

Original Article

# A History of Ethnic Conflicts and Peacebuilding Processes Involving the Maasai and the Gusii of Kenya, 1890-2002

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**Abstract** - This paper aims to solve two research questions that are related yet distinct within the field of academia. The first is on ethnic conflicts, and the second is on peacebuilding. The first one is that there were a lot of ethnic tensions in Kenya after multiparty democracy had been restored in the early 1990s. Therefore, these politically instigated ethnic conflicts have been the subject of many studies to the extent that other disputes, such as those that occurred earlier than the 1990s, have been left out of research. This study raises the problem of ethnic conflicts in Kenya being more politically induced and relatively new in Kenyan social history. As a foundational assumption of this proposed study, it is self-evident that ethnic conflicts and peacebuilding processes in Kenya can be dated back to the pre-colonial period. The other concern that animates this study problem is the tendency to promote external peacebuilding initiatives while neglecting internal peacebuilding processes. This study presupposes that homegrown peacebuilding practices existed as early as the interethnic conflicts among the ethnic groups in Kenya. In this regard, the author of this study contributes to the existing literature on the history of Kenya.

**Keywords** - Ethnic conflicts, Peacebuilding, Maasai, Gusii, Kenya.

## 1. Introduction

Ethnic conflicts have existed in various parts of Kenya for a very long time since the precolonial times (Barasa, 1997). One such area where ethnic conflicts have existed since precolonial times is in the Trans Mara area, and these conflicts have pitted the Masai against the Gusii. Ethnic groups, such as the Kuria and the Luo, have also been enmeshed in these battles. According to Aberi (2015), ethnic tensions, land and river disputes, and livestock rustling are some ways that ethnic conflicts along the Trans-Mara boundary are expressed. The Nilo-Hamitic Maasai are nomadic people involved mainly in stock breeding and dwelling along the border of Kenya and Tanzania (Hughes, 2002; Bentsen, 1989). The Maasai people settled in the Great Rift Valley of Kenya before the beginning of colonial rule in the region (Sokoine, 1981; Kipury, 1983; Morner, 2006; Homewood & Rodgers, 1991). They were also moved to avoid competition with the European settlers, who were the new settlers in the area. For this reason, most Maasai are now confined to two districts of Kenya: Kajiado and Narok. On the other hand, Mogusii is complementary to the Gusii, a Bantu-speaking people (Wipper, 1977; Ochieng, 1974; Were and Nyamweya, 1986; Levine, 1979; Mayer, 1950). Before deciding to shift their Location, the Gusii had massive herds of cattle. However, they began to engage in mixed farming with a bias towards crop farming because of

the frequent raids by other ethnic groups. The favourable conditions for farming in the Kisii highlands encourage them to engage in agricultural practices. (Omwoyo 1992, Wipper 1977, Kenya National Archives-PC/RVP/11/1/4, Silberschmidt 1999, Kenya National Archives-DC/KSI/3/2).

Having settled side by side, the Gusii and the Maasai engaged in conflicts mainly generated by cattle raids. The colonial government did not entertain these conflicts as they were economically counterproductive to the colonial mission. In order to effectively exploit Kenyan resources, including human resources, the colonial government needed to provide security. Male labour was directed away from ethnic warfare towards economically productive ventures. Thus, the colonial government embarked on the pacification of Kenya's ethnic communities in order to bring them under the security orbit of colonial rule. Ethnic wars are often viewed as a relatively new phenomenon in contemporary history studies. Most research on ethnic conflicts in Kenya usually begins with politically motivated disputes that arose with the early 1990s return of multiparty democracy. Furthermore, research on peacebuilding procedures sometimes overlooks their lengthy history. By analyzing the lengthy history of ethnic wars and the peacebuilding procedures that go along with them, this study closes a gap in the body of current material.



## 2. Methodology

The study data used was collected between January and August of 2021. The author's study was conducted at the Kenya National Archives (KNA). Regarding the historical analysis of ethnic wars between the Maasai and the Gusii in precolonial, colonial, and postcolonial periods, KNA provided helpful information. Another source of evidence for conflict between the two communities during the precolonial period was the archival records on Gusii's mobility and their places of residence. Local history and culture also captured conflicts between the two communities during the colonial and post-independence periods. The archival records also provided information about decreasing tensions and promoting peaceful relations between the two communities.

Other data sources were also oral and secondary data. Survey questionnaires were administered to participants from the two communities. The research used purposive and snowball sampling methods to select participants. The purposive sampling technique was used because the study targeted older members of the two communities who had attained the age of storytelling about relations between the two communities in the past. The first individuals were asked to provide the names and contacts of other people they deemed knowledgeable on the historical relations between the Maasai and the Gusii (hence the snowball sampling technique). The author also reviewed the secondary literature related to the current study. Each ethical consideration that applied to the research process was observed. As a formal procedure, the researcher sought the Ministry of Education (National Council of Science and Technology) Research Approval before implementing the study. Informed consent was sought from the respondents before they answered the questions. Moreover, they were assured that their information would be kept confidential. None of the responders were to be interrogated during the experiment. Additionally, respondents were assured they could leave the research anytime. After collecting secondary, oral, and archival data, the author conducted a content analysis. Themes derived from the content analysis are shown below as research findings.

### **2.1. The Ethnic Conflicts in the Precolonial Period between the Maasai and Gusii Communities**

Conflict is evident throughout the Gusii's migration and settlement history in the current Location. History, narrated by Ochieng (1974), shows that the Gusii settled in the Kano plains between 1760 and 1800. However, due to the constant Luo invasions, people shifted from the lowlands to the present-day Gusii/Kisii highlands. Since they had large cattle herds, the Luo attacked them. The Gusii migrated from the Kano plains to Gososia, near Ngoinyo Hill in North Mugirango. They were again chased by the Luo and forced to move closer to Nyamira, as KNA, DC/KSI/3/2 noted. The Osiango and Sigisa are two Gusii tribes that were neighbours to Nyimira. The following Gusii tribes were mentioned in Nyamira: the Abarangi, Abakeboye, Abasamaro,

Abanyameuru, and Mwanyamoronge. They were the first inhabitants of the Gusii highlands in the North Mugirango area. Around the end of the 18th century, more Gusii clans relocated from Gososia to Kabianga, which is located south of Sotik. Unfavorable soils, severe weather, and Maasai and Kipsigis invasions sparked migration. Around 1820, some of them relocated and made their home in Nyamararo, in the Trans Mara Triangle. The Maasai were hostile toward those who established themselves at Nyamararo, raiding them and stealing their animals. The Gusii thus dispersed and relocated to the highlands, with some seeking safety among the Kuria and some with the Luo of Kabwoch, which is close to Nyagoe Forest. Most of them were already in the highlands by this point, where they had begun to expand progressively. They were encircled by the Maasai, Kipsigis, Kuria, and Luo when they first settled in what is now known as the Kisii Highlands. The Gusii were frequently raided, and these groups stole their cattle. As a result, there was much fighting in the region where the Gusii had landed just before the colonial administration was established.

In addition to having a penchant for owning big herds of cattle, the Maasai are renowned for being skilled combatants. The Maasai acquired the majority of their cattle through cattle raiding. Early Arab and Swahili slave traffickers avoided passing through the Maasai's controlled land because they were so feared (Onduru, 2009). It is unlikely that any Maasai community members were displaced by slave dealers (Murunga, 1998). Matson notes that Maasai, Nandi, and Kipsigis warriors would have been able to assault caravans (KNA, MSS/10/5 papers of A.T. Matson). The Maasai were a thorn in the Gusii community's side since they were skilled at raiding and stealing animals from their neighbours.

However, the Gusii were unwilling to let Maasai attackers take their few livestock herds. To defend the village against Maasai raids, the Gusii trained their warriors. Men enjoyed uncontested power over political and legal relations and institutions due to Gusii's encouragement of masculinity in the boys (Levine, 1966). Like the Maasai, the Gusii valued and depended on warriors to take animals while protecting them from theft. The Gusii established cow communities, known as ebisarate, which young men closely guarded due to their conflicting relations with the Maasai (Ayuka, 2018). Additionally, young Gusii men received training in these villages on how to defend their cattle and community from Maasai attacks. According to Ortner and Whitehead (1981), manliness in African civilizations is defined by violent acts. In cattle camps (ebisarate), Gusii soldiers had to adhere to strict regulations and undergo intense training. According to Were and Nyamweya (1986), young males were historically taught to be capable, powerful, quick-thinking, brave, and disciplined. Unfortunately, unlike in contemporary times, no institutions could arbitrate for peace between two warring ethnic communities. What existed were peacebuilding mechanisms that resolved conflicts between members of the

same clan or the ethnic community. It was culturally acceptable for an ethnic community to attack and steal cattle from another ethnic community. Unable to match the fighting capabilities of the Maasai and overwhelmed by intense raids from other neighbouring communities, especially the Kipsigis, the Gusii designed their self-help mechanisms to find peace in their midst. These self-help peacebuilding mechanisms are discussed below.

## **2.2. Self-help Peacebuilding Processes that the Gusii Adopted in the Pre-Colonial Period**

As presented, there were no organizations based on ethnic structures to start and continue peace initiatives. Consequently, if an ethnic community were attacked, it would retaliate by attacking another ethnic community. During the precolonial era, the Maasai and the Gusii engaged in several militia attacks and counter-attacks. However, the Gusii embarked on self-help peacebuilding processes after they ascertained that they would not be able to defend themselves from attacks by the neighbouring Maasai community and other ethnic groups.

The first self-help peacebuilding measure that the Gusii initiated was a shift from keeping large herds of cattle towards mixed farming (KNA, DC/KSI/3/2, Ochieng' 1974). Silberschmidt (1999) observed that the Gusii did not abandon wholesale livestock-keeping. Instead, they kept small herds of cattle, which the males used to marry and settle disputes and lawsuits. Shifting from being predominantly cattle keepers to crop farming enabled the Gusii to kill two birds with one stone. One is that they reduced incidences of cattle raids from the Maasai against them. Secondly, they promoted trade between themselves and the Maasai by shifting to crop farming. According to Kivasis (1953), the Maasai bought cereals from the Gusii and paid for them using cattle (Barter trade). Trade promoted peaceful coexistence between the two communities.

In addition to changing from crop farming to fighting off cattle raids from the Maasai, the Gusii also embarked on a self-help peacebuilding project through migration and settlement in the highlands. Therefore, the migration of the Gusii to the highlands (Kisii/Gusii highlands, as they were called) resulted from conflicts with the Maasai and other communities, such as the Kipsigis. Initially, the Gusii were cattle keepers, and this is why they first settled in the plains but later moved to the highlands. The plains were good grazing lands, but due to constant raids by the Maasai and other cattle-stealing tribes, they moved to the highlands (Ochieng, 1974). There were many possibilities of escaping from the Maasai in the highlands; some people escaped to the Kuria and some to the Luos of Kabwoch, near the Nyagoe woodland. The rest of the century saw the Gusii begin to move out of the region, most of them moving into the highlands. The other group seeking asylum among the Kuria and Luo in Kabwoch was to join it (Omwoyo, 1992).

## **2.3. Ethnic Conflicts between the Maasai and the Gusii during the Colonial Period**

The Industrial Revolution in Europe and Africa's accompanying scramble and partition saw Africa come under colonial rule. Kenya officially became a British Colony in 1895 (Foran, 1962). When colonial control was established, the colonial government discovered that livestock robberies caused the majority of ethnic confrontations between the Gusii and the Maasai. For the colonial authorities to carry out their exploitative inclinations, the many ethnic groups who coexisted peacefully in Kenya had to get along. Without peace, the colonial government would not have had a chance to get land or labour from Africans. Furthermore, colonial exploitation of Kenya's resources for the advantage of Europe's Industrial Revolution would not have been feasible without these two forces of production.

According to some authors, the Industrial Revolution in Europe resulted in the colonization of African countries, including Kenya. The colonization of Kenya ensured Britain got cheap labour and raw materials to kindle the Industrial Revolution, as Ochieng (1992) notes. According to Maxon (1992:63), Kenya, as a Colony of Britain, was supposed to supply raw materials for industrial Britain and act as a market for Britain-manufactured products. It also refers to the same justification Ochieng provided. Parallel to this, Ndege (1992:93) has pointed out that the economic theory was the main reason for the colonization of Kenyan by Britain, noting that:

- The colonization of Kenya was essentially an economic plan conceived and executed by Britain following the kneel of laissez-faire capitalism in the Nineteenth Century (Ndege, 1992, p. 93).

The colonial authority took the lead in ensuring the much-needed peaceful coexistence of Kenyan ethnic groups, as we will look at in this section. Consequently, the colonial government set out to resolve livestock theft disputes. Thus, the entire colonial period witnessed peacebuilding processes in which the colonial administration got heavily involved. These peacebuilding processes are discussed in the following sections.

## **2.4. Establishment of Boundaries between the Maasai and the Gusii as a Peacebuilding Process**

The colonial government's 1895 establishment of colonial control in Kenya aimed to regulate Africans inside its enclaves. Ethnic communities were each assigned territories within which they were expected to undertake their daily activities without spilling over into territories owned by other ethnic communities. Confinement of ethnic communities within such territories was intended to facilitate indirect rule whereby ethnic communities were expected to be guided by and governed under their respective customary laws. The indirect rule was preferred as a cost-cutting measure as it

lowered administrative costs. Apart from lowering administrative costs, ethnic boundaries were expected to lower conflicts between neighbouring communities by preventing trespass and contact. However, the colonial administrators were not keen to enforce restrictions, and incidences arose where an ethnic community would trespass into a territory occupied by another ethnic community and cause tensions or actual conflicts. According to Abuso (1980), trespassing happened because there were no physical boundaries. In order to prevent more ethnic groups from encroaching into Maasai territory in the Trans-Mara area, the colonial authority recognized by 1950 the necessity of physically demarcating the border. Conflicts between these communities resulted from this (Aberi, 2015).

### **2.5. Employment of Trade Sanctions in Peacebuilding Processes**

The Gusii did not rely on the peacebuilding processes that the colonial government sought to establish. They used techniques such as trade restrictions to compel the Maasai to accept peace during wars. When the Maasai escalated their cattle raiding on the Gusii, the Gusii would reciprocate by withdrawing trade with the Maasai. The Nyaribari chief's testimony noted that in the past, the Maasai relied on the Gusii for food during the dry season (Kenya National Archives, DP/1/13). Historically, the Ramasha market was where food exchanges occurred within business relationships. However, the Gusii countered this by denying the Maasai access to food during the killing in 1943 when the two ethnic groups went to war. It was not until they had gone to their District Commissioner in Narok that they demanded that the DC in Kisii allow the Gusii to continue feeding their Maasai neighbours (Kenya National Archives, DP/1/13). The Gusii demonstrated to the Maasai that peaceful coexistence is possible by applying pressure through trade boycotts.

### **2.6. The Criminalization of Cultural Practices Which Promoted Ethnic Conflicts Served to Promote Peaceful Ethnic Coexistence**

It is important to note that the colonial government adopted a new regulation to prevent livestock theft just before the First World War. People called this communal punishment. Cattle theft was considered a serious crime under the Stock and Native Produce Theft Ordinance No. 8 of 1913 of the East African Protectorate (11-12)-This legislation was intended to discourage retaliatory attacks following livestock theft cases. Therefore, the act of stock raiding within the Gusii and their fellow neighbouring communities was transformed and, in effect, reconfigured. In this context, the following colonial statute or ordinance was amended:

- Whenever any court shall convict any native of the stock or produce, the court shall, in addition to or instead of imposing any other punishment authorized by law, sentence the native convicted to pay a fine which shall in no case be less than ten times the value of the stock or

produce in respect of which the offence has been committed... unless the amount of the fine shall be forthwith paid, issue the warrant for the levy of the amount of the fine by distress and sale of any moveable property of the offender, of the offender's family, sub-tribe or any member of the offender's family, sub-tribe or tribe (communal punishment)...(East African Protectorate, 1913: 11-12).

Cases of livestock theft were subject to collective punishment. These penalties were administered by chiefs in their spheres of influence. For instance, in 1914, Chief Oyugi imposed collective punishment on the Wanjari people. Because stolen livestock were found at the Location, a punishment of Rs. 1300 was imposed. The chief collected the entire sum. A collective fine of Rs. 500 was also imposed on the Kitutu Location after a cow was stolen and linked to the Location (KNA, DC/KSI/1/2). Because this penalty depleted the community's financial resources to which it was applied, the Gusii and the Maasai suffered economically.

### **2.7. Oath-Taking Ceremonies and "Naming and Shaming" Stock Thieves as Peacebuilding Measures**

Some leaders employed traditional conflict-solving instruments to solve the problem of cattle raids that threatened the harmonious existence of the Gusii and their neighbours, particularly the Maasai. In one case, the chief of the Kitutu Location in Kisii employed an oath-taking ceremony. Further, this strategy also helped prevent livestock theft and subdued conflict between the Gusii and their neighbouring communities. The Kitutu Location chief wrote this report in a letter to the South Kavirondo/Kisii District Commissioner:

- Stock theft in the Location was prevalent and increased remarkably from all angles of the Location. This subject was discussed in barazas and meetings to stop it. Also, a very big baraza was held to discuss this subject only, and an oath was performed between the elders and well-known thieves in May. Since then, thefts in the Location have decreased considerably (KNA, DP/1/13, 1949)

Peace has prevailed through the efforts of chiefs who have fought for cattle theft to be reduced. Sometimes, "names of all well-known thieves in the location were recorded" (KNA, DP/1/13, 1949) under the supervision of the said chiefs, who played a pivotal role in reforming the thieves. As expected, some of the criminals surrendered to the police in order to be law-abiding citizens (KNA, DP/1/13, 1949). Besides swearing ceremonies, the colonial authority banned the paid dowry since it led to acts of stock theft.

### **2.8. Encouragement of Payment of Dowry in Monetary Terms**

Besides criminalizing some aspects of the cultures of the two communities that led to cattle thefts between the Gusii and the Maasai, the colonial government also disapproved of

paying dowry in livestock since this stirred up more incidences of theft, especially among young men (KNA, DC/KSI/1/2). As a result of this, the need for money among the Gusii people increased during colonial times. Fortunately, the colonial government provided the Gusii with a means of generating income. There was wage labour, and cash crops emerged. It was adopted as a medium of exchange to reduce livestock, especially among the Gusii and the Maasai, reducing cattle theft.

### ***2.9. Cases of the Colonial Police in Securing Peaceful Coexistence between the Maasai and the Gusii***

In Kenya, colonial administration was instituted when ethnic groups were engaged in ongoing conflict. Men were desired by the colonial authority to work on European farms and government projects. There was a need to disengage the men from their traditional occupations (of being warriors) and redirect them towards facilitating the achievement of colonial goals.

Most young men were recruited into the police and the military to secure peaceful coexistence between ethnic communities. Chiefs and elders were able to turn out young Gusii men to work for wages (Maxon, 1989). In Kenya, colonial administration was instituted when ethnic groups were engaged in ongoing conflict. Men were desired by the colonial authority to work on European farms and government projects.

While in the police force and the army, young men from the Maasai and the Gusii communities served not just members from their ethnic communities but also other communities. In some cases, they served communities that were their traditional enemies. The best example is of police officers from the Gusii ethnic community who served among the Maasai and who helped the Maasai to recover their stolen cattle. It is no wonder that police posts/stations were established along or near the Maasai and the Gusii border than in the interior.

### ***2.10. Role of African Administrators and Cross-Border Security Committees in Peacebuilding Processes***

Peaceful coexistence was also secured through the efforts and work of the cross-border security committees. Cross-border security committees were tasked with finding solutions to the problem of cattle thefts (Kenya National Archives, DP/18/3). Members from warring ethnic communities were recruited into these committees. These committees did not, however, operate independently. The police, chiefs, and district commissioners of the impacted communities typically backed them. In order to refocus the traditional leadership of the two communities toward peacebuilding, the colonial authority changed it. With membership of cross-border security committees drawn from both communities, deliberations arrived at by these committees were acceptable and binding to both parties involved in the conflict.

## **3. Ethnic Conflicts Involving the Maasai and the Gusii in the Post-Independence Period**

This section examines the slight shift in ethnic hostilities during the post-independence era. Nonetheless, certain ethnic disputes between the Gusii and Maasai persisted. We look at ethnic disputes and tensions between the Gusii and Maasai tied to boundaries.

### ***3.1. Boundary-Related Conflicts between the Gusii and the Maasai***

Kenya experienced some ethnic conflicts and tensions as the country moved towards independence. The demarcation of regional boundaries triggered some of the conflicts. Kenya had adopted a bicameral parliament (Senate and National Assembly), and the demarcation of regional boundaries was necessitated by the pending election of senators to represent their regions in the Senate (upper house). Regional boundaries were intended to facilitate elections of representatives to the Senate. The demarcation of regional boundaries became a source of ethnic tension between the Maasai and the Gusii. 1963, for example, the "Regional Boundaries Committee failed to include the Tans Mara area," which the Gusii claimed to be part of their territory (Kenya National Archives, DP/33/3). However, apart from boundary-related conflicts and tensions, stock thefts continued to determine Gusii-Maasai relations, as had been the case in the colonial period.

### ***3.2. Ethnic Conflicts Emanating from Cattle Thefts Involving the Maasai and the Gusii***

Incidences of cattle thefts continued to be a pain in the neck of the local colonial administration, especially on the border of Gusii and the Maasai, as had been the case in the colonial period. As a result, border security committees, whose members were drawn from the Maasai and the Gusii, continued to meet at three points on the border, namely Monianku, Nyabitunwa, and Ramasha, to resolve conflictual relations emanating from cattle thefts (Kenya National Archives., DP/33/3).

- The relations between Kisii-Kipsigis and Kisii/Maasai fluctuated per the number of stock thefts. In February, the Maasai and Kisii exchanged payments for stock thefts and cemented their rapprochement with oath-taking. The Kisii paid over Shs.10,000/- and the Maasai approximately Shs.66,000/-. Since payment relations have been good and thefts remained very low, the Maasai/Kisii border committee perpetuated these good relations in its sub-committee monthly meetings (Kenya National Archives, DP/33/3).

Also, like in the colonial period, stock thefts increased during the circumcision season of Maasai youths (*Morans*). The government always kept a keen eye on these *Morans* during this season, and, as a result, such cases never reached fever pitch. That aside, the post-independence period

occasioned politically instigated conflicts resulting from speeches and actions of elected political leaders. This is examined in the next section.

### **3.3. Politically Instigated Ethnic Conflicts Involving the Maasai and the Gusii**

Kenya reverted to multiparty democracy in the early 1990s. Prior to the 1992 elections, political leaders, especially the Maasai, started inciting their subjects to chase non-Masai communities out of their land/territory. The Gusii had become widely established among the Maasai by this point. For instance, in 1993, it was said that:

- Anonymous threat letters and persistent political molestations by Maasai leaders continued to instil fear among non-Masai inhabitants, including non-Masai teachers...Julius Lekakeny Sunkuli, Assistant Minister in the office of the President, toured his political strongholds and held a series of unlicensed meetings. He instigated the eviction of all non-Masai from his constituency (KNA, ACW/27/16).

President Moi's government was not disturbed by these incitements, as they were meant to align Kenyans on the government side, at least politically. Political threats were intended to tell Kenyans that the country was not ready for multiparty politics because they promoted ethnic conflicts. As diverse as ethnic conflicts were during the post-independence period, so were peacebuilding processes, as discussed in the next section.

## **4. Peacebuilding Processes Involving the Maasai and the Gusii in the Post-Independence Period**

This section examines peacebuilding processes employed to resolve ethnic conflicts and promote peaceful coexistence between the Maasai and the Gusii in the post-independence period.

### **4.1. Peace-Preaching by Political Leaders**

The governments of both President Kenyatta and President Moi were keen on uniting Kenyans behind one government. Thus, both governments pressured elected leaders to preach peace, love, and unity across the country. Anybody who went against this expectation was seen as an enemy of Kenyans (Kenya National Archives, ACW/27/42). Moreover, whenever peace was disturbed, leaders were assembled to participate in finding a peaceful solution to the conflict.

- Fierce clashes and general disquietedness in early 1964 characterized the Kisii-Maasai border. However, sometime in April, through the administration's efforts, leaders from both sides at national and regional levels were alerted. Through discussion, things started cooling down from the middle of the year. It is mainly due to

skilful negotiations and the patience of wise administrators and local leaders on both sides that incidences of stock theft have been low, and comparative calmness has reigned on the border over the second half of the year (Kenya National Archives, DP/33/4)

Apart from preaching peace, the government also initiated social amenities along the Gusii-Maasai border for use by members of both communities. This is examined below.

### **4.2. Peacebuilding through the Sharing of Social Amenities**

Through Kisii District leaders and administrators, President Moi's government developed a development plan to address socio-economic development issues such as conflicts on the border of the Gusii and the Maasai. The Kisii District Development Plan for 1974-1978 (Government of Kenya, Kisii District Development Plan 1974-1978) clearly outlined these initiatives. To foster good neighbourliness, the plan started development projects for both towns, including roads, schools, hospitals, and water supply projects.

### **4.3. Compensation and Peacebuilding Processes**

In most cases, whenever one community stole cattle from another, the colonial government sanctioned a cross-border security meeting presided over by a cross-border security committee. Once it was established that a certain amount of cattle had been stolen, the ethnic community that stole was made to compensate the other community from whom cattle were stolen. Reports from District Commissioners have shown that peaceful ethnic relations were solemnized through compensation.

- The Kisii paid over Shs.10,000/- and the Maasai approximately Shs.66,000/-. Since payment relations have been good and thefts, as a result, remained at a very low level, the Maasai/Kisii border committee perpetuated this good relation on its sub-Committee monthly meetings (KNA, DP/33/3)

In the post-colonial era, it was still typical for the suspected offenders to compensate for animals that had been lost. For instance, a border committee was established in 1965 after the Gusii and Maasai clashed over cattle theft, which the Maasai had started. The Maasai were required to give "Shs. 3,300/- to the Kisii in compensation for the cattle the latter had lost" (Government of Kenya, Narok District Annual Report, 1965:4). According to the Government of Kenya, Narok District Annual Report, 1965:2, "the area remained quiet until the middle of the year" after this operation.

### **4.4. Peacebuilding through the Imprisonment of Criminals and Collective Punishments**

Criminals whose actions, such as stealing livestock, endangered the Maasai and Gusii people's peaceful cohabitation were dealt with by the post-independence administration; punishing or even imprisoning these

individuals helped reduce tensions and disputes between the two groups. The post-independence administrations of Kenyatta and Moi carried on the colonial practice of collective punishment. In 1965, for example, the Maasai were forced to pay the Kisii "Shs. 3,300/- to the Kisii in compensation for the cattle the latter had lost" (Government of Kenya, Narok District Annual Report, 1965:4).

#### 4.5. Peacebuilding through Oath-Taking between the Gusii and the Maasai

It is worth mentioning that precolonial strategies were applied in the colonial and post-independence periods to find peace between the Maasai and the Gusii. Oaths were a common practice, especially among the Gusii, to curb or minimize stock thefts. In the post-colonial era, this approach was used to reduce the number of Maasai and Gusii stock theft cases.

- The relations between Kisii-Kipsigis and Kisii/Maasai fluctuated according to the number of stock thefts. In February, the Maasai and Kisii exchanged payments for stock thefts and cemented their rapprochement with oath-taking (Kenya National Archives, DP/33/3).

The following section presents the conclusion of this chapter.

## 5. Conclusion

This chapter has examined ethnic conflicts and peacebuilding processes involving the Maasai and the Gusii from the precolonial to the postcolonial period. This study

identified various types of ethnic conflicts in ethnic relations involving the Maasai and the Gusii, which are defined by their respective root causes. Thus, the study identified cattle theft-related ethnic conflicts, culturally related conflicts, boundary-related ethnic conflicts, politically instigated ethnic conflicts, and government/administrative-related ethnic conflicts.

Various peacebuilding processes were employed to restore peace between the two communities. These processes included compensation payments, arrests and imprisonment of cattle thieves, oath-taking ceremonies, peace preaching by political leaders, and applying economic sanctions against conflict-aggressors to compel them to employ peaceful means to achieve their desired goals.

Despite the numerous peacebuilding processes the colonial and post-independence governments initiated or presided over, most of the processes failed to fix the underlying causes of conflicts. Through its officers on the ground, the government knew very well that conflicts between the Gusii and the Maasai were generated during the drought season when Maasai livestock died in large numbers. In 1970, for example, many Maasai livestock died due to drought. Also, much livestock died as a result of diseases. Moreover, when livestock died in mass, the Maasai resorted to cattle thefts, and as a consequence, conflictual relations were generated between them and the Gusii. The government would have addressed the root causes of ethnic conflicts by ensuring an adequate water supply and veterinary services to the Maasai community.

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