

‘In spite of Difference’: Making sense of the Coexistence between the Kamba and the Maasai peoples of Kenya

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The study discusses two distinct ethnic groups, which compete for resources and engage in ethnic conflicts. On the other hand, they share territory, have commonalities and are complementary. The study elucidates these discursive social forms to redefine interethnic coexistence.

1.1 Background information

‘Coexistence’ is a concept that can easily take centre stage in contemporary socio-political debates. Whether one wants to make sense of Huntington’s (1996) “clash of civilizations”, the religious and ethnic conflicts in India, Indonesia, Nigeria and the Sudan or the juxtaposition of a market economy with communism in China, ‘coexistence’ comes to mind. The concept, as indicated above, is a multidimensional one that encompasses contradictions and inconsistencies in human interactions. The study examines ethnic groups that live side by side, recognise themselves as distinct and are externally recognised as such. Although they are rivals, have strained relations and compete for scarce resources, they are also complementary and interdependent. Besides, this complex relationship is examined within the context of an influential and an ambivalent state.¹

In Africa, Kenya takes pride in being one of the most stable, peaceful and fairly prosperous multiethnic states in the conflict-prone continent. And this notion is not unfounded. Kenya has indeed remained quite stable in the midst of turmoil in the neighbouring states. Even limiting oneself to Kenya’s immediate neighbours like Uganda, Sudan, Ethiopia and Somalia, one can see that all have at one time or another experienced ethnic conflict, civil war and military dictatorships. For this reason, Kenya has been one of the key and strategic hosts to the large number of fleeing groups (refugees). Moreover, ethnic conflict and turmoil have been witnessed in many other states. From the Rwandan and Burundian ethnic cleansing and genocide, the crisis in the Democratic Republic of Congo, recurring ethnic tensions in Nigeria, to the brutal civil war in Sierra Leone, Africa has had more than its fair share of ethnic tensions and conflict, war and instability. And yet, the problem does not seem to be anchored

¹ In the study, ‘state’ and ‘government’ will often be used interchangeably. Empirically, I had problems drawing a clear distinction between the two. Although a state will ordinarily be more enduring than a government or a regime, it has been noted that in the vast majority of African countries, these entities are closely intertwined and not easily disentangled (Villalón, 1998: 9).

on the degree of homogeneity in these states. Conflict and turmoil have been witnessed in what would pass as “true nation states” like Somalia (Abdullahi, 1998; Schlee 2001, 2002), bi- or tri-ethnic states like Rwanda and Burundi where groups share one language and a long history of living together, to diverse multiethnic countries like Ethiopia (Triulzi, 1996), implying that ethnic conflict in Africa has never been reducible to simplistic categories like ‘sameness and peaceful coexistence’ or ‘ethnic diversity and conflict’. The internal dynamics that explicate why some states have escaped ethnic conflict, genocide and political instability require careful scholarly scrutiny. This study therefore is partly about how the crises witnessed elsewhere have been avoided in Kenya in general, and between the Kamba and the Maasai groups in particular. These two groups with linguistic and cultural distinctions, share a volatile and fluid political border, have fairly distinct modes of subsistence, and invariably compete for regional and national resources and political power. They often resort to armed but ‘controlled’ conflict, form political alliances, are engaged in social and economic exchanges and also have certain commonalities or seek common identities. Let me begin by giving a brief description of these groups.

1.2 The Kamba and the Maasai: An overview

The Kamba are a Bantu-speaking and farming group, while the Maasai are part of the Eastern Nilotes, formerly called Nilo-Hamites, and are predominantly pastoral. Throughout history however, there have been pastoral and non-pastoral Maa-speaking peoples. I do not wish to delve into an already well documented discourse regarding how Maa-speakers have shifted their identities and economy through out history (see Jacobs, 1975; Galaty, 1982; Kituyi, 1990; Spear and Waller, 1993). In terms of social organisation, the Maasai divide into many subgroups or sections spread over Kenya and Tanzania. These include, (II)-Purko, Samburu, Loitai, Waasin-Kishu, Loitokitani, Loodokilani, Matapato, Keekonyokie and Kaputiei (see Sankan, 1971; Berg-Schlosser, 1984; Kituyi, 1990; Sommer and Vossen, 1993).

In the course of my study, I interacted mostly with the Ilkaputiei (Kaputiei) Maasai who live mainly in Kajiado administrative district bordering Ukambani (“Kambaland”) to the west. The political border between the two groups, physically marked by a railway line that connects the cities of Nairobi and Mombasa, stands as an interface of social, cultural, economic and political continuities and discontinuities. This line is often portrayed as representing a boundary, across which ethnic identities and social relations do not neatly mesh. This aspect is expounded on in chapter six.

Though the Kamba generally consider themselves to be one *mbai* (“ethnic group”), there are historical, cultural and dialectical differences between the “Kamba of Kitui” and the “Kamba of Masaku” and others within these broad inclusive categories. Created by the British colonial masters in the early 20th century, Kitui and Machakos (Masaku)² districts were up to as recent as late 1980’s the two administrative areas for the Kamba people. It is worth noting here that, while to a large extent the Maasai sections and clans live in designated territorial areas, Kamba clans on the other hand are largely mixed, owing to a long history of vibrant internal migration. Although the population census of 1999 was supposedly manipulated, it is estimated that there are about 3 million people whose first language is Kikamba and who recognise themselves as Kamba. The Maasai on the other hand number 584,488 according to the same census. The ‘politics of numbers’ and its influence on Kenya’s multiethnic stability is taken up for discussion in chapter seven.

The Kaputiei Maasai, like many other Maasai sections, are emerging from a predominantly pastoral economy, and like the rest of their counterparts, are undergoing fast social transformation. Kituyi (1990) and Holland (1996) present the Maasai as a group under pressure from the state to transform itself. The fact that the Maasai have taken up farming and have been gradually integrated into the monetary economy has meant that the dichotomy, often said to characterise how they compare with the Kamba, has become conceptually and empirically misleading. Nevertheless, the Maasai are said to represent the “the highest degree of pastoral specialisation among Eastern Sudanic-speaking peoples”.³ It is partly this “specialisation” in pastoralism that sets the arena⁴ in which interethnic relations and exchanges between them and their mainly agricultural neighbours can be discussed. Generally, the Maasai are torn between embracing modernisation at the expense of sacrificing certain traditional institutions and practices and retaining their heritage. And although much of the credit in the transformation process has been given to the state, the political pressure notwithstanding, an internal comparative need to compete and ‘catch up’ with their neighbouring and migrant groups living in their territory cannot be underrated. Indeed, Rajah (1990:110) warns against giving too much emphasis or attention to the role played by the state in social transformation processes.

It should be stressed however that while the Maasai today may have their agricultural neighbours as models, this is quite a recent development and swapping of roles, for these

² “Machakos” was the British version of *Masaku*.

³ See Galaty (1993: 62).

⁴ “Arena” in the study is used in Long’s sense: As social encounters or situations in which contests over issues, resources, values, and representations take place (1997: 6; 2000: 191).

groups (e.g. Kamba and Kikuyu), used to imitate the Maasai in the past. What is more, despite the disparities in social transformation, there are still many similarities between the Kamba and the Maasai. In both groups, for instance, kinship ties are very strong and in most cases, form the basis for social organisation and social networks. But in terms of comparison, the Maasai have more in common with the Kikuyu with whom they have had a long history of intermarriage and cultural diffusion (Middleton and Kershaw, 1972: 60-64).

One of the most striking differences between the Kamba and the Maasai is in the literature. Unlike the Kamba, the Maasai have been studied intensively and extensively by ethnologists and historians due to, *inter alia*, their fascinating history, unique cultural heritage, their portrayal as exotic and an interesting resilience of old traditional practices which seem to have withstood the test of time. Besides, the Maasai have also attracted scholarly attention because of their unparalleled resistance to British rule, alienation of their land, the post colonial challenges they have faced and the attempts made by the state to integrate them into the ‘mainstream’ economic, social and political life. In anthropological research however, there has been a shift from what used to be labelled as ‘uncivilised’ or exotic non-western groups like the Maasai of East Africa to a more general concern with the “heterogeneity of all societies” (Jenkins 1997: 18).

1.3 Purpose and significance of the study

The significance of this study is seen both on a theoretical as well as on a methodological level: It seeks not only to fill certain gaps in theory and knowledge but also make a contribution on how knowledge is generated. The dominant discourse tends to present groups that are distinguished by descent, language and cultural practices as more likely to be conflictual, divergent and to pursue parallel interests (Gutkind, 1970). In Africa, this approach has been used to explain the prevalence of ethnic conflicts, instability of states and underdevelopment. Such a discourse is shared by scholars, the media and individual actors. In fact, as I began my fieldwork, a local administrator said that there was “nothing” to say about the Kamba and the Maasai except that both groups are “enemies” and “have nothing in common”. Such emic comments influenced the title adopted for this study.

There is no need to belabour the point that much of the phenomena in African reality would be difficult to comprehend without taking the ethnic factor into account. It transcends and defines social structures and political relations. Even in Tanzania, one of the most cohesive states in Africa, and where overt ethnic conflicts have been rare, the Maasai complain of being despised, demeaned and marginalised.

Most of the studies conducted in multiethnic African states have tended to focus on disharmony, particularly in as far as it threatens the existence of the nation state. Besides, there has also been a tendency to focus on those cases where disorder has captured the world's attention. Even Horowitz notes that he looks at groups that are "relatively large and therefore interact at the centre of politics rather than in isolated local pockets" (1985: 17), creating the impression that those groups that constitute "local pockets" should be of less scholarly interest. He admits however that there are many "less dramatic manifestations" of conflict in the world.⁵ And while Horowitz tells us why we should concentrate on "large" groups, Jenkins reiterates that anthropologists have concentrated more on minority rather than majority ethnicities (1997: 49). My study strikes a balance, by looking at how 'small' and 'big' ethnic groups interact.

During a doctoral colloquium at the University of Bielefeld in November 1998, Prof. Günther Schlee remarked that many scholars have pursued the objective of trying to unveil reasons behind the many ethnic conflicts in Africa and the failure, or miserable performance of the state. Taking into account the multiethnic nature of African states and the artificial national borders, he reasoned, what should perhaps preoccupy scholars is how stable states have been possible at all. This study partly responds to this challenge. In chapter seven, I discuss how ethnic politics in Kenya have been organised to produce one of the most stable countries in Africa. By so doing, the study addresses one of the pertinent issues and challenges to state formation in multiethnic societies in Africa, namely what keeps even hostile and differentiated groups together, making stable multiethnic states possible. There is recognition that even as transnational boundaries and communities gain prominence in academic discourse, the boundaries within states have not diminished in significance, for they not only shape the international boundaries but are also equally contested and redefined, and are sources of conflicts and often destabilise the state itself. Besides, as evident from the 1980's, more conflicts are being witnessed within rather than between nation states. Writing on South Asian groups, Wijeyewardene (1990) stresses that ethnicity should be analysed "at the local community level".

But on the other hand, although there is enough evidence to suggest that the Maasai and the Kamba have had strained relations (Ndolo, 1989; Sobania, 1993), this is not merely a study on ethnic conflict. And yet, considering the ever shifting contexts and magnitudes, it would be naive to say that there are enough books on ethnic conflict on our shelves. And whereas there is every reason to devote enormous resources and time in analysing the social and political

⁵ Horowitz, (1985: 3).

constellations that lead to conflict (Wimmer, 1997b), and to find explanations for the ethnic conflicts around the world, it is equally important to highlight how these tensions and conflict situations are pre-empted, avoided and precluded in other settings, despite the contested borders, competition for power, heightened degree of ethnic differences and external instigation.

There seems to be more explanations as to what keeps groups apart than what keeps them together. Horowitz (1985) concedes this by noting that scholars seem not to be ready to spill the ink before blood has been spilled, and that we have “enough data on ethnicity” but what we perhaps lack are explanations, and I think, contexts. Although there is agreement that ethnic conflict predicated on primordial grounds is a “myth”, to quote Crawford and Lipschultz (1998), there is also consensus that causes of ethnic conflicts are never obvious. And if causes of interethnic conflict are unclear, it would be theoretically and empirically interesting to find out what keeps potentially hostile groups peaceful. This study aims at making a contribution in this regard by looking at how ethnic groups live harmoniously in spite of differences and diversity.

Considering that Kenya hosts a wide diversity of Cushitic, Nilotc and Bantu peoples that divide into about 42 ethnic groups,⁶ interethnic coexistence in Kenya should arouse curiosity and close scholarly analysis. Nevertheless, Kenya has had its share of conflict. In fact, if all lives lost during ethnic clashes since as recent as 1990 were to be lost at once, it would look like a massacre of international proportions. But since these conflicts are intermittent and far between, they have not threatened state stability. The study expounds on this in chapters six and seven.

With regard to the Maasai, it is important to note that whereas they have been studied widely, there are still gaps in knowledge, as scholars keep on raising new dimensions of their identity, social organisation and transformation and their interactions with other groups and the state. The crucial role played by the state in either enhancing this harmony or disrupting it in the course of “nation building”⁷ and quest for cohesion is therefore explored. Of major significance also is how the state is shaped and influenced by the competing groups.

⁶ Some ethnic categories like *Kalenjin* and *Luhya* are too inclusive, lumping together groups that recognise themselves as bearing distinct identities. On the other hand, others are recognised as distinct though closely related to others. For instance, at least politically, the Samburu (Ilsampur) and Njemps, are categorised and recognised as distinct from the *Maasai*, although they are not only Maa-speakers but also have similarities in their cultural practices.

⁷ In the dissertation, double quotation marks are used to show that the researcher is quoting either an author or a respondent, while single quotation marks apply to words or phrases that I am using but not necessarily in their conventional meaning. I use italics if I am quoting words or expressions written in the same form by authors, when writing the names of books or to place special emphasis on words.

Whereas the prominence of the Maasai in literature is in no doubt, as noted, I do not wish to create the impression that ethnological studies have not been carried out among the Kamba. From the earliest accounts by missionary Ludwig Krapf around 1860, Richard Lindblom (1920), Kivuitu Ndeti (1972), John Middleton and Greet Kershaw (1972), Berg-Schlosser (1984) to Donald Ndolo (1989), there is a sizeable body of ethnological data. Looking at the dynamics of social change in his doctorate thesis (Universität Bayreuth), Ndolo, wrote one of the most comprehensive documents on the contemporary Kamba society. Nevertheless, reading books and articles written on the Kamba and the Maasai, one notices that very little, if anything, is said about how the two groups interact. And those who do (e.g. Ndolo and Middleton and Kershaw), only highlight conflicts. Further justification for this study rests on the fact that in general, most ethnological studies are rarely relational, ignoring the interface between ethnic groups. Some of those done among the Kamba and the Maasai have either looked at the groups separately (e.g. Berg-Schlosser, 1984), or focussed on Maasai's linguistically related groups (Berntsen, 1976; Kituyi, 1990; Spear and Waller, 1993). Besides, where cattle raids have been rampant, they have usually involved two or more pastoral groups; rarely does the case involve a pastoral and an agricultural one.⁸ The study shows how various modes of subsistence and diversity of cultural practices provide a perfect fit among two groups living in a fragile environment.

The study is equally deemed significant for its application of 'coexistence'. While natural scientists (e.g. Pontin, 1982), historians (e.g. Davies, 1987; Strandling et al., 1997), political economists (e.g. Aubey, 1961) and diplomacy and peace studies (e.g. Kriesberg, 1998) have used this concept widely, it has not found wider application among sociologists and social anthropologists. And among some of those who have, for example, Torstrick (2000) or the *Handbook of Interethnic Coexistence*, "coexistence" is taken as synonymous with the Israeli-Palestinian crisis on the one hand, and as a policy rather than a theoretical concept on the other. This study seeks to elucidate not only the conceptual and empirical contexts but also the processes through which the concept is constructed and modified.

Last but not least is the methodology. The study has largely adopted an interface approach and the actor-oriented approach in the generation and analysis of data. It looks at the discontinuities and discrepancies in the social life of two groups whose "life-worlds" intersect through actors and are shaped by external agents (see Long, 1989, 1992; Giddens 1984). It is an approach that looks at the researched (actors) as knowledgeable, calculating, capable, and

⁸ In Kenya, exceptional cases have been among the Kamba and the Maasai, the Kisii and the Maasai, the Pokomo and the Orma along the coastal zone or intra-ethnic raids e.g. within the Maasai sections or across clans among the Kuria of Nyanza (western Kenya).

not necessarily pursuing collective pursuits but acting as principal contacts between different levels of social order. Investigations are based on “actor defined issues” or “critical events” (Long, 1997, 2000). The “interfaces” here include ethnic and territorial boundaries as well as how both groups relate with state authorities. ‘Coexistence’ is seen as resulting from the interactions, calculations, negotiations, struggles and manipulations between special social actors representing groups or the state. The study presents actors in varying situations and how they make sense of their daily life with regard to their neighbours, local resources, inter-regional as well as national trends. Through a combination of narrative, case history, biographies, open-ended interviews, and participant observation, the dissertation brings out the complexities in this ‘tripartite’ relationship. The study is therefore seen as an interactional process between two groups on the one hand, and state authorities and other groups on the other, to shape the reality in which they live.

1.4 Organisation of the thesis

The dissertation is presented in eight chapters. In chapter one, I introduce the readers to some ideas on African ethnicity in general and Kenya’s in particular. I have presented an overview of the groups under study (the Maasai and the Kamba), that is, social organisation, transformation processes, modes of subsistence, territorial areas and how they are placed within the Kenyan multiethnic state. Since this chapter is only introductory, these themes are taken up for further discussion in subsequent chapters. The introductory part also provides insights into the basic ideas and theory that guided field research and study. Besides, the section gives a brief review of studies that have been done on this subject, the gaps in knowledge which this study seeks to fill or bridge, as well as what aroused the researcher’s interest to conduct the study.

The first part of chapter two takes the reader to some of the main concepts used in the study. It begins by presenting various definitions of *ethnicity* and the debate that surrounds this concept: The primordial and the constructionist approach. An attempt is made to relate this debate to some of the empirical findings. Besides, the concept of *coexistence* is discussed, setting the stage upon which the core debate in the thesis rests. The general objective is to show how these concepts have been utilised and defined previously, and more importantly, to enable the reader see how my study is embedded in these wider theoretical frameworks in the subsequent chapters.

The second part of the chapter discusses data assembling. It presents the process through which the researcher entered the “life-worlds” of the researched, showing the centrality of the actor in the study, how research partners were recruited, who was interviewed and why, the methods of social inquiry, the site of field research as well as the social, economic and political conditions under which the inquiry was conducted. Moreover, the researcher’s social position and ethnic identity are discussed to give a glimpse of how these attributes shaped the research process and the data assembled. The fieldwork experience shows how actors made sense of their ethnic identity, difference and commonalities through the researcher. The challenges encountered during fieldwork are discussed at the end.

Chapters three and four take up the issue of ethnic difference raised in chapter two. The Kamba and the Maasai have a rich body of stereotypes through which they define their ethnic identity, difference, modes of subsistence and morality. In these two chapters, I identify the actors, a step which is a basic requirement in a study on ‘coexistence’. The chapters show that ethnic groups have a “passion for difference”⁹ to the extent that group members invent differences to maintain ethnic boundaries. While chapter three looks at how the Maasai are depicted by the Kamba, chapter four looks at the Kamba from a Maasai perspective. In both chapters, it is argued that ethnic difference and maintenance of ethnic boundaries assume a lot of significance among groups that live side by side. In other words, ‘coexistence’ is about ethnic distinction. To say that two groups ‘coexist’, means that they can be distinguished. These two chapters therefore show how the Kamba and the Maasai distinguish themselves from each other. In addition, the section also discusses some of the commonalities between the two groups. In as much as coexistence is about distinction, there are necessary points of convergence among groups that share territorial space.

Chapter five discusses complementarity and interdependence between the Kamba and the Maasai. Interethnic coexistence, it is argued here, is not just about difference and distinction but also about the social and economic exchanges that take place between groups. Without exchanges between groups, it would be difficult to say that they ‘coexist’. It is these mutual exchanges, to put it simply, that keep distinct groups together. The chapter therefore shows how the two groups depend on each other to sustain their livelihoods. While some of the commodities of exchange are based on ecological differences and modes of subsistence (e.g. cattle, milk, maize and beans), other exchanges (e.g. where the Kamba provide shopping and schooling opportunities to the Maasai), reflect the disparities in social transformation.

⁹ Citing Moore (1994).

Chapter six proceeds to show that although ethnic groups share and exchange resources, they also compete and fight for them. In this part, contested political boundaries, land and water resources are analysed. The chapter is about ethnic antagonism and expounds on some of the challenges that confront groups that share a common territory. Ethnic competition, tensions and conflict are presented as integral aspects of coexistence. The chapter also highlights ethnic conflict in Kenya in general and shows the state's contradictory roles in the politicisation of ethnicity (e.g. by the political elite), while administrators and the police arbitrate in the resolution of conflict. The section therefore does not just address conflicts but also how the same are resolved and averted. In this regard, compromises and concessions are discussed as important dimensions of coexistence. Besides, I also discuss how actors legitimise ethnic conflicts. This chapter also discusses some of the strategies adopted by migrant Kamba populations to win acceptance among the Maasai.

Chapter seven examines the external dimension in interethnic coexistence. The point here is that ethnic groups do not 'coexist' in a vacuum. The chapter presents the Kamba and the Maasai in wider social spheres and shows how both groups are shaped and influenced by other groups and the state, and how they impact on national politics, stability, cohesion and integration. The chapter presents the state's ambivalence in the enhancement of harmonious ethnic coexistence in Kenya. It is here that I assess the ethnic competition for power and ethnicisation of Kenyan politics. It is argued in the chapter that although the state's divide-and-rule tactics enhance difference and disharmony, they also produce stability by easing ethnic competition and rivalry for power at the centre. The chapter also assesses ethnic alliances and how they shift, the politics of ethnic numbers and how stability is produced by "eating" with "co-eaters".

Chapter eight is a conclusive one that pulls together the main findings of the study and makes a case for a redefinition of interethnic coexistence. The chapter therefore addresses the question: What is interethnic coexistence? My argument is that coexistence is about ethnic distinction, social exchange, complementarity and interdependence as well as ethnic antagonism and conflict. Besides, coexistence is also about compromises and concessions. And since all these aspects have an implication on shared physical space, it is also argued that 'common territory' is an important dimension of coexistence. Last but not least is the argument that ethnic groups do not 'coexist' in a vacuum, which brings in the state and other groups as the 'external' dimension of coexistence.

CHAPTER TWO: CONCEPTUAL AND METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS

As I have noted above, this chapter is intended to introduce the reader to the debates on the two main concepts in the study, i.e. ethnicity and coexistence. This discussion is blended with the data gathering process which also helps to clarify these concepts.

2.1 Seeking an understanding of ethnicity

This chapter starts by reviewing various theoretical perspectives and arguments pertaining to ethnicity and coexistence. The purpose is to examine the underlying explanations with regard to how ‘ethnic groups’ come into being and how the same interact or ‘coexist’ in particular social and economic contexts. The chapter will serve as a base as well as the lens through which the patterns of inter-relationships between the Maasai and the Kamba peoples of Kenya are being examined. One may wonder why an attempt should be made here to redefine the concept of ethnicity or ethnic groups, so widely written about by famed ethnologists, sociologists and political scientists. While such concern may not be unassailable, the fact that these concepts have witnessed wide scrutiny has also meant multiplication of controversies. “Ethnicity” and “ethnic groups” have meant different things in different historical epochs, in various contexts and to various scholars. For instance, despite the fact that it is considered fashionable to use “ethnic group” instead of “tribe” in African settings, Baumann avers that most Europeans would be upset if they were categorised as belonging to a certain *ethnic group* (1996: 19). In fact, Jack Eller questions why African groups are referred to as “tribes” while the same concept is not used when writing or reporting about the Balkan groups or the Quebec francophone and the Anglophones (1999: 196). Indeed, in the American society, “ethnicity” is interchangeable with being “black” with a tendency not to categorise other “white” groupings as ethnic (see Reed et al., 1989).

Departing from this, Waterman argues that there is nothing pejorative or derisory in using “tribe” noting that “the respected British weekly, *The Economist*, has been using it for the past decade and a half...”(1994: 399). Cottam and Cottam use the term “ethnic communities” merely as a synonym of “ethnic groups” and defines it thus: “A social group whose members share a sense of common origins, claim a common and distinctive history and destiny, possess one or more distinctive characteristics, and feel a sense of collective uniqueness and solidarity” (2001: 28, citing Smith, 1981: 66).

In Kenya, apart from using “tribes” to differentiate various ethnicities, they are loosely referred to as “communities”, a terminology viewed as politically correct and popular with the

media and political elite. It did not come as a surprise therefore, when a number of ‘elite’ respondents talked of the “Maasai community” or “Kamba community” in the course of my study. While most of them were simply imitating what features in the media, some used the concept to present their respective ethnic groups as sharing cultural practices, goals, destiny, interests and territory. But, just like ethnicity, “community” is used and redefined contextually (Baumann, 1996: 4).

It would be safe indeed to say that these terminologies are largely in search of definitions since they have not only been interpreted differently, but anytime they are defined or redefined, new controversies emerge (Jenkins, 1997: 40, Wimmer, 1997a: 18). Stressing a more comprehensive approach, Milton Yinger argues that disagreements in literature have been witnessed due to the fact that various authors select one or more of the following variables; one, how groups are perceived by others in terms of language, religion, race and ancestral homeland with its related culture; two, how the members perceive themselves as different and finally, how they participate in shared activities built around their (real or mythical) common origin and culture (1994: 4). But if my field experiences were anything to go by, those groups that we study and our own biases do not make it any easier in our attempts to come up with definitions of what ethnic groups are or what ethnicity is or what these concepts represent. As will be shown later, contextualised insights did emerge which may find wider sociological and ethnographical application. Nevertheless, to deepen the understanding of ethnicity, let me revisit the historical debates, the “dominant discourses” (or primordial approaches) and the pragmatic/contemporary understanding of the concept.

2.1.1 “Tribes” and “ethnic groups”

Going back to history, some of the early references to “ethnicity” can be traced to Max Weber’s “Ethnic Groups” in his book *Economy and Society* where he saw shared beliefs and common descent as key characteristics of an ethnic group or race.¹⁰ According to Weber, it is the “political community” that inspires the belief in common ethnicity (1978: 389). In his definition, sharing a common background is seen as the basis for collective identity and togetherness.

Jenkins argues that having read Weber, Everett Hughes rejected his definition of ethnicity that was based on cultural traits. Hughes argued that the existence of a group is not a reflection of cultural difference stressing instead the aspect of internal (ins) as well as the external (outs) aspects (Jenkins, 1997: 11). But based on my experience in doing research among African

¹⁰ See Weber (1978: 385), *Economy and Society*.

groups, it is difficult to dismiss cultural practices as a basis for drawing ethnic boundaries. In his book, *Ethnicity in Modern Africa*, Brian du Toit notes that “ethnic” has profoundly changed over time from its first original use where it referred to differences in religion particularly for being non-Christian or Jewish (Du Toit, 1978: 19), to focus on race or phenotype as well as emphasising socio-cultural differences. In a nutshell, du Toit notes that apart from the use of ‘ethnic’ in reference to a socio-cultural group, the concept was later narrowed down to refer to a sub-group living among other groups in a foreign country and finally, to its usage where a group of people contrast themselves or are contrasted by others on the basis of sharing certain cultural criteria like language, beliefs and values, religion or history. He argues that while early British scientists in the 1920’s were using ‘ethnic’ to refer to race, Americans were giving it a socio-cultural meaning.¹¹ Du Toit notes that over the years, the concept of ethnicity has “gained recognition as a neutral, unemotional referent to those characteristics and qualities that mark an ethnic group, irrespective of whether the group is defined basically on socio-cultural or basically on phenotypic grounds”.¹² Perhaps with Africa in mind, he asserts that ethnic groups may have a geographical contiguity (Du Toit, 1978: 4). Indeed, many identity groups in the so-called non-nation states are said to be geographically concentrated (Cottam and Cottam, 2001: 195). It has been argued by Barth and others that the intensity with which a group organises itself as an ethnic group and with which individuals stress their ethnicity increases if the same share a designated geographical space (see Roosens, 1989: 12). The geographical contiguity, as will be shown later, is quite significant in Kenya where, territorial boundaries enhance and shape ethnic attachment and loyalty. In Kenya and other British colonies, names of ethnic groups were also adopted as names of their traditional homelands, although the territorial boundaries remained fairly porous irrespective of the restrictions placed on the migration of groups. This brings me to the concept of ‘common territory’ which is central in interethnic coexistence. It is discussed in greater detail in chapter six.

Going back to the chronology of ethnicity, a comprehensive historical review showing how “tribes” and “race” changed into “ethnic groups” in both sociological and ethnographic discourse is provided by Jenkins (1997: 9-24; see also Alexander, McGregor and Ranger; 2000). Way back in the 1960’s, Wallerstein appeared to use “tribe” for the social group in the rural area and “ethnic group” for urban residents.¹³ This compares to Abner Cohen’s (1974) use of “tribalism” as a native term and “ethnicity” as a sociological term. Du Toit critiques

¹¹ Du Toit, (1978 : 3).

¹² Ibid. p.5

¹³ Wallerstein (1960), cited by Du Toit (1978 : 7).

Van den Berghe and M. G. Smith's use of "racism" in their studies in Burundi and Rwanda and among the Fulani and Hausa of Nigeria respectively, arguing that they should instead have used "ethnic" or "ethnicity."¹⁴ On the same line of argument, Jenkins notes that by the 1960's, the notion of the "tribe" was losing currency among anthropologists who adopted 'the less embarrassingly colonial' *ethnic group* which was also based on the social constructionist model (Jenkins 1997: 17). It is important to note that it is indeed the 'tribe-group' model that Barth (1969) set to critique showing how collective identities and the issue of ethnic boundaries had been taken for granted.

The first reference to the term "ethnic" in reference to an African society is said to have been done by Seligman in 1936¹⁵. Du Toit makes reference to Nadel and his study in the Korofan region of the Sudan where he is said to have used the concept of "tribe" and argued that the concept disregards uniformities beyond its self chosen boundaries.¹⁶ Du Toit admits however that just like "tribes", the boundaries of "ethnic groups" are subjectively drawn. What has been significant in the study of ethnicity in Africa is the fact that even with increasing urbanisation and adoption of wage labour, ethnic affiliations have steadily remained important (Banton, 1983: 164). Osaghae (1994: 137) notes that ethnicity is perhaps the most popular concept used in the analysis of African politics.

Irrespective of its colonial roots and the prejudice and primordial connotations associated with it, the concept of *tribe* is used rather commonly in the post-colonial African state. In Kenya, Uganda, Nigeria etc., the use of *ethnic group* is limited mainly to academic discourse. Otherwise, most people, some sections of the media, political establishment, and even a wide cross section of scholars use *tribe* rather than *ethnic group*. "Ethnic group" is generally seen as circumventing the pejorative implications of "tribe". In other cases, no distinction is made between the two concepts. This is clearly illustrated by a parliamentary report containing findings of the 'ethnic clashes' that affected some parts of Kenya in 1990/91. It is entitled 'Report of the Parliamentary Select Committee to investigate *Ethnic Clashes* in Western and Other Parts of Kenya 1992'. Although the title bears, "ethnic clashes", in the introduction, the report starts by restating the parliamentary frame of reference thus; "while appreciating the Government's efforts to stop *tribal clashes* in western and other parts of Kenya..." (Republic of Kenya, 1992: 1; emphasis mine). In the report, the concepts 'tribe' and 'ethnic group' are used interchangeably which is basically a reflection of how the same are used across the social, political and academic fabric. Western scholars are no exception. As recent as 1995,

¹⁴ Ibid. p. 8.

¹⁵ Ibid. p. 6

¹⁶ Ibid. p. 6

Christoph Lang, writing about the situation in Kenya remarked “conflicts between different pastoralist *tribes* have occurred in history and continue up to date” (1995: 21). Suffice it to say that due to familiarity with the concept, the use of *tribe* in contemporary African society may not carry the biases often associated with this concept by some scholars. To many people, it is the *only* English word they know that draws distinctions among the various ethnicities.

2.1.2 Primordial considerations in ethnicity

As noted above, ethnicity discourses are riddled with debates over the involuntary or primordial perspective on the one hand, and a pragmatic one on the other. Treating culture as synonymous with ethnic identity is not uncommon, although this implies that culture can be the property of an ethnic group, and therefore creates non-existent mutual distinctiveness. Baumann notes that the simplistic equation between ethnic identity, culture and community is common in many societies. Indeed, he avers, “it is the dominant discourse” (1996: 22). Following the influential work of Fredrik Barth (1969) among others, much of contemporary ethnicity debates revolve around how group boundaries are socially constructed. But, though relatively marginal in contemporary ethnicity debates,¹⁷ the biological and culture discourse cannot be totally ignored. Baumann (1996: 16) notes that biological reductionism still enjoys wide appeal. Nash (1989: 10-12) identifies three most common identity markers as blood, substance (e.g. food) and cult, arguing that it is usually in situations where such characteristics are not outwardly apparent, that the secondary symbols of dress, language and physical features become important.

For the sake of clarity, the primordial approach or the essentialist discourse basically refers to a perspective that stresses predisposition and cultural distinctions that are psychologically reductionist and in which one’s or a group’s ethnic identity is taken as ‘natural’ or as a ‘social fact’. In this model, people’s cultural differences based on language, tradition, religion and ethnic roots are assumed to be by nature exclusionary. Although scorned for naturalising ethnic groups and providing a fertile ground for chauvinism and hatred, matters of descent and kinship, locality and cultural roots inform interethnic relations. The formation of any group involves the principle of inclusion that identifies its members and exclusion that identifies those who cannot be group members (see Schlee, 1996). The primordial bonds or cohesiveness of a group are influenced by the relative degree to which inclusion or exclusion is stressed.

¹⁷ see Jenkins (1997: 48).

The primordial model is associated with the works of Geertz (1973), Gutkind (1970) and Cohen (1969) among others. They talk about groups of people whose identities are primarily grounded in existential feelings or what Geertz called “primordial sentiments”. Early writings on African ethnicity for instance, treated tribes and tribalism as primordial groupings which did not qualify to be treated as ‘ethnic groups’ (Du Toit, 1978). Quite often, non-western groups are seen in the West as non-modern and therefore tribal (Eller, 1999: 196). It is now generally agreed that in spite of people’s predispositions and cultural settings, ethnic groups tend to invoke or manipulate their different attributes for various group interactions as well as arbitrarily shifting the criteria for ethnic identification depending on what is at stake.¹⁸ There is a wide body of literature that supports the notion that ethnic identities are not mere self-evident categories but rather consist of porous boundaries that are constantly changing and being renegotiated (see Barth, 1969; Schlee, 1989; Roosens, 1989; Yinger; 1994 and Jenkins, 1997). Morris-Hale correctly observes that rarely will a single ethnic attribute hold a group together or define its identity. He notes that even the so-called ‘ethnic’ struggles for the control of resources where economic disparities exist should not be viewed as mere ethnic rivalries and hatred (1996: 5). This particular dimension will be taken up later in illustrating how ethnic differences are expressed in everyday practices in order to exclude others from accessing scarce or valued resources.

Roosens (1989) notes that people will identify themselves to a certain group not because of the blood links but, more significantly, for a sense of belonging, psychological security as well as a certainty that one knows his/her origin. The ‘blood links’ though appear to lay the foundation on which the other forms of attachment are based. Roosens does actually note that in some multiethnic societies with minority groups, laws might be instituted to define ethnicity. Citing the case of Canada, he notes that “being Indian” is mainly defined in law through biological descent. He writes: “A child of two *full-blood* Indians is, without any doubt, an Indian, but one who deviates too much from this ideal type is not” (1989: 16, 24). He notes further that the ethnic origin of the mother is irrelevant and if an Indian woman marries a non-Indian, she loses her Indian status. In his discussion on ‘hybridization of roots’, Friedman cites a case where a youth from a mixed marriage insisted that he was ‘black’ and justified by saying that “if I am mixed, then I have no history and no identity, no roots, I am nobody” (1999: 253).

This particular case, cited in a context where Friedman is discussing hybrid identities and cultural globalisation, illustrates how primordial considerations shape and influence people’s

¹⁸ Horowitz, (1985: 42, 44).

definition of their own identity and how kinship roots are embedded in social meanings. Although the youth insists that he's 'black' in this particular context, one cannot rule out the possibility that he would readily take advantage of his mixed identity in another context. In my study, it was interesting to see that while some respondents reproduced the essentialist mode of ethnicity, stressing how physically different and mutually exclusive the Kamba and the Maasai were, others reproduced the fluid aspects, while others oscillated between the two. Talking about the height distinction between the Kamba and the Maasai, a respondent (Kamba businesswoman) noted, "they are tall (Maasai), but now look at me, how many Maasai are tall like me...eh...even men (laughs)?" But as she challenged a primordial criterion or marker of 'being Maasai', she opened up a Pandora's box about her own identity noting that "because of my height, some people think I am not Kamba".¹⁹ Although starting from an essentialist view of ethnic identity, she challenges that notion by showing how limiting and misleading it is to classify people simply by their physical features. During our conversation however, I could not rule out an underlying motive to demystify the Kamba notion of the Maasai as physically imposing and fierce fighters. During the study, the question of "who is a Maasai/who is Kamba?" was met with responses that ranged from kinship roots, language and territory to a wide range of commonly held stereotypes. The responses were: Those who speak Maa/Kikamba (language), "if your mother and father are Maasai", "if your father is Maasai/Kamba" (patrilineal kinship), non-Maasai who have been taken up as a wives by the Maasai, those who live in Maasai territorial areas/Ukambani (designated physical space or locality), those who practice 'Maasai culture', "if someone says he is Maasai, there is nothing you can do to him" (self identification and contested identities), and if you have been bred on "Maasai milk".

When I asked the Kamba what they associate with *Maasainess*,²⁰ they talked of: Being "traditional" or "people of culture", "backward", "they are tall", "black", owning "many" heads of cattle²¹, moving animals from one place to another (nomadism/transhumance), "walking very fast" (Maasai men) and "proud and arrogant". Other attributes identified included, gaps in the front lower teeth, clean shaven women, young men with braided hair, wearing of red *shukas* and ornaments, red ochre on the head, pierced earlobes, living in cow-

¹⁹ She insisted that she was a "pure Kamba"! Among the Kamba, one is considered as *Muukamba kivindyo* ("truly Kamba") if his/her both parents are recognised as Kamba and/or if one was not born outside of wedlock. People therefore insist: *Ndyaauka na mwaitu*, literally meaning "I did not come with my mother". Whereas the worst insult you could possibly tell a Kikuyu man is to characterise him as uncircumcised (kiihi), as for a Kamba man the worst insult would perhaps be to tell him he 'came with his mother'.

²⁰ see Spear and Waller (1993) for a comprehensive review of the complexity of Maasai identity.

²¹ Pastoralism is one of the most dominant features of the Maasai identity. Over the years however, the Maasai increasingly keep fewer cattle as others who previously kept cattle as the main economic activity have taken up agriculture to diversify their subsistence economy.

dung walled huts, men carry clubs and knives, illiterate and having many wives. The Kamba had relatively much to say about the Maasai. Their detailed descriptions illustrated not only what appeared to be ‘clear’ distinctions between them and their Nilotc neighbours, but also the richness of the Maasai culture.

On the other hand, whenever I asked a Maasai respondent “what do you associate with *Kambaness*”, they were generally economical with words. The question was treated as being “sensitive”. Whether it was due to my own identity as Kamba or for some other reason, the Maasai appeared to be more reluctant to essentialise. I got responses like: they are just like us, it is you who should tell *us*, they are farmers, toil a lot, wear clothes of “these days”, lost their culture, light skinned (*white*), short, poor, have no cattle, no land,²² and that they are tricky and cunning. They gave fairly fluid depictions of Kamba identity. In both cases however, the descriptions were reflexive in nature, made vis-à-vis the other group and they should therefore be evaluated in that context; few could stand on their own. An exhaustive discussion on these depictions is taken up in chapters three and four. Barth reminds us that “categorical ethnic distinctions do not depend on an absence of mobility, contact and information but do entail social processes of exclusion and incorporation whereby discrete categories are maintained despite changing participation and membership in the course of individual life histories” (1969: 10).

All in all, I was to discover that, just like Gerd Baumann (1996: 4) notes, actors can be incredible at how much they grasp the complexity of ethnicity. The descriptions clearly showed that actors knew how complex it was to delineate ethnicity but have their own ways of categorising who belongs to which group. Such field experiences, treated in some detail later on, illustrate how physical differences traced to one’s kinship roots were/are socially constructed or given meaning in people’s daily lives. It was rather interesting listening to African groups discussing ‘colour’ differences and other genetically predisposed characteristics that were said to distinguish “who is who”.

While some responses appeared to border on the primordial model of ethnicity (Geertz, 1973) many were, either socially constructed or long held stereotypes. Even the genetic characteristics were laden with social meaning. What is clear is that phenotype or physical appearances are simply identity markers in a myriad of others. To be fair to Geertz, he did

²² Descriptions were often given in absolute terms with little relativity. The Kamba were said to have ‘no land’ but this simply meant that they hold smaller plots; they were also said to have ‘no cattle’ although they keep some stock which has allowed cattle raids to significantly define Kamba-Maasai relationships in history. On the other hand, the Maasai were associated with ‘having many wives’ although the Kamba practice polygyny too. Asking a Maasai respondent why these descriptions were so ‘clear-cut’ and yet the reality was different, he said that he didn’t want to cause ‘confusion’ or sound like he didn’t know the Kamba ‘very well’.

provide the link between the primordial ‘givens’ and social meaning by stating that actors will perceive blood and cultural ties as natural and obligatory (1973: 260). From my field experience, it seems that there are many instances in life that could tempt actors to perceive ethnicity as a given condition. This is particularly the case where people are positively or negatively discriminated on the basis of their ethnic roots²³ or where others seek an ‘easy solution’ where competition for resources like land is rather stiff. During the politically instigated ethnic/land clashes that almost engulfed the whole of Kenya into a civil war in the early 1990’s, a Maasai cabinet minister caused an uproar when he characterised the Kikuyu as inherently selfish and power hungry and said that one could tell a Kikuyu from others since they apparently had “stained teeth” and “protruding stomachs”! It was quite a crude way of drawing a distinction between the Maasai and the Kikuyu. The remark appeared to be informed by some naked hatred in the Moi regime for the influential and internally widely dispersed Kikuyu.

It was quite misleading though since after many decades of intermarriages and assimilation, the Maasai and the Kikuyu identities overlap a great deal. Besides, despite the fact that the Maasai take pride in their milk white teeth and lean erect bodies, these are attributes that not only cut across many ethnic groups but have discontinuities among those who identify themselves as Maasai. Actually, many non-Maasai groups tend to identify the Maasai through their traditional *shuka* dress and other cultural practices particularly the removed lower incisors. Indeed, certain physical features and forms of dress are common markers used in ethnic identification and subsequent discrimination (Horowitz 1985: 45; Schlee 1989: 5; 1991: 3). As will be shown later, owing to the fact that the Maasai physical attributes lend themselves easy to imitate and therefore look ‘Maasai’, the Maasai identity remains one of the most appropriated in Kenya. And while there has been instances in which some of those who claim to be Maasai are challenged to prove if they are “truly Maasai” or are accused of having “no drop of Maasai blood”, these have been mainly non-violent encounters. As elusive and controversially laden as they are, physical attributes are nonetheless applied in interethnic conflicts. Jocelyn Alexander et al. note that for those involved where ethnicity has become salient, “ethnic identifications are often understood as both natural and all too real” (2000: 306). It has been shown that ethnicity enhances symbolic and behavioural differences which can be used to promote or defend the political, economic or social interests of the

²³ That is common when one seeks to obtain an *identity card* on attaining the age of 18. Some Kamba and Kikuyu peoples born and living in Kajiado district (Maasailand) would be told to ‘go back home’ to their ‘home districts’ and obtain the identity cards there. The same rule would be applied when school leavers applied for admission to government/state colleges or when they availed themselves for recruitment to the armed forces. The two activities are carried out at the district level to ‘give all *tribes* a chance’, to quote a district commissioner.

communities concerned (see Peil and Oyeneye, 1998: 86). A colleague of mine from Burundi noted that during the ethnic genocide of the 1994/95, the apparent relative differences on the size and shape of the nose among the Hutu and the Tutsi were utilised by the villains in positive and negative discrimination. He had no concrete answer though when I asked him how these features manifest themselves in those born of mixed marriages.

It is also worth noting that during the ethnic cleansing, while some used such apparently clear-cut features to inflict harm on targeted members, to others, these were features that identified those who needed help and protection. In an edited book, *Ethnic Hatred: Genocide in Rwanda*, Obi Igwara notes that “some Hutus chose to commit suicide rather than kill their Tutsi compatriots, and...some Hutus risked their lives to save and hide their Tutsi friends and relatives”(1995: 1). There are many other social, psychological and economic considerations as well as dummy distinctions and categories that are created as groups target others. Banton (1983: 83) notes that in ethnic competition, “the more defenceless a minority is, the more suitable it is as a target”. Conversely, when ‘minority’ groups dominate power, as has been the case in many parts of Africa (e.g. Kenya, Uganda, Nigeria and Ghana), the revered ‘majority’ or more populous groups are usually demonised and labelled with all sorts of stereotypes that are treated as ‘facts’. That explains the case referred above in which a cabinet minister vilified the Kikuyu ethnic group.

Despite the fact that essentialism may be used as a benchmark in certain interethnic encounters, the primordial approach to ethnicity has been criticised for, among other things, assuming ethnicity to be a natural or given phenomenon and for failing to recognise its dynamism and why it is important in some situations and not in others. Besides, the approach is said to underplay the political, social and economic milieu as well as failing to recognise ethnicity as a function of social forces and impulses. What is more, by stressing that ethnicity is a permanent form of moral obligation to one’s fellow kin overlooks the fact that often people have a relatively weak and diffused loyalty which imposes no particular obligation to help a kin member (see Osaghae, 1994: 139; Crawford, 1998: 11).

Going by the arguments and counter arguments presented here, one may conclude that irrespective of the plausible position that takes ethnicity as principally a function of social meanings and as manipulable (flexible), the primordial dimensions constitute the basis for the social construction of ethnicity. Moreover, this balance between nature and nurture is often skewed depending on the actors and the issues at stake. Some scholars however are very categorical; Jenkins notes: “No matter how apparently strong or inflexible it may be, ethnicity

is always socially constructed, in the first instance and in every other" (1997: 47; original emphasis).

2.1.3 Ethnicity: Pragmatic considerations

Regarding the genocide in Rwanda and Burundi, Eller (1999: 196) notes that the interethnic conflict witnessed was neither primordial nor were the very identities on which it was predicated. Deviating from "cultural stuff" in the definition of ethnic groups, Fredrik Barth led the way in the adoption of a discourse that treats the creation and maintenance of ethnic boundaries between groups as core in the anthropology of ethnicity (Barth, 1969; Jenkins, 1997:90). The setting of boundaries is said to be necessary where groups engage in competitive situations (Horowitz, 1985: 70). He notes further that such boundaries tend to shift with the political context. Horowitz further provides a crucial link between physical and social boundaries by noting that "territorial boundaries help shape the level of group identity that emerges as the most salient, the wider the effective territorial boundaries, the wider the ethnic boundaries are likely to be; the narrower the territorial boundaries, the narrower the ethnic boundaries, all else equal".²⁴ Recognising how complex and fluid boundaries could be, Horowitz remained rather non-committal, for in interethnic relations there will always be intervening variables that cannot be held constant.

In much of Africa, ethnic territorial boundaries were artificially created during the colonial period and perpetuated or sustained by the post-colonial state. In other cases, individual groups themselves realised that fragmentation would put them at a disadvantage in the ethnic competition that was expected to follow the creation of independent states.²⁵ This acted as a major driving force in frantic efforts to redefine both social and territorial boundaries. Indeed, emphasis of common descent and myths of origin have been common particularly among groups living across national boundaries (see Wijeyewardene, 1990). In some cases, these group-based initiatives have been thwarted by the political leadership keen to keep potentially powerful groups fragmented.

It has been stated over and again that ethnicity is indeed relative and that it is a social resource manipulated by actors depending on who has what power to influence the flow or access to scarce resources. It has been assumed that people may change their ethnic identity "if they can profit by doing so" (Roosens, 1989: 13). Well, non-material considerations may also motivate groups to shift their ethnic boundaries.

²⁴ Horowitz, (1985: 66).

²⁵ Ibid. p. 71.

It has been argued that the boundary a certain group claims at a certain time is arbitrary and can shift out of linguistic, social, or any other changes. Evidence from Africa shows that individuals as well as lineages are normally in the process of becoming members of a given ethnic group since one is not a member of a group in an intangible way (see Du Toit 1978: 8). This argument has also been ratified in latter writings.²⁶ Ethnic boundaries are said to be porous, fluid and flexible and may be manipulated to serve given ends at a particular place and time (Barth 1969). It would be prudent here to provide a definition of an ethnic group. In this regard, Yinger provides one of the most comprehensive. He defines it thus: “An ethnic group is a segment of a larger society whose members are thought, by themselves and or others, to have a common origin and to share important segments of a common culture and who, in addition, participate in shared activities in which the common origin and culture are significant ingredients” (Yinger, 1994: 3). Ethnicity claims have to be validated by others who serve as the audience and the benchmark on which such claims are made. The example given above where the Kamba and the Maasai define each other illustrates this. Ethnicity is therefore produced and reproduced through internal and external definitions (Barth, 1969: 15; Jenkins, 1997: 80). However, shared locality which is given prominence by some scholars as an integral aspect of ethnicity, is often challenged (see for example Jenkins, 1997:41). Using the case of Wales, Jenkins argues that locality involves political rights and responsibilities which are not entailed in ethnicity.

Based on his social constructionist view of ethnicity, Barth defined ethnic groups as “categories of ascription and identification by the actors themselves”. He noted that in defining ethnic groups, “the features that are taken into account are not the sum of ‘objective’ differences, but only those which actors regard as significant” (1969: 14). Borrowing mainly from Barth, Jenkins provides a summary of what should guide one in defining ethnicity.

He says that ethnicity has to be defined from the social actors’ perspective and that the focus of attention then shifts to maintenance of ethnic boundaries, that is, the interaction between ‘them’ and ‘us’ across the boundary. He says that ethnic identity depends on ascription both by members of the ethnic group and by outsiders.²⁷ He adds that ethnicity is not fixed but rather situationally defined. Fifth, that ecological issues influence ethnic identity just like competition for economic niches which plays a crucial role in the generation of ethnicity.

²⁶ See, for example, Schlee (1989).

²⁷ see also Roosens, who notes: “It is impossible for ethnicity to mean anything without the existence of ethnic groups or categories, for it is a relational construct” (1989: 19).

Others have associated ethnicity with common culture and history as well as similarities and differences between people (DeVos 1995). Ethnicity is said to define membership and eligibility into a status group.

In the pragmatic approach, the most significant aspect in the search for a definition was the departure from seeing these groups as ‘social facts’ or givens to looking at what the actors think, that is, their self ascription as well as the ascription of those in interaction with them or to quote Jenkins, as an attribute of the *other* (Jenkins 1997; see also Barth 1969). In a summary, Jenkins identifies four elements in the social constructionist model of ethnicity, namely that ethnicity emphasizes *cultural differentiation*, it is *cultural* but produced and reproduced in social interaction, that it is not fixed or unchanging but rather *variable* and *manipulable* and finally, ethnicity is *collective* and *individual* at the same time (1997: 41; original emphasis; see also Yinger, 1994: 3-4). He admits however that these categories cannot in any way be treated as final as there are questions relating to how ethnicity is to be differentiated from or related to other forms of communal attachment or identification.

2.1.4 *Clan or ethnic group?*

Suffice it to say that while ethnic groups have been the main focus of study among ethnologists interested in social identity, some scholars have challenged that notion stressing instead other lower level social units e.g. clans and lineages or even larger units and networks (Schlee, 1989:1).

In his study on ethnic groups in Southeast Asia, Wijeyewardene (1990) similarly noted that it is important to look at ethnicity ‘at the local community level’ arguing that it is here that individuals define their own identity and sometimes, in terms of that identity unleash violence on their neighbours threatening their right to exist. The question however remains: what is ‘local community level’? In fact, in his edited book, Wijeyewardene and others discuss ethnic groups across national boundaries in Southeast Asia.²⁸ Without delving into the controversies of defining what is ‘local’, this basically shows that the level at which a researcher bases his/her study should be determined by the setting as well as the objectives of the study in question. In spite of the popular scholarship on ‘interethnic relationships’, Schlee (1989) has, for instance, examined interethnic clan relationships or cross-ethnic clan ties in the Horn of Africa with fascinating insights, showing not only how complex it is to identify or locate ethnic and clan boundaries but how clans constitute the basis for interactions across wider social networks.

²⁸ See Wijeyewardene, (ed.) 1990; *Ethnic Groups across National Boundaries in Mainland Southeast Asia*.

There is no denying however that in some of these groups in the Horn and north of Kenya for instance, clans appear to take precedence over broader social groupings. In analysing interethnic relations therefore, the challenge is to establish at what level are socially meaningful interactions and transactions taking place. Needless to say, individuals or groups that engage in various forms of exchanges, will represent various identities based on their ethnic group, subsection/tribe, clan, moiety, lineage, family or religion. In my case, much of the analysis centred on the interactions and transactions at the interethnic group level, that is; ‘Maasai’ versus the ‘Kamba’. However, any relevant intra-ethnic or clan-based patterns of coexistence were taken into account.

It would be important here to note that while the Kamba could remotely be divided into two main sections (Ndeti, 1972: 1; Ndolo, 1989: 8), the Maa-speaking peoples divide into about twenty-two autonomous and territorially demarcated sections (Sommer and Vossen, 1993: 30). These Maasai sections are further subdivided into several clans (Sankan, 1971: 1-4). The relatively ‘clear’ demarcations among the Maasai were reflected in their self-definition of their identities in which they often made reference to their sections or clans, categories which many Kamba respondents were not ignorant about. On the other hand, a long history of both internal and external migration as well as faster adoption of ‘modern’ lifestyles appeared to have dealt a major blow or eroded the significance previously attached to clans and lineages among the Kamba. Generally speaking though, it was clear that in both groups, lower levels of attachment or identity were not necessarily limited to internal exchanges or relations within the particular ethnic group. Among the Maasai for instance, different sections or clans have always related with a wide cross section of non-Maasai neighbours so that those who border and closely interact with the Kalenjin groups (e.g. the Kipsigis) or the Kisii to the west, are ‘different’ from those who closely interact with the Kamba to the east. Nevertheless, the various sections maintain a Maasai identity and are identified as such. In addition, while they may often have internal strife and conflict, they do form alliances against a common external adversary. Jenkins correctly points out that “although two groups may be differentiated from each other as A and B, in a different context they may combine as C in contrast to D (with which they may combine in yet other circumstances)” (1997: 40; see also Banton 1983: 176; Schlee 1989: 42).

The weakening of clan ties among the Kamba was evident as many people would not tell their clan totems much less observe clan head directives or attend clan meetings. A big number of the young people have only a vague idea of their clans, if they know them at all. “The Kamba

have lost their culture and direction”, regrets Mr Makoti, 69.²⁹ The clan heads are rarely respected anymore and the situation is worse in the ‘new settlements’ where people from different parts of Ukambani have converged. Mr Makoti notes, “many people in this *nthi sya makomano* (“new settlements”) would not even disclose their clan and nobody has the mandate to ask them anyway”. It appeared that in most cases, people invoke their clan during marriage ceremonies or when they need some monetary or material assistance or when vying for an elective post, or when they are meant to pay damages to another clan especially after one of their own kills or maims outside the clan.³⁰ It is also found prudent when one simply wants ‘proof’ over his or her kinship roots or to disqualify suitors and brides before a marriage ceremony. Otherwise, for those who can claim some economic independence or are relatively well-off, they treat clannism as a liability. Clan-based forms of behavioural sanction and punishment are hardly observed when invoked while in many cases, statutory forms of arbitration have generally taken precedence.

Mr Makoti told me a story about a man beaten up by his clan members for failure to attend clan meetings. He was in addition ordered to produce a fine of a male goat. When he reported the matter to the chief, those responsible were rounded up by administration policemen³¹ and in a settlement out of court, they paid for his hospitalisation and a ‘fine’ of Ksh 6,000 (EUR 80) including the chief’s dues of Ksh 2,000 as an arbitrator.³² Some of the clan members however helped them to pay up. There are many cases however of people sponsored to school and even to university by the *mbai*, even though such cases are becoming rare. Other forms of social organisation have instead taken root particularly using those in urban areas to raise funds for local projects under the understanding that “we should not forget our people” or “we should not forget where we came from”. Few want to be labelled as “those who have hidden in Nairobi”. Those in the rural areas usually expect that those in urban areas meet fairly often, share in their agonies, keep close contacts and visit one another and yet, the reality is usually different. It is often embarrassing for some if they cannot deliver a letter to their relatives in

²⁹ The names of research partners in the thesis have been changed in observation of confidentiality. However, names of state officials and politicians who were interviewed as ‘key informants’ have not been altered.

³⁰ If the case is being settled out of court

³¹ In the provincial administration, the administrators from the rank of chief straight to the provincial commissioner, are administration policemen who provide security to these officers, quell civil strife and crime, enforce certain decrees and laws e.g. arrest those brewing traditional alcoholic drinks or those practicing female genital mutilation. In some remote areas, they symbolise ‘government presence’.

³² Among the Kamba, just like in many other areas in Kenya, chiefs normally arbitrate disputes over land, oversee land transactions and also settle criminal offences that would otherwise be settled in a court of law. In return for their services, they normally ask for, or expect *usuu* (*porridge* in Kikamba) a practice that over the years has been conveniently monetarised. The sum of payment for the ‘services rendered’ is usually arbitrary but is mainly dictated by what is at stake and the level of income of the parties involved. In an incident where A Kamba from Machakos bought 10 acres of land in Kiboko when I was carrying out research in the area, the chief asked for Ksh 5,000 as *usuu* after ‘facilitating’ a land transaction that saw Ksh 200,000 change hands.

the towns since it is assumed that coming from the same village, then you must have some close contact there. Other new forms of social security include self-help groups which may not be clan-based but geographically determined, religious-based groups e.g. where people who worship together will assist one another during droughts, funerals, weddings and even for school fees fund raising ceremonies. Contrary to Ndolo's (1989: 15) observation that only the two largest clans (perhaps in reference to *Aombe* and *Atangwa*) do not practice exogamy, even some of the smallest Kamba clans hardly insist on exogamous relationships. During my study, I came across four cases where attempts to block endogamy among Aanziu, Aakitutu and Atwii clans failed. I shall now look at another key concept in the study.

2.2 What is interethnic coexistence?

Although the entire study revolves around 'coexistence', it would be appropriate to introduce some ideas and debates on this concept. Review of literature reveals that by and large, coexistence is a terminology whose meaning is taken for granted or assumed to be self explanatory and therefore unnecessary to concretise. However, Weiner gives an elementary definition: "To exist together, in conjunction with, at the same time, in the same place with another" (1998: 14).³³ As a concept, coexistence has evidently not found wide application in ethnological studies. Weiner partly explains this: That both as a concept and as a policy, *coexistence* was not born in the West. But this applies only if we limit ourselves to peace studies, for coexistence has been used widely in the natural sciences, particularly in the fields of mathematics, physics, ecology and agro-biology. In his book, *Competition and Coexistence of Species*, Pontin (1982) provides an elaborate analysis of 'coexistence' in relation to plants and animal species in their competition for survival within their niches. I find some of his ideas (e.g. "conditions for coexistence") quite relevant in making sense of how human groups compete for resources. I will revisit this in chapter six and seven.

It has been observed that *coexistence* per se, that is, when unqualified, is ambiguous. Louis Kriesberg (1998) notes that for clarity, an adjective is usually added to the concept. Such adjectives include 'conflictual', 'competitive', 'peaceful', 'harmonious', 'stable' etc. Besides, the concept is used in many disciplines and therefore, it is equally important to clarify the context in which it is used and the subject of study. With regard to ethnic groups, some scholars use 'coexistence' in a restricted sense; to refer mainly to harmonious relationships. Kriesberg, for instance, argues that coexistence means a "wide range of relationships,

³³ Definition lifted from the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

excluding ones characterised by overt struggle or relations between persons or groups in which none of the parties is trying to “destroy the other” (1998: 182).³⁴ To him, interethnic coexistence excludes violent conflict, but may be “restored” after conflict. This is also the approach adopted by Weiner and many of the contributors to the *Handbook of Interethnic Coexistence* (1998). The bone of contention therefore is whether antagonism and conflict should be considered as part of the ‘coexistence’ process. The “overt struggle” Kriesberg is talking about usually does not assume permanence among groups. In any case, these struggles can also take place alongside sustained systems of mutual exchange. I adopt a more inclusive approach in which conflictual situations are considered as part of interethnic coexistence. Besides, I do not take coexistence as a relationship that is initiated after conflict but rather as an ongoing everyday relationship in which groups compete for resources and supremacy while at the same time maintain cross-ethnic transactions. Actually, many studies show that groups of different ethnicities, religions or otherwise, but share physical space, there is always a thin line between harmony and conflict. In her study in Lebanon, Peleikis (2001) shows that potentially hostile Shiite Muslims and Greek Catholics often live together in harmony. More examples on the incompatibilities in coexistence relationships are provided below.

It is important to underscore here that *coexistence* was a very popular concept during the cold war. The concept was used by political scientists/economists to illustrate the juxtaposition of communism with capitalism or socialism with a free market economy (see Aubey, 1961). Aubey, who wrote his book within the auspices of the so-called “economics of competitive coexistence”, notes that the term “coexistence” was apparently coined by the former Soviet leader, Lenin, as he strategised to handle the Western threat against the Soviet Union. Lenin reasoned that the West and the Communist Bloc could “coexist” peacefully without recourse to war or open conflict. At worst, he suggested, the two blocs could engage in “competitive coexistence” where each pursued its interests without necessarily endangering the survival of the other. Aubey shows that there could be cases of economic, cultural and intellectual supremacy in coexistence; that it is not a ‘conflict free’ process. Galbraith and Menshikov (1988) bring in the dimension of concessions and compromises in coexistence by arguing that countries that relate closely but compete enhance relations by not getting into “each other’s way”. On his part, Griffith (1971), demonstrates the diversity that coexistence represents; that it neither involves equal transactions between groups nor is equality a prerequisite. In other words, coexistence may be possible in cases where a group dominates another. Kriesberg notes that this domination may be so severe that the subordinated party may not consider it

³⁴ Italics my emphasis.

feasible to raise any challenge. Whereas this applies among the Kamba and the Maasai, there is however a tendency to demystify dominance, albeit metaphorically. Besides, the subordinated group also wins concessions from the more privileged group by yielding to it. I provide more details in chapter six.

Apart from political scientists and economists, historians have also done studies on coexistence. In his book *Conquest, Coexistence and Change*, Davies (1987) examines the strained relations between the Welsh and the English over a long period of time. He demonstrates that coexistence is a function of intimate as well as potentially explosive interethnic relations. He argues that it involves struggles and negotiations to accommodate differences among potentially antagonistic groups like the “conqueror and conquered, settler and native, English and Welsh”. Appearing to share Kriesberg’s view, he avers that “coexistence” could also “fail”. Indeed, Josef Korbel examined what he called the “failure of coexistence” in the former Czechoslovakia, arguing that communism could not “coexist” with the democratic forces (free world). But, he concedes that “coexistence” is a process of blending “two antagonistic ways of life”. However, he argues that as a practice, it can be used as a deception to obscure extremely unpleasant situations (1959: vii). He is suggesting that using ‘coexistence’ in situations of antagonism and conflict can be misleading since the concept is often taken to be synonymous with harmony. This seems to be the reason why he cautions that coexistence can fail. Horowitz (1985: 136) indicates that coexistence is a process that may juxtapose “incompatible” groups or ideas. Further evidence on incompatibility is provided by Rajasingham-Senanayake, who notes that for a long time, the peaceful coexistence of “diverse and hybrid cultures” in Sri Lanka astounded ethnologists (1999: 99). She argues that quite often, ethnic groups are presented as mutually exclusive entities ignoring their fluidity and overlapping forms. This supports Galtung’s (1994) idea that “coexistence” is possible “in spite of borders”. In other words, groups that may appear to be quite different and antagonistic in various ways, may equally engage in mutual transactions to enhance their survival. Indeed, Davies concedes that even in situations where there are glaring power disparities, “peaceful coexistence” is possible.³⁵

Davies brings in the idea of “the arts of coexistence”, suggesting that coexistence is a social practice which groups may have to learn (1987: 415-21). Besides, he also talks about the ‘external factor’ and shows how the state could create ethnic divisions and disharmony by

³⁵ A distinction could be drawn between ‘harmonious’ and ‘peaceful’ coexistence. In my view, to live in ‘peace’ means merely devoid of conflict, overt hatred and war, while ‘harmony’ appears to suggest a deeper notion of not just living in peace but complementing exchanges, reciprocal relationships, shared practices and understanding, and perhaps destiny. In other words, ‘harmony’ implies a sense of mutual acceptance and social intercourse.

treating groups differently, granting separate charter of liberties, regulating interethnic marriages and assigning different status and privileges (see also Roosens, 1989: 23-40). Indeed, many of Africa's ethnic conflicts have been blamed on the state (Wimmer, 1997b). In chapter seven, I will examine how interethnic coexistence is influenced by the state and other groups.

Some authors have even taken the debate further to look at the global dimension in the coexistence processes. According to Galbraith and Menshikov, 'coexistence' is shaped by a world that has become "immutably and perilously interdependent and small" (1988: 2). In this sense, coexistence is seen as a juxtaposition of the global with the local. They insist that coexistence is shaped and made necessary not only by the 'local' milieu but also by the surrounding external environment. Writing earlier, Ramundo (1967: 161) talked about the "law of coexistence" stressing the interdependence of states, opposed social systems and more importantly, the interplay between the "local" and "global", necessitated by "a fact of international life". Although I am not looking at how countries coexist, Galbraith, Menshikov and Ramundo highlight the external aspects of coexistence, which are useful in making sense of how ethnic groups are shaped by governments and other groups (see chapter seven).

Description and analysis of the field experiences below will clarify further the concepts of ethnicity, difference and interethnic coexistence.

2.3 Methodological Reflections

2.3.1 *Entering the field*

2.3.1.1 *"Are you from across"?*

When I went back to Kenya for research work in August 1999, I was assigned teaching duties at the University of Nairobi where I work. After a series of consultations with the chairperson of the Department of Sociology, my workload was reduced with my seminars rescheduled to Mondays and Tuesdays. This provision made it possible to have at least four days of continuous fieldwork per week. As required by law, I had to apply for a research permit before embarking on my study. The research bureau was then under the Office of the President but has since been moved to the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology. A research permit was issued on the 10th of September 1999. After two months of fieldwork, I reviewed my study objectives based on the real field experiences. Consequently, I applied for a new research permit but one the officers advised me otherwise. He warned that to obtain a

permit to research on ethnicity could be problematic particularly when one of the ethnic groups targeted for study was in the President's Rift Valley province and a member of the so-called "KAMATUSA".³⁶ I heeded his advise and proceeded with fieldwork using the old permit. The bureau had also 'allowed' me to proceed with research work after providing them with a provisional list of interview questions rather than a questionnaire. This followed a lengthy discussion on the open-ended and interpretative methodological approach which was to be used in the study. Ordinarily, before a research permit is issued, the researcher is required to hand in two copies of the questionnaire to be used in the assembling of data.

Before I could begin any field activity, I was expected to report to the District Commissioner (DC) in the respective districts of Kajiado and Makueni where I was to carry out research work. These mandatory visits were to bring to the attention of these officers about my forthcoming activities in their areas of jurisdiction. Since Kajiado is nearer to Nairobi, I decided to go there first. Unfortunately, the DC was unavailable during my first three visits. Each time I was being told to "check later" or "come tomorrow" or "try next week". It was a familiar experience in a Kenyan government office. Asking whether if I came at the said time I would find the DC, the usual answer was "you might find him, just try". When I finally met him on the fourth visit, to my surprise, he told me that as a "Kenyan" researcher, I did not need to see him. From this experience, I assumed it would be a waste of time travelling all the way to see the Makueni DC. I began my fieldwork. Wherever I went however, I paid courtesy calls to the local chiefs. Earlier experience had shown that these location heads could easily disrupt research work on "security grounds". I also knew that I would be recruiting some of them as research partners or key informants.

When I started my fieldwork in rural Kajiado (Maasailand), I found it rather difficult to maintain any covert identity. I found myself in a setting where people knew one another by name, family name or lineage. Newcomers are therefore noticed very easily. Heads turned everywhere I went. In my modest jeans, some old sneakers and a T-shirt, I had to reckon with the fact that I still stood out. There were other problems. For instance, when I went to see the Kenyewa³⁷ area chief in Simba market, the administration policeman at the entrance 'pretended' that he did not know the chief's name. He was a Maasai and from my name, he assumed that I was Kamba, which I suspect made him to ask "are you from across?" to which I responded "which across?" He replied "Ukambani"! I confirmed that Ukambani was my birthplace. I told him about my place of work and that I was conducting a study in the area. He wondered what I wanted to inquire from the chief since "he is just a young man (laughs),

³⁶ KAMATUSA is an abbreviation for **K**alenjin, **M**aasai, **T**urkana and **S**amburu groups.

³⁷ Kenyewa is one of the administrative locations in Kajiado district.

he is new, he doesn't *know* much." I told him that it was a requirement to report to the chief before starting on any research work in his area of jurisdiction. He told me that if that was a requirement, then I could proceed to the office but if I wanted information about the area, "see me, I will show you the people to talk to." And on that note, I had began the reflexive enrolment process.

2.3.1.2 *Initial impressions: Unveiling the myths*

Irrespective of the setting, the purpose of social research is generally to enable the researcher see beyond the ordinary in order to arrive at a new understanding of social life (Strauss and Corbin, 1998: 8). However, it is often the case that scientific analyses begin with a certain preliminary observation, experience and conceptualisation. In this section, the main objective is not only to discuss some of the myths and stereotypes that I was confronted with but perhaps more importantly, to discuss methods through which myths could be unveiled. The first challenge was to see whether common stereotypes corresponded with the actual daily practices. In addition, I had to overcome my own personal biases as a member of one of the ethnic groups being studied.

My perspective of the Maasai had been shaped by a number of factors. I grew up about 30 kilometres away from the Ukambani-Maasailand border (Nairobi-Mombasa railway line) but it was not until 1980, at the age of 13, that I saw a 'Maasai' for the first time. I had been sent by my mother to buy kerosene at the Shell service station in Kiboko, which lies along Mombasa Road. It was at this time that I saw Maasai men and women roaming around the market centre. Their *shuka* (loin-cloth) dressing style and physical appearance (e.g. their pierced earlobes), gaps in the lower teeth, clean shaven women, men holding clubs and with swords hanging from the abdomen and relatively taller made them stand out among the more dominant Kamba population. My childhood friend, then 15, and who had been to Kiboko before (his father was a barber there), asked me whether I had seen "the Maasai" before. When I told him that I had not, I recall him telling me they are "very bad people" and that "they kill the Kamba". I had heard about fierceness of the Maasai before but we disagreed on their might because my grandfather used to narrate to us how the Maasai used to lose interethnic battles whenever they took on the Kamba. We decided to consult his father, who, to my disappointment, confirmed what his son (my friend) had said. Having migrated from Kilungu where contact with the Maasai has been historically more intense than where my parents had migrated from, my friend's father told me that he had not expected me to have a correct impression on the issue. In the latter part of 1999 and much of 2000, some 20 years later, I was to realise that Kamba opinions about the Maasai are just as diverse, contradictory

and uncoordinated. Interviewing an old Kamba man (Kyuli) in May 2000, he told me that he could not “recall” an incident where the Maasai defeated the Kamba in battle. I raised the story that I had been given in 1980. His response was that “as small boys, it would have been boring to tell you that the Maasai are weak (laughs), I think he (my friend’s father) wanted you to admire them and also keep off, not to go near them”. Strauss and Corbin argue that early concepts often provide a departure point from which to begin data collection but warn that once data collection begins, initial conceptions should be gradually discarded as this could hinder discovery (1998: 205).

Of all the strategies that were adopted to assemble reliable data (e.g. participant observation, relating what was said and actual action and using different sources of data) time was the most significant factor. In a number of occasions, and owing to my prolonged stay in the field, respondents would retract some things they had told me earlier either after having a better understanding of my research activities or after realising that spending more time in the area had yielded information that had ‘falsified’ what they had said. Regarding an incident where the Maasai were involved in an armed conflict with the Kamba at the Simba trading centre in February 1999, the chairman of the centre had given me an account that conflicted with what I gathered from other sources. Meeting me two months after our first interview, he asked me to see him later “for some clarifications”. When I met him, he said: “Young man, do you know there are things we tell passers-by, we are on the main road, people keep on asking questions, you cannot tell them everything...I did not know that you were going to be around that long” (Makonyi, 21/06/2000). This partly touches on one of the basic things in ethnographic research, namely that actors may not share with outside investigators what they share among themselves (Charmaz and Mitchell, 2001: 163).

As I conducted fieldwork, I would form certain initial impressions which changed as more insights emerged. I must admit that when I began fieldwork in Maasailand, homesteads looked rather similar, people appeared more or less dressed the same way and it was difficult to tell who enjoyed what status, wielded what power, could influence what or could be a potential informant. From what started as a fairly ‘homogenous’ group, I was to find out that the Maasai were not only such a socially differentiated group but even antagonistic. Whatever was to emerge as ‘differences’ therefore between the ‘Kamba’ and the ‘Maasai’ had to be treated with lots of caution as the lines of distinction got thinner as overlaps emerged. There were many things that I surmised to hold only to be confronted with other dimensions in the course of the study. I was, for instance, told repeatedly that the Kamba and the Maasai are “enemies” although day-to-day activities appeared rather harmonious and reciprocal. Asking a

Kamba what he had to say about the Maasai, he quipped: “You know the Kamba and the Maasai are enemies”. As a follow up, I asked him, “could you please tell me why they are enemies”? He said: “You are Kamba, if you do not know, how am I supposed to know”. Apart from equating group membership to shared knowledge, his reluctance to clarify revealed not only the fluidity of such claims but also how actors can mislead investigators. Asking the same question to different actors led to a more integrative position. It also helped talking to ‘outsiders’ who had stayed in these areas for considerable time to take me through what they had to go through themselves.

I had to devise ways of establishing how differences as well as notions of commonality were constructed and made sense of. What did the Kamba mean, for example, when they said that they were more “modernised” than their counterparts, the Maasai. I found it misleading, to assume that the Kamba ‘traditional’ systems had been broken down. This had to be seen in relative terms. In fact, Ndolo (1989) had shown that the Kamba ‘lagged behind’ other groups like the Kikuyu and the Luhya in the adoption of western education and Christianity. Compared to the Maasai however, they were ‘better off’. Maasai culture has had stronger elements of persistence and resilience; less watered down compared to the Kamba.

I had to reckon with the fact that Maasai ‘traditional’ appearances were often deceptive. Their traditional dress could deceive a newcomer to make the assumption that such dressing styles represented illiterate and ‘rural-based’ populations. An American researcher I met in Kajiado noted that making “negative” comments about the Maasai in English assuming that no one around him would comprehend what he said had landed him into “trouble.” Incidentally, this applied for the Maasai ‘elite’ too. I had to get accustomed to the fact that the lean, tall youth in full traditional regalia including a club and a sword and with dusty legs, could be a university student on holiday or somebody who has never been to school. The Kamba used to claim that these similarities in dress and appearance had led to loss of cattle as raiders would be hardly distinguishable from the rest when paraded by police for identification. But even in “uniform”, there were some outstanding distinctions. The ‘educated’ ones tended to ignore some pieces of attire, associated rather closely, were more inquisitive and spent most of their time in the market centres. More details on physical appearances are provided in chapter three.

2.3.1.3 Situating the study: Description of the site

Let me start by presenting the wider context within which this study was conducted. The study was carried out at a time when Kenya was in a deep economic crisis following the suspension of World Bank and IMF financial support and a declining tourism sector that had

not recovered after the ethnic clashes of 1997 that took place in and around the historical town of Mombasa. Suspension of aid was based on accusations of bad governance, poor human rights record, a bloated civil service, corruption and failure of the government to move fast enough in the privatisation of loss making state corporations (parastatals). The structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) prescribed by the World Bank over the years had seen drastic reductions in the financing of education and health services.³⁸ The cost-sharing policy introduced in government health facilities and in schools had led to reduced access to health care (with many resorting to herbal medicine) and falling school attendance respectively.³⁹ An education officer⁴⁰ in Kajiado district noted that rising costs in education had worked against government efforts to encourage the Maasai to send their children to school. He noted that the number of Maasai girls dropping out of school and married off had increased, while fathers “conveniently” claimed that they could not afford to keep them in school. Local administrators also said that “petty crimes” (e.g. theft of cattle, sheep and goats) had increased along the Makueni-Kajiado boundary. This was particularly attributed to “idle young men” (some school drop outs) who could not find other means of generating income. Although these thefts were not only interethnic but also intra, they were mainly portrayed as “intertribal”. In general, the worsening economic situation in Kenya was compounded by the re-ethnicisation of the political sphere as leaders mobilised their ethnic groups in preparation for the “Moi succession”.⁴¹ The instrumentalisation of ethnicity had taken root in the early 1990’s during the debates that led to the re-introduction of a multiparty system of government. The study was also carried out through a period of drastic climatic and seasonal change; starting with harvests and abundant pastures to a time of drought and famine. The infamous El Nino heavy rains of 1997/98 that swept through much of East Africa were double edged, destroying many infrastructural establishments but resulting in bumper harvests. The 1999 period therefore was a time of plenty, farmers had food stocks while cattle keepers had pastures and water. As we moved to 2000, rains failed and the fortunes were gradually overturned, there was rampant food and water shortages, decimated pastures and enormous livestock losses. Nevertheless, the people in the study areas are no strangers to these shifts but each time they occur, strategies of survival are realigned, modes of exchange between the

³⁸ With few exceptions, this has been the same story in many African countries. In Zambia for instance, in view of the deteriorating living conditions under SAPs, the people renamed the acronym “Strangling African People”, accusing the Bretton Woods institutions of marginalising African countries and trapping them in a cycle of dependency and underdevelopment.

³⁹ The new coalition government, which took over from Moi after the 2002 elections, re-introduced free primary school education.

⁴⁰ A Kenya Union of Teachers (KNUT) official.

⁴¹ President Moi, who ruled Kenya for 24 years, stepped down in 2002.

groups are altered and intensified and there are more incidences of ethnic conflict as groups compete for scarce resources. There was movement of Maasai cattle into Ukambani and other parts of Maasailand while both groups relied more and more on the market for the provision of foodstuffs. But in all this misery, there were inherent signs of resilience. It was also a time when the Maasai not only in Kenya but also in the neighbouring Tanzania continued to press for ancestral land rights in the wake of diminishing grazing areas.

The study was conducted in Makueni and Kajiado districts of Kenya (see map below). The Kamba and the Maasai live in different districts but it is mainly along the shared border where, like all interface analyses, the examination of interethnic interaction is particularly intense, dynamic and unpredictable. Apart from droughts that threaten the Maasai economic base through livestock losses, they are also confronted by a serious health crisis.

By going through the records and his own experience, the clinical officer at the Simba Health Centre did associate certain infections to lifestyles, housing, cultural practices etc. He identified common infections like Brucellosis, which he associated with inadequately cooked meat or organs like kidneys and liver that are also eaten raw. He attributed Tuberculosis to the limited ventilation in Maasai huts, which eases transmission. Tuberculosis has also been identified as one of the commonest opportunistic diseases among patients with the AIDS virus (HIV). The clinical officer also identified sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) which he attributed to “promiscuity”, a common stereotype of the Maasai. There is also typhoid which was attributed to contaminated water sources, while eye infections were associated with cross-infections through flies. But, as a prophylactic against diseases, the drinking of milk however helps to keep illnesses at bay. International NGOs particularly AMREF and bilateral organisations like the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) have been active in improving the health related problems in Kajiado through safer water supply, primary health care campaigns and setting up of health facilities as well as support for the existing ones. A Maasai pastoralist told me: “There are things which we are also reviewing ourselves like *dirisa*⁴²(windows) and sleeping with women. To say the truth, sex is not a problem to a grown up Maasai man!...now we hear of this disease (AIDS) and we are concerned...they say some of the people who are dying now die because of it and it is true... people are dying at a faster rate these days” (Nkari, 18/05/2000). The challenge has been to transmit AIDS messages in such a way that campaigners are not seen as necessarily condemning Maasai sexual practices but rather sharing information on the deadly virus. Another issue has been to

⁴² Corrupted Swahili word *dirisha*. The Kamba call a window *ndilisya*, also a loan word from the Swahili language.

create awareness in an environment where AIDS has become just one among many other life-threatening conditions.

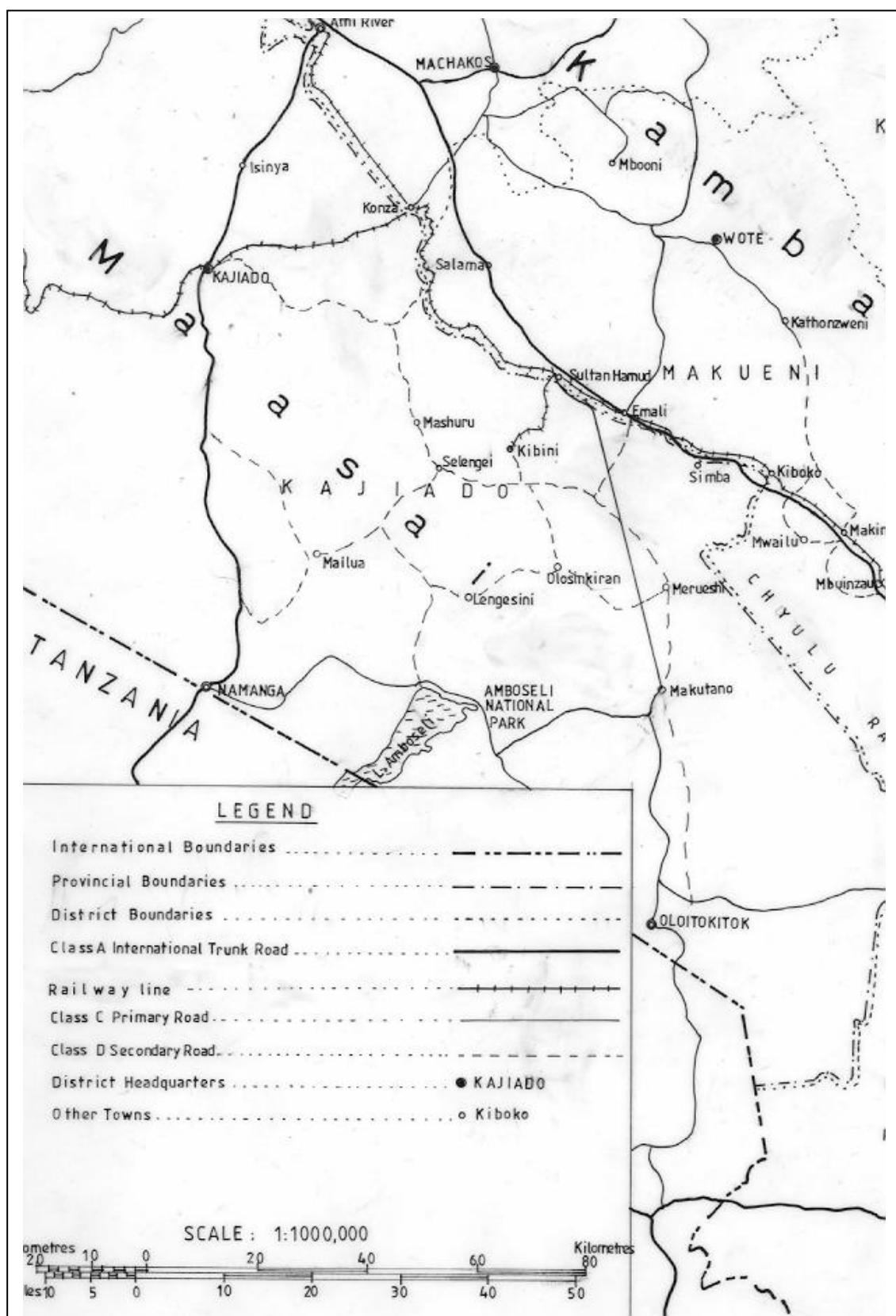
Below are two maps showing the location of Kajiado and Makueni districts and the specific area of study respectively.

Map 1. The administrative and 'ethnic' districts of Kenya



Source: Republic of Kenya, 1997. Kajiado district is shaded, and adjacent to it is Makueni district. The Maasai inhabit Kajiado, Narok and Trans Mara districts while the Kamba native districts are Makueni, Machakos, Kitui and Mwingi.

Map 2. The area of study



This map was sketched by a 'local' cartographer. Note the railway line that marks the political border between Maasailand and Ukambani and the trading centres along the line, particularly Sultan Hamud, Emali, Simba, Kiboko and Makindu which feature prominently in the study. Note also other places like Chyulu, Oloitokitok (Loitokitok) and Mashuru.

Both districts receive inadequate rainfall and are categorised as semi-arid. Kajiado and Makueni are food-deficit areas, often relying on the state and charitable organisations for the provision of foodstuffs during prolonged droughts. Sharing harsh climatic conditions, infuses a sense of commonality among the Kamba and the Maasai. The *Kenya Human Development Report*,⁴³ released by the University of Nairobi in May 2002, says that the most vulnerable and poor groups in Kenya are pastoralists (e.g. the Maasai) and peasant agriculturalists (e.g. the Kamba). The theme of commonality will be discussed in greater detail in chapter four. Apart from these notions of sameness based on aridity and vulnerability, Maasailand and Ukambani are paradoxically areas with gross disparities. The table below shows the distribution of livestock.

Table 1: Livestock production (1995)

<u>Makueni(Ukambani)</u>	<u>Kajiado(Maasailand)</u>
Cattle 258,700	822,401
Sheep 116,900	874,469
Goats 286,000	853,677
Poultry 611,640	398,429

Source: District development plans of Makueni and Kajiado, 1997.⁴⁴

The table shows that Kajiado has an extremely high concentration of cattle, sheep and goats. Just to know how big this disparity is, one has to bear in mind that Makueni has twice the human population of Kajiado. But on the other hand, Kajiado is almost three times the size of Makueni.⁴⁵ On the other hand, it is rather conspicuous though that when it comes to poultry, Kajiado lags behind. The explanation is that traditionally, the Maasai usually neither keep, eat nor like chicken (*elukunku*), which they equate to ‘birds’(*mtunyi*). Those who keep poultry in Kajiado therefore are either the ‘progressive’ Maasai or migrant populations, particularly the Kamba and the Kikuyu. In Ukambani, it is taken as great honour by visitors if a chicken is slaughtered for them. Chicken is a delicacy reserved for very special occasions like weddings

⁴³ See *The Daily Nation*, Friday, 3. May 2002.

⁴⁴ Compared to Kajiado, Makueni figures appear rounded up.

⁴⁵ Kajiado measures 21,105 square kilometres compared to Makueni’s 7,440. In terms of cattle population per square kilometre, Kajiado has 39 cattle while Makueni has 34 cattle. In terms of surface area therefore, the disparity is small.

or fund raising ceremonies for the ‘guests of honour’. Otherwise, chicken are kept as alternative sources of income sold to meet the daily monetary needs (e.g. to buy sugar, cooking fat or soap). Besides, with limited land acreage in Ukambani, keeping chicken is preferred because they require little space. In addition, unlike cattle, sheep and goats, their prices are more stable and they are easier to feed regardless of the season. What is more, among the Kamba, ownership of chicken is used as a benchmark upon which one could determine how ‘badly-off’ a household is. In other words, it is the minimum that a family should own. A ‘very poor’ person is often said to be one who “does not even own a chicken”. Among the Maasai, one is regarded that poor if he does not own any cattle although that is said to have been a long bias expressed by the cattle-owning section of the Maasai, against gatherers or *iltorrobo* and those who tilled the land, the *ilmeek* (Spear, 1993: 4). This variation should not be construed to mean that the Maasai had ‘higher’ standards in setting the ‘poverty line’. These ‘limits’ have to be understood within each group’s social, cultural and economic milieu. For instance, a Kamba household could ‘function’ normally without any cattle. That would be inconceivable among the Maasai. This is not to say that cattle have no significance among the Kamba. In fact, Ndolo shows that even during the colonial period, the semi-pastoral nature of the Kamba economy diversified their income base making them more averse to wage-labour compared to the Kikuyu who occupied more arable land (1989: 117). Apart from the distribution of livestock, another attribute of distinction is polygyny. This is more common among the Maasai. According to the Kenya Welfare Monitoring Survey III published in May 1996, 8.6% of all married men in Kajiado (Maasailand) were polygynous (had more than one wife) compared to 1.7% in Makueni. As noted earlier, the Kajiado figures would even be much higher if migrant and entirely monogamous groups like the Kikuyu and Kamba were excluded from the statistics. The same survey also showed that Ukambani has more women-headed households.

2.3.2 Application of the ethnographic research methodology

2.3.2.1 From a quantitative background to interpretative approach

Research methodology in the social sciences is a highly contested subject (Lachenmann, 1995). Strauss and Corbin correctly point out that both qualitative and quantitative methods have roles to play in the development of theory (1998: 34). They advocate a methodology where both approaches interplay and feedback into each other. The challenge remains: How does one strike a balance between the temptation to seek representativeness or what is typical in a given area and treating as paramount the informant’s perspective or the local perceptions

and knowledge systems. Anyhow, the partner's views or presentation of his life-world should reflect on the broader society in which he is a member.

Bourdieu's book, *Logic of Practice*, was particularly helpful in expounding on the distinction between quantitative and qualitative research. He begins by pointing out that social science is divided into what constitutes subjectivity and objectivity (Bourdieu, 1990: 25) and notes further that although there is antagonism between these two modes of knowledge, there is the subjective experience of the world and also the objectification of the objective conditions of that experience (see also Schutz and Luckmann, 1973). Bourdieu argues that "social science must not only...break with native experience and the native representation of that experience but also, by a second break, call into question the presuppositions inherent in the position of the *objective* observer who, seeking to interpret practices, tends to bring into the object the principles of his relation to the object, as is shown for example by the privileged status he gives to communicative and epistemic functions, which inclines him to reduce exchanges to pure symbolic exchanges" (1990: 27-36). The observer has to distinguish the discrepancy between the practically experienced reasons and the "objective" reasons of practice. The study adopted an intersubjective approach, in which, actors' subjectiveness attained 'objectivity' in as far as they were assumed to be shared by others within a given space and time frame. Everyday life-world was taken as intersubjective (as a "social world"). It was assumed that actors' life-worlds were subjectively motivated and articulated purposively based on their particular interests and what is feasible for them (Schutz and Luckmann, 1973: 15-17). Similarly, Moore (1994: 3) notes that human experience is intersubjective and embodied, not individualised and fixed but "irredeemably" social and processual.

Bourdieu criticised "context" or "situation" approaches which sought to correct the structural approach. He avers that these approaches have fallen back on the "free choice of a rootless, unattached, pure subject" and argues further that the so-called situational analysis "remains locked within the framework of the rule and the exception" (1990: 53). He critiques the objectivist view that tends to look at social practices from their "state of pure appearance" rather than "as it is lived and enacted" (1990: 104).

The methodology debate, which has preoccupied social scientists for decades, remains a bone of contention in my own department at the University of Nairobi. Most of my colleagues in the department of sociology are schooled in the quantitative approach in the generation of social knowledge and although qualitative research methodology is taught as a course, it is basically treated as a 'supplementary tool' that should at best be used to enrich quantitative data. What is more, qualitative research methodology is not taught at graduate level. A

colleague who researched on how tourism impacted on agriculture along the Kenyan coast proposed to use qualitative research methods. His professor had nothing against it but he said to him: “Just use quantitative methods to avoid unnecessary questions”. It was clear to the candidate that the supervisor was not exactly sure how the methodology would be defended during the oral examination. I still recall an incident in 1994 where, a PhD candidate who had used the grounded theory approach in her research on ‘teenage sexuality’ faced serious problems with one of her supervisors, who dismissed her rich narratives and biographies as “journalistic” insisting that for a doctorate thesis, “hypotheses have to be rigorously tested”. With the support of the other supervisor, she defended her position and was finally awarded the doctorate degree. Admittedly, the thesis remains one of the most spectacular works ever presented before a board of examiners in the faculty. Nevertheless, that experience did not deter some of my colleagues from asking why I was not using questionnaires for data collection. Severally, I had to defend my methodological approach in departmental seminars. I stressed the importance of developing analytic codes and categories developed from field data rather than preconceived hypothetical codes (see Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Apart from my area of study that called for an ethnographic approach, and therefore ruling out the use of a questionnaire, qualitative research is generally more suitable in most African settings where settlements are not linearly organised, modes of production and relations are quite complex and data bases are scanty and far between. The guiding principle was to seek reflections from individual respondents and groups. The functioning and dynamics of the Kamba and Maasai societies was constructed by following closely the day-to-day activities of some its members. I was keen to capture what was typical in a given area or situation as well as allowing room for variations. An attempt was made to see reality from the standpoint of actors or research partners which made it possible to acquire the vantage point necessary to see not only patterns of interethnic coexistence but also power structures.

I remember discussing my research methods with a respondent named Mutua.⁴⁶ He had asked why I was not using a questionnaire and wondered why I was seeing him severally. On the issue of the questionnaire, I recall telling him that I did not want to end up “testing” my own ideas but rather I was seeking his. He sought more clarification. I tried to explain how participant observation and oral interviews elicit more reliable data compared to a questionnaire. I suggested to him that he could, for instance, give a very accurate account about his close friends, family, parents or close relatives whom he shares in their daily lives

⁴⁶ Mutua is a Kamba and school drop out, worked for a Maasai pastoralist as a cattle herder. More details about him can be found in chapter five (5.1.3). His inquiry on methodology is also revisited on the section on “methodological challenges” (2.3.3).

and yet he has never administered a questionnaire to them. That appeared to make sense to him. He agreed that if he would have access to a questionnaire that had been administered to his family members, he would most likely find certain pieces of information that may not reflect their real life experiences as he knew it as a co-associate.

2.3.2.2 Selection of research partners

The study borrowed a lot from the ideas of qualitative researchers, particularly Barney Glaser, Anselm Strauss, Juliet Corbin, William Whyte and David Silverman. Other useful insights came from the actor-oriented approach of Norman Long and Giddens, and Pierre Bourdieu's "Logic of Practice". Strauss and Corbin define qualitative research as an inquiry about people's lives, lived experiences, behaviours, emotions, feelings, social movements, cultural phenomena and interactions (1998: 11).

The study was done through episodes of ethnographic research deploying in particular participant observation, informal interviews, biographies, in-depth interviews, cartographic techniques (making maps) and recording interviews (audiotapes) where possible. Selection of interview partners was based on the subject of inquiry, ethnic affiliation, one's knowledge base and the willingness to participate in the study. Most interviewees were selected through the snow-balling method.

Being a relational study, there were certain regional variations and methodological challenges. For instance, Maasai men were generally keen to participate in the study and would even insist on being present as I interviewed their wives, while in Ukambani, men would often tell me: "Talk to my wife" insisting that women were in a "better position" to provide me with the information I wanted. This was a pointer to the variations in family power structures and how knowledge systems were distributed among men and women. The following account shows how I met one of my research partners in Maasailand.

Eager to establish contacts among the Maasai, I took a walk from the Simba shopping centre⁴⁷ and through narrow paths, thorny bushes, overgrazed fields and noisy bleating cattle, I came across a Maasai *Manyata* (actually, *enkang*⁴⁸). Outside one of the huts stood a woman who was curiously looking at me. I greeted her in Swahili. She did not answer back and instead she entered into the hut immediately. There were some two small children playing outside another hut. There were six huts in total. I walked into the compound and went straight to the hut she had entered into. Before I could call her, she came out and asked who I was and what I wanted.

⁴⁷ This is about 150 kilometres south of Nairobi.

⁴⁸ The word *Imanyat* (manyata) is used rather loosely to refer to 'homestead' which is actually *enkang*. Manyata are actually warrior homes/camps built after initiation into warriorhood (*Ilmurrani*). *Enkang* is the thorn fenced homestead with several huts and where women, elders and cattle live.

She spoke in some broken Swahili but we could communicate. I told her my name, where I came from and that I was doing research in the area. I also told her that I had permission from the local chief to conduct research. “So, what do you want from me, I don’t talk to *strangers*”⁴⁹, she posed. I told her that if she could spare some time I could explain.

She told me that she has no time since she had a lot to do. I told her that I could come another day if she gave me an appointment. She said that I was wasting time with her since she “doesn’t know anything”. I told her that I was interested in her lived experiences and everyday life. She responded: “I only milk cows, cook and fetch firewood (pause)...I am sure that is not what you want”. I told her that was a major component of what I was interested in. She replied: “If you want to know anything about us (Maasai) come and talk to my husband or look for other men”. I told her that I will talk to the husband and ‘other men’ but that I was also interested in interviewing her. She told me to come back the following day at around 10 in the morning. I came back the following day as agreed. It was on a Saturday. She was not in the homestead. I met a co-wife who told me that Nkata had gone to Kibwezi to sell milk. I was tempted to interview her (Nkata’s co-wife) but I felt that could be counterproductive jeopardising the rapport I had established. I was not to see Nkata until the 10th of December although I used to check on her almost on a daily basis. In the meantime, I had also established some other contacts in the area.

When I met her, she told me that she was not expecting me and that she had assumed that I got “better sources” of what I wanted. I asked her why she was not home on the 4th of December as agreed and she retorted: “Did you expect me to sit here and wait for you?”⁵⁰ She offered me a stool to sit on. She remained standing. She told me that her husband had instructed her not to talk to me before I met him. Lucky enough, he arrived as I was trying to negotiate with her. He greeted me and spoke in *Maa* with his wife and she left immediately. He told me that he had already enquired from the chief about my presence in the area. He wanted to know why I was keen on talking to his wife “when you know very well that she will tell you nothing”.⁵¹ I insisted that the study would not be comprehensive if I talked to men only. He gave me the go-ahead but as an afterthought, he asked me whether I was in a position to find a job for his son. I told him that we could discuss that later. He said: “We know you people, you come here, ask us questions, waste our time and you never want to help us”. I asked him which “people” was he was referring to but he did not answer. He talked to

⁴⁹ She actually said “people I do not know”; later revised after she said later that from the first time she saw me, she knew I was not Maasai...and “not from here.”

⁵⁰ It appeared that giving me an appointment was tantamount to sending me away.

⁵¹ He did not mean that his wife would deliberately not share information but rather, she was not in a position to ‘know’ a lot. According to him, she would ‘mislead’ me.

his wife briefly and left. On that note, I began the interviewing process. Nkata was to tell me later that there are many things that men do in Maasailand without consulting their wives: “Maasai men think that women cannot keep a secret, they can say *dangerous* things to outsiders, they are not reliable”. Data were gathered mainly in four separate occasions. Apart from interviewing her at home, I also attended her “self-help” group meeting and accompanied her to Kibwezi trading centre where she had gone to sell milk. Apart from interviews, simple and participant observation were therefore important supplementary sources of data. She used to call me “my son”. Little did she know that she was only 3 years older than me! My judgement was that telling her the ‘truth’ would have been to my disadvantage, since it would have altered our ‘mother-son’ relationship which was working perfectly. Regarding her suitability to the study, she represents what I would consider as a ‘typical rural Maasai woman of today’. She is a woman at the threshold of various interface levels. She dropped out of school after little formal education and married an illiterate and much older man as second wife, but she has made an effort to make sure that her children benefit from formal education. She was also engaged in milk trade with the Kamba as her main customers (although she had said that her activities were just limited to the household). Nkata’s experiences are presented in chapter five. I had a total of about 45 interview partners. During the entire fieldwork, neither the research partners nor local administrators (with the exception of one) bothered to ask for my research permit. This was a departure from what I went through during my fieldwork for my masters thesis way back in 1990/91. This change could be partly attributed to a freer society after the adoption of a multiparty democracy in the early 1990’s.

2.3.2.3 *Flexibility and ‘using what works’*

Flexibility and creativity during fieldwork is considered central to qualitative research (Kathy Charmaz and Richard Mitchell, 2001; Glaser and Strauss, 1979; Strauss, 1997 and Strauss and Corbin 1998, Whyte, 1984). Irrespective of the documentary guidelines on qualitative research that I had read before fieldwork, I made an attempt to be as adaptive and innovative as possible. I was not only guided by the principle of multiple realities but the knowledge that what had worked elsewhere was not necessarily going to work in my situation. This flexibility therefore made it possible for the study to make some inroads in some of the conventional practices in qualitative methodology. Different actors related with me differently. Some would relate with me on the basis of gender, as a researcher, and as a “foreigner” while to others, I was a faculty member at the University of Nairobi. In some occasions, being registered for doctorate study in a European university made it easier to recruit some partners. A retired

police officer noted that: “Local researchers gather data for nothing”, adding that those from other countries look “more serious”. For some respondents, the mention of the word “PhD” thrilled them and wanted to be associated with the study saying they had never been involved in such a study before.

In view of the general living conditions and income levels, I had chosen not to use a car. Whereas walking around and using public means worked perfectly well, to some respondents, that was cause to doubt my authenticity. In what was ideally an experiment, a fairly influential man who kept on postponing appointments saying that he was pressed for time agreed to be interviewed after I drove to his compound. Surprisingly, he apologised for his earlier stance noting that he had not expected somebody who was teaching at the university “to be walking around in dirty jeans and snickers”.

In Sultan Hamud, a respondent told me that “after talking to me, you don’t need to talk to any other Maasai”. This put me in an awkward position since being an influential man, I did not know how he would react if he found me interviewing somebody else. I had to engage him into a long conversation so that he would appreciate the notion that interviewing others was not necessarily aimed at ‘cross-checking’ what he had shared with me but rather to benefit from other people’s unique experiences. A local councillor once met me in Simba and told me that he had been told that I was carrying out research in “his area” and that he was wondering why I had not gone to interview him. I had to save the situation by explaining to him that since he was a “big man”, I had planned to talk to him last so that I could also share with him my findings on the area. This appeared to please him and offered to assist me to attend some local public meetings. Maasai leaders were generally concerned about the image of the Maasai which they said had been presented “negatively” in books and in the media. For this reason, they felt duty bound to provide “accurate” information.

Local power structures shaped the interviewing process including who should be interviewed before whom. An attempt to interview the chairperson of Simba trading centre before interviewing the local chief was met with the response: “The head is more important than the neck...talk to the chief first then come and talk to us”. The chairperson said that he did not want to be accused of undermining the provincial administration.⁵² There was an ethnic dimension too. Whereas the chief was Maasai, the chairperson of the centre was Kamba although Simba is in Maasailand. I will revisit this in chapter six.

⁵² This is a prefectoral system of administration introduced by the British colonial government and retained by the post-independence state. The civil servant posted to a region (e.g. to a “division” or “district”) acts as a delegate of the central government and officers of individual ministries in his/her region are subordinate to him/her. Further clarifications are provided in chapter seven.

Apart from selected and carefully chosen respondents, data were also obtained from ‘casual discussions’ held with people in a bus, on the road side or when I accidentally listened in on a conversation. Some of these incidences would provide very useful information that would clarify certain codes and categories. The whole research exercise was not a steady continuous process but one marked by ups and downs. It would at times take one or several days without ‘any data’ and then a day would make all the difference. Data would also be gathered at ‘odd places’ outside the research area or at times when I had taken time to relax. On three occasions, I left respondents in a restaurant to rush to my room to make some notes and then came back within a reasonable interlude. At another time, a respondent whom I was listening to was wondering how he would react if I took notes, raised the issue himself saying that I should note down what he was saying “or is it that I am telling you nonsense”. I had to learn that each day, each respondent and each place presented unique challenges that had to be dealt with spontaneously. When I met the chief of Kiboko location to arrange for a suitable date of interview, he ended up saying so much regarding a ranch where dominantly Kamba and some Maasai families had been evicted by the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS).⁵³ I was to realise later that he had provided detailed information basically because in his judgement, I was not taking notes. Being in a restaurant, we ended up talking for about 3 hours. Luckily, since I had found the discussion very informative, I used to take a break, rush to my room and note down what we had discussed. My absence passed for normal urinal breaks which he also took to pass water. This experience is similar to Baumann’s strategies during his study in Southhall (London) where he talks of “hurrying to the toilet to take my notes” (1996: 65). In my case, all these were precautionary measures as the chief had given me an appointment to see him “officially” the following day at around 9.00 hours. When I went to see him as agreed, with my writing paper and pen ready to take notes, he said that he had told me “everything” the previous day. This was interesting because, during our three-hour ‘casual’ conversation, he kept on telling me that “I shall give you all the details tomorrow”. My conclusion was that although he knew that I was doing research, the absence of a questionnaire or writing material and a pen was to him a casual talk which encouraged him to share information freely without little if any inhibition. The social environment was quite relaxed and he must have thought that since I was not recording the information, whatever he said would be of no consequence.

⁵³ This is discussed in chapter six to show how state authorities shape ethnic competition over land resources and conflict.

2.3.3 The researcher's social position

2.3.3.1 Being 'Kamba' among the Maasai: Identity dilemma in the field

During the study, it was assumed that the nature of data gathered were shaped and influenced not only by the situation and the actors, but my own personal identity. Doing research among the Maasai was quite a challenging task. On the one hand, I was conscious about some of the biases and stereotypes I had acquired over the years as a Kamba. A researcher is shaped partly by the "degrees of difference" in cultural background or ethnic identification between him and the "study subjects" (Whyte, 1984: 28). Every effort was made to ensure that the study did not reinforce essentialist notions that I had acquired over the years as well as some of the biases reflected in the media and also in various research works: The idea was to remain 'open' to learn. Doing research among the Maasai made me appreciate some of the advantages a 'foreigner' may have in carrying out research in places away from 'home'.

Many of the Maasai that I came into contact with took it as an opportunity to say what they thought about the Kamba. For instance, Mr Solinketi ⁵⁴of Sultan Hamud said that: "I am happy you have come to talk to *us*". To him, I was not just a researcher but also as a messenger. I was being treated as if I had been sent on some fact-finding mission after which I would go back and report what I found out from the other area. The phrase "tell them that..." or *waambie* in Swahili or *taliki* in Maa was used quite often. In the completed form, the Maasai would say *taliki Ilmeek tiaki mikira ilmankati* which means, "tell the Kamba we are not enemies". Others would say: "Tell them we need each other...we are enemies but we live together..." "we are not *wachokozi* (troublemakers) anymore" or that the Maasai are friendly people. Others stressed that: "The Maasai are not as stupid/ignorant as *they* (Kamba) think" and that "they should not be taking us for granted". Another said: "Both of us are supporters of Moi".⁵⁵ An elder noted: "They (Kamba) should ignore what the politicians say."⁵⁶ A cattle trader said: "Some of us (Maasai) voted for Ngilu...that Kamba woman". One respondent told me to "correct" the notion that the Maasai pin their spears outside a hut as a sign that they were having sex with the woman of that hut. This "correction" can be found in chapter three. Demands to "correct" what were seen as "falsehoods" were generally made by the Maasai 'elite'.⁵⁷

The statements above touch on very many aspects of Kamba-Maasai relationship. There are stereotypes (discussed in chapters three and four), an emic definition of coexistence ("we are enemies but we live together") as well as commonalities and ethnic alliances (e.g. "both of us

⁵⁴ A retired teacher and former councillor.

⁵⁵ Revisited in chapter seven.

⁵⁶ Awareness that politicians shape much of the discourse that defines interethnic relations.

⁵⁷ Particularly teachers and local leaders (e.g. councillors).

are supporters of Moi”). To the Maasai respondents, I was not just a researcher but an ambassador who would bridge some of the gaps identified between them and the Kamba. To other Maasai, I was an informant and for these, they did not lose an opportunity to make enquiries about the Kamba, particularly their political orientation. It appeared that some sought to confirm what they already knew. All in all, this reciprocal relationship, where I got research partners who volunteered information and allowed me to stay in their midst while they had in me a listener who would take a message of goodwill to the “other side”, enhanced commitment to the study. There was evidence of commonalities and the fluidity of social boundaries as Maasai actors said they voted for a Kamba presidential candidate in the 1997 elections or that both groups “support Moi”. There was an attempt to deconstruct certain stereotypes e.g. by saying that the Maasai are not “ignorant” as well as appreciating forces of social transformation which had resulted in reductions in cattle raids. Others alluded to the fact that some of the ‘local’ tensions and misunderstandings had an external dimension and cautioned: “Ignore what the politicians say”.

Since I was not proficient in Maa language,⁵⁸ I employed the services of a pre-university student to assist me in the interpretation of texts or during interviews where the respondent could not speak Swahili or English. He played a crucial role in the enhancement of my hermeneutic approach, that is, in the pursuit of a more integrative ethnographic experience. I do recognise that command of a local language permits access to a wide range of data that may not otherwise be taken advantage of. I must say however that my inability to master Maa at times worked to my advantage. As a ‘stranger’, I became a centre of interest. The study generated a lot of curiosity among the Maasai. As some spoke in Maa, others volunteered to translate. Maasai respondents got immersed in the study with commitment that I did not witness among the Kamba. One of them told me that an exercise that had forced me to talk to people who could only speak Maa “must be very important”.⁵⁹ He noted further that “people come here to ask about water problems or to laugh at us! They don’t ask how we relate with our neighbours”. Besides, I was to learn in due course that the Kamba who spoke Maa were often despised and treated with suspicion by the Maasai.⁶⁰ They were the *wajuaji* or the

⁵⁸ The time available for fieldwork (one year) was not adequate to learn and master Maa.

⁵⁹ A remark by Mr Palalelei, a Maasai elder, in Kiboko (15/04/2000). More information on Palalelei is provided in the empirical chapters. A photo of his homestead is provided in chapter five.

⁶⁰ Although mastery of other people’s language can no doubt facilitate assimilation or integration, there are occasions when this is not the case. During my stay in Germany for instance, there have been situations where good command of German contributes to appreciation and builds bridges that would otherwise be impossible to achieve but I must add that in some other situations, speaking broken German or English has served me best. The latter scenario portrays me as a ‘foreigner’, somebody on transit or incapable of accessing certain benefits in the German job market or the welfare system thereby attracting sympathy. I am taken as somebody who needs help, one who is not a ‘threat’ or competitor.

“know it all” who “exploit the Maasai”. This was a surprise since bilinguals should theoretically provide fertile ground for harmonious coexistence, common understanding and integration.

In some instances, some Maasai assumed that I could speak Maa fluently and that I was therefore ‘pretending’. Sitonik⁶¹ asked me: “Why are you speaking to me in Swahili?...I know that you speak *kimasai*”. When I told him that I had learnt only a little, he said “we know that you speak but it is okay”. My concern was that by this assertion, he had concluded that I fitted into a Maasai analogy where the Kamba are said to be “cunning”. In actual fact, most Maasai respondents were more comfortable with “foreigners” who could not follow all their conversations. Other experiences were perhaps more dramatic.

Negotiating for an interview

A respondent selected for interview as a key informant refused to cooperate and proceeded to justify his position. This was the immediate and long serving chief of Kenyewa location. I went to visit him in the company of his son, who, in the course of my study, had become a friend and an informant too. After the son (named Tenka) introduced me to the old man, the former chief spoke with the son for about 20 minutes in Maa. Then the father posed a long question in Swahili: “What is your name, what do you want and where do you come from”? After I answered those questions, he said that he wanted to know three things; one, what the study was all about; two, whether I had a letter from the local chief since he did not want to be accused of undermining him; and thirdly, whether he stood to benefit in any way from the study so that he would know “how much time I should allocate” for the exercise.

I was shocked since I had not experienced this kind of resistance before. Even after expounding on the study objectives, he told me that he did not see how he would “benefit” from the exercise. He introduced an interesting dimension in the conversation when he said that “the Maasai have been taken advantage of by other people for so long”. Though fairly reticent about his experiences, he talked at length on how “people from outside” exploit the Maasai thinking that they are very “stupid”. He said that he was not going to be “another victim”. He was blunt: “If what I know is important, then you must pay for it”. He noted further that if I did not know, the Maasai have “woken up” and are not going to be “taken advantage of” anymore. He said that I was “lucky” if I had met Maasai who had assisted me with information “free of charge”. Telling him that data gathered for academic purposes should ordinarily not be monetarised did not change his mind. I tried to explain that the

⁶¹ A male school teacher.

information he was to share with me was invaluable and could only be shared freely. To this suggestion, he quipped: “*Kijana* (young man), nothing is for free these days”. The statement was pregnant with meaning. My interpretation was that he was talking about the Maasai society in general whose leaders have been seeking redress for past and apparently present forms of exploitation. When I told him that I was doing the study for scholarly purposes, he said “now, are you not a Mkamba?, how will the Maasai benefit from your study?” I tried to insist that “we are all Kenyans”⁶² and that since I teach in a local university, students from all parts of Kenya would indeed benefit. He interjected and asked: “How many of your students are Maasai”? I told him that students are not admitted in the university on ethnic basis and therefore it would be difficult to know how many students are Maasai.

I told him though that there were some students I knew personally from Samburu district. He asked me: “You don’t know that there is a difference between the Maasai and the Samburu?”⁶³ He said that the reason I was not saying the number of Maasai students at the university was because “there is none...so you see, people like you come here get a lot of information but nobody cares about us”.⁶⁴ Saying “nobody” cared about the Maasai struck me since the Kamba on the other hand talked about the Maasai as people who were “enjoying state protection” and “favours”. His arguments appeared to be consistent with some of the Maasai leaders who have been pressing for “indigenous” status on the one hand and a federal system of government on the other. The conversation is very similar to what Teresa Gowan experienced during her study among homeless recyclers. She warns that “one limitation of doing ethnography with the marginalised is that it is hard to see the mechanisms of exclusion” (2000: 75).

On the issue of ethnicity, I explained that impartiality was one of the guiding principles of the study and that I was working with research partners drawn from the Maasai and the Kamba. As for the letter from the chief, I told him that I had not transgressed rules governing research as I had obtained a permit from the Office of the President and that I had reported to the chief in question who had in turn given me the go-ahead to conduct field research in the area. When I produced the permit, he said that he could not trust “documents from Nairobi” as they might have been forged. At that point, I had to leave and think of another strategy or look for alternative informants. But, in his bitterness, he had provided very useful information.

⁶² A familiar phrase in the multiethnic Kenyan society. It is analysed in chapter 8.

⁶³ This distinction is discussed in some detail in chapters one and four.

⁶⁴ A common opinion among the Maasai.

Besides the fact that it proved rather difficult to trace the new chief⁶⁵ for a letter, I had to acknowledge that the basic mutual trust with the former chief had been breached. Later on, I tried to make sense about the whole experience. The old man had behaved as if approaching him in the company of his son had amounted to some form of insubordination. A generational issue could not be ruled out considering the highly structured Maasai society. As a senior elder, he might have felt intimidated and would not submit to his son's request. On the other hand, he appeared not only quite unhappy with the Kamba but he also maintained an intransigent position. I was to find out later that some of the most serious interethnic conflicts were witnessed during his tenure as chief in-charge of what used to be a very expansive Maasai territory. I had also to take into account that he served during the one-party state when research was restricted.

Apart from such challenges, my marital status was a problematic subject among the Maasai, where men marry as early as in their late teens and early 20's. It was often taken for granted that I was married. So the question used to be "when" I married and "how many children" I had and what my "wife" was doing for a living. With time, I discovered that depending on who was asking or making the assumption, I could jeopardise my position as a researcher by insisting on the truth. Being a society where age-grades and sets define relationships and responsibilities, being 'unmarried' gave me a junior status. In some cases, saying that I was not married is what was seen as a lie. If the question was posed, I answered correctly, when it was taken as a foregone conclusion, I had to judge what would be the consequences of my clarification.

2.3.3.2 Being 'Kamba' among the Kamba

Needless to say, being members of the groups we study accords the fieldworker certain advantages especially having the subjective knowledge necessary to truly understand the group's life experiences (Miller and Glassner, 1997: 104). But "doing anthropology at home", as it were, has its own inherent challenges. A leading qualitative researchers cautions that one has to bear in mind that any interpretative act is influenced consciously or otherwise by the tradition to which the interpreter belongs and therefore, s/he has to accept a separation from his/her familiar universe and the study s/he is doing (Silverman, 1997: 12).

As I began my fieldwork among the Kamba, I had felt that I had an edge conducting research in an area whose cultural practices, modes of subsistence, climatic conditions and ways of life were familiar to me. But, as I shall outline shortly, doing research among 'my people' proved

⁶⁵ He had moved with his animals to the Kari grazing grounds in Kiboko (Makueni district).

to be relatively more challenging, all the advantages (including a mother tongue) notwithstanding. I was to realise that some of the ‘advantages’ outlined above could also work against the researcher. In my case, the Kamba, unlike the Maasai, were more problematic to engage as research partners. While some used to be busy in the farms or engaged in various income generating activities, others would say that the Kamba who “know more” about the Maasai are those living among them or taken as wives. The paradox was that some of these Kamba women married to the Maasai would pose as “Maasai” and even deny their ethnic descent. Other Kamba considered the subject of inquiry as “very sensitive” with three respondents suggesting that for such information, I should talk to the “authorities”. One clarified that the Kamba have “permanent homesteads” and therefore can be easily traced if they were to be victimised for what they shared during interviews. Even more discouraging, other respondents insisted that they did not know “anything” about the Maasai “apart from what you know”. Others felt that I was basically interested in the Maasai respondents since earlier researchers who had conducted fieldwork in the area had targeted the Maasai and “ignored” the Kamba. I was concerned that such a notion might discourage many potential respondents from taking part in the study.

Unlike among the Maasai, it was hardly taken for granted that I were married. Respondents used to ask. Older and illiterate men and women would also inquire about my clan membership and lineage while younger and educated respondents showed little interest. Those older respondents who happened to be members of my clan were usually more receptive to the study. Other research partners wanted to know I was interested in doing research on coexistence between the Maasai and the Kamba and not between the Kamba and other Bantu groups like the Kikuyu and the Embu. Others wanted to know how the data would be used. A respondent (Ann Mwende)⁶⁶ asked: “Will this (the study) solve all the *problems* we have with the Maasai?” I told her that such studies could be useful in creating deeper understanding among the two groups.

I had to be conscious of the fact that in a narrative, the story is being told to a particular audience/person and that it might have taken a different form if someone else were the listener (Miller and Glassner, 1997:100; quoting Riessman, 1993: 11). This might explain why on many occasions, Kamba respondents used to tell me “you know them (Maasai)”. To the Kamba, I was not just a researcher but also a member of the society, who shared their world view. Asking the Kiboko location chief about Kamba-Maasai relations, he quipped: “are you

⁶⁶ Ann Mwende comes from Emali. Her experiences with the Maasai are discussed in chapter three.

testing me? Which Kamba doesn't know about these things"? (i.e. "enmity"). There was a general tendency to portray the Maasai as unchanging.

In the course of my study, I met and interacted with many teachers particularly those working in primary schools. They were generally so enthusiastic about the study that in some cases, they would seek to direct its course. Some had strong opinions about who should, and should not be interviewed. As 'rural elite', teachers are accustomed to being 'consulted' on various issues. Since they are often the only people on regular salaried employment in the rural areas, they are role models in Ukambani and to some extent, also among the Maasai. With higher literacy rates, they shape and influence opinion on many issues ranging from political representation, ethnic relations, government policies and activities of non-governmental organisations. Teachers are held in such high regard in the rural Ukambani that a peasant who has looked after his wife well often say: "If you meet my wife, you will think she is a teacher/a teacher's wife". Teachers are not only some of the prime movers of the local economy as businessmen and women but also lead women groups and other self-help grass root organisations. As opinion leaders and shapers, they are sought by politicians, they are the church leaders and are the ones who neutralise the powers of local leaders, particularly chiefs. They cushion the rural masses from the excesses of the provincial administration particularly exorbitant fines, arbitrary arrests and land disputes. The Kamba teachers working in Maasailand engage in commercial farming, while others have intermarried with the Maasai. Such teachers provide vital links in interethnic relations although on the other hand they are despised by the Maasai who see their deployment in their territory as "external domination". In Emaroro, Mashuru division of Kajiado district, a Maasai man had demanded the removal of a Kamba teacher after the teacher intervened to 'rescue' the man's daughter who had been removed from school and married off as a second wife.

From the foregoing, it is understandable why some teachers asked why I did not interview them. In Loitokitok, a primary school headmaster told me: "If you talk to us, you will save a lot of time...we know everything". It was in such occasions that the ideas of Strauss and Corbin (1998) regarding "variation" in the research process and how to select research partners were useful. I had to strike a delicate balance between benefiting from the teachers' experiences and being recruited into their 'camp', which, in those settings, constituted the privileged. Besides, although they were sources of very useful information, theirs was not necessarily a reflection of the experiences of the farming and pastoral communities.

The notion of Language

“You know that they are very different from us”, was the response to a question I had posed to a Kamba respondent, Mr Musango who was living among the Maasai. The simplistic and seemingly tautological answer suggested three things; one, he felt that he was addressing somebody who should know, two, the distinction between the two groups is taken so much for granted that it would be ridiculous to ask, and three, this distinction is so ‘unreal’ and exaggerated that substantiating the ‘difference’ was an arduous task. Asking for elucidation led to a familiar response; the dressing codes, Maasai huts, cattle keeping (as if the Kamba keep no cattle),⁶⁷ female circumcision, etc. Musango, like Sitonik, was desperate to ‘prove’ how distinct these groups were.

Musango moved from one criterion to the next to make a strong case. About language for instance, he told me how ‘impossible’ it is for a Kamba to learn Maa language⁶⁸ and dismissed those who had achieved that feat as “those Kamba who aim at taking advantage of the Maasai.” But he was categorical that speaking Maa is not what makes one a Maasai. “There are other things”, he said. Apart from the attributes above, he also identified territory, Maasai patriarchy and “doing what the Maasai do”. It was quite interesting how actors would start in earnest telling me how ‘different’ they were from the other group but then find it difficult to support their assertions. It shows how groups safeguard their identities jealously and would want to hold onto ‘something’ that distinguishes them from the rest.

Language featured quite prominently. In Solinketi’s homestead, he had a ‘Kamba’ domestic servant who could not speak Kikamba, prompting the ex-councillor to pose the question “now, would you consider him a Kamba?” And for sure, although he still bore a Kamba name and had Kamba parents, he regarded himself a Maasai. Seeking to find out the extent to which language was considered a criteria in defining ethnic boundaries, a Kamba research partner, Mr Mananu, noted that the Kamba concept of *akavila* or *andu mate Akamba* (“other ethnic groups” or “those people who are not Kamba”) is “those people who speak another language”. However, he insisted that the domestic servant is a Kamba who “had refused to learn the language of his people”. It is a typical example of how the criteria for ethnic inclusion and exclusion shift.

Whatever the case however, one usually affiliated him/herself with one of the groups and rarely did people take the ‘middle’ position. Studies done have shown that people can go to

⁶⁷ In his effort to expound his point on difference, he went into the details of saying how ‘Kamba cattle’ are different from ‘Maasai cattle’.

⁶⁸ As part of the eastern branch of the Nilotc languages, Maa language and Kikamba (a Bantu language) do not have much in common, and appear to have hardly benefited from genetic and areal relationships (although there are some loan words). For details on Maa language, see Sommer and Vossen (1993: 26).

any lengths, often inventing stories, just to show how distinct they are from others, including eating habits in South Asia (Wijeyewardene, 1990: 3).

Going back to the Kamba-Maasai identity debate, Palalelei remarked that the ‘difference’ between the two groups was “obvious...we live here together but there is a big difference”. Asking him what kind of differences these are, he adopted a linguistic criterion and asked “what do you people call water? what do you call milk?”⁶⁹ After telling him the Kikamba names (he speaks Kikamba), he told me the Maasai equivalents and posed a question: “And you ask if we are different”? At that point, I got a bit frustrated since going by his initial determination, the knowledgeable man ended up oversimplifying ethnic differentiation. Drawing his attention to the bilinguals among a section of the Maasai and the Kamba, he asked: “If you learn *kimasai* do you think you will be Maasai?”, which takes one back to Solinketi’s story above. Apart from unshared language, he also highlighted the modes of subsistence (pastoralism and farming), transhumance, construction of huts, development disparities, importance attached to initiation rites (particularly circumcision), polygyny and dressing. He noted though that “it is difficult sometimes to say this is what is *Maasai* and this is what is *Kamba*”. Besides, it was clear that nearly all the ‘differences’ identified were social practices. The tendency to treat an item like language as a ‘natural’ attribute, even when actors know that it is learnt within a certain social space, underscores how eager actors are to stress ‘difference’. As we proceeded with our conversations, it was becoming clear that we were talking about how real and fluid ethnic difference is. Convinced as I am that ethnicity is entirely a social construction, one cannot ignore how actors insist on Barth’s (1969) “cultural stuff” in defining their identity. Barth noted that ascriptive factors in ethnicity are used to mark boundaries but they may change and the cultural characteristics of the members may also be transformed. Common language for instance, has been shown not to necessarily constitute a prerequisite for common consciousness nor protect groups against conflicts (Haneke, 2002: 146).

2.3.4 Methodological challenges

One of the major challenges of the study was to stay focused in the midst of competing social realities. Charmaz and Mitchell (2001: 161) warn that “a potential problem with ethnographic studies is seeing data everywhere and nowhere, gathering everything and nothing”. Maintaining a “perspective” particularly in participant observation is a major challenge

⁶⁹ The Maasai refer to water as *enkare* while the Kamba call it *kiw'u*. On the other hand, the Maasai’s name for milk is *kule* while the Kamba call it *iaa*.

(Whyte, 1984: 27). During the study, an attempt was made to establish connections and continuity in the data gathered, integrate research categories and compare data with emerging categories on a regular basis. Researching on interethnic relations posed certain challenges. Due to the ‘sensitivity’ of the topic, some respondents would ‘disappear’ leaving some gaps in my fieldnotes and memos. To have a coherent story, such gaps would be filled up with supplementary sources or much later after the respondents resurfaced and were willing to continue. Among the Maasai, transhumance disrupted interviewing process. In certain cases, follow-up interviews meant travelling to distant areas where they had moved with their cattle. The principle of ‘theoretical saturation’ and sampling was adopted where a line of inquiry was followed up to such an extent that there was no more variant or new information emerging. For some respondents, the absence of a questionnaire made them think that I was not doing “research”. For instance, Mr Mutua asked, “you don’t have that *form* which people fill?” By “form” he was referring to a questionnaire, which is the commonest method of data gathering in Kenya. When I told him that I had no “form”, he looked unsettled. As noted earlier, I had to engage him into some lengthy discussion regarding the methods of data gathering that I was using. My earlier experiences had shown that apart from their inherent shortcomings, questionnaires introduce officialdom, fear and ‘distance’. Surprisingly, I was now getting schooled to the idea that failure to produce this device was also generating suspicion and distancing myself from respondents. Mutua even knew that a questionnaire was ‘quicker’ saying that if I were using one, I would have “got” what I “wanted” a long time ago. He wondered why I kept on coming for ‘clarifications’ from him.

Generally, I had problems using a tape recorder. At one time, I and a university student (John) who was assisting me with translation of *Maa*, were given a go-ahead to attend a women’s meeting. After a short session of self introduction, I asked them whether I could record the deliberations on tape. One member insisted that I should not tape-record the proceedings. Speaking in *Maa* she said “you never know where he will take the information”. I complied. Generally speaking, recording of interviews proved problematic. The perception that whatever I was doing must have been ‘serious’ restricted my acceptability and raised the stakes. Explaining to respondents the reasons as to why I needed the information on tape was understandable but the doubts remained. Their suspicions were not baseless. For a very long time, Kenyans have lived in a culture of fear. Apart from that, I realised that stressing that what they were telling me “was very important” was working against me. By stressing that it was important, some respondents feared that those records may be kept for a long time and that the data could at one time be used against them. In other cases where respondents had no

problem with tape-recorded interviews, I often noticed that they were more cautious about what they said, in effect restricting the information they would ordinarily share.

For the women group referred above, John and I adopted a strategy where he took notes since a direct translation could have influenced the proceedings of the meeting. Among the issues discussed included a Kamba woman heading a credit scheme. They wondered whether she would lend them more money⁷⁰ and discussed her attitude towards “Maasai groups”, which they felt was negative. One member suggested that they should not discuss about her in my presence but another told them that they should not “fear people”.

Deliberations resumed and I kept on getting concerned why John would not be taking down notes during some discussions. He was to tell me later that some of the things discussed were “not important”. My experience with John taught me that interpretersassistants must be chosen carefully. They should know clearly the purpose of the research and that the researcher is interested on gathering data that may otherwise be of very little or no interest to the assistants, or which they may take for granted as members of the local community.

During fieldwork, inconsistency of information made me realise why it was important to match not just what people say and do (Long, 1989), but rather what they also say and do at different times and places. In my first interview with the leader of a credit facility, she told me that 60% of women were receiving loans but then during the third interview in her office, it turned out that out of a total of 204 beneficiaries only 80 were women against 124 men. Besides, distinctions had to be made between ‘collective’ or typical practices and individual ones. Asking a Maasai respondent about his daily diet, he told me that *unajua chakula yetu ni nyama* (“you know that our food is normally meat”) only to find out in the course of the interview that he had not eaten meat for about a fortnight. The question had forced him to project a positive image about himself and his group, otherwise, in the contemporary Maasai society, meat consumption has gradually become a luxury. Such responses also show that depending on how a question is framed or understood, the respondent might be forced to create some non-existent categories.

I had to be cautious about how ‘reality’ was being presented by the actors. In fact, this traversed many areas of the study including the definition who the Maasai or the Kamba were, with a consistent attempt to portray each group as a clear-cut collective entity although observations and in-depth analyses revealed inter-group overlaps. Many decades ago, Leach had encountered the same problem while studying interethnic relations in northern Burma (Leach, 1954: 17).

⁷⁰ They had previously borrowed Ksh 50,000 which they had lost through ‘poor’ investment.

Last but not least, this is largely a study that anthropologists would perhaps lay much claim to. In spite of the fact that I have worked closely with social anthropologists (including my supervisors), it is difficult not to see myself as a sociologist ‘doing anthropology’, the fluidity of the borderlands notwithstanding. In fact, Jenkins (1997: 6) notes that recent developments in anthropology have made it “...no longer as easy as it might once have been to distinguish anthropology from sociology, its closest sibling and most obvious rival”.

Needless to say, as a researcher, I did impose my own influence or limitations on the data gathered and do acknowledge that at times, it was possible to influence actors’ responses when asking questions or seeking clarifications on issues that they ordinarily do not deal with in social practice.⁷¹

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter was aimed at exposing the reader to the complex debate on ethnicity and to clarify some of the concepts and the approach used in the study. The two sections allowed the reader to see the interplay between theory and practice. The section serves as a foundation to the subsequent empirical chapters and also to the concluding chapter. Of particular importance was the controversies surrounding ethnicity; the “dominant discourse”, presenting groups as ‘givens’, and the pragmatic approach pioneered by Barth (1969), which looks at ethnicity as a situational and a conscious effort of group members in response to social, economic and political pressures, as well as basis for social action. I have stressed that there are multiple, interlocking or overlapping collective identities. However, the chapter has also shown how the Kamba and the Maasai make sense of their ethnic identity and distinctiveness, a theme that is pursued in greater detail in chapters three and four.

The readers were introduced to the concept of ‘coexistence’ and its discursive dimensions. This chapter has shown that ‘ethnic coexistence’ is a contested concept. However, it has emerged that coexistence is about difference, juxtaposition of seemingly incompatible groups and antagonism as well as interactions between groups, the possibility of switching identities and external influence. The various dimensions contained in this provisional definition are expounded in the empirical chapters, with a succinct synthesis in the final chapter.

The process of data assembling has shown how the researcher entered the field and how he was recruited into the life worlds of the researched and how interaction with various groups shaped the ‘methods’ of research and the content of what was assembled. The fieldwork

⁷¹ See Bourdieu (1990: 82).

experience provides preliminary ideas on how the Kamba and the Maasai ‘coexist’ and how the researcher acted like a point of convergence for the actors who made sense of their own identity and difference. I acted like a mediator of peaceful coexistence. The challenges experienced during fieldwork, and the need for flexibility, underscore the subjectivity of the research process. The ‘rejection’ I often experienced among ‘my own people’ and the warm reception I got from the Maasai, partly confirm why difference plays a complimentary role in coexistence relationships as I will be arguing in chapter five.

In the next two chapters, I examine emic notions of ethnic difference based on common depictions that often present ethnic groups as unchanging entities. The aim will be to define the actors, how they make sense of ethnic difference and how this distinctiveness is an important dimension of coexistence.

CHAPTER THREE: THE ACTORS: ETHNIC DEPICTIONS, DIFFERENCE AND COEXISTENCE (PART ONE)

I have already noted that the Kamba and the Maasai are distinct but interacting groups. Chapters three and four seek to deepen this understanding by addressing one of the basic tasks of any study on interactions, that is, identifying the actors or parties and their attributes, and how these influence how they relate with one another. These chapters take up the debate in chapter two, to show how groups oscillate between primordial and constructivist ideals to make sense of their identities and interactions in their daily struggles. My argument in these two chapters is that to say ethnic groups ‘coexist’, means that they are ‘distinct’. In other words, I consider distinctiveness as one of the most basic requirements in a coexistence relationship. I shall discuss this distinctiveness and ethnic difference by presenting and analysing the rich body of Kamba-Maasai ethnic depictions. From Horowitz (1985), we know that ethnic groups that share physical space have myths about their relative values and stereotypes about one another (see also Barth, 1969: 19). This study however goes a step further and shows how ethnic stereotypes define difference and therefore how depictions become relevant in discussing coexistence. But stereotypes, particularly negative ones, do not just expose difference but also antagonism and rivalry, aspects that are an integral part of interethnic coexistence.

I have to point out however that in as much as ‘coexistence’ is about difference, antagonism and rivalry, it is also about cross-ethnic transactions, sharing and commonalities. Whereas the bulk of these exchanges are discussed in chapter five, I will highlight the contradictions in ethnic depictions. By ‘contradictions’, I mean that although actors present other groups with whom they live together as if they were separate and unconnected to them, observation of everyday practices reveals a different story. Observing everyday practices involves delineating the “critical interfaces” that show the points of contradiction and discontinuity between the different and often incompatible lifeworlds of the actors. This allows us to understand the production of the heterogeneous cultural phenomena and outcomes of cross-ethnic interaction and discursive domains (see Long, 1997: 34). Using an entirely emic approach, I show who the Maasai are from the eyes and lived experiences of the Kamba (chapter three) and vice versa (chapter four). In each case, I also present the logic and meaning behind ethnic depictions,⁷² as well as the group’s response on how it is portrayed. The discussion is not simply limited to ethnic stereotypes *per se*, but goes beyond these

⁷² Ethnic depictions here mean generalisations, stereotypes, representations and portrayals. The concepts are used interchangeably in the study. In fact, Torstrik calls them “popular understandings” (2000: 36).

popular representations to discuss issues around which these depictions revolve, namely the modes of subsistence, cultural practices, disparities in social transformation and the access and deployment of resources within and across the two ethnic groups.

3.1 Kamba ethnic depictions of the Maasai

3.1.1 Making sense of visible difference

Apart from language and modes of subsistence, distinctive markers, emblems and diacritical features are identified as important aspects of ethnic identity (Barth, 1969; Schlee, 1991; Eicher, 1995; Eller, 1999). Schlee notes that the display of material objects or gestures “indicates group membership and other social relationships and provides expectations for corresponding ‘real’ behaviour” (1991: 2). Furthermore, racism and discrimination are mainly a function of outward appearance and the meanings attached to those appearances. Barth notes that overt cultural forms are a reflection of the external circumstances to which actors must accommodate themselves. He notes further that on the basis of culture-bearing aspects, differences between groups become differences in trait inventories (1969: 12).

While skin colour is not an important variable among these African groups,⁷³ there are specific physical characteristics associated with each ethnic category, most of which are reminiscent of racial distinctions. While the Kamba would be unobtrusive in a ‘Maasai’ trading centre and vice versa, there are attributes associated with each ethnic group and deployed in everyday life interactions. Telling ‘who is who’ influences how impressions across the groups are managed. Actors identified the attributes associated with each group. For the Kamba, the Maasai are tall⁷⁴, walk fast, have erect bodies, “large white teeth”⁷⁵ and dark skinned while the Kamba are said to be short, light skinned and muscular. Tall Kamba would be said to have “Maasai blood”. Most of these descriptions, even when given by women, tend to be male-specific, an indication of the significance attached to patriarchy in both groups. Tallness among the Maasai is associated with eating of meat, drinking of milk and blood, and walking a lot, while the Kamba apparent shortness is said to be due to poverty, lack of food and toiling in the farms. Both groups value height, but since the Kamba are relatively short, they belittle it. Mutua⁷⁶ notes: “They (Maasai) need it, if you are looking after cattle, height helps, you can see all your animals, you can see lions and hyenas that may attack your animals...what else can you use it (height) for?” (in Mashuru, 25/01/2000). Kamba men

⁷³ Although when describing each group’s physical attributes, the Kamba were said to have a lighter skin complexion.

⁷⁴ Nilo-Hamites (e.g. the Maasai) are associated with what Adamson (1967:21) calls “great height”.

⁷⁵ Actually not as a result of predisposition but a social practice, namely the intake of calcium (from Maasai’s milk rich diet).

⁷⁶ A Kamba working as a herder in a Maasai homestead. More details about this actor in chapter five.

are particularly uneasy about the height aspect which is said to attract Kamba women to Maasai men.

As I have noted above, tall Kamba are often mocked to have Maasai blood, a claim used to accuse Kamba women of being unfaithful to their husbands. But actors from both groups acknowledge that neither are all Kamba short nor are all Maasai tall, but these grey areas are ignored in everyday talk. Other actors claim that they can tell whether one is Maasai or Kamba by intuition, irrespective of height, body marks or dress. Palalelei, a Maasai, says “when you meet a Kamba, you just know, you just feel it (prolonged laughter!)”. He argues that even with those Kamba that have adopted Maasai dress code and body marks, he would still tell they are not Maasai. But the “feeling” he is talking about is based on what he has internalised as physical attributes associated with each group. Although he insists that he cannot go wrong in his categorisation, he admits that many Maasai do not stick to their dressing code nor are all people wearing such attire or ornaments necessarily Maasai (see also Spear and Waller, 1993). Besides, among the Kamba and the Maasai, there are some shared pieces of attire like hand made tire sandals,⁷⁷ worn by both men and women.

The ethnic dressing code, which make the Maasai stand out, includes brightly coloured loin clothes and shawls or *shuka* and usually red, ornaments (including heavily beaded necklaces, cowrie shells and bangles won by women),⁷⁸ bodies painted with ochre and men’s regalia like clubs and knives, and occasionally spears. These ascribed markers of cultural identity, that also include braided hair, clean shaven heads, severed incisor teeth and pierced earlobes with plugs dangling below them, make the Maasai an outstanding group indeed. In the introductory part of their book, Spear and Waller (1993: xiii) carry a stereoscope photograph of Maasai girls apparently taken in early 1900s and note the following about Maasai image and dress code: “In essentials, it has not altered much in eighty years”. This resilience in Maasai culture, which wins them many admirers, including the Kamba, remains as the most obvious mark of distinction and difference.

On their part, the Kamba are said to have “abandoned their culture”⁷⁹ by adopting the “clothes of these days”, meaning, among other attire, dresses, skirts and blouses for women and shirts and trousers for men.⁸⁰ Although the Kamba have had elaborate beadwork and other ornaments (some copied from the Maasai), very few wear them today. But even those who do,

⁷⁷ These are normally made by men ‘shoe makers’ and sold during market days in the trading centres.

⁷⁸ For details on Maasai manifestation of identity through codes of costume, see Klumpp and Kratz (1993: 203-18).

⁷⁹ They were generally said to have “nothing to show” for their cultural heritage.

⁸⁰ Most of these clothes are bought in the open air markets during “market days”. A few buy new ones but increasingly, second hand clothes, otherwise called *mitumba*, have become more common.

they acknowledge the elegance of Maasai ornaments, with clear cuts of colour (see Klumpp and Kratz, 1993: 207). But the Kamba dismiss this ‘elegance’ saying that it is “simply” a combination of “bright colours which is typical of the Maasai” (in reference to the dominant red clothing worn by the Maasai).

There are certain practices peculiar to the Kamba, though. In the recent past, chipping the upper front teeth into sharp points was valued in some clans and territorial areas. It was meant to enhance one’s appearance. Among the Kitui Kamba, women in particular used also to beautify themselves with cicatrizations over their body using latex of the local euphorbia. They also used to tattoo their cheeks (see also Adamson, 1967). Piercing of earlobes, said to have been an imitation from the Maasai, used to be a common practice among the Kamba. These permanent bodily marks are still evident among the older generation. The Kamba of the 1920’s were just as ‘traditional’ as the Maasai and borrowed a lot from the rich Maasai culture. In fact, during the long-distance-trade with the Arabs at the East African coast in the 19th and early 20th centuries, and for which the Kamba became very famous, the Swahili used to call them *wasionanguo*, meaning “the naked people”.⁸¹ A closer look indicates that the Kamba underwent faster social transformation only after the Second World War. Although one can hardly find a Kamba dressed ‘traditionally’ today, as recent as the 1940’s, they were dressed similar to the Maasai, as illustrated by Adamson’s paintings and photographs (1967: 238-257). Besides, even in the 1970’s, old Kamba men in particular used to walk around scantily dressed.

What is important to underscore is that these appearances of distinction shape patterns of cross-ethnic interaction. They are used to determine who is ‘modern’ or ‘backward’, who is in ‘transition to modernity’, who has upheld ‘culture’, who is literate or illiterate, who is ‘poor’, those who should not board certain public vehicles and how much fare they are charged,⁸² where to shop, which bars to go (there are “Maasai/Kamba bars”), the attention accorded an individual in an office and who qualifies to be issued with an identity card within a demarcated territory. In this regard, the Maasai tend to be more ‘problematic’ to classify. I was told, and also witnessed, cases where Maasai dressed in traditional attire would be assumed to be illiterate and ignorant and therefore people backbite them in English or overcharge them in public vehicles only for their adversaries to be shocked at the realisation that the ‘naive’ looking man is actually a university student on holiday.

⁸¹ Lindblom (1920:22), quoted by Middleton and Kershaw (1972), but stated as *waringao* which is a mistake, for that means “the boastful people”.

⁸² The ‘Maasai’ may be prohibited from boarding certain public vehicles or may not bother to stop them. This has nothing with ‘being’ Maasai but looking ‘Maasai’. When dressed in their traditional attire, the Maasai are occasionally overcharged by non-Maasai *Matatu* and bus operators.

Studies done elsewhere similarly show the significance of physical attributes and stereotypes. Eller notes that in Rwanda, people were categorised as Hutu or Tutsi according to their degree of beauty, their pride, their intelligence and political organisation. Quoting Destexhe (1995: 38), he notes that the colonisers established a distinction between those who did not correspond to the stereotype of a Negro (the Tutsi) and those who did (the Hutu). In addition, the Tutsi were said to be “more Caucasian” and therefore more superior (Eller, 1999: 201). The role that was played by explorers, missionaries, colonialists and even western scholars in the creation, enhancement and perpetuation of ethnic difference among African groups cannot be overemphasised. When the Maasai are said to have “good looks” (Adamson, 1967: 220), this positive discrimination sows seeds of ethnic pride and chauvinism. But on the other hand, such depictions create the uniqueness and exoticism which encourage cross-ethnic transactions like intermarriage.

3.1.2 The Maasai as enemies

Negative attributions among the Kamba and the Maasai are so prevalent that the attention of the researcher shifts from whether the groups hold each other in low regard to seeking explanations. The groups portray each other as enemies. As I show in greater detail in chapter six, much of this enmity has to do with competition for resources like cattle, farmland, pastures and water. A key research partner, Sitonik summed Kamba-Maasai relations thus: “You know, when we sit with the Kamba, we are usually solving disputes...we have no opportunity to say positive things about each other.” On their part, the Kamba blame the Maasai for such disputes and present the Maasai as warlike, brutal, merciless, swift and temperamental. A ‘temperamental’ Kamba is said to be “as temperamental as a Maasai warrior.” The Maasai are said to be extremely ruthless and to kill people indiscriminately during ethnic conflicts.⁸³ However, the Maasai deny this, although Sankan notes in his pioneering book on the Maasai that the conception of the guilt of murder did not extend beyond Maasailand: “A man can only be regarded as guilty if he murders another Maasai, not if he murders a man⁸⁴ from another tribe or race” (1971: 14). To be fair to the Maasai though, this basically applies in most ethnic conflicts and should not be treated as a Maasai peculiarity. It is important to note that it is not just the Kamba who claim to hate the Maasai. The Maasai refer to the Kamba as *iloong'u*, which means something that stinks or smells. Middleton and Kershaw (1972: 67) citing Hobley (1910) make reference to *long'u* but they neither offer any

⁸³ I have indicated in chapter six that there were some “war ethics” during raids.

⁸⁴ In ‘traditional’ Maasai society, usually, women were never murdered during war. They could be captured and taken as wives instead. The Kamba did the same.

details regarding its cultural significance nor take it as a codename that continues to have relevance. If there is something that has never died out, it is this codename. How did it come about? My research partner, Solinketi, explains that it was originally associated with Zebra meat which is said to have a distinct smell which the pastoral Maasai loathed just like they hated hunters. So the Maasai would refer to the Kamba thus “the people who smell have come”. So *iloong’u*, meant to refer to Zebra meat gradually came to be used in reference to the Kamba in place of *Olopirisia* or *Ilmeek* which are the ‘normal’ Maasai names for ‘the Kamba’. The word *iloong’u* fitted well with what the Kamba represented in the eyes of the Maasai, namely rivals and enemies. But careful not to make it look as if directly aimed at their Bantu neighbours, the Maasai would say that their cattle were the ones irritated by the awful smell of the Zebra meat.

Iloong’u is not used by the Maasai unless the speaker intends to *insult* the Kamba. The Kamba do not seem to have an equivalent. When they call the Maasai *Akavi*,⁸⁵ which means a number of things including the ‘normal’ name for “the Maasai” and in another sense “one who would one day raid your cattle”, it is still too ‘mild’ compared to *Iloong’u*, although the enmity and hatred are mutual. But there seems to be a distinction between enmity and hatred. While the Kamba regarded the Maasai as *amaitha* (“enemies”), the Maasai appeared rather to have some deep rooted hatred for the Kamba. Portraying them as cowards (later in the chapter), the Maasai do see the Kamba as “enemies” but due to a long history of rivalry, cattle raids, encroachment on Maasai land, the Maasai ‘hate’ the Kamba. However, Schlee’s account shows that it is not easy to concretise “hatred” (2002: 21-25). Nevertheless, it is indisputable that enmity and hatred go together, in that enemies would be hated.

Commenting on ethnocentrism, Forster et al. (2000: 21) indicate that some Tanzanian peoples have derogative names for foreigners. For the Chagga, they are “kyasaka”, for the Pare, “mnyika” (i.e. “people of the bush”) and for the Luguru, “mtoka mbali”.⁸⁶ The Israelis are said to portray the Arabs as irrational, emotional and violent (Torstrick, 2000: 35).

3.1.3 The Maasai as “herders” and not keepers of cattle

“The Kamba have always looked down on the Maasai as people who know nothing else other than looking after cattle (*aithi*)...” (Mananu, Kilili, 17/06/2000). Of importance here is the distinction made between “herding” and “keeping” or “owning” cattle. Although the Kamba keep and adore cattle themselves, *kuithya*, that is, looking after cattle, is not considered noble.

⁸⁵ The word bears semblance to “Kwavi”, also called “Iloikop”, the marginalised agricultural Maasai (see Spear and Waller, 1993).

⁸⁶ In Swahili, *mtoka mbali* means ‘from afar’.

In ‘traditional’ Kamba society, when a goat was slaughtered, the neck, very bony with little meat, was reserved for the young men who looked after cattle. Today, siblings often gauge how much their parents love them depending on whether they are assigned herding duties or not. Moreover, those who take up herding jobs for a monthly wage would ordinarily be ashamed to disclose their occupation to other people. The point is: Herding is demeaned while ownership of cattle is a passion that runs deep in the group. Even those Kamba in lucrative employment will have cattle, sheep and goats, and may incur enormous expenses maintaining their stock. Many of these deploy the services of a cattle herder whose annual wage⁸⁷ often outstrips the total value of the stock he looks after. In addition, due to shrinking acreage, they may have to graze outside the family land at a fee.

The question is, why are cattle that important even with decreasing grazing land? Apart from being the means of exchange during food shortages, supply of meat during feasts and ceremonies, payment of school fees, meeting medical bills, a central component in bridewealth negotiations, and in rituals to appease the gods through sacrifice (e.g. when rain fails), there is an underlying symbolic aspect. Contrary to Schlosser’s (1984: 70) assertion that cattle were of less “spiritual importance” to the Kamba, in fact, a homestead is considered incomplete without a cattle kraal. Apart from land, cattle are the second most valuable asset that a father can bequeath his children. As a measure of wealth and wellbeing, possession of cattle has remained a focal point of shared understanding between the Kamba and the Maasai. Even among those that would be called elite in both groups, the talk about the heads of cattle in one’s possession is common and having a large stock enhances one’s status among contemporaries. All this begs the question: why do the Kamba belittle Maasai pastoralism when cattle are such a valued resource among them? My explanation would be that for the Kamba to justify their mockery of the Maasai, the “ownership” bit is ignored and instead the Maasai are portrayed as mere “herders”, which is a low status activity.

For the many Kamba who are oblivious of their group’s past similarities with the Maasai, the herders’ low status is enhanced by the modest traditional dress worn by the Maasai herders. Besides, owing to Maasai social organisation, where several families may share an *enkang* (homestead), the large cattle herds that the Kamba see are taken to be “collectively owned”, an assertion that is not necessarily incorrect. What is more, “herding only” carries other intrinsic meanings. It is taken as an indication that the Maasai have not diversified their economy, that they have ‘lagged’ behind in the taming of nature (e.g. by farming) and consequently evoking the feeling that the Kamba are better-off. In an environment where

⁸⁷ When I was doing fieldwork, they were paid between Ksh 1,000 (EUR 12,50) and 2,500 (EUR 32,50) per month.

community development initiatives are not necessarily seen as a responsibility of the state, and where groups compete to ‘catch-up’ with the ‘others’, putting others in bad light enhances a group’s self-worth. This exoneration of the state, it will be argued later, eases the competition for power at the centre, confining conflicts at the periphery with the consequent result of some semblance of a stable state.

3.1.4 The Maasai as “backward” and “ignorant”

Being the most dominant depiction, Kamba’s portrayal of the Maasai as “backward” and “ignorant” is beset with serious conceptual problems. The concepts are not only difficult to concretise despite having repeatedly featured in literature, but they are also associated with colonial discourses. They are equally reminiscent of the way the Maasai are presented by other groups and outside of Kenya’s borders.

At least empirically, the line between *backwardness* and *ignorance* is fairly thin. Deduced from actors’ descriptions, ignorance, was associated with actions that were interpreted to be illogical, devoid of knowledge, counterproductive or placed those involved in jeopardy. On the other hand, backwardness was expressed in relative or comparative terms. Borrowing a lot from the modernisation model, the Maasai were said to have lower literacy rate, fewer schools, low school enrolment rate, fewer medical facilities, poorer water supply, poorer quality of roads and “traditional” housing structures. Others associated backwardness with keeping of large herds of cattle “for their own sake”, female circumcision, warriorhood, early and “arranged” marriages and polygyny. Some of these issues are handled exhaustively elsewhere. Nonetheless, it would be important to point out here that based on these perceptions, Maasai neighbours have evolved an ideology of superiority over the Maasai. However, most of these claims are at best ostensible assertions, for the same are to be observed among non-Maasai groups.

As a way of distancing themselves from the Maasai, the Kamba say that Maasai pastoralism, dress and other practices like female circumcision are “things that we used to do many years ago”. Making this observation, Mutui was to admit later that female circumcision “has persisted” among the Kamba. Apart from female circumcision, the Maasai were said to eat raw meat, drink blood and milk “direct from the cow” (not boiled). Observations made showed that when an animal is slaughtered, only the liver and kidneys may be eaten raw while the consumption of blood (usually mixed with milk) or milk that is not boiled is a rarity. Moreover, meat is not eaten as frequent as I had been made to believe. Increasingly, a bull, goat or sheep is slaughtered only during special occasions (e.g. marriage ceremonies). Penetration of the cash economy and the consequent social transformation has led to the

commoditisation of cattle which are sold to pay for school fees, meet medical expenses, buy clothes and foodstuffs. Otherwise, just like the Kamba, many Maasai buy meat from butcheries.

Persistence and resilience of Maasai practices like dress and food appear to enhance the feeling among the Kamba that the Maasai “don’t change”. Kyuli puts it this way: “I am an old man (about 65), I grew up here with the Maasai, I see them everyday, now they eat *ngima* and *isyo*⁸⁸ and some go to school, but...no, they have not changed, what they used to do when I was a small boy is still what they do these days” (Kyuli, Kiboko, 11/05/2000). Although he appreciates that there has been some transformation among the Maasai society, he rejects this reality which would negate his long cherished convictions of what a ‘Maasai’ should be like.

Another aspect that the Kamba claimed exposed “Maasai ignorance” is a practice where pregnant women are denied foods like meat and milk. The Maasai reason that if these women are fed to their fill, particularly on these protein rich foods, babies would be too big to pass through the birth canal and the woman or the child or both may die during birth. In addition, it is also almost a taboo among the Maasai in general to eat eggs, chicken and fish (see also Schlosser, 1984: 155). Ordinarily, the mothers-in law are charged with the responsibility of ensuring that the expectant daughters in-law adhere to the feeding code. In certain cases, women may be forced to avoid food for two days. The situation is compounded by the recurrent droughts and famine experienced in the area. The point is, the frail looking expectant women are not denied food out of ignorance but, “wisdom”.⁸⁹

Scientifically, it is held that pregnant women should be placed on a balanced diet and that eating a lot of food does not result in big babies. Moreover, although the Kamba may take this notion as ‘ignorance’, in the recent past, the Kamba had similar beliefs and practices too, whereby pregnant women avoided fatty foods. It is a question of social transformation which is presented as “our culture...” A recent comparative study done in Kajiado among the cross-section of groups living there showed that most Maasai women give birth to underweight children. Wangulu Eliezer (1999) shows that out of 46 “pure Maasai parents” who gave birth, their children’s birth weights were 2.72 kilograms compared to 3.18 kilograms for children born of 86 mixed parents (e.g. Maasai and Kikuyu) and over 3 kilograms for children born of 144 parents that were non-Maasai.⁹⁰ These differences, that tended to follow ethnic lines had

⁸⁸ Kamba traditional dishes. *Ngima* is popularly known as *ugali* in Swahili. Made by adding cornmeal (usually white) to boiling water and stirring to a thick paste, it is the staple diet among many ethnic groups in Kenya. The interviewee equates adopting Kamba dishes with ‘modernity’. *Isyo* is a dish prepared by mixing maize and legumes. More details in chapter four.

⁸⁹ Noted Sitonik, one of my research partners.

⁹⁰ See “Horizon”, *The Daily Nation*, Thursday, December 16, 1999, p. 11.

something to do with feeding habits. What is more, the Maasai in general tend to dislike green vegetables.

While creating awareness on healthy dishes, a clinical officer in Simba health centre met a lot of resistance whenever he encouraged the Maasai to eat greens popularly known as *sukuma wiki* and which are available in nearly all parts of the country. A man told him once that those people who eat “such things” are “desperate”. Speaking to the clinical officer in Swahili, he posed: “*Nikule majani, kwani mimi ni mbuzi?*”, which means, “how can I eat leaves, am I a goat?” Although such comments signify pride and wealth, the Kamba health workers see them as informed by ‘ignorance’. But the Maasai attitude towards greens is quite logical. Other groups (e.g. the Kamba) feed on green vegetables not out of the realisation that they are healthy foods, but because they are staple foods, which are often despised. Many say that they eat them because “we cannot afford meat”. Otherwise, other claims to the effect that “only” Maasai women deliver at home with the assistance of traditional birth attendants are unfounded as the same applies to many Kamba women.

The story of Mwende

‘Ignorance’ was expressed in other ways. Anne Mwende, a Kamba research partner from Emali narrated how the Maasai had struck her home “around 1972” in an attempt to raid cattle. She noted that as some went to the cattle kraal, others broke into her granary, something which she said was quite unusual since the Maasai raiders normally never targeted agricultural produce. This time however, they did. A thorough search left grain strewn all over the place and yet nothing was taken away. In a narrative that was given in detail and emotionally, she said that a month later, she found out from “another woman” (actually her step cousin married to a Maasai), that the warriors were most likely looking for *Muthokoi*, a Kamba dish prepared from white maize whose testa or husk has been removed using a mortar and pestle. The lean maize grains are then mixed with legumes and cooked in a pot. She said that the Maasai “thought” that *Muthokoi* was harvested directly from the farm. Mwende argued that the failure to ‘know’ the process by which *Muthokoi* is prepared was an expression of “ignorance” on the part of the Maasai. She admitted however that there is perhaps even a wider range of Maasai practices that are equally incomprehensible among the Kamba. She appeared reluctant to accept that such a gap in knowledge was ‘normal’. She insisted that “we know these people, we have lived with them, we know that they are naïve.” The whole scenario has to be understood within the context in which these neighbouring groups operate. To a Kamba, for one to imagine that *Muthokoi*, which involves so much labour to prepare is harvested straight

from the fields, is a gross expression of ignorance and naivety. But, this has to be seen in a subjective sense. It is a criteria being used to reinforce what the Kamba think of the Maasai and to enhance Kamba pride. So keen was she to distance herself from the Maasai that when I asked her whether there are any social and economic exchanges between the two groups, she retorted “we have nothing to do with the Maasai”.

During one of our conversations though, a young Maasai woman entered the homestead bringing in milk. When I put back the question to her she just laughed and told me that I was being “too critical”. And she belittled the milk thus: “We just accept it because we have no alternative...who can trust milk from the Maasai?” To her, admitting close social interaction with the Maasai would unmask the underlying networks of interdependence thereby weakening her ‘backwardness’ thesis. She refused to see the milk as a mutual exchange that sustains groups’ livelihoods, and was uncooperative when I told her that I wanted to interview the Maasai girl. Her response is explained by Hahn’s observation that those who define others as strangers fear the destabilisation of their evidence (2000: 18). He notes further that market relations may thrive on the maintenance of strangeness/alien status (see also Simmel, 1958: 509). Mwende’s motivation to show that the Maasai were of a lesser status was so strong that even obvious cross-ethnic transactions were being denied and often treated as exceptions or accidents, irrespective of how frequent and consistent these exchanges were.

Other examples

In other cases, Maasai ‘ignorance’ was deduced from their perceived indifference to ‘modernity’, largely a colonial discourse. A Kamba businesswoman in Simba trading centre drew my attention thus: “Look at those women over there (pointing to a group of four Maasai women)...what are they doing?...they are doing nothing, just talking and wasting time...to be in the market, they think they are okay, they are just like the other people...is that business? they are just idlers...and some of these people have not been anywhere, they just know this place” (Mwongeli, 12/06/2000). To her, the Maasai are ‘lagging behind’ and they do not seem to be doing something about it. She felt that the women in question should be “doing more” now that ‘their’ trading centre’s business was in the hands of the Kamba, but that due to their ‘ignorance’ they “did not see the difference”. Actually, the Maasai women were not “doing nothing”. Two of them were selling milk, small packets of sugar and tea leaves to their fellow Maasai women in what can be called ethnic trade. Moreover, the Maasai were not as parochial as the Kamba tended to paint them, as some of the Maasai women were selling milk in bigger quantities and in distant areas outside of Maasai territory. In general, the Maasai are just as

conscious about, and keen on regional as well as on national issues just like the Kamba. It is a question of the passion to show that the Maasai were different.

How else was the apparent Maasai ‘ignorance’ and ‘backwardness’ expressed? During a conversation with the headteacher of a primary boarding school⁹¹, he gave an interesting account of a dialogue he had with a Maasai parent. He started thus: “You are asking why we regard these people as backward, ahaa, where do I start?...okay take the example of this man from Sultan Hamud, he has about eight children here (laughs)...no, they aaaare, seven, they are seven! I think they are seven. When he is paying school fees, he sometimes forgets some children, he cannot remember that they are his! There is this small boy, I think in standard four, whose fees he forgot to pay when he came here in June, I told him *mzee* (old man), you have left out one of your sons...he said no, no I have paid fees for all my children...no you have not! You know, I told him that he has seven children in the school and not six, then he counted quietly, one, two, three...of course in *kimasai* (Maa) and he said, I have only six children here and I have paid fees for all of them. I told him no, your children are seven. He insisted that they are six! I told him that I shall send home the one he has left out. When I told him that, he said that he wanted to see the boy. I sent for him, and you know what, the man was not sure whether that was his son! To convince himself, he asked the boy to say who his mother was, then he burst out laughing and said *aha kweli ni yangu, weka yeye kwa listi, aha, ni pesa gapi* (oh, it is my child, put him in the list, oh, how much do I owe you?), then he paid the money (Ksh 7,000 or EUR 85) and left...now look at that, who can forget his children? Okay, he has four wives but you should not forget your children...so when you ask me why we regard these people as backward, there is so much to say” (Kenneth, headteacher, Kiboko, 22/08/2000).

The question is: Why is this incident of a busy businessperson with a big family of about 20 children taken as an indication of backwardness and ignorance? One of the things that the headteacher detested was the large number of children. In another interview with a Maasai elder, I was told that with such a large number of children, one can easily “forget” some. He said that just like cattle, Maasai do not count their children. But he did not stop there. He quipped that it is possible that the man in question was “just playing games with the headmaster”! He felt that instead of seeing that as ignorance, it should be the other way round: “Having so many children that you cannot tell their names is the dream of any Maasai” (Palalelei, Kiboko, 13/09/2000). It is instructive that apart from age and animal wealth, having many wives, children and grandchildren over which to exercise authority enhances respect

⁹¹ The boarding primary school lies at the Makueni-Kajiado border. Though cartographically in Ukambani, the Maasai often argue that the school is in their territory.

among the Maasai society. While the Kamba were keen to portray the Maasai as people who cared more about their cattle than their wives and children, evidence seemed to go against this thesis. But the Kamba were not the only ones. Take the example of Tenka a Maasai aged 20. Identifying himself with a generation keen to embrace change and opposed to some Maasai practices, he told me that when his father comes home after being away for several days, “he asks about the cattle...whether any cows gave birth...he might not even greet my mother...it is normal here but some of us find it odd.” He claimed that the mother never looked disturbed by this ‘neglect’. I decided to take the young man to task. I asked him why he thought he thought his father’s behaviour was odd although the mother was not ‘bothered’. He had no answer. Being a ‘modern’ Maasai looking forward to going to university, he detested certain forms of behaviour common among his parents’ generation. The question is: Are the Maasai less affectionate towards their kin? From my observations, nothing could be further from the actual practice. And I cannot put it better than Fr. Hans Mol, a Dutch missionary who has studied Maasai language and culture for 40 years. He notes: “These are the only people of Africa whom I know kiss in their greeting...mother kisses child a lot, brother stands stiff and is kissed on the cheek by sisters, sisters run so fast to meet each other upon returning home that you expect a big crash only to get this gentle hug.”⁹²

Maasai ‘ignorance’ in daily conversations

When a Kamba shares a story with another or others and the story is taken as a lie, his or her listeners might in disapproval say “*mantha Muumasai ukenge*”, which means, “look for a Maasai to tell that lie”. This in essence implies that it is only the Maasai who cannot distinguish a lie from the truth. Surprisingly, another Bantu group, the Kikuyu, also have similar sayings about the Maasai. A Kikuyu may respond to a story judged to be a misrepresentation of the truth thus: *Etha Maathai uhenie* (“look for a Maasai to lie to”) or “*ndukandue Maathai*” which means, “don’t make me a Maasai”. I should add that many Kenyans in general, particularly in urban areas, appear to look down on people whom they categorise as Maasai. For instance, few residents in Nairobi care to know the names of Maasai guards who man entrance gates to their residential courts. They simply refer to them as “Masai” and greet them *habari Masai* (“how are you Maasai”) or *Masai kuja* (“come here Maasai”). For some reason, the guards do not seem to get offended. One would be very lucky if s/he said to a Kikuyu guard *habari Kikuyu* and left unscathed. The difference in reaction to the greeting is explained by what the ethnic categories referred to are perceived to represent.

⁹² *Sunday Nation*, October 28, 2001.

The Maasai guard is likely to interpret the greeting as “hello Mr courageous”, while the Kikuyu might take the greeter to be saying “hello Mr thief”.⁹³

The Maasai as contingent planners?

The Maasai are depicted as a group that never plans ahead. Although the Kamba appropriate this notion, development agents and state extension officers have enhanced this image. Pastoralists and peasant cultivators are constantly cautioned to plan ahead and steer clear of contingent methods. In the course of my study, I attended *barazas* (public meetings) where agricultural, livestock and administrative officers gave “advice” to the Maasai and Kamba cattle keepers with regard to management of herds. As drought looked imminent, farmers were told to store “enough grain” during harvests. From intensive interviews conducted among a cross range of local residents and from observations made, it was clear that few heed the ‘expert advice’ provided by government officials and non-governmental organisations. The first challenge was to find out why such advice is ignored. And it turned out to be the same old story of top-down approach where expert knowledge is provided with little consultation with the local groups. The advice is provided in a vacuum, hardly with safety nets to cushion vulnerable groups. Few external agents care to find out why herds are not reduced before an imminent drought or why most farmers sell their crops immediately after harvest.

Of interest here however is not what the Kamba and the Maasai do with their crops and herds respectively but rather how each group makes sense of the others’ actions. While both groups are generally vulnerable when rains fail, it is rather striking that the Kamba see the Maasai as a people whose survival hinges on contingency. Evidence gathered however suggests otherwise. The argument therefore, that the Kamba adjust better to the fragile environment is simply an affront in ethnic rivalry. In fact, in defence of the Maasai, I was told: “I never understand the Kamba, they had a bumper harvest just the other day and now we are queuing with them for relief...in fact, they are more desperate than us, now at least for us, you can understand...we have no farms” (Palalelei, Kiboko, 10/05/2000). This was in reference to the food shortages that came after the long rains of 2000. Palalelei’s comments outline the Kamba’s lifecycle where harvest and famine alternate with striking frequency. To illustrate this point, I present one of the farmers’ (Kyuli) experience by listing food shortages and famines since 1960. Some of these famines, the Kamba conceded, would have been avoided if they were anything different from what they were portraying the Maasai to be.

⁹³ The Kikuyu are depicted as thieves. In Nairobi, few people engage the Kikuyu as security guards. These jobs are dominated by the Luhya, Kamba and Maasai groups.

1961: *yua ya Ndeke*, i.e., “the famine of the plane”. Food had to be distributed using planes due to floods.

1965: *yua ya Ata*, i.e., “the famine of wheat”. People received wheat as food relief.

1969: *yua ya Makaa*, i.e., “the famine of charcoal”. People had to sell charcoal to survive.

1974-76: *yua ya Longosa*, i.e., “the famine of disorganisation”. This drought and famine was so intense, it decimated livestock. Children dropped out of school, families broke up while others relocated. Maasailand was not spared.

1983/84: *yua ya nikwa ngwete*, i.e., “the famine of ‘I am dying despite having money’”. During this famine, grain was often unavailable in food stores; having money therefore made no difference. Besides, people had to eat *katokelele* (yellow maize). Kyuli said that there were still “smaller famines” in between the years. It would be safe to say that hardly a single year ends without some parts of Ukambani experiencing food shortage. Food shortages often follow bumper harvests. Even after the enormous grain harvests that came by way of the El-Nino rains in 1998, people had shortages shortly after. This chronology of droughts and famine also affected Maasailand (at least Kajiado) which lies in the same climatic zone with much of Ukambani. Rain failure means poor pastures and causes social turmoil as the food chains of man and beast are disrupted. Besides, vulnerability on either side impacts on the other as the Maasai move their animals looking for pastures in Ukambani while the Kamba seek assistance (e.g. maize and beans) from their kin in places like Loitokitok (Maasailand). Drought, as I point out in chapter five, creates an arena in which the two groups intensify their interdependence.

As for the Maasai, some of the problems they face are a creation of the state. In the 1970’s group ranches were created to regulate rangelands grazing. These ranches have been transformed into individual plots discouraging pastoralism and increasing transhumance. In fact, a Kenyan scholar argues that the ranches restricted the Maasai to designated areas thereby causing overgrazing and depleting water. “Due to overgrazing”, notes Aboud (2001), “the pastoralists have lost their livestock and abandoned their way of life. Most are doing lowly urban jobs”.⁹⁴ He argues that attempts to reduce their herds as a way of conserving the environment were uncalled for, adding that the plight of pastoralists has been worsened by persistent encroachment on their land by people practising “modern agriculture”⁹⁵ and by gazetting parts of the grazing fields to pave the way for national parks and game reserves and

⁹⁴ Prof. A. A. Aboud is dean, Faculty of Environmental Sciences and Natural Resources at Egerton University, Njoro, Kenya. These comments were contained in a paper entitled “The Heart and Life of Pastoralists” which was carried by the *The Daily Nation* dated Thursday, August 23, 2001. He was addressing a conference on pastoral land rights in Naivasha (Kenya).

⁹⁵ For instance, the Kamba and the Kikuyu.

yet they hardly benefit from the revenues earned from tourism. Aboud exonerates pastoral groups from blame as herds shrink, and instead accuses the state and other groups that have encroached on pastoral lands. Aboud however, falls short of saying whether the ongoing subdivision of group ranches and issuing of title deeds to individual owners⁹⁶ (e.g. in Kajiado), is the way forward. From interviews, most Maasai have mixed feelings about creation of individual plots. Although the intention of subdividing the ranches is to encourage individual responsibility and therefore development of the land parcels, there is very little evidence that this objective is being met.⁹⁷

In Ukambani, people blame the state for inaccessibility to drought resistant crops and stop-gap measures like food relief while promises to dam rivers for irrigation have remained unfulfilled since independence. In the Kenyan state, the Kamba and the Maasai find a common enemy, but for different reasons.

The ‘Kambanisation’ of modernity?

Citing Aristotle, Bourdieu (1990) reiterates that man is the most imitative of all animals. On that premise, there is basically nothing shaming in copying others. In practice however, social transformation processes are full of controversies regarding agents and recipients; it is an arena of contestations. Regarding western culture, Roosens notes: “There seems to be a far reaching consensus among human beings, whatever their cultural tradition, that a number of material goods and social values, whose production originated in Western society, are desirable” (1989: 11). The Kamba, posing as agents of modernity, claim that they are partly responsible for the transformation in Maasailand although the Maasai on the other hand are often cited as an example of conservatism and resistance to development in both Kenya and Tanzania (Forster et al., 2000: 110). And yet, the Maasai have either been selective or as they say, “marginalised”. Besides, Galaty (1993) tells us how economies and societies of what we call Maasailand emerged and were transformed over the centuries. Nevertheless, if the Kamba were to be believed, they argue that they adopted ‘western’ ideals (e.g. education and market economy) earlier or faster than the Maasai and became the pastoral group’s role models. Such claims are quite common. Triulzi (1996: 261) tells us that the Boorana were regarded as “senior members” or those who “opened the way” of the Macha society in Ethiopia.

⁹⁶ “Individual” here includes parcels belonging to a ‘family’ (man, his wife/wives and children) or extended family (where married sons or brothers have not been allocated their own parcels).

⁹⁷ Just like the group ranches, the individual parcels have created pockets of poverty as keeping of cattle has become untenable for some. Nevertheless, during the fieldwork period, adjudication of group ranches, creating of individual plots and issuing of title deeds was underway in many parts of Kajiado district. The 1997-2001 development report indicates that 15 group ranches were to be subdivided by the end of the plan period (Republic of Kenya, 1997: 95).

To go back to the Maasai, if groups that have contributed to the social transformation in Maasailand were to be identified, it would be a very complicated exercise. This is clear in *Being Maasai* (Spear and Waller, 1993). The Kamba generally talk about more recent developments, particularly during and after colonial period. In fact, the Kikuyu are even better positioned to make such claims in view of the long history of association between them and the Maasai. But all these are ‘recent’ developments. Throughout history, the Maasai have been an influential group and both the Kamba and the Kikuyu imitated their cultural practices. Spear talks about Maasai cultural pride, arrogance and dominance of the plains, noting that “while pastoral Maasai might be reluctant to speak the languages or participate in the social institutions of others, hunters and farmers readily learnt Maa and participated in pastoral social activities” (1993: 13). Well, this may have been the case in the 19th and early 20th centuries, but a closer examination of the Maasai society from the 1940’s appears to show a reversed trend where Maasai’s Bantu neighbours and the state assumed an increasingly commanding influence in the transformation of the Maasai society.

For many of the Kikuyu and Kamba ‘models’ who migrated to Maasailand as state employees or to do farming, they were simply pursuing their own interests. In any case, in the 1960’s and 70’s, many professionals (e.g. teachers and doctors) resisted state postings to Maasailand citing remoteness and lack of amenities. Many non-Maasai migrants were driven by the desire to access resources like land and markets for farm produce and retail goods. In some parts of Africa, it is argued that elite groups excluded others from “modernity”. The first African groups to get European education like the Creoles, Baganda and Yoruba are said to have got advantages which they did not want to share with others (Peil and Oyeneye, 1998: 79). The authors however do not explain how this was feasible.

One thing that struck me during fieldwork, was that relative to the Maasai, the Kamba were keen to present themselves as being “modern”, that they have abandoned most of their traditional practices and embraced modernity while the Maasai on the contrary insisted that they were “traditional” even those who had embraced modernity.⁹⁸ As a matter of fact, Ukambani has more educational facilities and there are many Kamba teachers working in schools all over Maasailand. Many of these teachers have been involved in campaigns to boost school enrolment among Maasai children, but the decision to send the same to school has rested with the Maasai themselves. Well, there are those who go a step further, those who rescue Maasai school girls that are married off against their will by their fathers. There are also many Maasai who have attended school in Ukambani⁹⁹ and who assist in rescuing such

⁹⁸ The Maasai know that thanks to tourism, being ‘traditional’ evokes pride.

⁹⁹ For instance, the youthful Maasai chief of Kenyewa Location, Kajiado District.

girls and encourage Maasai parents to support girl education. In many of the public meetings that I attended in Maasailand, their leaders stress on formal education and often criticise institutions like warriorhood which keep boys away from school or lead to drop outs. Surprisingly, school drop out rate is equally high in Ukambani, although this is related to inability to raise school fees (Republic of Kenya, 1996).

The tables below show some of the disparities in the distribution of educational institutions in the two districts.

Table 2: Educational facilities (1995) and ratio per population

	<u>Makueni</u>	<u>Kajiado</u>
Pre-primary	912 (1: 840)	452 (1: 901)
Primary	767 (1: 1,000)	189 (1: 2,155)
Secondary	125 (1: 6,135)	23 (1: 17,711)
Youth polytechnics	44 (1: 17,429)	6 (1: 67,895)

Source: District development plans (Makueni and Kajiado), 1997-2001.¹⁰⁰

Looking at table 2, one can clearly see some glaring disparities in the distribution of educational facilities, the inhabitant population in the respective districts notwithstanding. The total population of Kajiado district according to the 1999 census was 407,368 while Makueni had 766,885. The table shows some glaring disparities particularly in the distribution of primary and secondary schools and youth polytechnics. The pre-primary schools appear to be proportionately distributed. In fact, the concentration of primary and secondary schools in Makueni, though a semi-arid district, is one of the highest in Kenya. In Nyeri (Kikuyuland), arguably one of the most developed districts in Kenya, the primary school ratio is 1: 1,715 while secondary school ratio is 1: 5,161, comparing very favourably with Makueni. Makueni however lags behind in many other important facilities like electricity, telephone, water supply and roads.

Going back to the Kamba and the Maasai, it is important to note that the disparities in the statistics above is not all that makes the Kamba to claim to be the pacesetters of modernity. It is what has been passed on through the generations, what the people see and attach meanings to, share in conversations, sometimes read and hear in public meetings. The bottom line is that depictions are hardly based on hard statistics. It is important to note here that in spite of the fact that the groups demean each other, all are in a transition to 'catch-up' with other ethnic

¹⁰⁰ Data lifted from the development plans excludes the ratios.

groups. Claims on literacy is a question of magnitude. There are no ‘pure’ types on either side but a mixture of both ‘tradition’ and ‘modernity’. The only difference perhaps, is that among the Maasai, certain traditional institutions like age-sets and rites of passage still have a lot of relevance in the contemporary day-to-day affairs of society. Elders, for instance, may negotiate with schools to agree on days to carry out important traditional ceremonies like circumcision. But then, school goers are expected to wear school uniform, while school attendance itself has revolutionised household labour.

Although some of the variations in literacy are presented as primordial, it is basically a question of environments and proximity to influential agents that have shaped practices, aspirations and life goals. Bourdieu noted: “A given agent’s practical relation to the future, which governs his present practice, is defined in the relationship between, on the one hand, his *habitus* with its temporal structures and dispositions towards the future, constituted in the course of a particular relationship to a particular universe of probabilities, and on the other hand a certain state of the chances objectively offered to him by the social world” (1990: 64). Although there might be disagreement on Bourdieu’s concept of objectivity, he does stress the significance of the social environment in shaping people’s destiny. After all, some of the schools of which the Kamba claim ownership, trace their roots to external religious organisations or the state’s ministry of education. Moreover, in principle, a Kenyan can school anywhere in the republic. The only limitation is that in most pre-primary and primary schools, local languages/dialects are the main medium of communication and tool of tuition in the rural areas. Otherwise, provisions limiting the number of pupils that can be admitted to secondary schools outside their home districts are never strictly followed.

The Kamba embraced state and missionary patronage while the Maasai either rejected it or were ignored. The relationship between the Maasai and the state as an agent of social transformation may have been largely indirect, mediated among other agents (e.g. Maasai neighbouring groups). The ‘pressure’ therefore was brought to bear on the Maasai, as they were meant to feel disadvantaged and ‘left behind’ as their neighbours ‘progressed’. Although these osmotic and diffusionist forces cannot be denied, the Maasai internal dynamics cannot be ignored either. It has been quite a selective group. In fact, Kituyi cites an incident where an MP’s calling on the Maasai to embrace modernity and “dress decently” earned him an exit from parliament. And yet on the other hand, he was basically telling them what they were doing! A Maasai elder explains: “Maasai don’t want to be told what to do, they know what is good for themselves...the Maasai are arrogant, you know that, who can force the Maasai to do anything? what you are seeing here (schools, ‘modern’ houses) is what the people

want...which tribe in Kenya has not been assisted by the government (state)? (Solinketi, Sultan Hamud, 12/06/2000).

As the Kamba claim to have been modernisation ‘brokers,’ the Maasai hint of their own ‘modernity’, very much in line with the idea of *plural modernities* (Long, 2000). The social change approach has attracted criticism for, among other things, seeing people’s cultural values and belief systems as inappropriate or “an obstacle, a barrier to be overcome” (see Cochrane 1979:10-11). The theory lacks the multidimensional approach necessary to assess the complexity of development processes. Further criticism of the theory comes from Long (1989:222) who, mainly citing Knorr-Cetina (1984:4), argues that social change among the local communities cannot simply be explained by the intervention of public authorities or “powerful outsiders” but rather as a result of the interactions, negotiations, and social and cognitive struggles that take place between specific social actors. Long says that social actors have to be perceived as “knowledgeable” and “capable” who respond depending on the context and whom they are interacting with. Cochrane notes that “indigenous peoples” are interested in self-assertion and self-expression. Criticising the social change model, he says that “targeted populations” may want some of the advantages of civilised knowledge but (they) will want inevitably to make use of them in the rhythm of their lives and in a society they have inherited even if it is a modified society.

“Helping” the Maasai to “catch-up”

Ukambani is an area where it is unusual to find a woman who is not a member of a women’s self-help group.¹⁰¹ And like in all places where these groups exist, development activities in the villages are often channelled through them. They have also been easy prey for politicians who recognise them as crucial vehicles in the mobilisation of public support. It is against this background that I would like to discuss a Kamba-led credit scheme in Maasailand. Unlike in Ukambani, only a few women among the Maasai are members of self-help groups. I would like to base my discussion on a series of interviews held with Mrs Mwongeli Makoani. She is one of the most successful businesspersons in Simba trading centre. Of particular interest here however is her position as co-ordinator of a non-governmental organisation that supports women development activities in Kajiado.

She is the ‘local’ chairperson of the district-wide Kajiado Community Credit Limited (KCCL). There are such organisations in nearly all the districts in the Rift Valley province. Vitage, a Netherlands organisation, funds the credit facility. At the ‘grassroots’ level, these schemes are

¹⁰¹ Starting as ‘women groups’, in the 1970’s men have also been joining them. A self-help group is called *mwethya* or *kikundi* in Kikamba.

run under the so-called central management committees (CMCs). Mwongeli heads a CMC that serves parts of Mashuru division in Kajiado. But although it is a ‘Kajiado’ outfit, she reached out to Kiboko, Emali and Sultan Hamud in Makueni district. She argued that “development needs were everywhere” and that the credit scheme was bound by neither ethnic nor physical boundaries. But not ‘all’ access the loans. The funding agency is particularly interested in businesspersons, ‘progressive’ farmers and cattle traders, who are members of self-help groups. At the time she started her work in 1997, hardly any Maasai women groups existed in the area. They had to ‘bend the rules’ and conduct awareness campaigns to popularise the credit facility. Although women were particularly ‘targeted’, men were also encouraged to join groups and apply for credit from the CMC. Potential members of these groups had to be “business minded”, she added. The provincial state administration came in handy in popularising the credit facility. She particularly singled out the district officer (DO) Mashuru division, who was Kamba, for giving her “enormous support”.

By the time of my interviews (June-August 2000), she had about 18 registered groups with a total membership of 204 people. What was their social profile? One thing that struck me when I examined the files, was that although the word “women groups” featured prominently, actually, men outnumbered the women. There were 124 men (60.8%) and 80 women (39.2%). She explained that men were “more enthusiastic” on matters of “trade and money”. And how about the ethnic distribution? Out of the 18 groups, only 5 groups had Maasai membership and names.¹⁰² These 5 groups had a total membership of 59 members which represented 29% of all those who were accessing credit from the CMC. The rest of the groups had Kamba and Kikuyu membership.

There was a range of criteria that did not favour the Maasai. First time borrowers receive between Ksh 5,000 and 50,000 depending on the needs or capacity of the group or an applicant.¹⁰³ That is where the problem started. Those Maasai interested in loans dismissed those amounts as “too little”. One of my interview partners, Nkata, told me it did not make sense to many Maasai to be indebted over “money that cannot buy three bulls”,¹⁰⁴ in reference to the Ksh 50,000. And that was not all. Other conditions made the loans less attractive to the Maasai. Before the group or a member could secure a loan, 30% security for the loan had to be paid. This was said to be a show of “commitment”. Actually, the 30% is refunded when the

¹⁰² The Maasai groups were; Matonyoko (9 members), Ewuas (9), Ilparakuo (12), Ilkiramat (12) and Sukuta (17).

¹⁰³ By June 2000, the CMC had disbursed a total of Ksh 14,332,000 (EUR 186.130).

¹⁰⁴ The Maasai may be just as ‘poor’ as their Kamba neighbours but their utterances espouse pride. They see things in a big way; their huts may be small but they will be many, their wives may have lower fertility but a man will have several and therefore many children, and their cattle may be the traditional zebu type but they will be kept in their tens and hundreds and will wander in vast grazing fields.

loan is repaid. The money is also paid back with an interest of 2 % per month. Now, history has taught the Maasai to be sceptical about external agents. Within no time, rumours spread that those loans should have been dished out “for free” and that the CMC wanted to fleece the Maasai. Mwongeli’s ethnic identity (Kamba) was conveniently used to legitimise these suspicions. This might explain why no Maasai self-help group has been given an additional loan since the start of 2000. Records indicated that after the 5 groups received the first loan,¹⁰⁵ they defaulted, while other members lost interest. She noted that ‘Vitage’ recognised that “Kajiado has many tribes”. What was ironical was that some of the members of the groups receiving loans from the credit scheme did not consider themselves as residents of Kajiado. A member of a group called *Kuweta na Kwika*¹⁰⁶ noted: “We just live here (Kajiado), she¹⁰⁷ knows that we come from Makueni”.

The ‘disinterest’ of the Maasai created an opportunity for the non-Maasai. She justifies this move by noting that: “I have tried my best...the Maasai are not keen on these loans...they don’t like borrowing money from anything official”(Mwongeli, Simba, 24/08/2000). Maasai misgivings should be understandable considering the group’s low literacy rate and the fact that collateral for the loans were to be their cattle, which they value very much. She said that she had been trying to “teach them” to change their attitude and borrow a leaf from the “Kamba and Kikuyu groups” which were relatively doing better.

This discussion brings the development theory model to the fore. She sees herself as a development agent and the Maasai as ‘recipients’ and adopts a directive approach, and even seems to suggest that the Maasai should take whatever they are given without questions. Suspicions and ethnicisation of the initiative partly explains why what started as a noble development initiative was reduced to a Kamba-Maasai affair. She thought that the Maasai “needed time” to “catch-up”. To get some feedback from the Maasai, I talked to Sitonik, a problem shooter. Regarding development initiatives in Maasailand, he quipped: “We tell our people that *foreigners* cannot develop Maasailand”. He argued that the non-Maasai who work in Maasailand have a negative attitude towards the “locals” and went further to say, “look at Kajiado town...it has failed to grow because it is occupied by foreigners...a young market like Isinya¹⁰⁸ will grow and overtake Kajiado because it is developed mainly by the local Maasai”.

¹⁰⁵ First loan seekers received between Ksh 5,000-50,000; the second loan between Ksh 10,000-100,000; the third, Ksh 10,000-200,000; fourth Ksh 10,000-500,000. According to the records, only one group *Ngwatanio*, with Kamba and Kikuyu membership, had received a fourth loan. Groups were investing the monies in shops, cereal and cattle trade and the buying and selling of second-hand clothes.

¹⁰⁶ Name means “doing what you say”.

¹⁰⁷ In reference to the chairperson of the credit scheme.

¹⁰⁸ Isinya lies between Kajiado and Athi River towns.

He did not think that the Maasai themselves have shaped what he called “systematic marginalisation”.

In a nutshell, the subsection has attempted to show the meanings the Maasai attached to a Kamba-led organisation. From the start, they counted themselves as ‘excluded’ on the basis of ethnicity. To make matters worse, the operations of the credit facility were implemented in a hurry, heightening Maasai misgivings. Arguing that the Maasai needed more time to “catch-up” was a cover up for the depictions the leader of the credit facility had about the Maasai. On the other hand, Maasai dismissal of the money offered as “too little”, helped her to exclude them. When she told me that she was “helping” the Maasai to “catch-up”, what she had in mind was the success of women groups in Ukambani, whose model, she argued, could have been replicated in Kajiado. Unfortunately, the Kamba ‘Diaspora’ ended up appropriating a credit facility that in theory had been intended to serve the Maasai. If the Maasai did not hate the Kamba for this, a possible explanation would be that from the start, the Maasai neither considered the credit facility as ‘theirs’ nor meant to serve their interests.

Putting ‘backwardness’ into perspective

In much of Africa, a discourse on modernity, tradition and backwardness has been on the centre stage for decades. Indeed, tradition and modernity are said to be two major social, political and economic processes that have been competing with each other in the African state (Macharia, 1997: 107). Using the mathematical principle of a subset, Macharia shows that there can be no clear distinction between “modernity” and “backwardness.” Horowitz (1985) notes that groups will hardly be “collectively” advanced or backward. Stressing the same point, Wimmer notes that it is “all rare that all members of a politically mobilised ethnic group find themselves in a similar economic position” (1997b: 640). While the two authors make sense in their analyses, they do not explain why and how groups living in fairly the same conditions create these ethnic categories.

For those familiar with Maasai literature, the notion of portraying the Maasai as ‘backward’ or ‘traditional’ is neither new nor could it be exclusively attributed to the Kamba. In Kenya, the post-independence initiative to bridge the colonial marginalisation of pastoral areas has remained elusive, leaving Maasailand lagging behind in terms of access to crucial facilities like roads, schools, medical facilities and water supply. Much of the ‘backwardness’ therefore associated with the region and its people, reflects less on the Maasai as a group but more on the lopsided policies of the colonial and postcolonial state. For instance, of all the trading centres along the Kajiado-Makueni border, Simba (which entirely lies in Maasailand) is the only one that lacks electricity and telephone services. Such disparities enhance ethnic tensions

as the Kamba consider themselves ‘better-off’. This sense of superiority and talk that “Kamba towns have electricity and telephone”, sows seeds of hatred, albeit rhetorically. In the Kamba and Kikuyu portrayal of the Maasai as ignorant and “easy to lie to”, there are historical, social, economic and even mythological explanations. Interethnic property relations appear to be a major factor. For the Kamba, demeaning their Maasai neighbours helps them make sense of their equally precarious position where water scarcity and food shortage are perennial problems and which the state has not been in a hurry to address. It becomes important to talk about ‘other’ groups that are at a more disadvantaged position. This boosts the group’s self esteem.

If the Maasai are ‘backward’, it is only through the lens of the widely accepted western notion of modernisation. In any case, there is every indication that the Maasai have embraced formal schooling, western medicine, other forms of dress, diversification of subsistence economy, and have changed their eating habits. Whether this ‘mainstreaming’ is a ‘good’ thing is another question altogether. What is rather clear is that just like the Maasai were cultural models for their neighbours during much of the precolonial period, they are aggressively trying to ‘catch-up’ and want to be part of the ‘wider game’. Falling short of propping an explanation, Forster, Hitchcock and Lyimo (2000: 145) note that the Maasai have long been looked down upon by their Bantu-speaking neighbours. This notion could be misleading though. Looking back into history, the notion of the Maasai being ‘backward’ must be a recent phenomenon that was reinforced through the coming of the Europeans and the differential influence they had on African groups. Having been labelled as rebellious and warlike by the British, the Maasai were basically left alone after the former alienated part of their territory. Otherwise, Maasai image was the model for most Bantu groups like the Kamba and the Kikuyu. A lot of what came to be recognised as Bantu practices were actually imitated from the Maasai, notably, ways of managing cattle herds, cattle breeds, practices like female circumcision, piercing of earlobes and the making and wearing of beads and other ornaments. These are the groups that German scholars called *die Maasaiaffen* (the Maasai apes), that is, those groups that imitated and adopted Maasai practices.¹⁰⁹ After all, going back into history, African pastoral groups appear to have enjoyed higher status than cultivators. Peil and Oyeneye (1998: 58) confirm this notion with regard to the “high status” pastoral Tutsi and “low status” agricultural Hutu in precolonial Rwanda (see also Eller, 1999).

The swapping of modelling roles, where the Maasai find themselves having to imitate others, is partly responsible for the Maasai being “on the horns of a dilemma” (Holland, 1996).

¹⁰⁹ With some modifications.

Moreover, what makes the group sink deeper into a quagmire is that there are strong forces, internal and external (e.g. state) that seek to sustain Maasai culture. Bourdieu argues that groups with a tendency to persist in their ways may be composed of individuals with “durable dispositions that can outlive the economic and social conditions in which they were produced” and that this could be a source of misadaptation or resignation (1990: 62).

What is striking is that in most cases, it is the illiterate Maasai who insist that “things have changed”. A cross section of Maasai elite supported the whole notion of being ‘traditional’, expressing remorse for breaking with the past. A careful analysis revealed that it was considered fashionable to show the rest of the world that in spite of schooling, adoption of ‘modern’ dressing styles and urbanisation, one had not lost his/her ‘roots’. This was also done for self-praise, to show how much one must have worked hard to make it to the ‘top’ irrespective of the apparent social and cultural restrictions.¹¹⁰ Others who held this view were ‘Maasai’ whose ethnic identities were contested. Then there were politicians who simply praise Maasai cultural practices for political expediency. Whatever the case, the bigger debate among Maasai leaders is not whether the Maasai should be left alone but rather whether they are having their ‘rightful’ share of state resources. It is out of their initiative to ‘become Kenyans’, as Kituyi (1990) put it, that they are said to be ‘modern’ or ‘backward’. At least on the surface, Maasai housing structures look more ‘traditional’,¹¹¹ enrolment in school is lower, drop outs are higher and the general infrastructure is poorer compared to their neighbouring groups like the Kikuyu, Kamba, Kisii and the Kipsigis.

Are the Maasai ‘ignorant’

Spear (1993: 1) tells us the following about the Maasai: “Uncowed by their neighbours, colonial conquest, or modernisation, they stand in proud mute testimony to a vanishing African world”. While many Kamba respondents were unanimous about Maasai ‘ignorance’, a few had a different story. If we take ‘cunningness’ and ‘craftiness’ or outwitting people as the opposite of ‘ignorance’, then the story of Kyuli of Kiboko challenges the notion of the Maasai as ‘ignorant’. And I met him in unusual circumstances. Whereas recruiting research partners was an arduous task as noted in chapter two, Kyuli asked me to interview him. He told me that he had heard that I was carrying out research in the area and had wondered why “you are not interviewing old men”. I obliged. He is a farmer and also runs a small retail business in Kiboko trading centre. Out of the large body of data generated after spending

¹¹⁰ Also used to show that educated Maasai elite are ‘tougher’ than their Kamba counterparts.

¹¹¹ But it is not uncommon to find a brand new Toyota Hilux pick-up packed right in the midst of the traditional mud huts.

considerable time with him, of relevance here is what transpired during the 1999/2000 drought.

A Maasai herder approached him in April 2000 during the prolonged drought and asked him to allow his “50 head of cattle” to graze in his farm at a fee of Ksh 10,000 (EUR 130) per month. After surveying his pastureland, the Maasai herder paid for the coming month immediately; “they always pay before hand”, noted Kyuli. But when the cattle were brought in, they did not number 50 but 99. Kyuli said, “to make matters worse, the person I had negotiated with...the owner, was not there...the two cattle herders could neither speak Kiswahili nor Kikamba.” He suspected that perhaps they ‘could’ but did not want to. He was caught between a rock and a hard place. On the one hand, he could not air his protests due to the communication barrier and on the other, the man he had transacted business with was nowhere to be seen. And that was not the end of the dilemma. Kyuli desperately needed the money, which was forthcoming without delay but the cattle owner made those payments through a proxy. After four months, he sought assistance from the police who refused to intervene after Kyuli could not produce a written agreement. Although it would have helped to seek assistance from the chief, he restrained himself fearing that the state administrator would “complicate things”. Apparently, the chief would have questioned why he was not involved during the time of agreement. Kyuli had other genuine fears. He noted: “If the chief knew that I was getting Ksh 10,000 a month, he would have demanded a monthly rate for his intervention (shakes his head)...the chiefs of these days! they are just criminals”.

Based on these misgivings, he mobilised his Kamba kin and neighbours to drive the cattle out of his grazing fields. It was at that juncture that the owner of the cattle reappeared. Kyuli was to find out that the man was all along monitoring the animals almost on a daily basis: “He would come...ask his servants whether there was any problem and then go away”, he noted. Although he rejected a suggestion to review the terms of the ‘contract’, he admitted that the Maasai herder had outwitted him. He told me that “it is easy to dismiss the Maasai, they look ignorant, very harmless but they are very clever”. But there was another dimension. The Maasai herder, as another Maasai (Palalelei) noted, had “proved” that “you can easily deceive the Kamba”. He went on to say how the Kamba had been “spoiled” by money and therefore “ready to do anything” to earn it. A reflection of this incident reveals that as a survival mechanism, the Maasai have perfected the art of “yielding” to “wield” influence (see Magdalena Villarreal, 1994). Using a Mexican example, Villarreal shows how women in a development project played “subordinate” in order to create room for manoeuvre and win power and influence.

Taking the Maasai for granted has in many occasions landed the Kamba into trouble. An incident that took place in a Maasai village near Emali illustrates this point. A Kamba cattle trader bought 10 heads of cattle from a Maasai pastoralist in December 1999. After the cattle he had selected were taken away by his *aingi* (hired cattle escorts), he, with the cattle owner on his side, followed from behind. They were heading to Emali trading centre where the payment was to be made. The Kamba cattle trader had other plans though. As they trailed the cattle from a distance, he deceived the Maasai cattle owner. On the pretext that he was attending to a call of nature in the bush, he disappeared in the woods thinking that by so doing, he had 10 heads of cattle ‘for free’.¹¹² He had agreed with the *aingi* on where they would take the cattle to.

To his surprise, when he got to Emali after clearing about 7 kilometres through the thorny bushes, he was shocked to find several Maasai *murran* keeping vigil over his car which he had presumed to be safely parked at a fairly exclusive restaurant.¹¹³ He had only two alternatives, namely to risk losing the four-wheel drive car which was to be burned or detained, and paying for the animals. He came to grips with not only a very complex and effective communication system on the part of the Maasai but also a well organised system to counter any threats on their lifeline and demeaning acts. The narrator (a Kamba who witnessed the incident) said “it was an opportunity for the Maasai to show the Kamba that they are not as stupid as we think” (Musyoka, Emali, 11/01/2000). Before the man paid up, the Maasai had threatened to seek the intervention of the restaurant’s proprietor, a senior government official. Within a short time, many influential Maasai knew about the matter too. After going underground for a couple of days, he had to pay for the animals and an additional “fine”.

I gathered that such incidences of deception were common in the area and the Maasai were hardly on the receiving end. For instance, the Maasai had duped innumerable Kamba into ‘buying’ non-existent commercial plots and pieces of land. Some local administrators who were accomplices in the alleged conspiracies had hampered seeking state intervention. In other cases, the ‘victims’ could not say the names or locate the homesteads of the ‘villains’. In their traditional regalia, the Maasai look of simplicity and vulnerability is often “mistaken” as emblems of honesty and reliability. This deception works to their advantage. Besides these, the Kamba have lost many cattle, sheep and goats through Maasai ‘cunningness’. This involves the manipulation of livestock marks. For instance, a Kamba called Umoa bought a bull from a Maasai herder in Makindu market but after a week, a group of Maasai came to his

¹¹² The animals were worth about Ksh 200,000 (EUR 2.600).

¹¹³ By local standards.

village looking for “our lost cattle”. Finding this bull which bore their marks, they took it away claiming that Mr Umoa must have stolen it. Mr Maithya, a neighbour who mediated on the case, said: “It was difficult to prove that he had bought it since people are not issued with receipts!” (with prolonged laughter). In his village alone, that had happened three times. This is compounded by the fact that unlike in the olden days, many Kamba do not mark their cattle. Among the Maasai, cattle marking is done almost without any exception, with a lot of precision and on clan/family lines. A lot of significance is attached to it. Similarly, the Kamba used to mark cattle and had clan-based cattle brands (Lindblom 1920: 129; Middleton and Kershaw; 1972: 73). The practice has been largely disregarded in the course of time due to *inter alia*; changes in land tenure (individualised ownership and therefore grazing in restricted areas), dispersion of clans, keeping of fewer stock, and lesser significance of cattle wealth as formal education and white collar jobs took precedence. As for the Maasai, cattle branding is still observed strictly and by looking at the marks, one could easily trace the family or section of the owner. What happens is that once Maasai bump into unmarked cattle (*indo itembane*) during raids or mere theft, they treat them as “cattle without an owner” and brand them immediately.

Looking at all these scenarios, one sees that the Maasai outsmart the Kamba in various contexts. And this is partly because the Kamba are socialised to perceive the Maasai as less ingenious. Erroneously, the Kamba assume that the Maasai ‘respect’ them. In fact, the Maasai regard them as “easy prey” to use the words of Mualuko (Loitokitok). Besides, the Maasai, as vulnerable, illiterate and ‘backward’ as they may look, have one major advantage. Being a self conscious marginalised group, they have very close contacts with their political leaders. While a Kamba teacher, respected in his/her neighbourhood and considered an opinion leader may never have met his MP, or have any contacts with him, it would not be surprising to find an ‘ordinary’ Maasai pastoralist who can just walk into the office of a Maasai cabinet minister. Secondly, and as we shall see later when discussing “politics of recognition”, the Maasai easily evoke sympathy even when they have wronged others. And they know that.

3.1.5 *The Maasai as “promiscuous”*

Citing what he called “previous reports”, a Maasai businessman told me that my dissertation should not present the group in “bad light”. He lamented that “many lies” had been told and published about the Maasai. Anyhow, I was given many stories regarding how each group was more ‘moral’ than the other. I would be told how the *murran* are so disciplined that they “cannot touch alcohol” only to find some drinking, not in secluded places but in the public

bars. Such was also the myth that it was a taboo or “unheard of” for them to sleep with married women.¹¹⁴

The story of how Maasai men simply leave or ‘plant’ their spears outside a hut as an indicator that they are having sex with the woman who lives there¹¹⁵ has been told over and over again. And people never tire of telling them. Very few Kamba respondents did not cite this story to express how ‘immoral’ and ‘promiscuous’ the Maasai are. The story is also similar to another one which I saw on CNN about a community in rural India where a married woman can be shared by brothers. In this case, the man leaves his walking stick outside the hut to indicate that “the woman is busy”. The practice of ‘leaving a spear’ outside the hut has also been associated with the traditional Tutsi of Rwanda and Burundi.

Going back to the Maasai story, it is indisputable that Maasai men pin their spears outside the hut before entering inside for whatever business. This is done for practical reasons. Considering that a spear could be as long as two metres, while the entrance to the huts is hardly more than a metre high, it would be extremely cumbersome to get into the hut with the spear. In the evening however, the spears are kept in the huts for security reasons. While some Kamba respondents knew this, they would only confirm after I shared with them the other side of the story. For those who held the stereotype as ‘true’, the deconstruction was treated with derision. But then comes in Sitonik, the teacher. Rather sarcastically, he praised ‘his’ people, the Maasai for “inventing” the “do not disturb” tab seen in houses and hotel rooms around the world!

Some stories about Maasai sexual relations are not stereotypes though. Members of the same age-set can share wives but as always, the woman has the final say. Ole Sankan admits though that this traditional arrangement where a wife theoretically and in practice can sleep and have children with any man of her choice, provided he belongs to the husband’s age group, has led to “easy spread of venereal diseases within Maasailand” (1971: xii). The stereotype has been that the women have no choice. Whatever the case, the whole arrangement has faced stiff challenges from Christianity, monogamy and modernity. Let me illustrate. Sometime in the mid 1990’s, a fairly educated Maasai man was having a drink with his semi-literate friend and a member of his age-set in Kiboko. At some point, the ‘friend’ bought him two drinks and excused himself saying he was coming back ‘shortly’. This man was seen entering into his friend’s rented house in the trading centre. A Kamba neighbour, who knew that the two had been playing hide-and-seek games, went out looking for his friend and found him drinking.

¹¹⁴ It was also evident that neither do all boys become *murran* nor do all *murran* live in the warrior villages (*manyata*). See also Spencer (1993: 150).

¹¹⁵ Married Maasai women usually live in separate huts from men.

This particular Kamba knew that the practice of sharing wives among age-mates was increasingly facing resistance among the Maasai. After relaying the information to his Maasai friend, the latter rushed home immediately. He found his friend and his wife in bed. He beat him up and took him to the nearby police station where the suspected ‘adulterer’ was locked up overnight. The ‘accused’ thought he would take advantage of the non-Maasai policemen by telling them that among the Maasai, what he had done was the norm. The police however had handled similar cases before. The next day, the ‘wronged’ man was asking for Ksh 100,000 (EUR 1.300) from his friend’s family as “compensation”. He threatened to take him to court or “deal with him”. Through the intervention of their parents, uncles and some clan elders, it was agreed that he would receive Ksh 5,000 (EUR 65) ransom. It was claimed that “as Maasai”, they should not wash their dirty linen in public (Kiboko is dominantly Kamba). The complainant was also told by an elder that if the ‘accused’ had been Kamba, then a high fine would have been “justified”.

The wronged had taken advantage of the modern forms of arbitration and sanction, for the Ksh 100,000 he demanded was quite exorbitant by local standards. To the eyes of the Kamba though, it was an indication of how ‘similar’ the two groups had become in their ways of resolving interpersonal differences. The incident was an eye opener to Kamba residents in Kiboko who realised that many of the ‘traditional practices’ that the Maasai are said to observe are no longer tenable. For the Kamba to see a “Maasai rise against Maasai” over a woman served to deconstruct the ‘Maasai image’. A Kamba businessman in Kiboko put it thus, “...that day, we knew that the Maasai are just pretenders...they say that they share wives and yet we had to intervene otherwise they would have killed each other” (Kyuli, 14/09/2000). This was an incident that made the Maasai also come to terms with their own ‘culture’. The older generation, for instance, are said to have been “disappointed” by the reaction of the “educated” man.

Did the Kamba who followed this story ‘change’ their attitudes towards Maasai sexual relations? Generally, no. They insisted that this was an “isolated” case. Maasai ‘promiscuous’ status had to be maintained to support other generalisations revolving around ‘primitivism’ and presenting the Maasai as abusers of women. Taking into account that the Kamba also regard themselves as more Christianised than the Maasai, such negative analogies enhance the feeling that they were ‘better-off’. At the time of my fieldwork, this had taken a different dimension with the HIV/Aids pandemic. The Maasai were being presented as a “risk group”. A Kamba commercial sex worker in Kiboko told me that when she is going with a Maasai, “I

have to charge them more...they don't use condoms, they don't care, you know...they sleep with anybody, they don't care, that is their life" (28/06/2000).

I gathered many stories that involved Maasai men and Kamba women. Such stories would be narrated with detail and enthusiasm. They remained fresh in people's memories perhaps because of their phenomenality. Maasai pastoralists/traders lost thousands of shillings to Kamba and Kikuyu female commercial sex workers based in the trading centres. In one particular account given by a Kamba woman working in a bar in Kiboko market, a Maasai trader lost Ksh 60,000 (about EUR 800) in a lodging where he had spent the night with a friend to the bar maid, and who had since relocated to Mombasa. Although this friend of hers was afraid of the reprisals, she told me that the Maasai cattle trader had later said that what he had lost was "*pesa kidogo*" ("little money") and that it was "*ng'ombe tatu tu*" ("only three heads of cattle"). She had offered to go for her friend in Mombasa clarifying that "this would have cost him about Ksh 3,000...but he would have recovered his Ksh 60,000". She sounded as if she knew exactly where her friend was and assumed that the 'stolen' money would have been found intact. Cleverly, the Maasai trader had rejected the offer. Telling her that the Maasai man would probably have lost an additional Ksh 3,000, she burst out laughing in agreement. She considered the Maasai as gullible. But in this narrative, there is a mix of 'class' and 'ethnicity'. In the rural settings, it is common practice for the 'poor' to take advantage of the 'rich' irrespective of ethnic affiliation. It is only that the Maasai appeared more vulnerable. This vulnerability was said to be exacerbated by Maasai men's tendency to be ostentatious "even when they sell one cow" (Mutui, Kiboko, 06/03/2000). To be fair to the Maasai, considering that a cow can fetch up to Ksh 10,000 (EUR 130), the monthly salary of a trained primary school teacher, it is a considerable amount.

Going back to the Ksh 60,000, that is a lot of money by any standards. My reading is that it was not that the money was "little" but perhaps because the Maasai trader was addressing a Kamba audience. The underlying message seems to have been; "we have money, you do not have it". It was evident that for those who have it, the Maasai carry a lot of money with them. The school headteacher referred earlier, told me how Maasai parents, in comparison to the others, not only paid school fees for their children usually in cash, but they would pay any outstanding balances and contingent levies "on the spot" even when they did not know about them.

3.1.6 External depictions: The Maasai as a "famous" group

Many books have been written and numerous films made about the Maasai. It is definitely one of Africa's prominent groups. In fact, they are often presented as symbolising African heritage

and the elusive but cherished ‘uncontaminated’ identity. And from school pupils, the warriors, elders, to women, awareness about their fame (often exaggerated) cuts across age-sets and their vast territory. “We are known all over the world, I am sure you know that”, remarked a Maasai elder during my fieldwork. Palalelei continued: “You people...you are known for nothing (not as well known).” Although one may say that few groups, if any, can be said to lack some form of pride, the case of the Maasai pride can only be comparable to the Nuer of Sudan and Ethiopia.¹¹⁶ If those people who study the Maasai have disagreed on certain aspects of Maasai history, ethnicity, social organisation and practices, they are agreed on one thing; the Maasai are a proud people. So proud are they that after the 2001 September 11th attack in New York and Washington, they donated 15 cows to assist the Americans! after a Maasai student who was in America at the time came back home later and narrated the episode to his people.¹¹⁷ This gesture put the Maasai in the news once more as the American embassy officials in Nairobi went to Maasailand (Trans Mara) to receive the cattle.

Palalelei was keen to stress that the Maasai were ‘better positioned’ than the Kamba in their ethnic rivalry and competition. The phrase, “I am sure you know that” had a deeper meaning. First and foremost, he was addressing me as a Kamba and therefore seeking acknowledgement of his assertion that the Maasai are famous. Secondly, he knew that I was studying in Germany and therefore sought to confirm whether the Maasai were well known overseas. In general, Maasai fame appears to reverse the purported ‘advantaged’ position of the Kamba who portray themselves as the ‘local agents of modernity’. Well, the Kamba dismiss Maasai’s world appeal and fame saying that it has reduced them to tourist objects. Incidentally, the heading of this subsection is also based on a protest comment made by a Kamba respondent: “Okay, they are famous, is that important?” (Mwende, Emali, 20/07/2000). This comment, made out of anger, sent me pondering, what is in fame? Mwende was of the view that the Maasai were famous “for the wrong things”. That they were well known for “keeping their culture, circumcising women, keeping many cattle, killing lions, their traditional clothes, such things...whites come here, they don’t cross to our side, they go to Kajiado...some of these people you see here (Maasai), have they even been to school? no! but they have white women”.¹¹⁸ The idea of Maasai men being admired by white women does not seem to go down well among Kamba men. But although they could not comprehend exactly why the whites had a liking for the Maasai, they were convinced they could not compete. They also felt that ‘fame’ translated into material gains and enhanced Maasai’s self

¹¹⁶ See Prichard (1940).

¹¹⁷ See *The Daily Nation*, Friday, June 7th, 2002.

¹¹⁸ As wives.

esteem. Sitonik, my research partner, was more blunt. He claimed that if there was a white who knew a Kamba, then this must have happened “by accident” as s/he criss-crossed Maasailand or by meeting them “in the hotels where they work”.¹¹⁹

All this brings to mind books like *die weisse Massai* (“the white Maasai”) by Corinne Hofmann (2000). The book tells you how ‘different’, exotic and unique the Maasai are. In a casual chat with a German family, with whom I visit once in a while, and who had read the book,¹²⁰ they could not hide their curiosity about the Maasai. No wonder that the first time I visited them, they had asked whether I was Maasai. Telling them that I was not, they looked a bit disillusioned. I was partly to blame. Before I visited the family, we had exchanged notes about ourselves and photographs. Accustomed to the Kenyan style of using the Maasai image as a way of selling Kenya to the outside world, I had sent them Maasai photographs in their traditional regalia (in shawls, loin-clothes, pierced and extended earlobes etc.). Little did I know that this was actually the kind of person they expected to see. Listening to them telling their friends about what they had learnt from me, little would be said about my studies in Germany or my university career but rather whatever I said about life challenges in rural Africa, snakes, hunger and poverty. But to be fair to them, what sense would it have made to their listeners being told how ‘western’ I was! A friend of theirs quipped one evening that I was “fortunate to be in Germany”. Although he was apologetic later, his was a position shared by many of my Kenyan friends.

Kenyans or indeed Africans who read Hofmann’s book should be excused for the anger the book may evoke. For it presents a very familiar African story; people living very close to nature, using rudimentary methods of survival, hardly influenced by the urban or ‘modernised’ environments in which they live¹²¹ and ‘crude’ in behaviour. But again, when you read about the rich body of depictions exchanged between the Kamba and the Maasai, you might find Hofmann’s book too ‘mild’. The only difference perhaps, is that her book runs like a documentary, a lived experience, devoid of meanings and stereotypes. I know that I am landing on a very slippery ground, for whatever the Kamba actors said about the Maasai was presented as ‘real’. So that what Hofmann, as a westerner not ‘stand’ among the Maasai, turns out to be what a Kamba cannot ‘stand’ too. They literally share a platform. But there is still a difference. Hofmann presents her story as an ‘insider’ and as this study has shown, insiders often deconstruct myths, stereotypes and imagined ethnic differences. But contrary to this, she uses her insider position to perpetuate ‘known’ Maasai stereotypes.

¹¹⁹ It was claimed that the Kamba are overrepresented as waiters in Kenya’s tourist resorts and big hotels.

¹²⁰ In fact, they gave me their copy!

¹²¹ She met her lover, Lketinga, in the historical city of Mombasa.

During my study, it was clear that many Maasai knew that there was a large body of literature written on them. While some expressed concern about the ‘negative’ image often portrayed, many took pride in being ‘internationally’ well known. Actually, the first time I heard about Hofmann’s book, was from one of my Maasai research partners. When Sitonik talked about the book, I first thought that he was referring to another sensational story that hit Kenyan headlines earlier regarding a British woman who met another Samburu man in Mombasa, fell in love and divorced her husband.

Although I doubt that he had read the book, he gave a vivid account of its contents. He did not say the title of the book nor the author but he noted that “it is written by a woman from Switzerland who had married a *msamburu*”. This compels me to comment about Hofmann’s selection of her book title, *die weisse Massai*, although the story actually revolves around a ‘Samburu’. It is the appealing and well known ‘Maasai’ image which must have made her to select a ‘Maasai’ title for marketing reasons. Admittedly, the Samburu (Ilsampur) are linguistically and culturally related to the ‘Maasai’ but, inhabiting Samburu district, they are in many respects a distinct ethnic group¹²² from the Maasai of Kajiado, Narok and Trans Mara. They do recognise themselves as ‘Samburu’. A Maasai historian, ole Kantai notes: “..also within this body of the Maasai are Ilsampur who are geographically isolated by their location in the north east of Kenya”.¹²³

Although Maasai fame may at times be premised on the “wrong reasons”, as Mwende had noted, their admiration world-wide is evident. And this fame is not just acknowledged by Kenyan groups, novelists and tourists. Scholarly works have been on the frontline. From Adamson (1967), Kituyi (1990), Spear and Waller (1993) to Holland (1996), the Maasai are praised for their resilience, unique culture and history. Within East Africa, Maasai image has been appropriated for all sorts of purposes. Tourist websites advertising Kenya as an attractive destination would be incomplete without pictures of the Maasai.¹²⁴ In addition, there are instances where non-Maasai Kenyan groups pose as Maasai for commercial purposes. A Kenyan journalist, Wycliffe Muga, wrote an article entitled “when ‘Maasai’ is a job description”. He eloquently noted that in the coastal town of Mombasa (where he was based), “we have long been familiar with “Maasai” as a job description, rather than a tribal label...”¹²⁵

¹²² Unlike other ‘Maasai’, for instance, they keep camels. ‘Politically’, they are also treated as distinct from the ‘Maasai’. Apart from having their own district, they are also counted separately from ‘Maasai’ during censuses and in the run up to the 1992 elections, they were slotted as a distinct member of the so-called KAMATUSA, which stood for **K**alenjin, **M**aasai, **T**urkana and **S**amburu groups.

¹²³ In a forward in ole Sankan’s book “The Maasai” (1971: x).

¹²⁴ For instance, see <http://www.magicalkenya.com>

¹²⁵ See “comment” in the *The Daily Nation*, Saturday, January 5, 2002.

He proceeds to give a vivid account of how non-Maasai groups clad in the red *shuka* (shawl), braided hair, and holding a club, hawk beaded ‘Maasai’ ornaments in the beaches, the underlying motive being to catch the attention of European women tourists. He notes that “the anecdotal evidence would seem to indicate that the great majority of these ‘Maasai’ are actually Giriama,¹²⁶ often ex-members of some tribal dance troupe...it paid dividends to be a “Maasai” and so they deserted their earlier calling and settled down to being full-time ‘Maasai’ to their conspicuous advantage. But recent years have reportedly brought increasing numbers of Digo and *Kamba* into this speciality market. And although the Giriama had a head start, ‘Maasai’ from these other tribes are believed to be in hot pursuit, racing neck to neck, to challenge the dominance of Giriama ‘Maasai’”. It would appear that Bantu groups have not ceased to be *die Maasaiaffen* (Maasai apes) only that this time around, the ‘aping’ has taken a different form in that it is for commercial purposes. The imitators cannot afford to introduce modifications but instead try to be as ‘Maasai’ as possible, often overdoing it. Because of Maasai fame, their traditional dance, which other East African groups may not find very thrilling, pulls huge audiences among foreigners basically for what it represents.

The ‘real’ Maasai are caught up in a dilemma. On the one hand, they are demeaned by other Kenyan groups while on the other, many mimic their dressing styles to access certain resources, making it look quite fashionable and potentially resourceful to be Maasai. After I learnt a bit of Maa, I greeted a watchman in Nairobi’s South ‘B’ estate who, from his dress, looked Maasai. He retorted in Swahili: “*Wewe ukiona mtu amevalia namna hii unafikiri ni Masai?*”, meaning, “if you see someone dressed like this, why should you conclude that he’s a Maasai?” I challenged him, saying that one may speak Maa when he is not Maasai, to which he responded that he was just dressed *kikazi* (“as per the demands of the job”). It was clear that all what his employers (Kenyan Asians) wanted was a ‘Maasai watchman’. In any case, they communicated in Swahili.

The Maasai in commercial advertisements

The Maasai international appeal is used in the advertisement of a wide range of products. On Kenyan television, the national postal corporation¹²⁷ carried an advertisement in the 1980’s in which somebody who posed like a Maasai was shown running through several ridges, valleys and plains to post a letter, and then showed how ‘easy’ it had become overtime to access postal services. In this advertisement, Maasai image is associated with the past. In Germany,

¹²⁶ The *Giriama* or *Agiriama* are a Bantu speaking group living along the Kenyan coast.

¹²⁷ Previously called Kenya Posts and Telecommunications Corporation (KP&TC) and now renamed Telkom Kenya Ltd.

a coffee processing and marketing company, *Tchibo*, features the Maasai in a television commercial that advertises coffee. It is safe to assume that the commercial is aimed at giving coffee ‘African roots’ and perhaps show that the beans have been acquired through “fair trade”. Otherwise, I am certain that both the company and the targeted consumers are not ignorant of the fact that the Maasai, predominantly associated with pastoralism, live outside the coffee belt of East Africa. In the *Tchibo* commercial, the Maasai image appears to represent the African identity. The leading airline manufacturer, Boeing, also features(d) the Maasai in one of its commercials perhaps to drive the point home that a Boeing airline can take you to the remotest parts of the globe. Here, the Maasai are presented not only as a marginal group inhabiting geographically distant areas but also as a tourist attraction.

In yet another feature (see photo below), a Maasai looking after cattle in the dry East African



plains is holding a mobile phone, a gadget associated with elitism in that part of the world. This photo, carried by *Missio aktuell* of the German Catholic organisation, was in connection with the inequitable distribution of technology in the world. While the photo shows the technological gap between African countries and the industrialised world, it also appears to show the mix between modernity and tradition. It is an irony since the last thing one would associate with a Maasai herder is a mobile phone. Following a discussion I held with two German students who toured Kenya and saw a considerable number of people in Nairobi and Mombasa holding mobile phones, the hidden message behind this photo seems to be: “Eradicate poverty first and then you can think about mobile phones”.

These are just some of the many ways that the Maasai image is appropriated within and outside the Kenyan borders. It is partly this kind of attention given to the Maasai that makes some non-Maasai pose as ‘Maasai’. There is something positive about these commercials; at least, it is a departure from other negative images where the Maasai have been portrayed as drinkers of animal blood, mutilators of female genitals, as a people who lead promiscuous lifestyles and as trapped in a development dilemma.

Plate 1: A Maasai ‘cattle herder’ posing with a mobile phone. *Source: Missio aktuell* 1/2000.

The photo could evoke pride or anger depending on who is looking at it. What is negative about it is that it depicts the Maasai as exotic and ‘different’. Although the young man is holding a technologically advanced gadget, he is not representing modernity but a disadvantaged, ‘backward’ and remotely located group. The photo and other commercials which feature the Maasai appear to stress that there are gains to be reaped by remaining ‘traditional’, different and set apart from the ‘ordinary’; they stress difference.

Incidentally, the Maasai have also had ‘cultural ambassadors’ supposedly to create awareness about ‘African culture’ in the West. One such Maasai was Tom Mpeti ole Surum who was ‘Kenya’s cultural ambassador’ to the United States.¹²⁸ He became a very famous personality back in Kenya and at one time joined forces to fight a cabinet minister and self styled ‘Maasai spokesman’. The campaign did not succeed though. A CNN *Inside Africa* edition of 14th April 2001 featured one John ole Tome who appeared to have stepped into the late Surum’s shoes.

Seeking to exclude others

In as much as the Maasai take pride in the social significance attached to their identity by other groups, many have strong reservations on the appropriation of ‘Maasainess’. My research partner, Sitonik noted: “Some people think that it is very easy to be Maasai, they come, they try, many give up, it is not easy...you see, sometimes I am dressed just like you¹²⁹ but one can see that you are not Maasai.”¹³⁰ He was desperately trying to erect ethnic boundaries between the Maasai and non-Maasai by insisting on how ‘different’ the Maasai are. “Red *shukas* are synonymous with the Maasai, but dressing in a *shuka* does not necessarily (make) everyone a Maasai,”¹³¹ wrote Sinoyia ole Yiaile of the Maasai Environmental Resource Coalition. This is one of the Maasai-led organisations that are fighting for conservation of the Maasai pastoral economy, environment, and against the “misrepresentation” of the Maasai culture as well as violation of intellectual cultural property rights.

In his article entitled “cultural robbers taking sheen off Maasai culture,” he argued that cultural ‘impostors’ should be shunned for they were “spoilers of the Maasai culture.” He argued that their culture was attractive and irresistible, making some non-Maasai to cash in on

¹²⁸ See *The Daily Nation* Friday, October 12, 2001.

¹²⁹ In a shirt, trouser and shoes.

¹³⁰ He was referring to certain physical characteristics e.g. height.

¹³¹ See “letters to the editor”, *The Daily Nation*, Friday 12, 2001.

its “commercial value.” He lamented that an individual “purporting to be Maasai” gave a lecture to an attentive audience at the exclusive Grand Regency Hotel in Nairobi. He notes: “The individual does not even know how to hold a *rungu* (club). He holds it with his left hand”.¹³² He calls the person a “cultural robber and conman.” He expressed deep concern about the arbitrary observance of Maasai group norms and physical representations and took a swipe at those who parody the “Maasai culture.” He appeared to have been stressing what Bourdieu (1990: 69) calls the “pedagogic reason,” that is, to “extort what is essential while seeming to demand the insignificant” when defending certain ethnic ideals.

Yiaile’s anger appeared to be premised not on the fact that people imitate the Maasai, but that there were financial gains in doing this. He also cited another case in a Nairobi restaurant called *Simmers* where a waiter-cum entertainer “presents himself as a Maasai.” He argued that such individuals should be vetted to ascertain their authenticity and that employers should look for “*true Maasai* who understand their culture fully to avoid embarrassment.” He appealed to the hotel industry to be advertising such positions. What he did not say in his article is who a “*true Maasai*” is. His attempt to demarcate ethnic differences was quite illusionary. Although he insists on the authenticity of those who pose as Maasai, he ignores the fact that “impostors” may be more motivated and keen on ‘Maasai culture’ more than those he calls “*true Maasai*”. He went against Barth’s suggestion that “it makes no difference how dissimilar members may be in their overt behaviour-if they say they are A, in contrast to another cognate B, they are willing to be treated and let their own behaviour be interpreted and judged as A’s and not as B’s” (1969: 15).

3.2 Conclusion

As I noted in the introduction, this chapter and the next are about showing how the Kamba and the Maasai make sense of ethnic difference through depictions. In this chapter, one sees a passionate move by the Kamba to distant themselves from the Maasai whom they had imitated in the past. That is why many of the depictions revolve around social transformation. Surprisingly, the Maasai are not insisting that they have embraced education and market economy and therefore are increasingly becoming similar to the Kamba. Instead, they choose to take pride in the resilience of their culture and say the Kamba “have nothing to show” for their heritage. This is one depiction that is acceptable to both groups: The Kamba like being portrayed as people who have ‘modernised’, while the Maasai, even when ‘modern’, take

¹³² The Grand Regency Hotel in Nairobi is a five star complex. It is a preferred venue for ‘high level’ seminars and conferences. A *Rungu* is the Swahili word for the Maasai traditional club otherwise called *Orinka* in Maa.

pride in their cultural heritage. This not only lends credence to interface relations, where discontinuities become critical (Long, 1989), but also boils down to what the theme of this chapter is; to show that from the Kamba's point of view, the Maasai are distinct from them, and therefore meet one of the basic qualifications in interethnic coexistence, namely distinctiveness.

In this chapter, there is a combination of primordial and constructed aspects of ethnic identity. Distinctions range from predisposed physical traits and temperament, ecology and modes of subsistence, cultural practices (e.g. dressing codes and female circumcision) to social transformation. The Maasai are portrayed as contingent planners, backward, ignorant, promiscuous, but on a positive note, as famous.¹³³ These depictions are presented as opposites of what the Kamba are. I have shown however that there are overlaps, which are often denied. I have also discussed the logic behind these depictions, showing that some are grounded on social facts. The actors' are keen to draw 'clear' lines of distinction between the two groups, irrespective of their interactive everyday practices and a history of interaction. Distinctions are drawn with so much zeal that where physical appearances are fluid, actors still claim that they can intuitively "feel" and tell the ethnicity of an actor. This demonstrates the quest for actors to maintain ethnic boundaries and make sense of their own existence and identity.

Depicting the Maasai as "backward" is a 'face saving' exercise aimed at legitimising the abandonment of many of Kamba's cultural practices (e.g. initiation rites). The irony in demeaning a noble attribute like the Maasai traditional dress is that present day Kenyan designers and artists have been searching for a national "African dress" which is to incorporate Maasai bright coloured dress code.

It has been shown in the chapter that external dominant discourses, including western literature, reinforce stereotypes, even if it is by glorifying Maasai culture. The Maasai are portrayed as exotic and therefore far removed from their neighbours. Nevertheless, ethnic depictions also bring the groups together. The "backwardness" of the Maasai, presented as something that should be overcome, has created avenues of closer interethnic interaction with the Kamba assuming the role of change agents in development activities, education and business. Some of the depictions have wider implications; non-schooling (seen as an attribute of ignorance) is a reflection of some of the fundamental challenges facing the Kenyan state as it struggles to eradicate what it set out to do at independence: ignorance, poverty and disease. After going through chapter four, where I look at the other side of the story, one notices that in comparison, the Maasai are stereotyped more. This has to do with the resilience of Maasai

¹³³ Although they are said to be famous "for the wrong reasons!"

cultural practices which astound not just the Kamba but other groups and people from many parts of the world.

Let me now look at the other side of the story: How the Maasai depict the Kamba.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE ACTORS: ETHNIC DEPICTIONS, DIFFERENCE AND COEXISTENCE (PART TWO)

4.1 Maasai ethnic depictions of the Kamba

Chapters three and four could have been combined but have been separated for two reasons. One, a single chapter would have been too big and clumsy, and two, to allow the reader discern more clearly the intricate nuances in the way the two groups depict each other. Although both chapters are about how the Kamba and the Maasai make sense of ethnic difference, the two groups stress different attributes. As a proud group that values cattle wealth, the Maasai portray the Kamba farmers (*Ilmeek*) as “poor” and desperate. And owing to the resilience of Maasai culture, the Kamba are presented as people who have lost their cultural heritage and direction. The Kamba are also presented as cowards, immoral, lovers of women and thieves. But the Maasai present Kamba women, whom they often take as wives, as “hard working”. This chapter includes a section that examines commonalities (points of convergence) between the two groups which enhance co-operation and harmony. At the end of the chapter, I present the conclusion for this particular chapter and a general conclusion covering both chapters.

4.1.1 *The Kamba as “poor”*

“To us, *wakamba* (the Kamba) are people who live in constant poverty...always on food relief...they have small farms, we employ them to look at our animals and build our houses...even in the schools, our children are not send home for lack of fees”. This statement, by a Maasai (Nkari) is made with a lot of finality and embodies *stativity*. He talks about the past and the present and does not see any possible changes in the state of things. Nkari is a fairly well-off Maasai and he takes his privileged economic position as the embodiment of being Maasai. But these notions depicting the Kamba as poor are common among the Maasai. And unlike the Kamba who tend to have many post-colonial depictions on the Maasai, Maasai stereotypes on the Kamba are generally primordial.

What is striking is that although the Maasai glorify animal wealth, and see it as the epitome of their identity, many of those who recognise themselves as pastoral Maasai have only small herds and some have no cattle at all,¹³⁴ and two, many Maasai have diversified their economy, taking up farming. And although they portray the Kamba as “poor farmers” (*Ilmeek*), they

¹³⁴ Earning their living by working as cattle herders or watchmen in trading centres and towns.

know that the Kamba have always kept some cattle. And that is not the end of the inconsistencies. When I asked them to define ‘wealth’ they did not just talk about cattle. Generally, wealth was defined in terms of visible material acquisitions that enhanced one’s level of performance and social status. They said that it is manifested by the number of cattle, sheep and goats owned, size of land, number of wives and children, jobs in the modern sector, whether one has sons/daughters in gainful employment, whether houses are mud-walled/grass thatched or brick/stone walled and tin roofed, in terms of businesses (e.g. cattle trade) or by ownership of commercial buildings. What is interesting is that all these attributes are more common among the Kamba than among the Maasai. What is more, in both groups, ‘old’ ideals, like having a big family or the quantity of cattle kept rather than quality, are gradually losing significance. Although cattle and land are still highly valued among the Maasai and Kamba respectively, significance is being attached to keeping fewer but improved breeds, and commercialisation of farming. But all these are eclipsed by white collar jobs and business engagements.

Maasai presentation of the Kamba as ‘poor’ has to be seen within their interethnic dynamics and history of rivalry. In the recent past, when property was basically evaluated in terms of cattle and land, even the Kamba were great admirers of the Maasai, but they would still not portray the Maasai as ‘rich’, since they were also their enemies. That is why Mananu, a Kamba, lost his temper when I asked him about Maasai’s “wealth.” He emotionally blurted: “What? rich? who? (shaking his head)...you want to tell me that these people who walk around almost naked are rich?” (in Kilili, 19/06/2000). He was referring to the loin-clothes and shawls worn by the Maasai, and in his attempt to distance the Kamba from their recent past, made reference to Maasai dressing styles, although he admitted that had very little to do with their material possessions. But the Kamba of today take the Maasai as ‘primitive’ accumulators. To make nonsense of Maasai’s animal wealth, Mananu says that “this way of accumulating wealth is outdated, its a cycle, you have them now, they die next year, many of these (pointing to his herd of about 25) belong to my son...when they were small (his children) I used to have about 40 (cattle)...even more...you think he is old? (the son) he is young, just twenty something, but he works (employed) and now I ask him for money”.

Mananu’s sentiments express how formal education has shifted property and influence from the older generation to the young, from subsistence to a transition towards a cash economy. In his narrative, he takes the position of the Maasai (cattle economy), and his son, Kamba’s, who have a more diversified economy. And the story of a Maasai of Mananu’s generation is no different. Living near Loitokitok, the 64 year old elder, who had about 70 head of cattle put it

thus: “These things (cattle) used to be very important, people used to respect you a lot, women would not be a problem... (pauses) you want, you get (laughs), now young women want other things, now you cannot compare a doctor to a man with even 100 cattle, pasture is a problem now, drought comes, and you lose all of them... people working for the government (e.g. doctors) earn their salaries throughout”. He told me that although the Kamba have more members in the modern sector including “teaching our children in the schools and treating us in the hospitals” the Maasai regard them as poor. He explained that to a Maasai, tilling of land is something degrading and just like hunting, strenuous and less productive. He said: “Cattle multiply as you watch”. (Leleita, Makutano, 16/09/2000). Leleita still believes in cattle, and ignores the fact that they can also ‘go as you watch’, particularly during droughts. Nonetheless, both underscore that the future lies in the modern sector, but for Leleita, old depictions will always find relevance.

Let me briefly present Nkari’s story, quite similar but which fills in some of the gaps in Leleita’s. His father owned about 600 head of cattle by the time of his death in 1971. After the animals were shared out among the six sons, two, out of the four still alive, had no cattle anymore by the time of interview.¹³⁵ During the 1974-76 drought, most of the cattle died. Nkari loaned his brothers cattle, one “misused” the animal wealth and no relative was willing to revive his herd anymore. At the time I recruited Nkari as a research partner in 2000, only one of his brothers had “cattle worth talking about”, to quote Nkari. Many things had happened: Reduction of grazing space through land sales, school fees, paying for medical care and shortage of herders as school attendance took precedence. And then there are relatives who had died of Aids related illnesses leaving behind children. Commenting about this increasing burden of dependence, Nkari said: “These are some of the things that are making us poor... if it was just feeding and clothing, no problem, I can even take more (children)... but school, do you pay fees? (I told him I do) it is too much... you sell three bulls and you only pay fees for some, and these people (buyers), they are bad, they don’t care, they know we are desperate so they just give us what they want... that is the problem... sugar never goes down but cattle... it is bad.” (Imaroro, 19/05/2000). Nkari’s story reiterates how the Maasai pastoral economy has been declining but also its resilience e.g. through revival of herds by loaning of cattle. They are stories showing how similar the two groups have become overtime.

A Kamba chief noted that Maasai “superiority” was based on “past glory”. The chief, who serves both Kamba and Maasai groups, argued that since wealth and status among the Maasai was measured in terms of the number of cattle owned, the Kamba, as owners of modest stock

¹³⁵ Nkari was taking care of the families of the deceased brothers.

were put in the lowest category. Which is understandable for even Maasai who had few cattle or none “could not talk in the presence of *men*”.¹³⁶ The chief said that as a young boy, they would be told how cattle raids among the Maasai made people “rich”. And he claimed that he had seen Maasai wealth and supremacy deteriorate overtime. He explicated: “Just about 15 years ago, you could not see a Maasai eating anything else here in Emali...they ate only roasted meat in butcheries...now they eat *kitheli* just like us and queue for yellow maize¹³⁷ during food shortages, I give them food”.¹³⁸ He attributes this decline to successive droughts and transformation processes within the Maasai society itself.

To be fair to the Maasai, we should bear in mind that in a peasant economy integrated into a market economy, livestock fetches more money than agricultural products. The pastoralist therefore may only be second to the successful businesspersons or next to the higher middle income earner. The small scale farmer comes last in that hierarchy. The condition is exacerbated by the subsistence farmer who faces periodic bouts of drought and crop failure. This would of course bring in class categories which are vertical as opposed to ethnic categories that are horizontal. As Roosens (1989 :14) argues, ethnic divisions create equivalences rather than hierarchies. In any case, the Kamba resist Maasai attempt to place them at the bottom of the social ladder and belittle Maasai animal wealth to get even with them.

In an environment where ethnic groups compete for scarce resources and self-worth, making sense of their lives vis-à-vis others involves ignoring ‘known realities’ including documented information. Listening to the Maasai talk about the Kamba regarding poverty, you would be surprised to find out that according to the Kenya Welfare Monitoring Survey (1996), Kajiado and Makueni districts are some of the most disadvantaged regions in the country, with insignificant variations. What was defined as ‘poverty’ therefore was not just material possessions but an ethnic category.

¹³⁶ Quoting Nkari of Imaroro, Mashuru division, Kajiado district (18/05/2000). “Men” here means those who owned large herds (at least more than 50 cattle).

¹³⁷ *Kitheli* is a corrupted version of *githeri*, the Kikuyu name for *isyo* among the Kamba. It is the commonest dish among the two ethnic groups. While the Kamba prepare it simply by mixing maize and legumes, the Kikuyu, who live in wetter zones, usually add potatoes and cabbages. Yellow maize normally comes from overseas during famine and is usually eaten as a last resort since Kenyans generally grow and feed on white maize. When both breeds are available during prolonged droughts, feeding on white maize becomes a status symbol in the villages. This is because yellow maize is either much cheaper if commercially available, or it is given out for free as famine relief. Much of Maasailand and nearly the whole of Ukambani are food deficit areas.

¹³⁸ Chiefs’ camps are key food distribution points during shortages.

“Poor” but “good in business”

One striking thing about Maasai depictions of the Kamba is that some are positive. A Maasai school teacher noted: “The Maasai are poor in investing money...the money they make from cattle trade...they just keep it at home” (Vivian Kateria, Simba Primary School, 13/6/2000). And some of the incidences I was confronted with tended to confirm this. I was personally shocked after meeting a Maasai pastoralist who had just sold 39 head of cattle (out of about 190) for a total of Ksh 485,000 (EUR 6,300) and openly confessing that he was keeping the whole amount in the simple makeshift hut in Mwailu (Kiboko) where he had moved his cattle in July 2000. Every afternoon, he would carry a chunk of it to entertain his friends in one of the bars in Kiboko. Asking him why he had not taken the money to the bank, he said that he neither had a bank account nor did he find that necessary. Further inquiries revealed that although those who own such large herds of cattle are few, this practice is typical among pastoral Maasai men. In my entire study, I met only two Maasai who had bank accounts and who believed in savings. Many kept their money at home after cattle sales.

It is against this background that we discuss entrepreneurship. Whereas the Maasai portray the Kamba as poor, they present their Bantu neighbours as “good in business.” Several cases of ‘successful’ businesspersons were cited, including a Kamba woman based in Simba whom the Maasai often described as “very rich”.¹³⁹ In several trading centres in Maasailand, business was in the hands of non-Maasai groups. In Simba, for instance, the Kamba ran shops, kiosks, open air vegetable trade, butcheries and bars. Although many of these business ventures were in the hands of men, I am going to highlight two Kamba women. The woman the Maasai said was “very rich” was born in 1957, the third wife of a former prominent businessman. But at the time of my fieldwork, the husband was almost bankrupt and there was every indication that she was supporting him financially. She had learnt the art of money making; combining shops and rental buildings with farming and cereal trade. After the El-Nino rains of 1998, for instance, she made over Ksh 600,000 (EUR 7,800) from crop sales, and used the funds to buy a tractor and put up a new shop. Her enormous financial activities attracted police investigations who sought to know her source of money. She told me: “We live in a society where...when a woman makes money it is news”, adding that it was perhaps only among the Kikuyu that women entrepreneurship was taken as “normal”.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁹ One joked that if Kamba men were like her, then the Maasai would “respect” them. The woman in question is discussed in chapter three, as coordinator of a credit scheme. Although the Maasai had reservations on the way she ran the credit scheme, they admired her success in business.

¹⁴⁰ She argued that when it came to women involvement in “big business”, then Kamba men were just like their Maasai counterparts; i.e. they took as a challenge to patriarchy.

The second case I would like to discuss is Mrs Monica Mulei of Sultan Hamud. She was running a well stocked shop within premises that belonged to a Maasai. Born in 1950 in Nzaui (Makueni) and forced to cut short her secondary school education in 1968 because her father “could not afford”¹⁴¹ to pay her fees together with that of her two brothers. Anyhow, 32 years down the line, she was running a prosperous business. She married in 1972, and had five children. The husband used to work with the military but died in 1988. One of her children graduated from university in 1996 and is in full time employment. She inherited property in Nzaui (after some attempts by her brother-in-law to deny her that right), she sold some commercial plots in 1992 and came to establish a business on the ‘main road’ (in Sultan Hamud). This decision culminated in her encounter with *Amasai* (Maasai). She rented a shop from a Maasai whom she was paying Ksh 2,000 (EUR 30) per month. Although she insisted that she made about Ksh 15,000 per month, the size of the stock and the movement of goods suggested that she was making much more. She even admitted that what the landlord asked for rent was “unbelievably low”. Monica is no ‘ordinary’ person. The Maasai landlord had refused to rent the premises to her. He had demanded that she comes with her husband “or another man” as proof that, one; she was “serious”, and two; that the monthly rent would be forthcoming. Since business premises owned by Maasai neither target nor attract other Maasai, as Kamba, she had met the ‘first’ requirement. But still, she was forced to pay him five months rent in advance for him to get ‘convinced’. When asked to comment on the Maasai assertion that the Kamba are poor, she quipped: “That is men’s talk”!

Very busy but keen to participate in the study, she invited me four times to share her lived experience. She portrayed herself as a person who had succeeded where “many Kamba men had failed”, namely in the “risky but profitable” world of self employment. She said: “Because Kamba men have been sleeping, this town now is full of Kikuyus...coming all the way from Kikuyu (Kikuyuland)”. But how about the Maasai whose cattle criss-cross the trading centre but yet appeared marginalised in the running of business in the trading centre? To this she answered sarcastically, “at least those ones, we understand”, citing the resilience of their cattle economy, illiteracy and inadequate business models. About Maasai claim that the Kamba are poorer, she posed: “Do you think my landlord can say that?...he can’t”. She claimed that the Kamba (men) had not “proved” the Maasai wrong.¹⁴² Monica strongly believes in women. She told me that if I had been observant, then I must have noticed that

¹⁴¹ She had been forced to repeat her end of primary school education for the father “to look for money”. She said that at the time, it was simply quite “unusual” for a family to invest in women education.

¹⁴² Stereotypes however are not necessarily based on social facts.

among Kamba families that lose a parent, it is always a catastrophe if its the woman who dies. And she seemed to epitomise this herself.

I would like to revisit Maasai's occasional presentation of the Kamba as "good in business". Suffice it to say that Kamba 'dominance' of business has nothing to do with ethnicity but the socio-cultural environment in which the Kamba, unlike the Maasai, operate and how history has shaped both groups. In the 19th century long-distance-trade that took groups from the interior to participate in the Indian Ocean trade along the East African coast, the Kamba were only rivalled by the Yao and Nyamwezi of Tanzania. With a history of recurring famines, the Kamba were also very active in interregional trade, particularly in the Kikuyu country where some of the items obtained from the coast e.g. salt and corrie shells were traded for food supplies.

It is important to point out though that Maasai recognition of the Kamba as excelling in business does not exonerate them from being designated as "poor". Moreover, it is also a relative edge. Both the Maasai and the Kamba are quick to point out that other ethnic groups e.g. the Kikuyu, Meru and Kisii tend to be more entrepreneurial.

4.1.2 A story of raiders and thieves

A discussion about the Kamba and the Maasai would be incomplete without talking about cattle. And what is interesting is not that both groups keep them, but rather that they have killed each other for them. The heading is derived from a comment made by Sitonik: "We raid cattle, they (Kamba) steal cattle" (Mashuru, 21/03/2000). As a trained primary school teacher, Sitonik had very idealistic observations. Asking him why he said the Kamba stole cattle while the Maasai 'raided' them, he explained that among the Kamba, raiding "in the traditional sense" died off "long ago" as the group disregarded their "culture" and embraced "modernity". Though not entirely implausible, his suggestions ignored two things. One, the Maasai were also a transformed group whose traditional institutions of sanctioning social behaviour have been steadily superseded by statutory ones. Two, much of the 'raiding' was not being done for the 'collective' good but by individuals who had commercialised the exercise.

He insisted however that whenever the Maasai 'raid' cattle among the Kamba, a counter raid should be regarded as theft. One thing was clear, the Maasai had never been comfortable with the criminalisation of what used to be an acceptable way of accumulating wealth. Across the Ukambani-Maasailand border, cattle, goats, sheep, donkeys, grass and wood are often acquired through 'theft'. The Kamba 'steal' from the Maasai, the Maasai 'steal' from the Kamba, the internal thefts notwithstanding. The Maasai say that the Kamba are thieves "just

like the Kikuyu" while the Kamba say that Maasai's "deceptive" looks notwithstanding,¹⁴³ they 'steal' without batting an eyelid.

I would like to present an incident to illustrate this depiction. Something unusual took place one morning in February 1999. A Kamba businessman who owned a slaughter house in Simba was accused by a Maasai trader of "stealing" Ksh 32,000 (EUR 400) within the precincts of the slaughter house. There were also Maasai 'witnesses' whom the Kamba thought were fake. The businessman insisted that he had not picked any money. The Maasai acted swiftly, and after some consultations, a group of Maasai *murran* came and took a bull from the slaughter house as ransom. They said that the bull would only be handed over after the full payment of the 'stolen' cash had been made. In retaliation, the Kamba businessman mobilised his workers, relatives, friends and other Kamba in the neighbourhood who, armed with bows and arrows, crossed over to Maasailand and took 30 heads of cattle and 16 goats. What followed was a stand off that lasted for about three days. Business in the centre was virtually paralysed during that period. In the arbitration process which involved state authorities, the cattle taken by the Kamba were returned to the Maasai. The goats were handed over much later.

An examination of the incident revealed that it was something waiting to happen. There had been tension in the trading centre for a long time. The Maasai considered the centre as 'theirs' on the basis of territoriality and therefore felt they had every right to control all business activities. They had lost the interethnic competition in entrepreneurship. It emerged that when the Kamba butcher slaughtered a bull, it was sold out within a day. Conversely, when a Maasai slaughtered, he would be forced to throw some of the meat away. The chairperson of the centre noted that when it was Maasai's turn to slaughter, "even a goat would stay overnight" (Mavuthi, Simba, 21/06/2000). The chair, in consultation with the chief and local businesspersons made an arrangement where only one bull or cow would be slaughtered per day and that this would be done in shifts where, "if a Maasai slaughters today, a Kamba slaughters tomorrow". This was meant to give each ethnic group a chance. So, why was 'Maasai meat' boycotted? It appeared that while the Maasai had no discrimination in buying meat (or could not do without meat), many Kamba residents would boycott when a Maasai slaughtered arguing that "Maasai meat is not clean" and therefore they were not buying meat 'for hygienic reasons'. Moreover, even Maasai butcheries would be avoided with the excuse that the sanitary conditions were insalubrious, and that the Maasai "roast meat only for a few minutes". A Kamba respondent said: "If you have been eating meat around here, you must

¹⁴³ Looks of simplicity and innocence.

have realised that Maasai eat meat when blood is still oozing out" (Kyuli, Kiboko, 15/09/2000). The Kamba boycott of Maasai meat was interpreted to mean that they had hatched a strategy to drive the Maasai out of a fragile but lucrative meat business.

Back to the 'theft' case. The Kamba had returned the animals taken from the Maasai while the Maasai had returned the bull, but the issue of the money had not been resolved. Elders from both groups could not agree. A Maasai elder was quoted as saying: "If you had taken our cattle or sheep, no problem, we do these things...but money, no, money...you have to pay." Local government officials had to intervene. Through local chiefs, the matter was reported to the Makueni officer commanding police division (OCPD) and district commissioners (DCs) from Makueni and Kajiado. When the two groups finally met in an emotionally charged large gathering, the Maasai made two conditions. One, the money must be paid in full, and two, the Kamba businessman should be banned from doing business in the trading centre. After assessing the incident, the OCPD came to the conclusion that the 'Kamba' should pay the money "whether they stole it or not".¹⁴⁴ Although the Kamba protested, Mavuthi says that this was the only way the Kamba would earn their peaceful stay in the market. It was the price to pay for "acceptance" from the Maasai who, as the local chief said "were simply asking for respect." At some point therefore, the issue was not the money but a group's worth, self-esteem and recognition.

The Kamba were given time to raise the money and a date was agreed on when the payment would be made. The Kamba organised a fundraiser to raise the Ksh 32,000. The businessman's family members, his clan, families in the neighbourhood, fellow businesspersons and friends made contributions. The Kamba were convinced that 'their man' was innocent and that this had turned into a "Maasai versus Kamba" duel. That explains why irrespective of one's material inadequacies, the Kamba made contributions, ignoring the fact that the businessman could afford to pay the money on his own. When the money was being handed over to the Maasai, the Kamba made the 'final' condition. They insisted that if the Maasai were "sincere", then they should be subjected to the revered Kamba oath (*kithitu* or *muma*). The Maasai asked for a few hours to consult on that proposal. After 'consultations', they said that they could not be forced to take part in an exercise whose consequences could be fatal. Although Bourdieu (1990: 68) alludes to the requirement of "being born in it" in order to 'believe' and suffer the consequences of magic or witchcraft, the Maasai took no chances. The Maasai went contrary to Bourdieu's argument that beliefs are not an arbitrary adherence to a set of doctrines but rather "a state of the body". Whatever the case, two things

¹⁴⁴ It was the 'price for coexistence', an aspect analysed in chapter five.

were clear, namely the Maasai ‘believed’ in Kamba witchcraft and magic if they stood any chance to lose, and two, they knew a lot about the Kamba than what the latter had imagined. To the Kamba, the refusal to swear by their oath was interpreted to mean an admission of guilt and a confirmation that the Maasai had not lost any money. It was a display of not only a clash of the traditional institutions of administering justice and discontinuities of values but the transcendence of societal sanctions and beliefs across ethnic boundaries. The OCPD, who was neither Maasai nor Kamba, ruled that the money be handed over without conditions. The Kamba however asked the Maasai to give them a ‘stick’ (*kutulilwa muti*)¹⁴⁵ an act which, according to the Kamba oathing system would enable an aggrieved party to administer the oath against the Maasai *ex parte*. This suggestion too was cleverly rejected by the Maasai (for details on Kamba oathing system, see Lindblom, 1920; Ndeti, 1972, and Middleton and Kershaw, 1972).

What was Kamba’s interpretation of Maasai’s refusal? The chair of the centre put it thus: “We (Kamba) felt like we were dealing with our fellow Kamba not Maasai, they knew everything”. The response of the Maasai was a pointer that they had good knowledge of Kamba’s cultural practices and belief systems¹⁴⁶ which called into question the hitherto held general belief among the Kamba that the Maasai took for granted Kamba magic, witchcraft and medicine. And thanks to this ‘acknowledgement’, the Kamba did not consider themselves as losers. Mr Mutui said that to the Kamba, the Maasai had not only ‘finally’ demonstrated that the Kamba could inflict harm on them away from the battlefields, but they had also “confirmed” that they were the aggressors. He said that handing over the money to the Maasai was a demonstration that the Kamba could go to great lengths and sacrifice a lot for the sake of peace. There has been talk since then about how the Kamba went out of their way to pay money that they had not been ‘stolen’. To the Maasai however, the compensation was an admission that their loss was a genuine one. Mr Palalelei (a Maasai) told me: “We know them (Kamba), they are mean, if they had not done it, they wouldn’t have paid”.¹⁴⁷ What the Kamba were to realise was that they had to confirm that they were indeed ‘thieves’ and that since they were in Maasai territory, they had to live with that. Refusal to pay would have jeopardised their residence in Simba. They had fewer options. But perhaps more important is how what started as a personal dispute between two traders had been deliberately elevated to a ‘tribal’ dispute pitting the Maasai against the Kamba. Witchcraft and ritual are important means of social control and

¹⁴⁵ *kutulilwa muti* is giving whoever is in doubt or suspicion a chance or a go-ahead to prove the innocence of the accused.

¹⁴⁶ Through many years of cross-ethnic interactions and the Kamba wives married to the Maasai.

¹⁴⁷ “Mean” here also meant “poor”. He meant that: “As poor as they are (Kamba), they must have been guilty to pay”.

resolving of conflicts (Gluckman, 1965; Turner, 1972), but usually within a group. Kamba's attempt to apply these sanctions of behaviour across ethnicities were rejected. And yet, this rejection is also taken as Maasai admission of guilt. Apart from depicting the Kamba as thieves, this becomes a negotiation process with regard to residence rights. The councillor told me: "Look, they do all sorts of things here...you must have heard about how *they* stole some money from *a* Maasai the other day, but we are saying let them stay...we take peace to be very important" (Tauketi, Simba, 22/06/2000). Although the incident involved two people, a Maasai and a Kamba, the Kamba guilt is generalised ("they") while the Maasai 'victim' remains in the singular form. He stressed what was 'important'.

4.1.3 The Kamba as "harmless witches"

This is a lopsided depiction. While nearly all Kenyan ethnic groups recognise Kamba witchcraft, the Maasai dismiss it with contempt. Let me first clarify that I am not delving into the broad discourse on witchcraft, traditional medicine, and religion. I restrict myself to what was of relevance among the Maasai and the Kamba, namely claims of the Kamba magical power to cause harm (through *muoi* i.e., the sorcerer or magician) and to protect individuals from the same (through *mundu mue* i.e., the priest-doctor). Otherwise, for details on Kamba moral and traditional sanctions, one could refer to Ndeti (1972: 113-129).¹⁴⁸

One major contrast between the Kamba and the Maasai is the practice of witchcraft. While it would be implausible to suggest that the Maasai have nothing to do with sorcery, they are definitely much less superstitious. Partly due to the importance attached to witchcraft by some Maasai neighbouring groups (particularly the Kamba and the Kisii), the Maasai will tell you that they do not believe in "those things". In practice however, they do. Nonetheless, sorcery is less a question of bodily harm than forces of evil that may disrupt the smooth flow of traditional ceremonies. In such occasions, sacrifices to the deity are made to keep at bay the forces of chaos (Spencer, 1993: 149). Among the Kamba society, it is a different story altogether. Ndeti notes that "if a person has been killed by a wild animal, people believe he has been bewitched. If a child dies of common illness, the gossip goes around that some hideous witch stole the life of that child. If a man fails to win a woman's love, he is bewitched. Many accidents, especially serious ones, are caused by witchcraft". On the other hand, Maasai religion does not include widespread beliefs in the existence of ancestral spirits or mystical powers and is characterised by what Schlosser calls "general lack of belief in witchcraft and other forms of superstition" (1984: 150). That may explain why a Maasai elder's reaction to a

¹⁴⁸ One could also look at Lindblom's (1920) pioneering study on the Kamba.

question about witchcraft was swift and firm: “There is nothing like that” (Palalelei, Kiboko, 18/08/2000).

However, at least according to the Kamba, witchcraft has been useful in their transactions with the Maasai. During cattle raids, the divination powers of Kamba priest-doctors would be sought to direct the raiders on the routes to follow when planning a raid on Maasai cattle or when tracing Kamba cattle which had been taken away by the Maasai. This would also involve protective charms to guard them against injury. However, some Kamba raiders would still get killed in Maasailand or would come home empty handed. Mr Kyuli told me of an incident where, having been overwhelmed by Maasai raiders in 1961, his group threatened a group of Maasai *murran* that they would mysteriously die if they took the cattle away. After this, the Kamba traditional *kithitu* ritual, used to settle disputes, was performed. Amid laughter, he noted, “the Maasai ignored the threat...I am sure no-one died”. It is important to underscore here that Kyuli was in no measure sceptical about Kamba witchcraft. He explained that although Kamba witchcraft was lethal, it had its “limits”.

Giving it a more historical perspective, Mr Mutui noted that one of the most frustrating experiences among the Kamba was their realisation that unlike the Kikuyu, Meru or Taita, the Maasai showed no apprehension or fear towards Kamba witchcraft. He observed: “For the first time, a weapon that the Kamba had used very successfully to scare away enemies, failed...the Maasai were not intimidated by witchcraft.” He noted that there was no evidence whatsoever that the Maasai feared Kamba witchcraft which was a major blow since witchcraft was traditionally the Kamba defence “when everything else failed”. He noted that while the Kamba traded in witchcraft, magic and medicine, the Maasai were not keen to buy Kamba medicine or charms like the Kikuyu and Taita were. Citing his earlier stint in the civil service, Mutui noted that whereas the Kamba would be ‘feared’ in the civil service as well as in private firms, an advantage they would use to protect their jobs or get promoted, “they would have problems if they were dealing with a Maasai boss, it would be frustrating”(Mutui, Kiboko, 10/03/2000).

Perhaps, out of such frustration, the Kamba would play certain games with the Maasai to assert their prowess. Kyuli told me a familiar mythical story. At one time, the story goes, as the Kamba and the Maasai were signing a peace accord after bloody conflicts, some hiding Kamba warriors shot arrows upwards that tactfully landed on Maasai huts, cattle and people. When the Maasai asked why the Kamba had not observed a cease-fire, the Kamba elders said: “These arrows were shot yesterday, they had not arrived yet”. This gimmick was intended to create some mystery about Kamba weaponry and witchcraft with the ultimate aim of warding

off any possible attack from the Maasai. The Maasai were sceptical and the peace agreement was revoked. The “harmless witches” were sent back to the drawing board as their attempt to assert psychic influence over the Maasai failed.

Being courageous and warlike but not “criminals”

To show that the Maasai were the ‘opposite’ of what the Kamba were purported to be, courage was stressed and crime downplayed. The Kamba-Maasai rivalry is pegged on various standards of morality and excellence by which performance and social standing are judged. It was repeated again and again that the Maasai had lesser incidences of crime.¹⁴⁹ The Maasai were presented by the Kamba as warlike, brutal and merciless. The Maasai on the other hand said that as the Kamba were more deprived, they had a greater propensity to commit crimes like stealing or robbery. The police were uncooperative in providing statistics saying that such data was “classified information” and “sensitive”. The Kamba would also cite the traditional ‘weapons’ that Maasai men carry around as “evidence”. Closer analysis revealed that although many Maasai men carry clubs and knives, these play a more symbolic role and are hardly used to settle interpersonal disputes. The police and the provincial administration serving both groups did confirm that the Maasai had a lower crime rate than the Kamba. However, one has to bear in mind that the Maasai had lower crime reporting rates and not necessarily incidences.¹⁵⁰ Maasai traditional institutions of arbitration and administration of justice through the council of elders are still operational. But allegiance is now dictated by convenience. People turn to them when they suit them most. Compared to the Kamba for instance, a Maasai who has killed somebody can “get away with murder”, in the sense that while this crime carries a mandatory death sentence before a Kenyan court of law, among the Maasai, the ‘accused’ would be ordered to compensate the bereaved party several heads of cattle without resort to litigation.¹⁵¹

An administration policeman attached to the Simba chief’s camp which serves Maasai and Kamba residents, said that compared to Ukambani, crime “on the Maasai side (Maasailand) is very low...we are idle most of the time...hardly is anything reported that would require our attention”. He said that most of the time, “we have to deal with crimes committed by the Kamba...we do not like it, we are here to serve the Maasai”. He did admit though that when

¹⁴⁹ ‘Crime’ here is used loosely to include what falls under the police criminal code as well as acts that are disapproved of and punishable by the group. Examples include stealing, rape and murder.

¹⁵⁰ It is difficult to access information due to vastness and remoteness.

¹⁵¹ Sankan (1971: 14) says that the fine for murdering a fellow Maasai is 49 cattle but as he clarifies, fines vary considerably depending on the context and or Maasai section. I was told of a case in Imaroro (Kajiado district) where 19 heads of cattle were paid as compensation for a man murdered during a domestic dispute. The ‘nine’ is said to remain constant as representation of the body’s nine orifices.

they carry out patrols among the Maasai, “we find things happening”, suggesting that the difference may lie in concealment on the part of the Maasai. The officer had worked in the multiethnic and urbanised parts of Kajiado (Ngong’ and Kiserian) for 8 years where he said crime rate was very high. Asking him to explain, he attributed this to “the Kikuyu” and nearness to Nairobi. In Kenya, the Kikuyu are depicted as having a higher propensity to crime relative to other ethnic groups. Although the “Kikuyu are thieves” notion is treated as primordial, of course high crime rate among the Kikuyu has nothing to do with ethnicity or the socialisation patterns among the group but rather their long history of a cash economy, disintegration of their traditional institutions of social security, higher levels of urbanisation, unemployment, disparities in wealth distribution and landlessness among other reasons.

Going back to the Maasai, they claimed that migrant Kikuyu and Kamba populations in places like Loitokitok had substantially increased the incidences of crime (e.g. murder). While these claims were corroborated by the police and chiefs, the crimes in question were not necessarily committed against the Maasai. A police officer in Loitokitok said, “here, Kikuyu(s) rob the Kikuyu...what do the Maasai have? just cattle? who wants cattle? people want money”¹⁵² (Loitokitok, 07/09/2000). While the officer appeared to confine himself to the urban centre whose business is firmly in the hands of the Kikuyu, cattle thefts in the villages were rampant. As to the question of crime rate among the Maasai, he talked of ethnicity as a social fact noting: “Among the *real* Maasai, crime is low” and surmised that for most of these people, they were victims of crime.¹⁵³

4.1.4 The “hardworking” Kamba women: Positive stereotype?

Among the Kamba and the Maasai, women workloads in the homesteads vary mainly due to *inter alia*; differences in social organisation, modes of subsistence and marriage arrangements. The Maasai society is heavily men dominated, women marry relatively early and apart from women circumcision, most rites of passage and important ceremonies revolve around men. While hut construction is women’s responsibility, opinion is divided as to whether this crucial task should be taken as an indicator of women’s indispensable activities and therefore high status or as signifying male hegemony. Although one cannot argue that the situation of women among the Kamba is any better, increased literacy among women has drastically reduced incidences of early marriage while the phenomenon of women self-help groups have

¹⁵² Appearing to demean Maasai possessions; after all, most of the cattle stolen are converted into cash.

¹⁵³ His idea of *real* Maasai excluded Maasai who had embraced modernity, those with contested or dual identities or those who had been naturalised.

enhanced women's position in society. In a dominant cattle economy, Maasai women are charged with the responsibility of milking, selling it and also looking after cattle. On the other hand, farming being the dominant mode of subsistence among the Kamba, women prepare farms, cultivate, weed, harvest crops and also trade their produce. Then there are activities that cut across both ethnic groups. These include; child care and weaning, cooking, fetching firewood, drawing water and shopping. Looking at these workloads, you would say that women in both groups have more than their fare share of household labour. But these activities are made sense of along ethnic lines, through ethnic and gendered lenses. While the Maasai women are regarded as "lazy" by not only Kamba but Maasai men, there seemed to have been a consensus that Kamba women were "hardworking", with Maasai men saying that they were "overworked". It is not uncommon to hear the Bantu farming neighbours claiming that the Maasai (in general) are lazy. Writing on the Maasai and the Kisii interethnic relations, Omagwa Angima (2001) asserts that in contrast to the Maasai, "the Kisii are very industrious people".¹⁵⁴

Turning back to the Maasai and the Kamba, Solinketi noted that, "in Ukambani we know that the women farm and do hard work" and then added that, "the Kamba know that Maasai girls are lazy". He was the first Maasai respondent to say that 'their' own women were 'lazy'. Otherwise, almost every Kamba respondent had this notion. The Kamba businesswoman in Simba said that "the Maasai are very lazy...their women do nothing¹⁵⁵ ...they just roam around...I don't think the Kamba would marry them even if they were available, anyway, they would also not accept because they know what is awaiting them ahead" (Mwongeli, Simba trading centre, 08/06/2000). Her comment that Maasai women 'roam around' compares to Bourdieu argument that from the eyes of an outsider, "work" may be confused with "leisure" owing to a misinterpretation of social practices (1990: 83).

Nevertheless, Mwongeli introduced an interesting dimension in claiming that even if the Maasai women were 'available' the Kamba would not want to marry them for their perceived laziness. Considering that Kamba men found it difficult to marry Maasai women due to early marriage arrangements and bridewealth, Mwongeli's claims sounded more like the sour grapes story. Mr Mutua, a Kamba herding cattle in a Maasai homestead, told me that Maasai women are "so lazy" that "they cannot lift a 20 litre jerry can of water, that is why you see them with donkeys all the time".¹⁵⁶ Laziness here is equated with being physically weak.

¹⁵⁴ *Sunday Nation*, June 10, 2001 (www.nationaudio.com).

¹⁵⁵ It is important to note that respondents tended to express their opinions in absolute terms like "doing nothing", simply to stress their positions.

¹⁵⁶ The 20 litre water containers are very common among the Kamba. While it was evident that donkeys were more commonly found in Maasai homesteads than Kamba ones, it would be implausible to argue that they had

On the other hand, Simba's chairperson, Mr Mavuthi noted that “allegations” that Maasai women are lazy are perpetuated by the Maasai themselves to minimise competition for their women. This particular observation was endorsed by Ms Riantei, a Maasai, who said that she is normally “surprised” to hear that Maasai women are lazy since “our men do nothing at all so how can we be lazy?”, she posed. This was a remarkable observation since most Kamba respondents assumed that Maasai women were entirely dependent on men for their livelihood. Generally, it appeared that to the Kamba, if somebody is not working in the fields, then “there is no work”.¹⁵⁷ In Kamba households, those who have been looking after cattle are often said to have been “idle” in comparison to those who worked in the fields digging terraces, planting crops, weeding or harvesting. And it seems that as the Maasai increasingly embrace farming, they have adopted this limited view of what constitutes “work”. Maria, a Kamba woman who has lived among the Maasai (Loitokitok) for 13 years said that Maasai women’s daily life is like “the way the Kamba live when there is drought...just staying idle”. Having spent some nights in Maasai homesteads (e.g. Nkata’s in Simba), I did not see women’s ‘idleness’ even in families where men had three wives. Nkata, for instance, wakes up very early (at about 5.00 a.m.) particularly when she is to milk the cows and transport the milk to the trading centres for sale. The family has about 150 head of cattle, at least according to her son. Apart from milking cows and marketing the milk, Nkata also cooks, shops, collects firewood, draws water and undertakes routine repairs on the huts in the compound. The family does not practice farming. Her explanation was that this would go contrary to “Maasai culture” or means of livelihood. When I told her that I had seen agricultural farms among the Maasai, she said that “some Maasai have no cattle anymore and had been left with no other alternative”. She noted further that those who could afford and were keen to diversify their economy use labour “from Ukambani”. I asked her why the Maasai could not do such work themselves and she said that the Maasai (in general) were not used to “hard labour”, adding that “they hate working with their hands”. I noticed that at least in those families where a Maasai had a Kamba or Kikuyu wife, there was some farming going on. But being a Kamba woman in a Maasai homestead seemed to increase her responsibilities for cultivation did not exempt her from the ‘normal’ Maasai women chores of milking, taking care of children, looking after

made Maasai women “lazy”. As carriers of water, firewood and goods bought or to be sold in the markets, donkeys lighten women’s work.

¹⁵⁷ A common characteristic in ethnic depictions is the way ‘noble practices’ are given a ‘bad name’. Even where positive attributes are acknowledged, they are trivialised. For instance, while appreciating Maasai bravery and courage in war, the Kamba rather put it thus “they are brutal”. In Kenya, the Kikuyu are latently positively stereotyped by other groups as hardworking and result-oriented but instead of putting it this way, they are instead said to be “money lovers” and that they would kill for it. Kamba’s “hardworking” women are portrayed by the Maasai as “neglected” by their men and “left to rule the homestead.”

cattle, cooking, shopping, fetching water and firewood. Going back to the Nkata's case, she is clearly a 'busy' woman, constantly on the move selling milk to the Kamba and fairly 'open-minded' but who takes cattle keeping as a very noble activity. To her, farming activities were tiring and less prestigious, which also reflected her attitude towards the Kamba.

Examination of the household gendered division of labour in the two groups revealed how women's activities, largely dictated by the modes of subsistence, are constructed and categorised into 'light' and 'hard' work. None of the Maasai women respondents took their workload as 'light'. However, they were unanimous on one thing; that Kamba women did "much more". It is worth noting here that some Maasai men did not just say that Kamba women were "hardworking" which would be a positive attribute, but rather "overworked". Putting it this way, the Maasai insinuated that the women were not just responding to the labour needs of their households but rather as a consequence of an oppressive Kamba patriarchal system. By so doing, the Maasai kill two birds with one stone. On the one hand, to make Kamba men unattractive to Maasai women as potential suitors, and two, to distract the attention of Maasai women from their own men who were said to be "more oppressive" and "very restrictive". It was also argued that Kamba men are "very uncaring...they leave their women at home, go to towns looking for jobs, they don't care, most us (Maasai men) stay here with our wives" (Nkari, Imaroro, 19/05/2000). Nkari's comments are also double-edged in that he underscores the point that Kamba men are irresponsible and at the time pours scorn on migrant wage labour, which he dismisses as an indicator of 'modernity'.¹⁵⁸

In a nutshell, these depictions of women's work influence cross-ethnic relations particularly in curtailing agnatic kinship. As evident in the text, the notion that Maasai women are "lazy" has to be understood within the context/social milieu in question. It is argued that the idea of survival through cultivation of the soil scares Maasai girls.

4.1.5 The Kamba as "unsuitable" to marry Maasai women

"The Maasai often married women from other tribes-usually not the other way round" (Sankan, 1971: xi). Why would the Maasai marry from other groups but 'prohibit' their daughters from marrying outside? First and foremost, the Maasai have been surrounded by farming groups for generations. While the pastoral 'IlMaasai' (erroneously called *real* Maasai) detested non-pastoral groups (*ilmeek*), including fellow Maa speakers like the Ogiek and Arusha, the Maasai have always taken up wives from other groups provided female circumcision was practiced. Sankan expounds: "Although Kikuyu, Kamba, Meru etc. wives

¹⁵⁸ Schlosser (1984) found out that 95% of all Maasai were living in their traditional home area, which was the highest proportion among the many ethnic groups he studied in Kenya.

are to be found everywhere in Maasailand today and in the past, seldom does one find a Luo woman who is married to a Maasai.”¹⁵⁹ This preference for circumcised women explains why intermarriage between Maasai men and Chagga women¹⁶⁰ is quite common along the Kenya-Tanzanian border and inside Tanzania.

In spite of cherishing the notion that Maasai women are lazy, their ‘beauty’, among other things, has always drawn Kamba men to Maasai women. According to the Kamba however, there has always been barriers erected by the Maasai to block such intermarriage. First, there is the issue of male circumcision. The Maasai, just like the Kikuyu in the past, circumcise men in such a way that a small piece of flesh called *enteleliai* is left hanging below the penis. This is meant to maximise pleasure during sex. In fact, among the Kikuyu of Murang'a this form of circumcision is still common, and this flesh is called *ngwati* (“holder”). In traditional Kamba society, this form of circumcision, perhaps copied from the Maasai, was also common in the past and the piece of flesh is called *nthui*, which literally means “scratcher”. Now that the Kamba do not carry out this form of circumcision anymore, young Maasai women are discouraged from marrying men “who are not properly circumcised” and therefore would not satisfy their sexual desire.

Apart from circumcision, the Maasai adopted other measures to exclude Kamba suitors. Kyuli (Kamba) narrated how unmarried Maasai girls would wear ornaments worn only by married women in order to masquerade as “untouchable” when visiting Kamba homesteads. Often, the Kamba knew this trick but aware that Maasai men could be extremely violent if their women were molested, the girls would be given the benefit of doubt. This confusion explains why Anne Mwende (Kamba, Emali) could not tell the marital status of the Maasai girl who used to bring milk to her. She simply said: “With the Maasai, you never know”. Stressing how difficult it has been for the Kamba to marry Maasai women, a 75 year old Kamba noted: “The only Maasai women I know that were married by the Kamba are those that were raided in Ukavi (Maasailand) during cattle raids” (Maithya, Ngaakaa, 29/08/2000). He referred me to one of these women but when I visited her, she insisted that she was Kamba. Among the Maasai, there are also many women who were raided from Ukambani before and during the colonial period.

“I cannot marry a Kamba”

I would like to discuss a Maasai actor, Ms Patricia Toine, a school teacher, whose father is Maasai but who has a Kamba mother. She put it simply: “My mother is a *Muukamba* (Kamba)

¹⁵⁹ The Luo circumcise neither women nor men.

¹⁶⁰ The Chagga commonly practice female circumcision.

but I wouldn't marry in Ukambani...a *Muukamba*? nooo!" (Toine, Simba, 14/06/2000). Her reasons are that she considers herself a Maasai and therefore would not marry from where her mother came from. She is adamant about this issue of lineage noting that "we don't follow our mother's traditions...the father *decides*". "Decides" here has at least two meanings. One, that in a patriarchal society descent is traced following the male line and two, that on matters of marriage, 'the father' is the determining factor. She also said that her mother does not say "very positive things about Ukambani"¹⁶¹...she tells me that if Ukambani was good, she would have married there". She continued "...Maasai ladies are not interested in marrying in Ukambani because of hardship...in Ukambani you have to cultivate, you have to work hard...Maasai believe that Kamba are ever poor...as a *woman*,¹⁶² you don't feel secure". She stressed "shortage of land" and "fear" that a potential Maasai father-in-law may have to support the family into which their daughter married when it "should" be the other way round. She said that her maternal uncles "are always coming for help from my father.. we hardly get anything from them...may be some beans when they harvest which they rarely do." For all these reasons, she had decided to identify herself with what she was convinced was a higher status group. What is more, as a teacher, Patricia is regarded as a 'high achiever' among the Maasai. This would probably not be the case in Ukambani. This evidence appeared to negate conventional assumptions that children of mixed ethnic families can choose to be "one or the other at different times" (Cottam and Cottam: 2001: 196). While that remains an option, some attention has to be drawn to the social profile of the ethnic groups involved.

Other barriers

Regarding female circumcision, it would be important to note that although there are still pockets among the Kamba where women go through this rite, the practice has decreased substantially. The Kamba herdsboy, Mutua, who worked for a Maasai pastoralist and whose experience is discussed in chapter five, cited circumcision of Maasai women as the main reason why he would not want to take a Maasai wife. Due to social transformation and change of attitudes occasioned by Christianity and schooling, very few Kamba men today would specifically seek to marry a circumcised woman. If anything, such women are a laughing stock in the Kamba society. But for those 'few' who seek Maasai women, there is another barrier. Bridewealth among the Maasai, usually paid in cattle, is often out of reach. To make

¹⁶¹ The respondent made reference to territory and ethnicity interchangeably, appearing to suggest that being Kamba also embodied all that was associated with Ukambani e.g. the 'hard' farming activities, crop failure and shortage of land.

¹⁶² Asking her whether she was restricting herself to Maasai women, she clarified that "all" women, including those of Kamba descent, feel insecure marrying Kamba men.

matters worse, it is ‘fixed’ only in theory. A Maasai father can demand several heads of cattle simply to disqualify a suitor he does not want. In fact, many *murran* I talked to lamented over the ‘competition’ posed by senior Maasai elders who have a lot of cattle at their disposal and who are constantly seeking their third or fourth wives. In one case, Nkari, a Maasai elder, narrated how he had to assist his 23 year old son to marry a girl who was being sought by “another man of my age”.¹⁶³ They ended up giving 11 heads of cattle for the girl, which, he said was exorbitant. In addition, they had also given two sheep, sums of money, honey and sugar. Incidentally, Kenyan newspapers are awash with reports in which state officials and also relatives have to intervene to ‘rescue’ school girls married off usually to old ‘rich’ Maasai men. In short, courtship and marriage among present day Maasai is a far cry from the picture painted by Sankan (1971: 45-49).

Increasingly, fathers make unilateral decisions without due consultation with their spouses other elders, their age-grades or relatives. Looking at marriage arrangements among the Maasai, one could authoritatively question Peil’s and Oyeneye’s (1998: 66) thesis that in most African societies, cross-ethnic marriages are “still viewed” as joining of lineages and more premised on character and ancestry rather than wealth. In any case, bridewealth has never been one of the least considerations in marriage among most African groups.

Using the example of Spanish America, Banton (1983: 113) shows how different groups with different privileges and status were favoured or disfavoured in the selection of mates with whites having more room for manoeuvre. This may also apply to the Kamba-Maasai affinal relationship in that it has not been necessarily ‘ethnicity per se’, as actors often implied, but rather a question of material endowment and fear of the unknown. By asking for more cattle, the Maasai have not been necessarily blocking the Kamba from marrying their daughters but out of what a Maasai elder called “uncertainty”. He explicates: “when you give your daughter to the Kamba, you see, you do not know what will happen, she might be mistreated, overworked...we don’t like that” (Solinketi, Sultan Hamud, 26/06/2000). Asking him why the Maasai have fewer reservations about their daughters getting married to the Kikuyu, he cited their long history of interaction and similarities in the manner in which boys and girls were circumcised, and summing it up by saying that the Maasai treat the Kikuyu as “our cousins”. He added that the Kikuyu “respect” them while the Kamba do not. This issue of “respect” is revisited in chapter five, six and eight.

Another barrier identified was the age at which Maasai girls marry. Given that they are normally ready for marriage after circumcision, which is carried out between the ages of 12

¹⁶³ About 70 years.

and 16, many Kamba men said that by the time these girls “look marriable”, say at age 18, they are already people’s wives. Mutua made fun of the Maasai saying that “they marry girls who have no breasts,” to stress their apparent young age. Let us now look at it from the reverse side. It is safe to say that Kamba women have always married Maasai men. Mutui noted that the Kamba never mind the animal wealth they get from their Maasai in-laws. For the Maasai, what the Kamba ask for bridewealth is “cheap” particularly because many Kamba ask for goats¹⁶⁴ which are the least valued in a Maasai herd.

These affinal relationships have also been used by the girls’ relatives to access land in Maasailand. It was uncommon to find Kamba women married to the Maasai who had not drawn their next of kin to Maasailand. The kin could be given a small plot for cultivation or certain grazing rights. These relatives of hers also stand a better chance of being loaned cattle by the Maasai if theirs are wiped out by drought or if they need cows for milk. Nevertheless, Mutui averred that for most Kamba, a girl married to the Maasai is treated as “lost” in spite of the gains in livestock and land. Actually, it would be misleading to imply that Kamba women have no reservations about the Maasai. In many cases, Kamba parents may be willing to have their daughter marry a Maasai only for the girl to object. Kamba women are discouraged by the possibility of having to be circumcised and by what another called the “very strict culture” involving dressing styles, a meat and milk diet, piercing of earlobes, milking of cows and fears based on “sharing of wives”. Concern was expressed regarding what was perceived as the peripheral position of women in the Maasai society. A Kamba lady, Margaret who lives in Loitokitok, said that she loathed the sight of a Maasai woman with a donkey following her husband to the trading centre where the man buys what the family needs. After moving from shop to shop and through the open air market, the goods are loaded on the donkey which the woman accompanies home while the man stays in the market centre. But while Margaret finds the idea of not providing money to the woman to do the shopping herself and at her own time “oppressive”, Mwende, another Kamba noted: “that is the only nice thing Maasai men do to their women (laughs)...how many Kamba men can take their wives to the market centre for shopping?” What one sees as dominance and oppression is to the other an expression of care and empowerment.

Not least are the ‘concerns’ expressed by Maasai girls and their parents regarding ‘work’. It was stressed that Maasai women are used only to “light work”, and were therefore unwilling to marry Kamba men who would subject them to farm labour or leave them to “fend for

¹⁶⁴ In the traditional Kamba society, only livestock, farm produce and honey could be given as bridewealth. Asking for goats (browsers), instead of cattle, has been influenced by decreasing grazing land.

themselves”.¹⁶⁵ Some women (e.g. an aunt to one of my respondents) left their Kamba husbands and returned to their Maasai families and remarried. Reasons given included, language barriers, “too much work” in the farms, no cattle to milk and lack of “respect”.

Inhibitions discouraging cross-ethnic, racial and religious marriages are not a new subject. In Kenya, it is not uncommon to hear people say why they would not marry a man or woman from certain ethnic groups. Reasons advanced range from “rigidity of culture” among the Luo, “temper” and “oppression of women” among the Kisii and the Meru, “witchcraft” among the Kamba, “laziness” among coastal communities, “backwardness” among the Maasai to “money greed” among the Kikuyu. And as noted, the stereotypes are often based on certain plausible notions. Indeed, Peil and Oyeneye note that although many members do not fit the stereotyped models, “there is often some basis of truth which supports the stereotype” (1998: 86). Perlmann notes that ethnic stereotypes are “assumed to be somehow inherent in the nature of the group, perhaps in its biological make up” (1988: 4). What is more, these stereotypes are not confined to larger social units. Within the groups themselves, there are regionally or clan based biases. A Kamba from Makueni will tell you about the “spoilt” women of Kangundo and Masaku.¹⁶⁶

Elsewhere, barriers are often erected to discourage Muslim women from marrying non-Muslims, Christians against non-Christians, Protestants against Catholics (e.g. Northern Ireland) and blacks against whites (e.g. in the United States, South Africa and the United Kingdom). In many African societies, marriage inhibitions across ethnic groups are quite common. In some extreme cases, like in Rwanda, intermarriage between Hutu and Tutsi, though not categorically prohibited, was treated as something out of the ordinary (Eller, 1999). And just like in the Kamba-Maasai case, stereotyping enhanced difference by undermining cross-ethnic affinal relations. In general, cross-ethnic marriages will be higher among people who are least subject to the control of kin. Besides, where marrying outside the group is allowed, some groups will be more preferred than others. Kamba men would rather a Maasai woman than a Kikuyu (although they are culturally closer) where as, Maasai men would rather marry a Kikuyu woman than a Kamba.

It has also been stressed that while interethnic marriages constitute an important form of social exchange, conversely, they could be instrumental in ethnic conflicts. Banton (1983:

¹⁶⁵ In reality however, Maasai women are just as ‘hardworking’ as their Kamba counterparts. To stress “light work” the respondents would conveniently exclude activities like cattle herding which has increasingly become a woman activity as children are sent to school. Worse still, in some cases, the girls are not sent to school or are forced to drop out to fill this labour gap.

¹⁶⁶ Kangundo and Masaku constitute some of the most ‘developed’ areas in Ukambani. Apart from coffee growing and a higher level of urbanisation and an early exposure to a cash economy, nearness to Nairobi and higher literacy rates makes these areas ‘stand out’ in Ukambani.

113), for instance, argues that interethnic marriages can become a fundamental form of competition and exclusion.

4.1.6 “The Kamba like women”

If you were to ask a Kenyan, leave alone a Maasai, what the Kamba are ‘known for’ (stereotyped), you would most likely be greeted with a smile. For the question brings to mind witchcraft, appetite for women and cowardice. For the time being, I restrict myself to the issue of women. Stories told about the abortive coup of 1982¹⁶⁷ assert that when armed soldiers stormed rich Kenyan-Asian neighbourhoods in Parklands, Pagan and Westland’s in Nairobi, the Kikuyu were busy looting valuables e.g. jewellery and hard cash, the Luo were struggling to carry televisions, hi-fi systems, videos and sofa sets, while the Kamba targeted women. When the coup was finally quelled, the story goes that the Kamba soldiers had “nothing” to show for it. In everyday life, it is said that when several Kamba men sit together, they are likely to talk about women while the Kikuyu would be talking about ways of making money as the Luo exchange notes on their real and imagined academic credentials. A Kenyan will not believe you if you dismiss these generalisations. Having been a particularly interested party in stereotypes during fieldwork, what struck me most is not that Kamba men like women or spend lots of time talking about them but rather how convinced the non-Kamba groups are about it.

In their depiction of Kamba sexual life, the Maasai are relatively more reserved. Whereas the Kamba portray Maasai’s sexual practices as unsavoury, the Maasai simply put it that Kamba men have appetite for women. These two versions expose certain differences. In their stereotype, the Maasai exclude Kamba women. Two, while the Kamba see Maasai ‘promiscuity’ as largely restricted within the Maasai society, Kamba men were said to be ‘dangerous’ to any woman irrespective of her ethnicity. In fact, a Maasai school teacher averred that one reason why the Kaputiei Maasai were unwilling to stop female circumcision was the “imminent threat” posed by Kamba men.

Strange enough, when I started inquiring about incidences that would support Maasai depictions of Kamba men, hardly anyone came up with a credible observation. Instead, I was confronted with narratives that involved Maasai men and Kamba women. This was interesting as Maasai men had tended to ‘exonerate’ Kamba women. In Emali, a Kamba chief told me how he had to resolve a sexual dispute where a prominent Kamba businessman’s wife had a Maasai lover.¹⁶⁸ The businessman reported that the love affair had resulted in the infection of

¹⁶⁷ In reference to the Kenya Air Force abortive coup detat staged in August 1982.

¹⁶⁸ Maasai men were said to lure Kamba women with money in exchange for sexual favours.

his wife with a venereal disease. After he was infected with the disease, apparently by his wife, he beat her up to reveal where she had got it from. That is how a Maasai man came into the picture. After the treatment of the disease, the man came to the chief to seek his intervention. When the chief asked him what he expected his office to do, he was quoted as having said: “The man who has done this to my wife is a Maasai, you must do something”. The chief said that it was quite unlikely that the Kamba man would have reported the incident to him if the one accused was another Kamba. He noted: “He knew that he could very easily get a handsome compensation from the suspect...he also knew that the Maasai have *fear* for authorities” (Chief, Emali, 21/08/2000).

The chief decided not to act, arguing that his being a multiethnic locality, the Maasai would have protested against any move that would have jeopardised their “name”, dignity and possessions. Apart from the monetary motive, the wronged man appeared to have been keen to paint the Maasai as people infested with all sorts of diseases, which fits into an earlier assertion that they were a “risk group”. The chief could not clarify why the Maasai “feared” authorities for this claim went contrary to Maasai reputed courage, pride and readiness to defend their interests. Chapter seven, which examines how the Kamba and Maasai relate with the state, sheds more light on this.

4.1.7 Cowardice and keeping of secrets

If it were not for the ethnic competition for political power, Kamba ‘cowardice’ would not arise. From the colonial period to the present, the Kamba carry the reputation of loyalty and honesty that borders on cowardice. About the Kamba, Adamson wrote: “They are very likeable people and popular all over the country” (1967: 237).

Since they are portrayed as less ambitious and contented with ‘little’, the Kenyan Asian retail business community look out for the Kamba to hire as attendants¹⁶⁹ while town dwellers hire their girls and women as domestic servants. Besides, the Kamba are said to be less likely to take bold decisions that might threaten their jobs or undermine authority. Although we have no statistics, it is conjectured that compared to a Kikuyu, Meru or Kisii, a Kamba would avoid commercial loans fearing the possible consequences should anything go wrong. For that reason, it is argued, the ethnic group has minimal stake in the country’s economy, their numerical strength and proximity to Nairobi notwithstanding.

At the regional level, the Maasai regard the Kamba as cowards whom they say “have always” dreaded facing the Maasai in battle. Even with decreasing incidences of cattle raids and

¹⁶⁹ “Kenyan Asian” mainly refers to Kenyans of Indian and Pakistani descent. The Kamba are hired as attendants on the assumption that they have a lesser propensity to steal.

interethnic conflicts, the ‘cowardice’ talk is still rife. The Kamba are said to be “soft”, which appears to go contrary to Maasai assertion that their Bantu neighbours “toil too hard” in the fields. Besides, the Kamba regard themselves as men and women of exceptional bravery. Ndeti notes “the Akamba self-pride in the dignity of labour is further testified by the types of jobs which they occupy in the Kenyan government. Both the army and the police have a substantial number of Akamba. The large portion of actual fighting men are Akamba” (1972: 148). These ‘facts’ do not necessarily falsify the Maasai position on the Kamba. This simply shows what ethnic depictions are in practice; able to be twisted and manipulated to fit intended goals even if that means contradicting oneself. On the afternoon of the 25th August 2000, I was seated in a bar-cum restaurant in Kiboko having a meal of roasted meat with two of my research partners. It is a place where Kamba and Maasai mix freely. Like most ‘good’ bars in the region, it had a pool table¹⁷⁰ where young men in particular, and also women, took part in endless duels with losers having to part with an agreed amount of money or bottles of beer. On that afternoon, a Maasai *murrani*,¹⁷¹ fully dressed in the traditional regalia, took on a Kamba teacher. The teacher hesitated taking the *murrani* on, but as other Maasai patrons jeered him saying that he was acting “cowardly”, he stepped forward and offered to play. What would ordinarily have been a ‘normal’ play between two men was instantly transformed into a ‘Maasai-Kamba’ duel. People left their seats to surround the pool table. They played a total of 10 games. The *murrani* lost all. In fact, they played so many in his attempt to avenge his steady defeat. At the loss, the young man shed tears hitting his head on the wall and hurling incoherent insults, saying that he could not believe that “a Kamba” had beaten him in a game. The loss was to degenerate into a clash between his group of Maasai *murrani* and the Kamba patrons if it were not for the intervention of two policemen. The loss had robbed the *murrani* his pride as a warrior. He was disturbed that he had “let the Maasai down”, to quote another Maasai (Nkari) whom I had asked to make some sense of the *murrani*’s reaction. Although the Kamba cheered during the first four wins, at some point, some were asking the teacher to “let” the Maasai *murrani* “win one game”.

I gathered that the angry young man had played and lost to other Maasai without any scenes, but losing the game to a Kamba assumed a different meaning. The bar attendant said: “I always tell these people (the Kamba) not to play against the Maasai, if you leave them alone, then there is peace here, they come, they play, solve their own problems, drink their beer and

¹⁷⁰ Otherwise called “Billard” in German or billiards in English.

¹⁷¹ I am using *murrani* here instead of *murrani* simply to distinguish between the singular and the plural form. Otherwise, a one warrior is *olmurrani* while many are *ilmurrani*. In writing, *murrani* (without the prefix *il* and the suffix *i*) is commonly adopted in reference to the Maasai warrior age-set (see Spear and Waller, 1993).

go away”(Kithome, Kiboko, 25/08/2000). Kithome argued that “losing to the Kamba was like losing twice”. First, the game and, perhaps what was more painful, hurting his personal and ethnic pride, and concern that the humiliating defeat may confirm Maasai’s apparent ‘backwardness’.

This debate about Kamba “cowardice” is revisited in chapter seven when discussing interethnic competition for state resources and power. Nonetheless, I would like to talk about ‘secrecy’ which is closely linked to cowardice and ‘softness’. What are secrets? From an emic definition, it is that body of information which, if revealed, could be damaging to a person, family, lineage, clan or group. In many cases, by its very nature, a piece of information is expected to be regarded ‘secret’ without prior caution.¹⁷²

In the ‘traditional’ Maasai society, women were considered to be “incapable” of keeping family and group secrets. From a male perspective, they were said to carry “small brains” and therefore could easily jeopardise the immediate family, clan or section interests should they be privy to “crucial information”. In the olden days, they would be kept in the dark regarding expeditions, cattle raids, booty and whatever transpired in male gatherings. Actually, it is not that they could not keep secrets. They were taken as subservient and subordinate and therefore taken for granted and ignored. Even in the contemporary Maasai society, this trend has continued. The attitude that women “don’t matter” has had devastating consequences: Daughters are pulled out of school and married off by their fathers, land and cattle are sold behind wives’ backs and men disappear for days without prior warning to their spouses.

The Kamba are perceived by the Maasai as “unreliable” people who could easily divulge important information if threatened. Solinketi of Sultan Hamud says that whenever the Kamba captured a Maasai warrior during cattle raids, and asked him to disclose his accomplices or say where they had taken the raided cattle, “the Kamba would always be disappointed” for the captive would not betray his compatriots. On the other hand, he continued, when a Kamba raider fell into the hands of the fierce Maasai, “he would shamelessly say everything”(amid laughter). Solinketi even cited a 1965 incident in which he took part. Surprisingly, these assertions, that the Kamba would betray their fellow raiders and even reveal where the raided cattle had been taken, was confirmed by Kyuli and Mutisya, who, during their youth, raided cattle among the Maasai. Kyuli said that a Maasai captive would “say nothing...even if you threaten to kill him”. The two men could not hide their admiration for the Maasai “hardness”, as a reflection of “real men”. They confirmed that Kamba ‘secretive’ plans to raid the Maasai would at times leak to the Maasai or the police. But again, Ukambani was also a bit more

¹⁷² Excuses to the effect that “I did not know that it was a secret”, are usually unacceptable.

‘opened up’ in terms of communication and therefore the state could easily know what was happening. Moreover, there were many Kamba, even during the colonial period working for the police and military. Despite these facts, the Maasai insisted that just like their women, the Kamba had loose tongues.

Solinketi noted that among the Maasai, revealing secrets is “acting like a woman” and therefore “no man would allow himself to bend that low”.¹⁷³ Sitonik was even more blunt. Putting it in English, he likened Kamba ‘cowardice’ and ‘softness’ to “the way women behave”. He pointed out that Kamba traditional institutions like male circumcision had collapsed and yet it was during such occasions that “men would be taught important things, you see, secrets that are important for the survival of the group...these things (e.g. traditional circumcision) have disappeared”.¹⁷⁴ He argued that even for those who went through the old rite of passage, it was never “tough enough”, adding that Maasai and Kikuyu circumcision produced “real tigers”. He then posed: “How many of you (Kamba) have been circumcised using the traditional knife?...you take small boys to hospital, they are injected with pain killers, then the doctor uses a scissor to circumcise, now, you call that circumcision? Is that a man”? (Sitonik, 18/03/2000). He turned to the national police force and quipped: “I even wonder how they (Kamba) manage to be in the police force and military¹⁷⁵...they cannot keep secrets”. In schools, the ability to keep one’s mouth shut, was said to distinguish between “the cowards and the brave”, “the hard and the soft”, “the men and the women”,¹⁷⁶ and “the Kamba and the Maasai”.

A Kamba teacher, working in a school near Sultan Hamud that has Kamba and Maasai pupils, told me that teachers “face a problem” if a Maasai pupil is asked to name his/her fellow pupils when the group had broken school rules (e.g. ‘roaming’ around the trading centre). A police officer attached to Kiboko police post said the same about Maasai suspects; “they never tell you anything, which forces us to beat them...(up)”. The general police brutality in Kenya notwithstanding, the officer said that the Maasai stood out as “hard nuts to crack”. He argued that the Maasai were less willing to expose their accomplices in a crime (e.g. stolen goats, sheep and cattle) for they were bound by some “collective responsibility” or comradeship, which meant that exposing the others would amount to betrayal. This was particularly noted among Maasai warriors (*murran*), who have to exercise peer equality and protection.

¹⁷³ Maasai men hold women in low regard. This is not to suggest that they are an exception. In fact, a study by Obura (1991) showed that the same obtains in many other ethnic groups.

¹⁷⁴ In contemporary Kamba society, most boys are circumcised in hospitals/health centres.

¹⁷⁵ The Kamba are considered to be overrepresented in the police and military forces.

¹⁷⁶ Here, a woman could be a “man” if she could keep a secret. Likewise, a man could be a “woman” if he could not keep one.

How does one make sense of these depictions on cowardice, secrecy and ‘hardness’? Among the Maasai, building a strong institution of secrecy has been a matter of expediency. Maasai survival has hinged on sustainability of herds in fragile environments and shrinking grazing grounds, keeping cultural practices in the midst of hostile groups and other hegemonic forces (e.g. the colonial and postcolonial state). In such an environment, economic survival and maintenance of social boundaries has been a matter of life and death. This ‘isolation’ creates a fertile ground for enhancement of cohesiveness against the ‘others’. For a captor or ‘suspect’ therefore, the stakes are quite high and it is only through ‘hardness’ that he can bestow honour and pride to himself and the larger group. A combination of factors may explain why the Kamba may not be as ‘hard’ or secretive as the Maasai. Thanks to a wider adoption of Christianity, formal education, monetary economy, a weakening clan system and an individualised land tenure system, the sense of ‘collective interest’ has been undermined. As the Maasai society becomes more differentiated and many of their traditional institutions weaken, ‘hardness’ will probably be measured in other ways (e.g. academic achievements) and at some point, the issue of certain ethnic groups being more secretive or cowards may not arise.

4.2 An assessment of ethnic depictions

It is not uncommon for groups living side by side to demean each other. A prominent example are the English who, perceiving themselves as culturally and morally superior, have in their eyes, treated the Irish as backward and inferior (Morris-Hale, 1996: 47). There is a tendency for groups to assess their relative positive attributes, self worth and their relative level of advancement vis-à-vis other neighbouring groups (Cottam and Cottam, 2001: 196). In the multiethnic African societies, it is common for neighbouring groups teaching their children that “the As smell...the Bs are immoral (they allow sex before marriage); the Cs are ignorant (few children go to school); the Ds are lazy (they do not grow cash crops); the Es are grasping (they are successful traders)” (Peil and Oyeneye, 1998: 79). The duo attributes this to prejudice, that is, hostile feelings towards others, but they do not say exactly how groups acquire these attitudes. Although stereotypes “refuse to take individual variations into account” and are morally condemning, they may strengthen group cohesion (Eriksen, 1995: 252).

Many groups in the world have something to say about those they interact with, and this is also common among Nation-states. Eller notes that in Rwanda, the three groups are depicted in various ways. The smallest ethnic group, the Twa, are seen as gluttonous, loyal, lazy,

courageous when hunting and without any restraint. On the other hand, the Hutu agriculturists are said to be “hardworking, not very clever, extrovert, irascible, unmannerly, obedient”, while the pastoralist Tutsi are characterised as “intelligent, capable of command, refined, courageous, and cruel” (1999: 200, quoting Maquet, 1961: 164). He shows that these ‘colonial’ stereotypes have continued to shape interethnic interactions and coexistence in Rwanda and Burundi. Although Eller argues that most of these biases were externally constructed,¹⁷⁷ it would be misleading to assume that African groups did not stereotype one another. In any case, stereotypes are not necessarily baseless. I entirely agree though, that the Europeans who saw unlike and unequal races in the Rwandan groups perpetuated and deepened ethnic divisions, tensions and animosity as the same biases were used to determine which group would rule over the others.

Peil and Oyeneye (1998) note that apart from enhancing group solidarity in situations of potential conflict and threat, stereotypes and prejudice give identity and self-respect to people whose status might otherwise be low. I would assume that this partly explains why most ethnic stereotypes are negative. Cottam and Cottam note that greater problems of disharmony occur where strong judgements are made by one group regarding the relative superiority/inferiority of other communities. They argue that it is even worse where the community is weak in terms of population but highly achieving, e.g. the Jews. In such cases, they aver, “a community that is judged to be relatively underachieving is likely to be seen stereotypically in contemptuous terms”. Such terms, they note, include indolence, intellectual inferiority, low moral standards, and poor occupational performance including ‘poor’ leadership. They note that producing a sense of commonality in such situations is a daunting task. But as the subsection below will show, groups that display great disparities may also have commonalities, particularly if they share territory.

Group comparisons have also been seen as sources of conflict and competition. Horowitz remarks: “The cutting edge of comparison and conflict is the juxtaposition of backward and advanced groups” (1985: 166; see also Cottam and Cottam, 2001: 196). He argues that groups are in implicit competition for a favourable evaluation of their moral self worth. This comparative nature is said to derive from the juxtaposition of ethnic groups in the same environment. He notes that in unranked ethnic groups “...of Malays and Chinese, Hausa and Ibo, Maronites and Druze, Creoles and East Indians...” when placed in the same environment, no two groups are seen to possess the same distribution of behavioural qualities (Horowitz, 1985: 142-144). In such settings, stereotypes are said to crystallise as group comparisons

¹⁷⁷ A position also taken by Mutiso, who, writing on how Kenyan groups are portrayed, calls the depictions “the stereotypes of the coloniser” (1975: 47).

emerge. This compares closely with Alois Hahn's (2000: 15) conception of how neighbours are labelled strangers. Since each group has a distinctive inventory of imputed traits, alternative criteria of merit takes effect. Group worth, notes Horowitz, is important for self-esteem even at the individual level. Citing Firth's (1957) study in the Pacific *We, the Tikopia*, Horowitz illustrates how cleavage and comparison can be a source of conflict even in an isolated and a culturally uniform environment. In this particular case, each group was said to differ in temperament, talents and behaviour as they approached each other with a tinge of formality, suspicion and rivalry. Each, he notes further, was prepared to make disparaging remarks about the other. Some of the explanations for such tendencies have been provided by psychologists. Human beings are said to have a drive to evaluate their abilities by comparing them with those of others.¹⁷⁸ Closely related to this are group anxieties and fear for extinction which may force one group to engage in a race to 'catch-up' and avoid domination (see Yinger, 1994: 327). Wimmer's (1997a) discussion of xenophobia and racism corroborates the same argument. This partly explicates why groups sharing common territory strive to maintain distinctiveness as they interact and exchange with others.

Turning back to Horowitz, comparisons are also said to be made with those judged to be relatively similar to oneself, e.g. in a shared locality, and performance may either be improved to match the competitor and where that fails, attempts could be made to control the performance of the competitor or, as I show in chapter six, downplay this performance. As to how group comparisons have emerged in the third world countries, Horowitz underscores the influence of the colonial state authorities or what he calls "ethnic distribution of colonial opportunity". Through this, some groups advanced or progressed faster than others due to the fact that they were disproportionately educated and represented in the civil service or in business while others are backward ('traditional') because of being disproportionately in the subsistence rather than in the cash economy or disproportionately poor or uneducated. He notes that the British colonial administration had its own biases taking some groups as hardworking and industrious (e.g. Ibo of Nigeria, Kikuyu of Kenya and Tamils of Sri Lanka) while others like the Kamba of Kenya, the Hausa of Nigeria and the Kandyan Sinhalese of Sri Lanka were said to be lazy (Horowitz, 1985: 162-3). Such biases are said to have significantly influenced the distribution of facilities and productive resources enhancing regional/ethnic inequalities in the process. It is interesting that the Kamba, stereotyped as lazy by the British, regard themselves as hardworking (and the Maasai portray them as such) and depict the Maasai as lazy. This shows the relativism of ethnic depictions. "Laziness", as I have noted, is

¹⁷⁸ Horowitz (1985: 144) citing Leon Festinger (1954) in his book, *A Theory of Social Comparison Processes*.

a label that is shaped by ecological factors, modes of subsistence and deployment of labour, which are critical underpinnings that are often ignored.

What is certain is that though often taken for granted, ethnic stereotypes influence human action; whether it is how Asians are despised in Britain (Baumann, 1996), or Nigerians being associated with drug trafficking, ethnic and personality stereotypes influence the way societies are organised, how they are perceived by others, whether groups can form alliances or not, who can be trusted and for what, whether daughters can be given in marriage, which migrants are friendly or unwanted and whom to trade with. They are used to justify discrimination,¹⁷⁹ hatred, cattle raids and war. Torstrick for instance shows that Israeli depictions of Arabs as irrational and violent influence policy and the governing of Israel (2000: 36). In Nairobi, Kenyans of Indian and Pakistani origin hardly employ the Kikuyu as shop attendants out of the generalisation that the Kikuyu are thieves; instead, they prefer the Kamba or Luhya while the Maasai may be employed as watchmen for their image as “warriors”. Ethnic depictions can also forge closer ethnic relations, for example, in the deployment of labour; Kamba “cowardice” and “honesty” earns them herding jobs among the Maasai. I would also like to mention that in certain circumstances, negative stereotypes across borders can be broken through improved flow of information or enhancement of “connections” (see Soffer, 1994: 187; Peil and Oyeneye, 1998: 79).

4.3 A sense of sameness/commonality

Writing on strangeness, Hahn notes that, motivated by the need to define the identity of others, common characteristics among groups are treated as less significant even when these may “previously” have been instrumental in defining the interaction of groups (2000: 12). Moore (1994:1) notes that “the passion for difference seems to be linked to its unspoken and under-theorised pair, ‘the same’ or ‘sameness’...” She notes that thinking about difference entails thinking about sameness. It has also been argued that the more similar groups become, the more they are concerned about remaining distinct (Eriksen, 1995: 250). Nevertheless, as

¹⁷⁹ In the 1992 elections, as the Kikuyu and Luo competed for presidential votes, male circumcision became an issue as some Kikuyu leaders said that the Kikuyu cannot vote for a *kihi* (uncircumcised man) and that irrespective of his advanced age, Odinga, the Luo presidential candidate, remained a “small boy” for as long as he had not been “cut”. The Luo normally do not circumcise males. What had started as whispers was taken to the campaign trail with the full presence of the press. In fact, during the campaign period, the Kikuyu would abduct Luo men, strip them and take them for circumcision. The Kikuyu might be very modernised in many ways but circumcision of men draws raw passions, emotions and pride. A Kikuyu man, whether a top executive dressed in a Paris designed suit or illiterate, will lighten up and get emotional as he tells you how he “faced the knife” one chilly morning in the river.

‘different’ as the Maasai and the Kamba claim and are said to be, there are certain commonalities, including pursuing common interests. Under certain circumstances, the Kamba and the Maasai portray themselves as sharing and cherishing a sense of sameness. As Barth tells us, while groups may use their cultural emblems to stress difference, in certain situations, some of these differences may be ignored, radical differences could even be played down and denied (1969: 14). We have already seen how the groups distinguish themselves and for what reasons. But as I pointed out in chapter three, coexistence is not just about distinctions, but also common practices and consciousness.

In both groups, the marriage system entails a patrilocal or neolocal post-marital residence. There are no matrilocal arrangements although among the Maasai, a newly married woman may stay at the house of the husband’s mother until the birth of the first child. Apart from marriage, membership of the lineage is gained through having been born into a particular household. Another similarity between the Kamba and the Maasai regards inheritance rights. While the eldest son will normally have rights to the departed father’s property over his younger brothers, the youngest is charged with the responsibility of taking care of the mother at old age. Moreover, both groups practice exogamy which ordinarily would have made it possible to establish firm interethnic networks through intermarriages but as noted earlier in the thesis, certain traditional practices e.g. early marriages among the Maasai and deep rooted perceptions held by each group regarding women from the other group make it difficult for them to optimise affinal relationships. Limited intermarriage with the Kaputiei Maasai prompts the Kamba to say that this sub-group is more “conservative” than other Maasai sections but this may have more to do with their nearness to the Kamba, which makes ethnic boundaries more important. The more populous and mainly agricultural Bantu neighbours have made the Kaputiei Maasai to be more ‘inward looking’ in order to maintain their distinctiveness.

Whereas the Kamba and the Maasai lose no opportunity to portray themselves as having very little in common, they have other commonalities that have emerged out of many years of interaction. When the “Kamba of Mbitini”¹⁸⁰ (who have interacted with the Maasai for many generations), migrate to other areas of Ukambani for instance, they are often portrayed by the other Kamba as “too Maasai”. This emanates from their tendency to keep large herds of cattle, unsurpassed taste for meat, keep certain brands of cattle that are clearly marked, regard herding as being more important than farming, and usually circumcise women. But since these practices are not uncommon among other Kamba, the “Kamba of Mbitini” simply show

¹⁸⁰ Otherwise referred by other Kamba as “andu ma Mbitini” which means “people of Mbitini”

how blurred the differences between the Kamba and the Maasai are. Let me look at some selected cases to illustrate commonality.

4.3.1 “I am Muukamba-Muumasai”¹⁸¹

Generally, being born into a family is basically the recognised and common way through which one becomes Maasai or Kamba. But it is not the only way.¹⁸² The Kamba become Maasai through marriage, assimilation, naturalisation or simply claiming to be ‘Maasai’. As evident in literature, under certain circumstances, people exchange their ethnic identity for others (Baumann, 1996: 18). And while Kamba readily become Maasai, it is hardly the other way round. This is similar to Barth’s study about Southern Pathans who would become Baluch but not the other way round (1969: 22). In the Kamba case, a Maasai identity would be preferred even in a mixed marriage where the father was Kamba (e.g. the case of ole Muonki)¹⁸³.

To illustrate succinctly how some Kamba become ‘Maasai’, I present the case of Mualuko, who, in 1975, migrated from Kasikeu (Ukambani) to Loitokitok (Maasailand). He had sought a transfer from the local primary school where he was a teacher in his village to go to Maasailand “which had shortage of teachers”¹⁸⁴, he says. But his aim was not just to go and teach there but to move out of the 6-acre family land and leave it to his three brothers “who were not as fortunate as I was.”¹⁸⁵ Besides, he says that in Ukambani, progress was hampered by fear of witchcraft. Among the Maasai, where belief and practice of witchcraft is almost

¹⁸¹ Put another way, “I am Kamba-Maasai”.

¹⁸² Among the Maasai, a non-Maasai could be naturalised if his/her mother marries a Maasai, if he or she is captured in war or if one requests absorption after staying among the Maasai for a considerable period. In other cases, many Kamba are absorbed by Maasai families after at first being taken as herdsmen. While in some cases, the family may let the clan know about their decision to adopt the herder, at other times this might just be a decision taken by the ‘father’ who may also consult his brothers. After this, he is normally allocated cattle, sheep and goats. He is also taught the traditions of the family and instructed on how to earmark and brand his animals. This adoption is sealed by his taking a Maasai wife and raising a family (for details, see Sankan, 1971: 19-20).

¹⁸³ Actually his original name was *Muoki* but it has been manipulated to sound ‘Maasai’. Few Maasai expressed any desire to become ‘Kamba’. An NGO worker was slapped by a Maasai for speaking to him in Kikamba, even after he apologised for having taken the man for a Kamba. The light skinned Maasai is said to have had ‘Kamba looks’ but he stunned the worker when he said that he would kill himself if he were Kamba. His reasons: Kamba are cowards, they do not respect the Maasai and they have taken Maasai land. What was rather surprising was that although he distanced himself from any ‘Kamba links’, his mother was known to be Kamba from Mbitini in Makueni who married the man’s Maasai father in the mid 1970’s. I was confronted with such incidences of vehement denials among ‘Maasai’ of mixed parentage. They were so enthusiastic about distancing themselves from any non-Maasai roots. It was reminiscent of Baumann’s experience in Southall where he noted that “most Southallians are aware, of course, that there are Muslims who are ‘Black’ and Christians who are ‘Asian’; yet these are treated as classificatory anomalies” (1996: 72). The only difference perhaps is that while in Southall’s case the motivating factor was to portray groups as unified entities, in the Kamba-Maasai case, it is what it would mean if one was not ‘Maasai’. Although one can easily be recruited as a member of the Maasai society, those who maintain non-Maasai identities but also pose as Maasai are usually treated with contempt.

¹⁸⁴ Regional imbalance in teaching personnel is a common problem in Kenya.

¹⁸⁵ Among his three brothers and two sisters, he was the only one who had attained secondary school education, training and a permanent job.

absent, he expected to live “without fearing anyone”. After working among the Maasai for six years, he bought a 20-acre piece of land from a Maasai family which he had befriended. By then he had learnt Maa and had been “generally accepted” by the Maasai. He would always seek protection from the family that sold him land whenever he faced threats from other Maasai neighbours. Although he had ‘bought’ the land, it was still expected that he would not fence it off, much less clear the wood cover and grass to create a farm. His land near Kimana was in the midst of Maasai homesteads even though some Kamba and Kikuyu families lived in the area. He had to tolerate the Maasai who grazed their cattle “in my land” without prior warning. Wanting to expand his farm and fence it, he sought an elders’ meeting that was attended by the local chief and the sub-chief. Knowing that his wishes may not be granted in the proposed meeting, he consulted with the “most influential brother”¹⁸⁶ in the family that had sold him land.

The old man advised that if he wanted things to work out in his favour, he should seek to be “made Maasai”. That was in 1983. Seeking naturalisation was “easy” since his son had been circumcised together with other Maasai boys the previous year.¹⁸⁷ In the meeting, he was presented as an adopted son of the family “who has been living among us, teaches our children, respects elders...lives like a Maasai although he came here not long ago”.¹⁸⁸ In a ceremony where he was given some Maasai cow milk by a clan elder while he was dressed in the traditional regalia, and was promised cattle as the “final symbol”, he was declared a ‘Maasai’. Well, he did not get the cattle; he is actually the one who paid the family some money “for the service” and “took care of the elders” by providing meat and beer.

Despite this monetarisation of the noble Maasai practice of taking in non-Maasai members, he says that shortly after the ceremony, the family sold him some additional 30 acres at a price far much below the ‘market value’. He had been given a “son’s rate.” During a series of interviews carried out between May and June 2000, he would say “we” to mean “us Maasai.” Offering me some milk to drink, he quipped “a Maasai *boma* (homestead) must have milk.”

About his identity, he said: “I am *Muumasai*...okay, *Muukamba-Muumasai*” (“I am Maasai...okay, Kamba-Maasai”). Although he denied that he had sought Maasai identity to access various resources and win acceptance, he conceded that after the ceremony, life became easier and he was able to own a shop in the local market and, although with some

¹⁸⁶ Not the eldest but held much sway because of being literate and because of his wealth accumulated through cattle trading.

¹⁸⁷ The Maasai elders ‘ignored’ the fact that his two daughters, through the intervention of his wife, had not participated in the *emuratare ontoyie* (*circumcision of girls*) rite of passage.

¹⁸⁸ Either out of choice or as a gimmick, Mualuko wears Maasai traditional clothing occasionally, particularly when attending clan and village meetings, ceremonies or when attending drinking sessions in the vicinity.

resistance, he had since become the headmaster in his primary school. But although he is ‘Maasai’, he is very much like the other Kamba and Kikuyu in the Loitokitok sub-district for, among other things, his is a fairly modern home; a brick-walled, cement plastered and painted house with glass windows, corrugated iron roofs. Besides, he keeps only a few grade cattle whose milk is sold in the nearby market. He is also practising commercial farming, growing beans, maize, onions and cabbages. Watering of the farms is done through canal irrigation from springs. In addition to his farms, he also hires other farms to grow more crops. Offering farms for hire has increasingly become a major income generation activity among the Maasai. Based on his “popularity” in the area, he said that he was considering seeking an elective office in the local county council. Mualuko noted that the ‘Kamba’ who are hated by the Maasai are those who “never care to *know* the Maasai, they live here but they ignore the Maasai.” Indeed, Peil and Oyeneye note that “members of various groups often get along quite well when they get to know each other as individuals rather than as categories” (1998: 80). But Mualuko regrets that people “still say that I am Kamba, but I am a Maasai, my parents...well, my mother, my father died...my brothers and other people, all come and visit me here, I don’t visit them, they know that I am not Kamba anymore but they are my relatives, they are my people.”

His family had ‘accepted’ the acquired identity, which, in any case, was to their advantage; his right to own land in Maasailand had enabled them to access foodstuffs during drought as well as financial support. But he also appeared to be a person yearning to ‘cut ties’ with the Kamba and therefore ‘convince’ the Maasai on the one hand, and himself on the other, that he was indeed Maasai. He kept on asking me “what do you think? am I not Maasai?” I was not sure, although he had practically been accorded nearly all the rights befitting a full member of the Maasai.¹⁸⁹ The Kamba were living among a people who did not accept “fake Maasai.” One could not be ‘half Maasai’. This appears to explain why revealing the ‘Kamba’ identity among Kamba women married to Maasai men was almost taboo. It was denied too often and many women not well acquainted with my work would even end the conversation once I made such an inquiry. Statements like “who told you that I was Kamba?”, “what makes you think that I am Kamba?” and “go to whoever told you that I am Kamba and talk to him/her” were quite common.

From Mualuko’s account, one sees that socially relevant factors become diagnostic for membership rather than the overt or ‘objective’ differences (see Barth 1969: 15). Although ethnic groups may often insist on primordial aspects, in practice, they portray ethnicity for

¹⁸⁹ He was living among the Matapato Maasai.

what it is; fluid, changing and negotiable. Mualuko claimed that one's ethnicity is where s/he "lived". He had to stress the locality, which could be contested, and downplay the 'blood links' which could not be taken away from him. It is the Maasai identity that was elusive and which had to be guarded, for losing it would mean losing his right to property, acceptance and a place to call home. It corresponds to Barth (1969) and Roosens (1989: 13) conception of "ethnicity and economic interest".¹⁹⁰ In this particular case however, Mualuko sought more than just economic interests.

Being recognised as 'Maasai' appeared to be extremely important long after he had used his newly acquired identity to accumulate property. In any case, there were many other examples of people who went through similar ceremonies but 'dropped' the Maasai identity after they accessed what they wanted. Instead, Mualuko had opted to pay 'dearly' for the sustenance of this recognition. His wife complained that he hosted many feasts where Maasai elders were invited, attended many "unnecessary" clan and elders meetings and traditional ceremonies. Mualuko felt that his newly acquired identity had to be nurtured through full participation in the activities of the 'hosts' (apparently overdoing it). The wife felt that this constant show of gratitude made his newly acquired identity to be in doubt; why keep on seeking approval? But she admitted that: "We were *nobody* in Ukambani...here we are very important people". And the husband seemed to realise that this 'importance' was tied to certain responsibilities and expectations. Whereas she felt that they did not need to 'please' anyone, the husband felt they owed their neighbours certain favours in exchange for the security of their property and positions. Besides, he was also interested in seeking an elective post in the future.

In places like Loitokitok, it was difficult to develop a yardstick by which to measure ethnic identity and group affiliation. In some cases, ownership of cattle or adoption of Maasai ways of life did not qualify one to be Maasai. One had to go through the "adoption ceremonies". You hardly became 'Maasai' by just doing what they did. This is different from what obtained among the Hutu and Tutsi. Eller noted: "If a Hutu acquired enough wealth to own a herd of cattle and adopted the ways of a Tutsi, he could transform his social identity into Tutsi by a process of *kwahitura* or *shedding of Hutuness* and become a Tutsi" (1999: 203). For the Kamba, 'Maasainess' is not an identity that one sought or attained after acquiring wealth; seeking Maasai identity was informed by the desire to acquire property. Starting as desperate migrants, most sought to shed their Kamba identity to access land and accumulate wealth, but

¹⁹⁰ There are actually other 'non economic' reasons that could drive one into changing his/her identity. In Maasailand, I was informed of two Kamba who sought refuge among the Maasai after being ostracised by their clans in Ukambani on accusations of witchcraft. Afterwards, they became 'Maasai' as a way of covering up their past.

then some tended to revert to ‘Kamba’ after that. “Being Maasai” was about survival but once you make it, then it was not important to be ‘Maasai’. Those who remained ‘Maasai’ were those who still felt insecure or were aiming at accessing other resources (e.g. running for the local council or becoming a chief). That is why the Maasai talked of Kamba and Kikuyu who demean them “after getting rich” or “after using us”.

Now that there are many ways of becoming Maasai, there are those who take Maasai wives or young men who are first taken into a Maasai family as herdsboys and if they ‘behave’ themselves, they could be adopted by the family. But in all these cases, one could still be stripped of that status. I was told of a Kamba teenager in Makutano¹⁹¹ who had been taken in by a Maasai family as a “son” but was chased away after allegedly selling two bulls and claiming that they had simply disappeared in the fields. He was summoned by a group of family elders and told that he was no longer ‘Maasai’ and was chased away as ‘Kamba’. The teenager was told: “The *Maasai* do not do that.” Becoming ‘Maasai’ was predicated on a number of moral standards and exceptions, and the ethnic identity could only be retained within certain fluid limits. Mualuko said the boy had stolen “before he had become a *real* Maasai”. “Real” here is slightly different from Sankan’s talk of “pure Maasai” (1971: 28), defined by blood and used in special cases (e.g. in the selection of the first elder among warriors).

Using Simmel’s categorisation of strangers, the ‘Kamba’ boy would appear to have been a newcomer who intended to become a full member of the Maasai society but who turned out to be a “marginal person” who did not integrate although he was committed to a permanent residence. The only difference here is that the criteria used to disqualify herding boys from becoming ‘Maasai’ was a vice that was also quite common among the Maasai herders themselves and equally unacceptable among the two groups. In spite of the fact that ethnic boundaries are socially constructed and are based on a variety of criteria that shift, the Loitokitok area appeared to be quite an extreme. People here keep on telling you that there are no “real Maasai” (which analytically makes sense) only to discover that they are simply protecting their shaky and highly contested ‘Maasai’ identities. The Kamba said that those who consider themselves as “true Maasai” (*kara orosamani katukuru*) were increasingly getting concerned about the appropriation of their identity, compelling them to come up with criteria for screening Maasainess. While it was clear that the Kamba could still maintain their identity and live peacefully among the Maasai, that set limits as to the resources one could access, including the possibility of remaining a ‘stranger’.

¹⁹¹ This market centre lies about 55 kilometres north of Loitokitok (Kenya-Tanzania border).

4.3.2 *Being ‘Maasai’ only by name*

During my study, I came across Kamba and Kikuyu members who did not ‘pretend’ or wear the mask of being Maasai. They were forthright about their Bantu identities but the Identity Card (IDs) bore Maasai names, which they did not use in everyday life. These names are adopted mainly for speculation purposes. In most cases, these new names are adopted so that young people can take advantage of training and recruitment opportunities in state institutions. In contemporary Kenya, recruitment to the military, the police, teaching and medical colleges are done at the district level. Each district normally has a quota. Besides, the state also gives some priority to applicants from marginalised pastoral groups. Due to high literacy and population in Kamba and Kikuyu districts, competition is extremely stiff. To increase one’s chances of selection, some school leavers ‘migrate’ temporarily to Maasailand and obtain their IDs there.¹⁹² Obtaining these cards from a certain district theoretically means that you are a native of that area. After the recruitment is over, those who are successful may never return to those districts again. Those who are left may hang around or return to their home districts and come back the following year to try their luck again.

There is still another category. Some non-Maasai parents residing in Maasailand give their children *masyitwa ma Amasai* (“Maasai names”) in anticipation of the opportunities discussed above. These are people who will have names in their identity cards that are ‘Maasai’ although the Maasai around them recognise them as non-Maasai. This is also a category that does not seek to be recognised as Maasai. In fact, even in school, they maintain their Kamba names, but in the ID and other important certificates acquired after that, they are identified as ‘Maasai’. Muisyo (Kamba) of Loitokitok says: “If you get my identity card (pulls it out), then I am *Maasai*, but as you have *seen*, I am Muukamba, they (Maasai) also know that I am Muukamba” (Loitokitok, 05/09/2000).

4.3.3 “*For me, the Kamba and the Maasai are the same*”

This is the story of Nkeni. Born in 1968, she was working in a bar in Kiboko when I met her. She doubled as a bar maid and a commercial sex worker.¹⁹³ Nkeni is a unique actor. As I have noted before, most of the people from mixed parentage and living in Maasai territory, tended to identify with the Maasai even in cases where it was the mother who was Maasai.¹⁹⁴ For Nkeni however, she is ‘Kamba’ and ‘Maasai’ in word and action. Her mother, a Kamba from Salama (Makueni) met her Maasai father when he was working in a farm that belonged to a

¹⁹² Luckily for them, many rural residents do not have birth certificates.

European settler along the Ukambani-Maasailand border. They married in 1966. Although she grew up in a Maasai homestead, Nkeni learnt Kikamba and Maa simultaneously.

Apart from language and matrimonial roots, some of her ‘Kambaness’ came by default. She did not undergo the *Emuratare ontoyie* (“circumcision of girls”) because when her age-set was to be initiated in 1981, she was already pregnant.¹⁹⁵ She was beaten up by the father and chased away from home but not ostracised. She eloped with her boyfriend (a Kikuyu) whom her clan later rejected when his parents came to negotiate for marriage and bridewealth. Nevertheless, they decided to stay as man and wife. They had dissolved the marriage by the time I met her in April 2000, and the three children of the marriage were in her custody.

Nkeni lives in a ‘rainbow world’. She sees herself as not only having a mixed ethnic but equally a multifaceted social identity. Because of her command of both Kamba and Maasai tongues, she had a unique way of interacting with bar patrons, who were dominantly Kamba and Maasai. In the first place, her ‘mixed’ ethnicity appeared to have been one reason why the bar proprietor hired her. They are simply the most appropriate kind of attributes in this multiethnic locality. The bar owner remarked: “She pulls customers...she knows what Masai want, what the Kamba want...she knows them...she knows where to *touch* (how to get along)...you know she speaks both languages” (Kiboko, 13/04/2000). But although she used to speak Kikamba with Kamba customers and Maa with the Maasai, conversely, she was ‘Kamba’ to the Maasai men who sought non-Maasai women and she was ‘Maasai’ to Kamba men for the same reasons. She also used to pose as ‘married’ which enhanced her ‘demand’ since, in the era of HIV/Aids, married women were generally perceived to be “safe”. She would also use the imposed marital status to ward off those bar patrons she was not interested in. Since getting a ‘Maasai’ woman working in a bar was a rarity in the area, she was particularly popular among the Kamba. But then, they had to compete with the Maasai. She had no obvious physical attributes that would betray her ethnic identity and would speak Maa to Maasai patrons to “catch them by surprise” as well as “make them feel at home.” Her ability to ‘surf’ into the worlds of both these groups’ made some patrons very angry. She was often dismissed as a “cheat” who took advantage of her bilingualism. However, there were many occasions when she would be best positioned to mediate between the two groups,

¹⁹³ While interviewing her, I had to give her some money as a compensation for the “opportunities” she might have lost “talking to a man who was not interested in me,” as she put it.

¹⁹⁴ Take for instance the case of Patricia Toine in this chapter. Nkeni has a divergent world view from Toine who sought to demean and discredit her maternal Kamba descent. Going by formal education and ‘exposure,’ one would have expected Toine, a trained primary school teacher, to be more accommodative than Nkeni who had only four years of formal education. Perhaps, having to rely on Kamba employers, Nkeni’s Kamba identity was important for her survival while Toine had a state job.

¹⁹⁵ As preparation for marriage, circumcision precedes sex and pregnancy.

particularly in the ‘resolution of conflicts’ within the business premises. She was each group’s most popular and most hated bar attendant. She tried to please all, but each group expected her to take sides. The Maasai would say that she should not speak Kikamba in their presence, for if she had a Maasai father, then she was “Maasai”. As for the Kamba, the bar was in Ukambani, owned by a Kamba and therefore she should have spoken only in Kikamba or Swahili at worst. Both groups would have loved to hate her but usually ended up hating to love her.

Nkeni had many trump cards. Some Maasai men, for instance, would be disinterested in her after finding out that she was ‘Maasai’. “I tell them,” she said, “okay I am Masai but have you ever slept with an uncircumcised one?” (prolonged laughter). By saying this, she created a cloud of mystery around herself arousing curiosity. She claimed that although the Maasai insist on marrying circumcised women, they looked for uncircumcised ones to satisfy their sexual desire.¹⁹⁶ She told me that one of her colleagues, a Kamba woman from Makindu, lost a “Masai customer” at one time by posing as circumcised, thinking that by so doing, she would enhance his interest. The Maasai man told her he had “two circumcised women at home” and he was therefore looking for “something different.” Her attempts to ‘correct’ the position fell on deaf ears. Interestingly however, Nkeni said that occasionally, she met Maasai men who sought only circumcised women. She explained: “For those ones, I tell them that I am Maasai”. Being “Maasai” was equated with having undergone the rite of circumcision. I asked her whether they would not find out; her answer: “Men just talk, they can’t tell the difference” (Nkeni, Kiboko, 10/06/2000).

Having lived in both ‘worlds’, Nkeni saw “very few differences” between the two groups. She felt that apart from physical appearances (e.g. dress or marks) and fairly divergent modes of subsistence, both groups had similar aspirations and concerns. For the men, she drew the conclusion that none wanted a circumcised woman “for sex” but only as “wives”. For her, being ‘Kamba’ or ‘Maasai’ is a question of “convincing others”. Her Maasai/Kamba identities had become situational and negotiable. She finds it strange that identities that she had taken for granted all along would be subjected to such controversies.¹⁹⁷ When she told me that the two groups are the “same”, she meant that the ‘incompatibilities’ were narrowing through social transformation. But she acknowledges that differences are reinforced by “attitudes” and language. As a master of Maa and Kikamba languages, she finds it easy to oscillate between the two identities. However, she had been hated by the Kamba and the Maasai alike for making it look like there was no ethnic difference.

¹⁹⁶ This claim was confirmed by some Maasai men.

¹⁹⁷ Identities become important or are defined when in relation with others (see Eriksen, 1997).

4.3.4 The Kamba and the Maasai as vulnerable groups

While droughts and famine enhance forms of exchange and interdependence, it is also at such times that the groups attain a sense of commonality. It is a time when both are dependent on the state for survival. People crowd into chief's camps waiting for food relief which may be donated by the state or international relief bodies (e.g. World Food Programme) or western countries. It is a time when pictures of Kamba and Maasai animals dying of hunger and disease are familiar sights on television and in the newspapers. And true to Anderson's (1983) notion of *Imagined Communities*, the notion of sameness appears to be enhanced by the media during such difficult times. Pictures of Kamba and Maasai searching for pastures and water on the one hand, and queuing for relief food on the other, present a category of people united in grief. It is a time when the feeling that they are 'sailing in the same boat' is enhanced. During such agonising moments, official statements uncharacteristically talk about affected "geographical areas" (districts) and not necessarily ethnic groups.

Vulnerability suppresses differences as both groups coalesce around themes of common concern. As they seek external assistance to survive, talk about who is 'modern' or 'backward' becomes irrelevant. Baxter, Hultin and Triulzi note that for people "to determine their collective aims and objectives...a people's consciousness of their identity is often forged through collective experience of suffering; but it assumes higher forms when they proceed to a rational of this identity through philosophical discernment of collective values and conceptual systems" (1996: 8; quoting Hagan, 1990: 10). This analogy is useful here although the reference here is basically about a group that already shares or are members of the same ethnic category. The "collective experience of suffering" can build bridges even across groups that ordinarily have little in common (e.g. that may not share a common language). Apart from electioneering time when Kamba politicians (particularly in 1997) had to criss-cross Maasailand mobilising the Maasai for support of the Kamba presidential candidate, it is usually during droughts that political leaders from both groups join hands to tackle a common problem.

Going by economic categorisation, both groups would fall under what a Kenyan scholar, Kinuthia Macharia, calls the "rural poor". Due to the differences in modes of subsistence, the Kamba would belong to the "smallholder farmers" defined as "those growing subsistence crops like maize, beans and potatoes in acreage of up to two acres in the high density population areas and in four acres or more in low density population areas that also tend to be poor agriculturally". On the other hand, the Maasai would fall under the "nomadic pastoralists", a concept that ignores transhumance. In this category, pastoralists are said to be

“poor”, live in harsh climatic conditions, where may have livestock that sometimes die en masse in case of drought; they tend to have very little money to live “above the poverty line” (1997: 164). Though mainly practicing fairly different modes of production, the two groups are affected, and rendered vulnerable, by the vagaries of weather. Both groups portray themselves as economically and politically marginalised, albeit through fairly different historical processes. But this marginalisation is also a contested category as some group members argue that they have been “key players” in the running of the government (see chapter seven).

4.3.5 The Kamba and the Maasai as “Christians”

Although Christianity has been slow in winning converts among the Maasai in the past, this has been happening at a faster rate in recent times. Schlosser’s comprehensive study had approximated that only about 20% of the Maasai had been converted to Christianity compared to about 90% among other groups like the Luo and Luhya (1984: 171).

The first missionary to set foot in Ukambani was a German, Johan Ludwig Krapf who had been sent by the Church Missionary Society (CMS). Arriving at the East African coast in 1844, he visited Ukambani in 1849. He later learnt Kikamba and translated the gospel of Mark into this tongue in 1850. Krapf’s entry into Ukambani set the ball rolling for other Christian missions. These included the East African Scottish Industrial Mission which opened a station at Kibwezi in 1891, the Leipzig Evangelical Lutheran Society (Leipziger Mission) which opened stations in Ikutha (Kitui) in 1892 and the African Inland Mission which set up a station at Nzaui in 1895 and the Holy Ghost Fathers who built their first station at Kabaa in 1913 (Ndolo, 1989: 76, 93). Christianity had a slow start in Ukambani all the same partly due to the missionaries being seen as an extension of the cruel colonial rule and two, due to their disapproval of Kamba cultural practices and lifestyles like polygyny, traditional dances, sacrifices and the administration of *kithitu* (oath). Ndolo notes that the reason why the Kamba later converted to Christianity and started going to school was that: “Under new social order this was the only way open for social betterment. In the 1930’s, the Kamba saw that the Kikuyu, the Luo and the Luhya who had seen the light much earlier had better political representation than they did. Some Kamba contented that their passive resistance to the colonial and missionary incursions had left them behind, in comparison to the other peoples of Kenya” (Ndolo, 1989: 98).

This gives a glimpse of the ‘catch-up’ crusade that has characterised ethnic competition in Kenya. This is not necessarily based on the western model of development but a comparative need predicated on what the other group is believed to have. But although the Kamba gave the

impression that Christianity entered Maasailand through Ukambani, actually, Dr. Rebmann and Dr. Krapf had also made contacts with the Maasai as early as late 1840s. In Kenya today, Christian churches can be found nearly all over the country.

Like any other religion, Christianity infuses a sense of community and competes with ethnicity as a mobilising force, by excluding others. With only about 10% of the population being Moslem,¹⁹⁸ Kenya is predominantly a Christian society, at least going by the mere identification with Christian faith. Although my study was dominated by talk about cattle raids, enmity and hatred, what struck me was the kind of movements people make on Sundays, converging in churches and under trees to listen to a sermon. Then there are the open air charismatic groups preaching to multitudes (e.g. in Emali and Sultan Hamud), with interpreters translating Swahili and English sermons into Maa and Kikamba. In such situations, there is an air of commonality that sweeps across the ethnic divide.

With Christianity, noted a Maasai church elder (Solinketi), “the differences are narrowing down...we pray together, they are our brothers.”¹⁹⁹ In one of the open air sermons in Emali, it was stressed that “...we are all equal before the Lord...your neighbour is the one in need...do you remember the story of the good Samaritan? you see, he helped a Jew.” The “Jew” here was to be any Kamba or Maasai in ‘need’. And it is not just the teachings about “love” for one another and care for the ‘poor’ irrespective of ethnicity; material assistance in form of food and clothes are also accessed through churches. To some extent, the Christian faith seemed to be providing a common identity under which they would interact not necessarily as Kamba and Maasai but as ‘believers’. Though latently, this notion of Christianity had brought in a new dimension where activities like cattle raids or early marriages were condemned not as ‘outdated’ but as “unchristian”. What is more, during peace and reconciliation initiatives, Christian religious leaders had gradually gained recognition as mediators.

It was difficult to gauge whether these churches had harmonised relations or enhanced closer interethnic relations. Some claimed that membership in common religious organisations had led to more ethnic convergence and the building of a community. In Maasailand, one notices that where Christianity has been widely embraced, these areas tend to have other facilities too (e.g. education and medical) while the people tended to be more receptive to ‘new’ ideas. Most churches along the border and inside Maasailand served both groups, with Kamba and a few Maasai pastors. Examples included the Redeemed Gospel Church and the Catholic church

¹⁹⁸ Although there are mosques in Sultan Hamud and Makindu, very few local people are Moslems. But these mosques, among other things, assist people with foodstuffs during shortages.

¹⁹⁹ In fact, it was in the local management council of the Anglican church that Mr Mutui, a Kamba and who introduced me to Mr Solinketi, had both met.

at Simba and Emali. I witnessed ‘Kamba’ Christian groups, participating in weddings or fund raisers organised by their Maasai counterparts and vice versa. At least, participation in common places of worship had provided an additional forum of interaction. Though at a limited scale, there were Maasai ‘Christian’ families that had abandoned and abhorred female circumcision, and there were at least two cross-ethnic marriages involving ‘Christians’ during the time of my study. Besides, Christianity had given people common names to identify with. My research assistant, for instance, preferred to be called simply as ‘John’.

The whole evangelisation process however had introduced other ‘differences’. There were tensions between the ‘mainstream’ churches (e.g. Catholic, Anglican and African Inland Church) and the fast growing charismatic groups. Besides, apart from these divisions along religious lines, it would be extremely simplistic to even imagine that “the days of enmity are long gone as people have turned their hearts to the Lord,” as one Maasai pastor told me. While churches have no doubt impacted on Kamba-Maasai relations and sense of identity, this has not superseded ethnic differences.

A Kamba pastor in Maasailand told of a myriad of difficulties he had faced “spreading the word of God” among the Maasai. He noted: “first they look at me as a *Muukamba* not as a man of God. The other day a church elder was asking me whether I have bought land...they still think I am just like any other person who comes here, buys land, starts commercial farming and makes money. I was distributing food relief another day and the chief was asking me whether I took some home and I knew that he was not being genuine. It is difficult to work here if you are not a *mzungu*.²⁰⁰ If you are a *mzungu*, they believe you, the rest of us are viewed as having a hidden agenda”. (Musau, Loitokitok, 21/09/2000). Although he had faced resistance, he saw the church as giving both groups a medium for resolving their problems, for negotiation and mutual understanding. He asserted that if Christianity had a penetrated Maasailand like in Ukambani, there would be fewer areas of misunderstanding between the two groups. However, as more Kamba and Maasai become ‘Christians’, there has not been a corresponding reduction in ethnic tensions and quest for ethnic identity. One reason was that the groups’ “tribal leaders” hardly used the church as a medium when advancing ethnic interests or even in the resolution of conflicts. Besides, Barth warns us that that reduction of cultural differences between ethnic groups does not correlate in any simple way with a reduction in the organisational relevance of ethnic identities, or a breakdown in boundary-maintaining process (1969: 33).

²⁰⁰ *Mzungu* is the Swahili word for a *White*.

4.3.6 Sameness through social transformation

While social transformation among the Maasai has been on many fronts, apart from ‘Christianity’, there were other fora that were seen as ‘emerging areas of commonality’ with the Kamba. I would like to focus on Maasai women and their struggles with the Maasai patriarchy. With increased education and monogamy becoming the norm rather than the exception, women are increasingly better placed to free themselves from what they said was a male dominated Maasai society or “where men are in charge” (Chieni and Spencer, 1993: 160). Take the example of Agnes Siyankoi, who took his husband to a Kajiado court over accusations of wife-beating (assault). After 13 years of marriage that included many beatings and at least one hospital trip, Siyankoi decided to fight for her rights through a state court. She took the matter for arbitration through the assistance of her brother, Keriako Tobiko, a lawyer. Agnes had been “married off” by her father at the age of 18 in exchange for 3 cows. She had however taken a step many Kamba or Kikuyu women would not envisage, perhaps even under worse circumstances.²⁰¹ This was seen as a bold move and it brought the Maasai to the centre of national debates regarding domestic violence and women rights.

In October 2000, the Maasai held a ‘cultural conference’ to chart the way forward for the community’s young generation. The meeting was attended by members of the Maasai ethnic group MPs, councillors and opinion leaders. It was an occasion to review *Maasai culture* and traditions and decide “which ones to discard and which ones to uphold”.²⁰² This move was taken positively by other non-Maasai groups. But what has all this to do with ‘sameness’? Well, whether it is women challenging what they perceive as oppressive patriarchal systems or the *murran* being encouraged to remain in school, these are transformations that place the Maasai in the ‘centre of things’ or make them to be ‘in tune’ with many other Kenyan groups. Some of the Maasai respondents associated these changes with increased proximity to multiethnic environments, whereby, they have to send their girls to school simply to ‘conform’ or through imitation (since Kamba and Kikuyu parents were doing the same). Besides these, there has been insurmountable ‘pressure’ from the state. Increasingly therefore, incidences where school girls have been rescued from forced marriages or walked out of them themselves are common features now in Kenyan newspapers.

The chief of Kiboko cited a case where his boss, the DO,²⁰³ rescued a Maasai girl who had done very well in her end of primary school examination but had been married off by the father immediately after circumcision. The administrator intervened and with the support of

²⁰¹ See CNN Interactive report by Nairobi Bureau Chief, Catherine Bond about a Maasai woman who had taken her abusive husband to court. The report is dated October 13th, 1997.

²⁰² See the Kenyan daily ‘The People’, Monday, October 2, 2000.

²⁰³ A non-Maasai.

some family members and the local church, he annulled the marriage and offered to take the girl to school at his own cost. In some cases, it is the ministry of education that takes the initiative. And we are not just talking about Maasailand. Just to pick recent examples; in Kwale district 3 girls were rescued from forced marriages and transferred into a boarding school.²⁰⁴ All the three had been ‘married’ to men aged 70 and above. A man who married off one of the girls was jailed for 8 years. Elsewhere, the daughter of a chief, aged 15, fled their rural home after her father attempted to force her to undergo female circumcision. The DC ordered the arrest of the chief.²⁰⁵ This was a shot on the foot of the state since it is these administrators who were expected to eradicate the practice. In another instance in Marakwet, 17 girls had to flee their homes and take refuge in a *human rights* centre after they were forced to undergo the ‘real circumcision’ after an alternative ‘mock’ rite,²⁰⁶ organised by NGOs to replace female circumcision had been successfully concluded.²⁰⁷ In Maasailand, there was a joint Ministry of Health/Gtz project offering this ‘alternative rite’ of passage to girls. The campaign was gaining momentum during my study.

Socially, female circumcision impacts on school attendance, leads to early marriages and is a barrier to cross-ethnic marriages. A Maasai teacher, who went through the rite and has no regrets, admits however that as a practice that basically prepares girls for Maasai suitors, educated women are disadvantaged since, after getting the chance to meet men from other ethnic groups while in high school or college, it dawns on them that many of these men are not keen on circumcised women. She notes: “Anytime a Kamba man is interested in me, they always ask whether I am circumcised.²⁰⁸ When I tell them that I am, most of them lose interest immediately.” (Vivian , Simba, 13/06/2000).

Generally, abandonment of female circumcision and ‘forced marriages’ was seen as one way of creating a sense of sameness between the Kamba and the Maasai; but the practice is riddled

²⁰⁴ *The Daily Nation*, Wednesday, April 25, 2001. The girls were taken to Waa Boarding Primary School for ‘protection’.

²⁰⁵ See *The Daily Nation*, Friday, December 7, 2001.

²⁰⁶ Women lobby groups, bilateral organisations and international NGOs (e.g. Plan International) came up with *alternative rites* of passage for girls. Among the Pokot for instance, some 153 girls aged between 10 and 18 years completed this rite at Chepareria Catholic church in West Pokot in 2001 (see *The Daily Nation*, Friday, December 21, 2001). Through lectures given by health experts and educationists, the girls are sensitised on contemporary reproductive health concerns (e.g. HIV/Aids) and challenges of childhood. While this alternative rite takes a week, the ‘traditional’ practice takes about two weeks and the initiates are taken to a secluded dwelling deep inside a forest. The practice involves the use of ‘crude’ knives and unsterilised tools, and with no use of anaesthesia, it is a very painful exercise. It is argued that without the pain, the exercise would lose some of its significance.

²⁰⁷ *The Daily Nation*, April 16, 2002.

²⁰⁸ The so-called female genital mutilation or clitoridectomy is called *emuratare ontoye* among the Maasai which basically means *the circumcision of girls*. The practice, even from the perception of two school teachers who had gone through it, did not appear to be despised or labelled with the negative connotations often associated with it by among others, development organisations, researchers and the media.

with heaps of controversy. Vivian says that it would be difficult to root out the practice since, contrary to suggestions that men perpetuate it, she blames the women: “They organise it, it is not men, sometimes, I feel like they are saying ‘we went through it, it might not be good but you must feel what we felt’...”. Moreover, the monetarisation of the exercise has compounded the problem. The ‘old’ women who carry out this exercise were being paid an average of Ksh 1,000 (EUR 15) per girl. What used to be ‘tokens of appreciation’ had been turned into means of income and therefore a transformation of social responsibility. Keen to protect their economic interests, these women, who are also influential, are opposed to the eradication of the practice.

There are other inconsistencies. As many girls increasingly run away from home or seek refuge among sympathetic relatives to escape circumcision or forced marriage, others yearn for it. In West Pokot, for instance, a schoolgirl threatened to take her own life after her parents ruled out her participation in the circumcision.²⁰⁹ While in ordinary circumstances it is the parents who find themselves on the other side of the law, this time round, it was the little girl who was arrested by the police. In Kisii, nearly all political leaders support the practice. A local MP and former university lecturer, Mr Jimmy Angwenyi claimed that female circumcision “is good and should not be stopped.” He warned that nobody or no amount of intimidation would stop the Kisii from pursuing their “cultural heritage.” As to how damaging the practice was, he said “amongst the Abagusii (Kisii) community, the idea of female genital mutilation (FGM) does not exist as girls simply go for a minor cut of the clitoris.”²¹⁰ In Marakwet, a women’s meeting was disrupted on suspicion that it was opposed to female circumcision. A group of Marakwet men and women stormed the venue, Chugor Primary School, and pelted the participants with stones accusing them of “interfering with our tradition”.²¹¹

The state has, previously in principle, and now by law, prohibited female circumcision. In December 2001, ‘forced’ early marriages and circumcision of girls below 18 years, were both outlawed and criminalised. The laws, contained in the Children’s Bill passed by parliament, says that anyone who commits these offences will be liable to a minimum of one year jail sentence or a Ksh 50,000 (EUR 650) fine or both. Shortly afterwards, President Moi banned the practice ahead of assenting the bill into law.²¹² In 1982, he had condemned the practice threatening those circumcising girls, at least in his home district of Baringo with dire

²⁰⁹ *The Daily Nation*, Thursday, December 20, 2001.

²¹⁰ *The Daily Nation*, Tuesday, December 4, 2001.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*

²¹² *The Daily Nation*, Thursday, December 13, 2001.

consequences. The question is: Did the practice stop after its criminalisation? Enacting laws and change of practices can be two different things. Enactment of a similar law in Ghana is said to have failed to root out the practice.²¹³ In the Kenyan case, immediately after the Bill became law, cases were reported in Kisii where the practice had been ‘medicalised’. Under the guise of normal hospital visit, female nurses would be contracted for the exercise, charging about Ksh 400 (EUR 5) per girl.

All this means that for many girls, the ritual is not an option, for those who somehow escape it have also to contend with the harassment their peers can mete out to them. While the practice has been condemned widely, there is no indication that there shall be adherence to the law. The reason why groups like the Maasai and Kisii resist even legislation banning the practice is that it is a deeply embedded practice, attached with a lot of symbolism and meaning. Banton (1983: 100) notes that when a group continues to maintain certain forms of behaviour, it is because the members are motivated to maintain them and that if they change, it is because individual motivations have changed. According to the Kenya Demographic Health Survey (1998) about 55% of Kenyan groups practice female circumcision. Among the Kisii, about 97% of girls and women aged between 15 and 49 have undergone the practice while among the Maasai, it was 89%, while the Kenyan average prevalence was 37.6%.

Teachers who taught in schools with Kamba and Maasai pupils, noted that girls and boys hurl insults at one another regarding female circumcision. This ridicule, rather than pressure from parents for the Maasai girls to get married, was seen as one reason why some Maasai girls dropped out of school after the rite. Those who avoid or ‘escape’ the rite, are said to win praise from non-Maasai girls, and boys too. Many Maasai girls are beginning to defy their parents, although there are arrangements now in which the rite is combined with schooling by carrying it out during school holidays. And with the support of non-Maasai (and sometimes Maasai) teachers, education officials and local administrators, more and more Maasai girls are skipping this rite. With the Maasai having the first woman chief in 2002, it does not seem that it will take “one hundred years” before the Maasai have an elected woman parliamentarian, as a former MP for Kibwezi (Kamba) retorted in a gathering called to reconcile the Kamba and the Maasai in 1995.

²¹³ *The Daily Nation*, Wednesday, December 12, 2001.

4.4 Conclusion of chapter four

Although each group is enthusiastic about showing how distinct it is from the other through depictions, one thing that strikes the reader is that the Maasai tend to be stereotyped more negatively. One explanation is that Maasai stereotypes are shared among many other Kenyan groups as well as outside Kenya's borders as I pointed out in chapter three. The fact that the Maasai have fewer negative depictions of the Kamba may be explained by the dilemma in which the Maasai find themselves as they strive to 'catch-up' with the Kamba and other groups in the 'modernisation' race.²¹⁴ An examination of Maasai depictions of the Kamba suggest that most of them are as old as the two groups have interacted and have been passed over many generations. I noted in chapter three that many Kamba depictions of the Maasai are relatively recent. Another major departure is that the Maasai are keen to stress morality, based on their misgivings about modernity. What is more, the Maasai have some positive depictions about the Kamba; that they have "hard working women" and that they tend to be "good in business." These positive notions however are a reflection of the transformation sweeping through the Maasai society as they take up farming and get more integrated in the monetary economy. It also shows that enemies can depict each other positively, particularly if those depictions serve the interest of the group propagating them. Maasai women of course, are equally hardworking and there are Maasai engaged in very successful business ventures. But groups are careful not to lose those attributes that distinguish them from others, and this objective can be pursued by depicting others positively, simply to stress that "we are not like them".

These positive attributes can also be used conveniently depending on what the actors want to achieve at a given time. For instance, the "hard working" Kamba women are also said to be a reflection of how "oppressive" and "negligent" Kamba men are; that they have abdicated their responsibilities in the homestead. As for being successful in business, the Maasai often accuse "foreigners" doing business in their territory for "exploiting" them. The Maasai also reject one attribute of difference: Kamba witchcraft. But this rejection does not translate into sameness but as a sign of Maasai superiority. It is also a way of maintaining the balance of power by making sure that no group has claim to superstitious powers.

²¹⁴ Maasai pride rests on their cultural heritage and cattle wealth. However, as the group goes through fast transformation, increasingly taking up farming, sending children to school and commoditisation of the economy, it becomes more difficult to sustain depictions that negate 'modernity'. Popular generalisations surrounding Kamba's apparent abandonment of their cultural practices, begin to reflect on what the Maasai themselves are witnessing in their own backyard.

At the end of the chapter, I have indicated that coexistence is not just about difference but commonalities too. Irrespective of the negative ways in which the two groups depict each other, the Kamba on the other hand adopt Maasai identity, while Christianity, education, vulnerability and trading centres create common points of convergence.

4.5 General conclusion (chapter three and four)

As I noted in the introduction of chapter three, the two chapters had the objective of showing how the Kamba and the Maasai qualify as actors in a coexistence relationship. The case I am trying to make in the two chapters is that ethnic distinction is one of the most basic considerations in interethnic coexistence. I have used ethnic depictions to make sense of difference. Apart from the groups' linguistic and historical differences as shown in chapter one, chapter three and four show that the Kamba and the Maasai have a repertoire of distinctions expressed through stereotypes. They range from physical appearances ("tall", "short" etc.), ecology (modes of subsistence, i.e., farming and pastoralism), monetary economy (e.g. "they are good in business"), social transformation (e.g. "backward", "ignorant" or "modern"), cultural practices (e.g. female circumcision, dress code etc.) to morality (e.g. promiscuity, thievery etc.).

Whereas stereotypes are largely "imagined differences",²¹⁵ that is, social constructions of identity, they are not necessarily unfounded. Most of them are based on observed practices, but that are often conveniently exaggerated. Besides, depictions are usually not revised to correspond to the processes of social transformation. They are largely negative and presented as incorrigible, and are therefore useful in trying to fathom the contradictions and subjectivity of everyday life. For a large part, ethnicity is basically about difference and maintenance of social boundaries (Barth, 1969). A group's criteria and recognition of others as 'different' from themselves enables them to make sense of their own identity (Wicker, 1997: 143). Besides, Werbner notes that essentialism and reification of culture is essential for mobilisation purposes (1998: 226-30).²¹⁶ On the other hand, Baumann notes that "ethnic divisions are indeed based upon a proliferation of distinctions, all of them mutually independent" (1996: 18). We are also told that the way we act toward others is shaped by the way we imagine them and this becomes even more acute if those 'others' are strangers (Scarry, 1998: 40). It is safe to say that most ethnic depictions are a reflection of this 'imagination'. Underscoring the ways in which groups depict others, Peil and Oyeneye note that "often, a people's name for

²¹⁵ For a definition of "imagined differences", see Schlee (2002: 6-7).

²¹⁶ The Maasai, for instance, have been seeking "indigenous group" status. For more details, see chapter six.

themselves means ‘the people’; everyone else is somehow less human” (1998: 79). In the same breath, Henrietta Moore (1994) tells us in her book, *A Passion for Difference*, that “difference” exerts an uncanny fascination for all people. What I have tried to show in these two chapters is this “passion for difference”.

The point I am trying to make is that *ethnic difference* is first and foremost what interethnic coexistence is all about. Without ethnic distinctions, there would be no ‘coexistence’ to talk about. To say that two groups ‘coexist’, is basically to say that they are ‘different’; they are distinguishable, internally and externally. But equally important, is that stereotypes serve as indicators of coexistence, that is, they act as evidence that groups have interacted in various ways. To put it differently, ethnic depictions are another way of saying “we know them”. And yet, the “passion for difference”, to maintain ethnic identity, explains why stereotypes are passed from one generation to the next even when they might not reflect actual practices. In other words, as cultural differences become less significant, ethnicity continues to find relevance as part of self-identity. This is why, in spite of the emerging similarities between the Kamba and the Maasai, ethnic depictions continue to paint a dichotomous and ‘clear cut’ categories (e.g. “*they* are backward, *we* are modern,” “*we* keep cattle, *they* are farmers” etc.).

It would be important to point out that ethnic depictions do not just make a statement about difference, they are also about ethnic pride, supremacy, rivalry and competition. I have shown that since stereotypes influence human action, that is, how actors respond toward others, they can easily lead to ethnic tensions and conflict. And yet, on the other hand, the exoticism and uniqueness created by depictions also act as points of ‘attraction’ between two groups. An example is Maasai men who seek to marry the “hardworking” Kamba women. Distinctiveness therefore creates an arena in which closer interactions become possible. Moreover, I have also shown that the two groups have commonalities, expressed through shared identities (e.g. “I am Kamba-Maasai”) and economic activities like cattle keeping, places of leisure (e.g. drinking in bars), vulnerability (through drought and famine), religious membership (where Christianity infuses a sense of community) and social transformation (e.g. more Maasai girls going to school, resisting the practice of female circumcision etc.).

I have shown how groups passionately distinguish themselves. And yet, in as much as coexistence is about distinction and difference, it is also about cross-ethnic transactions. In chapter five therefore, I proceed to discuss another aspect of this multidimensional relationship, i.e., how and why these groups that present each other as different and as rivals engage in complementing and interdependent relationships.

CHAPTER FIVE: INTERETHNIC COEXISTENCE AS MUTUAL EXCHANGE (COMPLEMENTARITY)

After a detailed analysis of the actors and how depictions shape ethnic difference and interactions, the first part of this chapter examines patterns of interdependence that sustain the groups' livelihoods. This chapter seeks to present the Kamba and the Maasai as intricately interacting groups. In other words, coexistence here is visualised as constituting activities undertaken by groups to meet their daily needs, and that transcend ethnic differences. In this chapter, I am saying: "In spite of difference", there are interethnic transactions. The phrase brings to mind Galtung's *Coexistence in spite of Borders* (1994).

The argument is that irrespective of ethnic differences and hatred, being juxtaposed together in a common territory, an environment of scarcity, disparities in the distribution of facilities (e.g. schools) and specialisation in different modes of subsistence make it logical for the Kamba and the Maasai to establish cross-ethnic networks to safeguard their livelihoods. Vulnerability and livelihood needs are what makes even hostile groups to be complementary (see Haaland, 1969). "Livelihood", to quote Long, (1997, 2000) is not just a matter of "shelter" and "bread" but also ownership and circulation of information, management of skills and relationships and the affirmation of personal significance/self esteem (citing Wallman, 1982). Long notes that livelihoods "represent patterns of shifting interdependencies" (2000: 197) and could be crucial in the resolution of conflicts. In the study, "livelihood" is used to describe the daily consumption and economic necessities of groups and strategies which they device (e.g. by forging closer links with others) to make a living and cope with uncertainties like drought. Of particular interest in the study is what kind of exchanges take place, who is producing and selling what to whom, and what meanings are attached to these relations. The question of pride referred above is crucial as some of the exchanges, as will be shown, involve what one group refers to as "technology transfer".

While the chapter borrows some ideas from studies on social exchange and reciprocity (e.g. Blau, 1964; Polanyi, 1957, 1992; and Baerends, 1994), it examines exchanges at a broader level (interethnic), that involve not only bartering and monetarisation but also schooling opportunities and transfer of labour. Because of this complexity, I have developed my own categories based on my empirical data. While Polanyi's (1957) concepts of reciprocity, redistribution and market exchange, make sense, the kind of exchanges I examine here do not fit into these categories. The exchanges discussed here range from each groups' specialisation

(agricultural and animal products), labour, skills and shopping facilities (where businesses tend to be dominated by one group) to situations where territorial disparities in the distribution of schools is translated into ‘owners’ of these facilities (Kamba) and ‘suppliers’ of pupils and fees (Maasai).

In the second part of the chapter, I examine other “conditions for coexistence” (e.g. demand for “respect”) and how migrant groups strategize to win acceptance from the host group. The chapter shows that despite the ‘differences’ outlined in chapter two, three and four, there is a continuous process of attenuation as ecological, climatic, social, economic and political needs squash together the diverse interests of the two groups. In a nutshell, the chapter seeks to show interethnic coexistence as a complementary process that is shaped by exchanges and compromises.

Although I am using complementarity and interdependence almost interchangeably, conceptually, distinctions could be drawn in terms of intensity of exchanges between groups and the extent to which resources are shared. In this regard, and in a strict sense, interdependence would be exchanges at a symbiotic level and where each group is almost ‘indispensable’, while complementarity would be exchanges at lesser level of intensity. In fact, Barth (1969: 18) notes that “complementarity can give rise to interdependence or symbiosis”. In other words, complementary relations are not necessarily interdependent. Exchanges between the Kamba and the Maasai, I would argue, oscillate between these two levels and depend on what is exchanged and when, i.e., whether there is drought or not (the magnitude of vulnerability).

5.1 A history of trade and exchange

Kamba-Maasai conflicts and negative stereotypes are juxtaposed within a history of cross-ethnic trade. Studies show that even for groups that claim to be ‘pure pastoralists’ like some sections of the Maasai, they have always supplemented their diet with grains obtained from other groups (Spear, 1993: 8). The Maasai previously acquired these supplements (e.g. beans) through barter trade and today they are procured through a combination of bartering and price market systems. Just like in the olden days, exchanges between the Kamba and the Maasai tend to revolve around their core modes of subsistence, namely farming and cattle keeping respectively. This form of negative complementarity, where insufficiency within a group is met by another, appears to be the premise on which other modes of interdependence (e.g. political alliances) are based. To illustrate their dependence on the Kamba for agricultural

produce (e.g. maize and beans), the Maasai say: “One finger does not kill a flea”. The Kamba on the other hand have a similar proverb: “One finger does not kill a louse”. Although they use different insects, the message is stark, that you cannot be self-sufficient, you need others; that as neighbours engaged in different trades, the Kamba and the Maasai have to depend on each other. Throughout the generations, whenever the weather has been favourable, interdependence in certain aspects is lessened, for instance, many Maasai may neither need to move their cattle to Ukambani in search of pastures, nor would the Kamba have to migrate to Maasailand in search of farms (near springs) to hire. But, whenever a “flea” stung (i.e. when prolonged drought struck), each group would need another “finger” (the other group) to sustain their lives.

The Kamba and the Maasai have engaged in cross-ethnic trade since the time they have shared borders, which goes way back to the late 18th and early 19th century. The Kamba are said to have been key providers of honey to the Maasai, which was important particularly in marriage ceremonies and in the making of liquor. This appears to have been at a limited scale though, for the chief suppliers of honey to the pastoral Maasai were the ‘poorer’ Maa speaking group, the Ogiek, who lived in the forests (Spear, 1993: 7). My research partner, Mr Kyuli, told me that his grandfather, who died “at the start of *Mau Mau*”²¹⁷ (around 1952) aged about 70 years, used to talk about Kamba-Maasai barter trade in honey, bows and arrows²¹⁸ and even beer in the exchange of livestock and its related products like milk, meat and hides. The trade in bows and arrows is said to have been done secretly since the Kamba were not comfortable with the idea of their rivals (the Maasai) owning such weapons which were considered superior to the Maasai spear, knife and club. This evidence of old trade links between the Kamba and the Maasai contradicts the findings of Ndolo who, based on an oral interview in Mutomo (Kitui district) concluded that: “It is seen straight away that the Kamba were prepared to trade with everybody and did so except with the hated “Akavi” Maasai whom they fought continuously...”. He notes further that “due to constant feuds, the Maasai and the Kamba did not have much in common with each other” (1989: 51, 57). Ndolo ignores the fact that not having “much in common” could actually be the prerequisite in cross-ethnic trade. In any case, conflicts and hatred do not necessarily act as a trade/exchange barrier. There is also the question of proximity. The Kamba bordering the Maasai (e.g. those in Nzaui and Kilungu) were better placed to trade with the Maasai compared to those in distant areas like Kitui.

²¹⁷ “Mau Mau” is the revolt that was mounted by African freedom fighters against the British colonial government.

²¹⁸ The Maasai also obtained bows and arrows from the Torrobo (Dorobo), who, just like the Ogiek, were hunters.

Besides, as the Kamba specialised in the long-distance-trade with the Arabs along the East African coast in the 19th century, they obtained additional hides from the Maasai, a commodity that was in high demand in the coastal trade.

Prior to and during colonial rule, Kikuyu country acted as the cushion for both drought-prone Kamba and Maasai groups. Both groups however related with the Kikuyu at different levels. With cattle, the Maasai enjoyed higher status among the Kikuyu compared to the Kamba whose members would often be armed with only labour in exchange for food. This “dependence” on the Kikuyu for food, noted Kariuki of Loitokitok who migrated from Gachie (Kiambu) in 1967, is the “main reason” why the Kikuyu “find it difficult to respect the Kamba.”²¹⁹ Among the long list of famines that forced the Kamba to depend on the Kikuyu for food included: *Yua ya musele*, “the famine of rice” of around 1898-99 which affected both Ukambani and Maasailand among other areas. During this time, there was little to eat except rice distributed by missionaries and the colonial government and then foodstuffs obtained from the Kikuyu; in 1908-09 there was *yua ya maalakwe*, “the famine of beans”.²²⁰ During this famine, the beans in question (which was the main staple food available), were obtained from the better watered Kikuyu country through barter trade; And just within two years, came *yua ya ndata*, “the famine of the star” which had coincided with the sighting of the Harley’s Comet in 1910.²²¹ During these famines and other times of food shortages, the Kamba obtained from the Kikuyu sweet potatoes, arrow roots and cereals in exchange for their labour (tilling in the farms), ivory, salt and medicine. Women would also be traded for food. This early links explain why many ‘Kikuyu’ in Kirinyaga area trace their descent to Ukambani.

5.2 Contemporary forms of exchange

During the colonial and post-colonial period, the forms and commodities of exchange have undergone transformation in the context of a more pervasive state, diminishing agricultural land (high population), changes in land tenure system and adoption of a market economy. There has been subsequent competition for resources based on fairly different property relations, with new dynamics, interest groups and priorities, altering the patterns of relations between individuals, groups and territorial areas.

²¹⁹ The Kamba generally claim that the Kikuyu look down upon them.

²²⁰ *Maalakwe* is corrupted Kikamba for *maharagwe*, the Swahili word for beans. Otherwise, beans are *mboso* in Kikamba.

²²¹ Other prominent famines include the famine of aeroplane (*yua ya ndeke*) of 1960-61 when food was distributed by aeroplanes, the famine of charcoal (*yua ya makaa*) of about 1969, Others include *yua ya nzalukangye* and *yua ya kakuti* (early 1940’s)

The Kamba and the Maasai usually engage in exchanges that are mutual, often due to vulnerability, and that result in social intercourse, acceptance and accommodation. Most of the exchanges tend to be routine, but there were gifts (or concessions) that were portrayed as “favours” and used as an indication that a group was more accommodative (i.e. demonstrating the willingness to live in harmony with other groups), which often went contrary to widely held stereotypes. A good example here would be when Kamba traders were given additional trading premises in Simba (Maasai territory). Let me look at the various forms of cross-ethnic exchange in detail.

5.2.1 The ‘pastoral’ Maasai and the Kamba ‘farmer’: Exchange through diversity

One notable thing about these two groups is that despite sharing a similar ecological zone, they have specialised in fairly distinct modes of subsistence. From ethnological studies, it has long been established that in certain settings, groups living side by side may occupy clearly distinct niches and therefore be in minimal competition for resources limiting interdependence despite co-residence in an area (Barth, 1969: 19). Barth also noted that groups may on the other hand monopolise separate territories, and compete for resources that are available in each territory and where groups may erect barriers to exclude others. He agrees though that in reality, these are fairly mixed situations and only through gross simplifications can reduce interactions into simple types. Although specialisation in different modes of subsistence is often seen as an aspect of distinction, on the other hand, it creates an opportunity for exchange and indispensability.

When I talk about the Maasai as cattle keepers and the Kamba as farmers, I am simply talking about the dominant modes of production otherwise there are overlaps, with the Maasai increasingly taking up farming. But this distinction can be seen in the trading centres where you see Maasai women selling ghee and milk while their Kamba counterparts sell agricultural products like maize, beans, pigeon peas, and cowpeas, as well as tomatoes, potatoes and cabbages. However, some of the products the Kamba women sell are not necessarily obtained from Ukambani but from the so-called “Kikuyu lorries”, an aspect that highlights the external dimensions of this trade.²²²

Generally speaking, trading patterns and interdependence change significantly depending on the season and whether there are food shortages or not. For most of the cattle keeping Maasai who do not practice crop farming, regardless of whether there is drought or not, they obtain their supplementary foodstuffs from the farmers in their midst (in cash or bartered), in the

²²² These are lorries that are mainly from Central Province (Kikuyuland) that crisscross Ukambani selling cabbages, tomatoes and potatoes.

open air markets or in food stores in the trading centres. The only thing that changes is that during drought, the foodstuffs appreciate in value. This makes food shortages and famine to be more devastating to the Kamba whose diet is entirely cereal oriented, besides the fact that they have fewer cattle to fall back to. When drought is prolonged, with the exception of Kamba traders, most Kamba farmers temporarily cease to be source of grain needed to supplement Maasai diet. In such occasions, both groups have to rely on the trading centres whose food stores rely on transporters (middlemen) obtaining their supplies from the rich agricultural belt of Trans Nzoia, Uasin Gishu and Kericho in the western parts of Kenya or the irrigated farms in Loitokitok and even Tanzania.

Barter trade

When Kamba farmers have had a bumper harvest, then the Maasai may obtain their cereals simply through barter trade. One of my Maasai research partners (Nkata) participates in this trade where, in the company of other Maasai women or alone, she visits Kamba homesteads in search of agricultural produce particularly maize and beans. She offers goats or sheep and ghee in exchange for *muthokoi*, maize, beans, pigeon peas and cow peas. For 0.75 litre of ghee, she gets in return 5 kilograms of maize or 3 kilograms of beans. The quantity of the grains is measured using cooking fat tins while ghee and milk is put in soft drink or juice bottles measuring 0.3 and 0.75 litres respectively. These are locally improvised and cross-ethnically acceptable measurements that ease trade transactions. In a few occasions, measurements can also be determined arbitrarily. The quantities exchanged are also determined by how “desperate” one of the parties is. If there is drought and Maasai animals drop in value, the Maasai are forced to exchange goats, sheep and cattle for relatively fewer quantities of grain as the ‘exchange rates’ change. For instance, a bull, which could ‘ordinarily’ fetch up to 5 bags of maize from a Kamba household, is exchanged for 2 bags during prolonged droughts. During harvest, a goat is normally exchanged for one maize bag (90 kg). Equivalents of exchange are also determined by how “close” the parties are. This borders on the *Bielefelder Ansatz* in which, Hans-Dieter Evers in one of the studies, *The Moral Economy of Trade*, the embeddedness of a trader’s economic behaviour by societal norms and obligations is discussed. In the *Trader’s Dilemma*, he argues that traders have to balance between accumulation of capital and the moral obligation to share with kinsfolk (Evers and Schrader, 1994: 5; cf. Hyden, 1983). In my study, the Maasai who had Kamba friends or were related in marriage would be offered ‘better terms’. In other cases, intervention of elders and other leaders would make it easier and cheaper for the Maasai to access Kamba pastures and

agricultural produce. These compromises, to be revisited later, constitute what I am referring to as the ‘price of interethnic coexistence’.

The cattle economy

It has been noted in the study that both groups value cattle. It is their meeting point. But this common fascination with animals, though at varying degrees and for fairly distinct purposes, allows a very strong bond to develop, which is also sustained for mutual benefit. There is even a semblance of patron-client relationship through which Maasai cattle keepers lend cattle to the Kamba. These will be Kamba whom the Maasai have known for a considerable period, often linked by marriage, living or working in Maasailand. Such loaned cattle may be milked, one may use or sell the ghee, they have to be taken good care of and may be reclaimed if not well fed or watered. They are monitored by the owner who should know of new calves and under no circumstances can the trustee sell these animals. Rarely will such animals be used for drawing carts or ploughs, engagements which the Maasai consider unsuitable for their bulls and oxen.²²³ ‘Monitoring’ of these animals and the restrictions placed on them makes the Kamba realise that although cattle are just as important to them, Maasai obsession with livestock is unmatched. The Dutch missionary (referred earlier) makes a description that captures this difference. He notes that when Maasai animals are coming home “every woman, man and child sit outside the house to watch the cows (cattle) return. There is absolute silence. I do not know if you can understand me but it is a very moving sight. I almost cry watching this. If one single cow is missing, you will know from the emotional reaction and the body language”²²⁴.

Although both groups practice transhumance, it is organised differently among the Kamba. When there is a prolonged drought, some of the Kamba cattle keepers practice what is called *kuvithya indo* where one’s animals are taken to relatives or neighbours who have bigger pieces of land. This may involve cash payments or expectations that your relatives reserve the right to access your pastures or other assistance in the future, making the arrangement appear reciprocal. Others take their animals to distant areas where they may have *kyengo*²²⁵ (pl. *syengo*). These are pieces of land which one bought or acquired (*kukwata*) for the ‘rainy day’ and may be outside of Ukambani (e.g. in Maasailand). The whole family will normally not

²²³ This particular requirement is a major bone of contention between Maasai cattle lenders and Kamba trustees. While ploughing and drawing of carts is one of the major reasons why the Kamba tend bulls, the Maasai normally use donkeys for these activities. To the Maasai, using bulls and oxen this way amounts to “mistreatment” and serves as further evidence for their claims that the Kamba are “fake” cattle keepers.

²²⁴ Fr. Frans Mol’s account during an interview with Phil Ikonya of the Nation Newspapers (see *Sunday Nation*, October 28, 2001).

²²⁵ The ‘kye’ is pronounced ‘che’.

move but one or two family members will. The contemporary practice is to send a salaried herder(s) to take care of the animals, but who will be monitored closely.

In recent years, there has been a trend where the Kamba adopt some of the 'superior' cattle breeds of *Sahiwal* and *Boran* kept by the Maasai. These breeds yield more milk and fetch higher prices when sold or exchanged compared to the traditional *Zebu*. Acquisition of these 'new' breeds has become a marker of social status among the Kamba while it has enhanced Maasai pride, since it serves as resilience of the Maasai as models and pacesetters. Such animals are acquired through many ways; through some form of barter where an agreed equivalent quantity of grain (e.g. four bags of beans) is exchanged for a cow, while others simply pay cash in the cattle markets or by going to Maasai homesteads. Some Kamba borrow male bulls from the Maasai to improve their breed sometimes 'free' depending on how 'well' they are acquainted. Others (e.g. Kyuli) got a *Sahiwal* bull in exchange for his grazing fields where his "Maasai friend" grazed his animals for two months. Apart from *Sahiwal* breeds of cattle, nearly all the Kamba I met during my study who possessed donkeys had acquired the same from the Maasai.

The photos below, taken during the study, show the traditional *Zebu* and the preferred *Sahiwal* breed.



Plate 2 : A 'traditional' *Zebu* cow with a calf.



Plate 3: The *Sahiwal* breed of cattle.

There are many Kamba who cross to Maasailand during droughts to burn charcoal, get firewood for sale, in search of herding jobs or to hire fields near springs to irrigate. In addition, there are Kamba families that have specialised in storing maize stalks (either after harvest or crop failure) and then sell these to cattle keepers in the dry season. Mr Kyuli of Kiboko, who has made this a form of trade, buys these stalks from his neighbours at “throw away prices” immediately after harvest or when rains fail and then waits for the dry spells. The maize stalks are not sold at ‘fixed’ prices, and the Maasai pay more for them not just because they are outsiders, but since they are more desperate (given the economic significance and emotional attachment to cattle). However, the Maasai who keep large herds would generally not be interested for it would either be too expensive or the maize stalks would be inadequate. In other cases, the farms were also turned into grazing fields during droughts at a fee. These are normally the large ones (e.g. 20 acres and more) and well fenced off to ensure that only selected herds have access. The progressive Kamba farmers also travel to Kajiado and negotiate for cow dug which they use as manure in their farms. While some get it for free among their in-laws or in families where ties already exist, many obtain it in exchange for cash or grain. The existence of barter trade in the midst of a cash economy showed the contradictions that existed in the two groups in spite of the fact that one regarded itself “modern” and portrayed the other “traditional”. The hybridity of the trade shows that despite distinctions, the groups are interconnected in intricate ways.

One sees that to a very large extent, droughts enhance interaction between the two groups, but with mixed fortunes. Mr Palalei noted that the Maasai were not necessarily placed at an advantage after a bumper harvest in Ukambani since the Kamba got an alternative source of income and therefore were less willing to rent out their pastures to the Maasai, but, “when they (Kamba) have a lot of food, we also get it cheaply,” he notes. The Maasai have their advantages; “when schools are about to open,” notes he, “the Kamba are desperate to sell their cattle so we take advantage of this”. It is a complex symbiotic relationship with contradictions and antagonisms. When there are food shortages and fewer sources of income, some Kamba along the border resort to crossing over the ‘Maasai’ side, haul wood during the night, transport it to ‘their side’ where it is either burnt for charcoal or sold as firewood. The Maasai on the other hand may take their animals to Kamba grazing areas at night, including farms. The cattle herders often adopt a strategy where cattle are ‘let loose’ and made to look like their whereabouts is unknown, while the herders monitor the cattle’s movement from a distance as they devour crops in farms or pastures in ‘private’ parcels. By the time the Kamba find out, the cattle have already grazed as the Maasai herders emerge with all manner of apologies including feigning having lost them! This is cross-border grazing among the Kamba and the Maasai. Such incidences have been increasingly common (particularly in the last 20 years) that they are often ignored or are treated as ‘normal’ unless they are pushed to extremes (e.g. a time when trees on Maasai soil were cut with impunity and “in broad daylight” or when cattle are led into Kamba farms “deliberately” destroying crops). As antagonistic as these relations might look, still, each group knows the ‘limits’ beyond which optimal equilibrium would be disrupted.

5.2.2 “Maasai milk” and Kamba customers: Maasai women as ‘brokers’

As noted earlier, the Kamba and Maasai modes of subsistence are not a dichotomy. Yet, due to a fairly long history of specialisation and adopting varying land tenure systems, one cannot deny the fact that the production of milk is dominated by the Maasai. Whereas most Kamba today have to rely on goat milk for tea and the children, the Maasai, on average, have a lot of cow milk that has over time been commoditised to generate income. So whereas, there are Kamba who are self sufficient in milk production and others who simply do without it, just like there are Maasai who have neither cattle nor goats, what is of interest here is the flow of this commodity from one group to the other and to find out how this commoditisation impacts on interethnic relations (e.g. whether it leads to consolidation of relations between the Kamba and the Maasai: See Mwende’s story in chapter four).

At one time, I spent three days with a Maasai family. They live about 8 kilometres from Simba trading centre. I would like to present the story of one of the family's three wives. Nkata and her two co-wives and with the assistance of their four daughters were milking a total of 18 cows and producing about 35 litres of milk. The cows could have produced more milk if they were all "improved" breeds or hybrids (e.g. Sahiwal). The family was selling about 30 litres and the rest was for family use. The commoditisation of milk has meant that less and less milk is available for domestic use. The milk trade however had motivated the women to tend cows particularly by ensuring that they have enough pasture and are taken to the watering areas every day (which also translates into more workload). But by so doing, Maasai women in general are involving themselves not just in looking after cattle but in the control and appropriation of this resource. It is worth mentioning that among the pastoral Maasai, milk is normally a woman's domain. What is a bit striking is that despite the commoditisation of milk, Maasai men have generally shied away from seeking to control this resource.

It has been shown that money changes the social-cultural interactions of society and those involved (Simmel, 1978). It influences not only lifestyles and living conditions but interpersonal relations. Going back to Nkata's case, her husband said: "We cannot *touch* milk, that is degrading for a man...ahaa...how much do they make anyway, little money," implying that the men might not mind the money but would not want to 'bend low' by seeking to 'control' milk. Almost in agreement, a councillor noted: "To us (Maasai men), milk is not wealth, if the woman can earn a living and the men lose nothing, why not! after all, the men will even spare their money". A careful analysis however revealed that in most cases, once a woman began to generate some income, then the husband either covertly or deliberately abdicated or ignored certain financial responsibilities in the family. Nonetheless, the commoditisation of milk among the Maasai has not only shaped women's activities and propelled them to attain a sense of self determination, but also to act as 'brokers' in forging closer interethnic links in the process. It would also be good to point out that the Maasai men, whose wives were involved in the milk business, tended to be more concerned about the 'contacts' and the 'exposure' than the money generated. This 'concern' forced one man to make all the business contacts himself and would also occasionally deliver the milk.

The milk was retailing at Ksh 15 (EUR 0.2) per litre although the price was 'negotiable'. Kamba homesteads that were known to the Maasai could be given the milk at a 'friendly' price of as low as Ksh 10. In Nkata's case, she was getting a bigger share of the proceeds

because ‘some’ of the cows were hers.²²⁶ She was more literate than her co-wives and that perhaps explains why she had taken some leading role in the milk trade. When I asked her whether she would not cheat on her co-wives on the proceeds, she said that: “I wouldn’t do anything like that, mzee(husband) would kill me”. ‘Kill’ here basically means that she would be liable for some form of punishment. Mentioning of the husband to some extent suggested that he, and by extension other Maasai men, were not as disengaged in the milk trade as initially implied. About the milk trade, its commoditisation had been “a recent phenomenon.” And this development had not just been influenced by an increasingly market oriented economy or the need to raise monies to pay for school fees but other external factors as well. Suffice it to say that the collapse of a key state parastatal, Kenya Co-operative Creameries (KCC) in the 1990’s seems to have created a vacuum which boosted sales of unpacked whole milk country wide.²²⁷ The family started offering milk for sale in 1993. It was evident that some other Maasai families in the village had started earlier. It started on a barter scale basis between families, then to occasional payments in cash to a fairly sophisticated monetary economy. Prior to the 1990’s there was limited sale of ‘Maasai milk’ in restaurants/tea kiosks in the trading centres, particularly those along the border. Nkata explained: “the Kamba who run these businesses used to say that our milk is dirty”. I asked her why the tea kiosk and restaurant proprietors changed their attitude and she said that with time, they came to “learn more about the Maasai,” the Maasai women also transformed themselves into “business women”, learnt a bit of Swahili, had to be “cleaner”, put the milk in plastic containers (rather than traditional gourds), and the question of demand; a vacuum had been created after scarcity of packaged milk and finally, that the Kamba had found out that ‘Maasai milk’ “had no water like the one sold by the Kamba”.²²⁸ The Maasai therefore, it seemed, had won the trust of the Kamba businesspersons. I did accompany Nkata in her milk marketing ventures which involved transporting the milk from the homestead at about 6.00 hours using donkeys to the Nairobi-Mombasa road where she took a *matatu* (commuter taxi) to Kiboko, Makindu or Kibwezi. Occasionally, she would also take with her milk from “other women,” particularly her relatives to the markets. After delivering milk to one of the Kamba ‘customers’ in Kibwezi, I posed a number of questions:

²²⁶ Maasai women accumulate property, particularly cattle, although ideally, they are supposed to be a custodian of the animals allocated to them by their husbands; that is, hold them but bequeath them later to their sons.

²²⁷ Through accusations of corruption and debts, the co-operative had collapsed, owing dairy farmers (particularly in Central and Rift Valley provinces) millions of shillings. It was later privatised and renamed KCC 2000 but by then smaller packaging firms had emerged giving it stiff competition. The firms that took centre stage include; Mount Kenya, Delamere Dairies, Brookside, Tuzo, Meru Dairy Co-operative Union and Kitunda Dairy Co-operative Union.

²²⁸ She said that with fewer cattle, the Kamba who marketed milk added water to increase sales. This claim was not entirely implausible. To Nkata, Maasailand is a land of plenty while Ukambani is one of scarcity.

Q : How did you get this client?

A: *He was introduced to me by a neighbour, she could not supply anymore (meet the contractual obligations) after selling some of their animals and moving the others to Nguu (Makueni district).*

Q: Did you sign a contract?

A: *No it is just on mutual agreement. He doesn't even know where I come from (but not the ethnicity). I assured him that I will be supplying him with milk everyday and that if there was a problem, I would let him know.*

Q: Did he trust you?

A: *At first he didn't. He said that we are very unreliable but with time he has come to trust me.*

Q: Did he give you any conditions?

A: *Yes. He said that I should be coming here very early. If I don't make it by 10 a. m., then I take the milk to any other market or hotel (tea kiosk, restaurant). He also said that the milk should be put in clean containers and I should not add water.*

Apart from these demands, the Maasai seemed happy that the Kamba ‘accepted’ their milk. Of course, the ‘rejection’ of Maasai milk and the notion that it was dirty, is definitely a new phenomenon which took root during the differential transformation witnessed during the colonial period. Anyhow, this change of attitude towards Maasai milk had created new arenas of interaction, communication, negotiation and deliberation that were not available before. As the Maasai proudly say that the Kamba tea kiosks and also families “depend on our milk” they also acknowledge that, to quote Nkata, who put in a very succinct way: “When they (Kamba) accept our milk, they also accept us.” (Simba, 05/01/2000). The money earned from the milk also enhances cross-ethnic interaction since it is used to buy grains, vegetables and fruits, and even to offset fees balances in schools.

5.2.3 “Kamba shops” and Maasai customers

To understand interethnic property relations, it was imperative to establish who owns what, where and of what significance were such property in terms of cross-ethnic interaction and coexistence. Although this was partly discussed in chapter four, I would like to revisit the subject from another dimension.

The heading of this subchapter should not be construed to mean that the Maasai have no stake in local businesses. For most of them though, the ‘market’ is a place where exchange between them and ‘strangers’ takes place. Nevertheless, owning shops, food kiosks (locally called *hoteli*), cereal stores, bars and butcheries was regarded highly among the two groups. Even among the Maasai, the importance placed on owning cattle is gradually being eclipsed by

other more ‘sustainable’ investments like land, commercial plots, food stores and buildings in trading centres. Just walking around the centres, not just along the border but also many inside Maasailand, the pattern was stark: most businesses were in the hands of non-Maasai groups (e.g. Kamba and Kikuyu). In quite a number of cases however, the buildings would be owned by the Maasai and few would be willing to sell them.

Whereas Barth tells us that neighbouring groups may occupy reciprocal and therefore different niches and provide different goods and services for each other (1969:19), the case here is a little bit different. Owning shops in the Kamba-Maasai context has little to do with ‘different niches’ but rather appropriation of market opportunities as more and more Maasai rely on the market for the provision of basic necessities. It was also a case where Kamba and Kikuyu businesses, for instance, compete for Maasai customers (market) on the one hand, and their own groups on the other. While the Maasai never appeared to mind where they shopped, the Kamba and the Kikuyu would, for the simple reason that they had ‘alternatives.’ This preference for certain shops run by certain groups appeared to give some semblance of ethnic trade. All the same, this is one venture where the Kamba and the Maasai were actually not ‘competitors’ but rather complemented each other, albeit in an unequal relationship. Anyhow, the Maasai on the other hand ‘sustain’ most of the shop and hotel businesses in the town. A Kamba businessman notes that the Maasai, “for some reason shop a lot... they buy large quantities of maize, beans, sugar and tea.” He noted further that they had ‘eating out’ habits adding, “if it were not for them, we would not be in business...the Kamba want to eat here too but they have no money.” This was also reflected in the consumption of alcohol (beer) with a Kamba bar proprietor in Kiboko remarking that his business is basically sustained by Maasai patrons.

The question was, why didn’t the Maasai run some of these businesses? A Kamba (chair of Simba trading centre) explained: “Their minds are in cattle, they have no time to sit in a shop when they don’t know what is happening to their cattle.” This is fairly a simplistic explanation. The Maasai had their own explanations. Palalelei said, “we don’t care, they bring to us things that we need, if this ‘hotel’ was not here, where would we be eating now?”²²⁹ and then cleverly justified this ‘marginalisation’ by noting that “look, we have no discrimination, we shop in your shops and eat in your hotels.” He ignored the fact that except for a very small minority, the Maasai were not running retail, wholesale or food store businesses. But non-participation was fronted as a token of ethnic accommodation. Moreover, in Simba, a decision was made in the mid 1990’s to have kiosks erected just next to the “main road” to promote

²²⁹ I was having lunch with him in Kiboko trading centre.

“small scale businesspersons”. This particular initiative was aimed at propelling the Maasai into business. After no applications were received from members of the group, the Kamba were given a chance to apply. And again, this gesture of giving away what the Maasai rejected was conveniently used by Maasai leaders as a sign of goodwill and friendliness to the Kamba. Talking to the local Maasai councillor who personally had opted to rent out his premises to a Kamba, he noted: “Our people (Maasai) are very social people, I was running businesses here, but you see, these become chatting places...people come, take tea or eat, and then later say they will pay another day or just leave...you do not know what to do, some of them, you don’t see them again...others say that you are rich...I made many losses...now I have peace...they know that when they are dealing with the Wakamba or Kikuyu they have to pay” (Tauketi, Simba, 23/05/2000). In this case, the ‘foreigner’ becomes a scapegoat as Maasai traders avoid kin obligations and keep his name in good books. In any case, renting the premises to non-Maasai ensured a steady flow of income, while the landlord enjoyed the right to change tenants. Besides, most landlords, and other Maasai, also demand that other groups in their territory should “respect” them. The notion of “respect” is revisited later in the chapter. It is important to note here that in spite of the reasons behind renting the premises to ‘foreigners’ and the unpredictability of these transactions, the Maasai used these gestures as evidence of how accommodative they were to other groups.

Other Maasai businessmen had other challenges. One explained how difficult and sensitive it was in trying to recover some Ksh 3,800 worth of goods that had been taken on credit by his father-in-law. On the one hand, he feared to push the old man since he had not ‘cleared’ the bridewealth and he feared that this would come up if he “pushed too much.” He avoided the discussion and the old man also said nothing. The situation was saved by his brother-in-law (the wife’s brother) who works in Nairobi. In one of his visits to the countryside, he explained to him and he cleared the debt on behalf of his father.

From these two accounts, it appeared that even for those Maasai who were keen on business, the economy of affection (Hyden, 1983) where relatives and clan members would obtain credit or simply ‘eat’ and leave, made it impossible for their kin to excel in business and compete with the non-Maasai. But even the Kamba and Kikuyu businesses had to reckon with goods taken on credit or were forced to mix cash trade with barter since, the Maasai for instance, would offer a goat for a bale of maize flour or an agreed quantity of beans. To run business among the Maasai therefore, you had to run it ‘in their own terms.’ These ‘compromises’ often led to losses as some debts would not be cleared or a goat promised to be handed in “immediately” never came. In some cases, the Maasai would simply refuse to pay,

invoking their position as ‘hosts’. Losses incurred by the non-Maasai are in a way seen as compensation for their stay in Maasai territory. Some misunderstandings are caused by what a shopkeeper in Simba called “baseless trust” where the Maasai borrow goods on credit ‘to pay later’ even when they are not known to the shopkeeper and if they don’t get this credit, they mobilise other Maasai not to visit that shop. She wondered why the Maasai customers expected her to lend them goods without any form of security, including “at least knowing the person.” She noted that some borrow goods when they have brought their animals around only for a short period then move away not to be seen again. Because of their dressing, she continued, it was difficult to tell them apart making it a arduous task tracing the creditor. Otherwise, where the debtors were known, the “extreme cases” would be reported to the administration. A case in point is where a Maasai owed a Kamba businessperson goods worth Ksh 9,000 (EUR 113) in Sultan Hamud. Such incidences are brought before the local administration for arbitration. In such cases, Maasai elders also co-operate in tracing the creditor, whom they portray as “spoiling our good name”, and in payment of the money owed. In the Kamba-Maasai business transactions, there were other technicalities. Most of the hiring contracts of business premises in Sultan Hamud, Emali and Simba were sealed verbally. Kamba and Kikuyu businesspersons lamented that when the Maasai landlord wanted to raise the rent, he arbitrarily proposed a figure taking the tenant by surprise. However, it appeared that in such cases, the non-Maasai were their worst enemies, as another Kamba or Kikuyu would be behind the hike aiming to take over the premise.

Rents depended on the nature of business, its location, the preference of the owner including ‘ethnic’ considerations and rarely on the size of the premise. Whereas sale of commercial plots or buildings by the Maasai would give preference to other Maasai, renting of business outlets ‘excluded’ the Maasai. The explanation given by the Maasai was that their kin would be less reliable in the payment of rent and two, the business they were to run would most likely flop. A number of factors therefore had made the Maasai appear as if they were not bothered by ‘external dominance’.²³⁰ Rates, at least in Simba, were as follows (Ksh per month): Shops went for 1,000, butcheries for 700, *hotelis* (food business) for 400 while rooms in the storey buildings fetched 2,000. Apart from ethnic affiliation, the amount of rent charged is also determined by the mere assessment of one’s ability to pay. Because of the lucrative meat business, butchery space attracts a higher charge than a *hoteli* even where the latter occupied more space.

²³⁰ Trade largely fell outside what the Maasai were concerned about most, namely cattle and grazing areas. calling “respect”.

When all is said and done however, there are some businesses that are entirely ‘Maasai’, particularly those involving their own ‘traditional’ clothing. Usually handled by Maasai women, they travel to Loitokitok or Taveta and Namanga where they buy the clothes from middlemen/women who obtain them from Tanzania. These garments are then sold in the open air markets in Sultan Hamud and Emali. What is more, Maasai women sell small packets of tea, sugar and milk to an entirely Maasai clientele, as well as featuring in the famous *soko ya ng’ombe* (cattle market)²³¹ in Emali selling tea and *mandazi* (buns).

To conclude this section, it is evident that owning shops or running businesses does not accord the Kamba any obvious advantages over the Maasai. It is, as shown, a complex pattern where ‘weaknesses’ are turned into strengths, modalities are constantly revised, property relations are situational, unpredictable but ‘stable’.

5.2.4 Housing transactions: Technology transfer?

Despite the fact that there were ‘clear’ distinctions in the way the two groups construct their dwelling structures in the olden days, overtime, there has been imitations, overlaps and deployment of external labour. Historically, Kamba and Maasai houses varied in shape, size, construction, materials, partition, who constructed them, their permanence and organisation. In both cases, the construction would begin with the erection of a wooden structure. But, whereas the Maasai would fill in the structure with mud and cow dug, the Kamba used grass. At some point, the Kamba are believed to have borrowed the use of clay (mud) from the Maasai. This changed the ‘traditional’ Kamba house to be mud-walled with a grass-thatched roof. Normally, Kamba houses used to be circular in design with a central pole holding up the roof. This pole was also used to hang things like bows and quivers. Though now associated more with poverty rather than an aspect of cultural heritage, these structures can be seen in various parts of Ukambani. The colonial period saw the adoption of ‘western’ designs. Ndolo talks about Kamba who worked in urban centres during the British rule coming back home and building houses similar to those “where the Europeans lived” (1989: 121).

It is also crucial to state that contrary to popular belief that the Maasai are keen to retain their traditional structures, what one sees in Maasailand is a revolution in housing. In fact, in his study, Holland had found out that in a sample of 47 Maasai women, only 2 preferred to live in traditional Maasai houses while the rest (45) wanted to live in houses with corrugated iron roofs (1996: 269). A possible explanation is that traditional house construction is women’s

²³¹ The largest in Kajiado district, the Emali cattle market (*soko ya ng’ombe*), brings together cattle traders from as far as Kitengela, Nairobi and Mombasa. It is not only a major source of income for many Maasai and Kamba cattle traders but an arena of social intercourse. Held every Thursday, it is a place where Maasai cattle breeds and Kamba ones change hands; those interested in trading in goats go to Sultan Hamud on Fridays.

responsibility, including regular maintenance. So adoption of other housing models free women from this enormous responsibility.

While some Maasai have adopted “Kamba houses,” this was generally not seen as ‘technology transfer’ but simply as a form of exchange. Over the years, the Kamba circular houses have been superseded by rectangular ones, and these are the ones the Maasai adopt. According to Palalelei, who had some of the “Kamba houses” in his homestead (see photo below), it was a question of pragmatism. He argued that “you (Kamba) have some *good* things, we also have some *good* things, that is how things are”. Actually, he did not need to be defensive, for part of this ‘technology’ he had ‘imported’ was originally Maasai. Nevertheless, he said that the “Kamba houses” were bigger and it was relieving to enter into the house “upright”.²³² Although it proved difficult to ascertain exactly when this adoption process could have taken root, it was established that it was indeed a ‘recent’ phenomenon that appeared to have gained currency among the Kaputiei Maasai in the 1950’s. It appeared that unlike among the Kamba, having a traditional house among the Maasai was not necessarily a reflection of income. Having a ‘modern house’ had more to do with ‘exposure’, occupation and level of education. Palalelei noted that there were many Maasai who would neither have the ‘Kamba houses’ nor “step inside.” During the construction process, he was despised by some of his age-mates and his first wife. His wife had sarcastically asked him why he had paid for the construction of the houses while Maasai women did the same work without any monetary compensation. His argument was that the wife should have been “grateful” that she had been “relieved” of such trouble, adding: “Our huts need to be repaired all the time...the cow dug keeps on peeling ...when it rains, the cow dug and mud roof is soaked very quickly...during El Nino²³³, most Maasai had no place to hide”.²³⁴

Contrary to ‘traditional’ Kamba practices, most of these houses had been wholly constructed and even thatched by Kamba men. Normally, thatching of houses among the Kamba is women’s work, including the harvesting of the grass. The men cut the wood logs, dig the holes that hold the logs firmly on the ground, fix the roof and usually apply mud to the walls. In this particular case, the Kamba men appear to have been motivated by the monetary gains, forcing them to sideline their women.²³⁵ They would negotiate for an average of Ksh 5,000

²³² One has to bend to enter a ‘traditional’ Maasai dwelling.

²³³ In reference to the unprecedented heavy El Nino rains that hit parts of East Africa in the 1997/1998 season.

²³⁴ During the rainy season (nowadays) most Maasai homesteads use canvas and plastic materials to cover the roofs.

²³⁵ Although Kamba women may claim to be more influential in their homesteads compared to their Maasai counterparts, on matters of income opportunities, men often sideline them. Men will draw water, if it is for sale and not for the homestead. A woman complained that when they bought an oxen-drawn cart, she thought that her agony of carrying water gourds on her back was put to rest only for her husband to use it specifically for ferrying

(EUR 65) for their skill and labour. It was also surmised that the Kamba feared exposing their women to Maasai men who could court them. Another explanation was that being a good opportunity for the two groups to interact, Kamba men wanted to be in charge of this important gesture.



Plate 4: Palalelei's homestead (Kiboko group ranch). Note the mix between the 'traditional' Maasai hut in the foreground and the two grass-thatched "Kamba houses".

Let me turn to other housing structures. This is what one would call 'modern' ones; permanent structures where bricks, concrete blocks or stones are used in the construction of walls by highly skilled masons, and roofed with iron sheets or tiles. The more 'progressive' Maasai are increasingly erecting such structures. How do the Kamba come in? Most of the masons undertaking such jobs are usually non-Maasai. And because Kikuyu masons were said to be "expensive" and "exploitative", the Kamba were preferred.²³⁶ Then there was 'trust' and 'honesty'. A Maasai whose stone house near Sultan Hamud had been constructed by Kikuyu artisans complained of "theft of cement and some other construction materials..." As if that was not enough, he continued, "that house you are seeing there (pointing to a house about 3 kilometres away); the owner lost a lot of things to some Kikuyu ..they even breached the

water to the residents in Emali at a fee. She said that "the only thing they (men) are shy to do is to sell firewood". Actually, some did.

²³⁶ The Kamba are stereotyped as not being ambitious.

contract and demanded more money in the course of the construction...you can't trust them" (Tuteti, Kibini, 15/08/2000). Apart from the accusations about theft, charging more money in the course of the construction appeared to be legitimate as the cost of materials keep on escalating. The Kikuyu masons being referred to here were also found to be a bit more 'professional' and they would charge their labour as per the 'market rates'.

Apart from the two sets of houses above, there were also some medium level or "improved" houses. These would be mud walled, then plastered with cement and have a corrugated iron sheets roof. As expected these ones were cheaper to construct and the Kamba 'masons' hired for the job were not necessarily trained but those who 'hands on' experience. Labour charges for two-roomed house would be in the region of Ksh 20,000 (EUR 260). In most of the cases, the Kamba masons would have a 'Maasai rate' (usually higher) and a 'Kamba rate'. One of them told me that this was not aimed at exploiting the Maasai but that "the Maasai just pay, they don't complain". It was established that on average, a Maasai seeking to have his house 'improved' will have, ordinarily, a lot more money at his disposal than a Kamba opting to do the same.

5.2.5 Labour relations: Kamba herders among the Maasai

In this particular subsection, I seek to illustrate how the engagement of Kamba labour in Maasailand shapes relations between the two groups. Although the Kamba may have claimed 'modernity' status and being Maasai models, many Kamba men had been hired by the Maasai as cattle herders and farm labourers. This was rarely the other way round. The movement of unskilled labour from Ukambani to *Umasai* (Maasailand) is a question of relative of poverty, population growth and the modes of subsistence; with cattle keeping showing more resilience as successive crop failures, particularly in the last 20 years, destabilised the Kamba farming economy. This has impacted on school attendance, with parents pulling out their children from school because they could not afford the fees charged. Some of these drop-outs choose or are encouraged by their parents to move away from home in search of 'better' opportunities. Depending on one's level of education and family networks, migration to the cities is not an option for some. This is how some youths (usually male) end up in Maasai territory. In some cases, those recruited to do menial jobs may have the option of being naturalised and becoming 'Maasai'. A case in point is Mbuani ole Kasimu,²³⁷ a herdsman in Murneshi sub-location, Kenyewa location, Kajiado. Starting as a herdsboy in the mid 1980's, he was adopted by the Maasai family where he worked and treated like a child of the home. By the

²³⁷ 'Mbuani', and 'Kasimu' are Kamba names while 'ole' is Maa for 'son of', a prefix that precedes the father's name and used after circumcision. At least in the naming, 'ole' was the pointer that he was 'Maasai'.

time of this study, his payments were even irregular and were given now as rewards rather than wages. He had undergone various rites of passage like circumcision (initiation into *murranhood*) and junior elder after taking up a Maasai wife. His ‘father’ even paid for the bridewealth.

In other cases however, like Mutua, who seek herding jobs when they are much older, tend to resist assimilation preferring to maintain ‘worker-employer’ relations. In any case, the Maasai families are also less keen on adopting circumcised boys. I would like to discuss the case of Mutua in some detail since it is more typical.

Mr Mutua, who comes from Masumba in Nguu division (Makueni) was born in 1975 and joined school in 1982. He dropped out in 1991 when, in Form 2, his father “refused” to pay school fees. He explained that his father had neglected his mother and her siblings after marrying a second wife in 1980. Although his father had a shop, traded in livestock as well as cereals, Mutua and his sister had to drop out of school for apparent lack of school fees. However, their step brothers and sisters were not affected. The mother’s attempt to obtain assistance from her brother (Mutua’s maternal uncle) whom Mutua said was “very rich” failed as he said that Mutua’s father was capable of raising the fees. His mother had six children while the step mother had seven. He is the third born in his family and was 5 when his father took a second wife in 1980.

After Mutua dropped out of school, he stayed home doing odd jobs, helping in the farm, hanging around in the trading centre where he did menial jobs like loading or unloading lorries and assisting masons in the construction activities. He resisted the idea of going to Nairobi or Mombasa since he felt that he was not skilled enough to make a living.

In 1995, he was lured by his friend to join him in Maasailand. He had never imagined that he could work in a Maasai homestead as a cattle herder, he asserted. His explanation was that they had never appeared to him as potential employers, taking them as poorer than the Kamba and that “because the boys don’t go to school, I thought there would be no need of external (household) labour.”²³⁸

I had met Mutua in January 2000 near Mashuru. He was on the roadside looking after a big herd of cattle. He said that the cattle were about 65 “excluding heifers which graze near home.” He started with a salary of Ksh 2,000 and was being paid Ksh 2,500 (EUR 33) per month when I met him. Out of this, he sends Ksh 500 to his mother, and spends the rest on his clothes, cigarettes and saves about Ksh 200 which he used to buy goats. He claimed that Kamba families “even those that are rich” would not have paid him that kind of money, the

²³⁸ A common Kamba stereotype of the Maasai.

claim that he would not have taken up such a job “near home” notwithstanding. I asked him a few questions regarding these claims.

Q: Why do you say that a Kamba could not pay you that kind of money?

A: *The Kamba are just mean and it is even worse if they knew you before...they don't want you to make any money...they even make sure that they pay you in bits so that you end up saving nothing* (cf. chapter seven).

Q: How about the Maasai?

A: *They are very good employers...they have no problem with money and they are proud so they wouldn't want to argue over amounts like Ksh 2,500.*

Staying with the Maasai had not led to the deconstruction Kamba-Maasai stereotypes. Mutua told me that the Maasai were “friendly” but “ignorant” arguing that was the reason why they were paying herders “a lot of money.” He also thought that they could have been trying to “show off” by paying a little bit more. He was even telling me that they do not send children to school,²³⁹ but he was ‘positive’ on other issues, arguing that the Maasai cattle economy was a better land-use practice than crop farming in the harsh climatic conditions. He was so pleased with the Maasai that he ‘assisted’ two other young men from his village to get herding jobs among the Maasai.

Mutua sees the Maasai as a cushion for the Kamba in terms of farming land, “employment opportunities” and milk. He did not think that the Kamba were reciprocating ‘enough’. But the Maasai who had Kamba herders or farm labourers tended to present it like a ‘favour;’ that all they did was to ‘help’ their neighbours. The Kamba workers however said they were doing jobs that the Maasai ‘could’ not do or did not want to do. The Kamba depiction of the Maasai as people of lower status makes this cross-ethnic labour engagements different from the Hutu-Tutsi relationship where “lower status” Hutu looked after Tutsi cows (Peil and Oyeneye, 1998: 58). And the Kamba were not just herding. Other engagements included being recruited by Maasai cattle traders as *burunkuai* (“transporters” or “escorts”), who accompany animals from one market to the next at an agreed fee.

Apart from Kamba men who take up jobs in Maasai homesteads, there were also Kamba working in ‘formal’ institutions that were run by Maasai. I would like to present a case of a Kamba woman employed by a Maasai chief as his clerk. Being near the border and serving both Maasai and Kamba populations, this was a deliberate move to symbolise what the chief called “good neighbourliness”. It should be seen as a concession or sacrifice to boost relations for the move had been resisted by Maasai elders on two grounds: That it was a woman, and

²³⁹ As we were talking, some Maasai children were passing by in school uniform.

two, that she was Kamba. The older Maasai did not like the idea of going to their chief and having to speak Swahili “at home, as if we are in Nairobi”, as one of them put it. Instead of the chief justifying his position by telling the elders that he had done this to improve interethnic relations, he told them that Maasai men did not want to do clerical jobs and Maasai women did not meet the educational qualifications. Having been educated in Ukambani, the youthful chief of Kenyewa location had wanted to reach out to the Kamba. It was easier, he noted, for Maasai men to deal with a woman from another ethnic group than one from their group. He noted: “They know that in other places, women work in offices”. The Maasai chief had to ‘annoy’ some of his people to do what he said was for “their own good”. He insisted that it was to the “benefit” of the Maasai to make the Kamba feel at home in Simba (where his office is based) than “treat them like aliens”.

5.2.6 “Kamba schools” and “Maasai pupils”: A symbiotic relationship

Disparities in the distribution of educational facilities had created what superficially looked like a dependant relationship. A closer look revealed a complex form of exchange. Owing to earlier missionary activity and colonial support, Ukambani has some of the oldest formal schools in Kenya. Entry of Christian missionaries into Maasailand had been hindered not by Maasai resistance but the general colonial hostility and indifference to development in Maasailand. A former history lecturer at the University of Nairobi, B.K. ole Kantai, notes that until 1952, there was only one intermediate school in the entire Maasailand including Samburu (Sankan, 1971: xxviii). A 1959 map (below) showing the distribution of educational facilities in Kenya is a clear testimony of how Maasai districts of Kajiado and Narok had been marginalised by the colonial administration. Although much has been done to bridge the gap after independence, the discrepancies are still stark. This has translated into certain readjustments where some Maasai pupils have to attend school outside their home districts. In this regard, boarding schools in particular have been more convenient. Some of the Maasai parents keen on schooling are often concerned about the demotivating environment in the Maasai villages where still a big number of children are not send to school even where the facilities are available in the neighbourhood. Moreover, transhumance is another limiting factor.

Along the Makueni-Kajiado border, one of the boarding primary schools where Maasai send their children is called Mwailu Academy. Although actual ‘ethnic’ statistics were unavailable as this was said to be a “sensitive matter”, I was told that about 20% of the pupils in the school were Maasai. One of the reasons why the matter was regarded sensitive was that in recent times, the distribution of ‘crucial’ facilities regionally has assumed enormous political

importance in Kenya. Promises of roads, educational facilities and hospitals have become major tools around which ethnic groups are mobilised. Although the unequal distribution of schooling facilities between Ukambani and Maasailand is often taken as the continuation of the colonial lopsided policies, there are certain realities in Maasailand that would limit the setting up of many schools. Since the population is scattered, building schools within reasonable distance where pupils can commute on foot has been problematic. Besides, since the 1980's much of the responsibility of building schools has been transferred to 'local communities,' with the state assisting with staffing. And the Maasai have done a lot in this regard too as their district development plans indicate. Much of political activity in Maasailand has revolved around building of schools as the groups also seeks other 'opportunities' elsewhere.

Interviews with the school headmaster revealed that schools were not only a means of exchange but also arenas where ethnic differences and depictions are deconstructed as both Maasai and Kamba pupils interact in class and share dormitories. The parents meet too during parents' days while the teaching staff occasionally has one or two Maasai teachers. But how is a school a form of exchange? Ethnic groups in Kenya have been socialised to claim that schools in their territory 'belong' to them irrespective of whether these facilities have been funded by the state or non-governmental organisations. Admitting Maasai children in Mwailu therefore is seen as a 'favour' or a gesture of 'good will' and as reciprocation of past or future 'favours.' Seen from this dimension, the Kamba would have a lot to 'thank' the 'Maasai' for, considering the thousands of Kamba residing in Maasailand. Nevertheless, whether in reference to primary schools or those Maasai attending secondary schools in schools in Ngoto, Enguli, Thome Andu, Kikuumini and Kasikeu in Makueni district,²⁴⁰ the Maasai claimed they paid their fees more promptly than the Kamba, an assertion upheld by the school authorities. On the basis of this claim, and on the grounds that education was not "free", the Maasai argued that they "sustain" some of these schools and that the Kamba were "happy" to admit Maasai children since that guaranteed the flow of funds. Although this had been used to justify the hypothesis that the Maasai were 'richer' than the Kamba, the explanation rather was that those Maasai who send their children to school tended to be of a higher social and economic status while for the Kamba sending children to school was a 'must' irrespective of ones level of income.

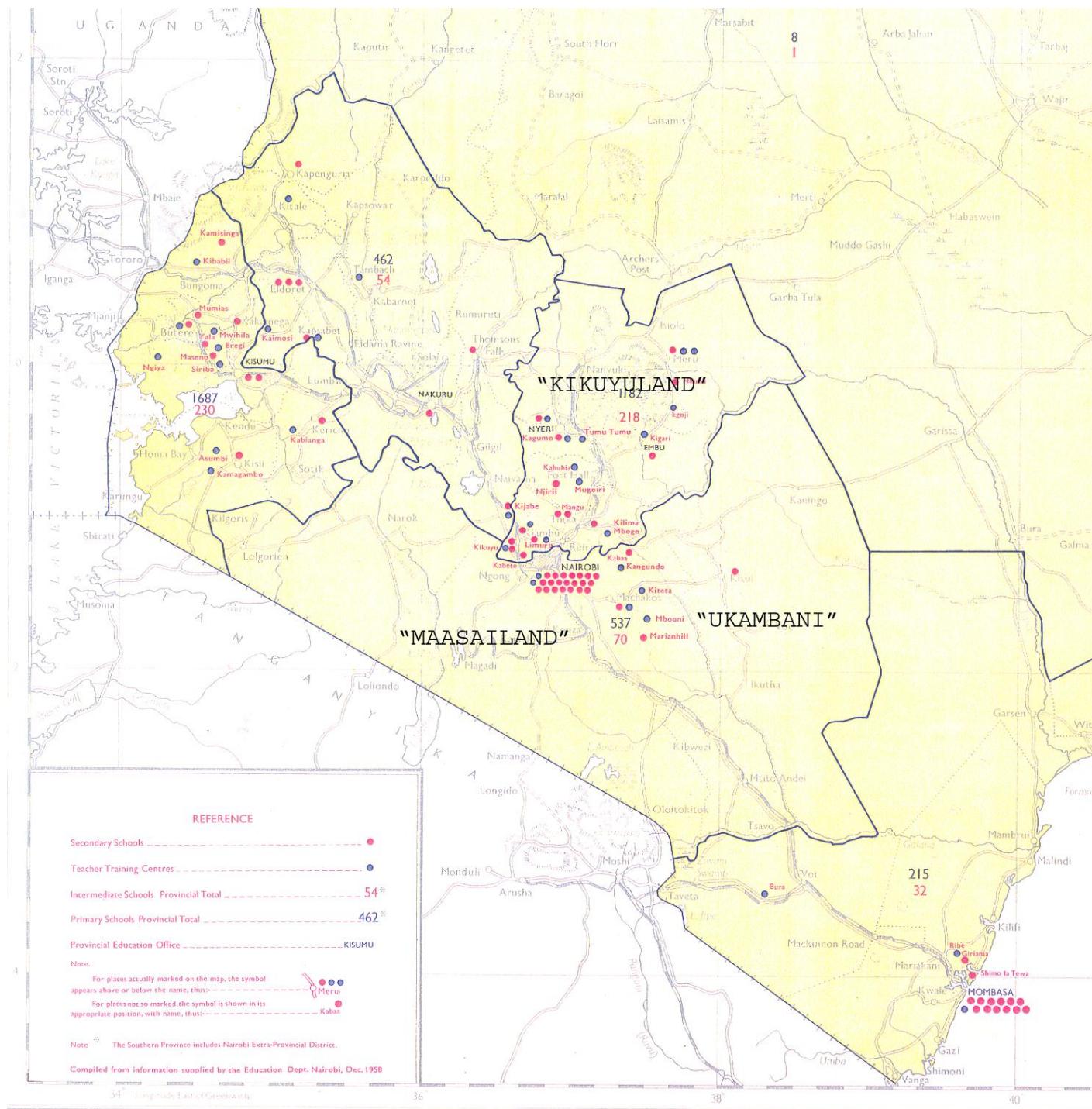
After all the ethnic talk and jostling, the Maasai recognise the fact that they have fewer schools in their territory, forcing them to seek opportunities elsewhere. Cross-border

²⁴⁰ The Kamba likewise also seek enrollment in 'Maasai schools' e.g. in Mashuru and Selenkei.

schooling overtime has made the so-called Kamba schools equally depended on the flow of Maasai children which augmented school finances. The need for interdependence had made both groups to ignore state guidelines regarding the number of pupils within a certain district that may be admitted to schools in another district.

Below is a map showing the distribution of educational facilities between Maasailand and Ukambani in 1959.

Map 3: Distribution of educational facilities between Ukambani and Maasailand in 1959



Source: Kenya Atlas, 1959 (Kenya National Archives). The lack of educational facilities in Maasailand in comparison with other surrounding areas is glaring.

5.2.7 Kamba wood carvers and ‘selling of the Maasai’

If this is a form of exchange, then it is an intricate one. As a tourist destination, Kenya is known internationally not only for its sunny tropical beaches and den of wildlife but also home to elegant works of wood depicting the rich variety of wildlife and cultural heritage. Most of these works can be credited to an old wood carving tradition of the Kamba. One of the striking aspects of this study was I was dealing with a group famed worldwide for its culture and another, six times more numerous but hardly known outside of East Africa although its carvings are to be found on many shelves around the globe.²⁴¹ But in a mix of fortunes, the Kamba have appropriated the Maasai image. Perhaps only second to the Makonde of Tanzania in the East African region, at some point during the colonial period, the Kamba realised that foreign tourists in particular were interested in the Maasai ‘image’. Otherwise, traditional Kamba wood carvers worked on items needed for domestic use e.g. mortars and pestles, wooden ladles and spoons and three-legged stools. These have long been eclipsed by the ‘dictates of the market.’ Many of the curio shops in Kenya and abroad are full of carvings of Maasai peoples depicting their way of dress, use of ornaments and traditional weaponry like shields, knives and clubs. The Maasai-related carvings are probably only rivalled by the carvings of wild animals. Forster et al. note this widespread use of Maasai images in the promotion of tourism where, they are not only part of the scenery but one of the key symbols of tourism in East Africa (2000: 144).

Carvings symbolising Maasai peoples and heritage and Kenyan wildlife make sense in tourism and the wood carvers have won praise for showing the world ‘what the country has to offer’. But the whole issue of depicting the Maasai as a tourist attraction draws mixed reactions from various quarters. A Maasai respondent (teacher) protested: “We make these people come here but we don’t gain in any way, we don’t own the hotels where they sleep nor are our people even employed there”. On Kamba carvings, he noted: “Kamba wood carvers make money out of our rich culture...they take advantage of us...but we don’t mind because through these carvings the Maasai are known all over the world. In fact, out there, people don’t even know that it is not the Maasai who do the carvings”. Although he complained about the ‘exploitation’ of the Maasai in the tourism industry, his consolation was that at least what the Kamba were doing promoted Maasai image globally.

²⁴¹ Because of their fame, many people I have talked to in Germany usually assume that the Maasai must be one of Kenya’s largest groups.

The Kamba trade in wood carvings has for many decades been done on a global scale. As early as the 1950's, the Kamba were organising trade in carvings to distant places like Britain and the United States. Commenting on the fame of Kamba wood carvings in East Africa, Adamson (1967: 237) noted that "they are also exported, and I have found them in curio shops in London, Stockholm, and New York." She also took note of the group's skill in stone and iron crafts.

One might ask, where the subtitle 'selling Maasai' was derived. It was midday in July 2000 when, seated outside a filling station in Kiboko, a Kamba wood carver and a curio shop owner dashed from his shop just opposite the station heading towards a *Pollman*'s vehicle carrying nine tourists en route to Mombasa. He was shouting "buy Masai, buy Masai." He made one or two sales. I invited him to have a soft drink and then sought some clarifications. I asked him why he invoked the name "Masai" when marketing his products and he told me: "You see, I don't know why...but *wazungu* (Whites) like Masai. Anyway, they have maintained their culture. I admire them too although I feel they should change...they are being left behind by the rest of the country." Well, at least Muli (his name) knew that "Masai culture" was good for his business.

Muli told me how he deployed the services of a Maasai at one time to sell the products on his behalf. All of a sudden, he noted, the sales went up. And this is the same strategy adopted by some Kamba traders off University Way in Nairobi, where you find 'Maasai' selling typically Kamba carvings. Let me expound why the Maasai are contracted to act as 'middlemen'?²⁴² There are a number of reasons; one, the Kamba, like many other Kenyan groups, know that the Maasai 'can get away' with a number of things including the sale of bows, arrows and swords,²⁴³ and two, many foreign tourists are attracted to carvings or curios being sold by 'traditional' groups. Muli put it this way, "the Masai and the wares match." This 'matching' is not just from the cultural aspect but also the fact that buying the products from Maasai in their traditional regalia makes the buyers feel they are engaging in some 'fair trade' where the money goes 'directly' to the 'producer.' Tourists appeared to consider wares sold by the Maasai as more authentic, and 'coming from the right source.' Amid laughter, noted Muli: "Asungu"²⁴⁴ keep on asking whether we are Masai, sometimes we just lie and tell them ja!"

Although these 'joint' partnerships still favour the 'contractors,' most of the Maasai I talked to tended to focus on the 'positive' side of the trade saying that the Kamba were "assisting"

²⁴² The Maasai do have their own wares too which they market directly. These include; ornaments, bangles, decorated belts and key holders, the Maasai sword, hide whips, clubs and walking sticks.

²⁴³ The law might prohibit the hawking of 'weapons' but the practice is that the Maasai freely sell them in towns without any police intervention. Others doing the same but not looking 'Maasai' risk arrest.

²⁴⁴ *Asungu* in Kikamba and *Wazungu* in Swahili, mean "Whites".

them to promote their culture in Kenya and beyond. Sitonik (the teacher) was generally unhappy with the whole exercise but he noted that what the Kamba had been doing is “like biting without hurting...they make their money but we (Maasai) also gain.” A closer assessment showed that through this exercise, both groups were portrayed as having sustained their traditions. A carving of a Maasai expresses one of the world’s striking cultures while the fine piece of sculpture depicts a long cherished tradition of another group. An exercise that gives one group fame and the other a means of livelihood represents an intricate reciprocal relationship. But if the Kamba are ‘assisting’ the Maasai in the promotion of their heritage, then this is only by default, for what the carvers are doing is simply to produce what sells.

5.3 Conclusion

This chapter sought to present the Kamba and the Maasai as groups that engage in mutual interaction and exchange. The chapter shows how interethnic coexistence is nurtured. It is an outline of the preconditions for coexistence. One of the most critical aspects that emerges is that coexistence is a complementary process. I shall expound on this by looking at the ecological, economic and social aspects. For ecological reasons and specialisation in different modes of subsistence, the Kamba and the Maasai have strong networks of exchange through which the Maasai provide cattle and their products while the Kamba provide agricultural products like maize, beans and peas. In ecological theory, it is noted that coexistence is enhanced when two species differ in the exploitation of resources (Pontin, 1982; see also Barth, 1969). Although the idea here is that this improves stability since the species in question reduce the frequency of “meetings”, specialising in different modes also acts as a basis for mutual exchange. Closely related to the ecological factor is vulnerability. Because both groups inhabit a semi-arid zone, drought enhances interdependence as the Maasai move their cattle to Ukambani in search of pastures while the Kamba go to Maasailand to hire farms (those near springs) or to haul wood for charcoal and firewood.

Economically, relations of interdependence revolve around Kamba businesspersons and Maasai customers. This is a relationship that has developed through regional variations in the integration to the market economy. Ukambani having had an early start in comparison to Maasailand, the Kamba have over the years exploited the business opportunities among the Maasai. This appropriation of the Maasai has extended to the tourism industry where the Kamba use the Maasai image to market their wood carvings. But as I have pointed out, the Maasai have their stake in business too, particularly in cattle trade or constructing buildings which they lease to the Kamba retailers. Moreover, the commoditisation of Maasai milk has

shaped Kamba-Maasai relations by promoting closer ties and a rare form of exchange between the Maasai suppliers and the Kamba clients.

Socially, the Kamba and the Maasai exchanges take various forms. On the one hand, the shortage of schools in Maasailand has created a situation where Maasai pupils seek schooling opportunities in Ukambani. In addition, many Kamba teachers are deployed to work in schools in Maasailand. Besides, the interdependence created through education, there has also been adoption of “Kamba houses” among the Maasai as well as the deployment of Kamba labour in herding cattle and in farms among Maasai who practice crop farming.

I would like to mention something about common territory. The kinds of exchanges discussed in this chapter take place within a given physical space. And this is perhaps what differentiates ‘coexistence’ from ‘relations’. Coexistence seems to exemplify a relationship with intensity of exchanges and proximity, aspects that may not be prerequisites among groups that simply ‘relate’. With regard to the Kamba and the Maasai, it is important to note that although they have independent territories, the boundaries have remained porous, making exchanges possible. But the most important aspect about their co-residence and interdependence are the distinctions and diversity they exhibit, since, common territory can also translate into assimilation, imitations and sameness, making exchange and coexistence difficult to discern. On the other hand, similarities between two ethnic groups can undermine coexistence as this may weaken the basis for exchange and heighten competition for similar resources. However, the aspect of distinctiveness should not be overemphasised, since groups can be very flexible. Although strangers and enemies can also engage in mutual transactions, there is usually some basis for understanding or commonality among groups that depend on each other.

Finally, I would like to comment about the relationship between ‘complementarity’ and ‘interdependence’. From the discussion in this chapter, I would conclude that complementarity (a system of mutual exchange) is a milder form of ‘interdependence’ (having to rely on others to survive). In other words, while ‘complementing’ each other may be at a superficial level, ‘interdependence’ signifies intensity of exchange and indispensability. I would also like to note that complementarity, interdependence and competition go hand in hand but the latter is discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER SIX: ETHNIC CONFLICT AS PART OF COEXISTENCE

Having looked at complementarity and interdependence between the Kamba and the Maasai in chapter five, I will examine another pertinent dimension of their relationship in this chapter. From an empirical standpoint, the Kamba-Maasai discussion would be incomplete without looking at what the two groups are mainly stereotyped for: Hatred and conflict. Conflict is associated with struggles, strife, collision or the use of incompatible means to a certain goal (Horowitz, 1985: 95). There has been a discourse that looks at ethnic conflicts, particularly overt struggles, as falling outside of what is defined as interethnic coexistence (see Kriesberg, 1998). Others have also seen incompatibilities as “failure of coexistence” (Korbel, 1959), while some argue that coexistence has “limits” (e.g. Torstrick, 2000). The kind of approach I adopt here looks at antagonism, ethnic tensions and conflict as integral parts of the coexistence process. The functionalist and structural approach to conflict become fairly relevant here (see Kuper, 1993).

However, I am not suggesting that interethnic coexistence cannot “fail”, but these would be exceptional cases of extreme social turmoil and disorder, leading to a total breakdown of existing forms of exchange and sharing.²⁴⁵ My argument here is that among ethnic groups that share territory and resources, antagonism becomes part of everyday experience as they compete for the said resources, territorial boundaries and for ethnic supremacy. The competition for resources therefore takes the centre stage, adopting an approach that does not see ethnic conflict as primordial or essentialist. However, although group members can hold multiple and cross-cutting identities and interests, it will also be evident that cultural differences, particularly through politicisation, come into play as groups compete for resources.

This chapter takes the reader through the issues around which the Kamba-Maasai conflict revolve. But, as a way of introduction, I begin by briefly examining the Kenyan scene in general, and then proceed to look at Kamba-Maasai ethnic tensions and conflicts. In this regard, I will examine territorial boundaries and coveted resources like farmland, grazing areas, water, cattle and trading centres. The complexity of interethnic coexistence is exemplified by the fact that the resources that shape the groups’ interdependence and harmony (as indicated in chapter five), are more or less the same ones that the groups fight over. Besides discussing how ethnic conflict comes about, I will also discuss how the conflicts are resolved as well as legitimised.

²⁴⁵ An example would be the ethnic tensions and mistrust following the genocide in Rwanda and Burundi. Torstrick (2000) also uses the Israeli-Palestinian case to argue that coexistence has “limits”.

6.1 Ethnic conflict in Kenya

In the introductory chapter, I noted that Kenya has been one of the most stable states in Africa. In chapter seven I will seek to explain how this relative stability has been realised against a background of competing ethnic groups, disparities in the distribution of resources, ethnicisation of politics, poverty and disease. Before coming to that, the point I would like to make here is that behind this facade of stability, there have always been incidences of violent ethnic conflict. In fact, a visitor to Kenya or one who simply reads the country's newspapers would be excused if s/he were to conclude that Kenya were at the brink of an ethnic turmoil or bracing itself for one. For instance, very often, there are reports about armed conflicts and killings among pastoralist groups. The commonest involve the Pokot, the Marakwet, the Maasai, the Sabaot, the Turkana, the Samburu and the Somali.²⁴⁶ These conflicts usually take the form of cattle raids and counter raids, feuds over grazing areas and territorial boundaries. There are other conflicts that are presented as clashes between modes of subsistence. Under this category are the incessant conflicts pitting the Tana Orma and the Wardei pastoralists against the Pokomo farmers along the Kenyan coast.²⁴⁷ Also included here are recurring clashes between the Maasai and their Bantu neighbours, particularly the Kisii and the Kamba.²⁴⁸

²⁴⁶ The Pokot, the Marakwet and the Sabaot are sub-groups that constitute the *Kalenjin*, a loose cluster of Nilotc speaking peoples.

²⁴⁷ The Pokomo occupy most of the fertile and arable land close to River Tana while the vast arid part is inhabited by the pastoralists. Land distribution therefore comes to the fore as some 'traditionally' pastoral communities have been trying to access the arable areas for farming. The perennial feud between Orma/Wardei pastoralists and the Pokomo farmers centres on land, cattle and grazing rights. The pastoralists accuse the farming group of restricting their movement to water points and grazing fields in the dry season, while the Pokomo accuse the cattle keepers of grazing on their farms and destroying crops. For this reason, the Pokomo deny the pastoralists access to watering points. This results in bloody clashes. In the year 2001 for instance, hardly a month passed without reports of fighting, killing or torching of houses. The deaths rose from about 13 in March to 52 in October and rose drastically to 120 by the end of November. By the time the clashes subsided at around March 2002, there were about 250 dead and a lot of property destroyed (See, *The Daily Nation*, Friday, October 5, 2001 and *The Daily Nation*, Saturday, February 16, 2002. These articles can be accessed on the internet:

www.nationaudio.com). For details on the identity of the Tana Orma and Wardei pastoralists, see Schlee (1992).

²⁴⁸ The Maasai relate with the Kisii in fairly distinct ways from the way they relate with the Kamba. The Maasai-Kisii conflicts have, for instance, been rather common in the recent past. Although they inhabit one of the most well watered regions in East Africa, a family of ten is lucky to hold an acre of land in Kisiland. The Kisii therefore hire or buy farms from their Maasai neighbours. Just like in the Kamba case, these land transactions are often politicised. In addition, cattle raids are common. In an article, Angima (2001), a Kisii lawyer starts by noting that: "Ethnic flare-ups between the Maasai and the Kisii communities sometimes seem to defy logical explanation".²⁴⁸ This observation is based on the assumption that since the Kisii are agriculturists and the Maasai keep cattle as well as lease farms to the Kisii, the two groups should ideally have some basis of coexistence. Other clashes have been fuelled by the commonalities between the two groups, for instance, by the fact that both keep cattle. Angima notes that "although the Kisii are not pastoralists, they value cattle almost as much as the Maasai do". During my fieldwork, Maasai-Kisii ethnic tensions reached a climax by mid 2000. The Kisii farming activities on Maasai leased land during the March-May 2001 rains were disrupted. Kisii farmers would be attacked and hacked to death while tending crops or harvesting. In fact, between 2000 and the harvesting

Not infrequently, ethnic conflicts in Kenya involve other groups outside of Kenya. These include the Karamojong of Uganda, the Ethiopian Boorana or Somali groups from Somalia who launch attacks in Kenya or get attacked for livestock. Most of these transnational conflicts usually involve more than two groups, going contrary to the supposition that most ethnic conflicts are dichotomous (Horowitz, 1985: 182). Moreover, the cross-border raids, particularly in the northern parts of Kenya, often pass as ‘normal’ daily experiences, to the extent that even after reports that Kenyan groups have lost hundreds of livestock and several villagers have been killed, sometimes there is no state intervention.

It would be important to note here that historical ethnic conflicts over cattle, territorial boundaries, grazing and watering areas have been significantly shaped by the market economy and the political elite. When the Pokot raid the Marakwet for cattle, it is not what their forefathers used to do; now they use modern weaponry (guns), the raiders are often organised gangs, the clashes are bloodier, and the cattle stolen disappear through sophisticated delivery systems. Besides, the police may not pursue the raiders making it plausible not to rule out a political hand. Access to guns became easier during the long years of chaos in Uganda, during and after Mariam’s military regime in Ethiopia and particularly after the collapse of Siad Barre’s government and the consequent disintegration of Somalia in the early 1990’s. The flow of sophisticated guns into Kenya has undermined Kenya government’s strategy of arming “home guards” who are expected to protect their groups or villagers in case of external attack.

Conflicts that have destabilised the state

Apart from the isolated interethnic raids and conflicts discussed above, there have been others that have threatened the persistence of the state. Most notable here was the so-called Shifta War of the mid 1960’s, where militant groups in the northern parts of Kenya fought for regional autonomy and subsequent secession to join Somalia. Although the Kenyan government won this war, much of this region has remained quite volatile, with sporadic incidences of banditry. After this protracted war, the only other real test to the stability of the state was witnessed in the beginning of the 1990’s. Fearing that the clamour for multiparty

season of 2001, the death toll had reached 80. Reminiscent of the argument that where you marry is where you wage war (cf. Schlee: 1997), Angima notes that “ironically, intermarriage seems to aggravate the problem. Maasai men now do marry Kisii women, which *never* happened until about two decades ago”. Actually, a closer analysis shows that because of the practice of female circumcision among the Kisii, Maasai men have always married Kisii women. Angima argues that ideally, intermarriage should bring the two groups closer by bridging the “cultural gap”. But, he writes: “Sons born to the Maasai from such marriages usually go to the Kisii side to see their relatives. But some of them use the opportunity to spy on the Kisii and facilitate cattle theft”.

democracy would threaten the ruling party's hold on power, cabinet ministers and other political elite allied to President Moi organised the so-called *majimbo* rallies in 1991.²⁴⁹ During these rallies, these political leaders²⁵⁰ threatened to evict migrant groups residing in the Rift Valley (e.g. the Kikuyu, Luo and Luhya groups), and seen to be sympathetic to the multiparty crusade. Within no time, members of these groups were being attacked, killed and their homesteads burnt down. By 1993, when the orgy of violence abated, it was estimated that 1,500 people had been killed and 300,000 displaced (ICJ report 2000, citing Africa Watch, 1993).²⁵¹ Surprisingly, even after KANU won the 1992 elections that were marred with violence, the ethnic clashes continued in some areas. In 1993, members of the Kikuyu were violently evicted by armed Maasai from Enoosupukia in Narok district. Apart from destruction of their property, about 17 of them were killed and 30,000 displaced.²⁵² Between 1995 and 1996, the ethnic clashes subsided. However, just before the 1997 elections, they erupted again; this time in the Coast province where residents of upcountry origin (e.g. the Kamba and the Luo), assumed to be allied to opposition parties, were systematically attacked and evicted. After the elections, which KANU again won, clashes flared up in the multiethnic Laikipia district and Njoro areas of Nakuru district with the Kikuyu as the main targets. From 1998, some semblance of calmness reigned in most parts of the country. However, as I have already noted, episodes of bloody clashes were witnessed between the Maasai and the Kipsigis along the Trans Mara-Bomet districts' border and again between the Maasai and the Kisii on the Trans Mara-Gucha border. Nevertheless, contrary to expectations, the 2002 national elections were not marred with ethnic violence, a clear departure from the two previous ones.

Looking back however, the "ethnic clashes" of the 1990's, branded "land clashes" to mask the politicisation of ethnicity, almost plunged Kenya into a civil war. In fact, it must have been a surprise to the Moi government that these conflicts were confined to the margins. Groups that had lived harmoniously together were being incited to take up arms and fight each other over imaginary grievances. The reason why the conflicts did not spread as envisaged by the agitators is because in some cases²⁵³, the groups ignored these external manipulations. Nevertheless, the clashes not only destabilised the livelihoods of those directly

²⁴⁹ *Majimbo* is Swahili word for "federal". The KANU politicians touted *majimboism* as the solution to the clamour for multipartyism. They wanted Kenya to remain a one-party state or go federal, in which *jimbos* (federal states) would be exclusive ethnic enclaves.

²⁵⁰ Mainly led by Kalenjin politicians.

²⁵¹ While some reports concur that those killed numbered about 1,500, they put the number of those forcefully displaced to 350,000 (see Young, 1999: 26).

²⁵² ICJ report (2000: 30).

²⁵³ For instance, between the Kamba and the Maasai.

affected but also contributed to Kenya's economic decline.²⁵⁴ Attempts made by church organisations, civil society, opposition parties and some Kalenjin politicians²⁵⁵ to have evicted groups return to their farms have hardly yielded any success, thanks to the Moi government's ambivalence in the facilitation of the process. Many of those evicted therefore are still displaced, residing in make-shift dwellings in church compounds and slum areas. The whole scenario is a showcase of how coexisting groups can be drawn into conflict and animosity through instrumentalisation of ethnicity. The new government ushered into office in 2002 is expected to revisit this problem and facilitate a reconciliation process.

6.1.1 *Kamba-Maasai conflicts*

“Muukamba kwata uta ulumye nundu nimakila, makwete matumo...” Translation: “You Kamba, hold your bow firmly because they (Maasai) have crossed the border, they are holding spears...” (Song by Kamba singer, Joseph Mutaiti). Composed and recorded in the 1980's, it sounded more like a war song although there was no ongoing conflict. The song however recollects some shared consciousness about past and present fears that the Kamba have about the Maasai. As already pointed out, the issue of territorial boundaries is common talk among both groups, at least metaphorically, for Ukambani-Maasailand border, though arguably one of the most clearly marked, has been one of the most porous. The song reinforces some Maasai claims that much of the Kamba-Maasai battles were fought on Kamba soil.

Apart from their astonishing history, elegance and resilience, the Maasai are widely reputed for their military prowess, at least before and during colonial rule. It has been noted that if it were not for the Rinderpest outbreak in 1880, among other cattle diseases, and a Small Pox attack in 1892, which dealt a severe blow to the group, they would have dominated many of their neighbouring groups (Adamson, 1967: 220; Lamphear, 1993: 98-9). Expounding on this point, a Maasai historian, Kantai, notes in Sankan's book that these “...natural disasters, disease and intra-tribal conflict decimated herds, and considerably reduced the population in some sections of the Maasai, thus making it possible for certain tribes to start attacking the Maasai with impunity. Thus the *Kamba*, the *Kikuyu* and the *Kalenjin* tribes all made incursions into territory that was previously effectively controlled by the Maasai...” (1971: xxi).

²⁵⁴ The violence at the coast, for instance, disrupted tourism.

²⁵⁵ In 1995, in a bid to lure the Kikuyu back to KANU, the so-called KAMATUSA groups led by the then powerful cabinet minister Nicholas Biwott started negotiations with the Kikuyu politicians led by Njenga Karume. These negotiations yielded little, and totally collapsed after the Kikuyu overwhelmingly voted the opposition in the 1997 elections.

6.1.1.1 Cattle raids

Their long history of sharing borders is dotted with episodes of raids and war. Most Kamba-Maasai conflicts have been fought over cattle. In other words, conflicts have not been necessarily influenced by their ethnic ‘difference’ or clash in the modes of subsistence but rather ‘sameness’, the fact that both groups keep cattle. And the keeping of cattle, which enhanced rivalry and competition, partly explains why the Maasai related with the Kikuyu, who did not keep herds worth Maasai raid, quite differently from the Kamba. Ndolo (1989: 67-72) notes that by the 1880’s and the 1890’s, the “Kamba-Maasai warfare had reached a new level of intensity.” During the Rinderpest epidemic that ravaged both Kamba and Maasai herds in 1882-83 and 1890-92, both tried to restock their herds by raiding each other. The “southern Maasai” (e.g. Kaputiei), raided the Kamba in Nzaui (now part of Makueni district) in 1893 unleashing a lot of terror and havoc in the area as they took off with large herds of cattle.²⁵⁶ The Maasai attacks on the Kamba at this particular time are said to have worried the British colonial powers who considered the Maasai as aggressors. This concern led to the establishment of a special militia to protect the Kamba who were major suppliers of food and labour to the local garrison of the Imperial British East Africa Company (IBEACo).

At around 1895, the Maasai were themselves engulfed in internal strife as two brothers, Olonana (Lenana) and Senteu (Sendeyo) fought over the ascension to the coveted position of *Laibon*²⁵⁷ or ‘leader’ left vacant after the death of Mbatiany. Although the Kamba and the Maasai had their traditional differences, Ndolo’s vivid account shows how the British used divide and rule tactics to foment hatred and rivalry. After the Kamba became hostile to Ainsworth after his attempts to curtail raids for cattle and women, in December 1895, a contingent of Maasai with the full support of the British attacked parts of Ukambani and collected a booty of 556 cattle and 1,300 goats which was shared among the Maasai and the British.²⁵⁸ Although the colonial administration was later to ‘abolish’ cattle raids, their evident complicity in the exercise might explain why it proved difficult to stamp out. From this early pre-colonial period to the present, one thing that has remained is the portrayal of the Maasai as ultimate aggressors and the Kamba as ‘victims,’ and yet, it is evident that warfare had significant cultural values among the Kamba. Apart from the animal wealth that was and still is highly valued, military prowess was one sure way that a young man gained recognition among his peers and elders in the society. In comparison however, cattle raids remained more

²⁵⁶ Ndolo, (1989: 67) citing Jackson F. (1936: 167).

²⁵⁷ The *laibon* was more of a spiritual leader but could also exercise political authority.

²⁵⁸ Ndolo (1989: 73) citing Ainsworth’s report to Sir A. Hardinge, 3rd December 1895.

meaningful among the Maasai. These raids had unparalleled social, cultural and economic significance in the dominantly pastoral mode of production.

I would like to cite an incident that illustrates the form some of these conflicts take. The narrative features Mr Maithya who took part in an armed conflict against the Maasai in 1952. Born in 1925, he was 27 when he faced the Maasai in battle. At the age of 13 (1938) however, he had witnessed another bloody battle in which his father had taken part.

In 1952, he said that the Maasai struck at Ngoto²⁵⁹, taking everybody by surprise and taking off with “many cattle.” Everybody first had fled at the sight of the heavily armed Maasai warriors chanting war cries. Some young men came to their village and told them that “Akavi (Maasai) have come” and that they had not only taken cattle, but speared people at another place called Kavuthu. News of the attack spread quickly and within a short time, nine Kamba men joined him armed with bows and arrows stocked in quivers (*thyaka*). The Maasai had struck at about noon on a Thursday and from a distance, he could see smoke from Kamba huts that had been set on fire. His group of ten mobilised other men and they managed to overpower a smaller group of Maasai warriors, forcing them to the edge of a steep cliff where, rather than surrender, the Maasai preferred to jump down sustaining serious injuries. The main Maasai group had already led the larger herd of cattle away. This particular group, he notes, was “too confident” that when they reached the railway line (the borderline) they sat down on the rails.

The Maasai warriors, displaying what Maithya called “Maasai pride and arrogance”, were taken by surprise. Before the Maasai could reach for their shields and spears, the Kamba attacked. Maithya recalls: “One of us shot one Maasai to death”, and as the Maasai became more desperate, “they killed an old Kamba man named Kimondiu who was passing by”. He said that the killing of the old man violated the “ethics” that were adhered to during such conflicts. “Although we did not sit anywhere to agree that, usually... old men, like me!, women and children were spared...but women could be taken away and married,” he explained.²⁶⁰ The Kamba were also not expected to lace their arrows with the poisonous *ivai*.²⁶¹ This shows that in as much as they were sworn enemies, there were still some

²⁵⁹ He explained however that many of the conflicts used to take place “farther up”, around Ngokomi (the area between Sultan Hamud and Yoani) and occasionally in Mbitini.

²⁶⁰ The Kamba were also aggressors. A report written by the British colonial administrator, Ainsworth, who had been posted to Ukambani by the Imperial British East Africa Company, shows that he secured the release of 44 Maasai women, 20 Maasai children and 14 Kikuyu women during 1893, who had been taken by the Kamba during raids. Maasai brutality during attacks is also evident, occasionally involving killing women and children in Ukambani (Ndolo, 1989: 73).

²⁶¹ *Ivai* is made through a mixture of acocanthera and other poisonous plants. The mixture is boiled until the plants dissolve into a thick, black plastic paste. It is a sacred exercise which also excludes women and children whose presence would apparently reduce the effectiveness of the substance in killing. For details, see Ndeti (1972: 141-142).

unacceptable excesses in war. This compares to Evans-Pritchard's account on the Nuer where clubs were the only weapons permitted in feuds involving villagers while the use of spears was reserved for attacks on strangers (1940: 152).

As the Kamba-Maasai conflict continued, the colonial police arrived and all were dispersed. They recovered all the stolen animals, he claimed, but was quick to add that this was one of the few occasions that the Kamba overcame the Maasai "easily". The Maasai were very bitter though and later that night, they struck again, killed a Kamba fighter and fled. And although the Maasai did not take cattle that night, the Kamba decided to cross into Maasailand and raid cattle "to restore our pride". He says that the police however intervened again after the fight continued into the following day.

During the counter raid, several Maasai were killed. The Kamba suffered a serious blow too, with the killing of the local Kamba chief, Nguumi, who was speared by the Maasai. Maithya recalled that most of the time, the police would intervene before the Kamba mounted an attack while the Maasai used to strike "undetected". This embarrassing aspect appeared to lend credence to the claim by the Maasai that they were more surreptitious than the Kamba. But as I observed earlier, it was expedient to develop and sustain a strong institution of secrecy among the Maasai. Maithya further noted that between 1952 and 1957, the Kamba could not organise attacks due to the restrictions imposed by the British during the *state of emergency* declared in 1952 to crack down on the African freedom fighters.

6.1.1.2 Recent conflicts

Of all conflicts between the Kamba and the Maasai in the recent past, the most memorable took place in 1961. Having suffered many defeats in the hands of the Maasai, the Kamba organised a major offensive. But perhaps to avoid being seen as aggressors, the Kamba say that just before they invaded Maasai country, some Maasai *muran* had raided some cattle around Emali. After a lot of planning, a big battalion of men crossed over to Maasailand and took what was estimated as 1,000 cattle after a fierce battle. This particular onslaught was led by a Kamba chief named Kivati, after whom a railway station between Emali and Simba is named. During the conflict, the Kamba had three groups of fighters; the front, the back and a reserve (support battalion).²⁶²

²⁶² In organised Kamba raids, the raiding army was generally divided into three sections. The front group normally consisted of those who could run very fast. They were charged with the responsibility of getting the cattle and taking them home. The second group contained the sharp shooters; they shielded the enemy as the runners drove animals away. Then there was a back up battalion that set on the 'tired' Maasai warriors. This sort of organisation is credited to a great Kamba warrior, Mwatu wa Ngoma. But even with this cleverly organised group, the Maasai resistance would at times be unbearable. In any case, this sort of organisation reflects the kind of enemy the Kamba were up against. Among the Maasai, the warriors similarly used to organise themselves into three groups and with fairly similar tasks like the Kamba, namely a group that drove the cattle, those

In this historical confrontation, “sharp shooters” from Kitui had been mobilised to join forces with the Masaku Kamba.²⁶³ The Kaputiei Maasai too had been joined by among other sections, the Matapato to face an external enemy. The actual fierce fighting took about three days and there were heavy casualties on both sides, including two Kamba shot by the police. But although the Kamba consider this as one of their successful onslaughts on the Maasai, having perfected the art of overcoming Maasai shields²⁶⁴ by shooting arrows upwards to hit the Maasai as they fell back to the ground, they were still pushed about 20 kilometres into their territory. The skirmishes were quelled by the paramilitary police. Through the involvement of the district commissioners of Machakos²⁶⁵ and Kajiado and elders from both the Maasai and the Kamba, a peaceful settlement was found. But this was followed by a court session in Athi River, near Nairobi, where it was ruled that the Kamba had to return Maasai cattle for ‘normal relations’ to be restored. The animals were particularly recovered from Mukaa, Kasikeu, Mulala and Nzaui areas of Ukambani.

In one of the worst consequences of cattle raid, the Maasai ‘stole’ the late General Ndolo’s hybrid cattle in 1968, just before the former head of the military forces was bundled out of his powerful position in 1971. It was not clear whether the Maasai raiders had mounted the raid with the full knowledge of whom the cattle belonged to. What followed remains one of the worst operations in independent Kenya ever conducted in Maasailand, as military personnel carried out the recovery exercise. Harmless children and women who could not have participated in the raid were not spared. Nevertheless, after the cattle were recovered, the then vice-president, Daniel Moi (later president), led leaders in both groups in a declaration of peace and peaceful coexistence in 1969. An effigy of ‘trouble’ was set ablaze to mark the ‘end’ of interethnic animosity.

Although the Kamba and the Maasai have not had a major conflict since, there have been sporadic conflicts on a smaller scale. A case in point is an incident at *Kanaani* in January 1995 in which a Kamba farmer was speared to death by the Maasai. I have also cited the Simba ‘theft’ episode in chapter four. During the fieldwork period, minor incidents were reported; for instance, in May 2000, 10 goats were stolen from a Kamba homestead by a group of Maasai *murran* near Ngaakaa.²⁶⁶ Also reported were “commercial raids” where a

keeping guard on the sides and another group that used to follow the raided cattle from a safe distance. It is believed that the Kamba had borrowed this raiding strategy from the Maasai and made some slight adjustments.

²⁶³ One thing that the Kamba boast about is their superior weaponry of bows and arrows in comparison to the Maasai spear. They could shoot at the enemy from a safe distance, and since arrows are easily portable, one fighter would carry plenty of them. The Maasai dismiss this by saying that bows are for “cowards” who cannot face the enemy “face to face”.

²⁶⁴ Which could not be penetrated by arrows.

²⁶⁵ Makueni was then part of Machakos.

²⁶⁶ About 15 kilometres from Kiboko.

well organised group of Kamba men from Mulala and Matiliku area raided Maasai cattle and took them to slaughter houses in Mombasa where they posed as traders. A bigger raid however was carried out in Kibwezi where a group of Maasai *murran* made away with 95 heads of cattle and 86 goats belonging to one Mr Kimatu. The incident was used by the local MP to ban Maasai traders from selling their livestock at Kambu, Machinery and Makindu markets.²⁶⁷ The move however was seen as a way of excluding Maasai cattle and buyers from a very competitive cattle market. The MP's move was unpopular among 'small scale' Kamba traders and other cattle keepers who target the cheaper Maasai cattle (particularly during droughts), fatten them and then resale later or simply restock their herds.

Another striking incident took place in May 2000. A group of Maasai from Namanga *stole*²⁶⁸ 4 bulls from a Kamba near Kiboko. The affected family mobilised a group of Kamba men who raided a nearby Maasai *enkang* (homestead) and took off with 6 head of cattle. They held the 6 as ransom for the recovery and handing over of the lost animals. The Maasai made some internal arrangements and within four days after the Kamba counter-raid, the cattle 'stolen' from the Kamba were recovered. The 'exchange' was supervised by the local police station (Kiboko). Apart from receiving back the animals, the Kamba demanded some monetary compensation from the Maasai for the "inconvenience and agony" caused and to serve as a deterrent act. The Maasai readily agreed to pay the fine, on the condition that the police dropped its demand to have those responsible for the raid identified. The Police asked the Kamba to accept this request and they complied.

Although a modern institution of arbitration and justice, the police, by desisting from criminalising cattle raids, did not necessarily condone or perpetuate the 'crime' but most importantly, this act made it possible for the Maasai to find relevance in these institutions. This particular police station had resolved many Kamba-Maasai disputes amicably. By 'tolerating' what was presented as Maasai cultural practice, the Maasai felt recognised by the state authorities. As for the Kamba, they did not mind since, the state had assisted them to resolve a dispute and two, they felt elevated as the Maasai insisted on being treated as 'traditionalists'. This is part of the regulatory role of the state in interethnic coexistence, a theme that is examined in greater detail in chapter seven.

²⁶⁷ See the East African Standard, Monday, October 16, 2000, p.8. The article is entitled 'Kibwezi MP bans Maasai traders'. Kambu, Machinery and Makindu shopping centres are located in Kibwezi constituency, Makueni district.

²⁶⁸ What used to be "traditional raids" are increasingly being defined as "mere theft" of cattle.

6.2 Contested territorial boundaries and resources

Barth correctly points out that for social scientists interested in studying ethnicity, special attention should be given to social boundaries. He notes however that these boundaries may have a territorial counterpart (1969: 15). It is this territorial boundary that is of particular interest here. With conflicts increasingly being witnessed within nation-states than among nations, internal territorial boundaries deserve closer attention. Hannerz (1997) notes that boundaries have to do with discontinuity and obstacles. It is a sharp line of demarcation, he declares. Borrowing from Barth, he looks at boundaries as something *across* which contacts and interactions take place but do not contain isolated groups. Politically, the physical boundary between “Maasailand” and “Ukambani” is marked by a railway line. I have already pointed out that this boundary does not constitute enclosures and has not been a hindrance to cross-ethnic exchanges. I am particularly interested in the meanings attached to this border, when it matters, when it is ‘open’ and when it is ‘closed’ and by whom.

Let me begin with a short history. Called *Mutambo* in Kikamba and *Esekengei* in Maa, the railway line in question was built by the Imperial British East Africa company (IBEACo.) at the onset of imperialism. Starting at the port of Mombasa in 1896, and reaching Nairobi in 1899, the line reached Kisumu (Lake Victoria) in 1901. Named then the Uganda Railway, it was meant to open the vast interior for commerce by easing transportation of farm produce and minerals. Surprisingly, Kenya’s railway network has not changed much since. What is important here however, is to note that this opening of the interior had repercussions for African groups. The White settlers needed land for commercial farming. In 1904, a “treaty” was signed between the British and the Maasai through the Maasai *laibon* (leader), Olonana, which moved the Maasai to two Reserves, one to the north of the railway and the other to the south of it. A further 1913 “treaty”, apparently thumb printed by a dead Olonana, moved the Maasai to the Southern Reserve. This confinement of the Maasai to the Southern Reserve is technically how the railway line became the political border between Maasailand and Ukambani. This Reserve is what is still “Maasailand”, stretching from Narok to Tsavo National Park, and bordering Ukambani to the West. I do not need to stress how colonial regimes artificially created physical proximity and opportunities for contact between persons of different ethnic groups regardless of the absence of shared understandings between them. Since the railway line became the ‘official’ border between Ukambani and Maasailand from around 1912, it has meant different things to different people and governments.

So important has been this line that although many of Kenya's towns are to be found along it, the railway was not built to connect them. It was the other way around. Towns and trading centres mushroomed along the line. In the Kamba-Maasai case, trading centres and towns along the railway (shared border) include Athi River, Konza, Sultan Hamud, Emali, Simba and Kiboko. These places have been common platforms through which ethnic differences have been redefined and interactions enhanced through cattle and grain trade, and intermarriages. But at the same time, these have also been arenas of ethnic rivalry and competition particularly with regard to the control of business premises and rights over land. But as fluid and blurred as this line is, there are times when it is made to look very 'real'. In the first place, one has to bear in mind that in Kenya, and indeed in much of Africa, railway lines are not common sights. What is even more compelling, at least physically, is the fact that due to fairly distinct modes of production and housing, one sees demarcated farmlands dotted with 'individual' homesteads (Ukambani) on one side of the railway line while on the other (Maasailand), one's attention is caught by the open grasslands, large herds of cattle and scattered homesteads. So when it suits either party, and depending on what is at stake, they say "our border is very clear". In terms of significance, the line marks the border between Kajiado and Makueni/Machakos, and by extension, Maasailand and Ukambani, and between Eastern and Rift Valley provinces. And that is not all. Albeit metaphorically, it is said to mark the border between "the Kamba and the Maasai".

After it was imposed as a boundary between two ethnic territorial areas, it assumed new meanings. During cattle raids, Kamba warriors would be in hot pursuit to recover cattle from Maasai raiders "before they cross the *Mutambo* (the railway line)...we knew that if they cross, that is all", explained the 75 year old Maithya. If the Maasai raiders crossed the line before the Kamba caught up with them, the Kamba warriors would often retreat. On the other hand, if they caught up with the Maasai before reaching the line, the Maasai warriors usually abandoned the cattle and fled. Where they exist, boundaries serve to slow down the free flow of transactions (Galtung, 1994: 6). The significance of the railway line should not be construed to mean that there were no 'tribal lands' before it was constructed. The line however, with the enforcement of colonial administrators, stood out as a continuous physical object that eclipsed whatever ridges, streams, hills and rocks that marked Kamba and Maasai territories.

Although there are Kamba and Maasai on either side of the line, attaching so much importance to this boundary often creates a conducive atmosphere for the reification of culture and differentiation. There is normally talk of "the people from the other side of the railway".

That explains why I was asked whether I came “from across” (cf. chapter two). In everyday practice however, the railway has never been an ethnic border. In fact, there are some Maasai and Kamba who are unaware of its territorial significance. Besides, the number of cattle that are crushed by trains as they cross this line demonstrate its porosity and that it is simply a physical mark across a common territory.

6.2.1 Meanings attached to the physical boundary

In as much as the border between the Ukambani and Maasailand is as artificial as it can get, there has been only few isolated cases of ethnic antagonism in protest. Ethnic disputes here have largely been informed by other issues especially Kamba migrant populations in Kajiado and cattle raids. However, both groups have claims over land on either side of the railway. The Maasai claim that much of the plains covering what is now Nguu division (Makueni) was their territory and grazing areas about a century ago. On the other hand, the older Kamba generation say that the “original” boundary between Kamba and Maasai territories was in a place called *Kwa Katule* deep inside what is now Maasailand. Well, the Maasai dismiss this claim as unfounded. During my fieldwork, however, both groups stressed that “for the sake of peace”, the railway line had been “accepted” as the bona fide borderline. Nonetheless, this border issue remains thorny and rears its ugly head at ‘critical’ moments. For instance, during a meeting organised in Simba in January 1995 to reconcile the Kamba and the Maasai after confrontations that left a Kamba dead, this issue came up. A Kamba ‘local’ leader asked the then minister for lands Jackson Mulinge (Kamba)²⁶⁹ to tell “those present and the nation” where the “border” between “the Kamba and the Maasai” lay. It was not lost to observers that he had not asked about the border between ‘Kajiado and Makueni’ or ‘Maasailand and Ukambani’. Cleverly, the minister deferred the answer. In the first place, it was rather strange that the question had not been raised by the Maasai who, unlike the Kamba, have historically lost large tracks of their territorial land. Besides, it appeared that the question would not have found relevance if the ministry of lands was not in the hands of a Kamba at the time. It revealed some of the ‘games’ the Kamba and Maasai play along this border and inside each other’s territories. The question was to serve as a ‘scare’ to the Maasai.

Apart from the instrumentalisation of physical boundaries, there are also cartographical technicalities, unilateral top-bottom approach when fixing regional boundaries, and media reports²⁷⁰ that compound the boundary disputes. All these combine to explain, for instance,

²⁶⁹ A retired general who was head of the Kenyan military forces.

²⁷⁰ While reporting the incident in which the Kamba and Maasai agreed to live in peace, the *The Daily Nation*, for instance reported that the venue of the meeting, Simba, is in “Makueni District” and yet this trading centre is actually in Kajiado (Maasailand). See *The Daily Nation*, Saturday, January, 28, 1995.

the uncertainty over the location of Kiboko trading centre (cf. map 2 in chapter two). Unlike the upper part of the centre where the boundary is ‘clearly’ marked by the railway line, as one approaches Kiboko, it is marked instead by Kiboko River.²⁷¹ So that although the trading centre lies on the ‘left’ side of the railway, it is, to the anger of some Maasai, not in their territory but in Ukambani. There is every reason for the Maasai to take advantage of this ‘confusion’. This river hardly dries up and serves as an important source of water for Maasai herds. Besides, around Kiboko, there is the prestigious Kenya Agricultural Research Institute (KARI) site, with its farms and vast grasslands and a boarding primary school. I should mention that one other reason why the Maasai assume that Kiboko is in Kajiado is because of a controversial telephone code. Telephones in Kiboko trading centre, the KARI site and the surrounding area use the Kajiado code (0302), although these places fall under Makueni district. This had been done merely for convenience, but it is used by the Maasai to legitimise their territorial claims.

6.2.2 Rivalry for land: Fighting over “Canaan”

To Kenyans, land is what security is to Israel; it is an emotional and explosive national obsession.²⁷² One of the reasons why productive land is such a coveted asset in Kenya is because unlike Uganda and Tanzania for example, only about 20% of Kenya’s landmass receives adequate rainfall that can sustain agriculture. This climatical factor has resulted in continuous internal migration of families and groups not only within their ethnic districts but also to other regions. The Kamba can only be compared to the Kikuyu in terms of dispersal within Kenya. Apart from their native districts of Machakos, Makueni, Kitui and Mwingi, there are significant Kamba populations not only in Kajiado (Maasailand) but Kwale and Taita Taveta districts (Coast province), Embu and Kirinyaga.

Among Kenyan farming groups, if an adult male²⁷³ does not own a piece of land somewhere, then culturally, he is incomplete. Such a piece of land is used to build a house, grow crops, keep cattle, or it could simply be held for status and prestige. Even those who have chosen to make towns and cities their permanent areas of residence, are still expected to own a piece of land in the rural areas. Land may be accessed through inheritance, buying, or through land allocation, if one is certified a “squatter”²⁷⁴ by state authorities. The so-called squatters are

²⁷¹ Locally called *Maangi uvungu*, which literally means “fake bamboo”.

²⁷² *Sunday Nation*, May 25, 1997.

²⁷³ Under the umbrella body Widow Support Network of Kenya, widows have pushed for a constitutional provision enabling them to own and inherit land. In the new constitutional dispensation taking effect 2003, married women have sought the right to have property registered in their names without the mandatory endorsement from the husband.

²⁷⁴ A controversial concept, used here to refer to people who claim to be landless and living in lands whose ownership is claimed by others.

allocated such land usually after having invaded or encroached on it. Sometimes, this might be private property but in most cases, it is “state land” in the form of gazetted forests, protected water catchments, land for agricultural research or national parks. While these lands may be recognised as no-go areas, that does not stop people from moving into them and setting up settlements. Moreover, the state’s claim to these lands remains controversial, and is often challenged since the same parcels were originally taken away from certain groups.

This brings me to Mikululo ranch. Measuring some 76 square kilometres and starting as a grazing area, its status has changed overtime. Due to the variety of wildlife that roam freely in the ranch and its nearness to Tsavo national park, the state declared it a game reserve, but this did not restrict human encroachment.²⁷⁵ But the wildlife department went a step further and within ten years, this land was declared a “water catchments” area, then a “protected area” and finally a “national park”. Mikululo is a place where ownership of land has been redefined as the Kamba and the Maasai competed over its control between themselves on the one hand, and both against the state on the other. What made the whole struggle more complex was that the state officials were seen to be partisan.

Lying at the fringes of Chyulu (*Kyulu*)²⁷⁶ range on the Maasailand-Ukambani border, Mikululo’s moist soils and pastures attracted both the Kamba and Maasai. While the Maasai were interested in grazing their animals, the Kamba established farms. Inquiries indicate that the Kamba started migrating to Mikululo in the 1970’s. Many migrated to the area particularly after the 1974-76 and the 1983 droughts and famine. However, the area had been a Maasai grazing ground for many years. In fact, one of my research partners, Mr Palalelei, was born there at around 1940, but since the Maasai were not sedentary, the Kamba made the Maasai cattle keepers look like late comers. Whereas the Maasai treated the area as an extension of their grazing zone, the Kamba accessed the ranch through a ‘broker’, an influential businessman who would allocate an applicant about 5 acres after paying a fee of about Ksh 1,000. There were no guarantees although he claimed that he had secured an allotment letter from the state paving the way for an imminent conversion of the “state land” into a settlement area.

²⁷⁵ In *game reserves*, wildlife can live side by side with human populations. It is in *national parks* that human populations are excluded.

²⁷⁶ Kamba name for Chyulu. *Kyulu* also refers to marijuana in colloquial Kikamba. The Chyulu area has not only been famed for its rich agricultural soils and bumper harvests but also as a source of this drug, locally smoked as a reefer and distributed by known ‘agents’ who hardly conduct their business discreetly, although a custodial sentence of up to 10 years can be handed down in Kenyan courts if one is proven to have been in possession of *kyulu* (marijuana).

Competing for user rights

After Mikululo proved to be extremely productive, the Kamba renamed it *Kanaani*, for it was like the biblical “Canaan”, the land “flowing with milk and honey”. With its fertile soils and reliable rainfall, the land offered unparalleled opportunities. It guaranteed harvest when many other parts of Ukambani experienced food shortages. On the other hand, the Maasai called the place *Kinyereti* which means “a place of many wells” (Mikululo has springs). For the Kamba, *Kanaani* was seen as a “gift” from the state, since, in spite of the fact that the settlement lacked state legitimacy, external interference was minimal. Besides, most of the Kamba who moved into the area retained their earlier settlements, establishing a network between the ranch and the original homelands. There was a flow of maize and beans as well as game meat during food shortages. The food crops were also sold for cash or bartered. Some businesspersons would also go to Mikululo during harvests to purchase grain for sale. The area also became a chief source of seeds during planting season, since, as Musango, a resident noted, “crops in new lands are not attacked by worms”.

By creating farms and erecting settlements, the Kamba were legitimising their exclusive appropriation of the land. Although the Maasai pastoralists had grazed their animals there for generations, the Kamba settlements made it look like the Maasai were encroaching on Kamba property. The Maasai were also being told that these grazing areas were administratively in Ukambani.²⁷⁷ Competition for space intensified and in order to secure their right to the land, some Maasai families set up settlements. But the Kamba population was growing rather fast and the Maasai could not keep pace. The Kamba also set up retail kiosks and built a school. The school was called *Kanaani*. As the population continued to swell during the 1980's, the state, through the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS), started putting restrictions on new settlements but no serious pressure was exerted before the run up to the multiparty elections of 1992. As the two groups competed for physical space and their modes of land-use (subsistence) often clashed, the KWS would set deadlines before which the groups should vacate the land. Pressure was therefore mounting from all sides. In 1994, there was a major ethnic conflict as the two groups fought for dominance.

Minor conflicts were usually witnessed during the planting season, when the Kamba would clear old and new fields by cutting and burning grass and bush. This is a routine exercise called *kuvutha*. To the Maasai however, the Kamba were depleting pastures; grass for their cattle and leaves for the sheep and goats. As for the Kamba, they had their grievances; their

²⁷⁷ At the time of study, and in practice, the area was administratively under Kasuvi sub-location, Kiboko location, Makindu division of Makueni district. However, following a boundary review carried out in 1994, no part of this land was ‘legally’ in Makueni.

farms had to reckon not only with wild animals which would occasionally devour their crops, but also Maasai cattle. But since the Kamba were also keeping some cattle, and a few Maasai had farms, ethnic tensions were not basically due to a clash of the modes of production but due to instrumentalisation of ethnicity. Despite the fact that their dominant modes often put them on a collision course, the underlying motive however was an attempt by each group to enhance its control over this important resource. Since the Kamba were in their hundreds while the Maasai were in their tens, the latter had genuine fears about losing grip on the land. In January 1995, a group of Maasai *murran* (warriors) attacked about 10 Kamba homesteads and burnt houses forcing several Kamba to flee the area in fear. It was during these clashes that a Kamba farmer, named Katiku Maweu (a retired civil servant), referred to earlier, was speared to death by the Maasai. When the Kamba protested to government administrators, they were reminded that they should not be living there in the first place and that the land belonged to the KWS.²⁷⁸ But they had an immediate concern, namely why the Maasai were asserting themselves as the eviction pressure mounted. When the Kamba expected the state to pursue the attackers, the Makueni DC at the time, Mr Maurice Makhanu instead urged reconciliation.²⁷⁹

All along, the KWS appeared to tolerate grazing of cattle as opposed to farming which was said to create bare patches of land affecting the wildlife ecosystem. While this may have been logical, it translated into the state being seen as favouring the Maasai and discriminating against the Kamba although the KWS claimed that they were ‘strictly’ talking about the different modes of subsistence. The period between 1995 and 1999 was marked by ethnic tension, conflicts, injuries, loss of lives and destruction of property. The Kamba would have their crops destroyed while the Maasai would lose their cattle. During the skirmishes of 1999, about six people were reportedly killed by KWS rangers and police while others were arraigned in court for “trespassing” and fined up to Ksh 6,000 each. By this time, there were about 1,500 families (dominantly Kamba) living in the ranch. The final blow came in 2000. On the 11th of May 2000, all the occupants were driven out of the land by KWS game rangers armed with guns. As the families were violently driven out and their school set on fire, the Maasai had conspicuously left by then. Unlike the Kamba, they had heeded to the eviction notice given by the KWS. The Kamba were adamant. Although they were pushed out, they mobilised political support. On the 21st of May 2000 a protest march from Makindu to *Kanaani* was led by 5 Kamba MPs to recapture the land. The aim was to force the state to

²⁷⁸ Part of it belonged to the Kenya Agricultural Research Institute (KARI) but it was later gazetted as part of Chyulu Game Reserve (under the Kenya Wildlife Service).

²⁷⁹ See *The Daily Nation*, Saturday, January 14, 1995.

back out of its eviction plans. After fighting their way to *Kanaani*, where they addressed a large crowd of ‘squatters’, all were forced to vacate the area by security personnel.

Political influence

In Kenya, there have been many incidences in which land, forest and wildlife departments have not intervened at the time when people encroached on protected land, and established settlements and farms, built schools, shops and religious centres. However, after they had done all that, they would still be forcefully evicted particularly if some influential people wanted the land or if the ethnic groups occupying the land were perceived to be anti-government (ruling party).

I shall illustrate shortly how this relates to Mikululo ranch. First and foremost, I would like to stress that although the Kamba and the Maasai had their own internal problems inside Mikululo ranch, they were also interdependent. The Maasai provided Kamba families with milk, while the Maasai engaged Kamba labour in the construction of houses and digging of wells, just to mention but a few modes of exchange. It is the external factors that compounded the problem. Enormous pressure was applied by the KWS in the run up to the 1992 multiparty elections. This was not just confined to Mikululo. In many parts of the country, the ruling party politicians, scared about their waning support as the elections drew closer, threatened opposition-allied groups with evictions in cases where these groups lived outside their ‘traditional’ homelands. The dominantly Kamba population in Mikululo was therefore threatened with eviction, since Ukambani in general was perceived to be allied to the Kikuyu-led Democratic Party (DP), while the Maasai were allied to the ruling party, the Kenya African National Union (KANU). Things worsened after the 1992 elections, since, true to prediction, the local seat where Mikululo falls (Kibwezi constituency), was won by a DP candidate, Mrs Agnes Ndetei. Conversely, on the adjacent side of Maasailand (Kajiado Central constituency), the seat was captured by the ruling party, KANU and the MP, Mr David Sankori was appointed an assistant minister in Moi’s government. This tilted the balance of power as the Kamba were labelled “anti-government” while the Maasai appeared to enjoy state protection. To make matters worse, although Mrs Ndetei defected to KANU before completing her term, she lost the seat to the opposition in the 1997 elections.

A ‘squatter’, Mr Musango told me that things worsened following both elections, with the KWS taking sides, “allowing” the Maasai to graze their animals but giving the Kamba residents notices to leave the ranch. In fact, the Maasai MP (Sankori) was accused of having backed the eviction so that the Maasai would reclaim the exclusive user rights to the grazing fields. It was widely believed that if the Kamba had elected a KANU MP, the government

would have softened its stance on eviction. To make matters worse, the five MPs who led the evicted squatters to recapture the land were all opposition MPs except one, who by then was a member of a group of KANU MPs labelled “rebel MPs”. Addressing those evicted, the “rebel MP”, Mr Peter Maundu²⁸⁰ argued that the area was not a tourist attraction and even if it was, livelihood concerns should prevail over revenue considerations. His counterpart from Yatta said that better land was being reserved for animals at the expense of human life.²⁸¹

The local MP, Onesmus Mboko,²⁸² with whom I held lengthy interviews, talked of legitimacy. He argued that if the government considered the settlement illegal, why did it set up a polling station in the ranch during the 1997 national elections?²⁸³ He said that it could not have been a protected area if people were allowed to vote from there. In addition, Mikululo had a recognised primary school and the ministry of education had actually posted two teachers there. All these, argued the MP was evidence that this was indeed a legitimate settlement.²⁸⁴ He said that the Kamba were being “punished” for rejecting KANU during the polls.

There were other reasons why the KANU government was seen to side with the Maasai. After the violent eviction in May 2000, the Kamba claimed that about 500 cows, 602 goats and 50 sheep were taken away by the Maasai.²⁸⁵ It was claimed that a few days after the eviction, some of the ‘stolen’ cows were found abandoned in Simba, and that after the authorities were informed, no follow up was made. In an interview, the area chief said that the Maasai were simply being branded as “thieves”. In any case, efforts by the Kamba to recover whatever they had lost proved futile as the police were said to be less enthusiastic to assist. A report by an investigative journalist, Monica Muthwii, indicates that only 28 cows had been recovered by September 2000 (2000: 5). Some of those who had lost their cattle threatened to raid Kajiado district and recover them from the Maasai herds. A local councillor, Mr Kalembe Ndile²⁸⁶ said that the Maasai had been served with a notice about the intended raid. This heightened tensions in the area, making my research work quite difficult. Some Maasai respondents asked me whether I was conducting a “pilot study before the attack”. Nevertheless, the “attack”

²⁸⁰ Of Makueni constituency.

²⁸¹ This was the same dilemma faced by the Tanzanian government as they drove ‘Tanzanian’ Maasai pastoralists out of Ngorongoro National Park.

²⁸² Representing Kibwezi constituency.

²⁸³ The polling station’s number was “10” based at Kanaani Primary School.

²⁸⁴ Well, the state had set up a polling station there hoping that the voters will support the ruling party candidate. This had been witnessed in other places too. During a by-election in an opposition stronghold in the Rift Valley (Kipipiri) in the mid 1990’s, the state moved in electricity posts and water pipes in the area telling residents that once they vote for the KANU candidate, they would have access to electricity and piped water. They voted for the opposition party (DP) and the state withdrew the electricity posts and pipes immediately.

²⁸⁵ See a report by *The People*, Wednesday, September 6, 2000. During my study, I kept getting conflicting figures and therefore the ones provided here should be taken as rough estimates.

²⁸⁶ Elected area MP in the 2002 polls.

never materialised although they did not recover their animals. Irrespective of the authenticity of the losses, one also has to understand that the two groups use threats to resolve disputes without having to resort to armed conflicts.

The Maasai have particularly perfected the art of manoeuvre. In the KARI site, which is in Ukambani but is made available to Maasai cattle keepers during drought, the Maasai do what ecologists call “displacement”.²⁸⁷ Although the Kamba are officially not denied access to the vast grazing areas, the Maasai have in practice exclusive access. The management of the institute charges for each single head of cattle and the Maasai not only move their animals to the site “early enough”, they are also said to be “more motivated to pay” while the Kamba are said to be “cunning”, partly because they, unlike the Maasai, feel they have the right to graze their animals there. Kamba cattle keepers have other concerns however. Some fear that their modest stock would be “swallowed up” in the huge sea of Maasai cattle, something that happens whenever the two groups share grazing grounds. In the KARI scenario, the exclusion of Kamba cattle keepers has not led to ethnic conflicts. This is perhaps due to the fact that the Kamba cannot accuse the state of discrimination in the ethnic competition for the resource.

Adjustment of boundaries

In Mikululo ranch, there have been boundary adjustments in the area that seem to be in favour of the Maasai. In 1988, part of Mikululo was chopped off and made part of Chyulu game reserve. The reason looked genuine; to safeguard wildlife and water catchments. It was a time when soil conservation and environmental issues were given special attention by the head of state.²⁸⁸ The adjustment did not arouse any ethnic tensions since the boundary, from the top of the hill, was adjusted fairly equally on the Makueni (Ukambani) and Kajiado (Maasailand) districts’ boundary.

After the 1988 elections, there was further adjustment of boundaries. This time round (1989) many Kamba migrant families were evicted as the game reserve and water catchments was expanded and the area was given an exclusive boundary (from the districts). On July 12th, 1994, there was a new boundary adjustment which appeared to target Makueni area but left out Kajiado district. This adjustment heightened ethnic tensions leading to clashes in September 1994 as the Kamba, whose agricultural space had been reduced, started clearing

²⁸⁷ Where a species dislocates another taking its place.

²⁸⁸ In the 1980’s, former President Moi spent a lot of time in soil conservation efforts. He would feature in the national television casually dressed leading various communities in filling gullies, building gabions and in afforestation activities. It was a time when one Mr Zephania Anyieni, appointed to head a presidential commission on soil conservation was a better known personality than many cabinet ministers. A Maasai respondent intimated: “That was the only time this man (president) was doing something for this country” (in Imaroro-Mashuru, 12/09/2000).

bushes (Maasai grazing fields). Houses were burnt, people were injured and both groups registered losses in cattle. The government's position was that all the groups were threatening the environment, destroying wildlife habitats and breaking the law. Through a legal notice of 1995, the area was gazetted and transformed from a game reserve and catchments area to a national park under the KWS. The boundary plan no. 204/71 of 12th July 1994 shows Mikululo as part of Chyulu national park and a small part in Kajiado. By the time I was carrying out fieldwork therefore, there was 'legally' no part of Chyulu/Mikululo that was in Makueni/Ukambani. After the KWS decisive eviction in May 2000, "the Kamba", argued the local MP, had lost land that for generations had been an alternative source of livelihood. He reiterated that compared to the Maasai, the Kamba had gotten "a raw deal". He said that the whole struggle had taught him that "belonging to a certain 'tribe' is the most important issue in this government". The MP argued that the KANU government had fuelled enmity between the two ethnic groups through "selective treatment". But he forgot that if the Kamba were not in the opposition, they would most likely not have been 'punished'. He argued that "left alone" the Kamba and the Maasai, "despite our *many* differences...have a way of sorting out our problems". (Onesmus Mboko, Makindu and Nairobi, 22/08/2000; 01/09/2000).²⁸⁹ While he stresses that the two groups have ways of reverting to an equilibrium following conflict, he sees the state as a spoiler by taking sides.

Why the land was lost

Evicted Kamba and Maasai said that Kamba leaders, including the 'broker' used a confrontational approach instead of doing it the "Kenyan way". Musango, who has been a 'squatter' a number of times in different places, argued that the Kamba leaders "forgot" that the lands the Kamba accessed throughout the 1950's, 60's and 70's²⁹⁰ were acquired through a combination of "invasion", negotiation, lobbying and organising delegations; in short, doing what Musango called "playing some games with the government". He noted: "You don't get anything from this government, even before, by fighting...you visit the minister or somebody close to the head of state, like Mulu²⁹¹ ...then he takes some of you there (to the

²⁸⁹ It was difficult to get the MP for an interview. I had planned to ask him for an interview on 21/05/2000 when he led a group of other MPs to Mikululo but I could not get an opportunity. I met him later in Makindu (in his Kibwezi constituency). After this interview, he agreed to meet me later in Nairobi on appointment. He also brought with him maps (to back his position) and other documents. Efforts to interview Kajiado Central MP did not materialise despite enormous effort.

²⁹⁰ Many parts of 'lower Makueni' were accessed during this period. The area, now settled, was a state protected area under wildlife.

²⁹¹ Mulu Mutisya, hardly literate, has been an influential Kamba politician and very close to former President Moi.

President)...you dance for the President (laughs), tell him that yes...we have an opposition MP but that was a ‘mistake’, you still support him...he will be happy and he just says that you stay and *that is all*,²⁹² these people do not know that”. Actually, the opposition MPs knew that a delegation to President Moi would have resolved the problem, but on the other hand, such a move would have undermined their credibility. Unfortunately, after losing the land, most of the Kamba squatters were sceptical about opposition parties, questioning their relevance if they could not “solve our problems”.

The ranch chairperson (‘broker’) ensured the area remained volatile for his own gain. He maintained enmity between Kamba and Maasai families in Mikululo, arguably to sideline the Maasai at some point, settle more Kamba migrants and therefore gain financially. The ‘broker’ would raise funds from the residents to file cases in court against the state. Musango said that over the years, the residents had given out “thousands of shillings”. But taking the state to court proved counterproductive. It became difficult to sustain a case against the state in which land had been acquired through encroachment. A local chief noted that at some point, the state was ready to lift the “protection” status on the land and carve a residential area out of it.²⁹³ He believed that by going to court and by using “confrontational tactics”, the Kamba themselves jeopardised a chance of having the land “given” to them. The ‘broker’ had thought that in the course of time, grossly outnumbered and hopefully frustrated, the Maasai would give up and leave the ranch. He could not have been more wrong. True to what the Maasai are depicted to be, namely proud, courageous and fearless, they hung on. In a desperate move to keep the land, Kamba migrants had been ‘advised’ to keep bows and arrows in case the need arose to fight for ‘their’ land. The weapons were to be used against agents of the state (KWS), a possible Maasai attack and to some extent, wild animals. This particular requirement seemed to discourage women residence in the ranch.²⁹⁴ Anyhow, bows and arrows may have sufficed against the Maasai and wild animals, but were no match for KWS rangers armed with guns. Keeping the ranch required a different strategy. A Maasai councillor told me that both groups would have retained the land “if they (Kamba) had lobbied with us”. He said that the Maasai “support the government (KANU) but we fight too, we don’t keep quiet”.²⁹⁵ I shall be revisiting the strategies both groups adopt in the ethnic competition for political power in chapter seven.

²⁹² Presidential decrees, which may contradict the law, have been common practice in Kenya.

²⁹³ It was apparently to be made a *sub-location* (usually headed by a sub-chief).

²⁹⁴ In the Kamba custom, women did not handle bows and arrows which were hunting tools and for defence of territorial boundaries in the event of external aggression or intrusion.

²⁹⁵ During the study, some Maasai portrayed themselves as being defenceless or having “nobody” to champion their rights while on the other hand, the Kamba considered them as enjoying government protection and favour.

I would like to note that the state authorities did not want to be seen as being partisan or as destroying people's livelihoods. For continuity and partly to enhance peaceful coexistence between the Kamba and the Maasai, about 200 'families'²⁹⁶ of those evicted were resettled by the state in an area called *Kiboko B*, not far away from Mikululo. This land was part of the KARI based in Kiboko. The 200 'families' were said to have been the only "genuine" landless peasants with no alternative pieces of land. The criteria used were not clear as some more deserving cases were left out, resorting to setting up temporary camps in the nearby trading centres. Ironically, bigger chunks of the land went to influential personalities. There was pressure mounted on the 200 to reject the offer and hang on to Mikululo which had more agricultural potential. Many ignored this 'collective' action for fear of victimisation and possible loss of this 'offer' too. Musango was one of those who hung on to the last minute and felt extremely let down by 'his own people' the Kamba whom he dismissed in a familiar depiction: "Cowards!" and sadly asserted: "If these were the Maasai, they would not betray their people" (Musango, Makindu, 26/06/2000).

In this section, I have shown how peaceful coexistence between the Kamba and the Maasai was strained as they competed for farmland and grazing grounds. As a strategy to exclude one group from the land, their modes of subsistence are portrayed as incompatible. But if there is something to deduce from this text, it is the role the state plays in the coexistence of groups. As the state intervenes to regulate the appropriation of this prime land, new loyalties emerge. Party politics in particular introduces a new attribute of difference between the Kamba and the Maasai. This is worsened by those affiliated to the ruling party being portrayed as "pro-government" while those allied to the opposition are branded "anti-government". The Maasai "pro-government" stance is used to lure the Kamba, who would have got this land as a reward. However, the Kamba neither supported the ruling party nor did they organise a delegation to President Moi. Since the land was not buying loyalty to the government, both groups were driven out. The Maasai could not keep the land since it was administratively in Ukambani, and the authorities feared such a move would provoke a backlash among the Kamba. Besides, politics being a game of numbers, it would have made political sense to give the land to the Kamba residents whose population outnumbered the Maasai by far. Below, I look at how the groups' rivalry for control of a water project was also shaped by the state.

²⁹⁶ Preference is given to families during resettlements. Since singles hardly stand a chance, people 'create' families by corrupting administrators or fooling them.

6.2.3 Competing for “state water”

The case I would like to discuss here is quite similar to the one above, where the involvement of the state sows seeds of antagonism between the Kamba and the Maasai. In this particular case, a water project implemented in the name of the two groups ended up serving the interests of influential personalities. Since the groups could not establish where the water had gone, they turned against each other.

Popularly called the Kilimanjaro water project, and started with a lot of fanfare in the 1980's and completed by 1990, this mammoth project was meant to transform the livelihoods of cattle keepers in Kajiado and the farming populations of Makueni and Machakos district. To put it differently, the project was meant to serve parts of Maasailand and Ukambani. Getting its water from the Nolturesh spring in Loitokitok at the shores of Mt. Kilimanjaro, this inexhaustible water supply was expected to improve agriculture and animal husbandry in those arid districts, as well as provide clean drinking water. To make sure that the water serves both groups, the pipeline followed the administrative boundary between Kajiado and Makueni/Machakos. The Kamba, as well as the Maasai, were encouraged to form self-help groups, or use existing ones to buy pipes which would be connected to the main line. The Maasai were to have cattle troughs at reasonable distance, while the Kamba were to have individual as well as communal water points. The Kamba were particularly interested in small scale irrigation.

Although those to be served made monetary contributions, the government was to supplement these contributions. But this expected support was hardly forthcoming, with accusations of massive corruption in the project. Places earmarked for extensions or water points were phased out altogether. All the same, some homesteads and public institutions (e.g. schools and medical centres) in Emali, Sultan Hamud and Yoani areas received water. The Kamba quickly started growing oranges, paw paws, bananas and tomatoes through irrigation. The Maasai also got water, but just like the Kamba, only a few could access this resource. Many stared at the massive pipeline with their herds, as they would not find any cattle trough in the vicinity. Within no time, even where there were watering points, the water flow became erratic. People were generally disillusioned and yet, government officials offered no satisfactory explanations. Among the Maasai, inadequacy of cattle troughs and the erratic flow of water were erroneously, but conveniently explained as resulting from the diversion of water to Ukambani. Left with no alternative, the pastoralists in some areas vandalised the massive concrete pipeline, creating ponds from which they watered their animals. The cost of repairing these damages, which have continued, has been colossal. But even for those who water their

animals, the project has not contained transhumance as the search for pastures remains a perpetual problem.

For the Kamba, long cherished dreams of food security through irrigation were shattered. While the water did not reach Makueni district's headquarters, residents of Machakos town were equally disappointed. State officials and politicians had promised that the water would put to rest the town's chronic shortages, but only the district hospital was connected. With rumours that water had been diverted to Kajiado through the influence of the then vice-president, George Saitoti, some Kamba leaders protested to the Moi government. It was argued that Saitoti had used the water project to enhance his influence and shaky position in Maasai politics.²⁹⁷ In a very rare move, the then powerful Kamba politician and close Moi ally, Mulu Mutisya took many by surprise when, while addressing a public rally attended by the President, he turned to the head of state and said: "Tell your *makamu* (vice-president) to leave *Kamba water* alone". Although both groups were President Moi's supporters then, the water debate had created the impression that in the event that the Maasai and the Kamba were to compete for a national resource, the interests of the Maasai would prevail.

At around 1995, local residents (both Kamba and Maasai) were beginning to realise that they had been dragged into a conflict, but the blame lay elsewhere. What emerged was that after the project was implemented, powerful personalities set up large scale flower farms in Athi River and Kitengela, near Nairobi, and diverted much of the water into those multimillion projects. The result was that the pipes started running dry, jeopardising the small scale irrigation farms, domestic water supply, cattle watering areas, business premises (e.g. restaurants) and health facilities.

An investigative report by Monica Muthwii noted that among those for whom the project was intended, "taps have become monuments of desperation" (1999: 15). The problem had been compounded by the fact that many could not afford to put up storage tanks to harvest and store water during those occasional moments when something trickled from the taps. But, she blamed the Maasai for vandalising the pipeline asking: "Why do they adopt careless tactics of vandalising the project? Can't something be done about it?" She ignores the failure on the part of the state to meet its obligations by providing watering points, and the fact that influential personalities had diverted the water. And contrary to her claims, the Maasai were ready to pay for the water. The vandalism of the pipeline however, which is quite conspicuous, has given some Kamba the impression that the Moi government was soft on the Maasai.

²⁹⁷ He has been accused of being a Kikuyu who posed as a Maasai.

It is worth noting that ten years after the implementation of the project, and with some knowledge about the complicity of the government and its operatives, many Kamba still have the notion that ‘their’ water was given to the Maasai. But the ‘Maasai’ they talk about did not get this water either, although they have been more daring, breaking the pipeline to access water. On their part, some Maasai are a bit ambivalent, saying that the water was meant for them and not the Kamba. Asking a Maasai pastoralist, Nkari, about the water, he posed: “Which water? okay, we see the big pipe, is that water?”

The Nolturesh water story remains a scar in Kamba-Maasai relations and yet, both groups have been losers. It is a case of ‘negative impartiality’ where, while the authorities did not side with any of the groups, both were also denied what was due to them. Nevertheless, since the flower farms were associated with some Maasai personalities, to some Kamba, “the Maasai” are still seen as beneficiaries. Although the Kamba and the Maasai have not taken up arms against each other over this water, it remains a potential area of conflict.

6.3 Ethnic tensions in Maasai territory

I have repeatedly underscored the fact that there are thousands of Kamba living in Maasailand. This has been occasioned by intermarriages, migration in search of farmlands, to work as household labourers and to establish retail businesses. I would like to highlight two trading centres, both in Maasai territory, and to discuss how the Kamba in these centres and the surrounding areas live alongside the Maasai. Key concepts here are ‘dominance’ and ‘co-dominance’.

6.3.1 Co-dominance in a ‘Maasai’ trading centre?

‘Dominance’ is quite a relative term, but it is generally associated with power relations, competition for resources and rivalry (see Banton, 1983). I start by discussing a case of “co-dominance”,²⁹⁸ where both the Maasai and the Kamba strategise to ‘control’ a trading centre, but in different ways. “The Kamba should know that Simba is in Kajiado”, are the words of a Maasai businessman. Such words are not uttered by a contented person. And as a matter of fact, Sainkoi, is not. A fairly propertied man, with many cattle and in the management committee of a group ranch, he represents a cohort of Maasai that accuse the “older” generation of “betraying” the group. Sainkoi looks genuinely bitter. He complains about non-Maasai groups that “are doing better than the Maasai” in Maasailand and a government that

²⁹⁸ I have borrowed this concept from the field of ecology/biology (see Pontin, 1982).

has apparently marginalised the group. Concerning Simba,²⁹⁹ he is unhappy about the Kamba whom he says have “taken over” the trading centre. He laments that the group controls “the most important businesses”, that “they are the ones treating you” if you go to the local health centre, and that even the chair of the trading centre is Kamba. His list of grievances is long. Simba is one of the most volatile of all the trading centres shared by the two groups. For instance, to the anger of the Maasai, it is taken for granted that the centre, just like the rest along the railway boundary, is in Ukambani. Sainkoi bitterly notes: “Few care to take note that the railway line lies on the right hand side”, that is, Simba is in Maasailand (in Simba, 10/08/2000). The analogy fits the basic theory regarding boundaries, that they are stronger or stressed at the point of intersection (interface) and weaker as you move away from this point. Since Simba’s actual location is a matter of conjecture, it is here that the issue of the border is most sensitive and significant, than, say, Loitokitok, which lies in the heart of Maasailand.

Sainkoi is equally displeased with the Maasai whom he says should be more assertive and competitive, arguing that it is them “who gave the Kamba an opportunity”. He also notes correctly that among all the trading centres, it is “only Simba” that has no electricity and telephone facilities. He blurts out: “At least that is what makes it (Simba) a *Maasai soko* (Maasai trading centre)!” On the question of Simba’s location, I provocatively asked him whether he meant that the Kamba did not know that Simba was indeed in Maasai territory. He quipped: “No, they don’t.” But he is not talking about mere knowledge where the boundary is located but rather ‘evidence’ that this is indeed the case. He does not buy the idea that whatever the Kamba are doing in Simba complements the Maasai, arguing that it is “only the Maasai” who can chart their own destiny. He wants the Kamba to “earn” their accommodation by being “useful” to the Maasai.

Controversially, he told me that he had “no regrets” about the Kamba who had been speared in Mikululo in January 1995. He argued: “The Maasai have to resist, they have to fight, people are stepping on us”. He complains that the population of the Kamba in the trading centre continued to swell while the Maasai was “constant”. He argues that the trading centre “belongs” to the Maasai. In what sense would a trading centre ‘belong’ to a certain ethnic group? His justification is based on ethnic territorial boundaries. Such claims are not uncommon in Kenya, and indeed elsewhere. It is similar to a CNN report I watched in October 2000 following days of chaos in Lagos, Nigeria in which more than 100 people (mainly Hausa) were killed. The leader of the militant Odua People’s Congress (OPC), Mr Fredrick Fasheun, said: “We welcome people to Yorubaland, but it is Yorubaland and they

²⁹⁹ See Map 2 (chapter two) for the location of the trading centre.

should know that". Appadurai correctly points out that deterritorialisation, where people have to move outside their native lands in search of new opportunities, is a cause to new forms of conflict. He cites the Los Angelenos getting worried about the Japanese buying up their city, and Indians in Bombay (Mumbai) getting worried about Arab investors from the Gulf states (1996: 49). Wimmer strongly feels that in analysing ethnic conflicts, the aspect of emotions involved tend to be underrated (1997b: 632; Horowitz, 1985: 134). Horowitz argues that the extent of emotion often invested in ethnic conflicts and groups' quest for autonomy or domination and symbols of prestige, may take precedence over economic interest.

In Kenya, exclusive control of trading centres and towns gained currency during the clamour for multiparty democracy in the early 1990's where "host" groups demanded that "foreigners" (groups from other areas) should either leave or tow the ruling party line. The Maasai happened to have been one of the groups whose leaders were against the introduction of mutipartysm. As I have noted earlier, this was an attempt by the KAMATUSA to cow multiparty activists, fearing that political pluralism would be a threat to their grip on power.

Looking at the issue of Simba closely, the Maasai appeared not to be striving to exclude the Kamba but were rather deeply concerned about recognition. Departing from Sainkoi's position, a Maasai who owned a commercial building in the trading centre (rented out to a Kamba) said that the Kamba should "do whatever they want, but they should *know* who owns this place". But it remained unclear how the Kamba were to express this gratitude. The Kamba businesswoman referred to in chapter five argued that the Maasai "cannot be respected *just like that*, what have they done to be respected?" Well, to the Maasai, being in 'their' territory is enough.

There were other aspects of disagreement. The Nairobi-Mombasa road, that runs through the trading centre, has been a problematic one. Local residents attach various meanings to this road. One side of the trading centre is branded the "Kamba side", while the other is the "Maasai side". To lay some claim on the trading centre, the Kamba insist that the road marks the border between Ukambani and Maasailand. They conveniently ignore the railway line, the statutory recognised border, for recognising the line would weaken their stake in the trading centre whose business they control and which lies "just a few metres from Ukambani", to quote the chairperson of the centre. Whenever there is ethnic conflict in the centre, each group consolidates their numbers on one side. During the "theft" incident referred in chapter four, Kamba men, armed with bows and arrows took positions on the "Kamba side" while the Maasai with spears, shields, knives and clubs paraded on the opposite side. But the chairperson argued that regardless of ethnic affiliation, one could run or put up a business

structure anywhere in Simba. That does not wholly reflect the actual situation. To start with, the Kamba are not allocated commercial plots in Simba. Those who own plots have bought them from the Maasai, and these have preferably done so on the “Kamba side”. Ethnic identity seemed to determine who puts up what where; spaces are ethnically allocated. Much of ‘Maasai activity’ is confined to ‘their side’ and vice versa. Some Maasai, claimed a bar attendant, cross to the “Kamba side...just to be seen there and to prove that the whole of Simba is theirs.” All the same, there are other reasons that have shaped this ethnic pattern. By virtue of their home districts, the Maasai approach the trading centre from the left, while the Kamba do so from the right, and therefore each group has a side ‘closer home’. Secondly, the road at the middle is a busy one and criss-crossing it is usually risky. However, the Maasai have to cross to the other side where most of the shopping facilities are located.

Control of social facilities

There seems to be a distinction between control over business premises and social facilities. Simba primary school and Simba health centre for instance, are regarded by all groups as “Maasai” although they are located on the “Kamba side”, and irrespective of the fact that these amenities were run by non-Maasai. Another critical location is the chief’s office. Its location on the “Maasai side”, may have been a coincidence, notes the chair of the centre, but it “makes them (Maasai) feel that they have the authority, if a Kamba or Kikuyu wants help, you go to them, and they like seeing people going to them for help” (Mavuthi, Simba, 20/06/2000).

A water project funded by AMREF³⁰⁰ in Simba and completed in 1999 was subjected to ethnic antagonism. The borehole, that cost Ksh 2 million (EUR 26.000), was particularly meant to provide water for the health centre (also supported by the aid organisation) but the facility also served Simba primary school and some residents in the trading centre. Problems started during the siting of the borehole. As the engineering team was searching for a suitable site to drill, they kept on drifting to the railway line and that did not go down well with Maasai elders. The team was summoned and cautioned that should the borehole be located on the “other side of the railway” (Ukambani), the project would be unacceptable to the Maasai. Lucky enough, water was struck very close to the line but at least on Maasai soil. The elders were ‘ready’ to reject any ‘anti-Maasai’ scientific findings.

³⁰⁰ AMREF stands for African Medical Research Foundation. The body supports many health and water facilities in Kajiado district.

What was interesting was that the Kamba had actually not expressed interest in the borehole. But a Maasai elder, a member of the health centre's management committee, said that the Maasai simply did not want to take chances. Actually, AMREF, as well as the health centre administrator were deeply concerned about the Maasai dominated management committee. The committee of 13 members consisted of 11 Maasai, and only 2 Kamba although the patients were fifty-fifty in terms of ethnic composition. In fact, most of those who reside in the trading centre are Kamba. However, the Maasai said they had to have more members "to avoid control from outside" and to avoid "dominance from all sides". They needed to convince others and themselves that they were in control. The concern expressed by AMREF and the administrator of the health centre was not ethnicity per se, but rather the attributes³⁰¹ of the committee members, where age and gender appeared to be the overriding factors. The administrator, a Kalenjin then, noted: "Most Kamba feel they are intimidated by the Maasai committee and they expect me, as a *neutral* person to intervene." (Simba, 27/04/2000). He had a difficult task as the Maasai expected him to be on their side. In fact, a committee member boasted that they had an administrator "from our side" (invoking both territorial and Nilotc links). Occasionally, the Maasai were accused of not necessarily ethnic, but "province politics"³⁰² in the running of the health centre.

In a nutshell, what one sees here is an attempt by the Kamba to be 'co-dominant' in Maasailand and a Maasai strategy to enhance their authority within their territory. It is a negotiation of coexistence.

6.3.2 Dominance with equilibrium?: The story of Loitokitok

Whether one is within the town or in the countryside, Loitokitok is a place of striking contrasts, at least on the surface. It is important to point out that the Maasai living here are usually not the Kaputiei section found near the Ukambani border (e.g. around Simba). This area is dominated by Matapato and Loitokitok sections, who also speak slightly different dialects of Maa.³⁰³ The town itself, being on the Tanzanian border, is a booming commercial centre, with a heavy police presence and a busy customs office. There are many people here involved in the black market, 'smuggling' goods across the border, often with the full knowledge or involvement of the custom officials and the police. Anyhow, overlooking Mt. Kilimanjaro, the town is multiethnic, with many Tanzanian and Kenyan groups, and is a

³⁰¹ During meetings, communication was a problem as some of the committee members could only speak Maa.

³⁰² By claiming that since the health centre is in Kajiado (Rift Valley province) where Maasailand falls and the Kamba districts are in Eastern province, the latter therefore should have no say in the running of the health facility.

³⁰³ For details on Maasai sections and dialects, see Sommer and Vossen (1993: 25-37).

tourist destination too, as well as a stop-over for those proceeding to the famed Amboseli national park.

Though deep in Maasai territory, the heavy Kikuyu and Kamba presence, among other ethnic groups, is, at least to an outsider, astounding. The main businesses in the town are in the hands of these non-Maasai groups. A prominent businessperson in the town, Mr Shah (Kenyan Asian), who portrayed himself as “neutral”, shook his head as he spoke about the ethnic composition in the town. Speaking in English, he noted: “This is a Kikuyu area, my friend, even you man you can see, just get out of this place and go knocking the doors...it will be Njuguna, Kamau and Kariuki (Kikuyu names)...you will also find Munyao...Mutisya (Kamba names) that is the situation here man (laughs)...if you find two Maasai living in this town and doing business come and tell me because I would also like to witness...it is a pity because this is their place...and you know what? 8 or 10 kilometres from here, you will find Lasset but the place is actually called *Kiambu ndogo* (“small Kiambu”)³⁰⁴ people hardly speak any other language there (apart from Kikuyu)” (Shah, Loitokitok, 12/09/2000). As a matter of fact, only one ‘real’ Maasai was confirmed to be doing ‘serious’ business in a town with dozens of retail shops, restaurants, hardware stores, boarding facilities, wholesale outlets and kiosks. During the day, you see many Maasai in the town but in the evening, they withdraw to the villages. While ‘formal’ business (e.g. shops and restaurants) appeared to be mainly in the hands of the Kikuyu, Kamba women appeared to be overrepresented in the selling of fresh farm produce in the open air market.

In the countryside, agriculture is entirely in the hands of non-Maasai groups. At the shores of Mt. Kilimanjaro and dotted with springs, the area surrounding Loitokitok offers some of most conducive farming areas in Kenya. When you visit places like Rombo and Kimana where migrant Kikuyu and Kamba took advantage of vast lands and spring water to irrigate farms that produce onions, cabbages, kale, potatoes and tomatoes, then you might sympathise with the pastoral Maasai when they tell you that they have been “marginalised in our own land.” In fact, only a small proportion of these agricultural products are sold in the local trading centres, for the bulk is grown for the Nairobi and Mombasa markets. Other products like okra, karella and chillies are exported to Europe.

³⁰⁴ “Kiambu” is a district in central province and is one of Kikuyu’s indigenous territorial areas.

With about 20,000 inhabitants,³⁰⁵ Loitokitok has the second largest urban population in Kajiado district (after Kajiado town). In and outside the urban centre, you find ‘pockets’ of various ethnic groups. Those tracing their origins to Tanzania include Chagga, Warusha (Maa speakers) and Pare. The Kikuyu migrated to this area as early as the 1920’s but thousands of them were expelled from the area following the declaration of emergency by the British colonial government in 1952 (Campbell, 1993: 262). But it appears that as some Kikuyu were being driven out of the area, others moved in at the same time as the colonial power was engaged in armed conflict with African freedom fighters. The Kamba migrants started moving into this area mainly after 1940. The Kamba family of Reverend Mumo that migrated to this area and opened the first Africa Inland Mission (Africa Inland Church) is particularly said to have opened the area for other Kamba migrants. The church presence is quite evident in the town, running a school and a health centre. The Kamba population is not confined to the town, and most of them are to be found between Njoro and Ndonet.³⁰⁶

Going by their names, one would think that many ‘Maasai’ were doing farming. But many of these people posing as Maasai, at times clad in full traditional regalia, are non-Maasai or are not recognised as Maasai. Most of these ‘impostors’ are Kikuyu. I met one *ole Nkanka* who was said to have been originally *Ng’ang’a* from Kiambu in central province.³⁰⁷ He insisted he is Maasai though and posed a very controversial question in his defence: “What part of me does not look Maasai...(laughs)”. I did not tell him that his accent as he spoke Swahili clearly showed that his first language was likely to be Kikuyu. That was before I met a stream of others who had also strategised to legitimise their residential rights. Individual migrants tended to prefer some form of assimilation while those who had migrated in large groups or as families maintained distinct identities and lived in certain geographical areas.

Although Shah argued that the Maasai *hawana neno* (“they are peaceful”), and that they were not “bothered” by the presence of other groups, there was evidence to the contrary. The Maasai have gradually become vociferous particularly in the wake of increased politicisation of ethnicity from the late 1980’s. Complaints that “people from outside” had relegated them to the periphery “on our own soil” were common. But Margaret, a Kamba teacher living in the area since 1980 noted: “I have not witnessed anything like ethnic clashes here and there can’t be” (Loitokitok, 20/09/2000). She argued that because there are many ethnic groups in the area, the Maasai have a problem identifying a particular group at which to direct their

³⁰⁵ See Kajiado District Development Plan 1997-2001 (1997: 16).

³⁰⁶ There is also Luo presence in some areas e.g. Ndarara.

³⁰⁷ The alteration from ‘Nga’ to ‘Nka’ is meant to make the name sound ‘Maasai’.

anger.³⁰⁸ But there are cases where pieces of land bought by non-Maasai are repossessed and ‘foreigners’ property destroyed. The general elections of 1992 and 1997 were marred by harassment of non-Maasai groups and eviction threats. With glaring disparities in the control and ownership of property, Loitokitok looks potentially explosive. The Maasai are not just concerned about ethnic competition for resources, but also feel incapacitated and vulnerable. Some said they were not “equipped” to compete effectively in the lucrative commercial farming and business ventures. Distinct from the cattle keeping Maasai, predominantly non-Maasai actors operate sophisticated irrigated farms producing French beans that are exported to Europe. Besides, non-Maasai also run modern restaurants, wholesale shops and control long distance grain trade using heavy commercial lorries.

Generally, young Maasai men are dissatisfied with this state of affairs. The bitterness emanates from what they see as an alienation by “newcomers” in ‘their’ own backyard. Except for just a few Maasai, most seem to be bystanders, but excluded by ‘default’. What is perhaps more disturbing is that much of this dissatisfaction is suppressed and only in very exceptional cases, overtly expressed. In one occasion, two young men (in their early 20’s) almost shed tears as they narrated how Loitokitok sub-district had been “taken over” by “outsiders”. The bitterness of the two had been heightened by what they interpreted as an unwillingness on the part of the non-Maasai commercial farmers and traders to engage “Maasai” labour, taking this as a deliberate move to exclude the Maasai from optimal participation in the ‘local’ economy. Their inadequate technical skills notwithstanding, they argued that “outsiders” had a moral responsibility to “involve” the Maasai in their “lucrative” activities as quid pro quo. It is one of these young men who said that “outsiders make money as we watch.” Forster et al. wrote: “It is possible that the Maasai will use their identity in an instrumental way to secure what they see as their just rights...the Maasai...are not yet *involved* in many commercial ventures with a high degree of valued added” (2000: 145, italics mine). The question of agency here is important. While Forster et al. talks about *involvement* as something that the Maasai can choose to do, the young men saw this as a responsibility that rested squarely with ‘others’. This also raises the question of comparative need; that is, it is the non-Maasai who had made the Maasai look bad! (not to be progressive).

Some of the Kamba residents I spent time with (e.g. Mualuko) said that at times, their property is targeted in robberies or for ridicule. In public meetings, said Mualuko, Maasai chiefs and politicians stress that “people from outside who came here and made money, do not look down on the Maasai, they are your bosses, they are your bosses...and we can drive you

³⁰⁸ Same argument has been advanced to explain the relative stability of the multiethnic Kenyan state (Chap. 7).

out" (Makutano, Loitokitok, 19/09/2000). Generally speaking though, Loitokitok has been fairly calm, with the Maasai appearing to be "suffering without bitterness" (cf. Schlee, 2002). However, below I discuss some of the strategies that the Maasai deploy to enhance their status and authority.

6.3.3 "If you respect us, then you can stay"

Maasai history is marked by conquests and cultural superiority enhanced by the possession of large herds of cattle and control over vast lands. These attributes have instilled in them an unmatched sense of pride. Although much has changed over the years, the Maasai still remain a proud people. The Maasai recognise that much has changed since the 19th century, with mixed fortunes; loss of land, declining herds, disease and their being dragged into a new social, political and economic dispensation. But despite these setbacks, the pride of being Maasai has not been lost and many resist any form of intimidation.

Although the Maasai may, in view of the dominant role played by migrant groups in business and commercial farming, appear a subordinated group, they cleverly set certain conditions for accommodating "foreigners". During interviews, I was repeatedly told by Maasai respondents that non-Maasai living in their territory should accord them *anganyet*, that is, "respect", and recognition. I found out that migrant Kamba, who acted "disrespectfully", were usually chased away or "warned". The bottom line is: The Maasai attach special importance to being honoured and dignified. *Anganyet* featured prominently during conversations with Maasai respondents. It is safe to conclude that as in the days of old, the Maasai expect to be accorded honour, not just because of their historical military might and large herds, but as hosts to migrant non-Maasai groups. During interviews, the Maasai stressed that they are "friendly" but since it is the non-Maasai who are in 'their' land, and not the other way round, then 'they' should show gratitude and "respect".

It was not uncommon to hear the Maasai say, *kiyeu neishori iyok anganyet* ("we have to be respected"). So what do the Maasai mean by "respect"? Before answering this question, it would be important to note that the concept had been instrumentalised during the multiparty campaigns of the late 1980's and early 1990's, during which the KAMATUSA politicians threatened to evict "foreigners" unless *they* "respected the wishes of the hosts", which basically meant supporting the ruling party. Unexpectedly, demands for ethnic territorial areas ended up pitting some of the KAMATUSA groups against one another.³⁰⁹ At the time of my

³⁰⁹ Presenting his views to the Land Commission, a Minister of State Mr Julius Sunkuli claimed that the Kipsigis have no right to live in Trans Mara district which should only be for the Maasai. This was however challenged by the Kipsigis Trans Mara civic leaders who argued that the two groups have lived together peacefully since 1949 (see *The Daily Nation*, Monday, July 2, 2001)

study, the Maasai were using the concept slightly differently although this instrumentalisation process had shaped their ethnic consciousness.

I shall use a “Kamba village” in Maasai territory to illustrate this notion of “respect”. The village is located in a place called Nkaatu³¹⁰ which has maintained some semblance of Kamba identity, many years after the first Kamba migrants settled there during the colonial period. Although some of the Kamba (over a thousand) are associated with *mbaa Nganga* (the lineage of Nganga) said to have migrated here in the 1930’s, there were many other Kamba not from this lineage. Like the first migrants, most of the Kamba here trace their origins to Kilungu and Mukaa areas, now in Makueni district. Survival here is said to have been easier in the past when the Maasai were less sedentary.

As more and more Maasai set up more permanent homesteads, the Kamba were under pressure to adopt and practice certain Maasai rites of passage including female circumcision. This made it possible to give and take wives from each group. In fact, the people in the village, which include the Kikuyu, speak Maa, Kikamba and Kikuyu. Talking to one of the residents, Mr Mwangangi Mule,³¹¹ a third generation Kamba, I realised that I was neither talking to a Kamba nor a Maasai. Apart from mixing Kamba with Maa, he used “we” interchangeably, often exclusively for the Kamba and occasionally inclusive of both Kamba and Maasai. But in spite of cross-ethnic marriages, the village is conspicuous because of farms and ‘Kamba huts’ in the midst of Maasai pasturelands and homesteads. However, one sees some ‘Maasainess’ in the Kamba dwellings. While the houses have mud walls, wooden doors and grass-thatched roofs, they are grouped together like a typical Maasai *enkang*. This arrangement was adopted to keep the amount of bare ground freed from bushes and grass to a minimum, otherwise that would have brought them on a collision course with the Maasai pastoralists. On the other hand, these enlarged homesteads were potentially useful for security in the event of a Maasai attack. While the Kamba were under enormous pressure to conform to Maasai lifestyles, the hosts made some concessions. The Kamba were ‘allowed’ to have farms where they grew crops like maize and beans. In any case, the agricultural produce supplemented Maasai diet. In the course of time, the Kamba and the Kikuyu established a church and a school which now serve all the ethnic groups.

³¹⁰ In Imaroro, Mashuru division of Kajiado district.

³¹¹ The pastor of the local Anglican church.

In recent times, Kamba survival has been pegged on other ‘conditions’.³¹² During the multiparty campaigns of 1992 and 1997, for instance, many Kamba could not fully identify themselves with opposition politics. Mwangangi said that the Kamba strategies to get accommodated by the Maasai often leads them to “extremes...we end up being more Maasai than the Maasai themselves” (Mwangangi, Nkaatu, 12/09/2000). In fact, on that material day, the Kamba presidential candidate in the 1997 polls, Mrs Charity Ngilu, toured Imaroro (just a few kilometres from Nkaatu) to meet the local people. But very few Kamba attended the rally fearing that they would be branded ‘opposition’, thereby jeopardising their ‘peaceful’ coexistence with the Maasai. Ironically, the Maasai attended the meeting in large numbers. Besides these sacrifices, the Kamba have had to make other concessions. Much of the local leadership is in the hands of the Maasai irrespective of the availability of what Mwangangi called “more qualified Kamba”. What is more, although Nkaatu Sub-location was older and more prominent than Imaroro (which is dominantly Maasai), Nkaatu was denied the status of a “location” in favour of Imaroro. Mwangangi says: “They never want us to be prominent in their land...but we could not fight for it...they can drive us out”. In other words, for the Kamba to win acceptance, they have had to make sure that they comply with Maasai demands.

Kriesberg (1998: 183) avers that groups may coexist peacefully without overt signs of conflict but one could be dominated by the other. He notes that the domination might be so severe that the subordinated party does not consider it feasible to raise any challenges and may accept the domination as if it were legitimate. However, the kind of dominance demonstrated by the Maasai here is slightly different. If the Kamba are ‘dominated,’ then it is perhaps what Bourdieu calls “disguised dominance” (1990: 128), where dominance is contested.

“Respect” for the elders

I would like to look at “respect” from another dimension. Empirically, this excludes demands for assimilation or integration. The Kamba do not have to adopt Maasai practices or seek naturalisation in order to secure their residential rights in Maasailand. Sitonik says: “We are not asking anybody to be Maasai, no, but if you live here, know that we are *different*, we have a tradition, elders have to be respected...it is not just the Kamba, even our other brothers (sections) when they mock us, we fight”. As noted previously, respect and honour are cherished virtues among the Maasai. In fact, although many conflicts between the Kamba and

³¹² In ecology, Pontin (1982) notes that one of the “conditions of coexistence” is that different species stabilise ecosystems by possessing different abilities. Among human groups, the “conditions” are negotiated depending on the social, economic and political context.

the Maasai have been occasioned by cattle raids, the driving force is arguably an attempt to restore Maasai pride, honour and dignity.

To illustrate what “respect” in practice meant in certain contexts, I would like to discuss the experience of a non-Maasai medical nurse who worked in an AMREF supported dispensary in a place called Ematoroki. Her duties included diagnosis and treatment of common diseases among the local Maasai. In October 1999, something very unusual happened. A group of Maasai *murran* came to the dispensary and beat her up for “embarrassing elders”, that is, for injecting them in the buttocks. She was accused of “undressing old men and humiliating them”. Narrating the incident, one of the old men said in broken Swahili: “*Wazee walilalamika na watoto wetu wakaona watie yeye tabia kidogo*”, which means, “the old men complained (about her) and our sons saw it wise to discipline her”.³¹³ She was forced to abandon her work. Although I had been told that she was Kamba, I established that she was not. It is rather mysterious how they had arrived at the conclusion that she was Kamba. The point however is that whatever she did amounted to “humiliating” old men who “deserve respect”. The punishment meted out to her was meant to be “a lesson for those people who do not *respect* the Maasai”. I was told that if she had been “Maasai”, she would not have done “something like that”.

The corrective action taken by the Maasai underscored their intolerance of demeaning practices particularly from those defined as strangers.³¹⁴ It shows the extent to which they detest real and imagined subordination on their soil. But there is a gender dimension too, which compounds the ethnic aspect. The Maasai elders, who are men, were particularly alarmed because the person “humiliating” them was a woman. Although the dispensary was closed after the nurse left, the Maasai said that honour took precedence over medical care. Their reaction goes beyond the reification of culture, where people say “in our culture we do” and “in our culture we don’t” (Baumann, 1996: 4), to setting certain don’ts and dos arbitrarily as preconditions for accommodation.

6.3.4 The Maasai as “indigenous people” and the politics of recognition

The Maasai are not just famed for the resilience of their cultural practices but also for the vast lands they lost during and after colonial rule. As they reorganise themselves to fight for the protection of their cultural heritage and to reclaim lost lands, they have made a case to join the

³¹³ In Ematoroki, Kajiado district; 29/01/2000. The respondent did not want to be identified fearing that what they did to the woman nurse may have some repercussions.

³¹⁴ During the ethnic clashes of the early 1990’s, ‘foreigners’ working as teachers, medical personnel and others running businesses were chased away from Mt. Elgon and West Pokot areas, creating a vacuum in the provision of essential services.

ranks of world's indigenous peoples. Who are indigenous people? It is a concept that brings to mind, among others, the Aborigines of Australia, the Maori of New Zealand, the Red Indians of America and the Innu of New Foundland in Canada. These are groups whose identities are normally tied to their lands, usually lost either to accommodate migrant settlers or as an attempt by governments to create space for wildlife conservation or mineral exploration. Eriksen defines indigenous peoples as "aboriginal inhabitants of a territory, who are politically relatively powerless and who are only partly integrated to the dominant nation state" (1997: 40). While in some cases only a single ethnic group is involved, in others, it is an amalgamation of peoples. In nearly all the cases, there have been attempts to transform these societies into western oriented lifestyles. Indigenous groups have been closely associated with colonialism and marginalisation. "Indigenous people" therefore, are normally found in places particularly where descendants of European immigrants remain a dominant political and economic force in a formerly colonised, or where previous occupants have been reduced to a minority (see Morris-Hale, 1996: 12). To what extent therefore, would the Maasai qualify as an 'indigenous' group?

In search of legitimacy

While the Maasai are aggressively pursuing education and market economy, they have also used their heritage and their history of land losses to have an edge over other groups. In his *politics of recognition*, Charles Taylor (1994) goes against conformity and modelling, arguing that recognition is a basic human need. However, he stresses the need for the external authenticity of the "oppressed" group. And that is basically what the Maasai have done by seeking to reclaim lost lands at regional, national and also at international fora. Looking at Levy's (1997) classification of cultural rights, what eludes the Maasai is the legal enforcement of their claims, partly because of the controversy surrounding their claims. Apart from seeking to be recognised as a marginalised group, the Maasai leadership has made frantic efforts to transform the ethnic identity of their group to bargain for 'higher' stakes. At least metaphorically, being an 'indigenous' group has gradually become the Maasai basis for representation and organisation. Whether the Maasai have succeeded to acquire this status is still debatable. However, appropriating this title has not only made the Maasai 'unique' but has also elevated them to another level in the highly competitive multiethnic Kenyan society. At least, it has been used to negotiate for more political influence. After the Durban conference in South Africa in 2001, in which the Maasai sent delegates, the campaign for the recognition of ancestral property rights has intensified. It is in such global arenas where

Maasai elite, ordinarily clad in designer ‘western’ clothing, are seen in the traditional Maasai shawls, loin-clothes and ornaments.

However, besides the gimmicks, the objective has been to recapture lands the Maasai lost in history, secure certain guarantees for the same, and to protect their rich cultural heritage and artefacts. It has been a move to convert ‘Maasailand’ into ‘Maasai land’. The crusade, has, in the process, reinvented new collective identities and a fight for self determination, drawing similarities to Pfaff-Czarnecka et al. (1999: 13) observations. But instead of the Kenyan government containing what the authors call a “minority complex”, in the wake of such minority movements, it encouraged the Maasai cause in what appeared to be a way of keeping the “big tribes” on their toes.³¹⁵ Actually, the Maasai are not the only Kenyan group seeking to be recognised as ‘indigenous’. In fact, the Ogiek, the Dorobo, the Cherangany and the Elmolo could be more persuasive cases.³¹⁶ However, the Maasai have stolen the show and attracted more public attention. And there is little doubt that the Maasai have almost convinced the world that they are a disadvantaged minority group. And there is empirical evidence that this has not necessarily been an elitist campaign staged in Nairobi and other world cities. A respondent, Mr Sitonik, told me that it was one way to ensure that the Maasai are “taken seriously”. The comment was reminiscent of how a Kamba research partner, Ms Mwende, justified Kamba’s quest for the presidency in the 1997 elections, saying that the group was seeking “recognition” in Kenyan politics. In other words, these two neighbours have been doing different things to achieve similar goals. Nevertheless, while the Maasai could still field a presidential candidate, the Kamba are locked out of the indigenisation discourse. The Kamba and the Maasai contrast in some other ways. While the Maasai have a semblance of a ‘Maasai cause’, the Kamba lack a ‘tribal agenda’, something around which the group could coalesce or get mobilised. They can only dream of the deep sense of ‘Maasainess’. This difference is underscored by Amponsem, who, writing on ethnic groups in Ghana, highlights that groups differ in internal solidarity, some being unable to create a common identity for purposes of achieving common goals (1996: 160).

The Maasai agenda has been pushed by influential personalities. In October 2000, a Maasai cabinet minister Mr William ole Ntimama called for the return of “all Maasai land annexed by the colonialist or grabbed by post-independence settlers”.³¹⁷ He called for compensation for

³¹⁵ Coming from a “small tribe”, Moi tried to broaden his political constituency by bringing together many Nilotics groups. This was aimed at enhancing his position vis-à-vis the “big tribes”. There are more details in chapter seven.

³¹⁶ These groups have equally been seeking recovery of their lost lands and protection of their dwindling forest based economies. Unlike the Maasai, they have not had an influential leadership to press for their case. However, it is important to note that the Dorobo and the Ogiek, just like the Maasai, are Maa speaking groups.

³¹⁷ See *The People*, Monday, October 2, 2000.

lands that cannot be reverted back to the group. The minister also criticised the principle of “equitable distribution”, claiming that it had not been applied to the Maasai, particularly in education. He noted: “We have been victims of discrimination in the past, we have also been victims of geographical exclusion and victims of underdevelopment”. He did not stop there. The self styled “Maasai spokesman” read a detailed memorandum to the Njonjo Land Commission³¹⁸ in which he noted that the Maasai had lost “too much” land through “dubious transactions”. He said that land dealers “took advantage” of illiterate Maasai to undervalue and sell large tracks of land in Maasailand, and that land speculators worked in cahoots with the land control boards to dispossess the Maasai. He retraced the problem historically, noting that the Maasai presented their grievances to the famous Carter Commission of 1933³¹⁹ where the group’s representatives showed that their land had been carved out, but were apparently ignored.³²⁰

Earlier in the year, January 2000, the Maasai quest for indigenous status had got a major boost. A group of Australian Aborigines visited Maasailand to ‘brainstorm’ on how to reclaim their land. The four Australians had also toured the Arusha region of Tanzania to consult with the Maasai across the Kenyan border. This group was led by Fred Tanner, a land rights lawyer. They visited several areas of Maasai territory, ate in Maasai homesteads and held lengthy discussions. The trip was organised by a British NGO, *Pilotlight*. In fact, in 1998, 10 East African Maasai delegates³²¹ visited Australia. Regarding the Aborigine visit to East Africa, a writer who covered the story noted: “Both communities (the Australian Aborigines and the Maasai) complain that their land is encroached upon and that their way of life is threatened by this encroachment...they feel that modern civilisation poses a major threat to their existence”. The similarities between the two were said to be that both groups “cling stubbornly to their past ways of life while at the same time being forced to change in order to fit into a modern way of life” (see Benson Kimathi, 2000).³²²

³¹⁸ Mr Charles Njonjo, a Kikuyu and a Moi ally, was appointed chairman of the land commission set up in 1999 which handed in its report in October 2002. He was an immensely powerful attorney general in the Kenyatta and Moi regimes.

³¹⁹ A Commission that had been set up by the British colonial government.

³²⁰ *The Daily Nation*, Wednesday, August 30, 2000. Ethnic claims to lands lost in the colonial time is not uncommon in Kenya. The Pokot have for instance staked claim to about 48,000 acres of Agricultural Development Corporation land in Trans Nzoia. Presenting their views to the Land commission in 2002, they also demanded compensation from government for land occupied by “other tribes” in Trans Nzoia, Uasin Gishu, Marakwet and Bungoma districts (see *The Daily Nation*, Friday, April 19, 2002).

³²¹ The delegates included a Kenyan High Court judge, Ole Keiwsa (later Court of Appeal), Keriako Tobiko, a lawyer, Dr. Naomi Kipury, an anthropologist and Ben Lobulu, chairman of the Tanzanian Human Rights Monitoring Group.

³²² In an article entitled “a tale of two tribes”, *The Daily Nation*, Saturday, February 26, 2000, pp 5-7.

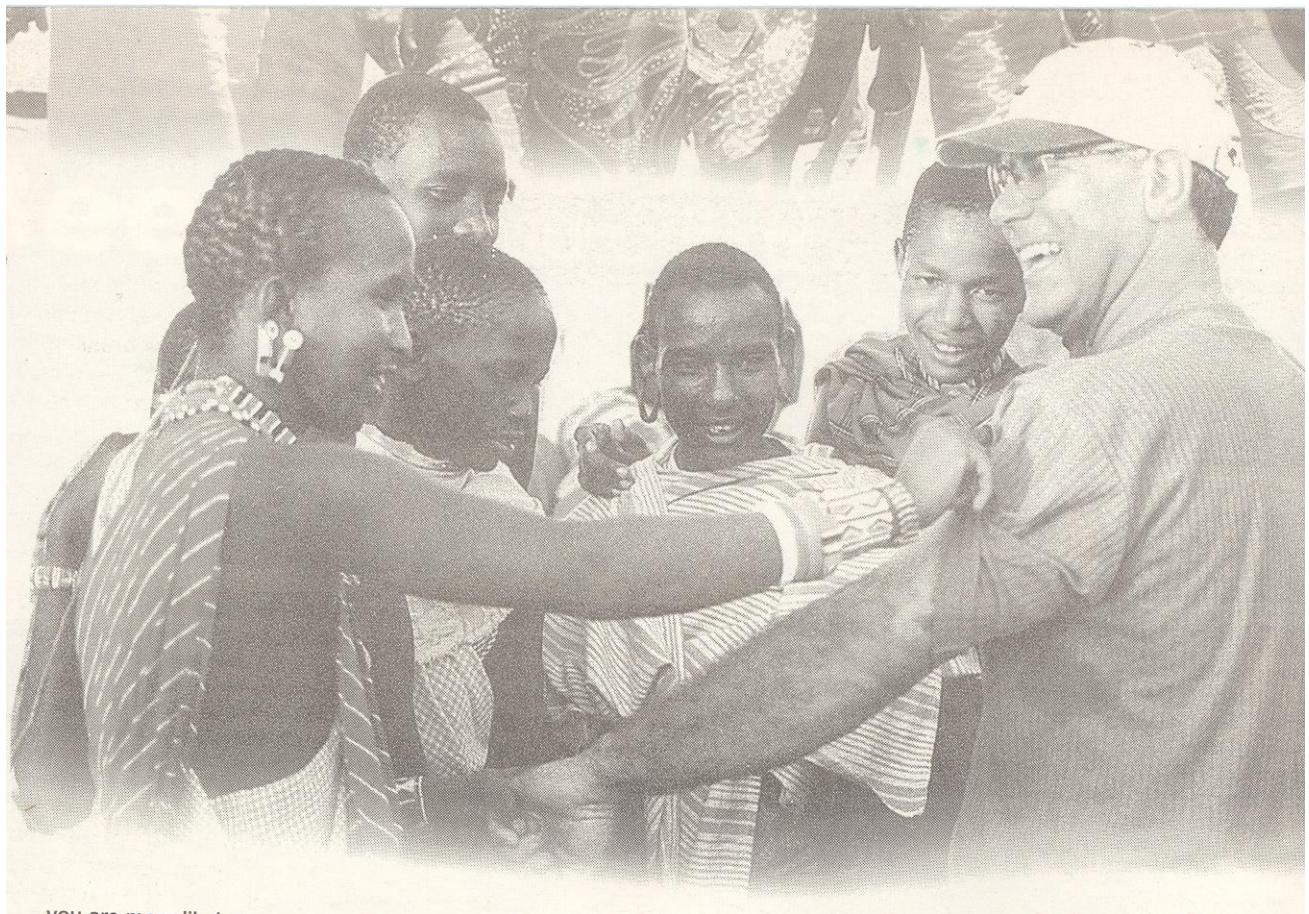


Plate 5: Maasai *murran* (warriors) admiring the hairy hand of Fred Tanner who led the Aborigine group during the Maasailand tour. The physical differences are rather obvious, but the two groups are united in their quest to restore land rights.³²³

Other points of commonality may include; the fact that they lost land to ‘foreign powers’ and that their respective governments have not done enough to restore these lost treasures, at least to their satisfaction. Just like the Maasai, the Aborigines were for long portrayed as a primitive group, not least by researchers. There are accounts of how whites in Australia, as they alienated land, would poison waterholes in Aboriginal areas while others engaged in human-hunting activities shooting native people as a form of sport (Banton, 1983: 121). These are some historical facts that legitimise the Aboriginal cause and weaken the Maasai one. I shall revisit this below.

Are the claims legitimate?

The Maasai have the advantage of winning sympathy and international recognition as the most well known ethnic group outside Kenya’s borders. While there is no denying that the Maasai meet some of the “indigenous” criteria, their claims beg some fundamental questions. Eriksen’s definition of indigenous groups (above) appears to disqualify the Maasai. Whereas

³²³ Photo copied from the *The Daily Nation* (ibid.).

they lost land under a colonial power, and the post-independence state has not corrected these anomalies, and while there is need to preserve their endangered cultural heritage, one may still ask: Are they a minority group? are they marginalised? If they are ‘indigenous’, which Kenyan groups are not? One may also ask, which part of Kenya are the Maasai indigenous to? Let me address these questions systematically. Let me start with the controversial land question. Any attempt to recover real or imagined traditional territory would be difficult to justify, for different territories were under the control of different groups throughout history. Some of the lands the Maasai lost through questionable treaties with the British, had been brought under Maasai control through military conquest of other groups before the Maasai might started to decline in the late 1880’s. In any case, in contemporary Kenya, landlessness is almost synonymous with being Kikuyu, who also lost land during the colonial period. Besides, save for the land the Maasai have lost to wildlife conservation efforts, most of the non-Maasai who have migrated to Maasailand or continue to do so, are in many ways just as disadvantaged as the Maasai themselves. These are peasant populations practicing small scale farming or keeping some animals.

Actually, those who own hundreds of acres, fenced off and inaccessible to the Maasai pastoralists during drought, are fellow Maasai chiefs, politicians, senior civil servants and the educated elite. Looked at from this angle, the Maasai crusaders would appear to be taking advantage of their well documented loss of land to the British to exclude other groups from their midst. Whereas the links with the Australian Aborigines are quite noble, the only problem is that those non-Maasai who have ‘encroached’ on Maasai territory are not the same ‘powerful and mighty’ group that took over Australia’s Aboriginal lands following Captain James Cook’s exploration of Australia in 1770. If the British were still a colonial power in Kenya, or those left behind were still holding large chunks of Maasai lands, then the claims to indigenous status would, in my view, be more legitimate.

Are the Maasai a ‘minority’? When you talk to them, the Maasai do not consider themselves as a ‘minority’ group. After all, as the eighth most populous group in a country with 42 ethnic groups, the Maasai would not be an obvious ‘minority’ group, at least in the demographic sense. Moreover, the numbers exclude other Maa-speaking groups like the Samburu and the Njemps.³²⁴ What is more, they have three vast administrative districts in their name. One would also have problems presenting the Maasai as marginalised or as a minority in the political sense. We are not talking about a group of people that are down trodden, ignored, insignificant and who, as Kituyi (1990) argued, are merely being dragged into mainstream

³²⁴ More details on this are provided in chapter seven.

socio-economic structure and politics. On the contrary, at least in the Moi regime, the Maasai were part and parcel of the decision making process itself, with some of the most powerful and influential cabinet ministers in government. Moi's long time friend and co-founder of KADU during the freedom struggle, Justus ole Tipis, was one of the most revered and powerful ministers in his cabinet in the 1980's. In the cabinet drawn after the 1997 elections, the Maasai had three cabinet positions including the vice-presidency. One could argue that it is actually because the Maasai are not 'marginalised' that they have managed to bring the indigenisation question into the international fora. The 'closeness' between the Maasai and the Kalenjin is one shaped not only by loose ethnic links, similarities in cultural practices, 'marginality' (during Kenyatta's regime) and geographical proximity but more importantly, their common hatred for and mistrust of the Kikuyu.

In Kenya, there is a diversity of opinion as to what constitutes ancestral land rights or where such rights should apply. Apart from the Maasai and the Ogiek; the Indian, Somali, Arab and Nubian groups lament that they are treated as second class citizens. It is a complex debate that revolves around ancestry, history and political power. In the clamour for multipartyism that preceded the 1992 elections, a group of six³²⁵ politicians came together to found Forum for Restoration of Democracy (FORD). An exasperated President Moi quipped that one of the leaders of this popular front, a Kenyan-Arab named Salim Bamahriz, was not a Kenyan and should go back to his native Yemen. Little did Moi know that he was getting himself into a quagmire, for pegging citizenry strictly on ancestry. Mr Bamahriz eloquently told Moi that he would be more than willing to go back to Yemen provided that the President also joins him by going back to the ancestral home of the Kalenjin, namely southern Sudan. The President tactfully withdrew from the debate.

It is important to point out that the state has no policy on indigenous groups. In any case, the clamour for such status is also quite a recent development. An interview with a senior government official revealed that the state hesitates to "create" what he called "special groups" or "special Kenyans" stressing that "all Kenyans should be treated equally" by the state.³²⁶ Even after suggesting to him that the lack of action on the part of the state amounted

³²⁵ Masinde Muliro and Martin Shikuku (Luhya); Oginga Odinga (Luo), Philip Gachoka (Matiba), George Nthenge (Kamba) and Salim Bamahriz (Arab).

³²⁶ Writing on ethnic land rights in Kenya, John Kamau notes that the Trust Land Act Cap 288, Forest Act Cap 385 and Government Lands Act Cap 280 do not recognise a subsection of the Maasai, the Ogiek as a forest dwelling community. The Ogiek, though organised under the Ogiek People's National Assembly (OPNA) have not achieved much. And they are not an exception. A high court sitting in Nakuru (Rift Valley) failed to accord another small group (the Eldoroir) land rights and rejected a plea to award them any benefits from Lake Bogoria National Reserve where they have subsisted for many generations (for details, see *The Daily Nation*, Thursday, May 30, 2002). Kamau suggested that Kenya should borrow a leaf from Fiji which is one of the pioneer countries to recognise the rights of its indigenous people. Picking on Fiji however weakens his thesis for Kenya's groups cannot be clearly categorised into indigenous and non-indigenous groups. The issue of indigenous rights

to ‘inequality’ since small minority groups were being pushed into the periphery, he was rather adamant. But in the same breath, the state has at least, tolerated the Maasai clamour for indigenous status. This is interesting because if the Maasai were to get legal backing to reclaim their lands, the state would be a loser, in view of Maasai lands it took and converted into national parks and game reserves. The question is: If the state does not back the Maasai cause in principle, why does it condone it? One explanation is that the campaign elevates a pastoral group (with whom the Kalenjin closely associate), to the political limelight. Underlying the Maasai quest for protection of their cultural heritage is a move that can adversely affect the livelihoods of groups living among them. Ntimama for instance, has on many occasions singled out the Kikuyu as unwanted migrants in Maasailand and in 1993, he was the force behind their eviction from parts of Narok district on excuses of environmental concerns. The Kikuyu sought legal redress. Mr Ngengi Muigai, a former legislator and nephew of the former president Kenyatta took Ntimama to court over forced ethnic evictions. The first mention of the case in the high court of Nairobi became an ethnic showdown as buses full of Maasai headed for the city. Inside the courtroom, the magistrate presiding over the case could hardly find her way to her bench as Maasai supporters occupied all available space in the courtroom. In a daring manner, she started by condemning what she called ethnic and political manipulation of the due process of law. Nonetheless, Ngengi did not win the case.

Looking at the whole Maasai crusade, there has been an attempt to present them as victims of circumstances, creating the impression that the group qualifies to be treated as what Werbner, (1997) calls “communities of suffering”. The Maasai are portrayed as having suffered and experienced incessant exploitation and as passive victims who were unable to appropriate these unequal property relations. Hiding behind the collective notion that they have been cheated out of their land, the Maasai have in some cases repossessed lands that had mutually changed hands to non-Maasai, on the grounds that the sellers were “taken advantage of”. ‘Genuine’ migrants (those who have accessed land ‘legitimately’) resent being branded “grabbers”. Mualuko, the *Kamba-Maasai*, noted that some Maasai lay claim to lands they sold before when they get broke later or an opportunity presents itself (e.g. when there are ethnic tensions), they lay claim to lands they had sold before. There is no doubt that some land transactions beg for a review, but making it a collective problem, in which the Maasai en masse are presented as having been cheated out of their land, is too simplistic. Non-Maasai groups fear that if the Maasai indigenous claims were given legal enforcement, many would

for minority groups has been raised elsewhere in Africa. In Botswana for instance, the Khoisan are fighting for the land they stand to lose in the Kalahari Desert to pave way for the mining of diamonds.

lose their property. It is not clear whether the state is wary of the backlash such a move would produce.

Whereas Maasai claim for ancestral land rights and indigenous status is a battleground of conflicting opinions and interests, the groups living in their territory are fairly receptive to Maasai “indigenous” status provided this is not going to shape property relations. Although guaranteeing “indigenous groups” their lands has been seen as a key factor in the coexistence of “diverse populations” (cf. Pfaff-Czarnecka et al. 1999), such guarantees could threaten interethnic harmony, depending on how the guarantees are enforced and the meanings accorded such entitlements by the actors.

6.4 Yielding to win acceptance

Apart from the strategies and demands that the Maasai adopt to enhance their pride and self-esteem in their territories, migrant groups also have their own strategies of winning accommodation and acceptance. I have already highlighted how the Kamba in Nkaatu suppress their political ambitions in order to win acceptance from the Maasai.

Villarreal (1994) talks about how “subordinated” or disadvantaged people can strategise, by “yielding”, in order to wield power. The Kamba living in Maasai territory seem to have adopted a similar strategy to avoid conflicts. By ‘lying low’, and posing as harmless, they win trust and acceptance from the Maasai, and in the process, access land and secure their livelihoods. In addition, through ethnic networks, the Kamba living in Ukambani appease the Maasai by allowing them to graze their animals “for free” during drought. Other concessions include lowering the price of cereals for the Maasai customers. By so doing, they secure the residence of their kin in Maasailand. Although most of these parcels of land have been acquired commercially, the Kamba know that their entitlement to land is anchored on other unspecified and arbitrary conditions, and not title deeds.

As a student of Norman Long, Villarreal uses the actor-oriented approach to show how the ‘poor’ or groups trapped in poverty adopt strategies like compliance and subordination to improve their livelihoods. She demonstrates that such disadvantaged groups access power “by acceding to the wishes of the other, thus relinquishing a possible social capacity or status to acknowledge a stronger, better or more appropriate bearer”(1994: 224).

'Excelling' without being a threat

In some extreme cases, some migrant Kamba adopt a strategy of building modest houses even when they would have preferred better structures. This is to avoid creating the impression they are doing well. But this impression management has its own complications. Some of those forced to be modest in order to avoid looking conspicuous are angry, since they are not necessarily better off. A migrant Kamba teacher, for instance, would be a source of envy due to the salaried job, way of dress and housing, and yet his/her income would be a small fraction of a Maasai keeping a large herd of cattle but clad in the traditional shawls and living in a mud house. To avoid ethnic tensions, however, such teachers choose to build a simple house (avoid brick- or stone-walled structures) in order to look quite 'ordinary'. Others borrow cattle from the Maasai, even when they can afford to buy them. The Kamba have to look worse off to win acceptance. The whole scenario reminds one of Goffman's (1969) *dramaturgy*.

One cannot generalise that all Maasai are bystanders in the transformation process of the Kenyan society and economy. Whereas progressive non-Maasai may arouse ethnic hatred and tensions, this results mainly from the actual participation of the Maasai in the new modes of production. But one must underscore that the choice between transforming grazing areas into farms and retaining pastoralism represents one of the greatest challenges to the Maasai society today. While some have combined both with lots of success, many are sceptical. In any case, the Maasai do not keep cattle just for economic reasons. Cattle largely define their identity, being, history, heritage and social status. This special attachment to cattle explains why some Maasai pastoralists resist destocking even when the animals are dying of hunger or in the face of an imminent drought. In extreme cases, some would rather their children dropped out of school than sell cattle and pay school fees. To some of these, external dominance can be overcome not by participating in new modes of production but by keeping off and avoiding 'comparison'. And this remains a big challenge to the migrant non-Maasai groups who at times have to conform and comply in order to avoid envy and hatred.

However, as I shall indicate below, the actors have a way of legitimising conflict if it occurs.

6.5 Justifying conflict: "Axes in one basket will make noise"

Looking at the examples above, it is clear that there are conflicts fuelled by competition and the drive to control scarce resources like land, cattle or water. These 'known' differences however may be hijacked or instrumentalised by 'tribal leaders' or politicians. In a fragile multiparty state, where party loyalties follow ethnic lines, the party in power may also take

advantage of potentially volatile interethnic relations to marshal support by pushing oppositionist groups back to the fold. The conflicting groups however, may have their own logic or explanation for their disputes. Mr Mavuthi, chairperson of Simba trading centre, where confrontations between the Kamba and the Maasai recur, looked at interethnic conflicts as “inevitable”. He cited a popular Kamba saying that *mathoka me kyondoni kimwe maiema ukayany'a* (“axes in one basket will make noise”).³²⁷ I tried to develop a story out of this statement and the conversation lasted an entire afternoon. “In one basket” referred to the shared borders and territory: The Kamba and the Maasai share physical space, a demarcated geographical area, an ecological setting and the resources therein. This dimension of ‘common territory’ lies at the centre of interethnic coexistence. It is the sharing of territory that puts groups on a collision course. This point is expounded more in the conclusion of this chapter and revisited in the last chapter.

Having come to Simba in 1973 when the centre had only 8 residents³²⁸ and becoming its chairperson in 1975, Mavuthi said that experience had taught him that groups living side by side and conflict were inextricable. He posed: “If people from the same womb can fight, how about two tribes?” Schlee tells us that it is not unusual to find neighbouring groups with varying value systems committing aggression and killings against their rivals (1989: 40). Mavuthi was saying that what should be surprising and indeed striking is that the Kamba and the Maasai coexist peacefully at all. He said that “looking at other places,” the Maasai-Kamba relations were cordial. This aspect of relativity is crucial; what he had in mind was the recurring bloody conflicts among other Kenyan groups. The point is that interethnic conflicts have to be seen in relative terms. Following his analogy of axes and the basket, he confirmed that the ‘axes’ rattle depending on their number, the size of the basket and how hard the basket is shaken. On ‘the number of axes’ he argued that one reason why conflicts were relatively fewer and “short-lived” was because of the population imbalance; the fact that the Kamba outnumber the Maasai. He reasoned that although the Maasai could easily lodge an onslaught against the Kamba migrants, the latter ‘fear’ that such an act could provoke a backlash in Ukambani. Still on numbers, he noted: “Lucky enough, these people (Maasai) are not very many...can you imagine if they were several millions or something?...eem...by the way, how many are they?” After sharing with him the Maasai population as per the 1999 census,³²⁹ he conceded that he had thought that they were “a little bit more”. He was glad to

³²⁷ There is a similar saying among the Kikuyu: *Mathanwa me kiondo kimwe matiagaga gukomongana*.

³²⁸ Seven of these were women. The centre had about 500 residents in 2000 but it is crowded during the day; in the evening, many people return to the villages.

³²⁹ The Maasai population in Kenya was indicated as 584,488.

hear that they were fewer than he thought, for a bigger Maasai population, he reasoned, would destabilise migrant groups living in Maasailand. On the ‘size’ of the basket, he surmised that whereas the Kamba had land shortage, the Maasai had “plenty of land.”

Pursuing the “axes” metaphor further, I told him that axes would not rattle unless somebody shook the basket. He noted that those responsible for “shaking the basket” are the group members themselves, “leaders” (political) and the state/government. But being an actor keen to paint a rosy picture regarding Kamba-Maasai relations, he was quick to add that rattling does not necessarily suggest “trouble” and that groups may be vociferous about their “common interests” rather than infighting. And he was right on this, considering the rich body of ethnic stereotypes and war rhetoric which hardly materialises into actual confrontation but actually pre-empt it. But we did not stop there. Even in situations where the ‘noise’ could mean conflict, he clarified that to make sure that the ‘axes’ remain silent even when shaken, one could put in a piece of “cloth”, “cotton” or a “lubricant”. He identified such soft materials and lubricants as intermarriages, formal education, “deeper understanding” of each group’s cultural practices and values and joint business ventures.

It is important to point out here that although the Kamba and the Maasai often portray themselves as enemies and are also portrayed as such, during the “ethnic clashes” of the early 1990’s, attempts to drag the two groups into armed conflicts failed.³³⁰ Although both the Kamba and the Maasai were President Moi supporters, Kamba loyalty was divided.³³¹ Through the instrumentalisation of ethnicity, some Kamba migrants living in Maasailand were evicted between 1991-92 while others left out of fear. In addition, people posing as Maasai *murran* would cross into Ukambani, burn homesteads and raid cattle. The Kamba would occasionally retaliate by invading Maasailand and avenge for their losses. Ethnic tensions heightened but Maasai elders insisted that those attacking Kamba homesteads were “unknown people”. But even before leaders opposed to the ethnic conflict held meetings and resolved that the two groups should ignore the isolated attacks, it was clear that an outright conflict would not pick up. After a short while, normalcy was restored. This did not auger well for the instigators, for the idea was not just to punish the Kamba, who were still loyal to the ruling party. The inciters also wanted to ensure that conflicts started in the Rift Valley spread to other areas, which would have given the President an excuse to declare a state of emergency,

³³⁰ As I noted earlier, these ethnic clashes, which were particularly intense in the Rift Valley, were politically instigated. Fearing a possible loss of their grip on power in the 1992 elections, the political elite among the KAMATUSA (see glossary) incited their groups to violently reclaim lands occupied by other groups in ‘their’ territories. The conflicts were largely aimed at derailing the clamour for multipartyism and to punish ethnic groups that were sympathetic to opposition politics.

³³¹ Details regarding ethnic alliances are provided in chapter seven.

and as a consequence postpone the dreaded elections indefinitely. The inciters had assumed that since the Kamba and the Maasai are portrayed as enemies, inciting both groups to conflict would be easy. What they ignored is that groups sharing a territory can engage in “competitive coexistence”, whereby, as I indicated in chapter two, diverse interests are pursued without necessarily any recourse to armed conflict.

Asking Mavuthi to explain why the instigators failed, he noted that the Kamba and the Maasai “fight their own wars”. Besides, as I have pointed out in chapter five, the two groups have strong bonds of interdependence which the instigators seemed oblivious to. These bonds, as I have noted above, act as the “lubricants” that inhibit the rattling of the “axes”.

6.6 Explanations for ethnic conflict

Before concluding this section, I wish to review some of the explanations offered by scholars with regard to ethnic conflict and see how their arguments compare with my findings. Disharmony in multiethnic societies is quite a complex phenomenon that is not easy to unravel. Morris-Hale (1996: 8) argues that in cases where conflict obtains, one should examine underlying social inequalities (see also Wood, 1993). Where resources are seen to be unequally distributed, this is likely to be a basis for hatred and disharmony. While this is also true in my case, I have also pointed out in chapter five that unequal distribution of facilities (e.g. schools) may not necessarily lead to conflict but rather be the basis for interethnic complementary exchange system.

In his book, *Racial and Ethnic Competition*, Banton (1983) argues that in competitive situations, human beings act in order to maximise their net advantage and to optimise. He says that competition begins “when two individuals or groups want the same thing and strive for it within a market”(1983: 103). Just like Banton, Wood noted that conflicts are common where resources are limited and demand is high (1993: 84). Similarly, Blau noted that “competition occurs only among like units that have the same objective and not among unlike units with different objectives” (1964: 331). While there seems to be a consensus that groups will compete if they are interested in the same thing (e.g. land), they will not necessarily appropriate it the same way. This is illustrated by the clashes between Kamba farmers and Maasai pastoralists, in which different modes of land-use introduce additional fronts/areas of conflict.³³² Besides, ethnic conflicts have been premised not just on competition for scarce

³³² Where tensions are not just out of the competition for land but about how it is used (e.g. the example given in the chapter where the clearing of bushes to create more farmland is seen by the pastoralists as depletion of pastures).

resources, but also on the “material dimension” of the “cultural” and on “symbolic” elements among groups (Zitelmann, 1997: 105, quoting Markakis, 1994: 217-37). This is the kind of ethnic antagonism that has greeted Maasai quest for indigenous status, with fears that such entitlement would jeopardise the livelihoods of other groups living in Maasai territory.

Citing ecological theory, Banton notes that there are some ideas that could be borrowed from plants and animal ecology in terms of how they colonise new environments. He notes: “People of superior status are unwilling to compete on equal terms with those of inferior status; they represent the latter as belonging to naturally distinct categories and as therefore suited to a different place in the division of labour” (Banton, 1983: 79). The lower group, he notes further, “might struggle to acquire a niche in which they would enjoy relative security from competition with members of the more powerful group”. In my case, it would be difficult to say which group, between the Kamba and the Maasai, is more “powerful”. Power shifts depending on which group is vulnerable *when* (e.g. the vulnerability of the Maasai pastoralists during drought) and *where* (e.g. migrant Kamba populations being ‘subordinate’ to the Maasai).

Banton notes that where groups enjoy different privileges and power, it is difficult to make compromises. Citing the case of Australia, he notes that the whites were unwilling to enter into any treaties with the Aborigines since that would have meant recognition of the native groups as land owners. And yet such negotiations would have pre-empted tensions and conflict.³³³ Banton notes that “when men are subject to little social restraint they will pursue what they consider their interest without scruple, and will later seek to justify it in whatever way they can, including arguments like the others attacked them first, or that their action was necessary to ensure their own survival” (1983: 121). Banton however is talking about a group that is seeking separateness from another for fear that close association would compromise its control and appropriation of resources. This presents a different scenario from the Kamba and the Maasai, whose survival is intricately vested in sharing of territory and resources.

The modernity-tradition theory has also been advanced to explain ethnic conflict. In *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, Horowitz (1985) critically examines the view that conflict is informed by tradition and that modernization would overcome it (see also, Morris-Hale, 1996: 1). Horowitz points out that conflict is largely a product of modernity itself. He says that groups may engage in conflict basically because they are the same or have similar interests or where the benefits of modernity are not spread equitably (1985: 97-101). The fact that sameness can lead to conflict as groups compete for similar resources attests to my findings. In chapter five,

³³³ Compromises and concessions are considered as key dimensions of interethnic coexistence. The discussion is revisited in the final chapter.

I noted that as the Maasai ‘modernise,’ similarities in aspirations with the Kamba heighten competition in other fronts (e.g. schools and jobs). I have also pointed out that as the Maasai, hiding behind ‘modernity’, revisit past interethnic transactions (e.g. where migrants got land) and nullify them, they raise ethnic tensions and incidences of violence. Horowitz (1985: 166) argues that the best recipe for competition and conflict is where a “backward” group and an “advanced” one are juxtaposed together. While the disparities in education and integration into the monetary economy between the Kamba and the Maasai are discernible, this has created the basis for interdependence rather than conflict.

Ethnic conflicts have also been associated with business rivalries where traders may compete among themselves, over customers or the so-called ethnic division of labour. Peil and Oyeneye note that societies where social differentiation is mainly based on race and where class, status and power positions correspond to racial identity, are more sharply divided than other societies (1998: 83). This is also what Andreas Wimmer calls “ethnically segregated labour markets” (1997b: 640). While these observations are plausible, I have pointed out that a group’s monopoly of businesses ventures may not entrench ethnic divisions, hatred and conflict. Specialising in certain economic niches like business can serve the interests of a ‘host’ group which predominantly pursues other interests (e.g. the Kamba running shops among pastoral Maasai). Banton’s argument therefore that as groups stand in different relations to the market, divisions between them deepen, can be challenged. He admits though that class theory may not be an appropriate analytical tool among African societies which tend to be divided on ethnic rather than class lines (1983: 87-93).³³⁴ Banton takes this debate further by noting that in an attempt to maintain group dominance, members of a category may come together and create a cartel aimed at maintaining a monopoly. My study however shows the group that is ‘dominant’ not trying to entrench itself but rather making attempts to conceal its ‘success’ or legitimise their dominance as a consequence of the other group’s failure to compete effectively.

Ethnic conflict has also been explained in terms of culture. Furnivall (1948) and Smith’s (1965) wrote about the concept of “cultural pluralism” in which ethnic differences in culture, history, preferences and imputed attitudes are said to lead groups into conflict (see also Banton, 1983: 91-94; Horowitz, 1985). Limitations in cross-cultural contact in non-plural societies (separate society) and lack of shared values are seen as fertile grounds for fomenting disharmony and conflict. Conflict is conceived as a clash of incompatible values. Smith has argued that where there is ethnic pluralism (i.e. where groups are hierarchically organised),

³³⁴ This of course neither means that ethnicity/racism plays no role in the division of labour and conflicts in industrialised societies nor that class divisions are absent in African societies.

there is a strong tendency toward cultural domination by one of the groups.³³⁵ Horowitz says that the plural society theory ignores the role of elite in ethnic conflict, citing the case of the Philippines where ethnic prejudice is said to be most marked among professional and salaried middle class.³³⁶ What is more, in practice, it is possible to have a dominant culture in a non-plural society. Jenkins argues that the concept has been used loosely for labelling all multiethnic societies. It is rather inconceivable to imagine groups “living side by side, but *separately*, within the same political unit” (Furnivall, 1948: 304). Such notions, which suggest a homogeneous nation-state consisting of isolated groups has been heavily criticised for not only contradicting the notion of fluidity and permeability of social boundaries but also for ignoring economic disparities and inequalities (Jenkins, 1997: 27-28). The study has shown that linguistic and cultural distinctions, transformational disparities and ethnic territories do not contribute to separateness but are actually the basis for interethnic exchange.

Politicisation of ethnic differences is also seen as responsible for the creation of artificial boundaries and discontent of unprecedented scale in post-imperial societies (Wimmer, 1997b). Wimmer indicates that in sub-Saharan Africa, there has been a direct relationship between state-formation and ethnic conflict. He notes that this results from ethnicised state bureaucracies and where private competition becomes a matter of public politics as educated middle class from various groups feel disadvantaged over access to power.³³⁷ This is what Horowitz basically calls unevenly distributed legitimacy.³³⁸ Morris-Hale argues that most cases of ethnic disharmony in former British colonies have been erroneously blamed on the colonial policy of “divide and rule”. He holds the view that most cases of disharmony could be explained by the fact that there is movement away from national solidarity and political integration (“centrifugal ethnicity”) as individual ethnic groups seek instead their own autonomy (“centripetal nationalism”), where local attachments and loyalty take precedence over wider socio-political networks.³³⁹ Although none of the groups discussed here seeks sovereignty, the Maasai have been seeking protection rights for their lands and cultural heritage by pushing for an “indigenous group” status. These campaigns however have not been conducted violently and are contradictory since, on the other hand, the Maasai are increasingly “becoming Kenyans”.³⁴⁰ As the Maasai seek these rights, they are equally active in the ‘wider game’, pursuing education and playing an active role in competitive politics.

³³⁵ Horowitz, (1985: 137).

³³⁶ Ibid. p. 139.

³³⁷ Wimmer, (1997: 636-7).

³³⁸ Horowitz, (1985: 139).

³³⁹ Morris-Hale, (1996: 255).

³⁴⁰ Borrowing Kituyi’s (1990) analogy.

Even during the ethnic clashes of the 1990's, apart from politicisation, the eviction of non-Maasai from Maasailand was not aimed at autonomy but recognition, "respect", and to stem or limit the continuous flow of migrant groups into Maasailand. I therefore disagree with Horowitz's generalisation that "when ethnic violence occurs, unranked groups usually aim not only at social transformation, but at something sovereign, autonomy, the exclusion of parallel ethnic groups from a share of power..." (1985: 31). While that may be the case in those conflicts that attract world attention, attention has to be drawn to other ethnic conflicts fuelled by livelihood concerns: Territorial boundaries, grazing areas, watering points and control of trading centres/markets.

There are some scholars who trace some of the ethnic conflicts in Africa to the way the groups 'traditionally' relate. While some argue that groups are inherently unstable and conflictual (e.g. Gluckman, 1965; Turner, 1972), Mazrui (1975: 67) controversially notes that in many traditional African societies, one was either a kinsman or a potential enemy since there was no intermediate category like "fellow citizen". Such a clear dichotomous relationship is highly doubtful since groups did/do not relate with all other groups the same way. While some are considered enemies, others are allies. In fact, the Kamba-Maasai relationship shows that even enemies can maintain interdependence. Nevertheless, in most African societies, primary attachment is largely to the clan, sub-group or ethnic group, with many people relating to the state only at the tertiary level. This is also partly the reason why much of social and political insurgencies in Africa have been associated with problems of an 'ethnic' nature. Quoting Magmata Diouf, Asowa-Okwe (1999: 96) notes that "ethnic issue is at the very heart of the bloodiest crises not only in Africa, but also in the former Yugoslavia". However, Asowa-Okwe goes further and talks about the excessive centralisation of power and the marginalisation of particular ethnic groups in accessing economic resources and political power as critical explanations for ethnic strife and conflict in Africa.

Other factors attributed to ethnic conflict include the "very nature" of the post-colonial state as an authoritarian structure serving primarily the interests of those who control it and their external allies (Asowa-Okwe, quoting Mamdani, 1987). These ideas are taken up in chapter seven where, among other things, I show that ethnicisation of politics may not necessarily lead to ethnic conflict or threaten the political stability of the state. But there is no denial that the ruling elite can easily sow seeds of antagonism. A case in point is the unequal distribution of crucial facilities in various regions (e.g. educational facilities or water facilities), a factor that could trigger ethnic discontent, group tensions and conflict (Wimmer, 1997b: 638; Horowitz, 1985: 101; Morris-Hale, 1996: 20). Schooling facilities, for instance, are useful

tools in positioning individuals and groups in the competitive job markets while water is crucial for the sustenance of pastoral and farming groups. But again, claims of marginalisation in a multiethnic society have to be treated with caution. The Maasai, for instance, claim to be a marginalised group while holding key positions in government.³⁴¹ Of course, participation in government cannot be construed to mean that equitable distribution of resources has been achieved or seen as such. Most Kamba and Kikuyu I talked to felt that the Maasai were getting more government attention than them. While it is undeniable that Maasai leaders were highly influential during the Moi regime, some of these leaders cleverly pursued a popular post-colonial doctrine that portrayed the Maasai as marginalised. Wimmer cautions that in the job market, ethnic tensions are not necessarily heightened by real competition for those limited opportunities but rather the *perception* of equality and difference (Wimmer, 1997a: 21; original emphasis).

It would be important to note that ethnic conflicts also spring from the demands of ethnic minorities for equal access to the rights of citizenship. Members of minority groups often lack access to government positions as well as being relegated to inferior positions in the political structure (Pfaff-Czarnecka et al. 1999: 17; Yinger 1994: 346). In Malaysia, Morris-Hale argues that while the Malay are politically dominant, the Chinese minority dominate the economic sphere, therefore having fairly clear lines of rivalry and conflict (1996: 181). Others see such disparities as unavoidable. Rothschild for example, notes that in multiethnic societies, there will inevitably be differential power among the groups (1981: 102). The Kamba-Maasai study shows that differential power among groups is not necessarily destabilising.

6.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have made an attempt to show the intricate linkages between ethnic conflict and coexistence. The general conclusion to be drawn from this chapter is that coexistence is a complex antagonistic process where interdependent groups oscillate between harmony and conflict. Conflict here is not viewed as a consequence of cultural differences but rather the rivalry for resources and the politicisation of ethnicity. To illustrate antagonism, I used various concepts like competition, dominance, destabilisation, marginalisation and co-dominance. I started by looking at the aspect of ethnic territory, noting that although the imposed political boundary has assumed permanence, it is constantly being negotiated and

³⁴¹ The vice-presidency and two ministers in the office of the President during Moi's last term of office.

often triggers conflict, depending on the interests at stake (e.g. siting of amenities) or simply when the boundary is instrumentalised as a way of seeking concessions from one group. The second aspect I looked at is the competition for land, water and animal resources. Common disputes revolve around land and cattle as the two groups compete for grazing and farming space.

It is also clear that disputes are closely tied to seasons: It matters whether there is drought which leads to transhumance and food shortages or whether there are adequate rains to support agriculture and regeneration of pastures. Variations in the weather conditions influence the magnitude of vulnerability and therefore the propensity to ‘invade’ farms or raid cattle, consequently heightening ethnic tensions and conflict.

The state, which controls large tracks of land through its wildlife, forest and agricultural research departments, brings itself on a collision course with groups that encroach on these lands on the one hand, and on the other, destabilises livelihoods and interethnic coexistence in its intervention to reclaim the land. Although such lands act as common territory in which different groups build strong bonds of interdependence, these are also arenas of ethnic conflict as groups compete to appropriate land whose ownership remains fluid. The so-called squatters know that the state authorities can take the land ‘back’, but they also have a stake since such lands were originally taken away from them. In the Kamba-Maasai case, pursuing distinct modes of subsistence/land-use on land where each group claims user rights, makes it difficult for the groups to coexist peacefully. Although pastoralism and farming ordinarily complement each other, this proved difficult where there were no mutually agreed ethnic territorial boundaries. Besides, it turned out to be an arena in which politicisation of ethnicity took place, with the Maasai, taken as government supporters, would raid Kamba homesteads with impunity. Although the state authorities and politicians can be blamed for being an accomplice in ethnic conflicts, they play a crucial role in arbitration and normalisation of Kamba-Maasai relations. Besides, groups that have ‘invaded’ state land may legitimise these acquisitions by going the “Kenyan way” where they do not confront the state authorities but rather combine these ‘invasions’ with negotiation, lobbying and organising delegations to the head of state.³⁴² But it is a complex situation, where groups adopt different strategies. On their part, the Maasai are trying to reclaim some of their lost lands and heritage by seeking to be recognised as an “indigenous group” with special property rights, a crusade that has met resistance, not least from non-Maasai groups whose livelihoods and entitlement to land in Maasailand is threatened. Since the state also stands to lose should the Maasai be granted

³⁴² This is what a research partner called “playing games with the government”.

these rights, it has at best been ambivalent. All these scenarios demonstrate the regulatory function of the state on interethnic coexistence, a theme that is pursued in greater detail in the next chapter.

A third important aspect that emerges from the chapter, just like in the previous chapter, is ‘common territory’. While ethnic conflicts will often be associated with hatred, suspicion, mistrust, enmity and agitation for revenge, groups will most likely ‘coexist’ (depend on each other) for as long as they share a common territory³⁴³ and resources. The bonds of coexistence will be particularly difficult to break if the groups occupy different ecological/economic niches in their shared territory. In the Kamba-Maasai case, the logic of justifying conflicts with the metaphor that “axes in one basket will make noise”, stresses the idea of common territory. In this metaphor, the “basket” represents territory. The actors see the inevitability of some form of conflict for as long as distinct groups share territorial space.

The fourth aspect I would like to highlight is rivalry for business in trading centres. As the market economy entrenches itself particularly among the Maasai, trading centres in their territory are acquiring new meanings and unprecedented significance. This has meant that non-Maasai groups that have controlled business enterprises are confronted with new challenges as the Maasai seek to assert themselves. And yet, as I have noted, the Maasai are not necessarily competing by venturing into business themselves, but by seeking to be involved, to be recognised as the hosts, and to be “respected”. By making this ambiguous demand, the Maasai are hanging onto something that cannot be taken away from them. Besides, whereas they are marginalised in business enterprises, they have held political power³⁴⁴ and demand loyalty from those running businesses in their territory. This is what I have called ‘co-dominance’, where each group wields certain powers in a given niche. Although this is not devoid of tensions and struggles, making concessions and recognising each group’s contribution allows some semblance of equilibrium. Often, ethnic conflicts occur when a group oversteps the ‘limits’ of tolerance/difference. Accommodation or acceptance is predicated on stiff conditions and sacrifices. For instance, the Kamba have to restrain themselves from challenging Maasai political authority.³⁴⁵

I have also discussed other situations (e.g. Loitokitok) where coexistence takes the form of ‘bad peace’³⁴⁶ and ‘dominance’. But again, dominance is a very relative concept. Although

³⁴³ ‘Common territory’ here does not imply the absence of ethnic territorial boundaries. But such boundaries, like the railway line in the Kamba-Maasai case, do not inhibit the movement and exchange among groups.

³⁴⁴ Political power is held through Maasai chiefs, councillors and members of parliament.

³⁴⁵ Other conditions include Maasai demand that migrant groups living in their territory should not join certain political parties.

³⁴⁶ Living ‘peacefully’ despite inequalities.

many Maasai in Loitokitok say that they are “dominated at home”, that is, non-Maasai groups are more privileged (particularly in economic terms), other Maasai would deny that they have been relegated to a subordinate status. Nevertheless, the marginalisation of the Maasai in the field of business ventures and commercial farming is evident. Loitokitok remains a potentially explosive case although the indigenous Maasai appear to have little chance of breaking the bonds of domination. But just like in the case of Simba, the Maasai wield political power which they use as a leverage. Moreover, if the non-Maasai groups were as dominant as they were made to appear, they would not be keen to conceal their ‘successes’. This concealment meant that the Maasai are not entirely viewed as a subordinate group.

CHAPTER SEVEN: EXTERNAL INFLUENCES (THE STATE/OTHER GROUPS)

The main aim of this chapter is to show that ethnic groups do not coexist in a vacuum. In other words, interethnic coexistence has an *external* dimension. In the previous chapters, I have inevitably touched on various state departments and political elite, showing how they shape ethnic difference, modes of exchange and conflict. However, I have largely restricted myself to how these agencies influence group activities at the regional or ‘local’ level. This chapter shifts the arena to the centre, to examine how Kenya’s stability/instability is produced. I discuss this by looking at the Kamba and the Maasai as an integral part of the state, and as major players in Kenya’s ethnic politics. This also involves looking at the broader context, that is, other ethnic groups, and how the Kamba and the Maasai interact with them in the competition for state power, state jobs and national resources (e.g. infrastructure). Equally important are ethnic alliances and how they shift to counter other alliances.

As sovereign polities, states are products of historical and political processes, and may be differentiated by the way they distribute political power within the population (Eller, 1999: 17). Kenya would fall under those states that are called *Nation-building states*, i.e., those that are in the process of becoming “nations” since they are yet to achieve national solidarity and political integration witnessed in older and more stable democratic states (see Morris-Hale, 1996: 256). As a democratising and fragile multiethnic state, Kenya can be seen not just as an embodiment and symbol of ethnic integration and peaceful interethnic coexistence, but also as antagonistic. I am presenting an *ambivalent state*, whose power bearers are torn between sustaining a united cohesive multiethnic state and reinforcing ethnic divisions for their political survival. Pierson argues that one of the main functions of a “modern state” is to act as a “regulator” of its citizens activities (1996: 106). While that may not be disputable, it is also plausible to argue that ethnic groups, particularly in “Nation-building states”, equally *regulate* the state. Therefore, it is basically for analytical purposes that I look at the state and other ethnic groups as “external influences” to the Kamba and the Maasai, for all these players are intricately interconnected.

I have noted in chapter six that despite being one of Africa’s most stable states, Kenya has also experienced ethnic conflicts, but most of these have not threatened the stability of the state. In this chapter, I look at some of the policies initiated or adopted by the political elite to perpetuate itself in power and how they have impacted on ethnic politics. There has been a debate as to whether Kenya’s relative stability should be credited to the political leadership (which has occasionally promoted ethnic hatred and conflict as indicated in chapter six), or to

the restraint and resilience demonstrated by the Kenyan groups themselves. I have already noted that the ethnic clashes of the 1990's were perpetrated by political leaders and administrators, whose aim was to see conflicts that had started in the margins replicated in other places.³⁴⁷ I have, for instance, singled out the Kamba and the Maasai as some of the groups that ignored incitement to conflict. A political scientist, Mutahi Ngunyi (2002) avers: "Kenya has remained peaceful because its people have chosen peace. They were provoked into civil strife during the ethnic clashes of the 1990's but they did not cave in. The biggest lesson we learnt from these provocations was that there are no war-like Kenyans. What we have are just war-like leaders".³⁴⁸ This observation corresponds to Armstrong's (1998) statement that states have a lot to learn from ethnic groups with regard to tolerance and mutual acceptance. Horowitz (1985) argues that ethnic groups often operate as if they were sovereign states, forging alliances when necessary and signing peace treaties to avoid confrontation.³⁴⁹ Peacemaking rituals among groups are said to be vigorously enforced with those who violate them being subjected to severe punishment to deter recurrence (see Oba, 1996: 120). In his discussion of the interethnic clan relationships among the Rendille, Sakuye, Gabra and Somali of northern Kenya, Schlee highlights the "tribe-wide rituals" as an "integrative force" (1989: 50).

While these examples clearly show that groups can regulate their coexistence, there is no doubt that the state remains a major influential force. Irrespective of the capacity of ethnic groups to live in peace, the overt and covert hand of the state authorities in interethnic transactions cannot be ignored. Schlee, for instance, draws our attention to the "one sided and unrestrained intervention of government forces" in the resolving of ethnic disputes in the northern parts of Kenya (2002: 22). This further underscores the significance of the state in interethnic coexistence. Although Rajah (1990) argues that the role of the state should not be over emphasised, ignoring this key player in a study of this nature would render it incomplete. I shall begin by showing how the politics of divide-and-rule, initiated by the colonial powers and retained by the post-independent state, have contributed both to Kenya's instability as well as stability.

³⁴⁷ Distinctions are drawn between "conflicts at the centre" and "conflicts at the margins" (see Zitelmann, 1997: 108-9; Fukui and Markakis, 1994: 3).

³⁴⁸ *Sunday Nation*, May 19, 2002.

³⁴⁹ He cites the Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam Pact in Sri Lanka to illustrate this point.

7.1 State ‘stability’ through divide-and-rule tactics

7.1.1 *The creation of ‘ethnic’ districts*

One of the major challenges of the newly independent African states was to enhance integration against centrifugal forces (Ake, 1967: 17). An independent Kenyan state was born in 1963, but largely, it inherited the power structure, laws and bylaws established by the colonial British administrators. In fact, it was as late as 1968 that the Kenyatta government changed the laws that confined ethnic groups to their own districts.³⁵⁰ Nevertheless, his regime retained the ethnic based districts. In 1978, Moi stepped into Kenyatta’s shoes after the latter’s death. In spite of the fact that the Moi government repeatedly accused the former colonial powers of having sown the seeds of *ukabila* (“tribalism”) and hatred in Kenya, he created about 30 additional ‘ethnic’ districts during his 24 year rule. Throughout Kenyatta’s regime (1963-78), Kenya maintained 46 districts, which was also the number approved in the country’s constitution. In fact, two Kikuyu MPs sued the state over the creation of the 30 districts arguing that this had contravened the constitution and that such a move should have been backed by an Act of parliament.³⁵¹ The question is, why did Moi create so many ‘ethnic’ districts? But this even begs a more fundamental question, namely why did the newly independent African state retain districts that had been drawn along ethnic lines? This question is particularly important because the party that took over government after independence, KANU, stood for a centralised national system as opposed to KADU, which was for a federal system.³⁵² The KANU government had even promised to abolish the provincial administration, and yet, the government not only retained it, but entrenched the same by creating more districts. A quick answer would be that the new African leaders realised that the same divide-and-rule method of the British would be useful for their survival and retention of power.

What is a district? Just like the demarcation of African boundaries during the Scramble for Africa ignored ethnic territorial boundaries and therefore ended up creating artificial nation states, the creation of administrative districts within the Kenyan protectorate by the British was no exception. They were meant to be for certain “tribes” but since neither *pure tribes* nor *pure tribal territories* existed, they were created in the name of majority groups and sub-groups in a given area. Where ethnic groups were assumed to be confined in one district, these territorial units were given the group’s name (e.g. Embu, Meru and Kisii). Over the years, the significance attached to the district, as a channel for distributing national resources and as

³⁵⁰ Irrespective of all the positive merits of this change, it was later seen as Kenyatta’s ploy to enable the Kikuyu to move freely and settle in other parts of Kenya.

³⁵¹ East African Standard, Wednesday, September 5, 2001; *The Daily Nation* (same dates).

³⁵² KADU, the Kenya African Democratic Union, dissolved itself in 1964 and its members joined the Kenya African National Union (KANU).

bases of ethnic leadership, meant that minority groups living among dominant ones in a given district were rendered insecure, since having a district translated into ethnic recognition from the state. President Moi exploited this aspect to create more districts.

If some African scholars and government officials are justified in arguing that ‘tribalism’ was unknown to African groups before the arrival of the Europeans (e.g. see Eller, 1999: 195), why have post-independence African states tended to uphold those divisive colonial policies. Ideally, there would be nothing wrong if Kenya were federal, with districts constituting ‘federal states’, complete with autonomous local governments. On the contrary, Kenya is a centralised republic, the districts are headed by civil servants, and they are created for political convenience, literally on a whim by the head of state. The civil servants however wield much power within their areas of jurisdiction, making the country to have a semblance of a federal state, albeit through the back door. And just like in the colonial period, these ethnic enclaves are usually not headed by officers from the local ethnic groups. Detached from the local scene, these officers’ only loyalty and source of power is the central government. Having no adequate knowledge of the regional dynamics, the power relations, social structure, cultural practices and local interests, these officers are alienated from the local people. This alienation however is ‘good’ for the state, since, just like in the colonial times, the officer is not accountable to the local people, who in turn are expected to ‘fear’ the authority of the state. Besides, the officers are transferred arbitrarily, before they have established any power bases. They normally serve the interests of state’s functionaries or local power brokers who could work for their transfer or their sack if the officers exercise a considerable degree of independence. Working in unfamiliar environments forces them to address gatherings either in Swahili or English, irrespective of whether their audience understands them or not. In a nutshell, although the state grants ethnic groups an emblem of identity by creating districts for them, it weakens the base for a strong regional authority and self-determination. This is what can be called the “institutionalisation of strangeness”, where ‘aliens’ run the affairs in territorial areas away from home theoretically not bound to the local ethnic group, sub-tribe or clans by loyalty (see Simmel, 1958; Schutz, 1964).

Creation of districts during the Moi era

As I have noted above, President Moi created about 30 new districts during his rule. Creation of a district means additional costs, in terms of administration and construction of buildings. Moi created these units under very prohibitive economic conditions. The Kenyan economy was basically in a pathetic state partly due to fluctuations in tea and coffee prices, a

deteriorating tourism sector and corruption. Tourism was particularly affected by the “ethnic clashes” of 1991-93 and 1997. Secondly, the IMF and World Bank were pushing for a leaner civil service. Apart from these economic limitations, the new districts created, just like the older ones, were multiethnic, contrary to the political elite’s rhetoric of “rewarding” certain groups.³⁵³ What is more, as the state created new districts, ethnic groups, sub-groups and clans fought over territorial boundaries, the areas that were to be included or excluded from the new district(s) as well as the location of the new district headquarters.

In Ukambani for instance, there were disagreements regarding boundaries when Makueni was carved out of Machakos, and in Maasailand, when Narok district was split into ‘Narok’ and Trans Mara. There were even deeper crises among the Kisii, the Meru and the Luhya.³⁵⁴ The initiatives generally created deeper ethnic divisions, rivalry and hatred. The selective subdivision of existing districts creates new frontiers for conflict. Some of the Kamba respondents said that they felt cheated in relation to the Maasai who, constituting less than a fifth of the Kamba population, had three districts in their name against Kamba’s four. However, although numbers should be a key criterion in the creation of districts, ethnicity has always been the overriding factor. In fact, irrespective of the glaring gap in population, the Kamba and the Maasai had two districts each up to as recent as the late 1980’s. Before independence, Kamba and Maasai districts were actually in one province called Southern.³⁵⁵ It is not clear why the Maasai and Kamba districts were put in different provinces later on (i.e., Eastern and Rift Valley respectively). A respondent argued that it was an attempt to create uniformity by putting the Maasai together with other “Nilotic” groups. This move however did not inhibit cross-ethnic interactions and the sharing of a ‘common territory’.³⁵⁶

During Moi’s rule, districts attained unprecedented significance. A new district translated into more government jobs and invariably, improvements in infrastructural development, making it a coveted entity. Besides, Moi’s cabinet appointments were awarded to leading party parliamentarians within a certain district. After the 1997 elections, for instance, at a time when Maasai districts had been increased to three and Kamba districts to four, each of these districts

³⁵³ For instance, Mbeere district, created in the late 1990’s to ‘reward’ the Mbeere, is a multiethnic district with a significant Kamba and Kikuyu population.

³⁵⁴ People fight over the location of the headquarters since that basically means the elevation of the market centre or town to a bigger urban centre through building of new office blocks, residential areas, , installation of services like electricity, post office and construction of all weather roads, tapped water, sewerage systems etc.

Consequently, what used to be a small centre grows rapidly through the attraction of investments, creation of jobs and markets for the local agricultural produce or livestock.

³⁵⁵ See Kenya Atlas, 1959.

³⁵⁶ ‘Common territory’ may not be affected by imposing political boundaries. Although the effect would ideally be relatively minimal within the state’s boundaries, there are many cases where international boundaries hardly introduce any inhibitions on transnational linkages between groups (e.g. the Maasai territory that stretches from Kenya into Tanzania, the Teso of Kenya and Uganda or along the Kenya-Somali-Ethiopian border).

was allocated a ministerial position.³⁵⁷ In such cases where an ethnic group had several districts, key politicians from each district became major political rivals as they fought to be the overall ‘tribal’ leader or the so-called ethnic group’s “spokesman”.³⁵⁸ These internal fights deflected attention from the centre as political leaders were kept busy in the margins.

Moi knew that all Kenyan groups, irrespective of their ethnic affiliation and political inclination, would be excited about the idea of having a district of “our own” or an additional one. Moi perfected the idea of making districts ethnic enclaves and platforms for regional and national politics. Groups or sub-groups therefore lobbied for these territorial entities and not for lower level units like *divisions* (which constitute districts) or larger units like *provinces* (constituted by districts). The demarcation of a district remained ‘strictly ethnic’, so that when Makueni was created out of Machakos in the late 1980’s, the new district *could* not take up some parts of the neighbouring and vast Kajiado district simply because Kajiado is a ‘Maasai district’. Creation of districts was mainly for political reasons, although the President and his allies claimed that they were created to hasten rural development.³⁵⁹ In practice, most were created to reward certain ethnic groups that had supported the KANU government. This reward would then serve as a punishment to others perceived to be “anti-government”. In other cases, those opposed to the Moi regime would also be given districts, as a way of luring them back into the fold.³⁶⁰ Those districts created as rewards for supporting the Moi government include Trans Mara in Maasailand and Mwingi in Ukambani.

The divide-and-rule method was taken to the extreme in cases where very small minority groups or sub-groups were awarded districts. This was aimed at breaking ethnic blocs opposed to Moi’s rule. That is how the Suba,³⁶¹ a group that only exists by name since it has been assimilated by the Luo, were given a separate district called Suba. Although human groups continue to find reasons to differentiate themselves from others by creating new groups, what was different here was the fact that the Moi government eagerly legitimised this ‘difference’, making the Suba to be in political competition with the Luo. Moi did not stop there. In 1995, he created one of the smallest districts in Kenya. This is Teso district, for the Teso people, who were hitherto in Bungoma district. The idea here was twofold: To reward the Teso for supporting the ruling party, and woo or punish the more populous Bukusu who

³⁵⁷ The Maasai ministers were: Prof. George Saitoti (Kajiado), William ole Ntimama (Narok) and Julius Sunkuli (Trans Mara). On the other hand, Kamba ministers were: Joseph Ngutu (Machakos), Gideon Ndambuki (Makueni), Joseph Nyenze (Kitui) and Kalonzo Musyoka (Mwingi).

³⁵⁸ While cabinet ministers, Julius Sunkuli of Trans Mara rivaled William ole Ntimama of Narok for Maasai “spokesmanship”, Kalonzo Musyoka of Mwingi competed with his cabinet colleague Gideon Ndambuki from Makueni for “Kamba leadership”.

³⁵⁹ The state insists that districts “bring development closer to the people.”

³⁶⁰ Districts created in Luoland and Kikuyuland were aimed at that goal.

³⁶¹ Or the *Basuba*.

fully backed Ford-Kenya, a leading opposition party.³⁶² Besides, the boundaries were drawn in an extremely antagonising manner. Some Bukusu localities like Chepkui and Tamulega were moved from Bungoma to the new Teso district. It was argued that the Bukusu and other Luhya groups like the Bakhayo would not have minded the shift if the district had been given a non-tribal name (e.g. the name of a town).³⁶³ While the Teso may have been entitled to some regional autonomy, the exercise was full of intrigue, literally creating chaos where diverse groups had coexisted peacefully for generations. But again, these are the ‘regional fights’ that deflect attention from the centre.

As various ethnic groups were embroiled in conflicts over these awards, and as the state exploited the appetite for ethnic autonomy, using the carrot and the stick on others, the state could not afford these money guzzling projects. This is partly because of the reasons outlined earlier. But Moi knew that people would still want a district at any cost, so he transferred the responsibility of putting up offices and residential houses to the local people. To some extent, this move irretrievably diminished the original significance attached to districts. But the trappings remained in place and the state could not cope with the demand.

One of Kenya’s smallest sub-groups, the Maa-speaking Njemps (Ilchamus), numbering only around 40,000, sought for a separate regional autonomy.³⁶⁴ Living mainly in Baringo central, which was represented in parliament by the President, the Njemps argued that since they are ethnically closer to the Maasai than the Pokot and the Tugen (Kalenjin) among whom they live, their unique cultural and social background had isolated them from the Kalenjin groups. Their request was rejected. Nonetheless, even those sub-groups that are numerically so few to be administered under a separate territorial jurisdiction (e.g. the Ogiek and the Dorobo) have been pushing for a district.³⁶⁵ The reason why the Njemps, the Ogiek and the Dorobo were not given districts or electoral constituencies by the Moi government was partly because they were considered numerically too few to warrant such coveted rewards. On the other hand, the Njemps crusade for autonomy was treated as rebellion against the President.

Districts and everyday practices: Going against the state

While districts are basically aimed at serving the interests of certain groups, everyday practices are different. State administrators, treating their areas of jurisdiction as separate

³⁶² FORD stands for **F**orum for **R**estoration of **D**emocracy.

³⁶³ See *The Daily Nation*, Friday, January 4, 2002. Possible ‘non-tribal’ names suggested for the new district were Amagoro and Malaba. The Teso factor is complicated by the fact that most of the group members are on the Ugandan side.

³⁶⁴ *The Daily Nation*, Friday 5, 2002. The Njemps have also been seeking a minority group status.

³⁶⁵ See *The Daily Nation*, Saturday, June 1, 2002. The report, by Lucas Barasa says that the Ogiek “also want to be recognised as the country’s 43rd tribe”. The Ogiek number about 10,000.

entities, have to exercise flexibility as they realise that local groups have cross-cutting ties and livelihood networks that cannot be confined within administrative boundaries. This flexibility deviates from the usual practice and in some areas, government officials refuse to be expedient. Contrary to my expectations, this was not the case among the Kamba and the Maasai. Let me illustrate. Emali Location is administratively in the Makueni district of Eastern province. The Kamba chief, however, serves the Maasai “from across” Kenyewa location of Kajiado district in the Rift Valley province. If the chief was to follow the provincial administration protocol, the Maasai would have to walk for many hours or board a *matatu* (communal taxi) to Simba where ‘their chief’ is. And yet, all this travel would be done to obtain a formality signature, an ‘official’ stamp, to sort out a domestic dispute or to get food relief. I found out that the Maasai chief of Kenyewa likewise, serves the Kamba from Makueni. Asking the Maasai chief about this arrangement, he said “we are all Kenyans”, an obvious remark but which questions the logic behind the creation of districts along ethnic lines. In both cases, it was evident that the chiefs simply complied with the common needs of the people.

Another departure from the norm was the *mobility* of these offices. In July 2000, I met the Maasai chief in Ukambani where hundreds of Maasai cattle, including his, had been relocated for grazing. He told me that since “my people moved, I had to move”. He also clarified that: “I move with my office, I am serving *my people* from here, those who come to the office are told that I am here” (Kamoni, Kiboko, 27/07/2000). Apart from this flexibility, he was also saying that serving ‘other groups’ had its limits. He explained that there were still issues that remained “exclusively Maasai” (e.g. safety of Maasai cattle) and therefore could only be handled by the “Maasai chief”. While this could be the case, when I talked to the local chief (Kiboko location), he insisted that when the Maasai bring their cattle to the KARI grazing grounds, “they are under my care, they are Maasai but they are not in Maasailand, if something happens to them, who is responsible? It is me. They lose their cattle at times, and they come here” (his office). However, the reason why the Maasai pastoralists come to him when they lose their cattle in Ukambani is because they suspect the Kamba to be the villains. The point I wanted to make here is that despite provincial administration’s restrictions and boundary maintenance, the state officials are compelled to conform to actors’ practices. This is one way that ethnic groups influence the operations of the state. The ‘mobility’ of the chief’s office shows how state institutions can be adjusted to meet local conditions. This also suggests that creation of districts along ethnic lines may make sense as unique and peculiar

needs, for example, among pastoralists, may prove difficult to address if they were lumped together with farming groups.

It is safe to surmise that state stability is a multifaceted process, produced through a combination of ethnic autonomy and the symbolism of ethnic recognition on the one hand, and the flexibility of the state to allow wider cross-ethnic networks on the other.

7.1.2 *The federal scare*

At the eve of independence, there were serious debates as to what system of government Kenya should adopt. During the *Mau Mau* revolt between 1952 and 1960, the British colonial administration prohibited the formation of broad based national parties. Political parties were limited only to the district level. Some of the political parties that were formed on district or regional basis included Kalenjin Political Alliance, the Maasai United Front, the Coast African Political Union, the Kamba Peoples Party and the Kenya Indian Congress. The colonial government had created an antagonistic atmosphere between different ethnic groups, fearing for a unified opposition (Macharia, 1997: 83). When this ban that limited political association to ethnic groups was lifted in 1960, two political parties, KANU and KADU emerged.

Whereas KANU stood for a centralised system, stressing the need for integration (a unitary state) and equitable distribution of resources, the opposition party then, KADU, which enjoyed the support of White settlers and the colonial government, sought to adopt a *majimbo* (federal) government (Ake, 1967:22), where power would be devolved from the centre to the regions. These differences however were not informed by ideology but ethnicity. While KANU had the backing of the so-called “big tribes,” led by the Kikuyu and the Luo, KADU brought together “small tribes”, which included the Kalenjin sub-groups, the Luhya sub-groups, the Maasai and the coastal Mijikenda. The Kamba were in KANU but their leader then, Paul Ngei, differed with KANU leadership and founded African People’s Party (APP). After the 1963 elections, he joined KADU as the deputy leader of the opposition in parliament. On the first anniversary of independence in 1964, Kenya became a republic under a KANU government that was centralised but recognised the existence of ethnic groups and ‘tribal’ homelands. The opposition parties, KADU and APP dissolved themselves and their members crossed the floor and joined KANU.

So why am I talking about a “federal scare” (*majimbo* scare) long after KADU’s demise? As I have noted in chapter six, in post-independent Kenya, the *majimbo* debate has kept on rearing its ugly head in political discourse. Though often touted as a measure to accommodate

difference and diversity, in the Moi era, the debate was usually activated to intimidate or woo certain ethnic groups. In other words, just like the districts, it was used as a bait and as a scare/punishment. As I noted earlier, *majimbo* rallies were organised in the early 1990's in which cabinet ministers and other politicians allied to President Moi called for the adoption of *majimbo* if Kenya was to adopt a multiparty system. Interestingly, political leaders who backed *majimbo* were from the same groups that at independence supported KADU, namely the Kalenjin, the Maasai, the Turkana, the Somali and coastal groups. In other words, the old members of the defunct KADU, who were now running a KANU government, used this to intimidate the "big tribes" which, although the original KANU founders and members, had joined opposition ranks to push for a multiparty system of government.

After "ethnic clashes" were started in the Rift Valley and Western provinces to drive out "oppositionists", (particularly the Luo, the Kikuyu and the Luhya), and KANU won the 1992 elections, the push for a federal government subsided. It was to emerge in the run up to the 1997 elections, and during the review of the country's constitution in preparation for the 2002 elections. During the Moi era, the objective of the campaign was stark: "For as long as we (Kalenjin and allied groups) rule, we can have a centralised government. Should other groups threaten our grip on power, then let us have *majimbo* or a civil war". Although a referendum has never been carried out to find out which regions or groups support this system of government and why, coastal leaders have been quite consistent. But even there, it is the leaders who say "my people want *majimbo*". For instance, before the constitution review commission visited the Coast province to collect views, a local MP was drilling his people. He told them: "You must tell the Constitution of Kenya Review Commission that this is what you want...I want a federal government that would allow us to rule this region ourselves and control revenues collected from this area to boost our economy".³⁶⁶ As the 2002 elections drew closer, a small party that calls itself *Chama cha Majimbo na Mwangaza* ("federal and light party"), proposed the creation of 11 *jimbos* (counties) combining various ethnic districts together. The party also proposed that in the public sector, jobs should be shared "Majimbo-style".³⁶⁷ Proposals from other areas were quite radical. Representatives from the Somali dominated North Eastern province told the review commission that the Islamic Sharia law should be introduced in province.³⁶⁸ Based on the fact that they are transhumant or nomadic, often taking their animals to neighbouring countries, they also proposed that a future

³⁶⁶ Sentiments expressed by Mr Suleiman Kamole, the MP for Matuga in Kwale district (Coast province). Featured in the *The Daily Nation*, Wednesday, July 18, 2001.

³⁶⁷ *The Daily Nation*, Thursday, March 28, 2002.

³⁶⁸ *The Daily Nation*, Tuesday, June 11, 2000.

constitution should allow them to acquire Ethiopian and Somali nationality while retaining their Kenyan citizenship. The existing Kenyan law does not allow double citizenship.

In general, few disagree that a federal system may be better suited to tackle Kenya's ethnic diversity, varying modes of subsistence and the regional imbalances in social transformation. Conceding power to the regions could be a better guarantee for a stable multiethnic state. With all the potential benefits that could accrue from a federal system, what makes some groups sceptical is the kind of system the leading crusaders usually have in mind. It is one where a certain *jimbo* (county) would be exclusive for a certain ethnic group or groups, making nonsense of the ideals of decentralisation, devolution of power, safeguarding minority rights and being more responsive to local needs. This intention, whether real or used as a scare to *tribalise* regions, explains why the Kamba, though solid Moi supporters almost throughout his rule, steered clear of the clamour for a federal system.

Kamba and Maasai response to Majimboism

Although sharing an ecological zone with the Maasai and both firmly represented in Moi's cabinet, the Kamba did not join the Maasai in supporting this controversial system. As I noted earlier, the Maasai have been seeking indigenous status and protection of their land. To some of their vociferous leaders (e.g. Ole Ntimama), a federal system would serve Maasai interests. On the other hand, the Kamba have been concerned about their drought prone area, which could be relegated to poverty in the kind of federalism sought by the crusaders. The *majimbo* proponents have evaded discussing the logical mandatory redistribution system, in which richer *jimbos* would finance poorer ones. But when the campaign intensified, with some politicians even saying that a *majimbo* constitution was ready (see ICJ, 2000), groups that were opposed to the system began drawing some strategies. Groups started laying claims to whatever valuable resource that was in 'their' region. Ethnic claims have been made on cities, towns, ports, industrial establishments, universities and land. With the Maasai keen to 'own' the highly valuable Magadi Soda in Lake Magadi and the Maasai Mara game reserve, the Kamba were saying that should a federal system be thrust down their throats, then their *jimbo* would control the industrial Athi River town, Tsavo National Park, Jomo Kenyatta International Airport and Nairobi-Mombasa road! So exclusionist and ethnic has been the *majimbo* debate.

The debate has been full of blackmail and arm twisting. As the Kamba were beginning to talk about the strategic Nairobi-Mombasa road, which cuts through their territory, a rumour was going round that the road would be re-routed to pass through Kajiado (Maasailand) and

therefore ‘deny’ the Kamba any possible benefits. It remains unclear whether this was just a scare or it was intended to heighten ethnic tensions between the Kamba and the Maasai. Besides the aridity in Ukambani, the Kamba have been generally against *majimbo* due to their migrant kin. Actually, this concern is what brought the Kamba and the Kikuyu together in opposing *majimbo*. The two groups are some of the most dispersed peoples in Kenya. Theoretically, in fact constitutionally, Kenyans are free to settle anywhere in the republic irrespective of their ethnic identity. While this has been possible, the ethnic clashes discussed earlier, where KANU leadership talked of “host” groups and “foreigners”, was a pointer to what kind of a federal government the crusaders had in mind. As I noted, the “foreigners” (migrant groups) were being asked to “respect” the “hosts” (the dominant local groups) or go back to their original homelands. This brings a discrepancy between theory and practice. The 1991-93 and 1997 experiences, in which the Kikuyu were forcefully driven out of the Rift Valley while the Kamba were evicted from the coastal region, are enough reasons for them to reject *majimbo*. During the *majimbo* rallies, the Kamba ministers, who were notoriously ardent Moi supporters, feared the backlash their support would provoke among the Kamba. As for the Kikuyu, ‘their’ *jimbo* would, in an ideal situation, perhaps be the most progressive, but the notion of creating pure ethnic zones would threaten the livelihoods of many others. This is why the Kikuyu-led Democratic Party (DP) dismissed *majimbo* as “tribal apartheid”, favouring instead a unitary system but where power is devolved to local authorities (local councils).³⁶⁹

So what has the debate done? On the one hand, it has made groups to think inwardly (regionally) rather than nationally. The Luhya and the coastal groups for instance, have been pushing for the establishment of a university in their areas. During Moi’s rule, Kenyans did not only see two state universities and some of Kenya’s best schools and highways built in his home area, but also an international airport.³⁷⁰ While it is widely believed that this was in anticipation of a *majimbo* government, it left many groups pondering: “What do we have?” The move reinforced the catch-up syndrome where each ethnic group evaluated its national standing in terms of schools, state of roads, medical facilities, and key jobs in government. But the whole debate had an impact on state stability. The rhetoric helped to deflect attention from the centre (that Moi had served parochial interests), as it cracked ethnic alliances that would be a threat to his grip on power. It slowed down the momentum of multipartyism as those who backed plural democracy had to counter the *majimbo* wave. Members of ethnic

³⁶⁹ East African Standard, Thursday, September 27, 2001. This newspaper can be accessed on the internet through www.eastandard.net

³⁷⁰ Kenya has a total of only six state universities and three international airports.

groups that had disproportionately benefited from Moi's rule felt vulnerable and therefore chose to support *majimbo* and protect 'what they had' while others supported the system in anticipation that they would be rewarded or that they would get a chance for self determination (e.g., North Eastern and coastal groups). The *majimbo* debate enhanced ethnic antagonism between "small" and "big" tribes. The so-called "small tribes", which President Moi was purported to represent, were being told that they would be marginalised by a government led by the "big tribes".

The whole debate undermined peaceful coexistence between the Kamba and the Maasai. This was particularly because, with regard to "small" and "big" tribes, the Kamba position, unlike the Maasai's, has remained ambiguous. Whereas the Maasai have always been categorised as a "small tribe", the Kamba, as I shall expound below, are regarded as "small" although they are numerically "big". The politics of ethnic numbers introduce a discourse in which the Kamba and the Maasai cannot share a common platform. In a nutshell, the *majimbo* scare remains active in Kenya's politics. Even after the 2002 elections in which KANU lost the presidency, a group of KANU MPs from the Rift Valley threatened to agitate for *Majimbo* "if the NARC Government continues to persecute the Kalenjin community".³⁷¹ The complaint was that the new government had started replacing Kalenjin personalities appointed to senior positions by former President Moi. They threatened that they could even declare Rift Valley a state on its own. This time round, other MPs from the province, notably Maasai MPs, did not endorse those sentiments. Following a countrywide condemnation of the threats, some of the Kalenjin MPs who had made the threats softened their stance. However, for as long as ethnicity, rather than ideology, remains the mode in which Kenya's polity is organised, *majimboism* will always be a useful way of building ethnic alliances in the competition for political power.³⁷²

7.1.3 The politics of ethnic numbers

There are several countries in Africa, prominent among them Nigeria, where census figures on the various ethnic groups have been potentially explosive (see Morris-Hale, 1996: 194). Until very recently, this was not the case in Kenya. From the censuses conducted from the period of British rule in 1948, up to at least 1979, Kenyans knew that the Kikuyu were the most populous group, followed by the Luo, the Luhya, the Kamba etc., in that order. It never

³⁷¹ See *Sunday Nation*, February 23rd, 2003.

³⁷² See also Prof. Kivutha Kibwana's article in the *Sunday Nation*, July 8, 2001.

occurred to them that this positioning could drastically change, since, during the intercensal periods, population growth rate among all groups tended to be fairly similar.

While the Kenyan government takes pride in being one of the few countries in sub-Saharan Africa that conduct population censuses every ten years, as per United Nations recommendations, recent censuses have been clearly delusive. The table below clearly shows that in 1969, the *Kalenjin* category did not exist, and therefore the individual groups (e.g. the Nandi, the Kipsigis, the Pokot, the Tugen etc.) were counted separately. However, with Moi's ascendancy to power in 1978, things changed. In the 1979 census, all these groups were transformed into sub-groups belonging to the *Kalenjin*³⁷³. Coming from the small Tugen group, Moi needed a bigger political constituency to counter the Kikuyu and Luo groups in particular. Although the Kalenjin cluster makes political sense, two of its most populous groups, the Nandi and the Kipsigis, have often distanced themselves from it, arguing that they have been used in the ethnic politics of numbers while the Elgeyo and the Tugen were the ones wielding real power and influence.

Throwing a glance again at the 1979 census, shows that for the first time too, the Suba (Basuba)³⁷⁴, an assimilated group, were counted separately from the Luo, who, having been in opposition politics since Kenyatta's time, were still considered a political threat. Reviving the Suba identity as a distinct category took away several tens of thousands from the Luo tally, besides its impact on Luo-Suba social relations. This partly paved the way for the Luo to be 'overtaken' by the Luhya as Kenya's second largest group, contrary to Ochieng's (2000) observation that this took place in 1989.³⁷⁵ It is most unlikely that the Kikuyu elite, still entrenched in power then, would have minded weakening numerically their political rivals, the Luo.

³⁷³ The term *Kalenjin* is basically a way of greeting meant to draw somebody's attention. It is like saying *I say!* and is one of the words the various groups have in common. It was coined in the 1940's by the broadcasting corporation in Nairobi and reinforced during the freedom struggle.

³⁷⁴ The Suba inhabit the highlands of Rusinga and Mfang'ano and the south east part of Lake Victoria. They are closely related to the Basoga of Uganda, the Haya of Tanzania, the Kuria of Tanzania and Kenya, the Samia of Kenya and Uganda and the Kisii of Kenya. But the Suba have over the years intermarried with the Luo so that today, they have more closer blood ties with Luo than their Bantu ancestral roots. Many Suba of today cannot even speak the *Basuba* language. And besides, they identify themselves as Luo, carry Luo names, fish is a staple food (just like the Luo) and practice Luo traditions.

³⁷⁵ In an article entitled "Kenyan tribes: How to lie with statistics", *Sunday Nation*, February 20, 2000.

Table 3: Kenya's population census (selected ethnic groups)

	1969	1979	1989	1999
Kikuyu	2,201,623	3,202,821	4,455,865	5,302,479
Luo	1,521,595	1,955,845	2,653,932	3,105,100
Suba	(as “Luo”)	59,668	107,819	155,629 ³⁷⁶
Luhya	1,453,302	2,119,708	3,083,273	4,069,920
Kamba	1,197,712	1,725,569	2,448,302	2,962,445
Nandi, Kipsigis,	1,190,203	1,652,243	2,458,123	3,455,953
Elgeyo, Marakwet,		(as “Kalenjin”)	(as “Kalenjin”)	(as “Kalenjin”)
Pokot, Sabaot, Tugen/Cherangani				
Maasai	154,906	241,395	377,089	584,488
Samburu	54,796	73,625	106,897	141,104
Njemps/Ilchamus	6,526	7,546	15,872	40,000 ³⁷⁷

Total population: 28,595,323 (1999).

Source: Kenya's population census reports and the *The Daily Nation*.

In the 1989 census, a number of things happened. The Kamba were overtaken by the Kalenjin as the fourth largest ethnic group, prompting a politician³⁷⁸ to ask whether there was an “epidemic” in Ukambani. The mysterious Kalenjin population growth rate continued to soar. In just ten years, that is, 1999, the group had not only maintained their unexplainable lead over the Kamba, but they overtook the Luo too and ‘became’ the third largest group in Kenya. After the results were released, the *The Daily Nation*, which published an exclusive report, wrote: “Another significant fact, if the figures are correct, is that the Luo have lost their place as Kenya's third largest community behind the Kikuyu and the Luhya. They have slipped into fourth place with 3.1 million members, overtaken by the Kalenjin who are now in third place with 3.5 million”.³⁷⁹

During the intercensal period (1989-99), the Kalenjin population growth rate, at 40.9%, looks rather intriguingly astronomical compared to the Kamba's 20.9%. Another remarkable observation is that all through, the “Luhya” cluster has been left intact. If we define ethnicity

³⁷⁶ Figure based on population in Suba District.

³⁷⁷ Estimate based on *The Daily Nation*, Friday 5, 2002.

³⁷⁸ Former MP for Butere, Mr Martin Shikuku.

³⁷⁹ *The Daily Nation*, Thursday, February 17, 2000 p.1

in terms of common language, cultural practices, shared history and ethnic consciousness, the Luhya category is simply untenable. As a name, “Luhya” is said to have been coined during the colonial period. It means “clansman” or “relative” in some of the dialects or languages spoken among the various groups or sub-groups that constitute the cluster. Otherwise, what are called the Luhya (or Baluhya), are three distinct groups: The Maragoli, the Bukusu and the Baluhya “proper”. To illustrate how distinct these groups are, Ochieng (2000) notes that when a Bukusu marries a Kisa (a sub-group of the Luhya “proper”), they can only communicate in Swahili or, if they can, in English: “They cannot understand each other in either Kisa or Lubukusu”. That partly explains why it has remained merely speculative to talk about a “Luhya vote” or a “Luhya presidential candidate”. In fact, the Bukusu, one of the most populous and influential sub-groups among the Luhya cluster, maintained an anti-Moi stance throughout the 1990’s. But closer Moi allies in the cluster would still tell him that “all the Luhya speak with one voice” or they are “solidly behind you”.

The Luhya and the Kalenjin categories deviate significantly from the level of homogeneity observed, for instance, among the Luo, the Kikuyu and the Kamba. Despite the glaring fallacy of Luhya and Kalenjin ‘ethnic groups’, in the political game of numbers, these two categories were used by the Moi government as a counter weapon against the numerous Kikuyu, Luo and Kamba groups. One notices that after the ‘Luhya’ overtook the Luo for the first time after Moi’s ascendancy to power in the 1979 census, they maintained a commanding lead in the subsequent censuses.

Making sense of the census manipulations

There are social, political and economic explanations why the Moi government seemingly falsified census results. Socially, it appears to have been a way of seeking some social justice. Since the Kalenjin were presented as a group that had been marginalised by the previous Kikuyu-led regime, inflating their numbers became a way of ‘correcting’ real or imaginary wrongs committed against the group. What is interesting however is that other ‘marginalised’ groups (e.g. the Maasai and the Somali), whose interests Moi was portrayed as representing, appear to have been excluded from this consideration. For instance, while the Kalenjin and the Luhya were presented as ethnic categories, the Somali, just like in previous censuses before Moi came to power, were counted as clans (e.g. Ajuran, Ogaden, Degodia etc.). Counting the Somali as clans appeared to contradict Moi regime’s attempt to consolidate and boost the numbers of pastoral and “small tribes” during censuses. However, the post-independence Kenyan government has never been entirely comfortable with the Somali, partly due to the

fluidity of the border between Kenya and Somalia and the war fought in the mid 1960's over secession threat. It is therefore possible that in spite of Moi's appointment of Somali personalities to influential positions in his administration, the need to present the group as splintered, 'small' and inconsequential may have been overwhelming. The same goes for the Maasai. Although the Maasai were an influential group in the Moi government, it is not clear why the Samburu and the Njemps, who are Maa-speakers, were not lumped together with the 'Maasai'. One explanation would be that, though ardent Moi supporters, the Maasai remained a thorn in the flesh. Their leaders made incessant demands for restoration of lost lands or compensation, and claimed that the group was still marginalised.

Politically, I have already underscored what appears to have been Moi's need to present himself as representing a broader political constituency against the "big tribes". To this end, he did two things. One, the Kalenjin became a category in the national census, and two, during his rule, the consolidated group moved from the fifth place in 1979 to the third place in 1999. The inflated and deflated figures (e.g. Luo's and Kamba's) appear to have been used to legitimise other things. The 1992 and 1997 elections, characterised by both local and international observers as irregular (rigged in the ruling party's favour), comes to mind. Although the Kamba were generally considered a KANU stronghold, about half of the Kamba vote went to opposition parties in the 1992 and 1997 elections. This might explain why it was necessary to deflate their numbers in the 1999 census. From an economic point of view, inflated population figures led to lopsided budgetary allocations, as districts with 'more people' received bigger allocations.

One might ask, of what relevance is this discussion to the coexistence of the Kamba and the Maasai and Kenya's stability? The 1999 census indicated Kamba's intercensal growth rate as 20.9%, while the Maasai stood at 35%. This glaring discrepancy has not been explained. In fact, since Kenya's demographic health surveys³⁸⁰ usually indicate higher fertility among farming sedentary groups (e.g. the Kamba and the Kisii), as opposed to pastoral and transhumant groups (e.g. the Maasai and the Pokot), it would be more logical to swap the Kamba-Maasai growth rates. Some Kamba respondents argued that the manipulation of Maasai figures must have been used to justify the creation of Trans Mara district. But again, why would the Kamba complain about a 20.9% growth rate while that of the Kikuyu was indicated to be as low as 15%? What I am talking about here is state stability that is produced not by what ethnic groups did, but rather what they did not do. Although the Kikuyu, the Luo

³⁸⁰ For example, see Kenya Demographic Health Survey (1998).

and the Kamba may have had genuine reasons to question the authenticity of the 1989 and the 1999 censuses in particular, actions that would have raised ethnic tensions, caused anarchy and destabilised the state, they did not. Neither political leaders from these groups nor civil society lodged any co-ordinated protest to the government. Incidentally, the 1999 census results were released by a Kamba, Mr Gideon Ndambuki, the planning minister then. Although the Kamba were an aggrieved party, when he was releasing the results, he praised the census team for doing “a good job”. However, there is no evidence that any Kamba expected the minister to reject the outcome of the census. But if he failed to react out of Kamba “cowardice” (see chapter four) or in observance of the so-called *collective responsibility* of ministers, how about the “courageous” and “fearless” Luo and the Kikuyu who were even known critics of the Moi regime? It is difficult to come up with an answer.

Taking the Nigerian example, where the mere talk of a population census threatens the survival of the state, one might ponder: Are Kenyan groups docile? A German who has worked in Kenya and other African countries told me that in matters of governance, most Kenyan groups are aloof and that things that would take South Africans, Zambians and Nigerians to the streets would not “bother” a Kenyan. What would explain this apparent apathy and docility? The situation might change in due course, but it appears that just like in the colonial times, most Kenyans do not regard themselves as an integral part of the state. Although they vote, they hardly expect the state to be accountable to them. Many may know that they finance the state as tax payers, but few expect the state to be responsible. Whereas Kenya enjoys one of the highest literacy rates in Africa, it seems that this is not matched by a high level of political consciousness. Apart from a weak civil society, the state has over the years blocked any attempts to create awareness on governance, electoral laws, ethnic politics and citizen entitlements. Not many Kenyans discern the intricate links between population census and the allocation of state resources or how manipulated census figures can be used to influence the outcome of national elections.

It would be logical to argue that Kenya’s relative stability has resulted from ethnic apathy and indifference. The long uninterrupted reigns of Kenyatta and Moi taught Kenyans that the ‘ruling tribe’ discriminates against other groups. The consolation among the ‘discriminated’ groups, it will be argued later, has been that they will have their chance at some point in time.

7.2 Ethnic politics and Kenya's stability: The inconsistencies

7.2.1 *The ever shifting ethnic alliances*

To say that Kenya's polity is organised around ethnic groups is truism. One positive thing, though, is that ethnic alliances have always been possible. And sometimes, they come from the most unexpected quarters. During the freedom struggle, the alliance between the Luo and the Kikuyu embodied the real threat to colonial rule. The fact that Oginga Odinga, a Luo, refused to form a government and demanded instead the release of Kenyatta, a Kikuyu, in 1960, epitomised not only the height of nationalism, but showed also that a peaceful post colonial state would be possible. It was not a surprise therefore that after Kenyatta became the first president of the republic in 1964, Odinga became his vice-president. But in 1966, differences, particularly on land policy and redistribution, led to a falling out between Kenyatta and Odinga, forcing the latter to resign from government. It could have been a complete Luo-Kikuyu split, but, a youthful, flamboyant and equally influential Luo, Tom Mboya, remained in government. In fact, this political stratagem was the architect behind the downfall of his fellow Luo, Odinga. Therefore, Kenyatta somehow escaped blame.

Together with a cabinet colleague, Bildad Kaggia, a Kikuyu, and former freedom fighter, Odinga found an opposition party, the Kenya People's Union (KPU) and bounced back into parliament in 1969. But shortly afterwards, the party was proscribed and its leaders were thrown into detention. Moreover, Tom Mboya was assassinated in the same year, and the Luo blamed the Kikuyu ruling clique for the murder. But it was also a time when Odinga was bitter with the Kenyatta government and the timing of Mboya's assassination might have been expected to leave some speculating that it could have been a Luo internal affair. The country experienced the first threat of a civil war at this time. And although these incidences instilled anti-Kikuyu sentiments among many Luo, one could still see personalities like Omolo Okero in Kenyatta's cabinet. Kenyatta therefore tactfully left an opening, a 'cord' through which he could still reach out to the Luo. Odinga's exit led to the elevation of Daniel Moi, a Kalenjin, as vice-president, after Joseph Murumbi's appointment lasted only a year with his resignation in 1967. The appointment of Moi took many by surprise, not least the Kikuyu elite who were increasingly getting concerned about the Kenyatta succession. Anxious about Kenyatta's health and longevity, this Kikuyu clique, led by personalities like Njenga Karume, at the time a powerful head of the moribund Gikuyu, Meru and Embu Association (GEMA), championed a "change the constitution" bid to block any automatic ascendancy of the vice-president to power in case the president died or was incapacitated. The bid failed, paving the way for Moi's presidency in 1978.

What is interesting is that the move to block Moi from succeeding Kenyatta was foiled by a Kikuyu, the then powerful attorney general, Charles Njonjo. When Moi took over as President, he could not do without the Kikuyu. For his own immediate survival, he had to keep them around and perhaps, eventually socialise them out of power. He therefore had a Kikuyu vice-president, Mwai Kibaki,³⁸¹ and Njonjo retained his job as attorney general. There were other Kikuyu personalities in the cabinet and the civil service. But keen to form his own power base, he started dismantling the ‘king makers’, beginning with Njonjo. Although Kibaki was retained as vice-president after the 1983 elections, the Kikuyu presence in the cabinet and civil service had been reduced drastically. Moi had started reaching out to his Kalenjin group, the Maasai, the Luhya, the Kamba, coastal groups and the Somali as new centres of power. After the 1988 elections, Kibaki was dropped as vice-president, but was appointed to the cabinet as health minister. Moi appointed a newcomer in politics, Dr. Josephat Karanja, a Kikuyu, to replace Kibaki. But it appeared that the new appointee was basically warming the seat for another person.

After just one year, Karanja was unceremoniously bundled out of the post and replaced with Prof. George Saitoti, an academic possessing a contested and ambiguous ethnic identity. Brought up as a Kikuyu, he ‘became’ a Maasai at some point.³⁸² Having been nominated to parliament in 1983, he left his teaching job at the University of Nairobi. After the nomination, he was appointed minister for finance and then literally ‘marketed’ to the Maasai as a ‘true son’ by among others, the then combative minister William ole Ntimama. Saitoti easily won the Kajiado North seat in the 1988 elections.³⁸³ He retained his vice-presidential position after the 1992 elections, although Moi had used the position to woo the Kisii, the Kamba and the Luhya voters during the campaigns. Although Saitoti was re-elected to parliament in the 1997 polls, the President did not name a vice-president for 14 months.

³⁸¹ Elected Kenya’s third President in the December 2002 polls.

³⁸² One of my Maasai research partners who lives near Sultan Hamud, told me that his late wife knew Saitoti from the time when he was a young boy in Ngong. The vice-president was one of the dignitaries who attended her funeral. Regarding Saitoti’s ethnic identity, he said: “Of course he is not Maasai but that is not important, he has done a lot for the Maasai”. A prominent Kajiado politician, Oliver Seki, challenged the ethnic identity of all those fighting for Maasai leadership noting “Mr Sunkuli has his roots in Luhyaland, Mr Ole Muyaa (a Saitoti opponent) is from Ukambani while Prof. Saitoti is a Kikuyu and they should therefore stop dragging the community into the selfish war of riding to state house. Let them address the plight of the Maasai who are languishing in poverty” (*The Daily Nation*, Friday, September 7, 2001). With Ntimama said to have Meru origins while John Keen’s father is actually German, it appears that political power among the Maasai rests on personalities with contested identities.

³⁸³ Saitoti’s likely opponents in the Kajiado North seat were prevailed upon not to run. The past MP, Phillip Odupouy was appointed managing director of a collapsing Pan African Vegetable Processors in Naivasha while a former MP, John Keen was nominated to parliament. Otherwise, according to the Kenyan constitution one has to be an elected member of parliament to be appointed as vice-president.

The 1997 polls and after

Prior to, and after the 1992 elections, there were the “ethnic clashes”, in which the Kikuyu, among other groups, were evicted from their farms in the Rift Valley and others were killed. Because of this, among other reasons, the Kikuyu voted for their two presidential candidates,³⁸⁴ and all MPs from their areas were elected on opposition tickets. But Moi nominated Joseph Kamotho, a Kikuyu, to parliament and appointed him to the cabinet. He was also KANU’s secretary general. Just before the 1997 elections, Moi was back to woo the Kikuyu back to KANU. The party’s overall victory in the 1992 election notwithstanding, it was extremely weak in Central Province (Kikuyuland). Kamotho and Saitoti were instrumental in setting up what was called Central Province Development Group which organised fund raisers and sought to reconcile the Kikuyu with the Kalenjin or to put it differently, the KAMATUSA and the GEMA. There were even deliberations regarding compensation and resettlement for those forcefully evicted from the Rift Valley. In the 1997 polls, KANU launched a high profile and moneyed campaign in Kikuyuland, but the Kikuyu overwhelmingly voted for their candidate, Mr Mwai Kibaki. Even people like Kamotho could not win a seat on KANU tickets.

This is partly seen as the reason why Moi hesitated in re-appointing Saitoti. But he finally did, taking many by surprise, since, once more, leading politicians from various ethnic groups were lobbying for the seat. Among other considerations, it appears that Saitoti’s contested ethnic identity worked to his advantage during Moi’s rule, for in him, Moi had a Maasai and a Kikuyu vice-president. The 1999 re-appointment however marked a very problematic tenure for Saitoti. Apart from opposition in his home district that seemed to enjoy presidential support or tolerance, his ethnic identity came to the fore when Kikuyu MPs joined the ruling party to vote against a motion of “no confidence” against him as vice-president. This bloc vote to save Saitoti was perhaps the first public endorsement of his ethnicity. Ochieng’ (2001) put it thus: “If these MPs can openly vote to save KANU’s second most important potentate, one whose name is deeply mired in *Goldengate*,³⁸⁵ the symbol of all KANU inequities, what exactly do they, then oppose in KANU? There can only be one answer. Their opposition to KANU has no ideo-moral content whatsoever. It is purely tribal. As long as Saitoti is our tribesman, it does not matter to us that he is in KANU. As long as he is one of us, if he can

³⁸⁴ Mr Kenneth Matiba and Mr Mwai Kibaki.

³⁸⁵ In reference to the so-called *Goldenberg* scandal in which the state lost more than Ksh 13 billion (EUR 162,500,000) in fake claims paid out by the central bank as compensation for non-existent gold exports.

use his position to climb to the presidency, we can't care less that his name is so besmirched".³⁸⁶

The defeat of the motion, tabled in the parliament by Otieno Kajwang of the Luo-led National Development Party (NDP), did not go down well among the Luo. To them, it was yet another betrayal of the Luo at the hands of the Kikuyu.³⁸⁷ In an unprecedented move, the NDP started working closely with KANU, and in March 18th 2002, the parties merged. Following this merger, two Luo ministers were appointed to Moi's cabinet. In addition, one of the cabinet ministers and the leader of the NDP, Raila Odinga, became KANU's secretary general. But as the Luo began to nurse presidential ambitions in the Moi succession, the President went back to the Kikuyu and identified the son of the late President Kenyatta, Uhuru as his preferred successor in the KANU presidential nominations.

The youthful Uhuru, born at independence in 1962, had only been nominated by the President to parliament in May 2001, and in October the same year, Moi made him a minister in his cabinet. Many state-funded campaigns were organised to popularise Uhuru, with the President taking the lead. He took the Kalenjin also by surprise, for it was assumed that a Kikuyu would not safeguard what the Kalenjin called the "community's interests". But after it appeared that Moi was determined, most Kalenjin leaders decided to support the President. All of a sudden, praises were being heaped on the Kenyatta regime. In one such rally, Mr Henry Kosgey, a cabinet minister, and four assistant ministers from the Rift Valley, praised the founding President, saying he had "enabled the Kalenjin to settle in the former White Highlands" and pledged their support for Uhuru as a show of gratitude to his father.³⁸⁸ This was a departure from the dominant discourse, in which Kenyatta's rule was associated with marginalisation of the Kalenjin and with having paved the way for many Kikuyu migrants to settle in the Rift Valley to the disadvantage of native groups (Kalenjin). It appeared that ethnic alliances could shift that quickly, at least in the Kenyan case.

Unfortunately, the October 2002 nomination of Uhuru to run for president on a KANU ticket led to a major split in the party. Saitoti, who had been sacked as vice-president, Kamotho, also sacked from the cabinet after opposing Uhuru's bid, joined forces with Raila Odinga, Kalonzo Musyoka (Kamba minister and KANU vice-chairman), Moody Awori (a Luhya and assistant minister) and William ole Ntimama (a Maasai cabinet minister), to found the so-called Rainbow Coalition. Just a day before the KANU presidential nominations, the 'Rainbow' ministers whom Moi had not sacked started resigning and relinquishing their KANU's

³⁸⁶ *Sunday Nation*, February 25, 2001.

³⁸⁷ The first betrayal being the fall out between Kenyatta and Odinga in the 1960's.

³⁸⁸ *Sunday Nation*, June 16, 2002.

positions. They joined forces with the opposition to found the National Rainbow Coalition (NARC), a united front which faced KANU in the December 2002 elections. Since NARC brought together many ethnic groups together,³⁸⁹ KANU was defeated in the elections. Decamping of the Luo from KANU was particularly significant.

What one sees here is a chronology of ethnic alliances that shift and shift again. Crawford (1998: 5) notes that in multiethnic societies, breaking of old social contracts leads to shifts in political power. He says that if these shifts are experienced as ethnic discrimination and privilege, the resulting resentment and opportunity provide fertile ground for politicians to mobilize support around ethnic and sectarian identities. While this is true for Kenya, Crawford does not capture the contradictions and inconsistencies and their frequency, where foes are potential allies and foes again. I am arguing that this dynamic scenario, where hostility assumes impermanence, and where spaces are often created to accommodate 'tribal' leaders, not only explains perpetuation of Kenyatta and Moi regimes, but also explains the relative stability and ethnic coexistence in Kenya. Kenya has not had governments dominated exclusively by 'westerners', 'southerners' or 'northerners' as has been the case in Nigeria, Sudan and Ivory Coast. This has ruled out the possibility of an ethnonationalist conflict (see Wimmer (1997b: 632). Alongside the Kikuyu and the Kalenjin political elite, there has always been appendages, that is, other groups, co-opted to share power. For those groups 'left out' at a given time (e.g. the Luo), there has been a sustained signal that 'soon' they will be on board, or if 'if they want', they can join.

7.2.1.1 Voting along ethnic lines

There have been many contradictions and inconsistencies in Kenya's ethnic politics. In the multiparty era of the 1990's, the Kamba and the Luhya in particular tilted the balance in the run for the presidency. The Kalenjin-led KANU, the Luo-led, and the Kikuyu-led opposition parties all scrambled for support from these groups. Since they are among the five most populous groups, backing from the Kamba and the Luhya was decisive. Besides, these groups either fielded no presidential candidates, or those who ran for president did not receive full backing from their group. Of course, the Luo and Kikuyu candidates sought support from other groups, be they the Kisii, the Somali, the Boorana or the Mijikenda. It was taken for granted that the Meru and the Embu vote would go to the Kikuyu-led parties while the Maasai, the Samburu and the Turkana allied themselves with the Kalenjin.

³⁸⁹ Among others, the Kikuyu, the Luo, the Luhya and the Kamba.

In 1992, the Kamba vote was literally up for grabs, since the Kamba who ran for president did not enjoy the group's support.³⁹⁰ There were assumptions that the Kikuyu-led DP would receive strong backing from the group since prominent Kamba politicians like Paul Ngei, Joseph Munyao, Mrs Agnes Ndeti and Mrs Charity Ngilu had allied themselves with the party. However, President Moi and the ruling party still claimed over 50% of the Kamba vote. In fact, in terms of the seats, KANU won convincingly, capturing 12 out of 15. Piqued by the Kamba support for KANU, enraged Kikuyu men beat up a number of Kamba at the main bus terminus in Nairobi accusing them of "betraying the opposition cause". What was ironical was that about half of the Kamba vote had actually gone to the Kikuyu-led Democratic Party (DP) presidential candidate and secondly, those who had voted for KANU had not betrayed the opposition but frustrated the Kikuyu quest for power. In any case, a GEMA group had also voted KANU: Among the Meru, 4 out of 8 seats went to KANU and the Luo-led Ford-Kenya took one seat, with the DP taking only three.

In the 1992 elections, the GEMA groups proved not to be a formidable cohesive entity, a reality that infuriated the Kikuyu. And whereas the Kikuyu accused the Kamba of betrayal in 1992, in the 1997 elections, theirs was an outright deception. Mrs Charity Ngilu, a Kamba, had been touted as a possible compromise candidate by the opposition parties but the plan shattered. Nevertheless, some Kikuyu parliamentary candidates ran on Ngilu's SDP ticket and it was expected that they would also campaign for her. The outcome however could not have been more different. In Gatundu South (Kikuyuland), for instance, while the MP was elected on an SDP ticket, garnering 22,637 votes, Ngilu received only 1,006 for president compared to Kibaki's 30,738. In fact, Moi did much better than Ngilu with 2,608.³⁹¹ This was the same trend in Gatundu North, Gatanga, Juja, Githunguri and Dagoretti. In all these constituencies, Kikuyu parliamentary candidates were elected on SDP tickets but the presidential vote went to the Kikuyu DP candidate. These voting trends, where ethnic groups were mobilised to vote for their ethnic presidential candidates, split the opposition vote and consequently handed Moi another term. The opposition lost the presidency, although it had a combined vote of 3,688,819 against Moi's 2,500,865. It was not surprising therefore that in the 2002 elections, a combined opposition of 14 parties, that brought together many ethnic groups, saw Mwai Kibaki capture the presidency easily.

³⁹⁰ Mr Harun Mwau, who ran for president on the Party of Independent Candidates of Kenya (PICK), did not run as a 'Kamba candidate'. He did not launch a credible campaign and failed even to capture the Westlands (Nairobi) parliamentary seat.

³⁹¹ See *The Daily Nation*, Monday, January 5, 1998, p.16.

Strictly speaking, Kenya does not have a majority ethnic group, a fact which creates an environment where, to win a presidential election, groups have to forge alliances as a matter of necessity. Constituting only 18.5% of the population,³⁹² the Kikuyu are merely the most numerous ethnic group, and their candidates have had to court other groups to broaden their constituency in seeking the presidency. Without an outright dominant group (like in Ethiopia where the Oromo constitute about 40% of the population), it is difficult to envisage a situation where a single ethnic group in Kenya could capture the presidency. In a mix of fortunes, it has not been possible to rally all Bantu groups, comprising 65% of the population, on a common platform. In the early 1990's a leading Luhya trade unionist³⁹³ called for a "Bantu alliance" to counter the KAMATUSA groups, but the call was treated with indifference. True, if that was workable, such an alliance would dominate power, but that would be the turning point in Kenya's history of ethnic coexistence, for this would clearly polarise other groups. Information gathered during my fieldwork shows that only the highly literate Kamba knew that the group is linguistically related to the Kisii and the Luhya of western Kenya. Most respondents considered these groups to be as distant to them as the Luo or the Kalenjin (Nilotes). And this is basically because they do not share territory and are in different ecological zones.

If the "Bantu alliance" would have destabilised Kenya, how about if the Kamba were members of GEMA? It is fairly strange that despite the linguistic and territorial linkages, the Kamba did not get recruited into this loose cluster of Bantu groups. The reasons are both historical and ecological. The GEMA groups were brought together particularly by the freedom struggle, with most intensive anti-colonial revolts and armed conflict taking place in the Mount Kenya region. Secondly, as an organisation that also had interests in the tea and coffee sectors, the semi-arid Ukambani did not fit well in this scheme of things. However, the fact that the Kamba are not members of GEMA was seen as denying the association critical backing during the multiparty elections of the 1990's. The Kikuyu-led GEMA was so desperate for the Kamba vote in 1992 that, in one of the campaign rallies in Machakos town, it was claimed that the Kamba are indeed members of GEMA: That the last letter 'A' in the acronym was said to stand for 'Akamba' rather than 'Association'! Although the Kamba crowd was not convinced, viewed from linguistic, cultural and territorial terms, the claim was not far fetched.

³⁹² According to the controversial 1999 census. Other groups: the Luhya (14.2%), the Kalenjin (12%), the Luo (10.8%), the Kamba (10%), the Maasai (2%) etc.

³⁹³ Wafula wa Musamia; he made the call in 1993.

As I noted earlier, GEMA was a very influential entity, at least during the Kenyatta era. When Moi came to power, in the name of fighting *ukabila* (“tribalism”), he proscribed all tribal organisations. Apart from GEMA, there were other ‘tribal’ organisations such as New Akamba Union (NAU)³⁹⁴, Luo Union and Abaluhya Union, among others. It is widely believed that this ban was not necessarily directed at these other groups but GEMA, which was financially, politically and numerically a big threat to Moi’s efforts to consolidate his power. Coming from a “small tribe”, Moi was uncomfortable with alternative power bases.³⁹⁵ But he had dug a hole to fill another one. The proscription of these bodies left a vacuum and perhaps to some extent polarised groups more to the centre. The ban, on the pretext of creating a more cohesive nation, blocked alternative avenues for expressing ethnic and regional concerns. These concerns were to emerge later through the agitation for multiparty democracy and the formation of political parties along ethnic lines.

The table below shows the voting patterns in selected provinces in the 1997 elections. This particular poll is selected because unlike the 1992 and 2002 elections, the 1997 elections witnessed fielding of many candidates that commanded broad support from their ethnic constituencies. The five candidates presented below also represented the five biggest ethnic groups. The four opposition politicians who faced Moi in the polls had failed to agree on fielding one presidential candidate.

Table 4: The 1997 presidential election results by province (‘ethnicity’)

	Moi	Kibaki	Ngilu	Wamalwa	Odinga
Rift Valley	1,140,109	343,529	11,345	102,178	36,022
Central	56,367	891,484	30,535	3,058	6,869
Eastern	370,954	296,335	349,754	7,017	7,787
Western	314,669	9,755	3,429	338,120	13,458
Nyanza	215,923	138,202	15,301	14,623	519,180

Source: Human Rights Report, no. 2, 1998.

³⁹⁴ Founded as “Kamba Union” by Nairobi based Kamba in 1938, the union worked closely with the Gikuyu Central Association, particularly on the issue regarding land alienation.

³⁹⁵ Leaders of these associations enjoyed considerable influence among their ethnic groups.

It is obvious from this table that each candidate had the highest number of votes in their native provinces (i.e., among their ethnic constituencies). To some extent, this confirms Horowitz's assertion that "where parties break along ethnic lines, elections are divisive" (1985: 12). Kibaki's impressive performance in Eastern is basically because of the other GEMA groups, the Embu and the Meru. In Ukambani, he received a mere 8,474 votes.

One sees that apart from the Rift Valley, Moi had a very strong showing in Eastern, Nyanza and Western. Two cases of 'rejecting your own' emerge. In Ukambani, which is in the Eastern province, Moi claimed 161,950 votes among the Kamba while Ngilu got 344,920. Moi therefore took a considerable chunk of the Kamba vote. After accusations that those who voted for Moi were "sell outs", a Kamba KANU politician asked, "where did the Kamba sit to agree to vote for Ngilu?" He argued that the Kamba who voted for the ruling party were "nationalists"³⁹⁶ while those who voted for Ngilu were "tribalists". But there are other Kamba, and indeed other Kenyan groups, who doubted Ngilu's sincerity in opposition politics. Her husband, Mwendwa Ngilu, who owns a consulting engineering firm, *Ngilu Associates*, continued to receive lucrative tenders from the KANU government while his wife was in opposition politics. Being a vindictive government, that crippled opponents economically, these tender awards, running into several million euros, left many people wondering whether Mrs Ngilu was genuinely against the KANU regime.

From the table, one can see that another contradiction emerged in Western province. Although dominantly inhabited by the Luhya, Moi got almost the same number of votes as Wamalwa, the "Luhya candidate". One reason why Wamalwa did not command a decisive chunk of his native Luhya vote is because of the loose and fairly antagonistic ethnic links among the Luhya sub-groups as noted earlier. Actually, much of the votes Wamalwa got in Western province were from his Bukusu sub-group, with other sub-groups like the Maragoli fully backing Moi. In Nyanza, support for Moi came from the Kisii and Kuria groups, otherwise Raila Odinga decisively claimed the Luo vote. Mrs Ngilu's performance in general had a gender dimension. Although the Kamba have elected women to parliament from as early as 1974, sending one to the State House was a totally new experience. Her candidacy was met with scepticism, and because some voters simply thought she could not win, they decided to vote for other candidates. Nationally, she turned out to be an ethnic candidate, more or less just like the rest, although she had been portrayed and presented as the "women's candidate". It is worth mentioning that women constituted only 3.4% of the 1997 parliament. A distinguished editor and gender activist, Lucy Oriang' explains that in as much as Ngilu had become one of the

³⁹⁶ *Nationalist* here is used to mean 'non-tribal'.

most spectacular women leaders in sub-Saharan Africa, she had not succeeded in becoming “a women’s woman”.³⁹⁷

In Maasailand, where a woman respondent told me that Ngilu “*ni president wa akina mama*” (“she’s the women’s president”) and that “she’s the only *woman* we have”, Ngilu had faired very poorly in the 1997 polls. She received only 3,210 votes against Kibaki’s 47,374 and Moi’s 127,796. As noted in chapter six, many Kamba living in Maasailand had chosen to comply with the “hosts” choice, fearing that voting for the Kamba presidential candidate would jeopardise their residential rights. In any case, in absolute numbers, Moi still got more votes in Ukambani than in Maasailand (161,950 against 127,796). As for Maasai women who did not vote for Ngilu, they simply fell within the national trend. In fact, despite being in a male dominated society, the Maasai women I talked with believed that women can provide effective leadership. Asking the Maasai woman respondent whether she voted for Ngilu during the polls, she said: “I did not, we only used to hear about her, she did not come...(here to campaign) and *we* were told that she cannot win so *we* should not waste our votes. Some other people also said that she is for the Kamba and that our candidate is Moi”. I asked her, “why was your candidate Moi?” She replied, “we are told that Moi’s people (Kalenjin) and the Maasai are the same” (Woman’s group leader, Imaroro, Kajiado, 12/09/2000). She appeared sceptical about the apparent ethnic links between the Maasai and the Kalenjin. Cleverly, she said that both the Kamba and the Maasai were “used by the Kalenjin as stepping stones” without real gains from the government.

Besides ethnicity

Although the 1992, 1997 and even 2002 elections have followed an ethnic pattern in terms of party support, there have been other issues too. These range from the mismanagement of the sugar industry in Luhyaland to the mysterious murder of former foreign affairs minister, Dr Robert Ouko, which did not go down well among the Luo.³⁹⁸ In Ukambani, the opposition criticised the Moi government for its failure to address the recurrent food shortages and water scarcity. The opposition argued that sustainable food security and water supply would have worked against KANU’s practice of providing food donations prior to, and during general elections. The same case applies in Maasailand, where the stop-gap measures adopted by the state during prolonged droughts (e.g. food relief) pacifies dissatisfaction with the ruling party. These livelihood concerns cannot be taken for granted. The people inhabiting the rich

³⁹⁷ See Lucy Oriang’s article entitled “Charity Ngilu at a crossroads”, *The Daily Nation*, Monday, October 29, 2001.

³⁹⁸ The unresolved murder was blamed on the Moi regime.

agricultural zones like the Kikuyu, Meru, Embu and the Luhya have had many grievances. Their economic base has been deteriorating with little or erratic returns from their tea, coffee, milk, maize and pyrethrum. And this has not been simply because prices have been fluctuating in the world markets, but due to mismanagement of the state marketing institutions. These quasi-government firms, otherwise called parastatals, have not only been ridden with corruption but are also seen as siphoning wealth off these groups to the benefit of the KAMATUSA elite (see Tostensen et al., 1998). But while the authors see these economic concerns as unconnected to ethnicity, there are overlaps and inconsistencies. In spite of the fact that some Kalenjin groups like the Nandi and the Kipsigis have not been spared the losses in maize, milk and tea, the backbone of their economy, they have still been supporting KANU. Although the GEMA groups have had logical economic grievances against the Moi regime, ethnicity would still be a major consideration in the presidential race. The meagre support the Kamba candidate, Mrs Ngilu, got among the Kikuyu in the 1997 elections, as noted earlier, is a case in point. Back in 1991, the Kikuyu had appeared to back Odinga Oginga (Luo) for the presidency but as time went by, they broke away and fielded their own presidential candidates. Even the backing the Kikuyu enjoy from the Embu and the Meru cannot be divorced from ethnic considerations, despite the fact that matters of livelihood are brought to the fore during campaigns. These are situations in which leaders of ethnic groups combine policy and the instrumentalisation of identifications for the organisation of support (Schlee, 2001:11).

Explaining the Kamba and the Kalenjin alliance

At least during the Moi regime, one of the most unusual alliances in the Kenyan political scene was between the Kamba and the Kalenjin. It was puzzling because, at least on the surface, a number of factors rule it out. Apart from the linguistic and cultural differences, in terms of physical proximity, Ukambani and Kalenjinland are two worlds apart. Besides, as noted earlier, the Kamba are closer, linguistically, culturally and geographically to the GEMA groups. And yet, the Kamba have backed Kalenjin-led KANU even when there have been Kamba or Kikuyu presidential candidates.

There are a number of explanations for the Kamba-Kalenjin alliance. As the most populous group inhabiting a semi-arid region, rendering them vulnerable and often dependant on the state for food relief, the Kamba became convenient Moi allies. However, one of the missing links is the African Inland Church (AIC). Historically, as the African Inland Mission (AIM) of Canada established itself in Nzaui (in Ukambani) in 1895 through Peter Cameron Scott, it also set camp in the Rift Valley, among the Kalenjin groups. In 1943 AIM became the self

governing Africa Inland Church (AIC) and took over the Mission's work in 1971. Up to this day, this church draws most of its followers from the Kamba and the Kalenjin. What is more, former President Moi is a staunch AIC, and because of his intensive involvement in the church's activities, it acquired the distinction of "state church". During his rule, Kenyans got used to the fact that on Sundays, the first item on the state television, the Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC), was the coverage of the President attending a church service.

During Moi's reign, two Kamba pastors, Dr. Jones Kaleli and Nthiw'a rose to unprecedented prominence. While one was the chaplain of Kabarak, the other one was in Sacho, two ultra-modern schools founded and funded by the President and located very near his home. Dr. Kaleli in particular became a prominent power broker and a national figure. Through his influence, his home area of Kalamba became a beehive of activity attracting all manner of rare infrastructure like a tarmacked road, telephone and electricity. Many Kamba leaders seeking favours from the head of state would either go through these pastors or find out where the President would be attending his next church service. It is an open secret that most of the Kamba whom Moi appointed to key positions during his rule (e.g. Prof. Philip Mbithi whom he plucked from the university to head the civil service in 1991), were either AIC faithful or posed as such. Mbithi proved instrumental in assisting KANU weather the multiparty storm that threatened the ruling party's grip on power. He was on Moi's side, whether the President was attending a political rally or listening to church sermons.

The religious link between the Kamba and the Kalenjin shaped ethnic politics. During the Moi era, the most solid KANU support in Ukambani was usually found in areas where the AIC had a considerable following. The church remained a crucial anchorage for the ruling party. It was the ignored 'religious factor' in Kamba politics during the multiparty era. Even during the single party period, AIC affiliation would give a parliamentary aspirant an edge where the church had a strong following. Kilome and Kaiti, for instance, were impenetrable even when Mrs Ngilu (Kamba) was running for president in 1997. While the Social Democratic Party (SDP), on which Ngilu ran enjoyed formidable support in many parts of Ukambani, and won 9 out of 16 seats³⁹⁹, one of the biggest margins was in Kilome where the SDP candidate polled a mere 4,526 compared to KANU's 10,368. Even in places where the SDP was extremely popular, like in Makueni, the KANU parliamentary candidate, Peter Maundu received solid support from AIC strongholds of Kalamba, Nzaui, Kilumba and Kilili. He received a total of

³⁹⁹ Losing some very narrowly e.g., Kitui West, where KANU's Francis Nyenze polled 17,572 votes against SDP's 17,009.

14,896 votes against SDP's 21,420. In fact, he won the seat in a by-election occasioned by the death of the MP, Prof. Paul Sumbi in 1998.

The fact that Kamba AIC members voted for Moi instead of Mrs Ngilu may suggest that religious affiliation overrode ethnic considerations. The AIC members displayed unwavering loyalty to the President and popularising him during church sermons was the norm rather than the exception. The AIC gatherings became platforms for praising the head of state, praying for his "good health", "long life" so that he can "continue to lead Kenya into greater heights of development". While the other mainstream churches like the Catholic, the Anglican and the Pentecostal churches were key critics of Moi and his government, at no time did the AIC top clergy, normally Kamba and Kalenjin, lodge any protest to the head of state and his government even during some of the worst state scandals (e.g. revelations of massive corruption or the "ethnic clashes" of the 1990's).

7.2.1.2 Using the Maasai to woo the Kamba: "The Kitengela Declaration"

It has been shown that the Kamba occupy an ambiguous position in Kenya's ethnic politics and alliances. They are neither allied to GEMA nor could they be recruited to the KAMATUSA cluster. The latter, a Kalenjin-led outfit, had brought together Rift Valley Nilotics groups, many of them pastoral, with the aim of derailing the clamour for democratisation and multipartyism. In order to achieve their objectives, they violently reclaimed lands allegedly occupied by "outsiders" and threatened to go federal should the country adopt a multiparty democracy. Even after KANU won the 1992 elections, the threat of losing power through the ballot box loomed. In any case, the elections results had been manipulated in many areas, with incredible results showing that registered voters had voted 100%, and in some cases, votes cast superseded the number of the registered voters. The Kalenjin knew that they needed broader ethnic alliances. Holding four cabinet positions after the 1992 elections, populous and vulnerable, the Kamba fitted well into their scheme of things. It is against this background that the "Kitengela Declaration" of 1993 should be seen. To imagine that the Kamba could also qualify as KAMATUSA simply shows how a wide range of criteria can be selectively applied to determine who is recruited to what membership, depending on the stakes (cf. Schlee, 1997: 577).

Immediately after the elections, the Kalenjin-led KAMATUSA leaders were criss-crossing the country once more, antagonising some groups and seeking the support of others. One such meeting was held in April 1993 at a place called Kitengela, in Kajiado North constituency whose MP, Prof. George Saitoti, was the vice-president. During this meeting, the Kamba and

Maasai groups were urged to co-operate “for the common good”⁴⁰⁰ This had come hot on the heels of another meeting in the Rift Valley hosted by the combative and then powerful Kalenjin minister, Nicholas Biwott and where the Maasai self styled “spokesman”, William ole Ntimama warned the “true inhabitants” of the province to be on their guard against “outsiders”. As noted earlier, similar statements had been made during the *majimbo* rallies of 1991, which preceded the bloody ethnic clashes in the Rift Valley. The Kitengela meeting was attended by among others, Saitoti and Ntimama, representing the Maasai, while cabinet ministers, Johnstone Makau and Jackson Mulinge represented the Kamba.

The aim of the meeting was not to make a pact between the Kamba and the Maasai, but rather to draw the Kamba into the inflammatory KAMATUSA, held together by their common fear of the perceived hegemonic tendencies of the big ethnic groups, especially the Kikuyu. It was seen as an attempt to whip up ethnic animosity between the Kamba and the Kikuyu or at least foil a possible Kamba backing of GEMA groups. The KAMATUSA link became clear when Biwott, who was not in the meeting, later endorsed the “declaration”, which had said that the Kamba and the Maasai had buried their unspecified differences and will in future “work together”. The Kamba and the Maasai were not told why they should unite, if they were disunited at all. The move reminds one of the famous American dictum: “If it ain’t broke, why fix it?” As the most powerful man besides Moi, the fact that Biwott’s hand was invariably lurking in the background of all these anti-Kikuyu crusades was telling. However, the bid to recruit the Kamba into the bandwagon did not succeed, as the Kamba leaders realised that the people they purported to represent were opposed to the move. Incidentally, this was a crop of ministers that served Moi with so much dedication that at one time during their tenure, they denied that Ukambani had massive food shortages. It took the President himself to contradict them! No wonder that out of the four Kamba ministers in the 1992-97 cabinet, only one was re-elected in 1997.

The meeting at Kitengela was challenged not only by the opposition parties but KANU personalities like Cyrus Jirongo⁴⁰¹ and a Kalenjin MP, Kipruto arap Kirwa. There was concern that the ethnic alliances being mooted could plunge the country into turmoil. The fear was that the Kamba would join the KAMATUSA, a scenario that perhaps would have seen other alliances emerge, polarising the country. The outcome of the Kitengela meeting showed that although the Kamba and the Maasai were Moi supporters, the Kamba were still keen to maintain some neutrality, by not allowing themselves to be dragged into a hate campaign

⁴⁰⁰ See *The Weekly Review*, April 23, 1993, p. 3-5.

⁴⁰¹ Who was then chairman of a lobby group called *Youth for KANU '92* which had campaigned for KANU in the 1992 elections.

against the Kikuyu. In retrospection, the Kamba and the KAMATUSA groups had related fairly differently with the former Kenyatta (Kikuyu) regime. While the KAMATUSA claim that they were marginalised may appear plausible, the same cannot be said about the Kamba. It appears that in both Kenyatta and Moi governments, the Kamba were neither marginalised⁴⁰² nor ‘too close’. But again, the Maasai have a unique historical and strong ethnic links with the Kikuyu. It was rather ironical that the anti-Kikuyu crusade in Kitengela was led by Saitoti, whose Kikuyu ethnicity is an open secret. But that is perhaps the reason why he had to be ultra hawkish to convince others and himself that he was indeed Maasai.

‘Fearing’ the Kikuyu

Writing on the politics of ethnicity in Kenya, Ochieng (2001) notes that “only a united tribe can contribute meaningfully to a united nation. That is why, as I have often said in this column, if leaders of a tribe or a group of tribes make a conscious effort to unite their people, we should encourage them. But there is a proviso. Although ethnic unity is a necessary condition for national unity, it is not a sufficient one. It depends on the ideo-ethical teaching which informs the ethnic unity”.⁴⁰³ He asked why it was tribalism to revive GEMA whereas it was not tribalism to flaunt KAMATUSA or to resuscitate unity among the Luo or among the Kamba. So why is GEMA dismissed as “tribalist”? He reasons that the Kikuyu, given their numerical strength and “overriding economic and intellectual fund”, play the vanguard role in GEMA, making the union a convenient Kikuyu front.

Ochieng argues that most ethnic groups in Kenya have a phobia about the Kikuyu, which, he says, goes back to the *Mau Mau* period when colonial propaganda ceaselessly depicted the Kikuyu as “born terrorists”. He notes that the other source is the “*Mau Mau* homeguards” who after independence, surrounded Kenyatta, and “with extraordinary chauvinism and ferocity” grabbed land, looted banks and subjected Kenyans, “including their own Kikuyu masses, to extreme tyranny”. While this may not be indisputable, the Moi regime was any different. Besides, Kikuyu presidential candidates have received support outside of their ethnic constituency since 1992. Moreover, through a coalition of opposition parties, Mwai Kibaki, a Kikuyu, became Kenya’s third president in the 2002 elections. If there has been any phobia about a Kikuyu president, it was based on the ethnicisation of the resourcefulness with which

⁴⁰² At some point in the 1980’s, apart from cabinet slots, the Kamba held the positions of commissioner of police, attorney general, head of immigration department, the treasury and headed the university of Nairobi. As to whether the Kamba as a group benefited from these positions is another question.

⁴⁰³ In an article entitled “historical root of our phobia for the Kikuyu”, *Sunday Nation*, February 25, 2001.

Kenyans have come to associate the presidency, and therefore a genuine feeling that the presidency should rotate so that groups can “eat” in turns.

Are the Kamba less ethnocentric?

Although power relations in multiethnic societies are largely antagonistic and dominantly ethnic (Foucault, 2000: 12), group members may also discriminate against their own members. In the Kenyan society, like others in Africa, ethnicity transcends many aspects of people’s lives. Whether you are thinking about a school for your son or daughter, a job in both the public or the private sector, training institutions etc., the inevitable question that crosses the applicant’s mind or their kin is “who is in charge there”. Whereas many rejoice at the idea that one of ‘their own’ is in charge, others may see it as a disadvantage. It is not uncommon in Kenya to hear group members say that their own kin despises “their people”.⁴⁰⁴ The Kamba say “*Muukamba ndatethasya ungi*” (“a Kamba does not help another one”). If you get rich, neighbours and relatives often remark “*ethua tuilea*” (“s/he is getting rich against our wish”). This common talk among the Kamba is not just symbolic and metaphorical but also matched by lived experiences. For instance, when Prof. Mbithi was head of the civil service in the 1990’s (the most powerful position after the presidency), the Kamba claimed that he did not “help” them. Kamba cabinet ministers have also been accused of being Moi puppets and “doing nothing” for the group. It is argued that Kamba personalities occupying powerful positions have been gullible, easily used for the benefit of other groups. The former head of the military, Jackson Mulinge, was accused of having been used by Moi to remove senior Kamba military officers before his retirement. However, during public gatherings in Ukambani, President Moi used to parade Kamba personalities he had appointed to positions of influence, naming them one by one and mentioning their positions. He would occasionally tell the Kamba that he had a soft spot for them! Besides, he would create the impression that if those appointees were not ‘helping’ the Kamba, then he’s not to blame. This gesture reinforced the stereotype that the Kamba do not “help” their own. When Mrs Ngilu found NPK, the sharpest criticism came from her backyard, the Kamba KANU leaders. After Kamba supporters crowned her a Kamba heroine, giving her the symbolic bow and arrows, a huge gathering was organised by Kamba KANU leaders to discredit the move. Keen to please President Moi, the leaders even argued that the crowning ceremony had flouted Kamba customs. They said that she should have been given a *lesso*⁴⁰⁵ and a basket full of cassava or

⁴⁰⁴ Ghanaians say that, in his bid to portray a national image, Gerry Rawlings neglected “his own people”, the Ewe.

⁴⁰⁵ A decorated piece of cloth popularly tied around the waist by women.

sweet potatoes which “befits a woman” and not bow and arrows.⁴⁰⁶ They vowed to fine her several bulls and goats to “cleanse the Kamba community for breaking traditions”. This was simply a threat though, for the main purpose was to show the head of state that his “co-eaters” were still loyal. Earlier, a Kamba cabinet minister, Kalonzo Musyoka, had challenged her to seek fresh mandate from the electorate.⁴⁰⁷ But this particular call notwithstanding, she surprised many opposition adherents a few months later when she asked Kalonzo to seek the nomination for KANU’s presidential candidate to succeed president Moi. She said that Musyoka’s position as KANU vice-chairman had “boosted” Kamba chances of ascending to the presidency. The minister welcomed the challenge but asked her to cross over to KANU.⁴⁰⁸ There are also other incidences that challenge the notion that the Kamba are less ethnocentric. During Mbithi’s tenure as head of the civil service, a Kikuyu MP accused him of “tribalism” in the appointment of civil servants. During the Kenyatta era, it is claimed that the Makueni district hospital in Ukambani was meant for Kikuyuland but a Kamba, who was the permanent secretary in the ministry of health, transferred the multimillion project to Makueni. What is more, it is an open secret in Kenya that the Kamba are over-represented in the police force. It is alleged that many got recruited particularly when a Kamba was the commissioner of police. Whereas it is conventional knowledge and practice that senior public appointees have been avenues through which the state redistributes resources in the Kenyan multiethnic society, the ‘outsiders’ do not lose an opportunity to accuse those appointees of “tribalism”. It is a complex debate. Even as the Kamba depict their leaders as incorrigibly disinterested in assisting them, and as being used as door mats by other groups, one has to bear in mind that few of Moi’s appointees had ‘real’ power to influence the allocation of state resources without his due approval or influence. Nevertheless, a study done among various ethnic groups in Nairobi appeared to lend credence to the notion that the Kamba were less ethnocentric. In his study of the ‘informal’ sector, Macharia notes that in the food selling business, among the Kamba, unlike other ethnic groups (e.g. Kikuyu and Luo), ethnicity was for them not a basis for “trust” and therefore consideration to give their members credit. Writing about one of his Kamba key respondents, he notes: “She would rather give credit to people from other ethnic groups than to her co-ethnics. Her explanation was that the Kamba are jealous and envious of each other’s success and may never pay back a credit, all aimed at running down the business of their co-ethnic. She also added that, in fact, they did not patronise her food, especially

⁴⁰⁶ *The Daily Nation*, Saturday, October 6, 2001.

⁴⁰⁷ *The Daily Nation*, Wednesday, September, 12, 2001.

⁴⁰⁸ *The Daily Nation*, Monday, April 22, 2002. Kalonzo did declare his candidature for KANU nomination but was later forced to decamp from the party to join Liberal Democratic Party (LDP).

when they had money. They only came to her when they were without money and were looking for food service on credit". Macharia continues "...my observations confirmed her story as I found that very few *Kambas* patronised her food especially during the beginning and the end of the month, when they were loaded with cash from their salary payments". He concludes, "this case of one ethnic group is unique as the opposite is true of other ethnic groups. They build more trust with their co-ethics who also patronised their businesses and were therefore likely to be given small credits on services they could not afford to pay promptly" (1997: 137).

If what Macharia is telling us is anything to go by, this question of ethnicity and trust building among the Kamba is analytically challenging. In fact, in contrast, he gives an account of a Luhya woman⁴⁰⁹ who regrets having given credit to a man who was non-Luhya and who had disappeared. He notes, "her main concern was that he was from a different ethnic group and she swore not to repeat *the mistake ever again*".⁴¹⁰ What makes the whole discourse problematic is that one cannot say that the Kamba are organised on other levels like class or have shed ethnic affiliations and kinship ties. In any case, Macharia ignores the fact that the patrons did come to her when they had no money. Although they took their money elsewhere, where they could not be given credit, they turned to *wamusyi* ("one from home") at the hour of need. Macharia also does not tell us what kind of food she was selling. Let me clarify why this is important. In most cases, when the Kamba join the labour market or migrate to the city and get jobs, they tend to avoid some of their 'traditional' dishes like *isyo* (a mixture of maize and legumes) which, being the food most people ate on a daily basis during their childhood and part of adult life, is associated with poverty. Some are in a hurry to remove it from their menu as soon as they 'make it' in life.

Nevertheless, assuming that Macharia's conclusions on the one hand, and what the Kamba say about themselves on the other, have some basis, what would be the explanation? Being very complex issues, there are no easy answers. Although many Kamba grow up in environments of scarcity, and therefore competition, I do not think that jealousy and envy can be attributed to any one group. As for the Kamba leaders accused of not helping their kin, it is basically the discrepancy between expectation and performance. In most cases, those seeking such favours simply exceed the capacity to assist. In other cases, those expected to assist their kin have to reckon with the risk of losing their jobs as a result. But it is not always a question

⁴⁰⁹ Sub-group not specified.

⁴¹⁰ Emphasis mine. Here is a contrast story: A University of Nairobi institute headed by a Luhya was once accused of ethnocentrism in offering jobs, admission to graduate studies and in awarding scholarships, but a Luhya colleague who had missed a job there said: "That is how *Luhyas* are. They can never help you if you are a Luhya, they gave that job to *somebody else*" (non-Luhya).

of material gains. Regarding Mrs Ngilu's bid for the State House, a Kamba research partner told me that: "We knew that she will not win but we wanted to make it known that we can also produce a president". The actor, Ann Mwende, brings out the complexity of ethnic politics where ethnic support may not be predicated on expected material rewards but recognition. Breaking away from KANU in 1992 to the Kikuyu-led DP and then jumping camp in the run up to 1997 to seek the presidency on an SDP ticket, Ngilu may have been pursuing her personal ambitions. In supporting her, the Kamba were not just thinking about recognition but better schools, electricity and state jobs. After emerging a poor fifth, she joined forces with other losers, Mwai Kibaki and Wamalwa Kijana to launch a united bid in 2002. But in a surprise move, her party introduced a controversial clause that ruled out fielding presidential candidates who were not university graduates. She dumped the party and founded the National Party of Kenya (NPK). A colleague of mine who was directly involved in the drafting of the NPK's constitution wrote me an e-mail, saying: "You know very well that SDP had become problematic. The president (of NPK) is the lady⁴¹¹ and we seek to galvanise the support of the Kamba. Some tribal chauvinism somebody may say, but with humility, that is about the only way to the power negotiating table". While expecting material benefits from a political leader may be a fallacy, it is difficult to convince Kenyan groups otherwise, including the elite who would be expected to champion ideology based political parties.

Although the Moi regime continuously cautioned Kenyans to be wary of "tribal parties", to the contrary, it created an environment where they mushroomed, partly by isolating some groups. Besides, the registrar of societies often hastened the registration of parties seen to be "tribal" while blocking those that appeared to be potentially multiethnic and therefore broad based. A case in point is a party backed by the so-called "KANU rebels", named United Democratic Movement (UDM), which was denied registration.

7.2.2 "They ate, it is our time to eat": Justifying ethnic politics

From the 1990's, and up to the 2002 elections, Kenya was a country in deep economic and political crisis. Looking at Abdullahi's (1998) criteria for a "failed state", Kenya had all the characteristics. Certainly, the situation was not as bad as in Somalia, which Abdullahi is discussing, but all the practices that finally saw the collapse of Somalia were in place: Nepotism, sowing of hatred, corruption, looting of the nations assets, anarchy etc. In both

⁴¹¹ Referring to Mrs. Charity Ngilu who had run for president on an SDP ticket in the 1997 polls.

Kenyatta and Moi governments, patronage and clientelism⁴¹² became major pillars of the Kenyan political and social organisation. However, with an increasingly more enlightened citizenry, the Moi regime was under closer scrutiny. Beginning in the 1990's, accusations of ineptitude, corruption, tribalism, and nepotism became so common that they were no longer news. Often, instead of Moi and his allies denying these accusations, they would legitimise them by saying that Kenyatta was no different.

The whole idea of an ethnic group being in government, and appropriating state resources at the exclusion of others, is what Kenyans call “eating”. “Eating” includes being in cabinet positions, in other senior public jobs, winning government tenders, as well as having roads, electricity, schools and medical facilities. During Kenyatta’s time, the Kikuyu were said to be “eating” while in the Moi era, it was the Kalenjin. Just like in the Kenyatta regime, Moi’s also had “co-eaters”. Alongside the Kalenjin therefore, were the Maasai, the Turkana, the Somali, the Luhya and also the Kamba. The list of ethnic groups that “ate” is quite long though, since, the mere appointment of a few personalities to senior positions in government was interpreted as being beneficial to their ethnic groups. When the Luo-led NDP merged with KANU⁴¹³ and Moi appointed two Luo MPs to cabinet positions, “the Luo” were said to be “eating”, although these appointments did not even last a year. It is the politicians who claim that their groups are “eating” or they are not.

“Eating” implies that some other groups have been excluded. The Kikuyu were said to have “eaten” during Kenyatta’s time, and the KAMATUSA groups would say during Moi’s rule that “it is our time to eat”. This simple statement is pregnant with meaning. It is the kind of politics where the concern of a group is not just the management of state economy but what flows to the members of the group. This kind of attitude also abetted corruption as people thought that they should make hay while the sun shines. The state remained an entity that people hardly identified with and one was never sure about its permanence. You loot and go, for that might be the only chance you have. The fallacy in this thinking is that the Kikuyu did not benefit en masse during Kenyatta’s rule.

In this “eating” game, the groups in government do not “eat” the same way, there are those who “eat” at the *high table*, i.e., the inner circle; those at *other tables* and those picking the crumbs. But these categories are disputable and highly contested. While a Maasai cabinet

⁴¹² Clientelism is defined as “an exchange relationship between unequal partners...it is a relationship of personal dependency, excluding kinship ties, maintained by reciprocal exchanges of favours in exchange for electoral support” (Macharia, 1997: 83; quoting Medard, 1982: 162). On his part, Macharia defines clientelism as a “situation where those in public office have allocated jobs, plots for business operation and other favours to kinsmen, friends or co-ethics in exchange for political support or legitimisation of these favours”.

⁴¹³ On March 18th 2002.

minister, Julius Sunkuli, claimed that the Moi government had not marginalised the Maasai but “rehabilitated” them, his cabinet colleague and fellow Maasai, Ntimama, took a contrary view. Some Nandi and Kipsigis leaders lamented that it was the Keiyo and the Tugen sub-groups of the Kalenjin that were “eating” during Moi’s rule. But looking at it closely, the Nandi and the Kipsigis were equally well represented in the Moi administration, but like the Maasai, they felt that they deserved more. If there was an ethnic group that was at the centre of things in the Moi regime but remained vociferous and controversial, it is the Maasai. As for the Kamba, their cabinet ministers would never lose an opportunity to thank Moi for the ‘crumbs’ falling from the table.⁴¹⁴ But it is also important to point out here that “eating”, is not just seen in material benefits. There are matters of social capital and symbolism. In fact, it is not uncommon to see an unemployed destitute person saying that their group is “eating”. There are the non-material benefits like group pride, self-worth and recognition that group members enjoy just by the mere fact that one of their own is in a position of influence. There are many Kenyans who win respect and reverence in their places of work, not because they are related to a minister or the President, but by the mere fact that they come from the same ethnic group. Some have even appropriated these ethnic links in seeking jobs or to hasten their upward mobility in their places of work.

“Co-eating” and ruling in turns

In Kenyan politics, it is almost impossible to conduct a successful election campaign based on issues that cut across ethnicities: The poor state of the economy, illiteracy, land reform, gender equity, HIV/Aids, the rule of law and good governance. If you do not tell your group how they will “eat” in the future or will continue to do so, then you have no election agenda. The educated elite, who may want to focus on issues and ideology, can be easily defeated at the polls by a novice if they don’t comply.

In the run up to the 1992 elections, Luhya and Luo leaders claimed that it was now their turn to rule. As the Luo pursued this goal through the opposition, the Luhya supported Moi whom they lobbied to appoint a Luhya as vice-president who would eventually succeed Moi. In both cases, the respective ethnic constituencies were being told “our turn is coming”. Among other things, the metaphor was intended to socialise the Kikuyu into accepting that the presidency should rotate along ethnic lines, and to let them know that they were excluded from “eating”

⁴¹⁴ Nine KANU Kamba MPs, led by three cabinet ministers, called a press conference at the end of January 1995 where they “thanked the government” for initiating development projects in Ukambani. In protest, two MPs (including one cabinet minister) refused to sign the statement released to the press (see *The Daily Nation*, Wednesday, February 1, 1995).

since they had had their turn before Moi. Waiting to rule, it is argued here, has contributed to Kenya's stability. On the other hand, no group has "eaten" alone, there has always been some "co-eaters", a situation which has helped in minimising the chances of polarisation. Moi would play weak and vulnerable, and thereby creating the impression that he was co-ruling with some of his ministers or senior civil servants. For instance, when Simeon Nyachae, a Kisii, was head of the civil service in the 1980's, Moi once remarked: *Nyachae akisema, nimesema* ("when Nyachae talks, I have talked"). Besides, in the early days of his regime, Moi used to carry some of the most powerful Kikuyu personalities in his official limousine, making it look unnecessary for them to topple him from power.

In this "eating", "co-eating" and waiting to "eat", months turned into years. Although few would dispute that the Kenyatta and Moi governments were dominated by the Kikuyu and the Kalenjin respectively, other ethnic groups were not excluded. In fact, although the Moi regime was seen to be anti-Kikuyu in the 1990's it is estimated that his government still spent more resources in Kikuyuland, than the so-called "KANU zones" like Ukambani and Maasailand. During the Kenyatta regime, the Kamba were trusted with one of the most sensitive departments. At a time when military governments were being established all over Africa and Latin America, and therefore the possibility of coup d'état was real, Kenyatta left the armed forces entirely in the hands of the Kamba. In fact, even after some Kamba were implicated in the abortive coup in 1971, the head of the military then, Joseph Ndolo, was retired and replaced with another Kamba, Jackson Mulinge. When Moi took over, the face of the military changed. Although some Kamba generals were retained, others were retired, with the Kalenjin taking up senior positions.⁴¹⁵

This story about "eating" finds some relevance in studies on ecology. Pontin (1982), for instance, talks about "diversity in dominance", that is, where different species dominate certain niches in turns. As the species form what he calls a "dominance ring"⁴¹⁶, coexistence of the species is enhanced.

7.3 Kenya and the question of a nation-state

Introduction

Before concluding this chapter, the idea of ethnic cohesiveness and nation state, introduced at the beginning of the chapter, will be revisited here. Whereas most African states are anything but "nation states", Tanzania and Somalia can be regarded as exceptions. At least at a theoretical level, Somalia had what it takes to qualify as a nation state, but clannism

⁴¹⁵ Including commander of the army and chief of the general staff (head of the military forces).

⁴¹⁶ Citing Jackson and Buss (1975).

overshadowed shared language, cultural practices, religion and territory. In the case of Tanzania, the semblance of a nation state was achieved through the concerted efforts of the founding president, who pursued a common language (Swahili) policy and suppressed ethnicity. To a great extent, Nyerere succeeded in creating among Tanzanians a consciousness of nationhood. In Kenya and many other African states, such a goal remains elusive, as much of economic, social and political life revolves around lower levels of identification.

But the concept of *nation* is, unlike *state*, quite diffuse. If we adopt Smith's definition, that a nation is "a named human population sharing a historic territory, common myths and historical memories, a mass, public culture, a common economy and common legal rights and duties for all members" (1991: 40, quoted in Eller 1999: 17), then it would be difficult to classify Kenya as a nation. Borrowing heavily from Connor (1994), Eller identifies "nations proper", "prenational" or "potential nations", "offshoot nations" and "immigrant societies". "Nations proper", are said to be the largest human grouping characterised by a myth of common ancestry. Following his description, Kenya and most African states would fall under the categories "prenational" or "potential nations". These are said to be groups that will or may become nations in the future but which currently lack a "national consciousness" and where meaningful identity is still limited to locale or "tribe". This category is what Cottam and Cottam (2001) refer to as "non-nation states" or states that are in the process of being or becoming as opposed to "nation-states". This distinction has its own inherent controversies. Other scholars, like Morris-Hale (1996) use "multiethnic societies" as a blanket concept to capture the diversity obtaining across the board from Nigeria, South Africa, Switzerland through Canada. Morris-Hale's "multi-ethnic society", appears to correspond to Barth's and Furnivall's "polyethnic society". Cottam and Cottam's definition of "multi-ethnic states", raises questions on Morris-Hale's use of the concept. They argue that in such states/societies, primary identity and loyalty goes to the various ethnic groups and that attachment to the state is either secondary or at a lower level (2001: 195). Besides, they say that multiethnic states differ from "core-community states" in that "they do not have a single community that considers itself the rightful national community for the territorial state".⁴¹⁷

On his part, Jenkins poses the question: "When does ethnic identity become national identity, and what is the relationship between them?" (1997: 42). And drawing from Eriksen's (1993) concept of non-ethnic nationalism, he asks, "when does nationalism cease to be ethnic?", thereby raising some of the core issues in the nationalism debate in Africa. With regard to African states, Eller avers that: "Certainly, the peoples of Africa, or even the peoples in most

⁴¹⁷ Cottam and Cottam (2001: 196).

single African states, do not conceive of themselves as one nation but as many; they may...someday come to see themselves as a common nation...but not yet" (1999: 18). He also stresses the idea that nationhood is not just achieved but subjective, a "state of mind", echoing the idea of "imagination" (Anderson, 1983), where a group embraces a common myth and memory. Calhoun (1991) however argues that national identities are not simply products of such "indirect social relationships". Challenges to nationalism have been encountered in many contexts. Writing about multiethnic Malaysia, Morris-Hale notes, "developing something called a Malaysian national identity is a Herculean task indeed, as so little is common to each group to use as a basis for a national identity" (1996: 180).

Kenya and ethnic cohesiveness

As indicated in the beginning of this chapter, Kenyan ethnic groups live in 'ethnic districts', some bearing ethnic names, and where this does not apply (e.g. where ethnic groups occupy more than one district), then people talk about "Luhyaland", "Luoland", "Ukambani" or "Kambaland", "Maasailand" etc. It appears that Kenya had the potential for faster cohesiveness and nationhood under Kenyatta, during whose tenure many 'ethnic districts' became increasingly multiethnic, with people settling and owning property outside their own districts. It was also a time when pupils accessed education anywhere in the republic undeterred. President Moi made a series of changes which reversed this trend. He introduced District Focus for Rural Development (DFRD), which, though theoretically aimed at devolving power from the centre, proved to be a way of enhancing disparities in regional development and ethnic divisions. Besides, limits were set as to how many pupils seeking secondary education could do so outside their home district. Moreover, the *majimbo* debates, as already indicated, were revived. It has also been stressed that the agitation for *majimbo* was not aimed at creating a federal state but ethnic enclaves. When multiparty democracy was re-introduced in 1991, the Moi administration was not comfortable with the multiethnic outfit (FORD), which was to challenge KANU in the polls. As this party split into smaller parties that followed ethnic lines, the government was blamed for it. I have also noted that the multiparty elections were accompanied by ethnic clashes in the Rift valley, Western and Coast provinces, targeting groups that were perceived as anti-KANU. In view of these developments, one would argue that if Kenya was in the process of becoming a nation, the Moi era reversed this process.

With regard to common language, Kenyans increasingly saw political leaders, even ministers addressing gatherings of mixed ethnicities in a dominant local tongue, instead of using

Swahili, the National Language. The head of state himself was no exception. Of course, there is nothing wrong with local languages, if anything, their use should be encouraged. But, in a country with 42 ethnic groups, Swahili provides a sense of common identity among the diverse groups. While Tanzania emphasised Swahili as both official and national language, Kenya gave it lip service, with the situation worsening in the Moi era.⁴¹⁸ There are many Kenyans today, even in urban areas, who cannot communicate in the “national language,” something that puts Kenyans to shame when they meet Tanzanians. Nevertheless, Swahili is occasionally used as a criteria to gauge citizenship. For instance, during crackdowns on “illegal immigrants”, the police ‘test’ whether a Somali is a Kenyan, and not a Somalian national, by speaking to them in Swahili. Lack of proficiency is construed to mean that one is not a Kenyan.

In daily life, rarely do people express themselves as “Kenyans”, unless they are filling forms at the airport or when the police confronts them at night, asking them to produce the national identity card or a passport. Even as late as the 1990’s, Kenyan identity cards used to indicate one’s “tribe”. In an editorial, the leading Kenyan daily notes: “The basic question which faces Kenya as it approaches the Moi transition and a new constitutional dispensation is whether it will ever become a nation, or continue to be a mere collection of tribes...” The editor continued, “...we assumed that interethnic marriages, urbanisation, interaction of students in ethnically integrated schools and employment outside local territories would eliminate tribalism. Regrettably, this has not happened. Politicians have turned tribalism into a medium for mobilising their tribesmen in their struggle for power”.⁴¹⁹ Kenya disproves the notion that tribalism diminishes in significance with increased literacy, urbanisation, cross-ethnic interaction and democratisation processes. People are increasingly considering themselves as Maasai, Kamba or Kikuyu first, then perhaps, Kenyan.

Following Moi government’s crackdown on broad based student unions in public universities during the 1980’s and 90’s, ethnic based organisations (e.g. Akamba University Students Association-AUSU), were encouraged and took centre stage. What is interesting is that the same “tribal consciousness,” writes Onyango-Obbo (1998), has intensified in Uganda in spite of the fact that Museveni banned political party activities after coming to power in 1986, accusing them of causing division through religion and ethnicity.⁴²⁰ This was done through a

⁴¹⁸ Partly due to increased schooling costs leading to high drop out and the policy of confining pupils in their home districts.

⁴¹⁹ See *The Daily Nation*, Saturday, August 25, 2001.

⁴²⁰ The Editor of the leading Ugandan daily, *The Monitor*. His article featured in *The East African*, July 6-12, 1998. Another Ugandan journalist, Joachim Buwembo, also wrote a similar article with the title “tribalism resurfaces in Ugandan life and politics,” *The East African*, August 3-9, 1998.

1987 amendment to the penal code (the “anti-sectarian act”) which outlawed tribalism. He says that in the once prestigious Makerere University, “there is no tree on the campus which is not papered over with announcements of meetings and cultural events of tribal associations”. In the article entitled “for Ugandans, tribe always comes first”, Onyango-Obbo notes that every “tribe” has an association in Makerere and that even Ugandans living abroad organise themselves around “tribes”, with the Acholi and the Baganda taking the lead.⁴²¹ Looking at the proliferation of ethnic based student organisations, it seems that whereas Kenya’s were created, financed and strengthened as a way of weakening the unifying and once powerful student body,⁴²² in the Ugandan case, outlawing and criminalising association along ethnic lines created anxiety, arousing a spontaneous ethnic consciousness as the imposed ‘Ugandan’ identity was too amorphous and ‘distant’.

A Kenyan political scientist and politician, Prof. Anyang’ Nyong’o, argued that during the long authoritarian spell of one-party rule, “Kenyans lost even the art of political organisation. Having been huddled into tribes that KANU can rule by organising elite competition for jobs, contracts, bribes, business, etc. on the basis of tribes, Kenyans seem to believe that political parties should be owned by tribes for the sake of such elite bargains”.⁴²³ He argues that before, and at independence, political parties in Kenya were organised on issues and were guided by ideology and therefore having ‘district-bound’ parties is retrogressive and a step backwards. He advocates the incorporation of “issue-based politics” into the civic education campaigns. Nyong’o asserts that many Kenyans have fallen into the trap of ethnic politics of distribution and that the nationalistic outlook proves elusive and its not even desirable. His argument raises the question of the medium through which allegiance to the ‘tribe’ can be minimised in favour of the nation. In Kenya, it has been possible to combine allegiance to the ‘tribe’ and to the nation. Actually, I do not think that Kenyans should be asked to reject the chauvinism that drives them to support parties merely because they are led by their tribesmen/women. Nyong’o argues that at independence, the ‘tribe’ was not at the centre of elections in which the “more nationalistic” KANU won. That argument is not convincing, considering the fact that it was a Luo-Kikuyu alliance that won the elections. In any case, Kenyatta ‘rewarded’ the Luo by making Odinga his first vice-president. What is nationalistic about two ethnic groups forming an alliance in a state with 42 ethnic groups? Besides, the fact that “small tribes” were united under KADU adds credence to the fact that ‘tribalism’ has been at the centre of

⁴²¹ With internet chat forums *Acholinet* and *Bugandanet* respectively.

⁴²² Students Organisation of Nairobi University (SONU).

⁴²³ *Sunday Nation*, April 8, 2001.

Kenya's political and social life. Moreover, the fact the two ethnic groups came together did not mean that each had shed its sense of identity and interest.

Turning to more recent developments, three opposition politicians from different ethnic groups formed a united front in 2002 to dislodge KANU from power. Then there were demands that the three, who had run for president in 1997, should step aside for other new leaders. Regarding this debate, Mutahi Ngunyi, a political scientist, wrote: "The three are tribal chiefs and their ethnic constituencies cannot be passed over...without legitimacy in the tribe. In other words, ethnicity is the bottom line. Or has this changed?"⁴²⁴ A plausible answer would be that it has not, as Kenyans continue to oscillate between an elusive national identity while cushioned in the cultural/ethnic identity. The ambivalent role of the state has slackened the process through which a 'nation' could emerge. On Moi's ethnic manipulation, Ochieng' says, "nobody knows our tribal stupidity like the President. He is thus able with the greatest ease to exploit it to the greatest advantage".⁴²⁵ Actually, there is no 'stupidity' here, for the state has not emerged as a symbol of collective identity.

Whether it is the context (e.g. divisive colonial and post colonial policies), the actors (particularly those assuming 'tribal' leadership positions) or what is at stake (e.g. competition for political power), what has been certain are the contradictions and inconsistencies. The question, perhaps, should be why there are populations available for ethnic mobilisation and why they respond to a call to act as "ethnic subjects" (Mare, 1992: 27). But as the chapter illustrates, a stable state is still possible in spite of the politicisation of ethnicity. The coalition that deposed KANU from power in 2002 is trying to restore harmony among groups by engaging in campaigns for cohesion and political integration.

7.4 Conclusion

The chapter aimed at presenting the Kamba and the Maasai in wider social spheres; as part of the larger Kenyan multiethnic society. In other words, the objective was to examine the external dimension of interethnic coexistence. The chapter has showed how interactions between both groups are shaped by other groups and those running government, in the production of a stable state. By examining state stability, the chapter sought to highlight the political dimension of Kamba-Maasai coexistence. While it has been argued that the primary task of establishing states is to subordinate primordial attachments since ethnic allegiances may compete with the state for allegiance and loyalty (Geertz, 1973; Morris-Hale, 1996), the

⁴²⁴ *Sunday Nation*, June 16, 2002.

⁴²⁵ *Sunday Nation*, August 18, 2002.

chapter has shown that the state could also enhance these “primordial attachments” and reinforce ethnic difference with the aim of foiling any potential broad based ethnic alliances. Kenya’s state stability is discussed by looking at the creation of ethnic districts, the politics of “small” and “big tribes”, “tribalism”, ethnic alliances, ethnic dominance and political consciousness. On districts, I have argued that although they were designed to serve as divide-and-rule mechanisms, and to undermine the basis for a cohesive society, they have also provided groups with their own spaces in which they can exercise their autonomy and address regional issues. Besides, district boundaries, though politically significant, do not inhibit interethnic interactions and exchanges. With regard to ethnic dominance, it is noted that Kenya does not have a numerically dominant ethnic group.⁴²⁶ Moreover, it has not been possible to unite groups under wider linguistic categories, e.g. as Bantu. This creates a situation where ethnic groups have to form loose alliances to capture and maintain political power. This interdependence, it is argued, has contributed immensely to the country’s relative stability. Closely tied to this, is the fact that in pre- and post-independent Kenya, it has always been possible to form ethnic alliances across Bantu, Nilotc and Cushitic groups. The dynamism of these alliances is illustrated by the frequency at which they shift. Besides, there has also been an all-inclusive practice, where ruling groups “eat” with others. These “rings of dominance”,⁴²⁷ where “eaters” also recruit “co-eaters”, as others wait for their turn, precludes a situation where groups are polarised or isolated. The 1992, 1997 and 2002 elections also demonstrate that although ethnic groups may vote along ethnic lines, it is the instrumentalisation of ethnicity by the political elite or “political entrepreneurs”,⁴²⁸ that shapes this process. When these ‘tribal leaders’ formed a common front in the 2002 elections, the voting patterns similarly changed.

Another aspect I would like to highlight is political consciousness. When discussing the politics of ethnic numbers, it was noted that although the manipulation of ethnic numerical strength during censuses, are evident, the affected groups did not confront the state authorities. This illustrates not only the apathy and indifference of the people to the state but also lower levels of political consciousness. In this case, political stability is a consequence of groups’ inaction rather than action.

⁴²⁶ Although the Kikuyu are the most populous ethnic group, they constitute only about 20% of the Kenyan population. This is particularly why Kikuyu presidential candidates, running without broader ethnic alliances, could not win the presidency in the 1992 and 1997 elections. Mr Mwai Kibaki, a Kikuyu, won the 2002 presidential elections after leading a coalition that brought together the Kikuyu, the Luo, the Luhya, the Kamba and the Maasai among other groups.

⁴²⁷ Quoting Pontin (1982).

⁴²⁸ See Elwert (2002).

CHAPTER EIGHT: TOWARDS A REDEFINITION OF INTERETHNIC COEXISTENCE

This section serves two purposes. First, it is a summary of the main ideas carried in the previous chapters and second, it is an analytical chapter where the researcher makes a case for a redefinition of interethnic coexistence. By pulling together the main theoretical outcomes in the study, this chapter therefore attempts to answer the core research question: What is interethnic coexistence?

8.1 Revisiting the concept of coexistence

I have argued that ‘coexistence’ is a concept that begs for concretisation in its application on how ethnic groups relate. As I have noted in chapters one and two, the concept has enjoyed wide application in the natural sciences, particularly in ecology (see Pontin, 1982), political economy (Aubey, 1961), history (Davies, 1987), peace studies (e.g. Kriesberg, 1998; Galtung, 1994) and social anthropology (Torstrick, 2000). While Pontin talks about the “conditions of coexistence”, and “rings of dominance”, Aubey talks about “competitive coexistence”, as Davies looks at coexistence as an antagonistic process. Kriesberg regards coexistence as a harmonious relationship while Galtung says that coexistence is possible “in spite of borders”. Torstrick examines the “limits” of coexistence. As evident in the previous chapters, these insights have been utilised in the analysis of the empirical data. The political economy debates during the cold war period which expounded on the contradictions that characterised the juxtaposition of the market economy and communism or the “coexistence” between the West and the Communist Bloc, have been particularly inspiring. But, I have underscored the tendency in ethnological studies to use ‘coexistence’ rather casually. Quite often, its use is not even clarified, forcing the reader to deduce the meaning from the context.

For some scholars who have defined the concept (e.g. Kriesberg), ‘coexistence’ is limited to situations where groups are purported to live together in peace, excluding relationships “characterised by overt struggle” (1998: 182). The approach I have adopted here however, presents ‘coexistence’ as constituting interactions that are not only peaceful and complementary but also antagonistic, where conflict is an integral part of the interactive process. Early anthropological studies conducted by Gluckman, Evans-Pritchard, Turner and Leach among others showed that social life is permeated by antagonism and conflict (see Kuper, 1993). But instead of looking at a single group’s social structure and organisation, as commonly is the case in ethnological studies, this study examined groups in interaction in

order to make a contribution on the complexity and the multidimensionality of interethnic coexistence.

I have also argued that while ‘relations’ and ‘coexistence’ appear to be used interchangeably, there are empirical and theoretical differences. My position is that ‘relations’ is a more general description of human interactions that may not be limited by physical space (i.e. groups that ‘relate’ may not necessarily share common territory).⁴²⁹ In addition, ‘relations’ is devoid of the intensity of exchanges that define ‘coexistence’. To put it differently, ‘relations’ can be considered a broader concept under which ‘coexistence’ falls. Groups or entities that ‘relate’ may not necessarily be interdependent. In other words, ethnic groups ‘relate’ with many other groups but ‘coexist’ with a few. I will expound on this aspect shortly.

In a nutshell, I have, on the basis of my findings and readings developed what I would call the main dimensions of interethnic coexistence. These dimensions are linked and are basically put in different categories for analytical purposes. I visualise interethnic coexistence as interactions characterised by: One, the actors (ethnic groups) whose distinctions (difference) and how they make sense of each other have to be concretised; two, as a complementary process that involves systems of exchange between the actors; three, as an antagonistic relationship where groups compete and fight for resources, ethnic supremacy and power; four, as a game of compromises, negotiations and concessions; five, where groups shared common territory; and finally, as a relationship that is externally shaped by other groups and the state authorities.

8.1.1 Coexistence as a question of ethnic difference

The discernment and constitution of actors in a study that looks at interactions between groups is a minimum requirement. Ethnic difference therefore becomes the first step in analysing a coexistence relationship. In chapters two, three and four, I attempted to deepen the understanding of how the actors (the Kamba and the Maasai) define themselves and their neighbours, as they struggle to appropriate and compete for shared resources. If there is anything primordialist, instrumentalist and pragmatist approaches of ethnicity have in common, it is that ethnic boundaries are important in the study of identity and ethnic difference. Seeking to understand how the Kamba and the Maasai make sense of each other

⁴²⁹ However, there are exceptions. Ethnic groups can get into a ‘coexistence’ relationship even if their territories are far apart. In Africa for example, this ‘coexistence’ can be witnessed in the large urban centres where people from different parts of the country have migrated to in search of jobs and better amenities. As centres of power and commerce, it is also in these urban areas where ethnic competition for political power and business opportunities will be more intense. In the world of global trade, distant countries can easily be interdependent (e.g. Japan and the United States). Besides, important natural resources (e.g. oil) are also vital links which bring together distant countries and peoples of different political and religious orientations.

led to the exploration of their rich body of ethnic stereotypes. I tried to see how these depictions influenced everyday cross-ethnic transactions. It emerged that common stereotypes (e.g. that the Kamba farmers are “poor” or the Maasai are “backward”) was a way of drawing ethnic boundaries and distinction. Stereotypes are used as identity markers. Whereas it is evident that through social transformation and increased interaction, cultural differences between the Kamba and the Maasai are losing significance, ethnicity continues to find relevance as a way of maintaining identity. In fact, both groups claim to display distinct physical traits, apart from ‘traditional’ dress codes. Indeed Barth (1969) noted that interactions between groups do not inhibit maintenance of ethnic boundaries. In fact, even for the Kamba who live in Maasai territory, subverting physical boundaries does not mean that cultural borders lose significance.

In general, depictions present actors as static, predictable and with incorrigible attributes. As I noted in chapter four, stereotypes “refuse to take individual variations into account” (Eriksen 1995: 252). In actual practice, the actors contradict these generalisations. Those portrayed as possessing certain fixed cultural traits prove to be differentiated, flexible and are calculating. I gave the example of how the Kamba depiction of the Maasai as ignorant is falsified in everyday practice (see chapter three). The question is: If the actors know that ethnic depictions are simplistic descriptions or have been overtaken by processes of social transformation, why do they retain depictions and pass them on to the next generation? In a situation where groups live side by side, there seems to be a deep “passion for difference”. Ethnic depictions play a crucial role in this endeavour. Keen to maintain ethnic identity, ethnic depictions become useful tools in the enhancement of a group’s self-esteem and self-worth and in making sense of its own existence. That is particularly important where groups are rivals but share territory and resources. Like any interface relationship (Long, 1989), identity attains significance at the threshold of interaction (see Eriksen, 1997).

Stereotypes make sense in a coexistence relationship; they enhance group solidarity and serve to distinguish between different actors. The quest for difference is one of the most basic ‘requirements’ in a coexistence relationship. To put it differently, interethnic coexistence is about distinctions and identity. It involves ethnic distinctiveness, drawing and maintenance of ethnic and territorial boundaries. And yet on the other hand, it is also the porosity of these boundaries that tell whether groups ‘coexist’ or not. This contrast is demonstrated by Rajasingham-Senanayake (see chapter two), who notes that for a long time, the peaceful coexistence of “diverse and hybrid cultures” in Sri Lanka astounded ethnologists (1999: 99). Chapters three and four have among other things, shown that the Kamba and the Maasai

qualify as ideal actors in a ‘coexistence’ relationship. The two groups display distinct linguistic, cultural and economic attributes, and disparities in social transformation processes. As I have shown in chapter five, a system of exchange (complementarity) is embedded in these differences (particularly the distinct modes of subsistence). Ethnic depictions enabled the researcher to know “who is who” and to discern more clearly the cross-ethnic flow of exchanges. The exchanges, as I shall indicate below, are very important in a study on coexistence since not all ethnic groups that live side by side ‘coexist’. The terminology of ‘coexistence’ should apply in those cases where the said groups are externally regarded, and recognise themselves, as distinct on the one hand, and yet are engaged in social intercourse on the other. Moreover, there has to be evidence that these distinctions (ethnic, modes of subsistence, religious, social transformation etc.), shape the day-to-day cross-ethnic interactions.

Coexistence may also take the form of commonalities or sameness. Whether acquired through interaction with the neighbouring group or through other agents, shared practices ease and enhance interethnic transactions. In terms of economic activities, cattle, for instance, serve as one of the most important areas of convergence between the Kamba and the Maasai. Apart from being a commodity of trade, cattle symbolise wealth in both groups, determine the flow of labour, enhance interdependence as drought compels cattle keepers to cross into other territories in search of pastures, seal not only marriage contracts but also determine where brides may be given for marriage. What is more, they form an important commodity of exchange (including milk) as well as create a forum where other issues like political alliances, resolution of conflict, cross-ethnic land sales etc. are negotiated. Sameness is also realised through farming, the quest for literacy, bilingualism and loan words, shared cultural practices (e.g. female circumcision) adoption of a religious identity (e.g. “we are Christians”), shared geographical locality, harsh climatic conditions (vulnerability), membership in similar political parties and being members of “small tribes”. Christianity in particular provides a common identity that has eased intermarriages between the two groups (cf. chapter four). Commonalities in general may be imagined or situational.

8.1.2 Coexistence as a complementary process

I have used complementarity and interdependence to make sense of the wide range of social and economic exchanges undertaken by groups to sustain their livelihoods (cf. chapter five). Although I have used both concepts interchangeably, I have noted that in a strict sense, distinctions could be drawn with regard to the intensity of exchanges, i.e., by looking at

interdependence as an extreme form of complementarity (see also Barth, 1969: 18). Chapter five showed how complementarity underlies coexistence. Interethnic exchanges, to put it simply, is what keeps groups together.

I shall briefly look at the exchanges between the Kamba and the Maasai under various categories: The ecological, economic and social aspects. On the ecological perspective, the Kamba and the Maasai occupy fairly distinct niches, specialising in different modes of subsistence. The Maasai pastoralists provide cattle, milk and ghee while the Kamba farmers supplement Maasai diet with agricultural produce (e.g. maize and legumes). These exchanges are carried out through barter trade, price market system or mutual aid. In addition, there are also loaning systems in which the Maasai loan cattle to the Kamba, while other Kamba also adopt certain Maasai cattle breeds.⁴³⁰ This is particularly significant in enhancing Maasai pride and self-esteem since they reclaim their past glory as models for the Kamba. Apart from these exchanges of animals, transhumance establishes strong ethnic interdependencies. During drought, some Maasai pastoralists move their cattle to Ukambani in search of pastures. These pastures are accessed through individual or collective agreements in which the Maasai can pay in cash or in kind (e.g. cattle). Moreover, there are also unconventional but tolerated methods of interdependence. For instance, the Maasai graze their animals in Ukambani at night, while the Kamba cut and haul wood from Maasailand for sale when the pastoralists have taken their animals to other areas or when it is dark. It is only when these practices are taken into “extremes” that they are regulated or penalised.

Closely related to the first are the economic linkages. The exchanges here take the form of trade relations in which the Kamba run shops while the Maasai act as customers. This has more to do with the slower pace at which the Maasai have adopted the market economy. In addition, there are also labour exchanges through which Kamba men are engaged as cattle herders and farm labourers in Maasai homesteads. There are other exchanges based on disparities in social and economic transformation. These include housing transactions whereby Kamba ‘traditional’ houses are adopted by the Maasai as “improved housing” and Kamba masons are engaged by the Maasai in the construction of brick and stone houses. I have also noted that facilities like schools and youth polytechnics are unevenly distributed between the two ethnic territorial areas. The Maasai, whose territory has fewer schools, send some of their children to “Kamba schools”. Moreover, there are many Kamba teachers in “Maasai schools”, while others work as medical personnel and veterinary officers in Maasailand.

⁴³⁰ The *Sahiwal* and *Boran* breeds (for details, see chapter five).

All these forms of exchange and interdependence are embedded in the diversity of the modes of subsistence and in the disparity in the adoption of ‘modernity’. The patterns of exchange also underscore how vulnerability shapes interdependence. It is an intricate system of complementarity, where exchanges are unequal and erratic, and where, due to uncertainties and common vulnerability, both groups somehow assume indispensability.

The other forms of exchange I would like to highlight are the social ones. In coexistence studies, intermarriage has been singled out as a common way of forming alliances across ethnic or kinship groups. Weber (1922/1978) observed that in all groups, the absence of intermarriage would be a consequence of ‘racial’ segregation. He noted that except in the rare situations where only endogamous children are accepted as full members of a group, most ethnic groups intermarry and form alliances (see also Schlee, 1997; Kurtz, 2001). The practice of exogamy⁴³¹ among the Kamba and the Maasai has led to intermarriages which have been an effective way of building bridges across these groups. Although these intermarriages are erratic and unbalanced,⁴³² they have been crucial in the shaping of property relations. Writing on the Maasai, Campbell shows how they lost some of their valuable grazing lands to immigrant Kikuyu and Kamba farmers whom the Maasai could not chase away since they were “relatives of Maasai by marriage and were thus permitted to settle in the area by custom” (1993: 262).⁴³³ In fact, Kurtz talks about “strategic marriages” that may be arranged to create “friends” out of “enemies” and therefore reduce the potential for conflict (see also Triulzi, 1996). As noted in the study, it is important to highlight here that although taking wives or giving daughters in marriage across ethnicities might not be deliberate actions aimed at forging harmony, once intermarriage has taken place, the alliances created can be appropriated⁴³⁴ conveniently if the need arose (e.g. during food shortages). Besides, I noted in chapter six that exchanges act as “lubricants” which ease the rattling of the “axes”. In other words, exchanges serve to minimise conflict.

8.1.3 Coexistence as an antagonistic process

As evident in chapters three, four and six, interethnic coexistence is not just about harmony, interethnic exchange and interdependence, but also about competition, rivalry, hatred and opposing interests. In fact, I have noted in chapter two that coexistence is a process of

⁴³¹ Which requires individuals to marry outside the primary consanguinal units of which they are members.

⁴³² Kamba women marry Maasai men but it is a rarity to find a Kamba man married to a Maasai woman. For explanations, see chapter four (4.4).

⁴³³ When ethnic differences are instrumentalised/politicised, migrants are stripped of these rights.

⁴³⁴ A church wedding in Simba (Maasailand) where a Kamba man married a Maasai woman in 1999 was cited by many respondents as an illustration that “we are not enemies”.

blending two “antagonistic ways of life” (Korbel, 1959: vii). Indeed social life among groups is seen as ambiguous and conflicting (Turner, 1972; Kuper, 1993). Ethnic stereotypes themselves are not just markers of identity but also signify hatred and rivalry among groups. Interethnic coexistence is therefore not just about harmony as is sometimes argued (cf. Kriesberg, 1998). Coexistence is a complex process where interdependent groups oscillate between harmony and conflict. Despite interdependence, groups will have competing interests, sometimes threatening the survival of the other. In localities where environments are more fragile and resources scarce, such rivalries occur with heightened frequency. It has been shown that even groups that intermarry may still sustain conflict since they “share the common feature of otherness” (Schlee, 1997: 577). In fact, even in cases where different groups assume common identity (e.g. through Christianity), this may not mean a resolution of conflict. Kamba and Maasai ‘Christians’, for instance, are divided along denominations which tend to compete with one another.

I examined antagonism and conflict by looking at the economic, social, ethnic and political aspects of competition. Economically, I looked at the competition for land, water and animal resources. Common disputes revolve around these groups’ most valuable resources, namely land and cattle. As one group expands farming space, the other laments over shrinking grazing grounds. I have also indicated that disputes increase depending on the level of vulnerability and interdependence (particularly during drought). Variations in the weather conditions influence the magnitude of vulnerability and therefore the propensity to ‘invade’ farms or raid cattle, consequently heightening ethnic tensions and conflict.

The other aspect I looked at is the unequal trading relations. Although Kamba’s running of businesses in Maasailand serves as a form of mutual exchange, it is also a source of ethnic tensions. Some Maasai see this as external dominance and exploitation. As the market economy entrenches itself particularly among the Maasai, trading centres in their territory are acquiring new meanings and unprecedented significance. This has meant that non-Maasai groups that have hitherto controlled business enterprises are confronted with new challenges as the Maasai seek to assert themselves. And yet, as I have noted, the Maasai are not necessarily competing by venturing into business themselves, but by seeking to be involved (e.g. by employment) and arguing that “foreigners” have been taking advantage of them. Often, ethnic conflicts occur when a group oversteps the ‘limits’ of tolerance/difference. Accommodation or acceptance can be predicated on stiff conditions and sacrifices. For

instance, the Kamba have to restrain themselves from challenging Maasai political authority.⁴³⁵

Politically, I have shown how the Kamba have to yield to Maasai authority in Maasailand in order to win acceptance.⁴³⁶ This was partly achieved through coercion whereby Maasai political elite, as allies in Moi regime's attempt to suppress "big tribes", demanded that farming groups in their territory should "respect" the "hosts". So as the Kamba dominated businesses, the Maasai retained political power (as chiefs, councillors etc.) This is what I have called 'co-dominance', where each group dominates a given niche. Although this is not devoid of tensions and struggles, making concessions and recognising each group's contribution allows some semblance of equilibrium. Apart from this, the state authorities antagonise groups in other ways. As a controller and distributor of resources, the state enhances ethnic tensions as it allocates these resources disproportionately across ethnic territorial areas. The state's control of large tracks of land through its wildlife, forest and agricultural research departments brings itself on a collision course with groups that encroach on these lands. "State land", as I indicated in chapter six, became an arena of conflict. Although pastoralism and farming ordinarily complement each other, this proved difficult where there were no mutually agreed ethnic territorial boundaries. Worse still, shifts in political patronage saw the state evict both groups. More details on how the state destabilises ethnic groups are provided in the last section on "external" influences. Still on the political aspects, I examined ethnic territories, and noted that although the imposed political boundary has assumed permanence, it is constantly being negotiated and often triggers conflict, depending on the interests at stake (e.g. location of amenities) or simply when the boundary is instrumentalised as a way of seeking concessions from one group.

In the race for social transformation and catching-up, ethnic tensions are aroused as groups compete for allocation of national resources. Besides, the Maasai have sought special cultural and property rights. The Maasai have not just sought for ethnic recognition, but also to be recognised as an "indigenous group". This campaign has been met with resistance, not least from non-Maasai groups whose livelihoods and land user rights in Maasailand are threatened. The complementarity between the Kamba and the Maasai on the one hand and the antagonistic relations on the other hand, shows the complexity of coexistence where mutual exchanges take place between 'enemies'. The Kamba-Maasai relationship does not necessarily follow the time and space pattern where "good neighbours" of today become

⁴³⁵ Other conditions that were set by Maasai ethnic mobilisers included asking migrant groups living in their territory to support only the ruling party.

⁴³⁶ And as result, secure their livelihood.

“strangers” tomorrow (Hahn, 2000: 11). While this conception is empirically and theoretically plausible, the Kamba and the Maasai display a complex mix where the “good neighbours” are also “strangers”; where your Maasai in-laws may not necessarily be your friends and where, in some cases, (e.g. Mwende’s case in chapter four), cross-ethnic transactions are denied or trivialised. So that if there is anything that has assumed permanence in Kamba-Maasai relationship, it is the frequency with which harmony alternates with disharmony and ethnic rivalry. The labelling of strangers is a complex process (see Simmel, 1958, Schutz, 1964 and Hahn, 2000). Simmel, for instance, argued that those who are close to us may be strangers while those who are far are not perceived as such (1958: 509).

8.1.4 Coexistence as a game of compromise

In as much as interethnic coexistence is antagonistic and conflictual, I have also argued that it involves compromises. This is where differences between contending parties are settled by mutual concession. Compromises constitute what can be called ‘the price of interethnic coexistence’. These comprise a wide range of actions which take the form of concessions or sacrifices made to avert conflict between groups. It is a negotiation process through which diverse and clashing interests coalesce in a give-and-take relationship. Made after an explosive conflict or when one is imminent, compromises are usually reached after actors have evaluated what they stand to lose or gain. Where a group lives in ‘foreign’ territory, where its presence fuels ethnic tensions, it may make concessions as it seeks acceptance and accommodation, or as demanded by those providing it. Such concessions may be collectively undertaken (where representatives from both parties enter into negotiations) or may take the form of individual initiatives (e.g. between a landowner and a tenant). As I have shown in chapter six, disputes may revolve around issues that are external to both groups. A case in point is the contested boundary between Ukambani and Maasailand, in which, “for the sake of peace”, the groups mutually agreed to recognise the validity of the imposed (artificial) boundary.⁴³⁷ This particular case showed that it might be easier to make compromises if the affected parties mutually regard the cause of the dispute as external to them, i.e., if none of the contending parties can be apportioned blame.

However, while compromises ease ethnic tensions and enhance interethnic harmony, they are complex negotiation processes. And because they involve sacrifices and partial surrender of a group’s position, compromises are difficult to reach. They may involve transfer of land resources, accommodating migrant groups, granting access rights to watering and grazing

⁴³⁷ See chapter six.

areas and sharing trading space. The group making these concessions therefore, may have to swallow its pride. But on the other hand, granting another group concessions can be used by the actors to enhance their pride. For instance, I have indicated that the Maasai view the concessions they make as evidence of how considerate, friendly and accommodative they are. Compromises therefore may take the form of “favours”, where, a concession given is not regarded as a right by the group making the sacrifice. An example would be the “theft” case in Simba trading centre (chapter four), where the Kamba agreed to compensate the Maasai to quell tensions, although the Kamba regarded the “theft” allegation as fabricated. I also mentioned the gesture of allowing Maasai herders to graze in Ukambani “for free” during drought, as well as lowering for them the price of cereals, which they need to supplement their diet. This also means that the level of vulnerability influences groups’ readiness to make concessions and enhance interethnic understanding and harmony.

Most importantly, concession making processes are shaped by power differentials among groups. I have made a distinction between scenarios where subordinated groups negotiate with those that control the instruments of state power, and other situations where none of the groups has an outright monopoly on state power (e.g. the Kamba and the Maasai). Examples cited where one group dominates state power include the whites-Aborigines case in Australia (Banton, 1983) and the Israelis-Palestinians case in Israel (Torstrick, 2000). Similar examples in Africa include Somalia (Abdullahi, 1998), the Sudan and Ivory Coast.⁴³⁸

The Kamba-Maasai experience shows that concessions between groups may emerge not merely as gestures aimed at better harmony but out of a group’s inability or weakness to compete effectively. The concessions therefore may actually turn out to be disadvantageous to the “foreigners”. This is illustrated by the case in Simba and Sultan Hamud trading centres where the Maasai rented out their business premises to the Kamba not because they were accommodative or sought to improve harmony, but rather because the Maasai themselves failed to make profits. Besides, by allowing the Kamba to run these businesses, the Maasai escaped the burden of their kin who borrowed goods on credit and often failed to pay for them. But as this incident showed, a compromise can also be a burden to the beneficiaries. The Kamba who rented these premises had to make additional sacrifices to win acceptance and to run their businesses smoothly. I noted that some had to sell goods to Maasai customers on credit without any guarantees, and sometimes to people they could not trace later.⁴³⁹ But as I

⁴³⁸ Where, in February 2003, a power sharing deal brokered by France between government and rebel groups collapsed. In the agreement, the President was to cede some of his powers to be transferred to a new post of prime minister. Those backing the President rejected the deal.

⁴³⁹ These costs are treated by the Maasai as a “compensation” for their generosity in allowing “foreigners” to live and do business among them.

noted (chapter five), these concessions have limits, i.e. there are “extremes” that both groups regard as intolerable. One of the reasons why compromises constitute an important aspect of coexistence is because coexistence has limits and can fail.

I have also used Villarreal’s (1994) ideas regarding how “subordinated” groups yield to wield power and secure their livelihoods. Closely related to this is the need for ethnic recognition and ethnic pride. For instance, I have indicated in chapter six that the Kamba living in Maasai territory choose not to challenge Maasai authority in the villages and trading centres so as not to be perceived as a threat. In addition, the Maasai occasionally demand that they must be accorded *anganyet* (“respect”) as “hosts” of migrant groups. Moreover, the Kamba who “excel” in Maasailand are often forced to conceal their success to avoid being conspicuous. Strategies adopted include resisting the temptation to build stone or brick houses in the midst of Maasai huts and making sure that they do not dress “too well”.⁴⁴⁰ However, I have also argued that groups may avoid conflict by engaging in “competitive coexistence”, where diverse interests are pursued without recourse to ethnic tensions or armed conflict.

It is also important to note that the state has a role to play in the making of concessions. I have cited cases where local state officials (e.g. police and chiefs) act as arbitrators in settling of differences between groups. I have argued that state intervention is usually more successful if its officials adopt the local ways of resolving disputes. I made reference to an incident where Kamba-Maasai conflicts were resolved not by enforcing the state law, but by ignoring it. This is where the Maasai were allowed to get away with the “theft” of cattle by treating it as a “traditional raid” and therefore safeguarding their honour. Instead of taking the raiders to court, the Maasai were asked to compensate the Kamba. Although the police and chiefs are expected to enforce the law of the land, they have learnt that enhancement of interethnic harmony is more important. This particular case corresponds to Weber’s argument that groups, even when “mutually repulsive” may coexist in harmony if they allow each other to consider their own honour and prestige as the highest.⁴⁴¹ The groups do not need to be “equals” but rather exercise mutual respect and recognise each other’s ways of life.

8.1.5 Coexistence and ‘common territory’

The theme of ‘common territory’ runs through the thesis. This is partly because it is the sharing of territory that enables groups to interact, stereotype each other, engage in social and economic exchanges and also become rivals. Although physical locality has been challenged as an attribute of ethnicity (Jenkins, 1997), there is little doubt that sharing of territorial space

⁴⁴⁰ This is besides the urge to conceal possessions and success out of fear of being bewitched (see chapter five).

⁴⁴¹ Horowitz (1985: 24), quoting Weber (1958: 189).

provides the arena in which interethnic coexistence becomes possible. As I indicated in chapter two, geographical contiguity is seen to be particularly significant in shaping the way ethnic groups are constituted and how they interact with others (Du Toit, 1978; Roosens, 1989; Cottam and Cottam, 2000). While discussing “ecologic interdependence”, Barth (1969: 19), shows that groups may monopolise separate territories but their proximity to one another creates a basis for complementarity and interdependence.

As I noted in the introduction to this chapter, ‘common territory’ can also clarify what appears to be both an empirical as well as a conceptual question, namely the distinction between ‘relations’ and ‘coexistence’. My argument is that the distinction lies in the intensity of exchanges between groups, which in turn has implications on territorial proximity. Whereas groups that ‘relate’ may not necessarily share territory, ‘coexistence’, which implies that groups are either complementary or interdependent, suggests co-residence. For some groups like the Kamba and the Maasai, *distance* assumes special importance since some of their commodities of exchange like milk, meat, green maize and vegetables are perishable, and yet they have no storage facilities. This is compounded not only by the hot tropical climate but also the limited means of modern transport (e.g. buses or lorries). These limitations confine trade and exchange to a given geographical area. As I noted earlier, advances in technology like air transport and the internet make it possible for groups (or countries) to ‘coexist’ irrespective of the physical distance between them.

I have noted that in spite of the fact that the Kamba and the Maasai have separate ethnic territories, the boundary between them has remained porous, making it possible for both groups to pursue collective as well as individual goals. As I noted in chapter seven, both groups used to be in one “province” before and shortly after Kenya’s independence. Putting the groups in different provinces later hardly altered the interdependence between them. Besides, I have also noted that despite restrictions in terms of movement within administrative units, the groups ignore political borders, often forcing state administrators to conform to the local practices. *Common territory* therefore has to be determined by the everyday practices of actors and not by the political boundaries imposed by the state. As I noted in chapter six, the concept of common territory challenges Furnivall’s notion of groups that live “side by side, but *separately*, within the same political unit” (1948: 304). Furnivall’s position depicts common territory as an inadequate criterion for coexistence.

I have stressed, particularly in chapter six, that common territory is also used to explain the inevitability of conflict. While explaining how the Kamba and the Maasai legitimise conflicts,

I cited an emic metaphor: “Axes in one basket will make noise”.⁴⁴² As I clarified, the “axes” are the Kamba and the Maasai while “one basket” represents “common territory”. The point is that although groups will often be associated with hatred, suspicion, mistrust, enmity and wrangles, they still ‘coexist’ (depend on each other) mainly because they share a common territory and resources. The bonds of coexistence will be particularly difficult to break if the groups occupy different ecological/economic niches in their shared territory.

8.1.6 Coexistence as an externally shaped process

Interethnic coexistence does not occur in a vacuum. It is a relationship that is not only shaped by the state but other groups as well. The state, as the organisation bestowed with authority, is indeed a “regulator” of ethnic groups (Pierson, 1996). The idea therefore was to show that in none nation-states, where nationhood is still on course, the stability of the state itself and within ethnic groups is a reflexive process. This is why it is a matter of conjecture as to whether the state should be considered as ‘external’ to the groups that constitute it.

Using Kenya as an example, chapters six and seven in particular demonstrated how a system of government within a state can destabilise ethnic groups on the one hand, and enhance interethnic coexistence on the other. In general, state-formation in Africa has been directly linked to ethnic conflict (Wimmer, 1997b). One of the complications in the continent has to do with the fact that due to limited private capital, the state is considered a key resource that provides jobs, medical facilities, electricity and builds roads and schools. The ethnicisation of the resource distribution process, and the resultant tilting of the balance of power, is what often destabilises interethnic coexistence, and consequently the state. In chapter six, for instance, I discussed how the involvement of Kenya’s state officials and parliamentary representatives in the accessibility and use of land and water resources enhanced rivalry and enmity between the Kamba and the Maasai. Besides, the inequitable distribution of national resources has produced glaring disparities between the two groups. These disparities in social transformation have partly contributed to a situation where one group regards itself as “modern” while the other is seen as “backward”.

Another important aspect I considered is party politics. In a multiethnic society, where loyalty to the ethnic group or clan takes precedence over the state, the multiparty politics of the 1990’s introduced an additional element of difference among ethnic groups. However, the problem was not the mere adoption of a multiparty constitution but the politicisation of ethnicity. As I have indicated, the ruling party then, KANU, had been running a one-party

⁴⁴² See chapter six (6.5).

government since 1964. Scared to lose power, the KANU regime saw the instrumentalisation of ethnicity as a convenient strategy to break up ethnic alliances opposed to it. The events of the 1990's tested the viability of the Kenyan state, as this remains one of the most destabilising phases in Kenya's history. The clamour for multipartyism was portrayed as rivalry between "small tribes" and "big tribes", with the ruling clique claiming that the crusade was merely aimed at wresting power from the Kalenjin and other "small tribes".⁴⁴³ To derail the process, ethnic clashes were instigated, in which migrant groups residing in the Rift Valley were violently evicted and others killed. Besides, the ruling elite proposed to introduce a *majimbo* (federal) government, in which, residence in a *jimbo* (district/county) would be on the basis of ethnicity.

I showed that although the Kamba and the Maasai were appendages in the Moi government, debates regarding "small tribes" and "big tribes" as well as regarding *majimbo*, among others, saw both groups taking different positions. I noted that even after the party won the flawed 1992 elections, it pursued an exclusionist policy, where groups backing opposition parties were treated as anti-government and discriminated against in the allocation of national resources. The KANU government, which was bundled out of power by a broad ethnic alliance in 2002, demonstrated what "tribal spokesmen"⁴⁴⁴, "ethnic entrepreneurs" (Crawford, 1998) or "political entrepreneurs" (Elwert, 2002), can do in the pretext of protecting ethnic interests. Through their manipulations, ethnic groups that had coexisted peacefully were turned into rivals. But as I have argued, those who instigated groups to take up arms against each other or to evict their neighbours were often resisted by the groups through their local leadership (e.g. chiefs). It is such cross-ethnic capacity to resist and repel external pressure that largely saved the Kenyan state. Indeed, irrespective of the state's influence, Davies (1987) emphasises that groups' have a potential and interest to coexist.

As I have argued, the Kenyan state occupies rather an ambivalent role, combining divide-and-rule tactics with national integration. The divisive colonial policies, where districts were drawn along ethnic lines and cross-district migration restricted, and some groups demonised, led to a situation where, by the time of independence in 1963, ethnic groups were less cohesive compared to the precolonial era. The post-independence state reinforced these differences and disparities for its own survival. But I have also argued that Kenya has been one of the most stable states in Africa. Regarding the ethnic districts, for instance, I have argued that although they were designed to serve as divide-and-rule mechanisms, and to undermine the basis for a cohesive society, they have also provided groups with their own

⁴⁴³ For example, the Maasai.

⁴⁴⁴ As they are often called in Kenya.

spaces in which they can exercise their autonomy and address regional issues. I have also noted that although district boundaries are politically significant, they do not inhibit interethnic interactions and exchanges.

Many state instabilities in Africa have resulted from exclusion and marginalisation of some ethnic groups from power (see Eller, 1999; Wimmer, 1997b; Abdullahi, 1998 etc.). I have argued that one of the reasons Kenya remained politically stable is because both Kenyatta and Moi regimes formed fairly inclusive governments. Although there were always “kitchen cabinets” (the inner circle), including what Kenyans call “eaters” (usually members from the President’s ethnic group), there were also “co-eaters” (members co-opted from other groups).⁴⁴⁵ These strategies minimised the possibility of marginalisation and rebellion. This practice, partly served to avert competition for state power and secessionist tendencies witnessed elsewhere in the African continent. Besides, not only would the “co-eaters” be changed depending on shifts in ethnic alliances, the governments, particularly Moi’s, created the impression that the presidency would rotate along ethnic lines. As groups waited for their “turn”, this pre-empted ethnic power struggles.⁴⁴⁶ It was in this sense that I borrowed Pontin’s (1982) concepts: “Diversity in dominance” and “dominance ring”, i.e., where groups dominate certain niches in turns, a practice, which, he notes, enhances the peaceful coexistence of species.

Apart from the notion of “eating in turns”, I have also discussed the issue of ethnic numbers and dominance. I have noted that Kenya does not have a numerically dominant ethnic group.⁴⁴⁷ Moreover, it has not been possible to unite groups under wider linguistic categories, e.g., as Bantu. This creates a situation where ethnic groups have to form loose alliances to capture and maintain political power. This is why in pre- and post-independent Kenya, it has always been possible to form ethnic alliances across Bantu, Nilotc and Cushitic groups. Although the alliances shift, this interdependence, as I indicated, has contributed immensely to Kenya’s relative stability.

Another aspect discussed was political consciousness. When discussing the politics of ethnic numbers, I noted that although the manipulation of ethnic numerical strengths during censuses

⁴⁴⁵ For example, the Kamba and the Maasai.

⁴⁴⁶ I cited, for example, the 1992 and 1997 elections where President Moi used the vice-presidency to woo ethnic support. During the campaigns, Moi promised to appoint members of various ethnic groups, particularly the Luhya, the Kamba and the Kisii as his successor. After the elections however, those who had been groomed for the position were appointed ministers instead.

⁴⁴⁷ Although the Kikuyu are the most populous ethnic group, they constitute only about 20% of the Kenyan population. This is particularly why Kikuyu presidential candidates, running without broader ethnic alliances, could not win the presidency in the 1992 and 1997 elections. Mr Mwai Kibaki, a Kikuyu, won the 2002 presidential elections after leading a coalition that brought together the Kikuyu, the Luo, the Luhya, the Kamba and the Maasai among other groups.

was evident, the affected groups did not confront the state authorities. This illustrates, in my view, not only the apathy and indifference of the people to the state, but also a low level of political consciousness. In this case, political stability results not from what ethnic groups do but what they fail to do. I have indicated that this seemingly limited level of political consciousness is closely linked to the state's policies and directives which nipped in the bud initiatives to strengthen civil society and to sensitise communities on their civic rights (through civic education).

8.2 Conclusion

This study was intended to make a contribution in the understanding of interethnic coexistence. It has shown that this is a multifaceted concept. By using the Kamba and the Maasai as examples, it has been demonstrated that despite hostility and antagonism, ethnic groups can be complementary and interdependent. It has been shown that groups with linguistic, historical and cultural differences can live together in harmony. Due to proximity, vulnerability and scarcity of resources, ethnic differences will not inhibit interaction and forms of exchange which sustain the groups' livelihoods. However, the study has also stressed that interacting ethnic groups have a "passion for difference", and will strive to maintain ethnic boundaries. It has been shown that even in intensive interactions, cultural/ethnic differences do not lose significance. However, I have argued that distinctiveness is the basis for coexistence.

The study has also demonstrated that complementarity and interdependence relationships are possible especially where groups share a common territory. This territory may have ethnic territorial boundaries which may be enforced by state authorities, but actors' everyday practices show that such boundaries remain porous and blurred. The study has also shown that complementarity will particularly be enhanced if groups occupy different ecological niches or specialise in different modes of subsistence. But, it is also the sharing of territory that brings groups into a collision course. Although *coexistence* is often seen as synonymous with harmony, I have adopted an approach that treats conflict as an integral part of this relationship. It has been noted that in spite of complementarity and interdependence, ethnic groups will also be antagonistic and conflictual as they compete for the same resources and ethnic supremacy. Nevertheless, the study has also shown that through compromises and concessions, groups have their own ways of resolving and averting conflicts. It can be argued that while differences, conflict and antagonisms are inevitable in interethnic relationships, it is shared territory, compromises and complementarity that keep groups together.

I have also argued that groups do not coexist in a vacuum; they are shaped by the state and other groups as well. The political leadership within the state can enhance ethnic difference, disparities in social transformation and conflict through politics of patronage and clientelism and in its attempt to foil broader ethnic alliances that might challenge its grip on power. The state, through its departments, officials and political elite, permeates the whole process of interethnic interaction. Political leaders influence how ethnic differences are defined as well as whether they are instrumentalised; they are often responsible for sowing seeds of ethnic hatred and conflict. On the other hand, the groups can also resist the machinations of the political elite.

On the question of state stability, I have argued that it is a multifaceted process, produced through a combination of ethnic autonomy and ethnic recognition on the one hand, and the flexibility of the state authorities to allow wider cross-ethnic networks on the other. State stability can also be produced by the lack of a dominant ethnic group or a cohesive alliance that could monopolise power. In the Kenyan case, this has forced the political elite to seek broader but loose ethnic alliances. Besides, having “co-eaters” among “eaters”, and a situation where group members not included in government wait for their “turn”, creates a situation which pre-empts rebellion.

In a nutshell, I have argued that ‘interethnic coexistence’ should be seen as a complex mix of ethnic distinction, complementarity, common territory, antagonism, compromises and as an externally shaped process.

APPENDIX

Abbreviations

AMREF	African Medical Research Foundation
CMC	Central Management Committee
DC	District Commissioner
DO	District Officer
DP	Democratic Party of Kenya
FORD	Forum for the Restoration of Democracy
GEMA	Gikuyu, Embu and Meru Association
IMF	International Monetary Fund
KANU	Kenya African National Union
KADU	Kenya African Democratic Union
KAMATUSA	Kalenjin, Maasai, Turkana and Samburu
KARI	Kenya Agricultural Research Institute
Ksh	Kenya shilling
KWS	Kenya Wildlife Service
OCPD	Officer Commanding Police Division
NARC	National Rainbow Coalition
NDP	National Development Party
SDP	Social Democratic Party

Glossary

Akavi: Kamba name for “the Maasai”. They also call the Maasai *Muumasai* (singular).

Anganyet: “Respect” in the Maa language.

“Eaters”: A metaphor in the Kenyan political sphere used in reference to those seen as disproportionately benefiting from the government (usually members of an ethnic group).

Enkang: Maasai homestead/kraal.

Iloong’u: Written as *long’u*. It is the Maa word for something that stinks. The metaphor is used by the Maasai to refer to the Kamba.

Ilmeek: Maasai name for those who till the soil/cultivators like the Kamba.

Imanyat/Manyata: The camps where the Maasai *murran* stay.

Majimbo: A federal system of government where a *jimbo* (county) is an ethnic enclave.

Mau Mau: The African revolt against the British colonial rule in Kenya.

Muthokoi: A Kamba dish prepared by mixing white maize whose husks has been removed (using a mortar and pestel) with legumes. The maize prepared for this dish, which is a common commodity of trade, is also referred as such.

Murran: Initiated Maasai young men after the rite of circumcision. It is one of the most important age-sets among the Maasai. As warriors, they are ‘traditionally’ charged with the responsibility of protecting the group.

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