

# The Transformation of Inter-Ethnic Conflicts in Uasin Gishu in the Post-Independence Era, 1963-2020

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## ABSTRACT

This study investigates the historical context of inter-ethnic conflicts in Uasin Gishu County during the post-colonial period right from 1963 when Kenya attained her independence. This study argues that European colonial land policy laid the groundwork for inter-ethnic strife. The land became heavily politicized during this period, as political elites strategically used it to mobilize their various ethnic groupings, thus stoking ethnic tensions and occasionally culminating in conflicts. The goal of this study was to examine the evolution of inter-ethnic disputes in Uasin Gishu from independence through 2020. The historical approach was used in the study, which drew on both primary and secondary data sources. Annual reports, reports from appointed commissions, interviews, court judgments, and official government statistics were the key sources of data. Furthermore, secondary sources were used in the study. It was shown that tensions in the post-independence era were created by how land distribution was carried out after independence, as well as the politicization of the issue. The immediate post-colonial government failed to properly transfer land to people and instead, the political class took advantage to incite ethnic tensions. Successive governments also failed to resolve historical land concerns, worsening ethnic tensions and resulting in violent clashes in 1992, 1997, and 2007. These conflicts generated far-reaching consequences, affecting individuals not only politically but also socially and economically; as shown in clashes between Kalenjin, the Kikuyu, Luo, Abaluhya, and Abagusii, particularly in 1992 and 2007/2008. The study concludes that all parties, both public and private, should take a holistic approach to addressing historical causes and preventing future disputes.

## INTRODUCTION

Inter-ethnic conflict is a pervasive global occurrence that extends beyond pastoral communities, affecting established political and industrial democracies as well. This phenomenon poses a significant challenge to maintaining peace and stability (Christie, 1998). Inter-ethnic conflicts have been observed in various regions globally, leading to potential risks to the maintenance of international peace and security. According to Piccotio (2010), the most lethal instances of ethnic wars worldwide occurred in several regions, including the Balkans, Chechnya, Iraq, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Israel's West Bank and Gaza Strip, as well as Rwanda and Sudan, with a specific focus on the Darfur region. Ethnic conflicts have resulted in significant divisions, which have been observed in diverse manifestations including ethnic hostilities, conflicts between states, conflicts inside states, and conflicts extending beyond state boundaries (Gurr, 2005).

The Horn of Africa has been subject to inter-ethnic conflicts arising from both natural and man-made catastrophes, which frequently damage the socio-economic structure of cities (Abel, 2003). African communities, as well as many developing nations, have been experiencing challenging periods characterised by inter-ethnic violence. The multitude of hostilities in Africa has garnered the interest of numerous

researchers seeking to formulate hypotheses regarding the underlying causes of these conflicts. Both local researchers and other observers view arbitrary colonial borders as a contributing factor to inter-ethnic disputes. The establishment of artificial and inadequately defined borders during this period has been widely seen as a significant contributor to the prevalence of violence and political instability in Africa (ISS, 2012). Monty and Gurr (2005) assert that the primary catalysts for ethnic wars in Africa are a confluence of factors, including but not limited to poverty, the presence of fragile nations, and the existence of feeble institutions. The presence of borders that cut across ethnic groups in Africa has been a crucial factor contributing to the increase in conflicts. Historically, there has been a prevailing perception that they pose a hindrance to cross-border exchanges and the equitable distribution of natural resources (Asiwaju and Nugent, 1996).

According to Barron and Kimenyi (2008), the occurrence of inter-ethnic conflicts and violence in Kenya can be attributed to significant historical happenings such, as colonial land policies at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century as well the repeal of section 2 (a) of Kenya's independence constitution and the subsequent demand for political reform, leading to the establishment of multi-party democracy in the early 1990s. As a result of these advancements, many ethnic communities formed alliances with political parties that were headed by leaders belonging to their ethnic groups. The concept of segregating ethnic groupings according to regional political affiliations emerged, subsequently becoming a significant determinant of Kenya's political landscape upon the reintroduction of multi-party politics. According to Nyanhoga (2014), the outcome of this phenomenon has led to the exacerbation of politically motivated disputes. As a result, Kenya experienced the emergence of politically motivated ethnic enmity and animosity for the first time leading up to the 1992 national elections and subsequent electoral events. Subsequently, a multitude of inter-ethnic conflicts have been observed within the Luo, Abaluhya, Mijikenda, Kalenjin, and Kikuyu populations residing in the regions of Rift Valley and Coastal Regions. Throup and Hornsby (2012) assert that the politically motivated violence in Kenya during 2007 and 2008, which was driven by ethnic divisions, garnered global recognition as a result of the heightened levels of inter-ethnic tensions in comparison to preceding years. According to Mwakikagile (2007), Uasin Gishu County has been plagued by inter-ethnic violence among the Kalenjin group, who constitute the majority, and the Kikuyu, Abaluhya, and Luo communities. Hence, the present study aimed to comprehensively examine the historical progression and characteristics of the inter-ethnic conflict, as well as its ramifications inside Uasin Gishu County throughout the designated research duration.

### **Objective(s)**

The objective of this study was to analyze the transformation of inter-ethnic conflicts in the post-independence era up to 2020.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study was conducted through a Case Study Design. This was motivated by the fact that the study intended to have an in-depth analysis of the issue under investigation, namely inter-ethnic conflicts in Uasin Gishu County. The study first employed a stratified sampling technique. In this approach, all six sub-counties (Soy, Turbo, Ainabkoi, Kapseret, Kesses, and Moiben) were divided into strata in which an equal number of respondents were selected. It also used a combination of two non-probability techniques, namely purposive sampling and snowballing. The researcher used interview schedules, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) to collect the required information and tape recorders. The interview schedule was chosen since it allows for detailed, 'insider' information.

It is also used to extract information even on sensitive topics like the one under study. The questions contained therein in turn gave an insight into the feelings, background, hidden motivations, intuitions, interests, and decisions of the respondents (Mugenda and Mugenda, 1999). Analysis entailed grouping the

historical periods into thematic areas for convenience analysis and discussing them in prose.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

### Inter-Ethnic Conflicts during the Early Years of Independence in Uasin Gishu County 1960-1963

Kenya, formerly a British colony Protectorate from 1887 and afterward a colony for nearly seventy years starting in 1895, achieved its independence in 1963. On the 12th of December, 1963, the long-awaited attainment of independence was ultimately realised in Kenya. The Union Jack was ceremoniously lowered, and subsequently, the flag of Kenya was raised in its place. Throup and Hornsby (2012) argue that upon achieving independence, there existed a disparity in the ethnic makeup of the nation concerning political representation. Certain ethnic communities were identified as the predominant majority, in contrast to those residing in the Rift Valley, Western, and Coast regions, who constituted a numerical minority. Throup and Hornsby (2012) provide additional elucidation of the manifestation of ethnic disparity shortly following independence, which became evident in the contestation for land possession within the previously predominantly white highlands and settler farms. As an illustration, it is worth noting that the Kikuyu group held the highest ethnic representation in Kenya in 1963, accounting for around 19% of the country's total population. The Luo community had a population of 1.2 million, making it the second-largest community. During the period, other communities had notable populations, including the Abaluhya community with 1.6 million individuals, the Mijikenda community with 0.5 million individuals, the Somali community with 0.2 million individuals, the Turkana community with 0.2 million individuals, the Maasai community with 0.8 million individuals, and the Embu community with 0.1 million individuals. According to the Republic of Kenya (1962), the Taita, Teso, Asians, and Arabs constituted other communities with populations below 0.1 million.

It is important to acknowledge that in the period leading up to independence and in the subsequent years, there emerged a process of ethnic balkanization as various groups vied for a portion of the country's resources and benefits. The concept of ethnicity has transformed the realm of politics. According to Throup and Hornsby (2012), it can be argued that the ethnic designations assigned to various groups during the early 20th century did not always align with those that were already established. The author asserts that whereas the collective identity of the Kikuyu and Luo groups had already been firmly established, other communities started adopting a 'tribal' designation instead of a sub-tribal one. The term 'Abaluhya' emerged during the 1930s as a designation synonymous with 'individuals belonging to the same fires'. According to Throup, D., & Hornsby, C. (2012), this strategy served as a means to establish a collective identity of sufficient magnitude to warrant a portion of the country's resources.

The term "Kalenjin" emerged during the 1940s with the primary objective of acquiring increased leverage in national-level negotiations. Similarly, the Mijikenda community devised a collective term to symbolize their shared sense of identity. These instances serve as evidence supporting the claim that the utilization of kinship and tribal identity played a significant role in the pursuit of political power and the quest for acknowledgment of autonomy. It might be contended that the Lancaster House Conference witnessed the emergence of divergent demands from the negotiators representing the Kenya African National Union (KANU) and the Kenya African Democratic Union (KADU), wherein both sides incorporated tribal and ethnic concerns into their respective arguments. Throup, D., & Hornsby, C. (2012), report that the Kenya African National Union (KANU) was perceived as the political party representing the dominant tribes, including the Kikuyu and Luo populations. Conversely, the Kenya African Democratic Union (KADU) was considered to advocate for the interests of smaller ethnic groups, such as the Abaluhya, Kalenjin, Maasai, Coastal peoples, and the Turkana.

As stated by Kagwanja (2002), the issue of ethnic placement and positioning posed a significant challenge,

particularly throughout the process of land transfer from the British to the African population. The procedure was marred by the presence of ethnic conflict and animosity. Jomo Kenyatta, the founding president of Kenya was faced with the complex task of navigating a precarious equilibrium between accommodating the demands of the British colonial authorities and addressing the pressing land requirements of the African population (Kangwanja, 2002). On one hand, the British government expressed a desire to ensure the safety of its citizens who conveyed a desire to remain residing in Kenya. Conversely, it also sought for Kenya to maintain stability and exhibit an anti-communist stance. The need for land and financial resources by the Kenyan government to facilitate the buyout of settlers, address the land demand, and simultaneously secure political backing was evident. In contrast to neighbouring Tanzania, the Kenyatta government did not consider land nationalization as a viable course of action (Kangwanja, 2002). According to Throup, D., & Hornsby, C (2012), the integration of settlement programmes, land registration, and consolidation inside the reserves represents a highly expedited and consequential transformation of land tenure systems across the continent. Nevertheless, as the discourse progresses, it becomes evident that the matter of land and the Kenyatta administration's approach to it emerged as a significant catalyst for ethnic tensions in Kenya following independence, particularly within the region of Uasin Gishu.

Kagwanja (2002) asserts that Jomo Kenyatta espoused an integrationist stance concerning land acquisition and settlement. In the face of considerable pressure, particularly from the former Mau Mau combatants, to grant property without cost, the individual in question defied prevailing expectations by advocating for the purchase of land by individuals, particularly the Kikuyu community, throughout the entirety of the Republic of Kenya. The government of Kenyatta successfully executed the intricate task of maintaining equilibrium by basing its position on the Bill of Rights, a fundamental component of the Constitution. The institution of property rights was established, ensuring that land could not be forcibly taken from its owners and redistributed to those without land at no cost. Consequently, due to their requirement for land settlement, the Kikuyu community established cooperative societies, limited businesses, and investment groups based on family and clan affiliations. The primary objective of these entities was to collectively acquire large-scale agricultural properties, thereafter distributing them among their respective members (Kagwanja, 2002).

### **The Land Question in Uasin Gishu County in the Post-Independence Period 1963-1978**

As previously indicated, Uasin Gishu was among the regions that were designated as the White Highlands. During the colonial period, numerous Europeans successfully created prosperous agricultural practices, particularly in the cultivation of wheat, maize, and dairy farming. The acquisition of this territory from the Nandi community by the Europeans was accomplished through force, following vigorous opposition by the Nandi people during the early 20th Century. With the increasing demand for labour on colonial farms, settlers initiated the promotion of Kikuyu immigration to Uasin Gishu to engage them in farm work, as they were thought to possess a strong work ethic, in contrast to the Nandi community (Kahura, 2019). Upon the onset of independence, European settlers began preparing to depart, hence instilling a sense of optimism throughout the Kalenjin community over the restitution of their ancestral lands to their pre-European invasion state.

Between the years 1962 and 1966, the acquisition of the white highlands in Uasin Gishu was facilitated by government-funded initiatives, administered and executed by the state, as well as by the establishment of settlement plans to redistribute land to small-scale landholders. The post-independence settlement initiatives aimed at transferring land from settlers to Africans were also subject to significant controversy. The government implemented a programme referred to as the "million-acre settlement scheme" wherein European farms were acquired to provide land to those who were without it. Nevertheless, it was the Kikuyu community that ultimately emerged as the primary recipient of the initiative. According to Kanyinga (2000), it can be observed that the Kikuyu community demonstrated a proactive approach in mobilizing themselves, mostly due to their advantageous position in terms of capital acquisition. Consequently, it spearheaded the

establishment of land-buying cooperatives. A survey was conducted on 162 cooperatives, revealing that 120 of them were solely owned by individuals from the Kikuyu ethnic group, while an additional 38 cooperatives comprised individuals from both the Kikuyu ethnic group and other tribes. The Kikuyu community was observed engaging in distant endeavours in locations such as Lamu, Kilifi, Tran Nzoia, and Uasin Gishu, to benefit individuals from other ethnic groups. The establishment of settlement projects created favourable conditions for the emergence of ethnic tensions within the affected regions, as explained by the Social Conflict Theory. This theory posits that communities perceived these schemes as a threat to their resources, leading to heightened animosity (Odingo, 1971).

According to Leys (1975), the aforementioned programmes resulted in the acquisition of around 20% of the land, with the primary beneficiaries being predominantly the Kikuyu community. In 1964, the establishment of Uasin Gishu Company marked the commencement of its operations, initially including a limited number of people. According to Boone (2012), the corporation acquired a total of 2,635 acres of land, consisting of 585 acres in the Kamukunji area located outside Eldoret, an additional 2,000 acres, and a further 50 acres close to the town. The Weekly Review of 1977 revealed that the enterprise had received sponsorship from the ruling elite to facilitate the establishment of a significant number of Kikuyu immigrants in Uasin Gishu. According to Kangwanja (2002), significant waves of migration took place during the 1960s, leading to the Rift Valley being the province with the highest population, exceeding ten million individuals. The migrations discussed were a significant factor contributing to the emergence of ethnic hostility and xenophobia, particularly between the indigenous pastoral Kalenjin and Maasai communities and the previous squatter groups residing in the region. The District witnessed a notable expression of discontent among the Kalenjin, Abaluhya, and Luo communities towards the Kikuyu individuals who were acquiring farmlands. It was widely believed that the Kikuyu were receiving undisclosed loans from Kiano while neglecting to extend similar financial support to the local population (KNA/PC/12/50). In the year 1961, according to the annual report of the PC Rift Valley Province, it was documented that there existed escalating tensions between the Kalenjin ethnic group and the Kikuyu ethnic group (KNA/PC/12/50).

The politicians of land redistribution in Uasin Gishu had a significant role in inciting and exacerbating ethnic tensions, as political elites prioritized the interests of their respective populations. The aforementioned politicians exploited the issue of land grievances to construct a narrative that sought to portray the Kikuyu immigrants as trespassers with insatiable land acquisition desires. Conversely, the establishment of the Land Freedom Army by Kikuyu immigrants in Uasin Gishu was met with disapproval by the residents. The aspirations of the Kalenjin community to reclaim their ancestral grazing lands after the attainment of independence were thwarted by this particular organization. The acquisition of land in Timboroa, Ainabkoi, Tinderet, Lesoss, and Kipkabus by the Kikuyu community was facilitated through coercive means, with the assistance of a particular organization. This development subsequently resulted in heightened tensions, as documented in the KNA/PC/30/21 report. The escalating tension reached a critical point in 1961 when, towards the conclusion of September, the Eldoret chapter of the Kenya African National Union (KANU) sent an invitation to Mr. Kenyatta to partake in a party rally held in Eldoret. The Kalenjin community perceived this event as a test of their physical prowess and promptly mobilized substantial contingents of armed combatants intending to obstruct the convening of the assembly. The potentially hazardous situation was successfully averted by ASP Crosland of the Kenya Police, as documented in the official record KNA/PC/5/70. The Kalenjin and Maasai communities established vigilante organizations as a means of opposing the migration and land acquisition activities of the Kikuyu population inside the former White Highlands region. The 1962 Annual Report of Uasin Gishu reflects the prevailing sentiment at the time, as it highlights the significant level of apprehension expressed by diverse African farmer groups. These groups strongly advocated for the removal of legitimate squatters from their farms. Unfortunately, this action was often perceived as a means to displace specific tribes from their agricultural lands, thus exacerbating tensions along tribal lines (KNA/PC/5/70).

The Rift Valley had a greater abundance of ethnic groupings compared to other regions. The Rift Valley garnered significant interest from a diverse range of individuals due to a multitude of compelling factors. Initially, the region possessed abundant arable land and benefitted from a favourable agricultural setting. Simultaneously, the region was perceived as pluralistic because numerous settlers had engaged individuals from diverse regions of the nation to serve as labourers on their agricultural estates. By the year 1975, the Rift Valley region witnessed an influx of 428,400 individuals who migrated to dwell in its several areas, whilst just 88,000 individuals migrated out of the region. The individuals that ventured outdoors primarily consisted of departing settlers, their labourers, and their acquaintances. This was attributed to the challenges they encountered in sustaining their agricultural endeavours ten years following the attainment of independence (Mbithi & Barnes, 1975). It is worth noting that the Agikuyu immigrants constituted the majority among the several ethnic groups that came into the Rift Valley. Following the submission of petitions by various factions of the Kikuyu community, a request was made to the President for assistance in obtaining land due to their disadvantaged condition as landless individuals residing in areas where they were confined as squatters. This predicament severely limited their socio-economic engagements and posed considerable challenges to their overall well-being (KNA/BN/81/46). As a result, strategies were devised to relocate people to the wide Rift Valley region, encompassing Uasin Gishu.

In a similar vein, the 1978 Annual Report for Uasin Gishu District delineates the regions of contention where individuals identified as 'outsiders', predominantly comprising the Kikuyu community, were resettled. According to the report, a total of 1,215 hectares of land were allocated to squatters in the Kimumu region, while an additional 337 hectares were allocated in the Kahungura area. The Kondoo and Haraka Scheme demonstrated the highest number of plot transfers, totaling 56 transfers during the given year. After the aforementioned settlements and the consequent dissatisfaction shown by the Kalenjin community, an ethnic altercation occurred on July 14th, 1969, specifically at Kondoo farm. The Kalenjin claimed that the Agikuyu were granted a majority of the land plots on the farm, asserting that Kondoo was being exclusively assigned to the Agikuyu community. Approximately 4,000 individuals belonging to the Kalenjin community assembled at Kondoo farm to engage in a confrontational encounter, although their efforts were thwarted and they were subsequently dispersed by law enforcement personnel. A total of nine individuals belonging to the Kalenjin ethnic group were apprehended by law enforcement authorities. Simultaneously, on the 18th of July, 1969, approximately 500 individuals belonging to the Kalenjin ethnic group assembled at Turbo National farm to assume control of the aforementioned agricultural establishment. All individuals were equipped with weaponry consisting of spears, bows, and arrows. The police subsequently dispersed them without any reported incidents. During the aforementioned occurrence, a total of 145 individuals belonging to the Kalenjin community were apprehended, formally accused, and then handed down a uniform penalty of one month of incarceration for their respective offenses. Significant levels of tension were seen between the two tribes during the entirety of 1969, as documented in the Uasin Gishu District Annual Report of that year.

On the 15th of December 1969, a group of approximately 30 Maasai households, accompanied by a herd of 300 cattle, were forcibly displaced from the Osorongai Settlement Scheme by the Kalenjin community. The Maasai families were relocated to Turbo and unlawfully encroached upon a farm owned by Mr. Warren. Subsequently, a public meeting (*Baraza*) was conducted by Mr. Waiboci, the District Commissioner, at the settlement Scheme, which involved a cautionary message to the Kalenjin community regarding refraining from engaging in vigilantism or extrajudicial actions (KNA/PC/5/70). In Turbo, the Kalenjin community showed significant resistance towards the government's proposed initiative of initiating tree planting activities, instead advocating for the allocation of the area for agricultural use. The Kalenjin community proceeded to issue threats toward the Kikuyu population residing within the region. Boone (2012) posits that the establishment of these communities engendered a perception within the indigenous population of Uasin Gishu of the presence of "new settlers." During an interview conducted with a resident of Uasin Gishu

County, the interviewee expressed their perspective by stating, “The actions taken by Kenyatta primarily involved the relocation of his constituents to the region, which has subsequently resulted in the challenges we have encountered since the attainment of independence” (O.I, Koimet). However, this assertion is not in alignment with the viewpoint expressed by Shibiriti Tom, who stated the following:

The perception that it is Kenyatta who brought the Kikuyus to Uasin Gishu is wrong; on the contrary, many of the Agikuyu came long before Kenyatta took over the mantle of leadership. They were brought by white settlers who thought that they were hard-working and as such they laboured on white farms during the colonial period. (O.I, Tom Shibiriti).

According to Kahura (2019), there were conflicts in Uasin Gishu before independence due to the settlement schemes. The Kalenjin community became concerned about the growing presence of the Kikuyu population in the region. Nevertheless, these conflicts were effectively resolved by the former District Commissioner for Uasin Gishu, Mr. Symes Thompson. He expressed a firm stance in opposition to the agitations put forth by the Kalenjin community, asserting that the presence and contributions of the Kikuyu people were crucial to the agricultural prosperity of the aforementioned farms. This perspective highlights the notion that while the government may choose to disregard the concerns expressed by the Kalenjin community in Uasin Gishu, it cannot indefinitely overlook these worries. The prevailing circumstances were further aggravated by the ruling elite’s concerted efforts to maximize the settlement of Kikuyus in Uasin Gishu. According to Mzee Kimani from Burnt Forest, it is stated that.

The land settlements that took place in the years after independence were, from the perspective of the landless Kikuyus, an opportunity to acquire a place where they could earn their livelihoods. As we were taking up land in the Rift Valley, we were never influenced by politics in any way. However, we came to learn after we had settled that there was a lot of politics in these programs and this has continued to invite conflicts in these places with the worst being in 1992 and 2007 (O.I, Mzee Kimani).

In response to the Kalenjin agitations, the government undertook a process of rationalization, asserting that there is no inherent issue with individuals from any region within the nation opting to settle in any region. According to Kahura (2019), the government explicitly communicated an official policy allowing anyone to settle in any location. A key measure taken to alleviate tensions in Uasin Gishu and the Rift Valley region was the selection of Daniel Arap Moi as the Vice President of the Republic of Kenya by President Kenyatta. A team from the Kenya African National Union (KANU) from the Rift Valley region visited to extend their congratulations on his appointment. Following that, the Vice President delivered two speeches to a sizable gathering at 64 Stadium in Eldoret. He recommended that politicians, government servants, and individuals from all racial, religious, and ethnic backgrounds collaborate to eliminate any divisive tensions that may exist among them. During a subsequent meeting held in November 1966, he issued a firm admonition to African farmers who were employing legal representatives and law enforcement personnel to forcibly remove their unregistered partners, falsely claiming that these individuals were trespassing. He emphasized that such individuals would be subject to legal consequences (KNA/PC/6/10). Nevertheless, the Kalenjin community in Uasin Gishu misinterpreted this position, as it appeared to be unfavourable towards them. Consequently, this resulted in the solidification of a profound animosity towards the Kikuyu community that was resident within the county during that period. The allocation of plots in Kondoo farms was discontinued in 1969 due to inter-ethnic hostilities.

As a result, the Minister for Lands and Settlement, Jackson Angaine, conducted a visit to the settlement plans located in the region. The speaker delivered a speech to individuals residing in Turbo, Kaptagat, and Ainabkoi Settlement Schemes, specifically targeting squatters and farmers. In each of his *Barazas*, the speaker cautioned squatters to engage in collaborative efforts with plot owners, while simultaneously advising plot owners to engage in cooperative measures with squatters (KNA/PC/6/10). The political establishment sought to mitigate the underlying tensions by promoting harmonious coexistence among the

parties involved. Nevertheless, there was a notable lack of overt and intentional endeavours to effectively tackle the underlying factors contributing to these disparities and ethnic conflicts. The actions taken by the politicians at that period merely addressed superficial aspects of the issue, rather than implementing enduring and lasting solutions to the already evident problem. During an interview with informant Mr. Kanyi Joseph, it was disclosed that the implementation of the sought-after measures moment would have significantly contributed to the prevention of subsequent explosions that occurred in Uasin Gishu. During this period, the seeds of ethnic animosities were sown. Another interviewee, Mzee Kibiwott, provided the following revelation:

The problem with the political leadership at the time was that it was not very much into solving the problems and afflictions that were faced by the ordinary Kenyan. They were busy striking deals that were aimed at advantaging and solidifying their positions at the helm of the leadership. That explains the reason why they resorted to knee-jerk solutions in solving the challenges of land in the District (O.I, Mzee Kibiwott).

According to Boone's (2019) report, there were endeavours made by the Kalenjin community to acquire land in the Ziwa region, which is situated in the periphery of Eldoret town. The area in question had previously functioned as a sisal farm under the ownership of a European settler. Similar to other farms that had been deserted by the early immigrants, it was highly coveted by the local community. Consequently, under the leadership of Chelagat Mutai, the Member of Parliament for Eldoret North at that time, the local community endeavoured to acquire the Makonge (Sisal) property. The government promptly intervened and apprehended the Member of Parliament, effectively thwarting their actions.

The Member of Parliament was sentenced to a term of imprisonment lasting two and a half years due to her involvement in instigating individuals to remove sisal plants from an estate located in Uasin Gishu, a region inside her parliamentary constituency in 1974 (The Weekly Review, 1981). After her release, Mutai remained in a state of disfavour with the government, prompting her to seek asylum in Tanzania (The Weekly Review, October 30th, 1981). Subsequently, the transfer of ownership of the farm was bestowed upon a corporate entity rather than the local community, contrary to their initial expectations (Kahura, 2019). Additionally, Mzee Kibiwot asserts:

This was the time when the kingpin for Rift Valley politics, Daniel Arap Moi had changed course from what initially he stood for. He had strongly advocated for Majimboism and was an ardent supporter of the original inhabitant's rights to their land. However, once appointed as a vice president, he changed from this stance (O.I, Mzee Kibiwott).

This episode serves as a subsequent event to a previous occurrence involving the Kiambaa Farmers Association, an organization that united individuals of the Kikuyu ethnic group originating from the central region, namely from a locality known as Kiambaa. In 1967, the individuals in question obtained land situated on the periphery of Eldoret. The acquisition was perceived to primarily result in the establishment of a Kikuyu settlement region. In a similar vein, the Burnt Forest region transformed predominantly Kikuyu settlement projects after its acquisition by the state exclusively for this objective. The region possessed abundant fertile soils, which facilitated the economic prosperity of the Kikuyu settlers through their engagement in commercial farming. This development, however, provoked resentment among the indigenous Kalenjin population (Boone, 2013).

The aforementioned situation garnered the interest of politicians hailing from the North Rift region, who made the strategic decision to capitalize on the prevailing unrest to further their agendas. The politicians showed a lack of awareness regarding the potential amplification and intensification of the situation, which ultimately served to advance their political objectives. They strategically utilized the issue to its fullest extent, aiming to incite strong emotional responses among the local population and mobilize public

sentiment against perceived injustices. According to Anderson (2005), a particular legislator was identified for vehemently expressing opposition to the government's ongoing appropriation of Uasin Gishu and the broader Rift Valley region, which was subsequently allocated to the Kikuyu community. The individual in question can be identified as Jean Seroney, who served as the Member of Parliament for Tinderet. In 1963, he secured the position of Member of Parliament for the Nandi North Constituency after a successful electoral campaign under the auspices of the Kenya African Democratic Union (KADU). Following his election, he was subsequently appointed as the deputy speaker of parliament. Following the merging of the Kenya African National Union (KANU) and the Kenya African Democratic Union (KADU) in 1964, the individual in question did not remain passive but rather persisted in expressing their dissent against the encroachment of settlers against the ancestral grounds of the Nandi community (Oyugi, 2000). Accompanied by fellow Members of Parliament from the surrounding area, the politicians convened a conference at Nandi Hills in 1969 to engage in a passionate discourse regarding the contentious matter of land. According to Kahura (2019), after the conference, the leaders issued a strongly worded statement commonly referred to as 'The Nandi Hills Declaration', asserting the exclusive ownership of all land within the vicinity of Nandi by the local population. This declaration posed a subtle challenge to Uasin Gishu and other regions where the Kalenjin language is spoken. According to Mbithi and Barnes (1975), it became widely accepted that individuals who were granted land in these regions did not possess any legal entitlements to retain ownership of this land.

The 1968 Annual Report highlights significant concerns expressed by emerging African farmers regarding the removal of legitimate squatters from their agricultural lands. This practice has often been perceived as a means to displace specific tribal groups from their farming properties. A comparable sense of tribal affiliation was observed in diverse aspects of social interactions within the district, including commercial transactions, transportation, and land ownership. Nevertheless, the government unequivocally stated that no individual should be impeded from establishing residency in any location. As a consequence of this proclamation, Seroney was subsequently apprehended and accused of sedition, ultimately found guilty, and imposed a monetary penalty for his assertion that President Kenyatta was engaging in the colonization of the Rift Valley (Boone, 2005). The Seroney incident significantly contributed to the exacerbation of ethnic tensions in Uasin Gishu and the broader Rift Valley region. The manifestation of ethnic tensions in Uasin Gishu County in later years serves as evidence of their escalation throughout history. According to Oyugi (2000), the inter-ethnic confrontations that occurred in 1991/1992, as well as their subsequent reoccurrence in 1997 and 2002, can be attributed to the unresolved land claims that had been suppressed. The suppression of politicians, whether intentional or unintentional, resulted in the accumulation of emotions that remained dormant until an opportune moment for their expression arose. According to Boone (2005), the Kalenjin speakers expressed their grievances by engaging in lamentations, directed even toward their politicians whom they accused of passively allowing the seizure of their property.

### **Inter-Ethnic Relations in Uasin Gishu (1978-2020)**

Politicians in Uasin Gishu and its environs began agitating for a sort of ethnic cleansing based on the Majimbo rhetoric. For example, the MP for Eldoret South, Joseph Misoi, called for a rally in Kapsabet and read a statement that declared that a 'Majimbo' constitution had been drafted that would be tabled in the house if the proponents of multi-partyism continued with their efforts. He stated boldly that the Kalenjin would fight using all means at their disposal to protect the government and the ruling party KANU. It was categorically stated that under the Majimbo constitution, outsiders in the Rift Valley would be required to go to their motherland (The Weekly Review, April 1992). This stance was a pointer to the political orientation that ethnic conflicts had taken. It emerged that the politicians were willing to use every means possible to cling to power and thwart opposition and the tool that they held in their hands was the ethnicity card.

The then MPs from the Rift Valley Region held political crusades that called for the unity of the Kalenjin ethnic group. Led by Messer's Nicholas Biwott, Timothy Mibei, Kipkalia Kones, Francis Mutwol, William Kikwai, John Cheruiyot, and Ayub Chepkwony, they held a rally in Kericho and warned that FORD members would be 'crushed' and that the KANU youth wingers would be ready to fight to the last person to protect the presidency of Daniel Moi and the KANU government. The politicians also added that the Kalenjins were not cowards and were ready to counter any attempts to remove them from leadership. Calls were made to the Kalenjins to use any weapons at their disposal and arm themselves with bows and arrows to destroy any multi-party advocate on sight (The Weekly Review, April 9th, 1992).

To argue that these politicians received the backing; albeit indirectly from the Moi government, would not be engaging in speculation. This is because coincidentally, the state never held such politicians responsible for these utterances, leaving no doubt that they were sanctioned by the government. State operatives used the politics of opposition to create fear and disruptions of the opposition. The Luo leaders alleged that the violence that broke out was a direct result of the Kapsabet meeting. Nevertheless, by December 1991, parliament went ahead to repeal section 2(A) of the constitution-making Kenya a multi-party state. As much as this move was welcomed at the national and international scenes, it spelled doom for ethnic communities in Uasin Gishu including the Luo, Gusii, and Abaluhya communities who were targeted for supporting the call for multi-party politics.

In December of 1992, days before the 1992 general elections, hundreds of Kalenjin youths attacked, killed, and looted as well as burnt homes of Kikuyu and Abaluhya communities in Uasin Gishu. The justification for these attacks was that the "Kikuyus had been pressuring the Kalenjins to join the political opposition" (The Weekly Review, 1992). In retaliation, the Kikuyu stoned cars belonging to Kalenjins. In a move that is likely to indicate that the attacks were in the full glare of the government machinery, the District Commissioner of Uasin Gishu was quoted as saying: "In Kenyatta's days, if an Abaluhya had said something against the Kikuyu, he would be killed, so now why should Kikuyus say things against the Kalenjin?" (The Weekly Review, 1992). By December of the same year, when the general elections were organized, thousands were unable to cast their votes as a result of the destruction caused by inter-ethnic clashes. Many eligible voters had lost property, title deeds, or even identification cards that would have enabled them to register to vote.

The same thing happened in the run-up to the elections in 2007. As the mood for the elections began setting in, ODM-Kenya conducted an ethnically charged campaign. They publicized instances of Kikuyu dominance in all sectors of the economy and public spheres. For example, in early 2007, they produced a list of senior appointments circulated widely alleging that the Kikuyu held a disproportionate number of state posts, especially in the Treasury, Kenya Revenue Authority, Central Bank, and Finance. These leaders fanned the narrative that the Kikuyu in Kenya were tribalists and self-seekers. In the Rift Valley, well before the polls, ex-KANU and ODM leaders were warning non-Kalenjin to toe the line or face the consequences. In an interview on BBC on January 31st, 2008, Jackson Kibor, a former Uasin Gishu KANU branch chairman, had this to say:

People have to fight Kikuyus because Kibaki is a Kikuyu. We will not sit down and say one community lead Kenya. We will fight. This is a war. We will start the war. One community cannot lead the other 41 ethnic groups. This is a war. Now we're fighting for power.... We will not let [Kikuyus] come back again, because they are thieves. We will never let them come back.... We will divide Kenya (Pascale Harter, "Assignment," BBC World Service, January 31, 2008).

A Kalenjin youth interviewed in the same broadcast, who confessed to participating in the Kiambaa church burning, told the journalist that perpetrators of violence were taking cues from the elders: "We as young men, our culture, we don't go over what somebody ... an elder tells us. If the elder says no, we step down,

but if our elders say yes, we will proceed.... I do it because it is something that has been permitted by our elders” (Pascale Harter, “Assignment,” BBC World Service, January 31, 2008.) In retaliation, the Party of National Unity (PNU) on many occasions attacked the ODM on its Majimbo agenda, accusing it of fomenting ethnic cleansing of migrant communities under the guise of Federalism. As the political temperatures flared up, confrontations turned violent and escalated between these two hostile camps. The day before the elections, on 26th December 2007, the DC for Uasin Gishu, Mr. Kinyua, acknowledged that there were violent skirmishes before the elections and the worsening of ethnic conflicts (CIPEV, 2008).

As soon as the announcement of the election results on 30th December was made, violence began in Uasin Gishu. According to the CIPECV (2008), the violence entailed large marauding gangs of more than 1000 Kalenjin youths brandishing machetes, bows and poisonous arrows, occasional firearms, and projectiles filled with petrol. They blocked the five entrances of the Eldoret town and burnt vehicles, killed and looted. It was not until the Provincial Intelligence Committee called in the military to clear blocked highways and feeder roads that there was a resumption of movement. In Eldoret, the slum areas of Munyaka, Silas, and Langas were awash with violence. These areas are cosmopolitan with members of the Luo, Abaluhya, and Kikuyu communities living together. Similarly, Yamumbi, a farm near Eldoret that was inhabited by Kikuyus, was seriously affected. Kalenjin groups reportedly came from the rural areas to attack Kikuyu residents in Eldoret town (CIPEV, 2008).

On January 1st, 2008, police and a district administration official set off in a pickup truck to attempt to disperse violent mobs in the Cheptiret area of Eldoret. The group included the District Officer of Kesses Division, Benedict Omolo, three police officers, Chief Inspector Elias Wafula Wakhungu, Administration Police Officer, Joseph Biwott, Administration Police Constable, Job Kipkorir Yegor, who was serving as Omolo’s driver, and National Security and Intelligence Service Officer, Benjamin Koech. At Chebii Primary School, they confronted one such mob, which had blocked the road (Republic v. Paul Kiptoo Barno, James Yator Korir, and Isaiah Kipkorir Leting, Eldoret Magistrate’s Court, CR 387/08. Case file consulted by Human Rights Watch, Eldoret, May 23, 2011).

According to testimony presented in court, the mob attacked the vehicle. Police fired into the air, injuring a young man in the crowd, Thomas Tendeni, with a stray bullet (CIPEV, 2008). The driver, Yegor, was struck by an axe and by arrows, but he survived. Biwott was also assaulted with various crude weapons before running away. Koech managed to escape uninjured. Omolo and Wafula were mortally wounded by arrows and machetes. Yegor, Biwott, Omolo, and Wafula were all robbed of their guns during the attack; attackers also stole Yegor’s mobile phone. Later the same day, according to police testimony, the crowd handed over two of the stolen guns to “two Kalenjin” police officers. The other guns were found on the roadside. Three suspects were arrested. One, Paul Kiptoo Barno, was found in possession of Yegor’s missing phone. According to police testimony, the two other suspects were arrested because they were “among the group chasing the vehicle”(Testimony of Chief Inspector Charles Mutua, Republic v. Paul Kiptoo Barno, James Yutor Korir, and Isaiah Kipkorir Leting).

Both the police investigations and the police prosecution case were riddled with holes. The two “Kalenjin officers” who retrieved guns from the crowd were never named during the trial or summoned to testify, and no evidence was presented to suggest police made any effort to identify those in the crowd who handed over the guns, nor did they take fingerprints. Police were vague in their testimony as to the recovery of Yegor’s mobile phone, explaining only that they “received information” that Barno had it. No fingerprints from the phone were presented in court, nor were records of its usage between January 1 and Barno’s arrest on February 17. Barno’s explanation, that he had found the phone on the ground, was never challenged. Police brought no witnesses to testify against the second and third accused, and no evidence was presented as to how they had been identified at the scene. According to police testimony, Tendeni, the man in the crowd who had been shot, “recorded a statement but refused to come to testify.” His statement was not presented in

court and court records do not indicate that he was summoned to give evidence (CIPEV, 2008).

In some cases, the Kalenjin attackers were repulsed; for example, in Matunda center, some 14-25 young Kalenjin men were hacked to death after they invaded the area in January to raid business premises belonging to the Kikuyu. They were overpowered and killed (CIPEV, 2008). In all, members of the communities perceived to be both foreigners and PNU sympathizers (Kikuyu and Gusii) were overwhelmed by the violence meted out to them. Of the incidents, perhaps the worst in Uasin Gishu was that which happened in Kiambaa. It occurred on 1st January 2008 when women and children, huddled together, were burnt in the church from where they had sought refuge following a December 30th attack on their village of Kamuri. The toll reached 17 for those who died in the church, 11 on their way to the hospital, and 54 others injured (CIPEV, 2008). Violence did not abate until when the peace accord was signed between Kibaki and Raila. In total, 205 people died in the post-election violence in Uasin Gishu; 165 were identified while 38 were not. In addition, there were 521 patients admitted and, out of them, 50% were Kikuyu, 22% were Kalenjin, 4% were Luo and 9% were Gusii and Abaluhya, and 10% other ethnic groups (CIPEV, 2008).

The effects of post-election violence were highly toxic regarding the inter-ethnic relations in Uasin Gishu County. The Kikuyu, who were highly affected, continued to live in perpetual fear, regret, and bitterness owing to the experiences of 2007/08. They never understood how they had been targeted ostensibly based on 'historical injustices'. For example, David Kiragu, a farmer who bought land in Kiambaa in 1969 wondered why he was seen as an invader yet he had been living in the area his entire life (Amnesty International, 2017). According to Murunga (2011), the interpretation of the violence was lopsided, and even renowned intellectuals were not spared from this interpretation. He gives an example of Ngugiwa Thiong'o, a public intellectual, who refused to buy the idea that PEV was a reaction to the rigging of elections. Wa Thiong'o explicitly stated that PEV, especially in Uasin Gishu, constituted an ethnic cleansing and he lamented that the deaths placed responsibility on the political opposition, more so the politicians in the Rift Valley. He claimed that rigging elections was one thing while ethnic cleansing was another (Murunga, 2011).

Barkan (2008) argues that positions for accountability for election violence were never uniform; even after the government of National Unity was formed, there emerged differences. For example, the Party of National Unity (PNU) took a strong pro-prosecution stance while the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) favoured amnesty, likely because most of those arrested in the immediate aftermath of the violence were affiliated with ODM. More so, the differences were escalated in ODM itself whereby there was an alleged plot by the leadership of the party to betray their members. When the ICC Chief prosecutor, Louis Moreno Ocampo, named six suspects on 15th December 2010, it became apparent that all was not well in ODM, because those who had been mentioned, namely William Ruto, Henry Kosgei, and Joshua Sang', came from the larger Rift Valley, and the leadership of ODM was not included in the list. This situation brought bad blood between the communities in the region with the Kalenjin venting their frustration to Raila Odinga. Meanwhile; other ethnic groups that had been affected breathed a sigh of relief over the naming of the suspects. Concerning the local prosecutions, there seemed to be some lethargy among the state machinery to prosecute. The police drew up a list of 200 suspected organizers of the post-election violence. Several of them were arraigned in court but none was ever brought to successful conviction (Republic of Kenya, 2009).

The issue of politics being intertwined with ethnic relations has nagged the country from independence to the present. Even the ICC cases, where three of the major suspects came from the region, namely William Ruto, Joshua Sang' and Henry Kosgei, their cases were highly politicized and elicited heightened ethnic animosities in the region. The animosity was heightened especially by the act of PEV victims openly welcoming the move by the ICC as a deterrent of future incitements by the political class. However, the politicians took the cases as a platform to solidify and sway the populace from the debates surrounding the

post-election violence onto a new political realignment that ascended to power in 2013.

## SUMMARY

This chapter has examined the transformation of ethnic conflicts in the post-independence era. It has been demonstrated that the independent government inherited unresolved land issues in the county. These issues involved the feeling of having been disinherited from their land by the local communities and instead favouring other ethnic groups. The government failed to properly transfer land to people and instead, the political class took advantage to incite ethnic tensions. The subsequent governments failed to resolve the issue and the effect was that the conflicts exacerbated ethnic relations with the effects being violent conflicts in 1992, 1997, and 2007. The impacts of the conflicts are far-reaching; they not only affected the people in the area politically but also socially and economically.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the study findings, the following recommendations are made:

1. Truthful, just, and objective knowledge ought to be disseminated to people to understand the root causes of ethnic violence
2. More studies to be done to unearth how ethnic conflicts can be prevented in the future
3. The National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC) ought to employ historical examples and lessons in coming up with conflict resolution methods.

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