

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES & SOCIAL STUDIES

Factors Contributing to the Ethnic Conflicts among the Residents of Kipchimchim Parish in Kenya

Thomas Kenduiywa

Student, Department of Religious Studies,
Catholic University of Eastern Africa, Kenya

Dr. James Mwita

Lecturer, Department of Religious Studies,
Catholic University of Eastern Africa, Kenya

Abstract:

The study sought to find out the causes that provoke ethnic conflict in the area of Kipchimchim, Kenya apart from other areas which experience ethnic conflict mostly after every five years during and after election. The paradox is that, conflict occurs in places that are known to be Christian stronghold. True Christians are expected to be Christ like in their way of life. They are supposed to be gentle, loving, kind, understanding, patient, generous and not self-centered, being mindful of others and peace makers just to mention but a few. The target population of this research was all the Christians of Kipchimchim Parish with a population of 2,106 people. Stratified random sampling was used because of its accuracy in representing the population. A sample of 200 respondents was selected for data collection through questionnaire, and 12 respondents by interview, one leader from every center, which made the total of nine leaders, then the Parish Priest, the local superior of the sisters and the representative of the catechists. All these 12 respondents were interviewed personally. The sample of at least 200 respondents in this research is approximately 10% of the total population. The study identifies election disputes and land disputes as the major cause of ethnic conflicts within the jurisdiction of Kipchimchim parish. Other causes of ethnic conflicts were cattle rustling, political profiling and the killing of the area Member of Parliament. The study recommends that individuals, communities, NGO's, FBOs, CBOs, National and County governments should come together and end this menace. Effective legal frameworks need also to be implemented without involving corruption in various mainstreams.

Keywords: Catholic Church, election disputes, politics

1. Introduction

1.1. Background of the Study

The genesis of violent conflicts varies due to the circumstances surrounding this particular region. The conflicts that frequently occur are due to racial differences (which are related in Kenyan context of ethnicity), religious affiliations, the struggle for resources like the case of the Philistines and the Israelites. Some of the main causes of conflicts are lack of equitable distribution of resources which when denied leads to aggressive behavior (Mwaniki, *et al* 2007). Others include weak institutions that are unable to prevent injustices or fight against vices that torment the weak and the voiceless in the society. This leads to anarchy, and in the long run brings about conflict among the people just as it occurs in Kenya frequently. The religious people are supposed to be the conscience in the society. The problem is that when the conscience of the society ceases doing its work or connives with the political leaders in partisan politics, it leads to division among the religious leaders and consequently loss of moral authority to correct the politicians. (Njageh, 2012).

Kenya has known major post-election conflicts every election year. This therefore is not a foreign phenomenon in Kenya. In fact, war or ethnic conflicts have been recurring mostly during and after elections. We as well have tribal and clan clashes every now and then, coupled with insecurity, crime and violence facilitated by the proliferation of small arms that are being used by criminals and raiders at will especially among the Turkana and the Pokot (Mbaro 2010).

The occurrence of conflicts which have been occurring after every five years reached its peak in 2007, when the late Fr. John Kibochi with another visiting Priest together with the lay visitors escaped death narrowly. It was through the help of the Father in-charge together with the seminarians (then) who made them escape. Fr. John Kibochi had to be put in the boot of the car, covering him with clothes and was driven into a safer place where the affected were assembled. This was as a result of the fact that he was from another tribe supporting another political party which was not supported by the Kipsigis and generally the Kalenjin people. The hotly contested results of the election caused many lives and loss of property.

The people living within Kipchimchim Parish are majorly the Kipsigis with a small percentage of the Kikuyu, Luo and the Kisii people who are majorly in the urban centers and in the tea estates' residential areas. Under normal

circumstances, the four groups co-exist in peace. It is only during election time or any small misunderstanding when the peace they have been enjoying is put into test. The effects of the conflicts instigated mostly by the politicians along political parties affiliated to ethnic groups are great. That is the time people forget the Christian brotherhood and sisterhood, and withdraw to ethnic groups. Some people have lost their lives, their livestock, houses and businesses. Some were forced to relocate to other places. This destabilizes and disorients people because some have been living there for long, while some who migrated recently bought the land and invested heavily with all they had. Therefore, during the conflict, some of such property were burnt or looted leaving the owner poor if he or she was lucky to survive.

1.2. Purpose of the Study

The main aim of the study was to find out the contributing factors to the ethnic conflicts among the residents of Kipchimchim in Kenya.

1.3. Research Questions

The study answered the following question:

What are the factors that evoke conflicts among the residents of Kipchimchim in Kenya?

2. Literature Review

According to Kakures, Castagnetto, Benson, Taschek and Hurley (1993), the genesis of the struggles and conflicts in the nature of humanity for Augustine of Hippo (354-430) comes as a result of the distinction between the two groups: the lovers of the eternal and immutable God and the lovers of the transitory and mutable. The first one was categorized by Augustine as the citizens of the city of Jerusalem while the latter are the citizens of the city of Babylon. When Augustine surveys human history, it is in terms of the struggles between these two cities.

Kakures *et al* (1993), giving the view of John Locke's state of war, said that it comes as a result of the attack of the person's property. He asserts that attack upon a person's property is an attack upon that person; for Locke, both because it attempts to deprive the person of things that are needed to preserve his or her life, and because these things are the person's property in virtue of having mingled him- or herself-via his or her labour-with them. He stipulates that to attack a person's property is thus to declare an intention to do with the person as one pleases, including taking the person's life like what was witnessed in 2007 during post-election violence in Kipchimchim. This for Locke clearly violates the laws of nature which easily devolve into a state of war between parties who will invariably allow their own interests to colour their determination of when and what extent the laws of nature have been violated.

In the world view, African continent is prone to conflict and war. There are many countries in Africa that are in constant conflict and war, and many people have lost their lives like what happened in Kenya always during election period as witnessed also in Kipchimchim. The problem as Mulunda (1997:61) underscores is the tension between the conflict and the consent in a democratic society. He said;

From the national conferences, the major problem in the continent today is how to manage the tension between conflict and the consent in a democratic society. ...the situation in Togo, Kenya, Burundi and other places challenges the church to resolve the tension between consensus and conflict. Special training in both the arts of controversy and conflict resolution is needed for all the members of the community: children, youth, women, men, students and all people who are in the leadership positions.

The challenges that the continent of Africa is facing are the same. Mulunda highlighted that in various governments in Africa, many governments are built on tribalism, nepotism and corruption. When the moment comes to account for all the ills, resistance and violence must be expected. He added that the national conferences faced no bigger problem than the issue of representativeness; one must look at the issues of tribalism, regionalism and nepotism. These are the major problems that are affecting various nations in Africa today, and they are the major causes of conflicts which is typical in Kenya. While the Church would like to get rid of these evils from African society, it needs to develop skills and strategies that will not divide the country between the saints and demons.

Pointing out the seriousness of ethnic conflict in a particular nation, Mulunda said that ethnic conflict is one of the most destructive forces in the continent. This has resulted to people's identity being denied and their participation in the political life of the nation prevented. While some people advocate the centralization of power, others are calling for a federal system that will allow each region or ethnic group to manage their own political and economic life. These divergent ideas cause conflict in a nation which may have been peaceful. Just as Mwita (2018:8) said, "When consensus and mutuality lack, human beings and animals tend to fight over the available chances and resources, this eventually could lead to conflict which usually turns violent". And the type of violence in most cases is ethnic based just as it occurred in Kenya, and particularly in Kipchimchim.

Another major cause of conflicts in a nation is because of marginalization, poverty and unemployment. Opongo (2016:33) asserts, "Lack of economic development creates fertile ground for poverty, unemployment and subsequently easy manipulation of population to war. Equally, countries that depend highly on primary commodities for its citizens are at high risk of facing civil wars. This suggests that it is mostly poorer countries that would be susceptible to civil wars". Opongo postulates that when there is good economic development in a country, high employment opportunities and efficient infrastructure, there are minimum chances that there could be war or violent conflicts. He observes that the scramble for minimum resources on the other hand due to poor economic development and less opportunities for survival make the populations susceptible for frustrations and use of desperate means to express their grievances. Such means are often violent, resulting in ethnic conflict which is often witnessed in Kenya.

Kenya as a nation had been regarded as the haven of peace attracting many refugees. Mbaro (2010: 2) upholds, "Kenya has been a country, among few others, that has been the haven of refugees from war-afflicted neighbouring countries". However, a disease of conflict also infiltrated Kenya due to several factors. One of the causes of conflicts is injustice as a result of land distributions to the natives. Basing herself on this issue, Nasimiyu (2013: 120) said, "The white settlers from the colonial governments displaced Kenyans from their resourceful fertile native lands but when the land was given back to Kenyans after independence, land distribution process was unfair with introduction of people to those lands from other places of the country whose native background was not displaced by the white settlers". Mwita (2018: 41) also has the same observation that, "Conflict in Kenya is informed by a history where the original communities on these lands were forcefully removed to give way to large scale farming for white farmers. After independence, restitution was never pursued; hence communities continue to clamour for ancestral land as part of their identity and political rights." African countries unlike most of the countries in Europe are composed of many tribes. Kenya being one of the countries in Africa has forty-four tribes; Indian community recently being considered the forty fourth (44th) tribe in Kenya. The diversity of tribes in Kenya ought to bring rich cultural diversity, positively enriching Kenya with different cultures. These tribes with their unique cultures are supposed to bring enriching unity in diversity. However, often times, instead of enriching the country with their rich cultural diversity have brought about divisions in the country. Aloyo (2013: 139) said,

Ethnic distinctiveness is important because it reflects the rich diversity of human life. People like to have a sense of security by being able to identify with a group of people with its history, customs and traditions. It provides some stability and rootedness in an individual. On the other hand, a stress on ethnicity can lead to an unhealthy situation where belonging to one ethnic group means being hostile to another. Real or sensed discrimination can cause mutual suspicion and be used by religious or political leaders to exploit situations to gain power and influence in their respective communities.

Aloyo continued that aggression seems to be a basic reaction to the fear of losing rights, privileges, means of livelihood, symbol of identity, supporting networks and other aspects of life which gave and maintain a sense of security and wellbeing. This for her is where the roots of violence lie.

The cause of conflicts in relation to ethnicity is segregation. One may be segregated or denied job or promotion because the bosses or those in charge are from another tribe. Okullu (1974:47) holds, "It is absolutely wrong for a person to be denied promotion or appointment to a certain post to which he is entitled by his training and experience because of his tribal background. This creates jealousy, jealousy gives birth to subversion and in combating subversion, a whole group of people the guilty and the not guilty, are massacred". Okullu highlights the fact that very few feel full confidence and security working under a boss from a different ethnic group and so take the first opportunity to transfer to a place where they feel their future is more assured. The result in this case according to Okullu is a tribal shifting, to the tune of finding a whole department employing people of only one tribe. He observed that whereas the motive behind this kind of involuntary tribalism is not evil, the effect itself is evil. It becomes one of the root causes of conflict in the society because the group which feels segregated may rise against another group (tribe) which they feel they are favoured. This may have been one of the root causes of ethnic conflict in Kipchimchim.

3. Research Methodology

A cross-sectional research design was used in the study. The target population was 2,106 including Christians, Catechists, Priests and Sisters. Through stratified sampling technique, twenty one Christians were selected from every outstation of which seven were men, seven women, and seven youth. Each selected stratum multiplied by the nine outstations made 63 apart from the 2 Priests, 4 Sisters, and 5 Catechists. Therefore, the total number of the sample size was 200. The instruments that were used were the primary sources which include; Questionnaire, Interviews and Observation. The secondary sources were useful in obtaining information from the parish records particularly on matters concerning the population of the parish.

4. Discussion of Findings

Nearly 64.6% of the respondents stated that the cause of ethnic conflict within Kipchimchim parish was both election dispute and land dispute. This confirms what Mbaro (2010) outlined. He said that one of the causes of conflicts is injustice as a result of land distributions to the natives. This was also echoed by Nasimiyu (2013: 120) who said; "Land distribution process was unfair with the introduction of people from other places of the country whose native background was not displaced by the white settlers". Mwita (2018: 41) also added, "Original communities on their lands were forcefully removed to give way to large scale farming for white farmers. After independence, restitution was never pursued hence communities continue to clamour for ancestral land as part of their identity and political rights."

About 19.1% of the findings indicated that the cause of ethnic dispute was election disputes. Comparatively, 10% of the respondents indicated that the cause was land dispute. Only 3.6% and 2.7% of the respondents stated cattle rustling and inadequate resources respectively as the causes of ethnic conflict in Kipchimchim area. In total, Over 90% precisely 93.7% stated that election disputes and land disputes were the causes of ethnic conflict in Kipchimchim.

The interview schedules enriched and gave more insight into real causes of ethnic conflict within Kipchimchim area. Interviews were conducted between the researcher and Parish Priest, the local Superior of the Sisters and the representative of the Catechists. These groups were considered as key informants since they had first-hand information on matters affecting residents of around Kipchimchim Catholic parish and also the Catholic diocese of Kericho at large. The

following were the inputs from the interviewees (for reasons of confidentiality would be referred to using other names and not their real names) in response to the causes of ethnic conflict:

Charles, a retired teacher, but currently a farmer in an interview with the researcher as a representative of catechist, this is what he had to say:

'Ethnic violence is provoked by politicians' influence particularly after the announcement of the presidential results which turned opposite of their expectation. They believed that the elections were rigged in favour of the opponent'. He added that:

'The killing of the area Member of Parliament by alleged Kisii man is what provoked anger among the people against all Kisii people and other non-Kalenjin tribes'.

The second interviewee identified as Stanley, who is a catechist and a farmer, had this to say on the cause of ethnic conflict in the area:

'The killing of the area MP by a man from a particular tribe provoked people against that entire tribe living within the area'. He added that:

'The feeling that the presidential votes were stolen in favour of the opponent making people to rise against all other tribes that were affiliated to the so-called opponent who was believed to have been rigged in'.

The third interviewee identified as July, a primary school teacher and a representative of sisters, listed the following as the cause of ethnic conflict in the area: "Political profiling; community against others, Cattle rustling and scrambling for resources at the borders".

The findings from both questionnaires and interviews identifies election dispute, land disputes, political profiling, Killing of the area member of parliament (MP) as the causes of ethnic disputes in Kipchichim area. The findings also notes that cattle rustling and scrambling for resources as the cause of ethnic conflict in the area which to some extent share the same problem with what was found out as the causes of conflict in the north rift as per the findings of Mwei *et al* (2007). Majority of the participants cited the disputed presidential election outcome of 2007, the killing of the area member of parliament and the land dispute as the major causes of ethnic dispute within Kipchichim Parish area.

The researcher was interested in finding out the group of people who were generally involved in ethnic conflict and their motivation to conflict in Kipchichim. The respondents, in this case, were required through the questionnaire to select the group among the three categorized as men, youth and women and state what motivated them to conflict.

Majority of the respondents (68.2%) stated that youth were more involved in ethnic conflict within the jurisdiction of Kipchichim parish which formed the majority number of the respondents. Exactly 28.2% of the respondent indicated that men were involved in ethnic conflict. Only 4 respondents representing (3.6%) of the participants stated that women were generally involved in ethnic conflict.

The majority of the respondents (68.2%) who stated that youth were generally involved cited peer pressure, unemployment and incitement by politicians as the motivation towards their involvement in ethnic conflicts. This reflects what Nasimiyu (2013: 123) said; "The past election heartaches in Kenya was based on tribal prejudices perpetrated by myopic self-centered politicians and other evil minded Kenyans who are boxed in their tribal cocoons". According to the respondents, unemployment among the youth resulted to poor living standards pushing them to desperation hence soft target for manipulation by some rogue politicians. In this aspect, Mwita (2018: 11) pointed out that, "The youth can easily be manipulated by politicians due to their lack of employments and frustrations which easily leads to conflicts". The findings show that men were involved in ethnic conflict were motivated by selfish desire to gain material wealth through illegal means such as cattle rustling and land grabbing. Additionally, they were motivated to do so by tough economic times occasioned by inadequate resources such as land and the desire to settle historical injustices particularly regarding land issues. The minority of the respondents (3.6%) indicated that women were motivated by desire to ravage and incitement from their fellow tribesmen towards their involvement in ethnic conflict.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1. Conclusions

The study established that election dispute, land disputes, cattle rustling, political profiling and the killing of the area member of parliament were the causes of ethnic disputes in Kipchichim parish. These factors play a key role in the ethnic conflict in the area. It was found that ethnic conflicts occurred rarely and was particularly during the electioneering period; that was shortly before, during and after general elections especially when election outcomes were disputed.

5.2. Recommendations

The identified causes of ethnic conflict can be dealt with through an integrated effort of different stakeholders. Therefore; individuals, communities, NGO's, FBOs, CBOs, National and County governments should come together and end this menace. Effective legal frameworks need also to be implemented without involving corruption in various mainstreams.

6. References

- i. Kakures D. S., Castagnetto S., Benson H., Taschek W., and Hurley P. (1993). *History of philosophy*. New York: Harper Collins publishers inc.
- ii. Mbaro P. (2010). *Makers of peacemakers*. Nairobi: finesse publishing limited.
- iii. Mbaro P. (2010). *Makers of peacemakers*. Nairobi: finesse publishing limited.

- iv. Mulunda D. (1997). *The reconstruction of Africa*. Nairobi: all Africa conference of churches.
- v. Mwita J. (2018). *The role of the church in mitigating intra-ethnic land conflicts in Meru region, Kenya*, (unpublished doctoral dissertation). The catholic university of eastern Africa, Nairobi.
- vi. Njageh A. (2012). *Education and evangelization: AFER vol. 54*. AMECEA gaba publications- CUEA PRESS.
- vii. Okullu J. (1974). *Church and politics in east Africa*. Nairobi: Uzima press limited
- viii. Opongo E.O. (2006). *Making choices for peace*. Nairobi: Paulines publications Africa.