemicals and another group of unhealthy (and unlucky) human beings living with them."[36] The quantities as well as the kinds of chemical exposure experienced by poor persons of color in the US far exceeds those which rich white bodies take in.[37] But chemicals cross

[33] More often, ethnographers voice in a rich medium of authorial co-production. See: Bawaka Country *et al.*, "Co-becoming Bawaka," 455–475; Robyn Dowling, Kate Lloyd and Sandra Suchet-Pearson, "Qualitative Methods II: 'More-than-Human' Methodologies and/in Praxis," *Progress in Human Geography* 41–6 (2017), 823–831.

[34] Julia A. Thomas, "History and Biology in the Anthropocene," *American Historical Review* 119–5 (2014), 1587–1607, 1594.

[35] Thomas, "History and Biology," 1592–1593; NIH Human Microbiome Project Working Group, "The NIH Human Microbiome Project," *Genome Research* 19–2 (2009), 2317–2323. On microbes and artisanal food culture, see: Heather Paxson, "Post-Pasteurian Cultures: The Microbiopolitics of Raw-Milk Cheese in the United States," *Cultural Anthropology* 23–1 (2008), 15–47; Myra J. Hird, "Indifferent Globality: Gaia, Symbiosis and 'Other Worldliness,'" *Theory, Culture & Society* 27–2/3 (2010), 54–72; Keith Wailoo, Julie Livingston, Steven Epstein and Robert Aronowitz (eds.), *Three Shots at Prevention: The HPV Vaccine and the Politics of Medicine's Simple Solutions* (Baltimore MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010).

[36] Thomas, "History and Biology," 1601.

[37] To be sure, studies of racialized exposure to biohazards map onto racial geographies which themselves reflect the constitution of racial groups by culture-historical processes. Dorceta Taylor, *Toxic Communities: Environmental Racism, Industrial Pollution, and Residential Mobility* (New York: New York University Press, 2014).

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all the conventional boundaries historians and multispecies ethnographers use to study people and other-than-human beings.[38] Those crossings change our understanding of the human as a category of historical analysis.

As we learn more about the ways in which viruses transfer genetic material across species, the tree-based metaphor of species differentiation breaks down, something historical linguists and historical anthropologists of style would find agreeable.[39] The same might be said of the ubiquity of toxic bodies, just alluded to. As Thomas has suggested, the increase in environmental toxins since the 1940s implies a biologically different embodied human than the one historians tend to take for granted. "Is it not possible that the Anthropocene's sudden chemical acceleration now separates us physiologically from prewar human beings and from our more vulnerable contemporaries?"[40] The figure of the human not only shape-shifts, but the instigators of change, the chemicals themselves, are not clearly beings with agency, even if they do do work in bodies – human and other-than humans a like.

Multispecies ethnographers attend to the indispensability of objects – that is, inanimate things – in people's social lives while exploring the limits of thinking about that indispensability with the category of agency.[41] They share this concern with art historians, historians of science, students of religion, and archaeologists. Scholars in all these fields have reckoned with the matter of life spilling beyond an animate-inanimate divide.[42]

[38] Thomas, "History and Biology," 1600.

[39] Among many, see: Stefan Helmreich, "Trees and Seas of Information: Alien Kinship and the Biopolitics of Gene Transfer in Marine Biology and Biotechnology," *American Ethnologist* 30–3 (2003), 340–358; Sharon R. Browning *et al.*, "Analysis of Human Sequence Data Reveals Two Pulses of Archaic Denisovan Admixture," *Cell* 173–1 (2018), 53–61. Sarah Thomason and Thomas Kaufman, *Language Contact, Creolization, and Genetic Linguistics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988); Olivier Gosselain, "Mother Bellah Was Not A Bellah: Inherited and Transformed Traditions in Southwest Niger," in: Miriam T. Stark, Brenda J. Bowser and Lee Horne (eds.), *Cultural Transmission and Material Culture: Breaking Down Boundaries* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2008), 150–177.

[40] Thomas, "History and Biology," 1601.

[41] Ogden *et al.*, "Animals, Plants, People, and Things," 10–11.

[42] Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Tim Ingold, "When ANT meets SPIDER: Social Theory for Arthropods," in: Carl Knappett and Lambros Malafouris (eds.), *Material Agency* (New York: Springer, 2008), 209–215; Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1998); Dan Hicks and Mary Beaudry (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Material Culture Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Zoë Crossland, *Ancestral Encounters in Highland Madagascar: Material Signs and Traces of the Dead* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Severin M. Fowles, *An Archaeology of Doings: Secularism and the Study of Pueblo Religion* (Santa Fé: SAR Press, 2013).

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Archaeologists, for example, have long studied other-than-human forms of life because their methodology cannot arbitrarily enclose people as subjects.[43] Much of value lies in this ethnographic urge to decenter the figure of the human.[44] But the figure of the human, understood as situated within multispecies worlds, interacts with such a diversity of beings that it multiplies the fields for studying agency, objects, and boundary work in a disorienting fashion. These multiplied fields lend a political urgency to much multispecies ethnographic writing that historians of ethnicity will recognize.

The urgency flows along two strands of scholarship, each of which braids work in different disciplines. One braid tracks a variety of colonial dynamics in which ways of knowing and being that were open to this broader field of beings were defeated or changed (see below). Another integrates the entailments of the idea of an Anthropocene in which human activity has, for the first time, accumulated in precise ways that push the direction of environmental processes, from geology to climate, "that will be identifiable in the future" across the globe.[45] The Anthropocene sets a range of scalar challenges to framing research agendas. Colonial dynamics ground those scales by focusing attention on the defeat, persistence, and transformations of other ways of being in groups.

Let us take the Anthropocene first, although clearly the industrial roots of the Anthropocene emerged, unintended, together with a new phase of Europe-initiated colonialisms. Historians and multispecies ethnographers alike have taken up geological and biological formulations of the Anthropocene. They use the evidence of past and current human activity leading to changes in atmospheric and climate dynamics that will last for many, many millennia, to question the moral economy of the intellectual structures producing such an accumulation of power in the globe's complex

[43] Broached in Ogden *et al.*, "Animals, Plants, People, and Things," 6. See also: Tim Ingold, "Hunting and Gathering as Ways of Perceiving the Environment," in: Aaron Gross and Anne Vallely (eds.), *Animals and the Human Imagination: A Companion to Animal Studies* (New York: Columbia Univesity Press, 2012), 31–54.

[44] Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, "Exchanging Perspectives: The Transformation of Objects into Subjects in Amerindian Ontologies," *Common Knowledge* 10–3 (2004), 463–484; Elizabeth Fenn, *Encounters at the Heart of the World: A History of the Mandan People* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2013), 105ss.; written by Timothy B. Powell and inspired by Larry Aitken, "Encoding Culture: Building a Digital Archive Based on Traditional Ojibwe Codes of Conduct," in: Amy Earhart and Andrew Jewell (eds.), *The American Literature Scholar in the Digital Age* (Ann Arbor MI: University of Michigan Press, 2011); Jim Harrison, *In Search of Small Gods* (Port Townsend WA: Copper Canyon Press, 2009).

[45] Paul J. Crutzen and Eugene F. Stoermer, "The 'Anthropocene,'" *International Geosphere-Biosphere Programme NewsLetter* 41 (2000), 17–18; Alan Smart, "Critical Perspectives on Multispecies Ethnography," *Critique of Anthropology* 34–1 (2014), 3–7, 4.

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ecological systems. They find it injects multiple kinds of time into debates over people's places in this story. The Anthropocene revives the urge to rethink (or pay no attention to) where people fit – or stand apart from – the rest of life.

Of course, since the later nineteenth century, Africa's ecosystems have been altered by political change, industrialization, and accelerating globalization. Indeed, these forces transformed land, bodies of water, and the air that humans and other-than-human beings require for their survival.[46] Colonial hunting expeditions, large-scale dam projects, species eradication efforts, plantation-agriculture, and so-called fortress styles of conservation redistributed the extent and abundance of a wide range of other-than-human beings, privileging some and extinguishing others. Environmental historians have examined these shifts, but such changes offer historians of ethnic formation new sources and contexts with which to work. If we want to better understand the vibrant worlds within which historical actors lived and made groups, we must attend to these recent transformations as well as earlier versions, such as the effects of metallurgy on forests or the impact of cattle pastoralisms on grassland ecologies. Multispecies ethnography encourages historians to examine beings that populate landscapes, homesteads, forests, fields, and bodies of water in relation to particular species and the worlds they inhabit with humans. This requires attending to species beyond the charismatic megafauna that animate the large conservation efforts that draw interested outsiders into Africa. Snakes, termites, crocodiles, squawking birds, cane rats, grasshoppers, millipedes, and many others offered historical actors material for thinking about and shaping their worlds. African language proverbs are populated with these beings as metaphors for human action and relations. As Johnson highlights in her essay in this collection, potentially vital sources of historical material may well be ignored when contemporary environmental conditions and species compositions are projected into the past.

Yet, as Thomas and others have shown so powerfully, the figure of the human in this story shifts depending on the scale of analysis, imposing challenges on thinking across scales. [I]n paleobiology, "we" are an increasingly domineering species operating over vast eons of time; in microbiology "we" are a coral reef of many species spread out in awkward archipelagos of co-dependent beings; and in biochemistry, "we" are a semi-industrialized product of the last, brief half-century."[47] The notion of

[46] James McCann, *Green Land, Brown Land, Black Land: An Environmental History of Africa, 1800–1990* (Portsmouth NH: Heinemann, 1999).

[47] Thomas, "History and Biology." See also: Dipesh Chakrabarty, "The Climate of History: Four Theses," *Critical Inquiry* 35–2 (2009), 197–222; Robert Emmett and Thomas Lekan (eds.), "Whose Anthropocene? Revisiting Dipesh Chakrabarty's 'Four Theses,'" *RCC Perspectives: Transformations in Environment and Society* 2 (2016), 7–115.

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species that biologists work with is incommensurable with historians' figure of the human. A species is not a vessel of reflection or debate or imagination, of emotion and intellect. "Species" collapses the distinctiveness of communities and cultures in which individuals generate self-knowledge, yet biologists' species is an effective vessel for describing past events. Such divides between biology and history ground their critical engagement with each other. Historians of the environment or the Anthropocene are beginning to take up the formidable challenges Thomas has set for them.[48] What then are historians of ethnicity to do with these multiple figures of the human, the multispecies worlds that constitute them, and the molecular suffusions they share, albeit unevenly?

Beyond Incommensurabilities

Scale of time and region is the first step. Historians of the Anthropocene tend to explore the "intellectual structures" of the Industrial Revolution, most often locating them in a "European enlightenment," shaped by interconnected regional influences, including varieties of colonialism.[49] The accounts of capitalism's multiple cultural underpinnings contained in these narratives explore notions of economic growth and expansion, and the uneven aftermaths of both. The stuff of "world" or "global" history, scholars rightly wrestle with these key elements behind the Anthropocene, arguing most energetically about the possibilities of multiple sources for their development. Blends of ideology, economy, and network that fostered a variety of vernacular capitalisms, since the fifteenth century, which some regions converted into industrial activity, as Pomeranz and others have argued, produced the unintended results now herded under "the Anthropocene." Each of those threads emerged from deeper regional histories with their own dynamic interplay of ennobling the human in particular ways. Arguably, that project did not happen once, in one part of the globe.[50]

[48] Ken Pomeranz, "Introduction: World History and Environmental History," in: Edmund Burke III and Ken Pomeranz (eds.), *The Environment and World History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 3–32; John M. Meyer, "Politics in – but not of – the Anthropocene," in: Robert Emmett and Thomas Lekan (eds.), "Whose Anthropocene? Revisiting Dipesh Chakrabarty's 'Four Theses,'" *RCC Perspectives: Transformations in Environment and Society* 2 (2016), 47–51, 47–49.

[49] Burke and Pomeranz, *Environment and World History*; Ken Pomeranz, "Water, Energy, and Politics: Chinese Industrial Revolutions in Global Environmental Perspective," in: Gareth Austin (ed.), *Economic Development and Environmental History in the Anthropocene: Perspectives on Asia and Africa* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2017), 271–290.

[50] Schoenbrun, *A Green Place,* 91–122; Kathryn de Luna, *Collecting Food, Cultivating People: Subsistence and Society in Central Africa* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), 93–130; Thomas, "History and Biology," 1600.

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The politics of planetary reference that invigorates decentering and refiguring "the human" therefore is a cumulative, scaled up – but transformed – version of earlier historical processes. What might be called vernacular colonialisms, for example, bore not only on the variety of ethnic formation and identification but also on the varieties of interspecific contact zones. Vernacular colonialisms were underway in earlier African histories of statecraft like Mali's or Ife's or Kongo's.[51] They shaped and were shaped by people's views of the moral duties of life guiding aspiration. People and other-than-human beings living in times and places before the advent of the idea of the "global" or the "planetary" still imagined themselves and conducted their lives within boundaries. The expansion of a bellicose Ganda state, since the latter half of the seventeenth century, is a vernacular colonialism present in each of the essays, below. To people living with that expansion, their "global" was constituted by points of reference to an Inland Sea, its islands, their littorals, royal capitals, shrines, and visitors from near and far.[52]

If we provincialize some of the existential urgencies provoked by the scales of the Anthropocene we can recognize that similar urgencies may have been rehearsed in different forms at other scales of time and place.[53] Glassman's call to study the "multiple sources" of ethnic and racial thought in Africa is in keeping with this broader move against Eurocentrism, for it requires other intellectual histories than those with roots in Europe.[54] Our work in the essays to follow not only keeps with the moves against anthropocentrism set out by multispecies ethnography and its intellectual antecedents, it develops the other intellectual histories Glassman calls for. If the interruptions and transformations of colonialisms frame the search for threads of intellectual and political life crossing them, that search grows richer still in multispecies worlds.

[51] Roderick J. McIntosh, *Peoples of the Middle Niger* (Malden MA: Blackwell, 1998), 240–286; Suzanne Preston Blier, *Art and Risk* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); MacGaffey, "Kongo in 1480," 28–30. Colonial-like processes are also often implicit in early African "migration" histories, see: Klieman, "*Pygmies Were Our Compass*."

[52] Some past residents understood the world to rest on a massive rock in the center of the Inland Sea. See: Bernhard Strück, "African Ideas on the Subject of Earthquakes," *Journal of the Royal African Society* 8–32 (1909), 398–411, 401–402.

[53] Steven Feierman, *Peasant Intellectuals: Anthropology and History in Tanzania* (Madison WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), 94–119; James F. Brooks, "Women, Men, and Cycles of Evangelism in the Southwest Borderlands, AD 750 to 1750," *American Historical Review* 118–3 (2013), 738–764; David Schoenbrun, "A Mask of Calm: Emotion and Founding the Kingdom of Bunyoro in the 16th Century," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 55–3 (2013), 634–664; Zoë H. Wool and Julie Livingston, "Collateral Afterworlds: An Introduction," *Social Text* 35–1 (2017), 1–15.

[54] Glassman, "'Slower than a Massacre.'"

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Taking seriously past people's interests in, knowledge of, and contact with multiple ways of being is a good starting point for historians to confront multispecies arguments about scale and interspecific communication.[55] It is one way to address the head-spinning vertigo multispecies ethnography can induce in historians. It opens up the fields they must engage – the incoherence of the human subject and the uneven vulnerability of its constituent beings to the risks and possibilities of environmental change. The results add "more conceptual tools" for thinking with groups ethnographically and historically.[56]

The limits of blending history and multispecies ethnography perhaps take on starker form here. Self-reflection matters in ethnic formation. Self-reflection is a precondition for "reenacting in our own minds the experience of the past" which is, in turn, implicated in the affective and practical work of orienting human groups toward the future.[57] Of course, many other-than-human beings do not possess these abilities, as far as we now know.[58] The post-enlightenment "we" in the last sentence excludes Amerindians who extend these possibilities to jaguars or ravens, for example. Indeed, it seems quite likely that participants in public healing, discussed below, understood the "familiars" (including pythons) in which departed ancestors could reside, to possess self-reflective capacities. Studying this variety of orientations to reflective consciousness expands the field of influence on making groups. Historians want all of the information about meaning they can get, in part because meaning is indispensable to accounts of value and power and invites readers into thinking about the contents of historical actors" self-reflection. So, when thinking historically about ethnicity, scholars might find in the practices and lifeworlds of other-than-human beings "continual challenges" to the "cultural agendas" of their historical

[55] On interspecific communication see, for instance: Donna Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003); Joe Hutto, *Illumination in the Flatwoods: A Season with the Wild Turkeys* (New York: Lyons & Burford, 1995), discussed in Kirksey *et al.*, "Introduction," 19; Nancy Jacobs, "Herding Birds, Interspecific Communication, and Translations," *Critical African Studies* 8–2 (2016), 136–145; and https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/23/science/birds-bees-honeyguides-africa.html, accessed 13 March 2018.

[56] Thomas, "History and Biology," 1589, tackling the incommensurability of biological and historical knowledge created by the different scales of their ways of knowing; multispecies ethnographers grapple with the risks of representing interspecific communicative practice. See: Kirksey *et al.*, "Introduction," 3.

[57] Thomas, "History and Biology," 1592.

[58] Dowling *et al.*, "Qualitative Methods II," 462. Problems multiply when objects enter consideration, see: Ogden *et al.*, "Animals, Plants, People, and Things," 13; Richard Harper, Alex Taylor and Michael Molloy, "Intelligent Artefacts at Home in the 21st Century," in: Carl Knappett and Lambros Malafouris (eds.), *Material Agency* (New York: Springer, 2008), 97–119, 97–98, 116–117.

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actors, as well as windows "from which to examine a great many other aspects of human societies."[59] Studying what other-then-human beings know how to do – rather than our abilities to communicate with them about that knowledge – reveals people using them as mirrors for debating social life and politics, and using them as metaphors in constructing new histories of belonging and ethnic formation.[60]

Yet, historians must also attend to shifts over time and region in the make-up of the range of beings people enlist in ethnic formation. By sifting the intended from the unintended consequences of such shifts, historians could generate a sense of the range of mirrors or metaphors enlisted by ethnic entrepreneurs – or ordinary people – in orienting a group to the future, at a given moment in the past. That would put into historical motion the interspecific contact zones that Tsing and others study as vital sources of living, as well as rich ground for the intellectual work of ethnic formation.

Histories of wild resource-use, its relations with farming and herding, and redistribution of forms of life and the erasure of others, come readily to mind.[61] Thinking through cattle domestication reveals high levels of observation, interest, and interaction between people and *Bos taurus*, as well as "progressive selection."[62] The many entanglements of African Rock Pythons with crafting ritual spaces in which, among other things, group-work occurred, involved intimate contact between shrine workers and pythons inclined to docility.[63] *Haplochromis* fish have been central to a

[59] Mullin, "Mirrors and Windows," 219; Anna L. Tsing, "Empowering Nature, or: Some Gleanings in Bee Culture," in: Sylvia Yanagisako and Carol Delaney (eds.), *Naturalizing Power: Essays in Feminist Cultural Analysis* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 113–143, 137.

[60] Mullin, "Mirrors and Windows," 207–215.

[61] Eugenia Shanklin, "Sustenance and Symbol: Anthropological Studies of Domesticated Animals," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 14 (1985), 375–403; Jamie Lorimer and Krithika Srinivasan, "Animal Geographies," in: Nuala C. Johnson, Richard H. Schein and Jamie Winders (eds.), *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Cultural Geography* (Hoboken NJ: John Wiley and Sons, 2013), 332–342; Juliet Clutton-Brock, *Animals as Domesticates: A World View through History* (East Lansing MI: MSU Press, 2012), 109–119; Jacobs, "Herding Birds," 136–145; de Luna, *Collecting Food, Cultivating People.*

[62] Jean-Pierre Digard, *L'Homme et les Animaux Domestiques: Anthropologie d'une Passion. Le Temps des Sciences* (Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1990).

[63] Ann B. Stahl, "Dogs, Pythons, Pots and Beads: The Dynamics of Shrines and Sacrifice Practices in Banda, Ghana, AD 1400–1900," in: Barbara J. Mills and William Walker (eds.), *Memory Work: Archaeologies of Material Practices* (Santa Fé: SAR Press, 2008), 159–186; David Schoenbrun, "Pythons Worked: Constellating Communities of Practice with Conceptual Metaphor in Northern Lake Victoria, ca. A.D. 800 to 1200," in: Andrew P. Roddick and Ann B. Stahl (eds.), *Knowledge in Motion: Constellations of Learning Across Time and Place* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2016), 216–246.

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gendered political economy of social reproduction for centuries, up to the present.[64] If the ubiquity and availability of such individual snakes or populations of fish have shifted over time, then the opportunities for enlisting their participation in groupwork have shifted as well. So, worries about the limits of interspecific communicative practices are less consequential for historians of ethnicity than accounting for the narrower range of self-reflection and conceptualization of "groupness" possible when other-than-human beings shrink or expand in number or diversity.[65]

Thus, the aims of multispecies ethnography will work best with those of historical writing in producing a moral and political knowledge, perhaps, if focused on the particularities of time, place, and practice. The following clutch of essays take this tack in order to develop the importance of other-than-human beings in ethnic processes. They also reveal the importance of ideas other than descent at work in metaphors of belonging. The lateral social compositions they explore often took shape inside a complex social institution that scholars call public healing. Its ideas and practices blend people with other-than-human forms of being in a tense relationship with the politics of belonging.

Rewards of Blending: Public Healing as Multidirectional Groupwork with Other-Than-Human Beings

As we have seen, Glassman argues that a metaphor of descent is the major field of discourse shared by ethnic, racial, and nationalist thought. The bonds evoked by that metaphor require maintenance – the work of ethnic entrepreneurs – and the intellectual traditions they evoke or compose anew seem always to hearken to accessible, shared experience, to invite people to think about them in relation to the past, combining the two in ways that orient people to a particular future. The metaphor of descent, often conceived as inherently vertical, stretches through time as branched or clipped lines.[66]

Kinship terminologies are a common form for this metaphor, but they do not traffic solely in descent. They map lateral, affinal connections as much as lineal ones. Wyatt MacGaffey and Kajsa Eckholm have shown the

[64] Jennifer L. Johnson, "Fishwork in Uganda: A Multispecies Ethnohistory about Fish, People, and Ideas about Fish and People," PhD dissertation, University of Michigan (Ann Arbor MI, 2014), 83–130.

[65] Kirksey and Helmreich, "Emergence," 550; Livingston and Puar, "Interspecies," 3–14; Jacobs, "Herding Birds," 136–145.

[66] Wyatt MacGaffey, *Custom and Government in the Lower Congo* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), 84–100; Kajsa Ekholm, "External Exchange and the Transformation of Central Africa Social Systems," in: Jonathan Friedman and Michael J. Rowlands (eds.), *The Evolution of Social Systems* (London: Duckworth, 1977), 115–136.

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ways in which people in mid-twentieth century Central Africa understood kin terms to map political economic possibility, not genealogy. MacGaffey pushes the argument into the deeper past, as well, by noticing that a key lexical sign for such groups, *-*kanda*, works in a semantic field not dominated by descent, or lineality, but by heaping, piling, or bundling. Before, during, and after the word comes to mean patrilineal or matrilineal, it means those other kinds of actions and conditions.[67] The basic point here is that metaphors of descent make groups from the practical experience of groups as heaps or bundles, not the other way around. This means not only that the concreteness of a group is intentional. It also means that heaping, piling, or bundling (rather than descending) informs the work of metaphors in fostering belonging.

Such basic points promise an even greater diversity of metaphors – and of the beings swept up in them – that people used to enlist belonging and superintend or propose the moral project the group might achieve. Such work will spin the needles of descent thinking aimed at past, present, and future in new, lateral directions. In recent scholarship, the practice of public healing enacts much of this promise for new political metaphors of belonging which include other-than-human beings.

Both adult women and men work at the center of Steven Feierman's notion of public healing; a labile form of belonging and aspiration, participation and social critique. Public healing emerged as an academic category of historical action initially through thinking about its evanescent forms – like that oriented to Nyabingi, in the Rwanda-Uganda borderlands. In oral traditions and documentary accounts from the turn of the twentieth century, the figure of Nyabingi appeared in different places and different times in this region from the eighteenth century through imperial conquest. But, Nyabingi required no permanent shrines, formal structures of initiation and learning, and was not enclosed in any genealogy. The people who assembled around someone possessed by Nyabingi's spirit constituted a knot of social criticism often aimed at figures in neighboring states like Rwanda.[68]

Such forms of collectivity critiqued the lineage politics of increasingly violent eighteenth and nineteenth century statecraft surrounding the region. For example, they resisted the violent alliances between Rwandan royals and a German military, early in the twentieth century, and they panicked

[67] MacGaffey, "A Central African Kingdom," 25–27.

[68] Jim Freedman, *Nyabingi, the Social History of an African Divimity* (Tervuren: Royal Museum of Central Africa, 1984); Steven Feierman, "Healing as Social Criticism in the Time of Colonial Conquest," *African Studies* 54–1 (1995), 73–88; Steven Feierman, "Colonizers, Scholars and the Creation of Invisible Histories," in: Victoria E. Bonnell and Lynn Hunt (eds.), *Beyond the Cultural Turn* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 182–216, 189–209; David Schoenbrun, "Conjuring the Modern in Africa: Durability and Rupture in Histories of Public Healing between the Great Lakes of East Africa," *American Historical Review* 111–5 (2006), 1403–1439, 1424–1436.

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the interests of the well-armed and Bible-literate of Africa's twentieth century, all of whom did their best to suppress such practices and imprison or kill practitioners. The conceptual tool kits of guild historians, mystified by accounts of ancient queens living in the same era in very different locations, struggled to integrate such temporally durable and spatially extensive forms of belonging and social action.[69]

The social criticism that collectivities arranged around figures like Nyabingi produced and practiced did not rely on the strict separations between nature and culture that undergirded European inspired modes of statecraft. Healers and the collectivities they assembled situated their critiques of lineage politics and the shifting alliances of royal rule within changing relations among humans and other-than-human beings. During the famine and disease that accompanied violent incursion, healers and their followers strengthened relations between humans and other-than-human beings rather than weakening them. Might the multispecies particularities of the forests, drylands, and sometimes especially lush locales where figures like Nyabingi emerged offer new material with which to reexamine transformative histories of regional politics and public healing? How might it matter that Nyabingi mediums were frequently given offerings of strong honey beer, a beverage usually reserved for elites, in exchange for their guidance? This intoxicating substance was made possible by the harvesting and fermentation of the sweet sticky fruits of many bees laboring in service to their queen, across many widely distributed hives. Colonial prohibitions on the brewing of honey beer in the 1930s may well have been more than efforts to limit offerings to Nyabingi. Prohibiting the production of honey beer also limited the metaphorical affordances that such work provided, distributed across many hives, in many localities, in service to many mediums.[70]

Similar accounts might be told in settings right across the continent, in every direction from Nyabingi's domains, and across the oceans, as well.[71] Practitioners and clients have made these qualities of public healing the

[69] Feierman, "Healing as Social Criticism;" Nicole Eggers, "Mukombozi and the Monganga: The Violence of Healing in the 1944 Kitawalist Uprising," *Africa, Journal of the International Africa Institute* 85–3 (2015), 417–436.

[70] For a brief discussion of offerings to Nyabingi, see: Steven Feierman, "Colonizers," 201.

[71] John Janzen, "Healing, African," in: Joseph C. Miller (ed.), *The Princeton Companion to Atlantic History* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015), 230–232; Neil Kodesh, *Beyond the Royal Gaze: Clanship and Public Healing in Buganda* (Charolottesville VA: University of Virginia Press, 2010); Matory, *Black Atlantic Religion*; Nancy R. Hunt, *A Nervous State: Violence, Remedies, and Reverie in Colonial Congo* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 61–94; Ras Michael Brown, *African-Atlantic Cultures and the South Carolina Lowcountry* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Sharla Fett, *Working Cures: Healing, Health, and Power on Southern Slave Plantations*

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core of patterned creativity reproducing it over long spans of time and space. Writing these histories as histories of ethnic formation sheds new light on the importance of social composition in making public healing constituencies. It expands the basic insight Neil Kodesh elaborated in his prize-winning book, *Beyond the Royal Gaze*. There he helped us understand the institution of clanship in the region known as Buganda through the political logic of public healing which composed them with skilled persons – healers, smiths, hunters, canoe-builders, and so forth. These compositions provided the material ground for shaping the moral aspirations of members of a given clan for the civic virtue of self-sufficiency, including in the making of new ones. Kodesh, like other scholars of spirit possession and mediumship, also noticed that the occult presences to which bundles of people oriented themselves in a particular territory required other-than-human beings. People understood "spirits" to inhabit trees, various bodies of water (springs, river sections, lakes, and seas), and a variety of animals and reptiles. In short, the intellectual history of public healing blends the figures of the human and other-than-human beings in the service of shaping the moral content of political action, across time and region.

The networks of knowledge that Neil Kodesh argues composed clanship in Uganda were assembled in explicit relation to other-than-human beings. Anthropologists, transposing concepts developed through studies of native Americans, called these other-than-human beings totems, but speakers of Luganda and other, related languages in the region, call them *èmìziro*. *Òmùziro* (singular) marked groups ostensibly united in their consumptive avoidance of a given lively being – mushrooms, small beans, cattle, buffalo, elephant snout fish, lungfish, *Haplochromis* fish, reed-bucks, civet cats, colobus monkeys, lions, sheep, grasshoppers, pangolins, ants, crested cranes, squirrels, small birds, otters, and others.[72] Kodesh skillfully

(Chapel Hill NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); James Sweet, *Domingos Álvares, African Healing and the Intellectual History of the Atlantic World* (Chapel Hill NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2011); Pablo Gómez, *The Experiential Caribbean: Creating Knowledge and Healing in the Early Modern Atlantic* (Chapel Hill NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2017); Lentz, "Of Hunters, Goats and Earth-Shrines," 193–214; Rebecca Gearhart, "*Ngoma* Memories: How Ritual Music and Dance Shaped the Northern Kenya Coast," *African Studies Review* 48–3 (2005), 21–47; Janice Boddy, "The Work of Zar: Women and Spirit Possession in Northern Sudan," in: William Sax, Johannes Quack and Jan Weinhild (eds.), *The Problem of Ritual Efficacy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 113–130.

[72] Including non-lively beings, like the rainwater collected as runoff from roofs or objects, like the awl used in sewing. For a sense of the lexeme's distribution, see: David L. Schoenbrun, *The Historical Reconstruction of Great Lakes Bantu Cultural Vocabulary: Etymologies and Distributions* (Köln: Rüdiger Köppe Verlag, 1997), 189–190. For Ganda clans, including those whose members avoid the rainwater roof runoff or the awl, see: Michael B. Nsimbi, *Amannya Amaganda n'Ennono Zaago* (Kampala: Longman Uganda Ltd., 1980), 170–319.

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attends to the bodily appearances of these species, and the affordances they offered for generating symbolic attachments to the living and the dead. For example, the white and black fur of the colobus monkey worn by ritual leaders in Buganda and Bunyoro offered "an apt symbol for the delicate and contingent nature of human life." Joining "notions of purity, order, indigenousness, and prosperity" associated with the color white with "images of impurity, disorder, foreignness, and misfortune," associated with the color black, the colobus monkey worked alongside humans making groups oriented towards healing, whether or not the monkeys were aware of their contributions.[73] Taking the particular practices of other-than-humans with which human groups were formed and reformed offers additional material to explore ethnic formation beyond the verticality of lineality that accompanies metaphors of descent.

Consider the lungfish (*èmmâmba*). As a fish it usually lives in water but breathes air, raises their young in wetlands but travels across open water, is able to encase itself in its own mucus to survive dormant for several years without water in times of drought, and is equipped with bodily appendages that allow them to crawl across muddy ground. Lungfish make their lives crossing boundaries – between wet and dry, life and death, and swimming and walking. Attention to the lives of lungfish alongside people who cultivated notions of "ourselvesness" with them offers possibilities for thinking through the work of making groups across other boundaries that have come to calcify separations between region and ethnic or tribal groups. Groups enacting themselves alongside the lungfish extend across what is now the southern littorals of Buganda and Busoga.[74] The habits and practices of lungfish may well have offered historic residents of these island and mainland littorals who specialized in canoe building, navigation, and fishing, exceptionally generative material for making groups and making kin in a region characterized by mobility, seasonality, and the possibilities and risks of living along an inland sea. Attention to the social formations associated with this purportedly ancient and spatially vast clan, reveals its members practiced endogamy, matrilineality, and perhaps even ate their own avoidance. It calls into question many of the conventional wisdoms framing contemporary historical studies of this region. At the turn of the twentieth century, ethnic entrepreneurs attempted to distinguish the lungfish clan as descended from two distinct founders.[75] But the

[73] Kodesh, *Beyond the Royal Gaze*, 56.

[74] Eriya Mubiru Buligwanga, *Ekitabo ky'Ekika ky'Emmamba* [Book of the Clan of the Lungfish] (Kitintale: New Era Printers and Stationers, 2006 [1916]); David W. Cohen, *The Historical Tradition of Busoga: Mukama and Kintu* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1972), 90, 93–100, 105, 107; Schoenbrun, "Pythons Worked."

[75] Apolo Kagwa, *Ekitabo kya bika bya Baganda* [Book of the Clans of the Baganda] (Kampala: Uganda Bookshop, 1949 [1912]), 32–39 (English translation by James D. Wamala, 1972).

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specificities of these genealogies likely mattered much less to historic residents finding and making kin from one littoral locality to the next. Given that lungfish still populate much of sub-Saharan Africa, as well as South America, attention to groups made alongside these boundary crossing fish may well offer fruitful material for comparison.

Schoenbrun and Hoesing each take up iterations of such forms of belonging. Though less evanescent than Feierman's account of the Nyabingi practice, they find other-than-human beings unavoidable. Particular constellations of other-than-humans, with their broad regional salience and mobility, are indispensable to diverse ethnic formations with these facets. They decenter ethnic formation from single places, often strung together in a tradition of descent or mobility, without losing sight of the centrality of place in creating and sustaining commitments of belonging across long spans of time. Central places remained central while moving. Thus, the locus of primordialist attachments were likewise highly mobile even while remaining stable over long spans of time. It was the mix of practices of assembly, aspiration, and critique that made a shrine powerful. Ethnic entrepreneurs-as-public healers could take advantage of what amounted to a distributed cognition in their landscapes and waterscapes, to activate affective and visceral charges through a mix of mobility and belonging. Other-than-human promptings of place served – and taught – the entrepreneurs and participants who gave life to a shrine and its parties.

Arguments about belonging that stress place-centered process and other-than-human forms of life push new ways of framing ethnicity within the broader rubric of belonging. They are ripostes to the implicit centrality of humans in the work of making groups. They do not refuse boundary and exclusion; they emphasize continual becoming, a goal of both multispecies ethnography and a factor of scale in Thomas's shifting figure of the human. In these ways, they also meet the need expressed by historians, unhappy with the power granted to colonial visions of ethnic formation, that such intellectual work was limited by antecedents and imagination.[76] Those limits emerge through attending to earlier ideas and practices of ethnic belonging, including all forms of life implicated in converting ideas of ethnic formation into concrete groups.

Nearly twenty-five years ago, Feierman called us to think historically about the evanescent mix of harm and treatment in public healing while simultaneously grappling with the limitations for studying it placed on the historian by recent, violent suppression of public healing. Bringing multispecies historical anthropology into debates over ethnic formation pays respect to the contents of African discourse and practice on these subjects.

[76] Tom Spear, "Neo-Traditionalism and the Limits of Invention in British Colonial Africa," *Journal of African History* 40–1 (2003), 3–27; Glassman, "Ethnicity and Race."

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Political histories of colonial encounter, as many have argued, were also histories of cattle and tsetse flies, donkeys and grass, wild pigs, and debates over gender.[77] Within African histories attuned to relations between human and other-than-human beings, practices and valuations of livestock, fish, and forests necessarily challenged global grand narratives about the natures of economic, environmental, and social change.[78] Arguably, they fit under a rubric of ethnic formation defined by combining moral ethnicity and political tribalism. But the influence of other-than-human beings was necessary in the intellectual contents of those formations.

However, these studies tend to portray other-than-human beings as passive objects, rather than as agents with their own lives. Or they take their presence for granted, over long spans of time. Recent anthropological studies confirm that the status and rights of personhood are not something that all people reserve for humans.[79] Many Amerindians and some scientists and anthropologists suggest that communicative practice – the emergent qualities of meaning that help form personhood – belong to humans and other-than-human life forms, including dogs, cats, non-human primates, and insects.[80] Eduardo Kohn takes the view that this condition of "sign processes" applies to life in general, not only human life. Just how ordinary persons are to "engage with the alterworlds of other beings" is unclear; perhaps it is a form of specialized labor, like public healers' work with pythons.[81] As Kohn argues, some persons and cultural orientations

[77] James Giblin, *The Politics of Environmental Control in Northeastern Tanzania, 1840–1940* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992); Nancy Jacobs, *Environment, Power, and Injustice: A South African History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

[78] William Beinart, *The Rise of Conservation in South Africa: Settlers, Livestock, and the Environment, 1770–1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); David Gordon, *Nachituti's Gift: Economy, Society and Environment in Central Africa* (Madison WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006); Fairhead and Leach, *Misreading the African Landscape.*

[79] Viveiros de Castro, "Exchanging Perspectives;" Agustin Fuentes, "The Humanity of Animals and the Animality of Humans: A View from Biological Anthropology Inspired by JM Coetzee's Elizabeth Costello," *American Anthropologist* 108–1 (2006), 124–132; Paul Nadasdy, "The Gift in the Animal: The Ontology of Hunting and Human-Animal Sociality," *American Ethnologist* 34–1 (2007), 25–43; Eduardo Kohn, *How Forests Think: Toward an Anthropology beyond the Human* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013).

[80] Frans B.M. de Waal and Pier Francesco Ferrari, "Towards a Bottom-up Perspective on Animal and Human Cognition," *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 14–5 (2010), 201–207; Hugh Raffles, *Insectopedia* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2010); Kohn, *How Forests Think*; Eben Kirksey, *Emergent Ecologies* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2015).

[81] Kirksey and Helmreich, "Multispecies Ethnography," 553; Schoenbrun, "Pythons Worked."

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practice "inhabiting the points of view of nonhuman selves" as a technique of making new knowledge.[82] For these specialists – public healers among them – other-than-human beings are not devoid of their own histories, desires, and systems of classification, they are instead constituted as social beings through their contingent entanglements with humans and other-than-human beings.[83]

Historians worry about representing the points of view of other people. So, whether or not they consider those of other-than-human beings, the goal of what we might call multispecies history is not simply to take more and more species into account, but rather to examine the ways in which relations between humans and other-than-human beings emerge and change as ethnic formation. The politics of that move refuse some of the boundaries between the human and beings other-than-human currently dissolving under the scrutiny of biology, as Julia Thomas has discussed. This requires situating textual and oral historical sources within the material and sensorial worlds within which they emerged. The sounds of crickets, birds, and hunters' horns, the sights of moving pythons, fish, and squirrels, and the aromas of roasting meat, fish, and fragrant grasses were often experienced by people in moments and in places where they were making groups. If ethnicity is a way of seeing, rather than a thing seen, and if other-than-human beings are implicated in that seeing, as subjects or objects, then the ways in which they mutually influence each other warrant consideration.

Multispecies Histories of Ethnic Formation in Buganda: Four Essays

A dissident intellectual with a snake draped around his neck prophesies during the trials of colonial rule in Buganda. A clutch of singing healers evokes the flying tree-squirrel as a familiar of the spiritual forces activated by twins. A grandmother recites the names of ancestors before feeding her daughter-in-law a small fish that protects its young by taking them into her mouth. A sprawling assembly of managers, supplicants, and gawkers at a shrine watch as a flow of cattle blood leaves the land and enters the waters of an Inland Sea that many today call Lake Victoria. In these scenes people are making groups and they engage other-than-human life forms to do so.

Whether consciously or not, snakes, squirrels, fish, cattle, and many other-than-human beings feature alongside people in practices and projects of ethnic formation. The following papers examine, weigh, and interpret these aspects of making ethnic ideas and identifying with them. Each considers group formation unfolding in close proximity to precolonial and colonial states and in moments and in places where gender, fertility, and

[82] Eduardo Kohn, "How Dogs Dream," *American Ethnologist* 34–1 (2007), 3–24, 3.

[83] Anna L. Tsing, "More Than Human Sociality," in: Kirsten Hastrup (ed.), *Anthropology and Nature* (London: Routledge, 2013), 27–42.

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generational tension are invoked through relations between people and other-than-human beings. One goal is to probe an African intellectual history of ethnicity that focuses on critique and debate in order to connect the category to times before European colonialism. That will free it from the dominating the gravitational pull of colonial history and postcolonial realities.[84] A second goal develops methodological approaches that take interspecific relations between people, animals, plants, and other beings seriously as material, metaphorical, and moral forces in ethnic formation.[85] In doing so, we build not only on the impulses issuing from the new multispecies ethnography but also on other scholarship which has made other than-human-life forms indispensable to understanding place and group in African pasts.[86]

The sources of information beneath these accounts is characteristically complex. Schoenbrun's essay engages other-than-human beings as instigators of affective charge bound by shrine managers (*bàlubàále*) to a place (a shrine) during practices of assembly. The assembly was oriented to figures with a part-time disembodied existence, otherwise called "spirits" in English. Mukasa was the name of that figure. Bubembe, an island in the Ssese archipelago, housed Mukasa's shrine. The resulting media for such binding prompted discussions about the shrine's ability to secure the conditions for people to enjoy Lonsdale's "civic virtue," what counted as viable, gendered social standing in a world of shifting inequality and conflict.[87] To reconstruct this process for times and places beyond literacy but near centralizing polities, the scholar must explore the interplay of various "oral" and ethnographic sources to take advantage of a state's urge to structure the past in particular ways: through royal genealogies. Scholars can

[84] Jacob F. Ade Àjàyí, "The Continuity of Africa's Institutions Under Colonialism," in: Terence O. Ranger (ed.), *Emerging Themes of African History* (Dar es Salaam: *East African* Publishing House, 1968), 189–200; Sandra E. Greene, *Gender, Ethnicity, and Social Change on the Upper Slave Coast: A History of the Anlo-Ewe* (Portsmouth NH: Heinemann, 1996); Spear, "Neo-Traditionalism and the Limits of Invention;" Paul Nugent, "Putting the History Back into Ethnicity: Enslavement, Religion, and Cultural Brokerage in the Construction of Mandinka/Jola and Ewe/Agotime Identities in West Africa, c. 1650–1930," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 50–4 (2008), 920–948; Lentz, *Land, Mobility, and Belonging*.

[85] James Fairhead and Melissa Leach, "Termites, Society and Ecology: Perspectives from West Africa," in: Élisabeth Motte-Florac and Jacqueline M.C. Thomas (eds.), *Les "Insectes" dans la Tradition Orale* (Leuven: Peeters, 2003), 197–219.

[86] Steven Feierman, *Shambaa Kingdom* (Madison WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1974), 17–31; Paul Richards, *Indigenous Agricultural Revolution: Ecology and Food Production in West Africa* (London: Hutchinson Publishers, 1985); Gordon, *Nachituti's Gift*; Fairhead and Leach, *Misreading the African Landscape*; Landau, *Popular Politics*; de Luna, *Collecting Food*; Clapperton Chakanetsa Mavhunga, *The Mobile Workshop: The Tsetse Fly and African Knowledge Production* (Boston: MIT Press, 2018).

[87] Lonsdale, "Moral and Political Argument in Kenya," 77–79.

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also push back on those ideological claims to power. Nearby states, such as Buganda, added a layer of interested interference in border regions to the requirements of reciprocity to weigh and debate whether or not rich and poor were living up to their duties to one another. Reputation hung in the balance, but the balance was set by arguing over what counted as duty, for whom, and the ways in which to carry it out. Lonsdale grants colonial capitalism the catalyzing role in converting such debates into ethnic ones where before they had been "implicit."[88] Where states like Buganda existed in Africa before the nineteenth century, they may have played that catalyzing role, as Schoenbrun's essay suggests.

Forces of change – such as waged labor, centralized bureaucracy, transportation efficiencies, military expansion, spreading literacy, new moral registers, pronounced population growth – rejigged the conditions under which adults pursued civic virtue and judged as vice the civic actions of others.[89] In those uncertain contexts men and women developed moral ethnicity. Earle draws our attention to a thread of political dissent that revitalized aspects of the *bàlubàále* practice Schoenbrun discussed. Earle explores the personality and intellectual creativity of Kigaanira, a figure of Uganda's 1950s. Kigaanira drew on histories of political critique with roots in the region's distant past to make them a rallying point for Ganda ethnic identification and a ground for national formation. As he prophesized and healed with a snake around his neck, Kigaanira mixed the aura of antiquity hovering around figures from a fraught moment in the past of the Ganda state. In the eighteenth century, royals struggled to turn the tide of military hostilities with Bunyoro, their competitive neighbor to the north, by calling on the figure of Kibuuka. Kigaanira blended allusions to Kibuuka with his abilities to locate and mobilize a diverse assemblage of animals under his command. He thus captured the ambiguity of royal power's claims to absolutism by evoking Kibuuka. Kibuuka was not only associated with a defeat by Bunyoro in the eighteenth century. Kibuuka also patronized a shrine at Mbaale, perhaps even more complex than Mukasa's on Bubembe. Kigaanira's enlisting of Kibuuka, then, was a searing critique of elite Baganda interactions with a colonial state antithetical to royal power. Bolstered by the mirrors and windows onto this circumstance, embodied in a two-headed snake and a crested crane, Kigaanira blurred the borders between ethnic and national feeling. He offered an alternative future in which people were once again healed and prosperous. Their future would be secured

[88] Lonsdale, "Moral Ethnicity and Political Tribalism," 138–139.

[89] Peterson, *Ethnic Patriotism and the East African Revival*; John Lonsdale, "Unhelpful Pasts and a Provisional Present," in: Emma Hunter (ed.), *Citizenship, Belonging, and Political Community in Africa: Dialogues between Past and Present* (Athens OH: Ohio University Press, 2016), 17–40, 24–25; Jonathon L. Earle, *Colonial Buganda and the End of Empire: Political Thought and Historical Imagination in Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

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by having regained control over important cultural institutions, such as Kibuuka, in part through integrating Christian principles into their meaning and use. Kigaanira and his followers mixed a profound nativism with worldliness to produce something new, neither ethnic nationalism nor nationalism devoid of ethnic identification.

Jennifer Johnson finds in gender and generation key variables in a hegemonic ground of debate over the terms and conditions of moral ethnicity. Johnson's essay explores alternative settings – those beyond the ken of the Ganda state and of men – in which the intimate politics of belonging unfolded around choosing which children, and by extension their mothers, would be admitted to a lineage and/or a clan. Johnson shows the ways in which senior women of the littoral used the consumption of *ènkejje*, the small, diverse, and often brightly colorful fish ichthyologists place in the genus *Haplochromis* to mark social life and biological death. In the course of the ritual process for including or excluding children, senior women evoked metaphors of descent and of marriage as they tested the health of children and the competencies of their mothers as potential members of the groups they superintended. Senior women thus gestured simultaneously to points on a lateral map of networked power – marriage – and to everyday aspirations for nourishment and wellbeing.

The importance of matricentric groups in this practice of remaking belonging is a powerful counterpoint to the often-unmarked masculine gender of ethnic and nationalist thought.[90] But, Johnson's essay reveals more than a set of "missing" voices in debates about ethnicity in African history. She shows women debating the very same issues as men, but deploying different idioms in local and intimate ways. Multiply the events of hatching the children across the region and it is plain that they produced a convergent sense of the stakes of ethnic formation without necessarily originating from a central place, like a shrine or a royal court.

The multiple registers of belonging sound out in Hoesing's analysis of a song that uses rich spatial and temporal metonyms to evoke twinship. Sung by specialists in the course of a particular kind of public healing related to the kind Schoenbrun's essay explores, they use a single name to point to connections between ordinary people and the world they share with Ganda royals. The name, Mayanja, evokes a river and a leopard familiar for a territorial spirit of that river. It also evokes a twin brother, Magobwe, whose familiar is a python. The song evokes the risks of twins – as both signs of abundant fertility and embodiments of additional responsibility for a household. Those risks are managed by ensnaring them in the

[90] Dorothy Hodgson, *Once Intrepid Warriors: Gender, Ethnicity and the Cultural Politics of Maasai Development* (Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, 2004); Jan B. Shetler, "Introduction: Women's Alternative Practices of Ethnicity in Africa," in: Jan B. Shetler (ed.), *Gendering Ethnicity in African Women's Lives* (Madison WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2015), 3–27.

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relationships between ordinary people and royals, ennobled by the aura of regional antiquity signaled by leopard and python.

Still another life form sounds out in the song. Nkerebwe, the tree squirrel, and the group of clanmates who avoid it, points to practices of public healing centered on clanship, like those Kodesh has studied. The metaphor of descent is involved here, literally – in the imperative to return to one's birthplace – and figuratively – in the rhetorical mode of that imperative. The mode is called *èkisokò*, in Luganda. The term is polysemous, meaning "cape" or "headland," a "graphic variation of theme, either in music or conversation" and, by extension, a "metaphor."[91] One gets healing at a shrine located on the estates held by one's clan. And, the practice requires metaphorical rhetoric to frame, a rhetoric that relies on associations and behavior of the tree squirrel. The rhetorical-singing structure lends itself to the arcana of specialists, but many of the metonyms open to ordinary peoples' practices of groupwork.

The blending of historical thinking with multispecies ethnography promises richer accounts of ethnic formation in Africa's past and present. But, it requires rethinking some of the assumptions of both kinds of disciplinary work. Each essay goes some way toward that end. Some give greater weight to certain threads, as their source material allows, developing a conceptually rich but historically shallow reconstruction. Other essays relax the focus on multiples into a broader claim about the environment as a source and a setting for debates with ethnicity. Still others bring each of these threads into a story about yet another topic, such as public healing. The essays ask scholars of ethnicity to think ever more broadly about its objects and constitutive techniques.

The concentration of study in a single part of a single region of Africa is, perhaps, a methodological pointer. In order to live up to the vicissitudes of thinking historically with multispecies knowledge, one would do well to define a region with care, working in a granular fashion, before making middle-range generalizations about the importance of other-than-human beings to both concrete and cognitive groupwork. It is clear that life is multiple and emergent and emplaced and that ethnic formations, one of the ways in which life itself sorts and consorts, are best understood as having multiple sources with specific content. In order to tease out that content, it is best to ground method in the particularities of place and time. Then one can notice similarities and congruence and convergence elsewhere, at other times, and in trans-local connection. The discovery of new scales, larger or smaller, and crossing the boundaries between them is the interesting problem to consider.

[91] Ronald A. Snoxall, *Luganda-English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), 142, 290.

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Our focus on region should not be misrecognized as unduly "local."[92] First of all, many of the practices and concepts taken up have much broader iterations, reflecting much deeper social and intellectual histories within the scholarly construct of Bantu-speakers' history. Secondly, Earle and Hoesing explicitly engage intellectual and theological claims with deep and broad roots in the history of Christianity, some of which enjoy a convergent, rhizomatous congruence their actors develop with alacrity. Thirdly, Johnson explicitly connects her analysis to both the broader and deeper histories of the continent and to other places involved in fishwork and making a world with fish. Lastly, the imperative of our regional focus also reflects the need to address the unequal exchanges of knowledge that often characterize ex-colonial situations, in which colonial and other forms of violence actively destroyed key domains of knowledge, such as those carried by public healing, relevant to group work and the diversities of life.[93]

The region is marked by the presence of centralized statecrafts. The colonial one began to form after 1900. An older one, called Buganda, had its own imperial ambitions predating those of the twentieth century colonial state. This is an, accidental benefit gained by the regional and temporal focus of this clutch of essays. Statecraft has always taken a great interest in ethnic formation as a tool of inclusion and exclusion, a core technique of sovereign power. And, juxtaposing an older with a colonial state immediately provincializes the latter with the earlier investments in and modes of ethnic formation nourished by the earlier polity.

The earlier polity is Buganda, one of Africa's best documented and well-studied centralized states, on a par with Asante in West Africa, Kongo in West Central Africa, or the Zulu state in Southern Africa. This gives historians the widest range of sources to draw into explorations of other life forms in ethnic work. In an essay Wyatt MacGaffey published in this journal's pages he listed a decathlon of disciplines that it was the duty of African Studies scholars to master.[94] Among them, only archaeology is sorely lacking for the core areas of Buganda.[95] In the essays that follow, readers will appreciate these riches. Schoenbrun's account of a temporally rhythmic and spatially unbounded concrete mode of assembly in which particular other-than-human beings are indispensable, rejigs the objects of ethnic formation to include both people and other colleagues in life. Johnson's and Hoesing's historical ethnographies focus on the multiple, but particular

[92] Matsutake Worlds Research Group, "A New Form of Collaboration in Cultural Anthropology: Matsutake Worlds," *American Ethnologist* 36–2 (2009), 380–403.

[93] Feierman, "Colonizers," *passim*, for cautions and ideas about the hard work required to address the situation.

[94] Wyatt MacGaffey, "African History, Anthropology, and the Rationality of Natives," *History in Africa* 5 (1978), 101–120, 103.

[95] Andrew Reid, "Bananas and the Archaeology of Buganda," *Antiquity* 75 (2001), 811–812.

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other-than-human sources of making new generations of people or of making new stages in people's lives. Johnson pays particular attention to the effects of power on the availability and legibility of particular forms of fish in these social dynamics. Earle's deep knowledge of the cosmopolitan literate worlds of Ganda intellectuals, dissident or otherwise, reintroduces "the environment" as a potent source for prompting affective responses to the political groups his actors seek to form.

Conclusion

Ethnic formation and identification presume categories, classification, and the more complex notion of schema.[96] The turn to multispecies ethnography, in which life forms other than people are taken seriously by people as actors in the world, brings something new to ethnic formation. But, it must confront the communicative challenges across multiple, and often very different experiences of the world. People and other life forms must be able to recognize each other's actions and messages before scholars can put them all in the same frame using evidence generated by other than the humans in the story. To put it another way, scholars need to find ways to give credible "voice" to other species' historical actions. But, the presumptuous dangers of giving something already possessed means we humans have a lot of learning to do. We'll have to rely initially on the scholarship of entirely unfamiliar zones of inquiry: vernacular biology, cognitive science, biosemiotics, ecologies of health, as well as fields not yet in existence (such as those that might pop up from the verdant humus of Tsing's work on mushrooms).[97] Cognitive scientists can devise experiments to reveal the ways in which animals categorize their surroundings, process sensory information and make decisions. All of that tends to be subsumed under behavior rather than thought. The point here is to put communicative challenges across species in the mix of research on ethnic formation and identification. The historical and ethnographic evidence analyzed and discussed in the following essays compels us to try.

Mixing multispecies ethnography and historical scholarship on ethnic formation in particular settings warrants care. It must be tempered with the historian's wonder about the gaps and overlaps between their and their actors' understandings of individuals, societies, and environments and with their worry about the limits imposed by the nature of their evidence on what they can say about them. The benefits are many. Scholars will discover different metaphors and practices of belonging, ones that exceed the directionality of the descent metaphor. But, macroscale anthropocenic

[96] Brubaker *et al.* "Ethnicity as Cognition," 32.

[97] Tsing, "Unruly Edges;" Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World*; Tony L. Goldberg and Jonathan A. Patz, "The Need for a Global Health Ethic," *The Lancet* 386–1007 (2015), e37–39.

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changes, including those induced by industrial work, expansionist statecraft, and other kinds of colonial activity, shifted the presence of other-than-human life forms in the past. That suggests that the variety of ways in which people and other-than-human beings made groups in the past was contingent and complex. In that diversity of approach people might rethink and enact their relations to other-than-human beings in new ways, now and in the future. We express that hope in the full knowledge that thinking and acting with groups always risks friction and conflict, in the past, the present, and in the future.

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