PLS 343
Politics of Sub-Saharan Africa

Week 8, Lecture 1:

Politics of ethnicity

Recap

- Political importance of patronage networks in postcolonial Africa and their basis in shared collective identities

Collective identities and the politics of identity

- Collective identities:
  - Ethnic
  - Gender
  - Linguistic
  - National
  - Racial
  - Religious

Plan for the next two weeks

- Politics of identity:
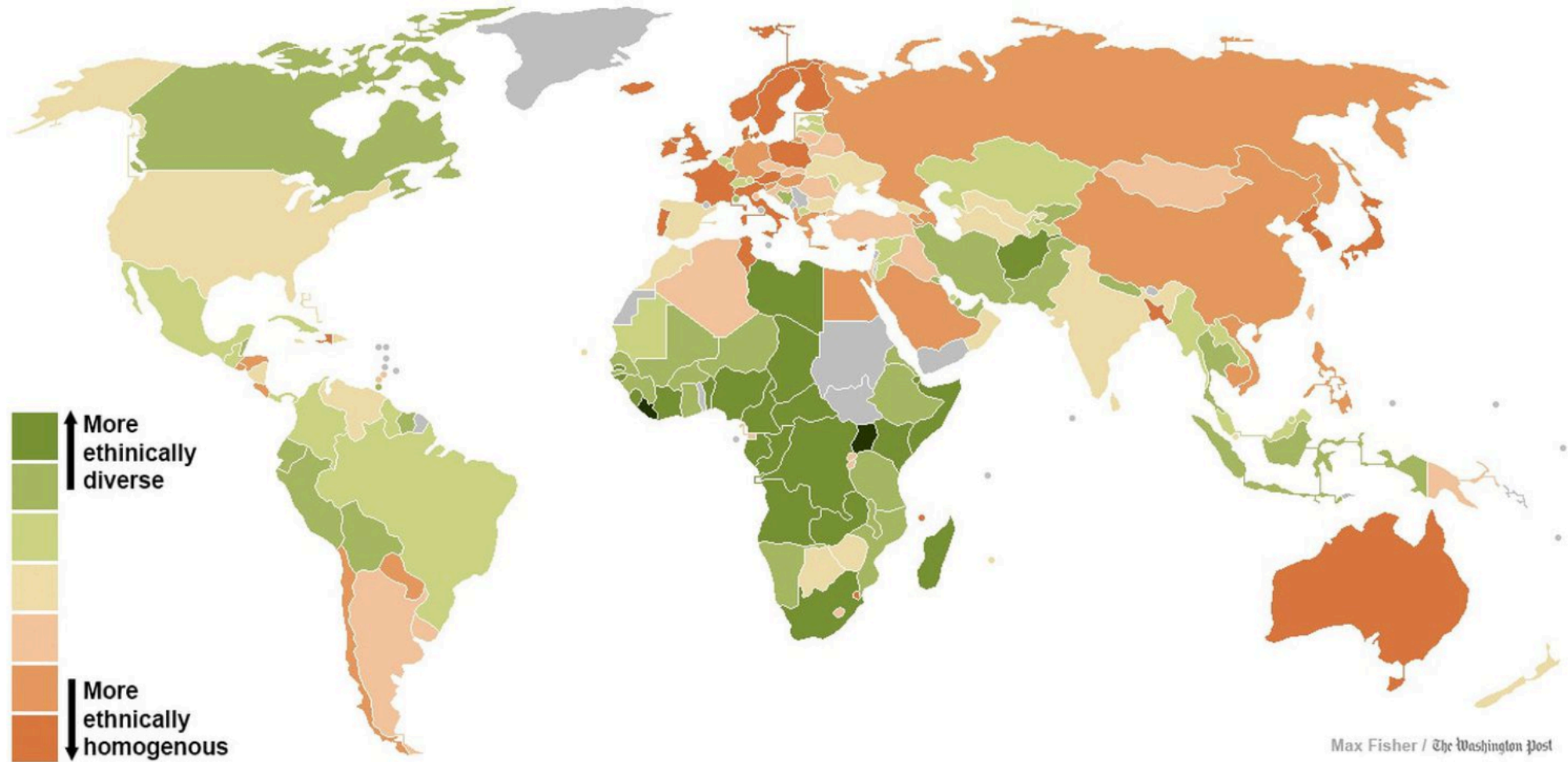 - Ethnicity, nationality, autochthony, indigeneity, and race
  - Gender and religion

Plan for today

- The concept of ethnicity
- Origins of the political salience of ethnicity in Africa

Ethnicity

- Weber: "a subjective belief" in "common descent ... whether or not an objective blood relation exists" +
  - Weber, Max. 1968. *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*. New York: Bedminster Press.
- Sense of distinctiveness (importance of ethnic boundaries) +
- Minimal scale requirement —>
- Ethnic groups: all descent-based groups based on ascriptive identities
- Ethnicity vs. nationality vs. race

Ethnic fractionalization
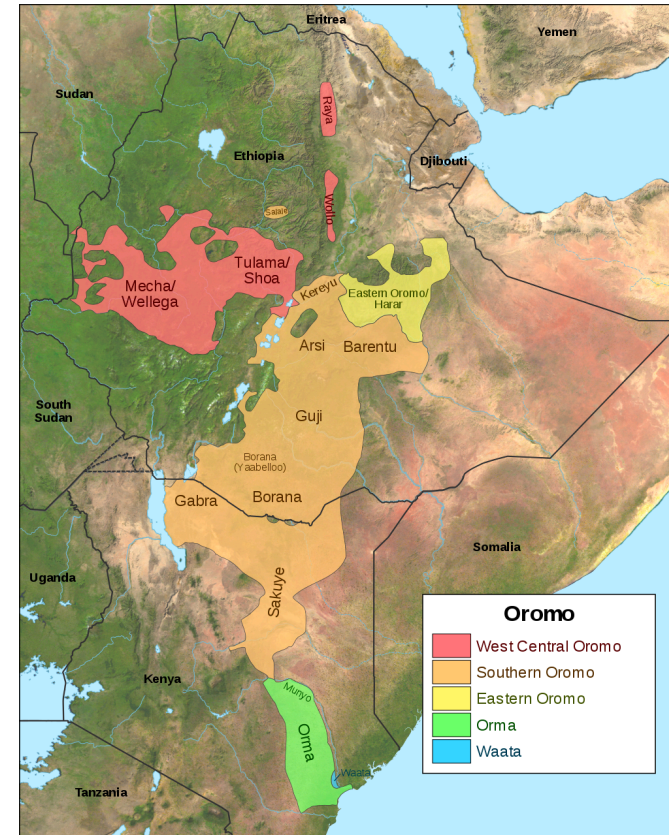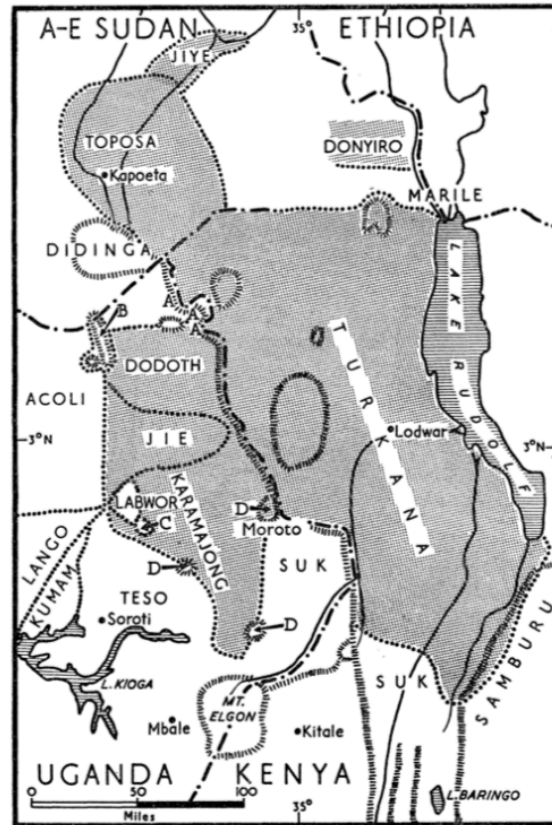

Max Fisher / The Washington Post

Ethnic fractionalization

- Negative association between ethnic fractionalization and:
  - Economic growth
  - Government public goods provision
  - Access to patronage
  - Access to foreign aid
  - Societal trust
  - Civil peace
  - Democratic stability
  - Quality of governance

Origins of ethnicity in Africa

- Fluidity of precolonial ethnic identities

Origins of ethnicity in Africa

- Colonial invention and manipulation:
  - Mamdani: "[m]ore than any other colonial subject, the African was containerized, not as a native, but as a tribesperson." —>
  - Chiefs and indirect rule
  - Customary law

Origins of ethnicity in Africa

- Colonial invention and manipulation:
  - Creation of new ethnic identities:
    - E.g. Mijikenda and Luhya in Kenya in the 1920s and 1930s
  - Preferential treatment for some ethnic groups:
    - E.g. Tutsi in Ruanda-Urundi, Kikuyu in Kenya

Origins of ethnicity in Africa

- African agency during the colonial period:
  - Ranger: "European classifications and inventions of race, or tribe or language in effect created a series of empty boxes, with bounded walls but without contents. It was all very well to write of 'the Ndebele; or 'the Kikuyu,' but to give meaning to that identity was a much more complex and contested business."
    - Ranger, Terence. 1993. "The Invention of Tradition Revisited: The Case of Colonial Africa." In T. Ranger and O. Vaughan (eds.) *Legitimacy and the State in Twentieth Century Africa*, Basingstoke: Macmillan.
  - Defense against colonial rule

Origins of ethnicity in Africa

- Colonial experience and ethnicity—the mechanisms:
  - Promotion of processes of ethnic invention and imagining through the categorization and administration of Africans as tribespeople
  - Encouragement of a sense of difference and competition through:
    - The growth of (real and perceived) economic and social inequalities
    - The association of ethnic groups with the ownership and control of particular geographic areas

Origins of ethnicity in Africa

- Invention and manipulation of ethnicity by independence-era and postcolonial African politicians:
  - Creation of new ethnic identities:
    - E.g. the Kalenjin in Kenya in the 1950s
  - Ethnic nationalism

Benefits of ethnic identity mobilization

- Jóhanna Birnir:
  - "A stable but flexible information shortcut for political choices."
    - Jóhanna Kristín Birnir, *Ethnicity and Electoral Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

- Coordination facilitation

- Solidarity

- Accountability

- Promise credibility enforcement

- Exclusion of non-coethnics

- Limitations on identity switching

Takeaway

- Ethnicity as an effective political tool bequeathed by colonizers and adapted by Africans