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Assessing the effects of social-economic interactions between the Abagusii and the Nubian communities in Kisii Township (2003-2013)

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Abstract

The aim of the study was to assess effects of the interactions between the Abagusii and the Nubian communities 2003-2013. The study was guided by Ethnic Stratification and Ethnic Identity Theory. The study was qualitative in nature and Historical research design was used to provide chronology and transformation of the interactions between the Nubians and Abagusii of Kisii Township Location, Kisii County. This study targeted both Nubians and Abagusii communities who are living in Kisii Township Location, Kisii County. The community leaders such as elderly people, clan elders, chiefs, sub-chiefs, Islamic religious leaders and Christian religious leaders, were also targeted because they have vital information about the Nubians living within Kisii Township Location. Purposive and Snowball sampling procedures was used to identify 50 informants for the study. The analysed data was reported in form of narrations coupled with first hand quotation from the primary data. The study found out that the Nubians as ex British solders settled in Kisii in 1938. The study will help to identify the contribution of Nubians towards Kenya's cultural heritage. It will also enrich historiography of Ethnic interaction not only in Kenya but also globally.

Keywords: cultural heritage, Nubians, social-economic,

Public Interest Statement

The Nubians' economic, social and cultural heritage has disappeared and the once proud and respectable community is vast becoming an endangered minority in Kenya. They have suffered through victimization and marginalization through land issues, citizenship, development, profiling and stereo typing just to mention a few. This has impeded the community's active participation in leadership and by extent development despite being one of the oldest communities in Kenya. This has made them vulnerable to exploitation by politicians who use them as pawns to secure and land key leadership positions, which has in turn hindered their participation in governance and created sublime divisions among Nubians in not only their homeland but the country as a whole. The study will help to identify the contribution of Nubians towards Kenya's cultural heritage. It will also enrich historiography of Ethnic interaction not only in Kenya but also globally.

1.0 Introduction

As the blacks in various African countries interacted with the white colonial masters which was an aspect of racial interaction, there were clashes over economic resources. As a result, the people preferred the whites over the blacks which in turn brought about white imperialism leading to political imperialism over the blacks. The end result of such imperialism led to a disgruntled situation of Africans who sought to fight for political independence. The nature of the interactions between these Africans and the colonial masters had political impact on each leading to racial segregation and political subjugation (Nyanhoga, Omwoyo & Nyariki, 2008). It can as well be pointed out that such political imperialism might have transformed into social conflicts. Political subjugation in turn led to the spirit of nationalism and the need to fight for political independence. The nature of the Gusii interactions with the Luo was cordial during the pre-colonial period. They traded as well as intermarrying with each other. Most of their trading activities were in cattle, grain and fish. The Gusii exchanged livestock for fish and millet which were plenty in Luo land. The Luo on the other hand got "sweet beer (*amarwa*) from the Gusii which was brewed using fermented honey which was mixed and ground together with wimbi (Ochieng, 1974, pp. 75-76). Even though this kind of exchange had economic influence, it also had social influence since it appears that the Luo assembled together with the Gusii to have a taste of the *amarwa* before they could develop interest in it as an item of trade. The Gusii of North Mugirango also acquired iron technology from the Luo; which was later acquired by the Kipsigis from the Gusii (Mwanzi, p. 155). Here, it can be seen that there was symbiotic interdependence in terms of social and economic engagements. Therefore, the nature of such interactions was a transformation from conflict to peace and exchange in trading adventures and acquisition of new technologies.

The colonial economic policy has had a lasting impact in most African societies (Watakila, 2015, p. 20). The case of Uganda is a distinct example. The nature of the British economic policy changed socio-economic and political situation of the Buganda community more so on land issues Okoth (Okoth 2010, p. 305) explains that before the establishment of colonial rule, the control of land was exclusively vested on the Kabaka. By the Buganda Agreement of 1900 clause 15, the Buganda land was shared among the British government, the Kabaka, princess, princesses, the ministers, the saza chiefs, other chiefs plus other ascertained land owners and missionary societies. This changed the initial traditional ownership from communal land ownership to private land ownership. The arrangement did not consider the peasants and the low-class people of the land. Therefore, this colonial land policy changed socio-economic and political situation of the Buganda community and reduced the political power of the Kabaka. Since land is a major factor of production in any given society, socially and economically, the Buganda community was affected by this agreement. The agreement transformed the nature of land-ownership since the Buganda ended up losing massive chunks of land to the colonial power. As a result, their social and economic way of livelihood was greatly interfered with.

The Gabra and Borana communities have also experienced interactions that have led to economic, social and political gains and challenges. A study by Watakila found out that both groups believe in common ethnology and culture. These include similarities in marriage customs and language. Not only similarities in marriage culture; they also intermarry, and this results in a strong social bond among the two communities. Again, their interaction has resulted to ethnic identity and political independence which is confined to territory in which they live. In addition, the result of this interaction led to the emergence of Borana's political dominance upon the Gabra community. It can be concluded that the socio-economic nature of the Gabra and Borana was that of peaceful interaction. Also, interactions between the two communities have been that which has witnessed cultural transformation and acceptance of each other in consideration of intermarriage practices. Whenever communities end up exchanging cultures such as intermarriage, peace and harmony would always prevail.

Pastoral communities had a wider network of interaction that influenced their social and economic situation. A study conducted by Chebii established that the Marakwet, Tugen, Pokot and Keiyo communities interacted but the nature of their interaction was mainly characterized with hostility. They raided each other in turns for cattle which were considered a vital economic asset. The Marakwet dominated the rest of the three communities for long due to use of superior weapons of poisoned arrows which their close rivals, the Pokot could not match. The political dominance of the Marakwet changed when the Pokot started acquiring guns from the Karamojong of Uganda in the 1970s and early 1980s. The nature of their interactions led to political superiority of the Pokot over the Marakwet. Pkalya points out that these interactions have led to loss of lives, livestock and devastation of businesses leading to closure of many trading centres. This has also changed social and economic status of the interacting communities. In a nutshell, their interactions led to transformation of social and economic uptrend status of the Pokot. In view of the above discussed literature, it is observed that most of these communities had their mode of interactions pegged on social set up and economic resources that they either shared exchanged in trade or raided to acquire. It is also clear that as these communities interacted, misunderstanding cropped up which in the long run led to acrimony and mistrust. The communities that have been discussed are those that lived within their own different political boundaries.

1.1 Research Objective

The aim of the study was to assess effects of the interactions between the Abagusii and the Nubian communities 2003-2013.

1.2 Research Design

This study used historical research design and made use of a Qualitative approach. According to Mugenda, this approach is suitable because it permits the researcher to probe and interrogate the respondent to get useful information which not otherwise be obtained in quantitative research. Qualitative design allows the participants freedom of expression in own words. This helped the researcher to obtain the desired information on the socio-economic impact of the interaction between the Nubian and the Abagusii within the study area.

2.0 Literature review and discussion

2.1 Effects of the social-economic interactions between the Abagusii and the Nubian communities in Kisii Township Location 2003-2013

The Nubians are one of the oldest communities in the country having entered Kenya as early as 1884. They were brought by the British from the Sudan to secure the British imperial colonial rule in Kenya from being taken away by the Germans. They settled into El-dama Ravine, Kibra, Machakos,

Kibigori, Mombasa, Kibos, Isiolo, Mumias, Bungoma, Meru and Oyugis and Kisii after service as soldiers to the British colonial government. Nubians are still a community with no clear direction, identification, recognition and integration within the current Kenyan government and society at large. This marginalized community has been underdeveloped with lack of exposure and access to skills, resources and opportunities (Inform Action Kenya, 2018). The Nubian village where the Nubian live was stated in 1938. The original Nubians who settled first in Kisii were ex British soldiers who fought alongside the British soldiers in the scramble for Africa in 1895. The British colonial government settled the ex-British soldiers in Kisii, gave them the land they presently occupy plus other pieces of land for their agricultural activities and for settling their future generations. As noted by Halima, OI, 1/1/2008:

We have lived in Kisii for a very long period of time. The living conditions of the Nubians is deplorable. We lack ownership to the land that we have stayed in for many decades

Nubian habitation remains undeveloped. The roads are muddy, no street lighting. No clean drinking water. They depend on rain water. Wells that have been sunk help them get water for other domestic use (Inform Action Kenya, 2018). While the Kenyan government issued and continued to Issue Identification cards to other residents of Kisii without many red tapes, Nubians remained discriminated. They had to undergo vetting in order to secure a National Identification card. As a result, most Nubians missed it out. In 2003 Yunus Ali, the former Nubian MP, with CEMIRIDE, brought a case to the Kenyan High Court about discrimination in access to ID cards, and in June 2004 a large crowd of Nubians marched through the streets of Nairobi to the High Court in support of the case, though in the end it was inexplicably stalled and subsequently abandoned. More successful have been two cases in international courts. In March 2011 the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, in a case brought by OSJI and the Institute for Human Rights and Development in Africa (IHRDA) on behalf of the Nubians, ruled that the Kenyan state has violated the rights of Nubian children to a nationality.

2.1.1 Marriage and assimilation

As Amole (2018) found, there was evidence of this in the names of the three Kisii men who had converted, married, and lived among the Nubians in Kisii Town; they were Abdi, Mohammed, and Bashir. This implies that the assimilated persons' first languages may not find adequate contexts of use in a Nubian home. Amone observes that, 'Islam and Nubian culture are so intertwined, that it is difficult for one to be Nubian without being Muslim' (2013, p. 396) and Kokole (1995) adds that Islam remains the most fundamental aspect of Nubian identity across East Africa. This implies that assimilated sons and daughters-in-law acquire Nubian and form part of the younger pool of speakers to perpetuate its use after the grandparents. In a history of almost a century, the respondents said, only three Kisii men converted to Islam, were given Nubian names, moved to Nubia Village, and raised families. The three, now old men speak Nubian fluently. One of them, now retired, worked with the municipality of Kisii. This further explains the survival of the language for a century and counting.

2.1.2 The influence of social interactions among the Abagusii and the Nubian 2003-2013

2.1.3 The Religious influence

There were two dominant religions in the region, the Islam among the Nubians and Christianity among the Abagusii. According to key informants, the region adopted by the residents was the religion they were born in as stated:

I was born a Muslim and I have been a Muslim for my whole life (Fidel, and “*Mimi nilizaliwa SDA nab ado mimi ni SDA*. Meaning he was born in the Seventh Day Adventist (SDA) and a still a faithful of SDA.

Both the Abagusii and Nubians participated in marriages. They either married within their communities or they intermarried with their neighbours. Muslims embraced polygamous marriage while Christians had monogamous marriages. However, a few Muslims were married to only one wife. When interviewed, some of the Muslims confessed to have married only one wife despite the religion allowing them to marry up to four wives. Intermarriages as a result of interactions had been witnessed. In most cases, just like in the Moi era, 1978-2002. The communities intermarried. The Muslim religion was superior when marriage occurred. The bride or groom had to convert to Islam.

2.1.4 Religious discrimination

The Nubian felt discriminated based on their religion. The discrimination came in various forms. In matters development of schools, The Nubians felt that they were not considered by the government that existed. For instance, as noted by a key informant:

Were Nubians stay, there exist no Muslim school. Gitembe primary and secondary was started by the Nubian. They contributed for their establishment yet the schools were named after the Muslim faith. Lack of a Muslim school, even Muslim nursery is discriminatory.

Nubians participated in various cultural functions of the Abagusii such as burials. Their Abagusii counterparts however, did not seem to reciprocate. When a Muslim dies, the Abagusii did not attend the burial. One key informant stated that:

Sisi tunaenda kwa matanga ya wakristo lakini yetu hao hawakuji! Meaning that they attended Christians burial ceremonies despite the religious differences but the Christians did not attend Muslim burials.

2.1.5 Culture and customs

The Nubian maintained most of their Islamic culture such as dressing, marriages, burial and male circumcision. Female circumcision was stopped.

Sisi kuvalia ni ki islam, wanaume kuvalia kanzu na kilemba.lazima mwanamke avae nguo ndefu na afunike kichwa chake.Hii ni lazima hata anapoenda msikitini kwa ibada.Asipofanya hivyo hawezi ruhusiwa kwa eneo ya ibad.anaweza laaniwa. Meaning For us, we must dress according to Islamic culture, Men must be dressed in *Kanzu*. Women must be dressed in clothes that cover their whole body also cover their head. For women, this dressing is demanded always. In places of worship, women cannot be allowed in without this dressing otherwise they can be cursed.

On the other hand, Christians borrowed some of the dressing from the Nubians. The women borrowed the *dera* (long dresses), *kanga* (piece of cloth for covering the body especially the waist while doing house chores. Some Abagusii men use the Nubian *kilemba* to cover their heads. When there is a Nubian ceremony, such as marriages and burials, the Abagusii attendees could dress in Nubian styles. Some of Abagusii elders However, believed that a Abagusii culture was still intact and what was borrowed

from Nubians may not be so significant. He stated that:

The Abagusii have not copied the dressing, cultures and way of life of the Nubians, what has been happening is that the Abagusii as well as the Nubians appreciate each other and coexist. The assimilation only happens in cases where their exist intermarriages otherwise, the Abagusii stick to their cultures and so are the Nubians. (Abuga, O. I, 4/6/2021)

Abagusii interactions with the Nubians led to borrowing a lot from each other, for instant, the Abagusii learned from the Nubians how to prepare some food such as mongorobo (type of mandazi), pilau, vitumbua and other Swahili foods. A key informant noted when Abagusii had ceremonies, they invited the Nubians to cook for their guests. The interviewee also states that the Nubians had benefited from the Abagusii, as they learnt how to prepare *ugali* and eat from them. The peaceful coexistence of the Nubian and Abagusii has taken decades to take shape. The two communities treated each other with a lot of suspicion. But in the Kibaki era, they seemed to have embraced each other. This were confirmed by a Abagusii elder who during the oral interview stated that:

Long ago when I was say 15 years, were did not have a good relationship with Nubians. Nubians were very violent. Children's from Abagusii community were not allowed to mingle freely with their Nubian counterparts. If a Abagusii child could be seen plucking mapera, it could result in violent confrontation from adult Nubians with Abagusii children and even their parents. You could not touch anything that belonged to the Nubians. Currently, the relationship has greatly changed and they two communities interact peacefully with children from both sides being able to play as well as adults interact peacefully.

On Education. The Nubians embraced education. It is during this period that the government introduce free primary Education.

3.0 Results, Findings and Discussion

3.1 The influence of economic interaction of the Abausii and Nubian, 2003-2014

Nubian engaged in trading activities, farming. The Abagusii community were known for farming. The cultivation of bananas, sugarcane and other food crops have been done by both the Abagusii and Nubians. Due to scarcity of land on the side of Nubian, crop farming and livestock rearing is majorly done by the Abagusii. It is believed that the cultivation of bananas in Abagusii as well as sugarcane received a jab in the arm by the arrival of the Nubians. The key informant interviewed, revealed that the bananas species planted and sugarcane species was borrowed from them. They arrived with these crops from Uganda. The Abagusii borrowed this species of crops and the crops have been thriving well in the Abagusii lands. The bananas planted in Abagusii had given the community food as well as sold for money hence improving the livelihood of the community.

Since most Nubians stay in town and have to participate in economic activities to earn a living, majority participated in trade. Just like the Abagusii, Nubians owned and operated hotels, rental houses and small-scale businesses. The Nubian worked in businesses of the Abagusii as well as the Abagusii worked for Nubians. Most of lands in Abagusii are owned by Abagusii, therefore the Nubian provided a large market for Abagusii food that was cultivated. The Nubians traded well with their Abagusii neighbours. Nubian women and youth engaged too in business activities but on small scale. As a Nubian clan elder notes:

Our ladies and youth did some trading activities. This included selling of *mandazi*, *tomatoes* and other glossaries in the market while our youths depended on Juakali. Some of our youth were involved in car washing business, some work in hotels”.

3.2 Economic challenges faced by Nubian through Discrimination

The interactions of the Nubian and Abagusii may have led to assimilations and cultural exchange. Cases of the Nubian discrimination by the Abagusii had been experienced. The discrimination came in many ways: political and registration of persons. That affected their engagement in economic activities like their Abagusii neighbours

3.3 Political discrimination

Politically, the Nubians did not get elected to any political office within the county. As noted by one elder:

The Nubian do not get elected to represent Nubian interest either locally or nationally. In one of the elections before, sometimes back, a Nubian contested for an elective position, the only votes he got were the Nubian votes. Since we knew our numbers, when the results were announced, our candidate had only garnered the votes of Nubian.

When asked if they believe that in future a Nubian can be elected to represent both the Nubian and Abagusii locally and Nationally, Most of the respondents were emphatic that the Abagusii cannot vote for a Nubian. Despite the fact the Nubian are the minority group, the nominated slots had never been given to them either to represent the Nubian locally or at National government. One key informant noted that:

If nominated seat became available, A Abagusii Muslim will be nominated. Since Nubian are Muslims, they believe that their interest will be handled by the Abagusii Muslims (Shakir, 2021).

The absence of Nubian in the Abagusii politics, made them survive on political scraps. Developmental decision made sidelined the Nubian and the decision made on sharing of resources at local governments, later county government lacked the input of Nubians. With their needs not represented, roads in Nubian villages were not made, street lights were absent.

3.4 Discrimination in the Registration of persons

National identity card is an important document which identifies a Kenyan. A Kenyan national identification card is mandatory when seeking employment applying for government tenders, travelling, seeking loans and making any financial transactions in Kenya. The transactions may involve but not limited to purchase and sell off assets, participation in trading of shares and investments among other. Lack of the national identification locked many Nubians from participating in major economic activities.

A one clan elder stated: our youths engage in juakali or casual labourous since they cannot get gainful employment in Abagusii.

The process of obtaining an Identification for Nubian youth was long, tedious, expensive, torturous and without guarantee for success. As one of the activists stated:

If a Nubian child born on the same day with Abagusii child in the same hospital and all issued with birth notification and consequently with birth certificates will apply to get National Identity cards, at age of 18 years, the results will be different. The Abagusii child upon filling the form at the chief's office, had to wait for a period of say a month or less and the national identification will be issued to the youth the only documentation being the birth certificate of the child or baptism card and copy of parents Identification cards. The submitted documents were not vetted. On contrary, the Nubian age mate and youth will be required to provide a lot of documentation which were vetted and authenticated such as the national identification for both parents and their birth certificates, as well as those of his or her grandparents if not their death certificate if they were deceased. That was not enough, they were also required to have a sworn affidavit which could cost more than Ksh. 1000. The submitted documents were to be vetted and if lucky one will get the national identification card after a period of not less than a year.

According to most of the Islam culture, most of the children's who are orphans could be adopted by well to do members of the society. For such like children, getting a national identity card was more complicated than the Nubian youth with parents. This resulted to most of Nubians to wait for many years without National identification card (Maalim, OI, 1/4/2021). Those without these important documents were locked out of economic activities that could improve their living standards. Additionally, the Nubian youth did not get more permanent jobs due to the fact that majority did not complete their schooling beyond form four and lack of national identification cards. One of the interviewees notes that:

Our youth were faced with many challenges. Most of them did not go to college hence ineligible to secure the white color jobs. Lack of National Identifications to some youths also hindered them from looking for more gainful employment.

Lack of government bursaries to the Nubian children made it hard for them to complete schooling. As a result, most of them lacked qualifications to enable them compete with their Abagusii counterparts. Employment Few Nubians got employed in county governments.

Conclusion

The interactions of the Nubian and Abagusii may have led to assimilations and cultural exchange. However, cases of the Nubian discrimination by the Abagusii had been experienced just like in the past two eras discussed in this study. The discrimination came in many ways: religious, political and registration of persons. The Nubians' economic, social and cultural heritage had disappeared and the once proud and respectable community is vast becoming an endangered minority in Kenya. The Nubians were a once proud community who owned and ran businesses within Kibra and other parts of the country. The Nubian community has faced a lot of challenges in the past years and this trend is getting worse as each day passes. They hence have long suffered through victimization and marginalization through land issues, citizenship, development, profiling and stereo typing just to mention a few. This has impeded the community's active participation in leadership and by extent development despite being one of the oldest communities in Kenya. This has made them vulnerable to exploitation by politicians who use them as pawns to secure and land key leadership positions, which has in turn hindered their participation in governance and created sublime divisions among Nubians in not only their homeland but the country as a whole. Nubians have been viewed to be at cross roads with the government with most of them not particularly pleased with some of its efforts with examples in lack of issuance of title deeds for their ancestral land although the government issued them with a leasehold of 100 years which still remains to be a big challenge as the future generation will still be facing these challenges of access to title deed in Kibra due to the title issued being a leasehold and not a freehold which gives you a full mandate of owning the Land fully, the strict vetting process in application of identity cards and passports, this has seen Nubians alienate themselves from governance and the government as failing to find favour.

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