

ETHNOCULTURAL IDENTITY AND INTER-ETHNIC RELATIONS IN WESTERN KENYA

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Introduction

Ethnocultural identity, uniting cultural and ethnic dimensions of ethnicity, can be viewed as one entity or as two separate factors, depending upon the levels at which it is examined. Such ambivalence is the basis for my contention that there is a very close and intimate relationship between ethnic and cultural identity and that the former is a product of the latter which attains particular independence to be governed by its own laws which, however, derive their power and force from the former. This implies that ethnic identity is the result of the cumulative effects of interactions between various elements of a cultural system within a particular natural environment. It means also that initially it is culture which is significant. This culture impinges upon the minds of its bearers who then realise that they are the same people since they have a common culture. Once this identity has crystallised in the minds of the people, elements of culture can change, but the products of the total culture remain so for a very long time. That is why it is possible to find two communities with identical culture but which identify themselves as belonging to two different ethnic groups.

The relation between ethnic and cultural identity and the extent to which ethnodemographic dynamics affect the inter-ethnic relations is well illustrated by the recent ethnic conflicts in Western Kenya. The latter region, which is made up of the three provinces of Nyanza, Western and Rift Valley was, between 1991 and 1993, an arena of conflicts between certain ethnic groups of the region.

It is estimated that, as a result of the conflict, 1500 persons lost their lives and about 300,000 were displaced, as well as KShs. 210 million worth of property destroyed (Kamau 1994). While the actual causes of the conflict were not clear, there were several speculations. On the one hand, some politicians saw the conflicts as part of the government's strategy to lend credence to the early prediction that multi-partyism would create conflicts among the peoples of Kenya. On the other hand, there were those who speculated that the conflicts were an effort by some politicians to create chaos so as to bring down the government. There was also the contention that the conflicts resulted from the inflammatory speeches with ethnocentric overtones made by a number of politicians prior to the times of the conflict.

Because of these speculations, in September 1992 the Kenya Parliament appointed a select committee to investigate the cause of the conflicts. The report (Kiliku 1993) emanating from the investigation was not satisfactory due to the tense political climate at the time.

Therefore, upto now, no exhaustive investigations have been carried out to determine the real causes of the conflicts. Thus, this article intends to contribute to this debate by soliciting the assistance from the nature of the relations existing between ethnic and cultural identity in Western Kenya, including the impact of ethnodemographic processes, in bringing about inter-ethnic tensions with potentialities for conflicts among the peoples of the region.

Methodology

Ideally, an effort to find out the nature of the relations

between cultural and ethnic identity in Western Kenya envisages undertaking of fieldwork in the region which would involve a variety of qualitative research techniques, including the interviewing of several people. However, such an approach could not be pursued in this study mainly due to the unavailability of the resources. In the circumstances, the only alternative was library research. The type of data generated by this method are basically statistical in which the national censuses for the years 1969, 1979 and 1989 were extensively used. Considering that questions about identity feature prominently in the census questionnaires, in the absence of actual fieldwork, there was no way of adequately assessing the ethnic identity of Western Kenya peoples other than relying on the answers given by the respondents on ethnic affiliations. The census materials also provided insights into the migration of the members of various ethnic groups from one area to another, thus leading to inter-ethnic contacts with implications on ethnic identity.

The literature on the general ethnography and ethnohistory of Western Kenya is another valuable source material on ethnocultural identity and inter-ethnic relations. Among the most important are the ethnographic monographs written and published during the colonial period, and the few historical works by Kenyan scholars. Equally important are newspaper reports and analytical articles on ethnic clashes in various periods of Western Kenya's history. All these provided information on both cultural history and the history of inter-ethnic relations in Western Kenya.

The Findings

Ethnic composition of Western Kenya

There are eleven independent ethnic groups inhabiting Western Kenya. Each of these speaks a language which is part of either Bantu or Nilotic groups of

languages and the people who speak them are grouped into clusters, although members of each cluster speak languages which are not mutually intelligible. The people who speak Bantu languages are the Abaluyia, Abagusii, Abakuria and the Abasuba. The Nilotic speakers are the Luo, Kalenjin, Maasai, Samburu, Il Chamus, Turkana and Iteso. Except for the Luo who are numerically predominant in Nyanza Province, and the Iteso in the newly created Teso District of Western Province, all the remaining Nilotic speaking peoples (henceforth the Nilotes) are mainly found in the Rift Valley Province. Among the Bantu, the Abaluyia live mainly in the northern section of the Nyanza Gulf, while the Abakuria, Agikuyu, a Bantu people whose ethnic territory is Central Kenya, is predominant in Nakuru and Laikipia districts of Rift Valley Province (Map 1).

"Ethnic territory"

All the peoples mentioned above are distributed all over Western Kenya, but I have decided to use the concept of "ethnic territory" to distinguish the migrant from the native population. An ethnic territory, for the purpose of this paper, means an area compactly and uninterruptedly occupied by one ethnic group which regards it as its own territory and from where its members live when they migrate to other parts of the country or elsewhere (Odak 1971). But since all peoples of Kenya have historically migrated from somewhere and settled in the territories that previously belonged to other people, but which they now claim to be their own, it is difficult to strictly identify any of the peoples with the territory it occupies at present as its own. In this article the numerical criterion of an ethnic group in an area has been used to determine whether or not that particular area it occupies is its own 'ethnic territory'.

Administratively, Kenya is divided (hierarchically) into provinces, districts, divisions, locations, and sub-locations. These administrative units are loosely

based on ethnicity, particularly at the district level. But there are provinces where more than one district forms the 'ethnic territory' of one people; and there are divisions and even locations which form 'ethnic territories' of smaller groups.

But in each of the three provinces of Western Kenya, at least one ethnic group is numerically predominant.

Thus, the Abaluyia are dominant in Western Province, the Luo predominate Nyanza Province while the Kalenjin constitute the majority group in the Rift Valley Province.

Such large ethnic groups which predominate in a province are normally distributed in more than one district within the respective provinces. This is shown in Table 1.

Province	Ethnic Group	Districts forming their ethnic territory
Western	Abaluyia	Kakamega, Bungoma, Busia, Vihiga and Lugari.
Nyanza	Luo	Siaya, Kisumu, Migori, Homa Bay and Rachwonyo.
Rift Valley	Kalenjin	Baringo, Keiyo, Marakwet, Kericho, Bomet Nandi, West Pokot, Uasin Gishu and Koibatek.

Table 1: District "ethnic territories" of particular ethnic groups.

However, the same provinces have districts which are the territories of particular groups. This is summarized in Table 2.

Province	Ethnic Group	Districts forming their ethnic territory
Western	Iteso	Teso District
Nyanza	Abagusii	Kisii, Nyamira and Gucha Districts
	Abakuria	Kuria District
	Abasuba	Suba District
Rift Valley	Turkana	Turkana District
	Maasai	Narok, Kajiado and Transmara Districts
	Samburu	Samburu District
	Agikuyu	Laikipia and Nakuru Districts
	Il Chamus	Baringo District

Table 2: Districts which form ethnic territories.



Map 1. Ethnolinguistic groups in Western Kenya



Ethnostatistics: The numerical factor

The number of people speaking Bantu, Nilotic and Cushitic languages in Western Kenya is shown in Table 3.

Lingusitic Sub- Family	1979	Percentage of Total Population of Western Kenya-	1989	Percentage of Total Population of Western Kenya
Bantu	3,611,814	48.6	5,330,579	48.6
Nilotes	3,7995,793	51.1	5,604,851	51.1
Cushites	19,613	0.3	23,907	0.32

Table 3: Numerical weight of Bantu, Nilotes and cushites in Western Kenya

From Table 3, it is apparent that there is no great difference in numbers between speakers of the Bantu and Nilotic languages. The Cushites, who come from the North-Eastern Province and whose territory is not found in Western Kenya, are mainly migrants.

Tables 4, 5 and 6 (see also Fig. 2) are compiled to facilitate comparison in the numerical strengths of the major ethnic groups in Western Kenya since these are the groups directly involved in the recent ethnic conflicts. Table 7, which is derived from Tables 4, 5 and 6, shows the districts where there are high concentrations of migrant peoples in Western Kenya. From this table, it is noticeable that some migrants predominate numerically over the local people. In such cases, if the migrants make up more than 50% of the total population of the district, then it becomes the 'ethnic territory' of the migrant ethnic group. The local people, accordingly, become the minority.

There are also cases where certain migrant ethnic groups form more than 5% of the total population of

an administrative division, usually a district. Those migrants can either be scattered all over the district or they may be concentrated (i.e., clustered) in one place in compact residences. In the latter situation, they are likely to be a potential cause of ethnic tension, particularly if the population density of the area they occupy is relatively high.

Table 7 further shows that Trans Nzoia, Nakuru, and Laikipia Districts have, by reason of number, become the ethnic territories of the Abaluyia (Trans Nzoia) and the Agikuyu (Nakuru and Laikipia) because these migrant groups form more than 50% of the population of these three districts. Thus, these groups are eliminated as potential causes of ethnic conflict. But there are still the minority Kalenjin and Maasai, each of whose total number in the districts exceeds 5%. They then become the potential source of conflicts in these areas. This is particularly the case if the new minority group is clustered in one particular area of the district. This is exactly the case for the Kalenjin of Trans Nzoia who are largely confined to Cheranganyi

Division, while in Laikipia the Maasai are concentrated in their traditional ethnic territory in Dol Dol Division. In Nakuru District the Kalenjin are largely concentrated around Molo and Londiani areas, where there is a large number of Gikuyu population.

Besides these originally "indigenous" peoples (i.e., the Kalenjin and Maasai), there are also large numbers of migrants in the former's current ethnic territories. In Uasin Gishu, a Kalenjin territory, there are a large number of the Agikuyu at Burnt Forest while in Kajiado, a Maasai territory, there were also concentrations of Gikuyu population in the Enoosupukia Forest area and in the Ngong region.

Density of population

By 1979, the southern parts of Western Province, which are inhabited by the Abaluyia, had a very high density of population which ranged between 300 and

1000 persons/km². The other section of Western Kenya with comparable population density are the Gusii Highlands of Kisii District in Nyanza Province, which are inhabited by the Abagusii. Elsewhere in Kenya comparable population density is in Central Province, the ethnic territory of the Agikuyu.

Both around the shores of the Winam Gulf of Lake Victoria and the areas along the Kenya/Uganda border, which are occupied by the Luo, as well as the northern parts of Western Province, the Luyia territory, have a density ranging between 200 and 300 persons/km². In general, the Rift Valley Province, predominantly inhabited by the Kalenjin, Maasai, Turkana, Samburu, and the Il Chamus, has the lowest density in the region. According to the 1979 census, it had an average of between 10 and 300 persons/km².

Table 4: The Abaluyia and Luo in Western Kenya: Numerical Comparison

ADMIN. DIVISION	Abaluya		% of population	Luo		% of population
	1979	1989		1979	1989	
WESTERN PROVINCE	1,562,532	2,192,244	86.16	49,326	65,320	2.57
Busia District	177,330	246,612	61.40	20,174	23,533	5.86
Kakamega District	975,225	1,383,366	94.52	23,364	33,786	2.31
Bungoma District	409,977	246,616	61.40	5,788	8,001	1.18
RIFT VALLEY PROVINCE	296,326	484,547	9.73	122,187	193,862	3.89
Baringo District	2,036	5,073	1.46	2,036	4,894	1.41

Keiyo-Marakwet District	2,321	5,243	2.42	649	1,603	0.74
Kericho District	11,025	16,353	1.82	39,967	53,735	5.96
Kajiado District	2,280	5,416	2.09	3,174	8,084	3.3
Laikipia District	1,816	2,443	1.16	1,498	2,224	1.04
Narok District	1,831	3,957	0.99	2,812	6,201	1.56
Samburu District	3,041	5,541	0.51	298	491	0.45
Trans Nzoia District	128,025	204,826	52.05*	7,279	9,964	2.53
Turkana District	715	2,743	1.49	503	1,123	0.63
Uasin Gishu District	47,862	82,245	18.46**	11,387	22,363	5.02
West Pokot District	5,312	11,383	5.05**	1,379	3,016	1.34
Nandi District	56,657	75,960	17.52**	14,488	16,851	3.89
Nakuru District	36,142	63,020	7.42	36,217	61,660	7.26**
NYANZA PROVINCE	60,528	90,926	2.59	1,546,936	2,030,278	
Siaya District	13,769	19,287	3.02	458,946	612,416	95.77
Kisumu District	25,302	38,218	5.75**	433,634	592,628	89.24
South Nyanza District	18,570	30,406	2.85	646,486	815,831	74.49
Kisii District	887	3,051	7.870	9,398	0.83	

*Acquired ethnic territory due to the number of the Abaluyia

** Districts where conflicts are likely to occur because of number and concentration of migrant population in one place

(Source: Compiled from Kenya Population Census Reports for 1979 and 1989)

Table 5: The Agikuyu and Maasai in Western Kenya: Numerical Comparisons

ADMINISTRATIVE AREA	AGIKUYU			MAASAI		
	1979	1989	% of Population	1979	1989	% of Population
WESTERN PROVINCE	18,865	22,001	0.81	2,132	3,242	0.13
Busia District	2,074	2,908	0.72	751	927	0.23
Kakamega District	9,121	13,137	0.83	929	1,220	0.03
Bungoma District	7,670	7,556	1.11	444	1,093	0.16
RIFT VALLEY PROVINCE	601,072	762,341	9.32**	24,126	365,007	7.33
Baringo District	15,408	25,049	7.20*	249	324	0.09
Elgeyo - Marakwet District	4,152	6,450	2.98	45	195	0.09
Kericho District	26,871	32,457	3.60	506	393	0.04
Kajiado District	32,630	61,446	23.76**	93,560	146,268	56.55
Laikipia District	86,606	146,607	67.75*	10,116	11,821	5.46**
Narok District	17,387	45,089	11.32**	118,091	188,308	47.28
Samburu District	1,925	3,073	2.82	90	480	0.44
Trans Nzora District	26,630	37,712	9.58**	2,185	4,460	1.13
Turkana District	548	1,322	0.72	18	80	0.04
Uasin Gishu District	58,131	75,315	16.90*	1,349	1,359	0.31
West Pokot District	4,144	6,127	2.72	111	162	0.07
Nandi District	7,785	7,244	1.67	229	250	0.06
Nakuru District	317,855	506,499	59.65*	4,540	6,273	0.74

NYANZA PROVINCE	6,641	8,658	0.25	442	405	0.01
Siaya District	242	310	0.05	25	39	0.01
Kisumu District	3,579	5,237	0.79	167	146	0.02
South Nyanza District	1,184	1,526	0.14	129	108	0.01
Kisii District		1,585	0.14		122	0.01

Key * Acquired ethnic territory by virtue of numerical strength

** Districts where conflicts are more likely to occur owing to the high concentration of migrant populations in one place.

(Source: Compiled from Kenya Population Census, Reports for 1979 and 1989)

Table 6: Abagusii and Kalenjin in Western Kenya: Numerical comparison.

ADMINISTRATIVE AREA	ABAGUSII			KALENJIN		
	1979	1989	% of Population	1979	1989	% of Population
WESTERN PROVINCE	2,967	5,381	0.21	62,11	82,373	3.24
Busia District	497	922	0.23	1,493	2,024	0.50
Kakamega District	1,530	2,921	0.2	10,489	13,992	0.96
Bungoma District	940	1,538	0.20	50,132	66,357	9.77**
RIFT VALLEY	54,948	123,692	2.48	1,567,091	2,309,577	46.36
Baringo District	617	2,057	0.59	172,826	291,567	83.79
Keiyo - Marakwet District	765	1,863	0.70	139,058	147,703	91.32

MILA (N.S.) Vol. 2

Kericho District	22,833	41,590	4.62	523,482	744,704	82.66
Kajiado District	765	1,803	0.70	943	15,350	0.52
Laikipia District	672	1,213	0.56	11,795	15,690	7.25**
Narok District	4,525	20,118	5.05**	59,921	121,099	30.41**
Samburu District	169	180	0.17	271	1,630	1.50
Trans Nzoia District	5,449	10,918	2.77	58,644	83,803	21.29*
Turkana District	77	261	0.14	604	933	0.51
Uasin Gishu District	2,493	6,031	1.35	165,294	234,294	52.63
West Pokot District	603	1,206	0.53	140,947	191,966	85.15
Nandi District	3,937	6,664	1.54	211,655	319,321	73.64
Nakuru District	12,319	29,688	3.50	81,651	127,163	14.98*
NYANZA PROVINCE	862,174	1,137,125	32.42	4,752	6,545	0.19
Siaya District	259	786	0.12	91	536	0.08
Kisumu District	5,453	7,253	1.09	3,556	4,376	0.06
South Nyanza District	6,673	12,116	1.14	381	633	0.06
Kisii District	851,789	1,116,970	98.23	724	1,000	0.09

Key: * Districts where conflicts are likely to occur by virtue of the number of the migrants

** Formerly was the ethnic territory of the Kalenjin, but now belongs to another ethnic group. Conflicts likely to occur when the Kalenjin try to demand their ethnic territory.

Source: Compiled from Kenya Population Census, Reports for 1979 and 1989.

Table 7: Percentage concentration of migrant ethnic groups in Western Kenya by District

DISTRICT	MIGRANT ETHNIC GROUP	PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL POPULATION OF THE DISTRICT
NAROK (M)	Kalenjin	30.41
	Abagusii	5.05
	Agikuyu	11.32
TRANS NZOIA(L)	Kalenjin	21.19
	Agikuyu	9.58
KAJIADO(M)	Agikuyu	23.76
LAIKIPIA(A)	Kalenjin	7.25
	Maasai	5.26
UASIN GISHU(Ka)	Agikuyu	16.90
	Abaluyia	5.02
	Luo	14.02
NAKURU(K)	Kalenjin	14.98
	Abaluyia	7.26
KISUMU(Lo)	Abaluyia	5.75
BUSIA	Luo	5.86

Key: The letters against the names of each district indicate the names of the predominant groups for whom the district is the 'ethnic territory'

M = Maasai

L = Abaluyia

K = Agikuyu

Lo = Luo

Ka = Kalenjin

Population density and ethnic migrations

The differential population density has an impact on certain demographic processes, notably the migration of peoples. All the Western Kenyan peoples have, in one way or another, migrated from somewhere else. Originally, this region was inhabited by some hunting and gathering communities. The Southern Cushites came later to some parts of Kenya and finally came the Arabs, Waswahili and Europeans. The latter were later to trigger further migrations, with far reaching implications for contemporary inter-ethnic relations.

In an attempt to consolidate their own identities, the migrating peoples prefer to move to the territory occupied by people belonging to the same group as themselves first. If that is not possible, then they go and live among alien peoples with a culture similar to their own. The other alternative is to migrate to areas closer to their original territories. This pattern of preference applies even to those migrants purchasing land in the former European settlement areas.

Accordingly, because of the demographic pressures in the Luo districts in the north of Nyanza Province, the Luo migrants first settled in the Luolands in the south where the population density was relatively low. The same happened with the Abaluyia who migrated from the south of Western Province, one of the most densely populated sections in Western Kenya. The Abaluyia from these zones migrated to the north of their province where the population pressure was lower. This also accounts for the Luyia settlements in Lugari and the Luo settlements in Muhoroni.

This same pattern of migrations continues as long as the pressure in the areas to which the migrants go has not so risen as to discourage further immigration. At that point the alternatives are found in sparsely populated areas with peoples having more or less similar

cultures, or areas closer to the original territories of the migrants. That is why the Avalogoli migrated to Migori District of South Nyanza, the ethnic territory of the Luo and some Abaluyia migrated to Nandi District, a Kalenjin area near to their (Abaluyia's) ethnic territory. For their part, the Abagusii moved to adjacent Kericho and Narok Districts, which are Kalenjin and Masai ethnic territories, respectively. These Rift Valley areas border with Kakamega and Vihiga Districts of Western Province and the Kisumu and Kisii Districts of Nyanza Province. It also explains the mass migrations of the Abaluyia to Trans Nzoia, a Rift Valley district neighbouring Bungoma, a district of Western Province which is numerically predominated by the Abaluyia.

Cultural and ethnic identity

Culture- economic types

Since economic organization is closely related to the direction of a society's cultural focus, there are in Western Kenya two traditional systems of economic arrangements around which the cultures of Western Kenyan peoples revolved. These are agriculture and the keeping of livestock. Traditionally, therefore, Western Kenyan peoples were either agriculturalists or pastoralists. These roughly corresponded with the languages the people spoke. While the Bantu were cultivators or agriculturalists, the Nilotes were generally pastoralists. But this clear-cut division gradually changed as the two sides interacted. The Luo and Iteso, the former Nilotic pastoralists, were the first to settle for cultivation mixed with the practice of animal husbandry. Then followed the Nilotes who bordered with the agricultural Bantu speaking communities, such as the Kipsigis and the Nandi. Finally, at present nearly all of the former pastoralists are trying to become cultivators, although the extent to which this is successful varies. Although agriculture and

animal husbandry are the types of economic management that are theoretically within the same level of socio-economic development, the current sedentarisation of the pastoralists for agriculture seem to point towards the superiority of agriculture when viewed from the standpoint of the adaptive success. The end result of such processes is that some of the former pastoralists are now full-fledged mixed farmers. But the rest (e.g., the Turkana, Samburu, part of the Masaai and the Il Chamus) have only recently began focusing attention on the production of crops. In general, therefore, the tendency is that all the formerly pastoral or nomadic pastoral peoples of Western Kenya are increasingly moving towards becoming full-fledged mixed farmers, so that in the near future we shall be talking of the Nilotes as mixed farmers rather than as pastoralists.

The Bantu have not remained unaffected by the interactions with the Nilotes either. Those of the former who share common borders with the formerly pastoral Nilotes have developed the techniques of stock keeping so much that the extent to which they are stock keepers is more or less equal to the degree to which they are cultivators. Some of them, like the Abakuria, have so much transformed their economy that their mode of life is nearly undistinguishable from their neighbours, basically pastoral people, the Masaai, but for their Bantu language (Abuso 1980). Abadiliji, a Luyia community, have been so influenced by the neighbouring Kalenjin in Nandi that they have even borrowed the Kalenjin social institutions (Sangree 1966). In general, the Abaluyia and Abagusii (Bantu peoples), have assimilated as much about animal husbandry as have the Nilotic Luo with regard to agriculture. This is also true of Abasuba (Ayot 1979).

The extent to which livestock is used in the different aspects of Bantu social life (e.g., in marriage transactions, in religious rituals, in oral traditions, in funeral ceremonies, etc.) reinforces the view that the former

Bantu agriculturalists have been strongly influenced by the Nilotes.

Implications and inter-ethnic relations

The establishment of British colonial rule altered the ethnic composition of what is now Rift Valley Province. Between 1899 and 1915, through a series of land regulations, much of the land in the Rift Valley was expropriated from the Kalenjin, Masaai, and other former indigenous populace there. Thus, the pastoral communities that had previously enjoyed corporate customary rights over the land were excluded from the areas they used to occupy, thereby dislocating their traditional communalism in land ownership and disinheriting them from the best lands in the region. According to Kanogo (1987), "the colonial government introduced coercive measures to create a large, cheap African labour force to service the white settler farms" (p. 4). The displaced pastoralist populations, lacking in farming experience, proved unsuitable for providing cheap agricultural labour to settlers. The colonial administration, therefore, resorted to recruiting labour from those parts of Kenya whose populations were traditionally agriculturalists. Thus, they got labourers from Nyanza, Western and Central Provinces. Consequently, thousands of the Agikuyu, Abagusii, Abaluyia and Luo were brought to the Rift Valley.

Besides, some of those who had finished their labour contracts on the farms were resettled in parts of the Rift Valley by the colonial authorities, particularly in those areas from which the pastoralists had been driven. For example, during 1939, the colonial government settled 4000 Agikuyu at Olenguruone (Kanogo 1987), which had originally been part of traditional Masaailand.

In 1961, Africans were allowed to buy farms in the Rift Valley. For those European settlers who wished

to sell their land when the country became independent, a resettlement scheme had been worked out by the British. The newly independent Kenyan government was supposed to buy the land from such settlers. Thus, Kenyans who had previously been squatter labourers would be able to buy land, either individually or through collective schemes such as cooperatives, societies or companies. Unlike the pastoral groups (such as Masaai, Turkana, Samburu, and Kalenjin), among the Agikuyu, Abaluyia, and Abagusii, as well as among the Luo, farming was an established traditional practice. Thus, many Agikuyu and other formerly agricultural communities took advantage of buying the land. In this way, during the 1960s and 1970s large numbers of the Agikuyu and other groups bought land in the Rift Valley and moved from their overcrowded ethnic territories.

Others who could not buy land in the former European farms had the option to do so in the reserves, after the formerly communal lands were registered for individual ownership of those who had inherited it from their fathers and grandfathers. It was now possible to sell land without reference to lineages and clans. So the agricultural communities began buying land in the ethnic territories of the pastoral peoples.

It is, thus, clear that because agricultural communities had been settled for a long time before the pastoralists, the population density in their ethnic territories started to rise much earlier. This was a consequence of their skills in intensive farming long before the pastoral groups thought about settling down for cultivation. That is why they were the first to take advantage of the opportunities that had suddenly become available after independence. This explains how a large number of agricultural communities of Western Kenya

and Central Province found themselves not only in the lands left by the Europeans in the Rift Valley, but even within the traditional ancestral lands of the pastoralists which had not been expropriated by the colonists. In their newly acquired lands the migrants not only made the maximum use of their experience in agriculture but also started experimenting with new agricultural techniques that produced higher yields. This is besides their venture in the local trade which they came to control. And, as a result, they became much more prosperous than the local people.

By the time the pastoralists realized the value of the land for agriculture, it was already too late; the cost of land was now very high. Some of them could only remember with bitterness how they had sold their own lands to the migrants at negligible prices, and it was now difficult to acquire as much land as they wanted.

This is the scenario under which tension between the "indigenes" * and immigrants began to rise. The manifestations of the tension included:

- a Demand by those who had sold land to the migrants for additional payments on top of what had been paid previously under the claim that the indigenes had been ripped off. Usually this involved comparing the original price and the current one, without considering inflation and the consequences thereof.

* For lack of a better term, I use the word "indigene" or "indigenous" to distinguish the early residents from late-comers who settled during and after the colonial period.

- b. The indigenes' demand for repossession of the lands in situations where transaction had been done through elders with no title deeds being issued. In this case, claims were made the arrangements had merely been for lease and not sale.
- c. Emergence of several land cases in which issues of pre-colonial ancestral land ownership were being raised. *
- d. Disputes arising over cultural differences between the migrant ethnic group and the indigenes based on the fear that the large number of immigrants that had settled amongst the indigenes would have their culture thriving at the expense of the indigenous peoples' cultures.
- e. Disparity in the socio-economic status between the migrants and the native populations owing to the former's agricultural expertise, control of trade, access to education for their children, and their general prosperity as compared to the latter's.**
- f. The fear that the migrants would use their economic prosperity to control politics and even seek seats in parliament.

* See the "Report of Kenyan Constitutional Conference 1962", paragraph 9, where it is specifically mentioned that the Maasai could not retain rights over their former land when the Europeans leave. Because of this, those non-Maasai, non-Kalenjin and non-Samburu who subsequently acquired lands in parts of the Rift Valley after 1963 did so as everybody else who was settling in places other than ancestral birth places. Even the Maasai, Kalenjin, and Turkana who acquired land after 1963 and who settled in places formerly occupied by the white settlers also bought land like other ethnic groups.

Since, in normal cases, the indigenous populations are the majority in most of the constituencies which are thus ethnically mixed, they have the ability to elect members of their own ethnic groups into parliament. So when they elect their parliamentary representative, they expect the latter to fight for them against the migrants. It then turns out that political incitements by the members of parliament thus elected are more a product of the prevailing inter-ethnic tensions within the localities rather than a cause of them.

Accordingly, the political representatives of the Kalenjin, Maasai and others whose lands had been expropriated by the white colonists during the early periods of colonization are the ones who feel that other ethnic groups currently living in the Rift Valley Province should return to their former ethnic territories from where they had come and leave the Rift Valley to those who 'owned' it before the advent of colonization. According to these leaders, the migrants in the Rift Valley are not supposed to express political opinions different from those supported by the former indigenes within the province (*Africa Watch*, 1993, p. 12).

**On the role of unevenness in socio-economic development as a factor affecting relations between peoples, see R.N. Ismagilova (1978) *Ethnic Problems in Tropical Africa: Can they be solved?* pp. 84-96 Moscow: Progress Publishers.

Ethnic Conflicts

The early conflicts

Conflicts between the peoples of Kenya are not a new thing. They have been going on throughout the history of inter-ethnic relations and they are caused by many factors. Usually, they occur in areas where two ethnic groups share a common border. Raids based on the differences in traditional ideologies about cattle (Odak 1971), conflicts over political hegemony (e.g. between the Wanga kingdom and the Ugenya Luo), or cultural differences, etc., are cases that can be cited. Specifically, they have been occurring between the Maasai and Abakuria, between the Abagusii and the Kalenjin or within Abakuria themselves among the composing clans. For instance, in 1962 during the re-drawing of the administrative boundaries there occurred several conflicts between Abaluyia and the Luo along the common border (Odak 1971). In 1984 there was a fierce clash between Abaluyia and the Kalenjin at Kapkangani in Nandi District within a Kalenjin territory which has a high concentration of Luyia migrants (*Weekly Review*, March 20, 1992). This is one of the areas where many members of the Nandi had sold parts of their inherited land to the Abaluyia within an area which had not been taken by the colonialists.

Researchers of the early ethnography and ethnohistory of Africa revealed that the relationship between various ethnic groups, particularly in the ethnic boundaries, involved a multiplicity of factors among which conflicts were only one of them. Unfortunately, some of these researchers seem to have overestimated the role of inter-ethnic conflicts in comparison to other peaceful social and economic factors. This they did by insisting that the precolonial period was replete with conflicts among African peoples and that colonialism rescued Africans from destructive wars (Yordansky 1970). Indeed, the end of the 19th cen-

tury when the colonialists were moving into Kenya was a period of Maasai civil wars. This was, however, a temporary phenomenon which did not characterise the whole pre-colonial era.

Besides the said civil wars, there were cases of conflicts, some of which ended in military confrontations between some peoples of Western Kenya. This particularly occurred between the Bantu and Nilotic speaking peoples.

Most of such conflicts started as ideological differences and then later involved political and socio-economic factors. Many of those which occurred during and after the colonial era have been reported in the Kenyan press. Thus, the idea of ngorokoism or cattle rustling among the pastoralists of Western Kenya is one type of such conflicts based on ideological factors. Several conflicts occurred between Abaluyia (who migrated into the Rift Valley within the ethnic territory of the Kalenjin, and the Nandi (*Daily Nation*, August 13, 1990) and between the Abaluyia and the Luo in the same year (*East African Standard*, August 12, 1990). Before then there were several conflicts between the Abaluyia and Luo in 1962, as well as between the Avalogoli and the Kalenjin Terik in the Nyang'ori area.

Recent conflicts

These conflicts which drew much attention and which were highly publicized occurred between 1991 and 1993. They involved many districts and ethnic groups. Table 8 includes only the main incidents of such conflicts, the districts and the peoples involved. Firstly, from the table it is evident that there were conflicts in Nandi, Kericho, Bungoma (especially around Mt. Elgon which is a Kalenjin territory), Trans Nzoia, Nakuru, Uasin Gishu, Kericho and Narok. They all occurred within the territories of the Kalenjin or Maasai and, only to a lesser extent in Trans Nzoia and Nakuru, the territories of the Abaluyia and Agikuyu,

Maasai and, only to a lesser extent in Trans Nzoia and Nakuru, the territories of the Abaluyia and Agikuyu, respectively. Secondly, the conflicts occurred mainly between the former pastoralists who had then realised the significance of land for crop production and the traditionally established agricultural communities. It is thus easy to infer from the table that with only a few exceptions (e.g., at Olenguruone and Burnt Forest) all the conflicts occurred within the Kalenjin and Maasai territories near the border between the territories of the agricultural and former pastoral communities where, apparently, it is easy for the former to acquire the land just on crossing the border without having to cover long distances.

Density of migrant population

The conflicts occurred only in those areas with a migrant population being concentrated in one place where they form more than 5% of the total population of the district. Table 6 shows that the only districts with migrant populations where no conflict occurred are Busia (Luyialand) in which the Luo are more than 5% of the total population, and Kisumu (Luoland) where Abaluyia exceed 5%. But going through the history of inter-ethnic relations of these two districts, one notices the existence in the past of several conflicts between the Luo and Abaluyia there. Among them was the attempt by the Luyia Wanga Kingdom to incorporate the Luo into its areas. Nevertheless, conflicts were not reported between the Luo and Abaluyia in the 1991 - 1993 spate of ethnic clashes.

Similarly, there were no conflicts in Laikipia District between the Kalenjin and the Agikuyu because the Kalenjin in this vast district are scattered throughout instead of clustering in one place as other groups did in the more westerly districts. The Maasai in Laikipia who form a sizeable percentage are confined to their ancestral land in the Dol Dol Division where they have not been disturbed by migrants against whom the conflicts could arise. Tension is, thus, almost non-

existent there. The Kalenjin are equally scattered in Narok among the Maasai, although they form a very big percentage of the district's total population.

Ethnocultural identity and the conflicts

Despite the long periods of interaction among the peoples of Western Kenya, cultural differences have persisted. At the same time each of the ethnic groups has either kept its own identity as an independent community, or a number of related peoples have forged a union into one larger ethnic group with which they identify themselves. Besides, each group recognizes its own differences from other groups with which it interacts. There are also instances of the re-assertion of some identities that had long disappeared. This appears to have been mainly occasioned by political considerations.

For example, up to 1969 the Abasuba community did not appear in the census as an independent group. Its members thought of themselves as being part of the Luo community whose culture they had adopted. However, during the 1979 census the Abasuba changed their identity and were now counted as the 'Basuba'. Similarly, before 1979 each of the peoples making up what is now known as 'Kalenjin' were counted as separate ethnic groups. But in 1989 they decided to be counted as one community under the name 'Kalenjin'. A similar situation had occurred earlier among the communities currently making up the Abaluyia. This assertion of cultural and ethnic exclusiveness has led to demands by several ethnic groups for their own administrative divisions in which their own members would be the rulers. For instance, Abakuria, who shared a district with the Luo, demanded a district of their own while the Kalenjin, who shared a district with the Abaluyia in Bungoma, also demanded to be administratively separated from the Abaluyia. Both Abakuria and the Kalenjin of Bungoma District succeeded in getting their separate districts. This set the precedent for the demand of more 'ethnic' districts

sub-locations where clans also claim that they be given their own sub-locations and assistant chiefs who are members of their own clan.

Since each of the groups identifies itself with its own culture, the effect of interaction between peoples only leads to the modification of certain external manifestations of (usually material) culture, but does not do so much as to change people's guard against their own cultural identity from being destabilized or drastically eroded. This situation tends to create and intensify feelings of ethno-centricity which are likely to contribute to tension during interaction between peoples.

Conclusion

All that I have been saying simply points to the conclusion that the recent ethnic conflicts that occurred in Western Kenya were caused by a multiplicity of factors which are related among themselves but which, ultimately, are traceable to matters of cultural identity. Economic circumstances which are themselves aspects of culture, create an environment for ethnic conflicts under the conditions of threats to cultural and ethnic identities. As a result, the interacting groups create conflicts only when there is a threat to cultural stability of the majority groups within a territory. Therefore, political agitations by themselves do not create conflicts, but are products of inter-ethnic tensions caused by cultural incompatibilities.

This occurs because there emerges a rivalry between the host with the migrant peoples' cultures. Due to their numbers the migrants feel confident that their culture can operate normally within their new area of habitation. But the host populations see this as a threat to their own cultural survival. Therefore, they try to assert their own identity by resisting the manifestations of alien culture. In the process, tensions arise.

This can be illustrated by the situation of the Abadiliji

of Tiriki that occurred in 1970. Because of the high density of population in Maragoli, many Avalogoli migrated into Tiriki where the population was still sparse. Because the land was still cheap in Tiriki, more and more Avalogoli bought it and settled there. Initially, the migrant Avalogoli did not particularly assert their cultural identity. They tried to speak the local dialect, subjected their children's initiation to the procedures of the Abadiliji and behaved more or less like the local people did. This continued as long as the number of Avalogoli in Tiriki was still small. However, when their numbers increased, the migrants began to do things the way they used to do them in Maragoli. Among others, they refused to have their children undergo the Tiriki initiation rituals and instead performed their own. Also, because of their numbers, they could now speak in their own dialect. Some of them began trading, they took care of their land and, in general, they became much more prosperous than the local people. Abadiliji saw a threat to their own culture and they feared that Avalogoli were going to be politically and economically powerful enough to control them. So they began demanding that Avalogoli should go back to where they had come from. This tension was going to lead to violent conflict but for the timely intervention of the government (Odak 1971).

This episode shows that even the usual claims by politicians (where the conflicts occur) that the migrants want to control the local politics and administration are partly a manifestation of the tension arising from cultural incompatibilities which include economic rivalry between the groups involved. Accordingly, areas with a high concentration of migrant populations are the ones which need to be watched carefully. The politicians representing constituencies in such areas should ensure that they are responsible in their political pronouncements so that they do not incite people into violent hostilities. This means that inciting political utterances in areas already pregnant with ethnic tensions, to some extent, do contribute to

such holocausts as the one that recently occurred in Rwanda. But the incitements are effective only when there are already tensions based on the intensification of cultural identities.

It is, therefore, advisable that the said politicians should not indulge in inflammatory speeches that are likely to show that they side with one segment of their constituents. The dilemma, however, is that such

politicians owe their seats to the majority of their constituents who happen to be the 'original' population and who voted them in precisely to solve the problems relating to cultural tensions. Since there are several ways in which the politicians can approach their task in such circumstances, making inflammatory speeches is one of the lesser methods of peaceful solutions to inter-ethnic tensions.

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