Characterizing links of toponyms and their role in social protection

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Introduction - Place names reflect the cultural footprints for protecting social-cultural rights bestowed by the communities' toponyms. In this paper, a quantitative method helped link and evaluate Maasai social culture's ability to name large swaths of Kenya, using toponyms. The evaluation involves toponyms connected with Maasai cultural heritage, established out of the contacts during the historical migration of the Maasai before and during the prehistoric period. All dialect groups of other languages adopted the Maasai toponyms to protect Maasai culture with minimal or no alteration due to interaction, colonialism, and migrations. Non-nomadic migrations leave footprints of toponyms related to the community's culture before migration or after contact with other dialects. Maasai and some associated dialects interacted during migrations and contacts of different cultures, who adopt Maasai culture. Internationally, Uyghurs in China (Kamberi, 2005), Kurds in Iraq, Syria, Iran, Armenia, and Turkey (Sahakyan, 2010), among others, pursue cultural protection of places named after them through public discourses. The toponyms social role is paramount in giving people a sense of recognition and feeling at home to participate in national development. Internationally some toponyms also exist due to transfer, such as Finnish

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toponyms in the US (Kaups, 1966), Arab toponyms in Africa (Morin, 2012), and the England toponyms (Moriarty, 2021) for protecting the rights of new migrants.

Methodology - Selected Maasai's toponyms were used to establish toponyms' social links due to existing literature and the only dialect whose culture is preserved in Kenya. Besides, most of the toponyms considered are outside, where there is a wide usage of Maa language. Firstly, a list of toponyms was generated that associates with the Maasai culture. Next, the evaluation of toponyms preceded to include the place names resulting from the interaction of Maasai with Bantu, Samburu, and Kalenjin dialects cultural identities of the lost people such as Athi, Gumba (Kenyatta, 1938), Sirikwa, Dorobo, and Shungwaya (Prins, 1972). The missing people are extinct in both usages and identification as dialects. Lastly, there was consideration on minority dialects who protest the renaming of the places culturally identifying and associated with them as documented by the Minority Rights Group organization (Minority Rights Group, n.d.).

Results - Toponyms of significant towns in Kenya segregated for evaluation for the presence of social links directly or indirectly with or from Maasai dialect where 60 toponyms emerged such as Nairobi, Nakuru, Eldoret, Kitale, Kericho, Londiani, Maai Mahihu, Limuru, Ngong', Laikipia, Naromoru among others culturally associated with Maasai origin as displayed in Fig. 1. There are toponyms of dialects of the lost people currently used as toponyms to protect social heritage even though no longer identified as dialects. These place names are Gumba, Athi, Lumbwa, Sirikwa, and Dorobo. Besides, toponyms help seek coexistence rights where social identity appears threatened and seek the intervention of minority rights organizations to defend recognition of their culture in naming places they reside through

public discourses, whose details are beyond the scope. In Kenya, such minorities as Endorois argue the protection of sacred places such as Bogoria and Mukogodo (Makoloo, 2005) and the Nubia (Wanjiru & Matsubara, 2017). Toponyms on age-sets shown in Table 1 include Tulwap, Kaplelach, Gada Korma, Kaplelach, and Tallai (Behrend, 1985) Kabianga social-cultural protection for continued coexistence. Toponyms arising out of age sets mainly were from men due to supportive social and cultural life in the public circles in African traditions.

Fig. 1 - Maasai place names map in Kenya.
Source: Author(s).
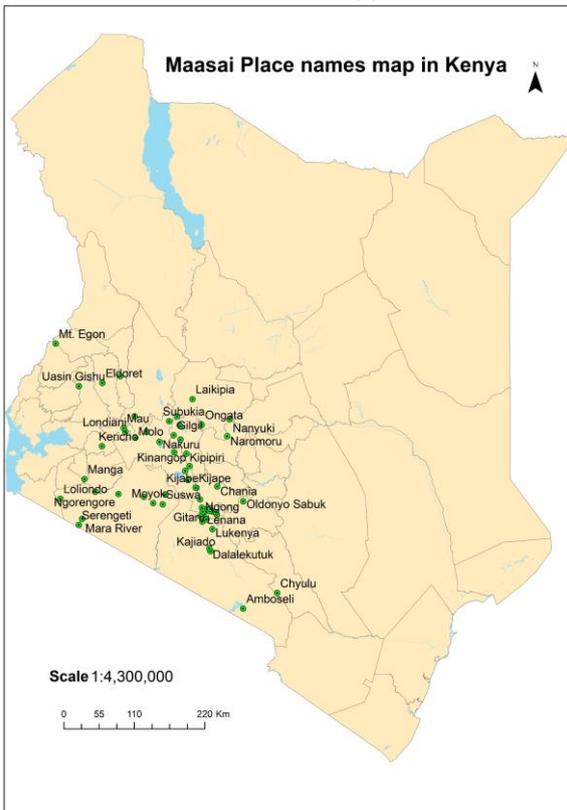
Tab. 1 – Toponyms exhibiting social protection

Toponyms	Languages involved	Nature of social protection
Mogori, Migori and Kabianga	Kipsigis, Luo, Maa and Kisii	Ceremonies of cultural events of wrestling, famine, and War
Mabanga	Luo and Luhyia	Ceremonies of cultural events of wrestling and war
Tulwap (Tulwapmoi)	Kipsigis and Nandi	Same clan and age set during circumcision
Talai, Kaplelach and Moi (Clans)	Kipsigis, Tugen, Okiek and Nandi	Kinship clan naming shared. Kaplelach (of children- cool and peaceful
Kabartegan and Londiani (Bamboo)	Kipsigis and Maasai	Social interaction of naming the same place
Korongoro (Warriors)	Kipsigis and Tugen	Tugen age-set for a place name in Bomet for being - hot, troublesome, and warlike)
Chumo (Political elders)	Tugen and Kipsigis	Tugen ageset for a place name of a school, area, road in Sondu, education centre in Sosiot, Kericho,
Kipkoimet (initiates)	Nandi and Tugen	Tugen age-set for a place name in Nandi for an area, dispensary, school
Maina-age-set	Kikuyu, Tugen and Kisii	Tugen and Kikuyu ageset for an area in Laikipia
Ruiru- Kiu and Kiambu (blackness)	Kikuyu and Kamba	Social interaction of combining two words from different dialects from two dialects
Gada Korma-	Boran/Oromo.	Age-set
Gumba, Sot, Sirikwa, Athi, Mukogodo	Kalenjin, Maasai, Kipsigis	Migrations and assimilation by Maa and Bantu dialects
Nimoru and Ngirisai	Turkana	Same lineage

Source: Manuscripts, narratives, and personal interviews

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