

Africa from the Margins

Dorothy L. Hodgson

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Abstract: This article argues for the continued merits of research with rural, long-marginalized peoples, including those whose fervent invocations of ethnic difference—such as Maasai—make many scholars and politicians nervous. Their perspectives “from the margins” offer key theoretical and political insights into this complicated place we call “Africa” by challenging grand narratives of modernization, “Africa rising,” and supposedly “universal” ideas of progress and justice. They also defy enduring stereotypes about the passivity and ignorance of rural peoples. I argue, in other words, for the value of both seeing and theorizing Africa from the margins.

Résumé: Cet article fait valoir les bénéfices d'une recherche continue avec les peuples ruraux, longtemps marginalisés, y compris ceux dont les appels fervents sur la différence ethnique—comme les Masai—rendent beaucoup de chercheurs et de responsables politiques nerveux. Leurs points de vue prient “de la marge” donnent des perspectives théoriques et politiques clés dans ce lieu compliqué que nous appelons “Afrique” en contestant les grands récits de la modernisation; “Afrique naissante” et les idées soi-disant de progrès et de justice “Universelles.” Ils défient aussi les stéréotypes persistants concernant la passivité et l'ignorance des populations rurales. J'affirme en d'autres termes, la valeur de voir et de théoriser l'Afrique des marges.

Keywords: Inequality; pastoralists; ethnicity; gender; states; modernity; indigenous peoples; justice; Tanzania

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The ASA Presidential Lecture is supposed to be a current survey of the field of African studies. Rather than provide you with a broad overview of contemporary trends from across the continent, I would like to offer you a survey from my position as a historian and anthropologist who has conducted research for over thirty years with rural communities in northern Tanzania who self-identify as Maasai. At a time when some politicians are celebrating “Africa rising” and scholars are studying urban dynamics, African performance, and technological advancements on the continent, I’d like to, as my title suggests, talk to you about “the margins,” the very kinds of rural, remote, generally underresourced communities that used to be the staple of ethnographic and other studies but are now often dismissed by both Africanist and African scholars as vestiges of another time: peoples and places whom we have little to learn from and thus no reason to listen to. Of course, development workers still have passing interest, perhaps, but most are more concerned with improving their metrics to meet U.N. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) than with asking people themselves about their own understanding of their problems and their own priorities for change. Indeed, to be a white American woman working with a group of people who still fiercely claim their ethnic identity despite—or perhaps because of—their enduring status as icons of Africa in colonial and national imaginations, coffee table books, movies, tourist brochures, and other media productions, is to often endure the easy scorn of colleagues who presume they understand my work from one word—Maasai—in my book titles, rather than from considered engagement with the content and arguments of those books and the complicated, changing lives of the people they portray.

So, what can we learn from an illiterate rural woman struggling to support her household in a dusty, deforested plain? Or from a young man from the same remote area desperately seeking work, wealth, and, eventually, marriage? In this talk, I want to argue for the continued merits of research with rural, long-marginalized peoples, including those whose fervent invocations of ethnic difference—like Maasai—make many scholars, and politicians, nervous. I believe that their perspectives and experiences “from the margins” offer key theoretical and political insights into this complicated place we call “Africa” by challenging grand narratives of modernization, of “Africa rising,” of supposedly “universal” ideas of progress and justice. They also defy enduring stereotypes about the passivity and ignorance of rural peoples. I am arguing, in other words, not just for the value of *seeing* Africa from the margins, but also of *theorizing* Africa from the margins. My arguments are drawn from my years of research and informed by the work of Valentin Mudimbe (1988), Anna Tsing (1994), Veena Das (2004), Antonio Gramsci (1971), and Achille Mbembe (2001), among others.

A Note on Margins

As is well-established by now, rural peoples and ethnic groups do not exist—and have never existed—in the kind of enclosed, bounded enclaves

once depicted by colonial “tribal” maps or imagined by colonial practices. Nonetheless, many men and women continue to live in rural areas, often clustered by ethnic group, by choice, because they lack options, or because of a fraught combination of the two. Indeed, these spatial margins are usually political, social, and economic margins as well. Margins, in other words, are not fixed, visible boundaries that easily delineate and distinguish groups of people. Instead, they reflect dynamic, contested, historical relations of power and struggle: between citizens and their state, rich and poor, majorities and minorities, and, increasingly, men and women, young and old. These relations—and the production and maintenance of margins—have been shaped by earlier histories of enslavement, migration, and conquest, and more recent histories of colonialism, nationalism, development, socialism, and capitalism. Indeed, the better term would be “marginalized” to reflect these processes and relations. “Marginalized,” as in marginalized people, signifies the relational, processual nature of the status of being on the margins, the histories of dispossession, discrimination, and, at times, demonization that actively marginalize some people—or their labor, lands, and livelihoods—for the benefit of others.

Take the Maasai case. How and why do people like Maasai become marginalized? I recount much of this history in my published work (Hodgson 2001, 2005, 2011, 2017), but here I would like to note several key moments.

First, the very ethnonym “Maasai” is itself a historical product of the encounter between Maa-speakers and early British travelers and missionaries. The term emerged in the late 1800s to describe Maa-speakers who depended primarily on livestock for their livelihoods, as distinct from Maa-speakers who farmed or gathered and hunted (Bernsten 1980). But while the name may be “invented,” it is now, many generations later, fiercely embraced by men and women.

The distinct name and marked cultural, linguistic, and livelihood differences played into colonial imaginations. Their ways of “seeing Maasai” shaped interventions into Maasai lives and livelihoods which often oscillated between extremes: either efforts to “preserve” and “protect” Maasai from outside influences, much like animals in a zoo; or aggressive actions to forcibly assimilate them into dominant cultural and economic norms.

Most notably, colonial officers were troubled by mobile peoples like pastoralists, and so they tried to forcefully collect, settle, and control them. In Tanzania and Kenya they did so by creating Maasai reserves. At independence, when national elites took over, they pursued similar policies and practices toward Maasai to try to control and contain them: forced removal into villages under Ujamaa, then efforts to fix them in place by village land titles and, eventually, individual land titles.

These ways of “seeing Maasai” also shaped state economic policies, which demanded that Maasai, like other rural peoples, be more “productive” in the interest of national “progress.” Thus most colonial and postcolonial development projects focused on livestock development, not social development.

State officials also took most fertile lands and permanent water sources for more “productive” and “profitable” purposes like commercial agriculture, settler farms, and national parks like the Serengeti.

Meanwhile, there was little social development, little attention to providing schools, health facilities, clean domestic water sources, reliable energy, or roads. Instead, state institutions directed resources and attention to more “progressive,” “developed,” “modern” areas, which were conveniently also areas of political power and patronage for state elites.

These political and economic interventions were accompanied by repeated efforts to force cultural change. Campaigns like “Operation Dress-Up” in 1968 required men to wear pants and shirts and women skirts and blouses in towns, without ochre and beaded jewelry. Bus drivers were told to refuse service to Maasai in customary dress.

Indeed, Maasai were always the marked “other.” Even in the heyday of Ujamaa, President Nyerere’s socialist ideology, when he tried to transcend ethnicity in the interest of nation-building by encouraging everyone to call each other *ndugu* (comrade), Maasai were still named by their ethnicity in political debates, newspapers, and everyday conversations: this “Maasai” man or “Maasai” woman.

One result of these policies and interventions has been the contemporary social, political, and economic marginalization of Maasai peoples. They have lost most of their fertile lands and permanent water sources. The tremendous loss of land, especially for dry season grazing, has produced a precarious economic situation in which pastoralism is increasingly unreliable. Meanwhile, Maasai have only a few schools or health facilities, none of which provides what we would recognize as “quality service,” and they continue to be represented in media, tourist brochures, and elsewhere as primitive, ignorant, backward, and marginal.

And so, as this brief historical review suggests, Maasai were not marginalized because they were excluded from political processes like state formation and nationalism; instead, their marginality was in fact produced by those very processes. Indeed, with the recent aggressive courting of international investment and capital by the Tanzanian state and privatization of formerly public institutions and goods, these forms of accumulation by national and international elites through the extraction of remaining rural resources—primarily land—have accelerated (a phenomenon similar to what David Harvey [2004] has called “accumulation by dispossession”). Through a succession of neoliberal policy “reforms” and practices, the Tanzanian state has privatized key industries, revised land regulations to encourage the sale of land, promoted large-scale commercial agriculture, expanded the highly profitable wildlife tourism and big-game hunting sectors, instituted service fees for healthcare, and withdrawn support for education and other social services. The introduction of land titles to villages, and eventually individuals, was supposed to anchor people and provide them with economic leverage. Instead, titles have hastened dispossession as corrupt village leaders sold land to outsiders

and impoverished individuals sold their land as a last desperate measure to feed their families.

As Koko, an elderly Maasai woman whom I have known for years explained to me a few years ago,

Life has become much more difficult since you left [I last saw her in 2001]; there is no rain, no water, and no wood, and people are sicker and hungrier. . . . It seems that people, especially children, are dying more often than in past years. . . . One problem is that people are selling their land to outsiders and others. Someone has problems, and then they sell their land for money, and then the land is gone. We [Maasai] are like an old ripped cloth, it keeps getting tattered and torn, and soon there will be nothing left.

According to Nayieu, another Maasai woman, “Women now sing about land issues and talk about men and the consequences of land sales. They tell the men, ‘We are not birds, we cannot just move from tree to tree once our land is gone.’ They accuse the men of finishing them, of selling out and not thinking about the future.”

Recently, Tanzania has been hailed for its steady economic growth and the relative stability of its “democratic” practices. But claims of national averages of 6 percent increase in GDP and good governance mask deep inequities within the nation in terms of economic resources, social welfare, and political power. Caught between the legacies of colonial policies that reified ethnic identities, socialist injunctions to order and regulate social and economic lives, and now the courting of transnational capital, Maasai peoples, among others, have struggled to survive.

To illustrate some of the dilemmas Maasai confront from the margins, I’d like to share the story of Lemayian, a man whom I have known for over thirty years. Lemayian was the oldest son in his extended family. He received no formal education and his father “drank” the family animals. Over the years that I visited him, he had a shifting number of wives in residence, sometimes as few as one, or as many as eight. He had a bevy of children in a range of ages. He tried desperately and creatively to find ways to feed his many dependents and ensure their future security—but how? Pastoralism was no longer viable given the loss of the communal grazing areas, fertile lands, and permanent waters that herders had relied on in the past. Moreover, they now faced stark challenges to access remaining lands, navigating the maze of fences and boundaries erected by individual farmers (often other Maasai) and commercial farms, and the patchwork of hunting reserves, national parks, and other restricted areas. Like others, he tried farming, relying on the labor of his wives and hired workers. But he was unsuccessful: farming was not appropriate for the fragile rangelands, the lack of rain resulted in pitiful crops, and most of his sparse harvest was stolen by hungry children and neighbors. Lemayian believed strongly in education as a pathway for the security of his children. But there was only one overcrowded

government school in the area, the teachers were often absent or drunk (they considered it a punishment to be sent to Maasai areas), there were no books, and his daughters risked harassment or even rape by their teachers.

Despite these challenges, Lemayian has remained undaunted throughout the years, restlessly imagining new schemes to make money: buying a car to rent to others (indeed, my car!), setting up one of his wives in a nearby town to run a small shop, starting a cultural tourism project, a tree seedling farm, and more. In the meantime, his adult sons have left, traveling to towns and cities to seek work as guards and laborers. His daughters have married, where possible to wealthy, much older men whom he hoped would provide them with secure futures. And his wives, as I mentioned, have come and gone, returning to the homesteads of their fathers or brothers in times of deep insecurity.

Most Maasai men and women I knew were, like Lemayian, seeking ways to make money: the women who walked sometimes two to three hours each way to the small town of Engarenaibor, where they sat huddled together in small groups along the main road, each with tiny piles of onions, salt, detergent, and other goods that they were trying to sell; the men I met sitting outside a closed ruby mine next to piles of leftover slag, using cutters to separate tiny ruby fragments from the mine waste to sell to dealers in Arusha; the growing hordes of young men who, like Lemayian's sons, sought wage work as laborers and guards in towns; the married women who, when they had a "free" moment, busily crafted beaded jewelry or ornaments to try to sell to tourists or searched for wild greens to eat or sell.

The few wealthy, educated Maasai I knew had moved to Arusha, an urban center in northern Tanzania, where they could send their children to private schools, often boarding schools, and eventually university. They relied on the labor of their nieces and nephews from rural areas to help in the household, perhaps (but not always) in return for some schooling and money. Most worked for international NGOs or the government, drove new Land Cruisers, and hired private security firms to guard their fenced homes, families, and possessions.

"Livelihood diversification" is the phrase used by social scientists and development workers to capture these relentless efforts to supplement or even replace pastoralism as a primary mode of production with a dynamic web of other possibilities. But the phrase ignores the historical, political, and structural factors producing the economic insecurities driving these changes. And it also masks the anxieties, desperation, and uncertainty of people themselves.

Critical Consciousness from the Margins

Maasai men and women are deeply aware of the political and structural pressures undermining their lands, livelihoods, and lives. They recognize the involvement of state elites (especially politicians, government officials, and party leaders), the bias and corruption of supposedly "neutral"

institutions like laws and courts, and the power of the alliances among state elites, international elites, and capital. Indeed, like marginalized peoples everywhere, their peripheral position offers clear understandings of the workings of power, a critical consciousness that is not mere abstract scholarly insight but an embodied, visceral praxis produced through reflection on their lived experiences—similar to what Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) has called the “consciousness of the Borderlands.” Margins can thus be a source of not just economic innovation and creativity, but theoretical insight and political creativity as well.

I would like to draw again on my Maasai research to provide two examples of how critical consciousness has generated new forms of political belonging and action based on new ways of seeing and theorizing power, progress, and justice, from seemingly unlikely actors.

The first example explores the efforts by some Maasai leaders in the late 1980s and early 1990s to circumvent the Tanzanian state and become actively involved in the international indigenous peoples movement in order to leverage international recognition of their plight and learn lessons from other peoples struggling to protect their resources and rights. Indeed, it was a Maasai man, the late Moringe Parkipuny, who was, in 1989, the first African to ever be permitted to address the United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Populations in Geneva. Until that time, indigeneity had been equated with “first peoples” from settler colonies in the Americas, Australia, and elsewhere.

As a young man, Parkipuny was forcibly taken from his rural homestead to a primary boarding school by the British. He soon recognized the value of education and defied his father to continue to study, eventually completing an M.A. in development studies at the University of Dar es Salaam. The Tanzanian government then hired him to work with USAID as part of the huge, U.S.\$20 million, ten-year Masai Range Project (an ambitious effort to increase livestock productivity that did nothing for social development), even though he had written a masters thesis (Parkipuny 1975) and several newspaper editorials that were deeply critical of the agendas and implementation of the project. USAID balked, and sent Parkipuny on a study tour of the United States to visit “proper ranches.” As he told me one evening, he traveled throughout the southwest visiting extension schools, ranches, and more. He soon found the visits boring and monotonous.

But at the airport one day, I met a Navajo from Windrock. We talked some and he invited me to visit. I said “Let’s go!” So I stayed with them for two weeks, and then with the Hopi for two weeks. It was my first introduction to the indigenous world. I was struck by the similarities of our problems. I looked at Windrock, the poor state of the roads and reservations, it was just like the cattle trails in Maasailand. But this was in the United States!

For Parkipuny, this epiphany was transformative. Seeing the similarities between the contemporary situation and historical struggles of Maasai and

those of Native Americans enabled him to think beyond the specifics of the Maasai situation to a deeper understanding of the exploitative relationships between nation-states and certain kinds of people, relationships that had been produced and exacerbated by colonialism, nation-building, and economic modernization. He quickly realized that the Maasai experience of being marginalized—of land alienation, forced settlement, deep disparities in the provision of social services, cultural disparagement, and at times, forced assimilation, first by the colonial and then postcolonial state—was not unique, but part of a global pattern. He developed these ideas in his talks, writings, and practice over the years within Tanzania and in international discussions and workshops with other indigenous activists.

In a 1989 speech to the U.N., Parkipuny offered a sophisticated understanding of the historical and political causes of the contemporary plight of Maasai and other pastoralists and hunter-gathers, citing colonial legacies, neocolonial relationships, the “might of Western economic hegemony,” the strengthening of cultural prejudices, and the “persistent violations [by nation-states] of the fundamental rights of minorities.” In East Africa, he claimed, two of the most “vulnerable minority populations” were hunter-gatherers and pastoralists:

These minorities suffer from common problems which characterize the plight of indigenous peoples throughout the world. The most fundamental rights to maintain our specific cultural identity and the land that constitutes the foundation of our existence as a people are not respected by the state and fellow citizens who belong to the mainstream population. In our societies the land and natural resources are the means of livelihood, the media of cultural and spiritual integrity for the entire community as opposed to individual appropriation. [As a result,] our culture and way of life are viewed as outmoded, inimical to national pride and a hindrance to progress. What is more, access to education and other basic services are minimal relative to the mainstream of the population of the countries to which we are citizens in common with other people.

Over the next twenty years, Maasai, Kung San, Batwa, and other African groups became actively involved in the international indigenous peoples movement, despite the active hostility of most African countries to their claims of indigeneity and international activism. By reframing their long-standing grievances and demands against their states in order to position themselves as indigenous, they gained greater international visibility, increased legitimacy, and additional resources. But they also introduced a complex cultural politics of inclusion and exclusion that intensified some of their structural predicaments as marginalized peoples within states.

Most Maasai activists, including Parkipuny, eventually withdrew from active involvement in the indigenous peoples movement, seeking other ways to engage the Tanzanian state. Many adopted the more politically neutral, developmentalist language of “pastoralist livelihoods” and used it in policy debates and court cases. But Parkipuny’s epiphany, speeches, and activism

had several long-lasting effects. One was the eventual expansion of dominant international definitions of “indigenous” by the U.N. to include not just first peoples, but also peoples like Maasai in Africa and Asia who shared similar marginalized structural positions vis-à-vis their nation-states. In time, the relevance of “indigenous” for some African peoples was even formally recognized by the African Commission on Human and People Rights, which is part of the African Union (ACHPR 2005). Second, for Maasai, involvement in the indigenous peoples movement helped them to imagine a different kind of community that was located both within and beyond states, a bifurcated belonging that articulated the local and global. They also learned new ways to belong to and act within nations. Third, their ethnic identity, which had been source of discrimination and disparagement, was now a space of power, pride, and political mobilization.

A second example of a form of political action that has emerged from the critical consciousness produced by the lived experience of marginality is more recent and also has a much longer history: women’s collective action. Rural areas in Tanzania, as elsewhere, have become gendered and generational spaces. With the migration of their husbands, women have become the de facto household heads, responsible for caring for the very young and very old. In areas where the alienation of Maasai land is most acute, women have mobilized to directly challenge their treatment by the state and political party.

For example, in April 2010 more than fifteen hundred Maasai women from many different villages converged on Loliondo, a district headquarters in northern Tanzania, to turn in their membership cards to the longtime ruling political party, Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM). Many of them disobeyed police warnings that they would be shot if they walked to Loliondo, while others were forcibly returned to their villages by trucks. Nonetheless, hundreds hid with their small children in the bushes overnight until the CCM office opened, then marched to the office and turned in 1,883 party membership cards. By renouncing their membership in CCM, the women were protesting the evictions of thousands of Maasai from their area in July 2009 by armed government security forces, who burned their homesteads, confiscated thousands of cattle, and violently attacked both men and women. They were also protesting recently announced plans by the government to take away even more legally titled village land to create a buffer zone along the boundary of the Serengeti National Park. As the women left to walk the many miles back to their villages, they sang “We are not for CCM, which sells our land.” The response of the government, political party, and mainstream media was shocked disbelief at the capacity of women, especially illiterate, rural Maasai women, to organize themselves; they instead accused various male leaders of “instigating” the actions (*The Guardian* 2010; Mwalongo 2010a, 2010b).

This protest was just one of several recent actions staged by Maasai women in northern Tanzania over the past few years to demand justice—in their terms—from people and institutions, including CCM and the Tanzanian

state, whom they perceive as propagating injustice. Other actions include a protest in which about five hundred women from the same area gathered together, cut sticks, stripped themselves naked, and then stood on a local airstrip to prevent planes from an Arab hunting firm from landing. There are accounts of similar collective actions by Maasai women in both the colonial and postcolonial periods, such as in response to the short-lived government decree that I mentioned earlier which demanded that Maasai men and women had to wear “modern” dress in order to be able to ride buses to town.

There is, as many of you know, a long history of collective protests by women throughout the African continent, perhaps most famously the 1929 Igbo Women’s War. Among Maasai, these forms of female collective protest also have a long history. In the past, these violations usually involved serious affronts to women’s responsibilities and rights as mothers. For example, according to a colonial report from 1910,

In the event of a man having intercourse with a pregnant woman, and thereby causing her to abort, he must submit to a punishment which is called *ol-kishuroto*. All the women of the neighborhood collect together and, having stripped, seize the guilty person and flog him, after which they slaughter as many of his cattle as they can, strangling and suffocating the animals with their garments. (Hollis 1910:480)

Similar reports of *ol-kishuroto* continue to the present over such violations as a man’s having sex with his real or classificatory daughter or preventing his wives from participating in their regular collective fertility gatherings. Such protests are recognized by both men and women as legitimate expressions of women’s moral authority to punish people who violate the social order and to demand justice on behalf of themselves and their families.

Thus, while the substance and scale of women’s demands in Loliondo are perhaps relatively new—challenging evictions, land dispossession, corrupt officials, and the resulting increases in the insecurity and precariousness of their families and livelihoods—the form, collective protest, has a long history, one based, as elsewhere, in the moral authority and political power of women as mothers. Although I was not present at the Loliondo protest, the published and unpublished accounts that I have read all say that most, if not all, of the women had small children with them—a clear statement that they were drawing on their status as mothers to protest and critique those they saw as guilty of undermining their obligation to care for their children and ensure their successful and secure futures. These women, in other words, perceived the assault on their families by the state as immoral, as violations of the social order, and as an assault on their rights and responsibilities as mothers.

Theorizing Africa from the Margins

So how do these stories from the margins help us understand Africa? What theoretical insights and political lessons do they offer?

First, the stories temper claims of “Africa rising.” They remind us of the need to disaggregate statistics and to listen to stories. Perhaps more important, they direct us to examine the relations between and among the disaggregated categories, the differently positioned groups of people. Some people are rising, especially urban, educated elites, but often at the expense and through the exploitation of those at the margins. While SDG’s may herald national increases in the enrollment of girls in secondary school, we must calculate, recognize, and analyze the stark disparities in enrollments in rural versus urban areas, low-income versus high-income families. We must consider, for example, the proliferation of expensive private schools for the privileged children of elite families alongside the collapse of government schools—with their huge classes, lack of books, crumbling classrooms, and overworked and underpaid teachers.

Second, the stories challenge dominant neoliberal ideas about poverty and progress. They reveal that poverty is not just the plight of individuals who need “by your bootstraps” remedies like microfinance. Instead, we must pay attention to the structural contexts and historical causes that have marginalized and continue to marginalize some peoples for the benefit of others. What good is livelihood diversification in the face of diminished access to land, poor schools, and enduring discrimination?

But the stories also illustrate the creative ways in which marginalized peoples cope, critique, and challenge their marginalization. Their experiences and ideas reveal not just economic creativity in their relentless efforts to find new ways to “diversify” their livelihoods, but political creativity as well. Parkipuny discovered and embraced a new form of political awakening and belonging—indigeneity—that helped Maasai and other marginalized African groups better understand, theorize, and challenge their precarious predicaments as second-class citizens. They realized that their experiences were not exceptions, but part of larger patterns of dispossession and accumulation by elites in the name of nation-building, progress, productivity, and profit. Mobilizing as “indigenous” enabled them to transcend their specific ethnic identities and situations and to advocate for more systematic changes from states, the World Bank, and other institutions.

Similarly, in contrast to dominant legal frameworks which promote liberal ideas of individual agency and responsibility, the collective actions of Maasai women express the importance of social connections and relationships rather than individual autonomy and rights. They address the structural inequalities produced by colonialism and capitalism that have alienated them and their families from lands and livelihoods, and directly challenge the involvement of the Tanzanian state in facilitating their disenfranchisement and oppression. These women perceive themselves as having a moral obligation to challenge perceived violations to the social order, whether from incestuous men in the past or corrupt state and party officials in the present. Moreover, they emphasize the need and power of theorizing and challenging these perceived injustices collectively—not as individuals.

By drawing on their long tradition of collective protest and modifying it to address current forms of injustice, they have emerged as a powerful political force to be reckoned with by the state and political party. As one Tanzanian reporter noted, when commenting on the Loliondo protests, “In the past, the Maasai were renowned for their warrior force, the morans. The age-sets still open and close to new spear carriers. But today the formidable army of the Maasai is their women” (*The Guardian* 2010).

The stories of how one group of people became ethnically marked and marginalized, and how certain individuals such as Lemayian and Parkipuny and collectivities like the protesting women draw on their marginalized, precarious positions to create new ways of living, of belonging, and of protesting, challenge not just our stereotypes, but also dominant narratives of power, progress, and justice. They provide, I hope, a convincing argument for the merits of listening to and learning from peoples often dismissed or patronized because they live on the margins.

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