

INTRODUCTION

.....

COLONIALISM, NATIVISM, AND THE GENEALOGICAL IMAGINATION

::

On the eve of 1964, the British Central African Federation (1953–63) that had united Northern Rhodesia, Southern Rhodesia, and Nyasaland for ten years ended. By July 6, 1964, Nyasaland achieved its independence to become Malawi, with Zambia following suit on October 24, 1964. Southern Rhodesia would pursue an entirely different political path through the white-led Rhodesian Front's Unilateral Declaration of Independence on November 11, 1965. A prolonged armed struggle would result, lasting until 1980 with the founding of Zimbabwe. However, the official collapse of the federation on December 31, 1963, virtually guaranteed eventual change across the region. British control and influence—even among Southern Rhodesia's white community—would decline dramatically in a span of less than two years. To mark the occasion, a symbolic funeral procession took place on New Year's Day, 1964, at the headquarters of the Malawi Congress Party (MCP) in Limbe, Nyasaland, with a coffin provocatively labeled "Federation Corpse" burned as an effigy of imperial failure. Hastings Kamuzu Banda (1898–1997), leader of the MCP and future president of Malawi (figure 1.1), prefaced this emblematic gesture with a short speech in which he affirmed, with pointed refrain, "Now at last, the Federation is dissolved, dissolved, dissolved."¹ In a similar spirit of disenchantment, Kenneth Kaunda, president of Zambia and leader of the United National Independence Party, commented several years later that the federation had been a doomed effort to counter African nationalism, presenting "a brake upon African advancement in the North." In his view, whites throughout the region had been "blinding themselves to the signs writ large in the skies over post-war Africa," a case of "shouting against the wind."² In these ways, the



FIGURE I.1. President Hastings Kamuzu Banda of Malawi (left) with President Julius Nyerere of Tanzania (right), early 1960s. Used by permission of the National Archives of the United Kingdom (CO 1069/165/9).

federation seemed fated to fail in the minds of its most public critics—a last imperial experiment—being a mere transition phase on the way to complete decolonization.³

Yet this regional political change in British-ruled central Africa did not reflect a universal consensus of popular opinion. Other voices supported the continuation of British governance that had been established in the late nineteenth century, evincing a politics of imperial identity and belonging that dissolved amid the racial revolutions of the 1960s. On a different evening in 1964, a car filled with several young men, assumed to be members of the MCP's paramilitary Young Pioneers, pulled into the driveway of Henry Ascroft (born in 1904) on Chileka Road near the outskirts of Blantyre, Malawi. Ascroft had been a founding member of the Anglo-African Association during the late 1920s and spent much of his political life as an advocate for Nyasaland's "Anglo-African" community—people of multiracial background who claimed African, British, and Indian heritage.⁴ The visit was a surprise and, given the time of day, unwelcome. The young

men left only after Ascroft had been physically beaten with their message firmly delivered: the Banda government did not approve of Ascroft's political views or sympathize with what remained of Anglo-African interests. The MCP stridently objected to a politics espoused by Ascroft that elevated European ancestry and entitlement over African interests, a colonial-era loyalism out of step with the transition then occurring.

This episode proved to be a turning point. Ascroft's health quickly deteriorated, leading to his death in 1965. In recounting these details to me over thirty years later, his daughters, Jessica and Ann, spoke with a mix of reverence and distance, relating their father's activities and politics as part of a different era of time, silenced by decades of autocratic rule under the Banda regime (1964–94) yet still held in family memory.⁵ In retrospect this event appears as a minor incident in Malawi's postcolonial history, more personal than public in nature. There were others like Ascroft who did not meet a similar fate. Ismail K. Surtee, an Indo-African man committed to the MCP, became Speaker of the National Assembly of Malawi shortly after independence.⁶ Yet Ascroft's treatment fell within an established pattern. State power under Banda often intervened in the affairs of perceived political opponents, brutally suppressing contrary political outlooks, social identities, and historical experiences.⁷ As another informant told me regarding Ascroft's views toward Banda and Malawi's independence, Ascroft was "not sure as to what the changes would bring in this country [for Anglo-Africans], what their fate would be, so they tried to resist."⁸

This book returns to the colonial period to examine the perspectives and histories of individuals like Ascroft—people of multiracial background who cultivated connections with regional colonial states and the British Empire more generally. It is concerned with those who lost—politically, socially, and culturally—with the end of colonialism, whose histories have since been marginalized by the politics of African nationalism during the postcolonial period. Indeed, despite Malawi's diverse and extensive historiography, my first encounter with Ascroft and the Anglo-African community was not through an existing published account but the result of sifting through documents at the National Archives of Malawi in Zomba while researching a different topic. The Anglo-African Association merited enough attention to receive a subject heading within an index compiled by a colonial archivist, an unusual inclusion amid more predictable listings of tobacco production, missionary activities, and annual fishing quotas from Lake Nyasa. My agenda soon changed. Although Ascroft's perspectives

were ones I resolutely rejected—exhibiting strident forms of racism and imperial patriotism in equal measure—they were also difficult to ignore, possessing an unvarnished honesty and even intellectual sophistication. They disclosed an unconventional worldview involving notions of kinship and racial heritage that not only articulated what it meant to be “Anglo-African,” but also argued for a politics of colonial loyalty and entitlement that sharply contrasted with the politics of anticolonial resistance common in many postcolonial social histories. Although descent and genealogy have played key roles in defining racial difference, their uses in this context were intriguingly inventive, clearly motivated by self-interest, and forcefully grounded in sentiments of family and lived personal experience rather than sociological abstraction—a kind of folk racism that only oppression could conceive. This surreptitious genealogical imagination was at once eccentric yet accessible, organic and local in orientation yet connected to broader patterns of cultural knowledge and historical experience. Above all, it suggested a history that had not been accounted for, a story waiting to be told, and a new set of possibilities about how histories of race and colonialism might be written.⁹

This book is about this genealogical imagination—its origins, its diverse morphologies and instrumental uses, and its historical demise. This socially constructed imagination was and remains a form of critical practice. It is essential to understanding how multiracial people negotiated a colonial world defined by racial difference and, more specifically, distinctions between *native* and *non-native*—to revisit the terminology of the time.¹⁰ It reveals an alternative social and political outlook that challenges assumptions about ethical life during the colonial period by introducing a critical vocabulary of connection, rather than resistance. Through this focus, this book contributes to an expanding literature on the varied political cultures that appeared under colonial rule, particularly those articulated by subaltern communities whose marginalization produced exceptional perspectives that challenge postcolonial nationalism and its versions of the past. But neither is it about restoring a set of moribund ideas that are ultimately of little consequence. Larger themes emerge regarding the catalysts, rationales, and limitations of such imaginative practices. At its core, this book is a study of racial thought under colonialism in British Central Africa from the early to the mid-twentieth century and the ways in which it informed a cluster of issues—sexual behavior, social identification, political arguments, legal status, urban planning, poverty, and colonial com-

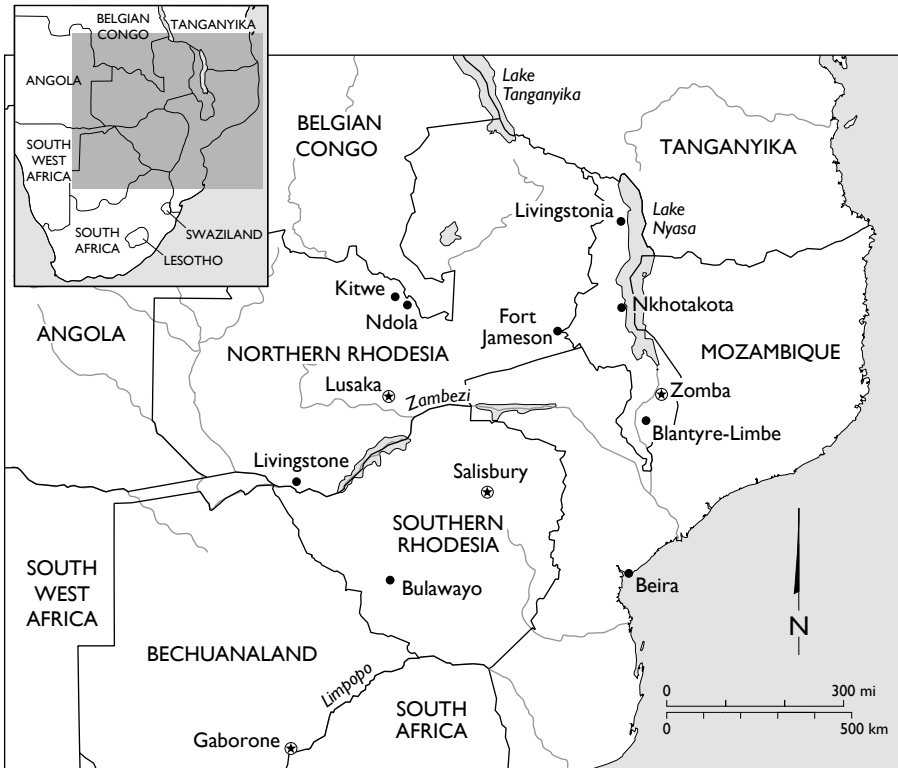
mon sense. It does not settle on any single aspect but traces the causal interplay among them, affecting the different realms in which multiracial Africans lived and the ways in which they negotiated these matters. This plural format captured in the chapters that follow draws attention to how people made strategic sense of a complex world infused with distinctions that could both provide and limit opportunity. Indeed, though intellectual origins are touched upon, this book is more concerned with constitutive practices.¹¹ Race is understood to be a marker, as well as a phenomenological schema—a structure of thought for explaining the world. Race is irreducible to any single context or explanation—what Ann Laura Stoler has called its polyvalent mobility—with each of the aforementioned issues carrying historical and pedagogical significance.¹² The forthcoming chapters consequently argue for the importance of racial minorities and their layered histories under colonial rule. They challenge conventional narratives of state formation, the establishment of colonial legal systems, and the composition and support of national liberation struggles.¹³ This book foregrounds the meaning of unfamiliar views like Ascroft’s—what E. S. Atieno Odhiambo and David William Cohen have referred to as “knowledge from the shadows”—that indicate the emergence of colonial political imaginations that were uncommon, even enigmatic, and tell us new stories as a result.¹⁴

: NATIVISM AND ITS HIDDEN HISTORIES :

Race and racism are widely addressed problems that have fundamentally defined our past and present. They demand attention, requiring both historical understanding and methodical vigilance that resists revalidating them uncritically.¹⁵ Race as a biological concept is a fiction. It is a socio-historical construction as so many scholars have underscored. But racism is not a fabrication, as varied histories of slavery, imperialism, and violence attest.¹⁶ Yet, despite the urgency of these issues, geographic, temporal, and analytic imbalances exist that raise vital questions about the universal definition, application, and meaning of *race* as a useful category for historical analysis. This situation particularly applies to African studies. *Race*—customarily defined by false notions of biological descent and intrinsic aptitude corresponding to physical type—and *racism*—the act of using race as a basis for social and political discrimination—were central aspects of modern colonialism, a fact widely accepted yet treated un-

evenly.¹⁷ One explanation is the reductive quality that a racial framework can impart. Given the demography of most African societies, *ethnicity*—also informed by ideas of descent, though complemented by learned, historically rooted cultural practices—has been perceived as providing a more textured view of social relations and history stretching across time periods.¹⁸ An ethnic paradigm has dominated African studies as a result. Indeed, this paradigm has been positioned as antiracist in orientation—a critical stance derived from the cultural relativism pioneered by scholars such as Franz Boas and his student Melville Herskovits.¹⁹ But imperatives of historical method have also played a decisive role in the undervaluation of this issue. Given concerns for enduring dynamics of history and identification internal to the African continent, racial thought has typically been perceived as fixed to the colonial era—a system of intellectual belief introduced by European contact—having no deep or meaningful history prior to this period.²⁰ This problem is compounded by scholarship that has congregated in certain parts of the continent, particularly those with high densities of white settlement—South Africa being the prime example. Yet South Africa cannot remain a stand-in for the rest of the continent.²¹

This book addresses these predicaments. It is positioned within a recent turn in scholarship that has sought to rethink histories of race and racism beyond accustomed places and time periods.²² This new scholarship has not only underscored the racial diversity of colonial societies. It has also enabled more complex understandings of colonialism and racism to emerge by outlining the multiple origins and outcomes of racial thought and difference. This book expands the geography of current research by undertaking a regional approach that accounts for the politics of racialization in British Central Africa (map 1.1).²³ Its primary setting is the Nyasaland Protectorate (first established as the British Central Africa Protectorate from 1891 to 1907)—a classic out-of-the-way place in many respects, particularly with regard to the topic at hand.²⁴ But racial difference and discrimination did have meaning in this ostensibly peripheral context—seen most evocatively in the Chilembwe Uprising of 1915—and the set of histories here examine how such vivid local experiences formed part of a regional political scene that extended to Southern Rhodesia (chartered in 1889) and Northern Rhodesia (1911).²⁵ Before race and nationalism intersected to herald political change as they did in Malawi and Zambia in 1964 and Southern Rhodesia in 1965, race took legal, intellectual, and cultural shape in an imperial context. The regional framework of this book there-



MAP I.1.1. British Central Africa, circa 1950.

fore intends to unfasten race and nation from each other — denaturalizing a relationship that has placed racial formation within narratives of anti-colonial activism, postcolonial nationalism, and group conflict more generally — to consider instead different social uses and political geographies.²⁶ Racial distinction was a consummate form of colonial reason, a central rationale that validated a rule of difference extending to realms of culture, class, land, and gender.²⁷ As such, it presented a means of organizing the world that neither states nor colonial subjects could avoid. In contrast to African nationalists and pan-Africanists who mobilized the experience of racial discrimination as a basis for anticolonial solidarity, it rationalized for multiracial people senses of legal and political entitlement on the basis of European racial descent, encouraging the evolution of a political language of imperial loyalty and reciprocity expressed through vernacular idioms of kinship and genealogy. For Ascroft and others like him, being multiracial offered degrees of social proximity to white settler and African

communities alike. Being “Anglo-African” reflected a deeply felt, yet instrumental, intersection of relationships—familial, racial, and political in scope. The liminal status of Anglo-Africans consequently posed challenges to conventional categories of rule, with implications that still have meaning in the present.²⁸

This book is critically minded as a result. It addresses the crucial question why histories of the kind observed here have been habitually marginalized by scholars. An understanding of “nativism” in its colonial and postcolonial forms is essential in this regard. Although *race* serves as a useful translation term, permitting historical comparisons between different temporal and geographic contexts, it can obscure the specific discursive practices that have inhibited recognition of and critical thinking about these communities in the past and present. In contrast, the terms *native* and *non-native* that marked basic distinctions of rights and rule in British Africa fundamentally affected their social and political status.²⁹ These locutions of dominance possess interactive elements of race, culture, and territory, and, given their historical use, it is more accurate and constructive to engage with them than with race alone. Revising our terms of analysis in this fashion, we gain a clearer sense why the subaltern histories described here were slighted during the colonial period and have remained underexamined since the historiographical turn that decolonization ultimately initiated. Colonial nativism—defined by an orientation toward black African communities, customary authorities, and local cultural tradition—not only structured colonial rule. It also produced an enduring *episteme*, to use an expression of V. Y. Mudimbe’s—a regime of rationality that has organized the intellectual conditions of possibility for understanding Africa.³⁰ African studies as a field has been fundamentally shaped by this colonial order of knowledge. “Africanism” emerged from the colonial native question, broadly construed, being deeply racialized in the first instance and firmly entrenched in the ethnic politics of the customary in the second—to the exclusion of non-native and interstitial forms of historical experience.³¹ Postcolonial scholarship has largely inhabited this intellectual trajectory of the black African subject established by colonialism. As Achille Mbembe has written, a prose of nativism has fixed race and geography such that the “idea of an Africanity that is not black is simply unthinkable.”³²

This provocation is not to say that a legacy of colonial thought has been received uncritically.³³ Ethnic identities and customary practices are still

indispensable—and evolving—features of African life. But this shared epistemology continues to raise significant questions regarding the accepted parameters of academic inquiry and the choice of legitimate subject matter. It requires persistent engagement, a task that has been periodically undertaken by scholars.³⁴ Indeed, a distinct critical tradition can be located to southern Africa. During the early to mid-twentieth century, anthropologists A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, Isaac Schapera, and Max Gluckman called into question the uncomfortable rapport between scholarship and the South African native “problem”—specifically how the latter political discourse had structured and at times conscripted academic research to rationalize segregation, which they opposed.³⁵ They were not alone. The historian William Macmillan published an early, pathbreaking study of South Africa’s Coloured population, citing this social group’s national relevance given insistent questions concerning its political and legal status between the two world wars.³⁶ His study took a comprehensive approach, venturing into issues of slavery and frontier settlement during the preceding centuries to examine how interracial encounters and relationships generated multiple communities that would later be classified as “Coloured.”³⁷ This holistic method, which embraced, rather than simplified, demographic complexity, presented layered histories of interaction that posed distinct challenges to the discrete boundaries of the native question. Macmillan argued for a more unified historical analysis of South Africa as a “common society”—a stance informed by his anti-segregationist politics.³⁸ This approach, along with Radcliffe-Brown and Schapera’s idea of a single social system, influenced Gluckman’s proposal of situational analysis to gain a more complete and accurate view of group relations in South Africa.³⁹ Archie Mafeje further refined this line of critical assessment two decades later, suggesting that an ideology of “tribalism” among scholars, inherited from colonialism, continued to oversimplify and obscure “the real nature of economic and power relations between Africans themselves, and between Africa and the capitalist world,” drawing “an invidious and highly suspect distinction between Africans and other peoples.”⁴⁰

Despite the esteem granted to these scholars of the past and present, the effects of these recurrent arguments against colonial racial and ethnic typologies have remained more marginal than mainstream in African studies—a condition explained by politics. This book confronts this issue. The preceding critical tradition against hermetic understandings of identity, society, and history serves as a backdrop to the approach undertaken

here. Andrew Apter has usefully summarized attempts to decolonize African anthropology before and after Mudimbe's important intervention, citing at once the methodological creativity of scholars to circumvent the legacies of colonial reason, yet the unrelenting dissatisfaction held by some like Mafeje.⁴¹ This book proposes that decolonizing enduring epistemologies requires not simply theoretical innovation, but a concurrent empirical expansion—a reconsideration of how certain historical experiences can unsettle assumptions and enlarge expectations of what African history has been and could be.⁴² Political protocols in turn must be reassessed. African nationalism before and after decolonization consolidated the power of black communities, resulting not only in the positive decline of racial distinction as a statutory method for organizing political order, but also making scholarship on local ethnic groups a renewed priority. Postcolonial nativism as an intellectual project emerged from this political transformation. Promoting indigenous identities, languages, and cultures formed a critical response to colonialism, as well as a means of authenticating and stabilizing manifold national identities. But such writing for the nation often did so to the exclusion—even active repression—of other unofficial histories.⁴³ Nativism that has taken various forms in both colonial and postcolonial scholarship has created invisible histories by generating hierarchies of credibility that have diminished experiences which did not fit into either native policies of the past or present definitions of postcolonial autochthony.⁴⁴ Scrutinizing such tacit continuities of knowledge and power is needed. Alluding to the connections between colonial and postcolonial reason, Edward Said has called nativism a regular “misfortune” of nationalism, a “besetting hobble of most post-colonial work” that has often reinforced colonial distinctions even while reevaluating the views and agency of local communities.⁴⁵

This book consequently belongs to a recent literature that has started to critique the historiographical effects of African nationalism. This scholarship has challenged a pervasive ideological and teleological framing of African history—national liberation and the nation-state being the universal end to colonialism with a historical meaning shared by all—by addressing marginalized racial minorities as part of a postnational research agenda.⁴⁶ These *alter-native* subjectivities provide a more heterogeneous view of colonialism and thus enable a more expansive interpretation of Africa's past. Colonial societies were remarkably diverse. Yet this demo-



FIGURE 1.2. A depiction of demographic diversity and domestic life near Mount Mulanje, in southern Nyasaland, including a white settler family (upper right corner), an African man (bottom center), and a Sikh man (top center), circa 1877. Used by permission of the National Archives of the United Kingdom (CO 1069/109/22).

graphic complexity remains understudied, particularly the question of how this colonial multitude reflected and informed the making of African history under imperial conditions. Imperialism generated extraordinary mobility within and between continents that resulted in the creation of new sociocultural communities in bustling metropolises such as Cape Town and Dar es Salaam, but equally in less cosmopolitan settings like Nyasaland (figure 1.2). The presence of Lebanese and Omani neighborhoods in West and East Africa, Arab communities along the Saharan Sahel, Indian and Chinese populations across eastern and southern Africa, and a variety of European settlements throughout the continent—themselves ethnically heterogeneous—underscores how Africa underwent fundamental demographic change, rendering imperialism as much a project in sociocultural management as it was an economic venture.⁴⁷ Yet these alternative communities have frequently been judged as having only superficial histories on the continent, with origins elsewhere—beyond the geographic dictates of colonial and postcolonial nativism. The chronological depth,

wide-ranging spatial distribution, and historical meaning of these experiences have frequently been disregarded, making scant impression on how the term *African* is defined and understood.

Multiracial communities have been a casualty of this pattern of occlusion. Across time and place, multiracial people have often occupied the shifting “middle ground” between empires and local societies—representing the widespread occurrence of interpersonal relationships between foreigners and indigenous societies, but also serving as pivotal brokers in the creation of trade and political influence, typically gaining status and power as a result.⁴⁸ Eurafrican, Luso-African, and métis populations emerged as early as the seventeenth century along the coast of West Africa, with the rise of the transatlantic slave trade.⁴⁹ On the East African coast, people of Afro-Arabian background appeared even earlier through networks of the Indian Ocean economy and the settlement of traders from the Persian and Omani Gulf regions.⁵⁰ Further south, among the *prazo* plantation estates of the Zambezi River valley established in the sixteenth century, the “Portuguese” community was primarily Afro-Portuguese.⁵¹ In contrast to many of these earlier groups, the Coloured population in South Africa remains distinctive, albeit with controversy due to the employment of *Coloured* (*kleurling*, in Afrikaans) as an apartheid state category.⁵² Other identity groups and terms materialized earlier on the frontier. The Griqua and the *Bastards* (or *basters* and *bastervolk*) emerged in the eighteenth century and were equally inscribed with interracial histories.⁵³ Paul Landau has applied the French colonial expressions *métis* (a person of “mixed” racial background) and *métissage* (“mixing”) to capture the broad dynamics of the South African frontier up through the early twentieth century.⁵⁴ Hermann Giliomee has further noted that the term *Afrikaner*—an identity strongly associated with racial purity and white supremacy—originated in the late nineteenth century to refer to “the half-bred offspring of slaves” and, more generally, people of “mixed descent.”⁵⁵ Overall, these histories point to the extensive presence of multiracial Africans across the continent in the past and present.

The relative neglect in mainstream scholarship toward this spectrum of historical experience is therefore not for lack of acknowledgment, but for lack of historical imagination—a disciplinary reason that can be attributed to an entrenched nativism and the ethnic paradigm it has produced. The subaltern status of multiracial Africans is rendered not solely by postcolonial nationalism or elite historiographies as such, but by this

inherited colonial epistemology that has privileged the claims of black autochthony over other “subject races.”⁵⁶ This condition of exclusion has been enhanced by the racially “transgressive” origins of multiracial people that defied the conventional logics of colonial taxonomy.⁵⁷ Multiracial communities have inhabited the shadows of this enduring structure of knowledge, occupying a space beyond native questions, policies, and histories. They have been treated as “people without history” in both senses of the expression—being beyond history as conventionally defined, and thus having no history.⁵⁸ Colonialism actively created this situation, with states, officials, and settler communities choosing to look away to maintain a semblance of racial order. Such colonial contempt has informed postcolonial disregard—a situation of empirical precarity and scholarly inattention that demands a different historical methodology and a more expansive political horizon regarding the dimensions and meanings of moral life under colonial rule.

: COLONIAL KINSHIPS :

Nativism is not only a structure of knowledge. It is also a political formation as mentioned. To work critically against nativism is therefore to rethink the political—to consider the different ways in which colonial and postcolonial histories might be rewritten. It requires historical engagement beyond customary politics, beyond the anticolonial liberation paradigm, beyond the territorial contours of the nation-state-colony, and hence beyond political narratives as conventionally understood. This book consequently seeks to contribute to a set of arguments put forward over the past two decades about the need to reassess historical agency in order to circumvent established analytic conformities of colonial domination and African resistance.⁵⁹ By inscribing the experiences discussed here into our postcolonial historiography, a rereading of colonialism is made possible that marks a return to a less discrete, more entangled sense of the past from demographic, political, and cultural vantage points. Terminology is important to this book, as highlighted earlier. Regional practices of self-naming provide a textured sense of the social pluralism that existed and the intertwined politics involved. Not only do Anglo-African, Eurafrican, and similar communities indicate new forms of peoplehood, but the genealogical imagination that emerged concurrently underscores the innovative ways in which local activist intellectuals defined what it meant to be simultaneously African and a subject of the British Empire—an invented

Afro-Britishness that has often been neglected and at times forgotten due to the priorities of postcolonial historical writing.⁶⁰ These liminal identities signify critical subjectivities that actively engaged with the opportunities and constraints of the period, as well as provoke consideration in the present toward experiences that have exceeded our intellectual grasp.

These observations underline the risk of narrowly applying a racial lens to these histories—an approach that can oversimplify the cultural markers and political sensibilities involved. Racial terminology can conceal, rather than reveal, historical experience. The commonly used, albeit weak, descriptive expression *mixed race* conveys imprecision, obscurity, and disregard for the personal and community histories of people who placed a strong emphasis on familial kinship and genealogy, as examined in forthcoming chapters. In southern Africa, the term *Coloured* has been used in synonymous ways, being transformed from a British imperial term referring to anyone who was not white, particularly during the nineteenth century, to anyone who was perceived as having a racially mixed background, especially during the twentieth century. Given the word's flexibility, mobility, and evolution in meaning over time, a consistent need exists to historicize this category to render it more precise—not only historically, but also geographically, and politically.

With the establishment of the Union of South Africa in 1910, which united the British Cape and Natal colonies with the defeated Orange Free State and South African Republic following the South African War (1899–1902), only the Cape had used the term *Coloured* in a statutory manner, with its 1904 census employing this category. This usage contrasted with that of the 1904 Native Affairs Commission, which defined *native* as including Coloured persons.⁶¹ But the identification of a separate tertiary “race” soon followed. “Some half a million people of many varying shades, the descendants of Hottentots, Malays, negro slaves, and many others, with a strong admixture of European blood, are comprehensively spoken of as ‘the Coloured People,’” wrote William Macmillan in 1927, indicating the haphazard differentiation internal to the term as understood in South Africa.⁶² The term *Coloured* entered the region of British Central Africa quite literally with the 1896 arrival of the Cape Boys Corps, which consisted of Coloured military recruits, in Southern Rhodesia from the Western Cape as part of the British South Africa Company's initial colonial incursion.⁶³ But it was not the only referent in the decades that followed. The expressions *Anglo-African*, *Euro-African*, *Indo-African*, and *Eurafrican*—as

well as *Cape Afrikaner*, in Southern Rhodesia — appeared across the region beginning in the 1920s, pointing to a diversity of self-naming practices that sought to articulate familial origins, cultural attachments, and political affiliations.⁶⁴ The application of the expression *Coloured* in instrumental fashion by regional states, schools, and missions was actively criticized by local communities and the political organizations they founded, given its occlusion of their connections with European communities, its overt and exclusively racial content, and its consequent discriminatory function in law.⁶⁵ As a sign of its centrality as a standard state category, it nonetheless became the principal term used in official censuses.⁶⁶ In Southern Rhodesia the category included people from the Cape Coloured community and first-generation people of mixed-race background, in addition to immigrants from Goa in India, St. Helena, and Mozambique — anyone whose racial background was perceptibly ambiguous in some fashion.⁶⁷

This colonial practice still lingers in postcolonial scholarship and must be denaturalized. The term *Coloured* should be understood as having specific geographic and historical origins — an encroachment from the south, literally and figuratively — that belongs to a constellation of self-crafted expressions that people strategically employed to describe themselves. Restoring this diversity of locutions uncovers regionally situated patterns of history that challenge the reductive uniformities of a colonial racial lexicon. This book therefore complements a growing literature on this topic by extending beyond the Cape Coloured paradigm, while also expanding its analytic range and meaning by engaging broader debates in African studies.⁶⁸ In the same way that the terms *black* or *white* can homogenize social experience, the uncritical use of this category can overwhelm historical subtleties, suggesting a false sense of monolithic consistency — a singular experience — that streamlines an otherwise diverse set of histories.⁶⁹ This argument against standardization consequently goes further than semantics or simple factual accuracy. Locally self-fashioned subjectivities tell particular stories. Their formations highlight complex intersections of race, culture, and politics based on sentiments of familial connection that work against abstract essentialization. These compound terms gestured to an imperial context — *Anglo-African* echoing *Anglo-Indian*, for example — as did pejorative expressions such as *half-caste*, which also referenced India.⁷⁰ Although the population figures of these communities were small (table 1.1), these intermediate categories demonstrated local views that were critical toward colonial practices of stark racial categori-

<i>Census year</i>	<i>Nyasaland</i>	<i>Southern Rhodesia</i>	<i>Northern Rhodesia</i>	<i>Total (estimated)</i>
1911	481	2,042	No data	2,523 (incomplete data)
1921	563	1,998	145	2,706
1926	850	2,158	No data	3,008 (incomplete data)
1931	1,591	2,402	425	4,418
1936	No data	3,187	No data	Insufficient data
1941	No data	3,974	No data	Insufficient data
1946	455 (1945 estimate)	4,559	804	5,818
1951	No data	5,991	1,112	7,103 (incomplete data)
1956	1,199	8,079	1,577	10,855

TABLE 1.1. Official population statistics for “Coloured Persons” by colony in British Central Africa, drawn from a 1956 census. It should be noted that population figures for Nyasaland during the period 1911–31 included both “Asian” (Indian) and “Coloured” people. Numbers were often speculative and even lowered by colonial officials, given the illicit origins of this demographic group. On problems of clarity, S. S. Murray, for example, cites the 1,591 figure from the 1931 census as being solely “Indians” (S. S. Murray, *A Handbook of Nyasaland*, 57). In contrast, the 1956 census lists the 1931 census figure as consisting of both “Asian” and “Coloured” people, which could explain the high number for that year (Rhodesia and Nyasaland, *Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland*, 3). Unlisted in this chart are 1961 figures for Southern Rhodesia, which had the largest Coloured community among the three territories, that recorded 10,559 Coloured people compared to 7,253 Asians, 221,504 whites, and 3,550,000 Africans (estimated) (Southern Rhodesia, *1961 Census of the European, Asian and Coloured Population*, 3). It is significant to observe that, when white and Coloured numbers are totaled each year for the years 1946 and 1956, Nyasaland’s Coloured population was proportionally larger than the Coloured populations in the other two colonies. In 1956, for example, the Coloured population in Nyasaland represented 15.1% of the white-Coloured population combined, compared to 4.4% in Southern Rhodesia and 2.4% in Northern Rhodesia (see Table 1.1). This factor could explain the level of activism there, despite smaller total numbers.

zation, indicating how socially marginal communities engaged with racial marking and mediated racial difference. Indeed, these histories not only reconfirm the active construction of identities under colonial rule. They demonstrate the sophistication of such self-constituting measures that resorted to different sources of knowledge—local and imperial, traditional and modern—to reconfigure these distinctions, their textured meanings, and their ensuing utility. Above all, these terms reveal the steadfast desire among multiracial Africans for social and political legitimacy. The boundaries of nativism and non-nativism appeared surmountable through the deployment of this invented terminology. Elevating these amalgamated self-locutions, rather than subsuming them beneath the colonial rubric of *Coloured*, ultimately enhances our comprehension of the past by indicating day-to-day phenomenologies, conciliatory interactions between states and communities, and how colonial people—even those on the periphery—exercised a range of techniques to define their place and status in Africa and the British Empire.⁷¹

Kinship and genealogy were essential to this repertoire. Actively embedded in these regional hyphenated terms, they presented structures of feeling that defined political and intellectual agency.⁷² Although colonial histories of race and racism have tended to focus on conflict, these histories argue for the importance of socially constructed connections—the ways people engaged in new forms of collective identification through understandings of racial affiliation.⁷³ Kinship and genealogy were vital idioms for these actual, assumed, and putative communal bonds.⁷⁴ *Kinship*—defined by its horizontal nature, working across a shared temporal frame inhabited by one or more generations—and *genealogy*—typified by its vertical character, citing relations of descent between successive generations over time—symbolized affective ties that were close and often deeply felt. Serving as conceptual tools, they furnished templates for interpretation—a means for recognizing social and political opportunity through webs of personal relationships. This realm of vernacular connection that informed and structured possibilities of social action is captured in the expression *colonial kinships*—a phrase I use to describe this phenomenon of historical bonds developed under colonial rule that were familial, racial, and political in scope. This expression equally denotes a certain cosmology—a genealogical imagination—based on these connections, an outlook articulated by Ascroft and others that perceived a world of relationships, patronage, and obligation rather than incontrovertible differences. It emerged from

archival work, conversations with different informants, and my own reflections about what to call this set of experiences that did not fit into discrete narratives and remained unnamed. This study does not reconstruct actual kinship trees or genealogical lineages as such. Rather, kinship and genealogy provided a language for social and political membership. The use of these terms in this book is therefore not about incontrovertible family bloodlines, primordial determinism, or the structuration of societies as hierarchical and unchanging over time. They represent instead social and contractual relationships substantiated through everyday interactions involving family, race, and political belonging. These claims and actions created colonial cultures of relatedness. Despite their small populations, these subaltern communities engaged in the production of racial knowledge, identity formation, and even empire making—often in surprising ways.⁷⁵

: UNREASONABLE HISTORIES :

Against this backdrop of issues and arguments, a set of paradoxes appears—using, for example, a regional lens to understand a numerically minor set of communities or, similarly, examining the microhistories of a demographically marginal group to address issues as significant as racism and nativism. This book consequently draws on a diverse library of preceding scholarship that has offered timely critical interventions by placing confidence in the empiricism of small-scale events, incidental occasions, and the forgotten cultural element to illuminate everyday *mentalités* and the conditions of broader social transformation.⁷⁶ The forthcoming chapters explore how people peripheral to power lived through certain contexts of change and uncertainty with particular ideas. Evidence is treated both ethnographically and historically in order to move beyond chronology and causality and understand how certain experiences created forms of social knowledge—what Emmanuel Eze has called “ordinary reason”—that reveal insights interred by time.⁷⁷ These histories tell us about the personal effects—the details—of empire. As suggested above, these subaltern histories fall within the contours of definition originally outlined by Antonio Gramsci, being “fragmentary” and “episodic,” as well as “inter-twined” with “the history of States and groups of States.”⁷⁸ But the historical technique that this book utilizes is a genealogical one. While all histories are provisional, this work is also experimental. The expression

genealogical imagination in the title refers to both the political imagination uncovered and the alternative historical imagination demanded to assemble and think through this particular set of histories. As defined by Michel Foucault, a genealogical approach seeks to historicize phenomena that appear to be “without history.”⁷⁹ In contrast to linear histories that presuppose the existence of cohesive identity groups, this genre favors a “complex course of descent” that highlights contingency and irregularity.⁸⁰ It is anti-teleological by definition, even when progressing from the past to the present.⁸¹ A genealogical approach is further defined by its concern for subjugated forms of knowledge—knowledge that is not simply ignored, but actively disqualified.⁸² Genealogical histories are ultimately counter-histories that critically resist dominant views and practices of conformity.

This book is therefore titled *Unreasonable Histories* with specific purpose in mind. The concept of unreasonable histories serves as a methodological tool with the term *unreasonable* employed in three ways, reflected in the book’s tripartite structure. First, it refers to modes of evidence and the difficulty involved in restoring these subaltern histories. The challenges in dealing with a minority group based on historical contingencies rather than established practices of social reproduction include fragmented archives; a cultural memory that is diffuse rather than collectively held; and ephemeral knowledge about personal, family, and community origins more generally, given persistent perceptions of racial “transgression” and social illegitimacy.⁸³ This unstable situation of knowledge that resists easy historical generalizations has been shaped by colonial and postcolonial power and the relative disregard for livelihoods beyond native questions. Part I explores this theme with three chapters that examine historical beginnings in the 1910s and 1920s, a set of accounts under the rubric “Histories without Groups.” Parts II and III attend to political emergence from the 1920s through the 1950s, posing two additional meanings of unreasonable. Part II, “Non-Native Questions,” looks at the legal and policy realms that affected regional community development through matters of status, education, employment, and poverty. These communities introduced problems of native and non-native categorical definition by posing uneasy questions about racial descent and privilege that generated political and statutory uncertainties. Part III examines how Anglo-African, Euro-African, and Eurafrican people mobilized on this basis, creating communities of sentiment that used the affective ties of blood, kinship, and genealogy to create racial bonds of agnatic affiliation and patrilineal loyalty to

regional colonial states and, more generally, the British Empire. Part III depicts how colonial kinship ties were transformed from a familial phenomenon (as discussed in part I) to an articulated genealogical imagination that sought political connection and entitlement. Yet these emergent politics had a specific cost. The form of unreason inhabiting this last section of the book is the racism employed to rationalize non-native status—an uncustomary form of politics that proved detrimental with decolonization.⁸⁴

These forms of unreasonableness—methodological, categorical, and sociopolitical—are qualitatively different from one another, but they are also interrelated. They underscore the effects of power—colonial and post-colonial alike. The histories in this book reveal and critically address the limits of a colonial reason centered on racial difference expressed through discourses of nativism and non-nativism. But the relative disregard these communities have received in the postcolonial present suggests more. Such indifference is not due to their marginal demographic status alone. It discloses tacit forms of colonial-era nativist reasoning that continue to inform postcolonial scholarship. It is unsurprising that the racist imperial politics these communities espoused would, in turn, contribute to their social and political demise in the wake of decolonization—a fate captured with immediacy in the case of Henry Ascroft. Less understandable are the reasons these regional communities and their histories have been marginalized by scholars. Indeed, to return to the opening anecdote, this kind of archival moment, I am sure, is familiar to many historians. But rather than being an instance of pure serendipity, such symptomatic events signal a working set of spoken and unspoken academic rationales and political ideologies defining what is and is not suitable for study. Understanding the life of these communities has an uncertain utility when a predominant ethos is to explain the origins of the postcolonial nation-state. These histories do not fit programmatically into either imperial ambitions of the time or postindependence historiographies of the nation-state-colony—a fact explaining how and why these histories have been viewed, treated, and archived as they have.

Yet this unreasonableness is the precise quality that can productively challenge existing approaches regarding what counts as a usable past. It evinces limitations in contemporary scholarship that are empirical, political, and epistemological in scope. These histories that stand apart from mainstream scholarship reveal a fundamental shift in moral and political values between the colonial and postcolonial periods, from a time when

racial hierarchies and imperial loyalty appeared rational and accepted to a period when such conventions and forms of intellection vanished, for all practical purposes. As stated, this book embraces a challenge issued by Achille Mbembe, that scholars should work beyond the contours of liberation histories that reduce political life to modular forms of “Afro-radicalism” and beyond narratives anchored in nativism that continue to promote the colonial idea of African identity as based on membership in “the black race.”⁸⁵

These communities have not entirely disappeared. But terms like *Anglo-African* and *Euro-African* have fallen into disuse, undergoing a type of social death. Their histories have largely been rendered invisible, highlighting the potential for patterns of identification and peoplehood to weaken over time. Identities are not about origins alone. They are equally about destinations: their long-term viability and status are shaped and determined by the contingencies of politics and the priorities of history. This book works through these observations regarding the precarity of empiricism and subjectivity, to think critically about the relationships between imperial experience, postcolonial scholarship, and the different forms of reason that have influenced them. Reason itself must be historicized. A renewal of awareness toward the intellectual and political rationales that motivate current research can result in productive shifts in method and subject, illuminating a more complex view of the past—even, and perhaps especially, aspects that we find disagreeable, are critical of, and wish to overlook.