

# Lecture 23

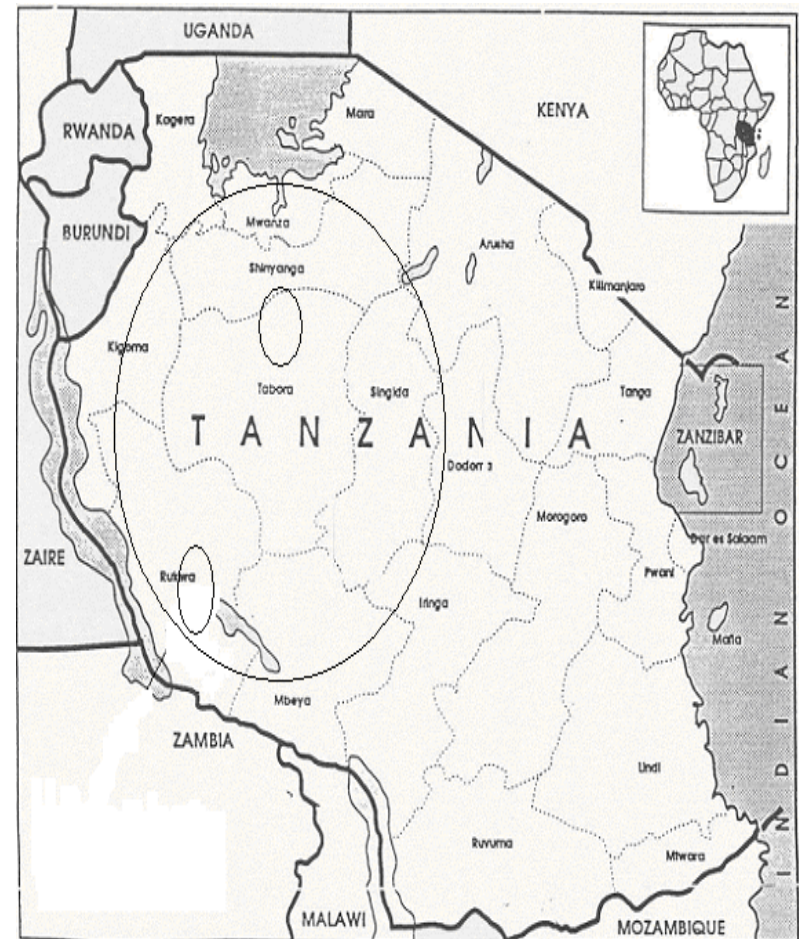
The Sungusungu “Vigilantes” of  
Tanzania

# Objectives

- Today we will continue to talk about the Sukuma and Pimbwe of Tanzania.
- The specific topic will be to evaluate the emergence and maintenance of a quasi-national justice institution started by the Sukuma.
- The main point is to compare the differences in **social capital** between Sukuma and the Pimbwe

# The Sungusungu of Tanzania

- Informal justice organizations (“vigilante”)
- Grass-roots emergence in 1982 to combat cattle thieves
- Tanzanian police sparse and corrupt
- Started by the ethnic **Sukuma** from northern Tanzania
- Quickly spread from northern villages to distant migrant populations



# Activities of Sungusungu

- Emerged to control cattle thieves

Now Sungusungu:

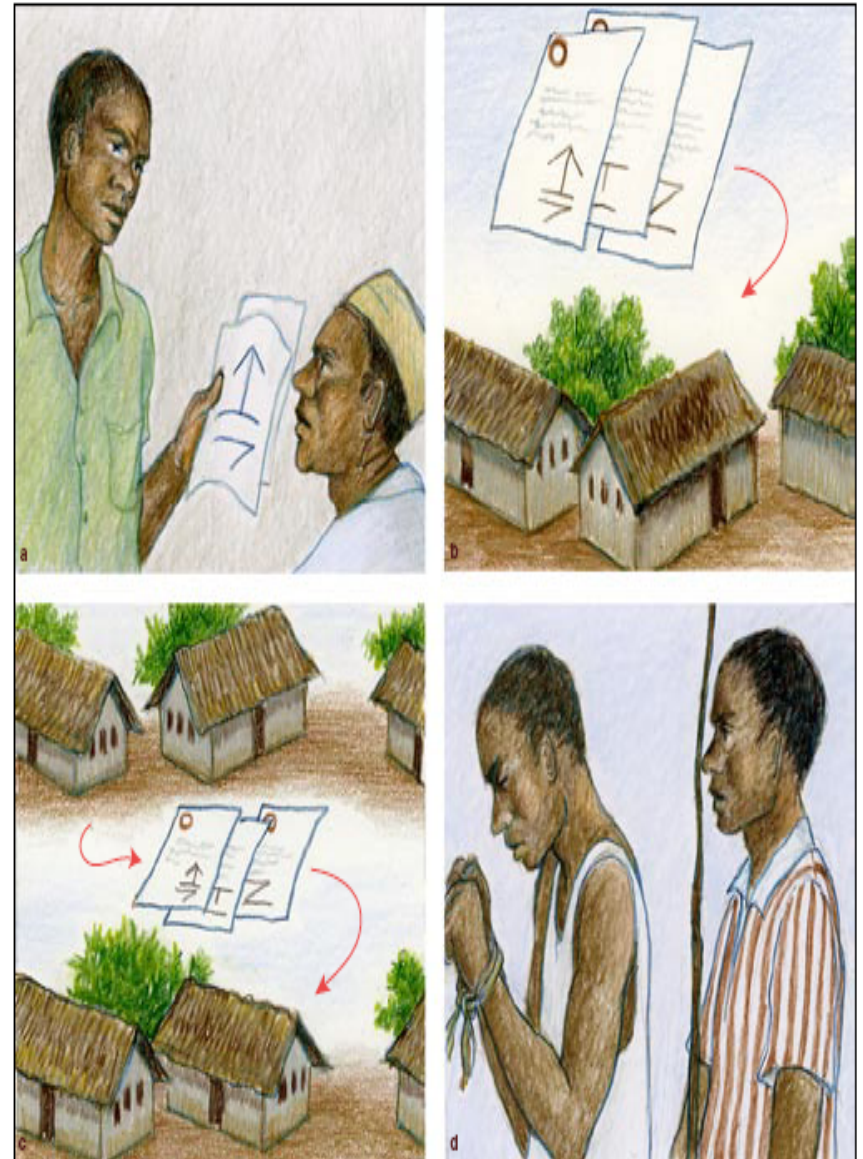
- Apprehend and punish all types of thieves
- Settle debt disputes
- Return runaway wives to husbands
- Ostracize or kill suspected witches
- Work with state to collect taxes, find lost people, and guard property
- Generally prosocial, not corrupt, and effective

**Table 2. Comparison of Sungusungu Cases from Mirumba and Bukurura**

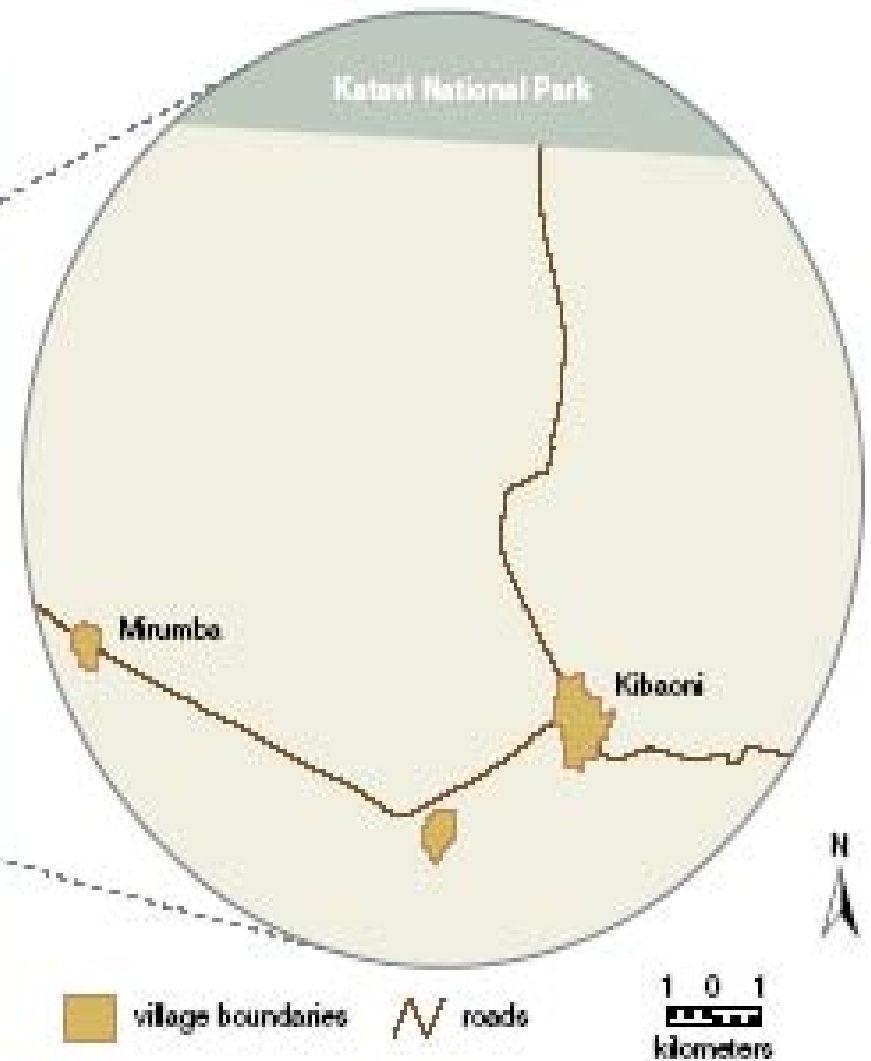
Case Types	Mirumba (N = 47)		Bukurura (1994) (N = 27)	
	N	%	N	%
Debt dispute	23	49.0	1	3.7
Theft	6	13.0	7	26.0
Adultery	3	6.4	1	3.7
Farming-herding dispute	4	8.5	0	
Slander	3	6.4	1	3.7
Bridewealth dispute	3	6.4	0	
Boundary dispute	1	2.1	0	
Lying	1	2.1	0	
Resisting arrest	1	2.1	0	
Domestic dispute	1	2.1	0	
Witchcraft accusation	1	2.1	0	
Child neglect			1	3.7
Organizational violations			4	14.8
Disorderly conduct			3	11.1
Assult			1	3.7
Other			6	22.2

# Sungusungu cooperate at large scales

- Cooperative ostracisms of entire villages (>10,000 men)
- Tight control of organizational corruption among different villages
- Inter-village cooperation to locate stolen cattle and ostracize deviants



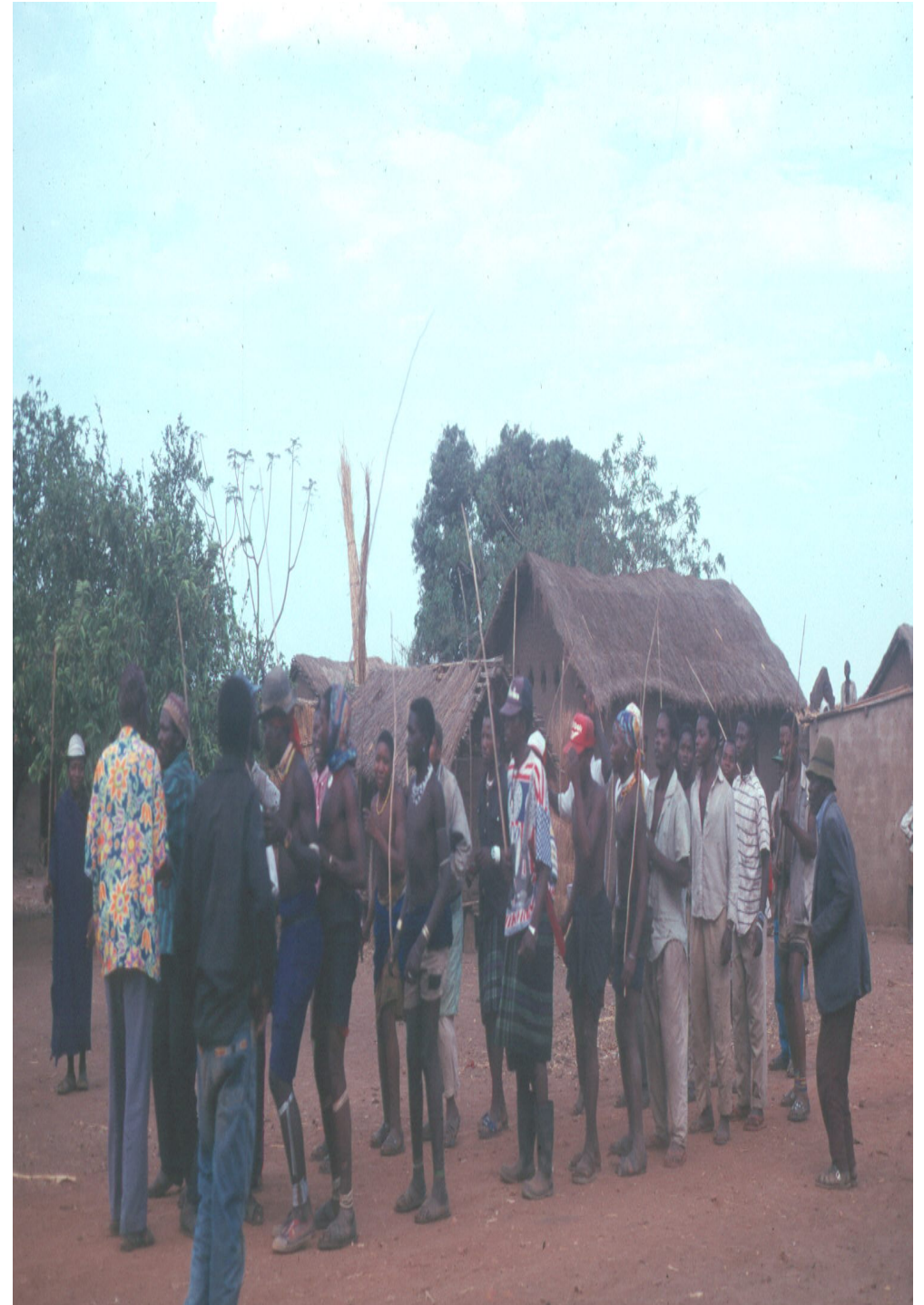
# Study area





# Methods

- I became a Sungusungu member (councilman)
- Participant observation
- Surveys (N=157)
- Analysis of *Sungusungu* records (cases, meetings)
- Experimental economic game (more about this next lecture)





# Study populations

- Pimbwe

- Maize horticulturalists
- Small household size
- Monogamous
- No cattle



- Sukuma

- Agropastoralists
- Large compounds
- Polygynous
- Cattle

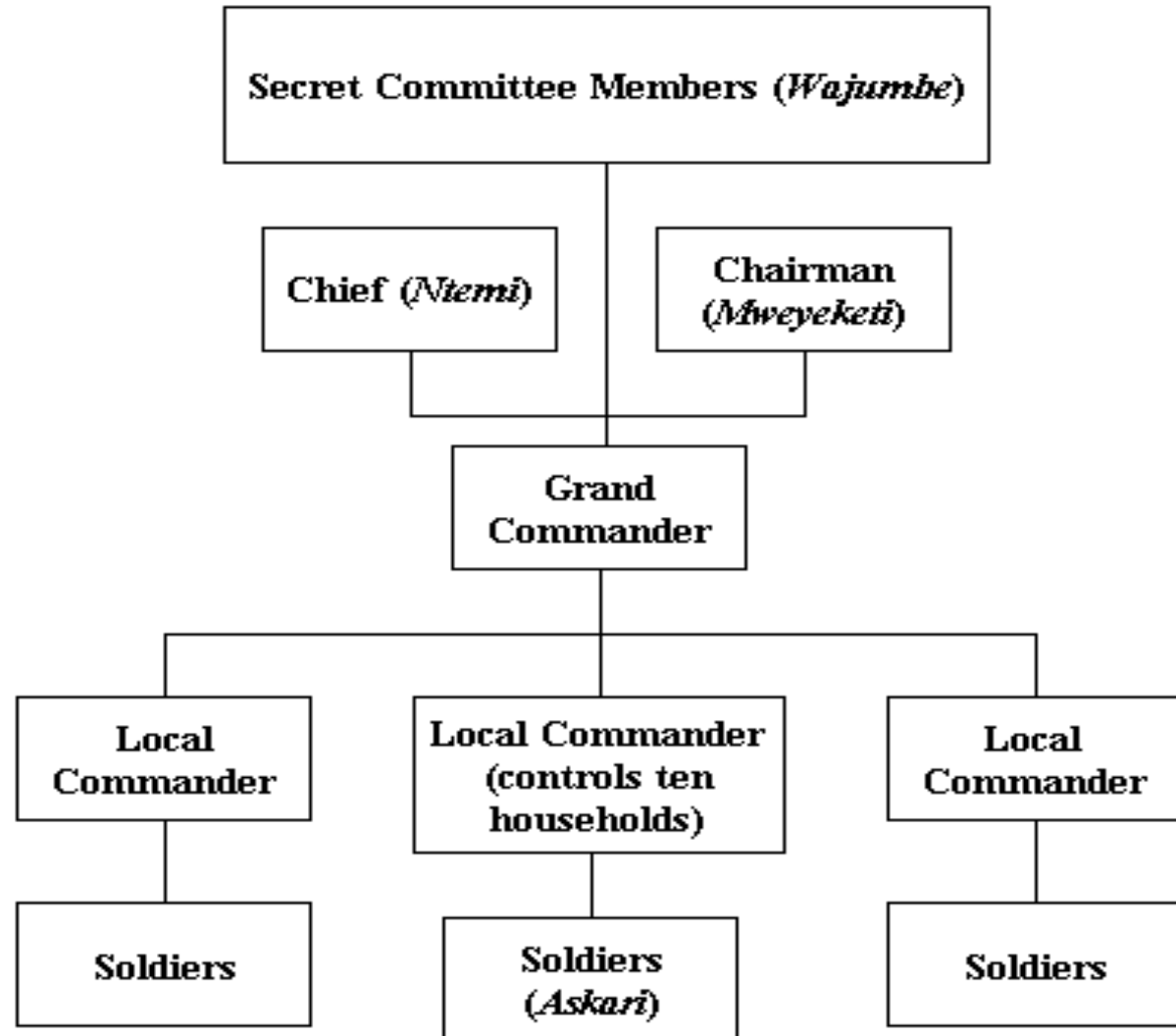


# Organization of *Sungusungu*

***Sungusungu Members (Wanachama)***  
(All Sukuma men and women, and some Pimbe and Fipa)  
Members monitor behavior of leaders and rank-and-file

- Multiple levels of organization:

- 1.) Village
- 2.) Ward
- 3.) Division
- 4.) District
- 5.) Region
- 6.) Nation











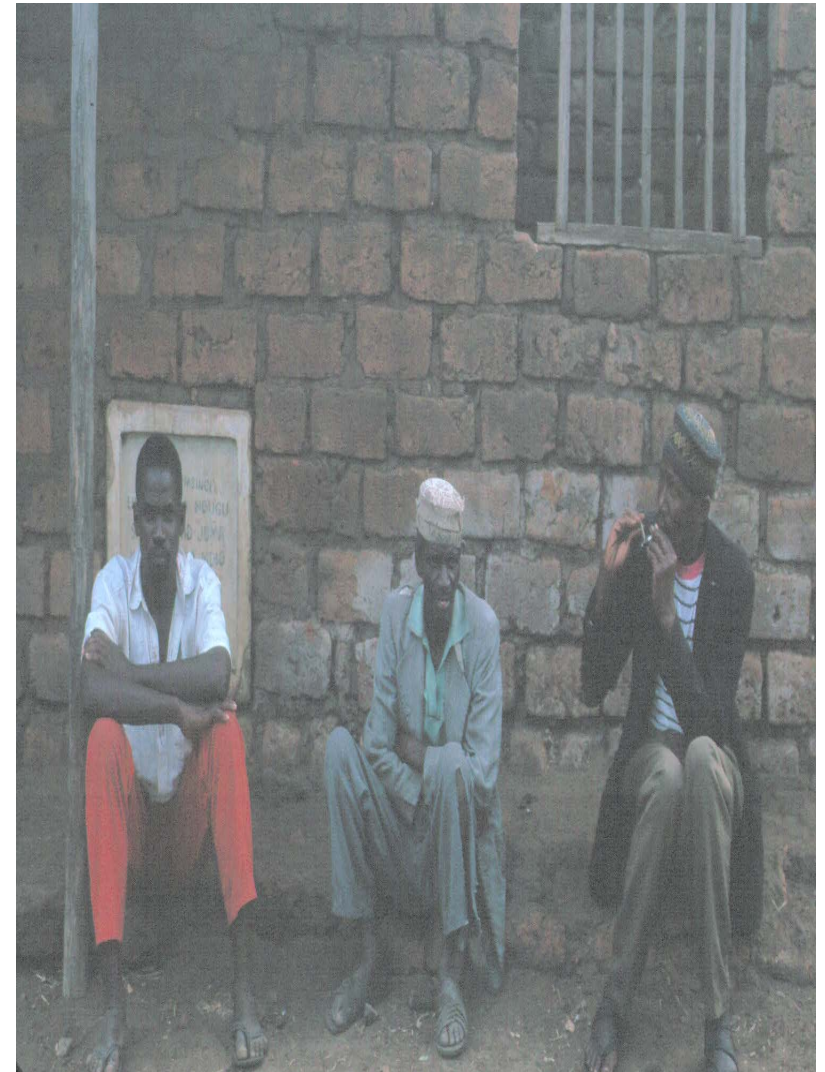






# Social Capital: Membership

- *All* ethnic Sukuma in Tanzania mandated to join SS and participate. Those failing to join were suspected to be thieves and punished.
- Non-Sukuma can join SS by paying a fee. Non-members cannot go to the Sungusungu for aid.



# Social Capital: Legitimate Punishment

- Violators of substantive rules (e.g., adultery, thievery) are fined in cattle.
- Violators of organizational rules are severely fined (e.g., slander, late to meetings, lying, disobeying leaders).
- Failing to pay fines results in **complete ostracism** from Sukuma society.
- Corruption controlled by democratic checks and balances, and very strict punishments
- System viewed as **legitimate**

# Path Dependence

- Natural Experiment: The state encouraged the spread of SS, and other ethnic groups also experienced the need for Sungusungu-type organizations.
- Outcomes: The Pimbwe and other ethnic groups attempted, yet failed, to establish their own effective Sungusungu organizations. Why?

# Path Dependence

	<b>Pimbwe</b>	<b>Sukuma</b>
<b>Historical Social Organization</b>	<b>SMALL-SCALE</b>  Weak central chiefdom, villages and clans	<b>LARGE-SCALE; WIDE IN SCOPE</b>  Multiple chiefdoms, strong village institutions, secret societies
<b>Ethnic loyalty and trust</b>	Weaker	Stronger

# Path Dependence: Ethnographic Examples

Pimbwe wedding: small-scale interaction with kin



Sukuma dance competition: thousands of individuals coming fifty miles to compete



# Globalization and Culture Change

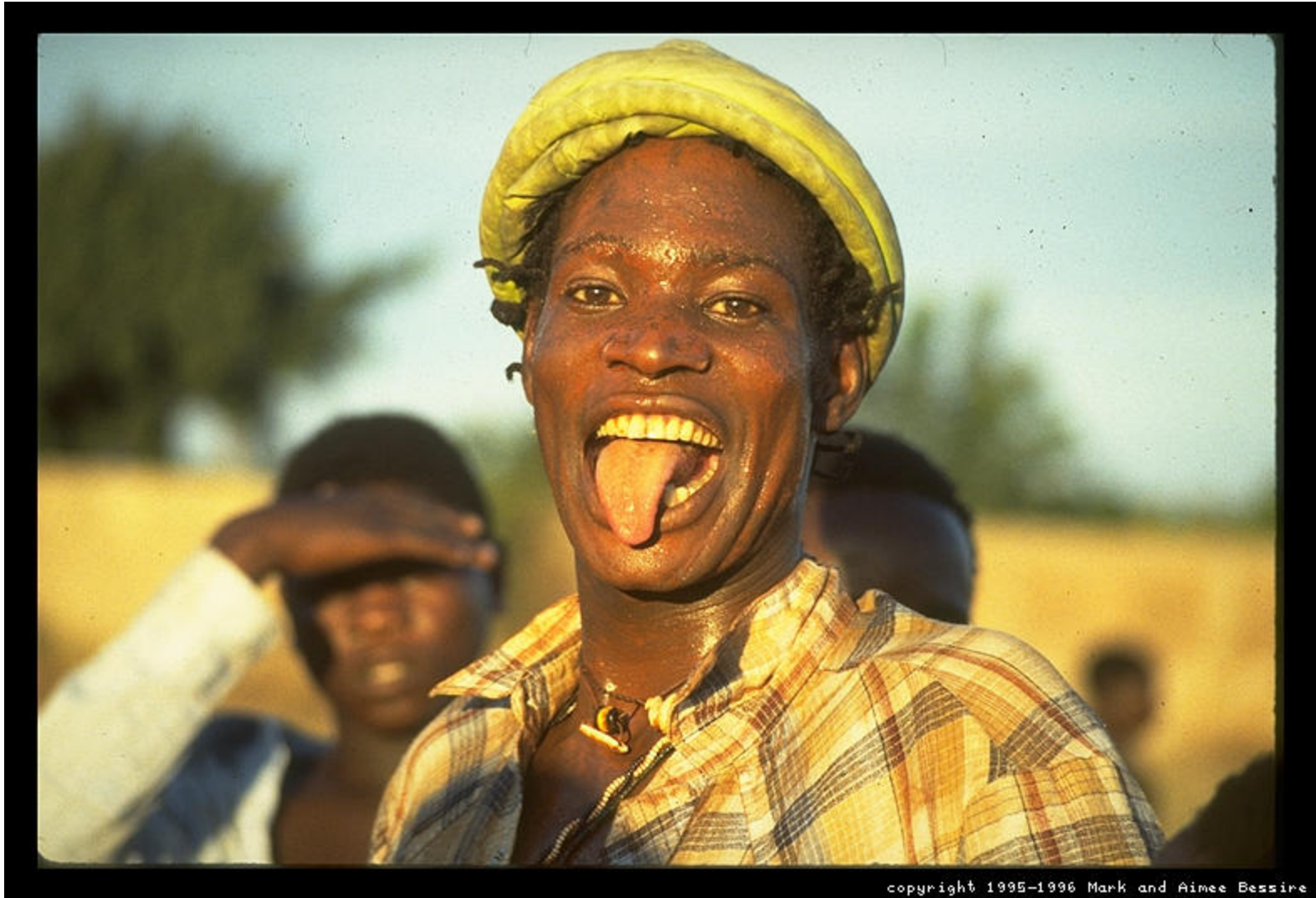
- Sukuma culture and social identity is changing due to modernization
- Sukuma in my study area are more “traditional” than the Sukuma living in the cities



# Modernization and Sungusungu

- There are reports that Sungusungu in city areas behave more like “mafia” organizations rather than public law and order organizations
- Reasons? Culture, social identity, different problems in the city





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# Study Limitations

- Observational
- Focus on a few villages
- Small sample sizes from surveys
- Anecdotal evidence from other villages
- I was accused of being a CIA spy, and had to leave my field area early



# Conclusions

- 1. Social capital:** Sukuma maintain Sungusungu with cultural rules that create a hierarchy, define membership, and create legitimate punishments
- 2. Path dependence:** The Sukuma—and not other ethnic groups—had the “cultural capital” for large-scale Sungusungu organizations
- 3. Culture Change:** Justice outcomes influenced by culture change; traditional communities operate more prosocial Sungusungu