

**HISTORICAL STUDY OF BORDER INTERACTIONS AND MILITARISM BETWEEN
THE ABAGUSII OF SOUTHWESTERN KENYA AND THEIR NEIGHBOURING
COMMUNITIES,1850-2007**

By

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Requirements for the Award of the Degree of Master of Arts in History of the Faculty of
Arts & Social Sciences, Department of Humanities, Kisii University.**

2017

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my family members, friends and colleagues.

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I am thankful to God for having brought me to this world where I have encountered several intricacies which have shaped me into what I am today. Thanks to Kisii University administration for offering me a place to undertake my post-graduate studies. Most important is my able supervisors Dr. Evans Nyamwaka and Dr. Evans Mecha who guided and offered me every bit of constructive criticism to enable this work see the dawn of light.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to establish the nature context of border interactions and militarism between Abagusii and their neighbouring communities during the pre-colonial period, colonial and post-colonial period. An exploratory research design was used to establish the various ways in which the Abagusii interacted with their neighbouring communities. The objectives of study were; to establish the historical evolution of the Abagusii in the pre-colonial period, find out the ways in which the Abagusii interacted with the neighboring communities between 1850 and 1895, examine the nature of the interaction and militarism between the Abagusii and their neighbouring communities during the early colonial period, 1895 and 1914, war and post war period to 1963 and to establish the dynamism of interaction between the Abagusii and their neighbouring communities in the post-independence period, 1963-2007. The study was carried out in the larger Gusiiland which presently is occupied by two counties, that is Kisii and Nyamira counties. The target population of this study was the elderly members of the Gusii Community and those thought to be the custodian of the Gusii oral history. A sample size of 90 respondents was randomly selected for study using purposive and snowball techniques. Data was generated using Questionnaire schedules, oral interviews, observation and document Analysis guide. The results indicated a positive interaction between the various communities, although there was significant negative interactions as evidenced by wars and raids among selected communities of the Kipsigis and the Luo communities who were also pastoralists during the colonial times. It was recommended that The government and the Ministry of culture should put more emphasis on the teaching on historical events and culture in preparatory, primary schools and higher institutions of learning. Steps should also be taken to ensure that the things and information inherited from the past are preserved and promoted. Scholars should also consider studying other ethnic communities which were not covered by the researcher to enhance national integration

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Sciences
SKD	South Kavirondo District
Phd	Doctor of Philosophy
SN	South Nyanza
O.I	Oral Interview

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Abagusii - This is a community in Kenya that resides in the south western parts of Kenya.

Interaction - It is the reciprocal action effect or influence.

Indigenous- Refers to the originating in and characteristic of a particular region or country e.g Kenya.

Community- Refers to a social unit of any size that shares common values, beliefs and traditions.

Pre-colonial- Refers to the period in history before colonization of a region or country.

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Map I: Kenya showing the location of the Gusiiland

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the study

African continent in the modern times seem to encounter the complexity of identity. The nature of ethnocentrism that we encounter today has its roots from the pre-colonial times. Scholars of African history believe that colonialism, in its effort to restructure pre-colonial societies, further enhanced this situation. Interaction among communities has been a natural phenomenon in all world communities. It is through interaction that communities get to learn and borrow cultural activities for good or for worse. In pre-colonial Africa, communities used to interact in several ways, which sometimes promoted peace among them. Some communities are known to have interacted through warfare, others through marriage, meaning that this interaction was both positive and negative¹.

According to Kakai, inter-ethnic interactions that date from pre-colonial days, some of which are characterized by peaceful co-existence, suspicions, tensions and even conflicts continue to pass over to the present generations, are products of historical forces of colonialism and neo-colonialism.²

The use of iron tools which is associated with the bantu marked a significant moment of African interaction. Iron tools enhanced weaponry, allowed groups to clear and manage dense forests, plough fields for farming, all of which had far reaching effects on people's lives. Ultimately, iron tools allowed Africans to flourish in every environment, and thus they could live in larger communities, which led to the formation of states and kingdoms. With state formation, came the formation of modern civilizations with common languages, belief and value systems, art, religion, lifestyle and culture. Interaction between states was by trade, conquering and invading or pushing the weaker communities³.

¹Branch, Daniel: (2011) Kenya. *Between Hope and Despair*, 1963–2011. Yale University Press, New Haven, Connecticut, ISBN 978-0-300-14876-3.

²Kakai, P.W. "The Northern Luyia Anti-Colonial Resistance: The Lumboka-Chetambe War." 1997.

³Collier, Paul and Lal: (1986)*Deepak.Labour and Poverty in Kenya*, 1900–1980. Oxford U. Press

In Southern Africa, the peoples of modern day Zimbabwe and Zambia are said to have had elaborate interactions with their neighbours. As a result of exploitation of the mineral wealth of their land, they were able to carry out booming businesses. Consequently, they established a large network through the area. Pre-colonial contacts were often more mobile. However, societies that moved to the land where there was fertility and closer to water supply had sedentary way of life. This was particularly true with the Eastern and Southern regions of the continent as well as in the Sahel and desert regions of West Africa. Therefore, as they moved to various places in search for pasture and water, they sometime had to push or force other communities that occupied the place to vacate. The concepts of cultural diversity and cultural identity are at the forefront of the political debate in many western societies. In Europe, the discussion is stimulated by the political pressures associated to immigration flows, which are increasing in many European countries, as. Dealing with the ethnic and cultural heterogeneity associated to such trends is one of the most important⁴ challenges that European societies will face. The debate on the perceived costs and benefits of cultural diversity is already intense. This is well illustrated for instance in France, where discussions about the wearing of the Islamic veil and the burqa stimulated in turn a public debate on the French national identity. Similarly, the recent vote in Switzerland against the construction of Muslim mosques clearly shows how heated and emotional arguments on ethnic and religious identity recently became important in European politics.

Studies have shown that Pre-colonial African societies were never completely isolated. Interaction between neighbours, across regions, and even outside African continent was a common feature. Societies interacted with one another through commerce, marriage, migration, diplomacy and warfare. Their fertile land, trade routes, or cattle forced interaction with other communities. East Africa was in contact with Chinese, Middle Eastern, and Indian traders. Portugal established Elmina in modern day Ghana its first African trading outpost, in 1482⁵. Commerce was instrumental in state formation. Trade offered the ability to exchange local surpluses for rare foods and goods. Across the Saharan desert and along the Swahili coastline of East Africa, vast trade networks developed. World renowned marketplaces and massive cities emerged at trade crossroads, such as Zanzibar and Timbuktu. For instance, it is estimated that Kumbi, a large city in the

⁴ Bisin A. and T. Verdier (2010), "The Economics of Cultural Transmission and Socialization", in Benhabib, J., A. Bisin, and M. Jackson (eds.), *Handbook of Social Economics*, forthcoming, Elsevier, Amsterdam.

⁵ Branch, Daniel: (2011) Kenya. *Between Hope and Despair*, 1963–2011. Yale University Press.

Western Sudan, possessed a population of 15 000 to 20 000 by the eleventh century. Kings and leaders, such as those of Ghana, controlled their areas' local markets and received tributes from traders. Camels and donkeys connected distant societies, and allowed trade to occur across the Sahara⁶. Areas with mineral wealth, such as Great Zimbabwe, developed mining capabilities and traded these for manufactured goods from overseas. This study examined inter-and intra-ethnic relations which prevailed between 1850 and 2007 in order to demonstrate ways in which inter-and intra-ethnic co-operations, suspicions, tensions and even conflicts between the Abagusii and the neighbouring communities in the pre-colonial period, colonial and post-colonial periods.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Interaction among communities in Africa has a long history. Scholars from a variety of disciplines including sociology, anthropology; linguistics and psychology have had keen interest in the understanding of how communities interact with each other in order to comprehend their present behaviour. However, there are very few historical studies, which have paid serious attention to ethnic identity, ethno cultural ramifications and ethnic relations and militarism in Kenya, both in the past and present. No known historical study, specifically on critical analysis of the interaction and militarism between the Abagusii's and their neighbouring communities in the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial periods. Therefore, there was a serious need to venture into this study, in an effort to investigate the issue ethno-centrism and interactions as well as militarism in the area of study. The study illuminates the perception of issues of inter-ethnic co-operation, ethnic inter-dependence as well as inter-ethnic tensions and conflicts between the Abagusii and their neighbouring communities.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

This study is guided by the following objectives to:

- i. Establish the historical evolution of the Abagusii in the pre-colonial period.
- ii. Find out the ways in which the Abagusii interacted with the neighboring communities between 1850 and 1895.

⁶Fatola T. Ed African Cultures and societies before 1885, Durham, cardina Academic Press, 2000. African Vol 2 p. 332.

- iii. Examine the nature of the interaction and militarism between the Abagusii and their neighbouring communities during the early colonial period, 1895 and 1914, war and post war period to 1963.
- iv. Establish the dynamism of interaction between the Abagusii and their neighbouring communities in the post-independence period ,1963-2007.

1.4 Research Premises

The research aimed at testing the following premises:

- i. Abagusii evolved and developed as an indigenous community in the pre-colonial period.
- ii. Interaction between the Abagusii and their neighbouring communities between 1850 and 1895, was characterized by peaceful co-existence and conflicts.
- iii. The period of early Colonialism in Kenya 1895 and 1914, the war and post war period to 1963, greatly affected the pattern of interaction and militarism between the Abagusii and their neighbouring communities.
- iv. Abagusii's interaction with their neighboring communities was versatile, ethno –centric and full of socio-economic, cultural and political interests.

1.5 Scope and Limitations of the Study

The study took place in Gusiiland, a region which is now occupied by two counties, that is Nyamira and Kisii. It focused on the history of the Abagusii's interaction with the neighboring community, during the pre-colonial period and its outcome. The study had a number of limitations. First it was not possible to establish all the interactions among all Kenyan communities. The year 1850 has been taken as a starting point because this was the time when the abagusii had distinguished themselves as a distinct community. The period 2007 has been taken to be the terminal point because, Kenya witnessed its worst moment due to post-election violence. This greatly affected the interaction between the Abagusii and border communities such as the Maasai, kipsigis and the Luo as was the case with many other communities in Kenya.

The study was also limited in that most of the elderly people that existed during the Pre-colonial period were not alive to be interviewed and also historical records were not substantial to be used. The study was also limited by the fact that it relied on self-rating questionnaires for the elders, Historians and knowledgeable individuals about the Abagusii history, who may have not had exhaustive knowledge about the community's history. This means that the respondents could have given inadequate information.

Another limitation was lack of adequate resources for conducting the research. Bad weather especially occasional rainy seasons in Gusiiland at times affected the movement of the researcher from one destination to another to conduct field interviews. Bad infrastructural facilities, especially roads in Gusiiland rural areas which were occasionally impassable due to their conditions occasionally posed a challenge to the smooth running of the study. Some respondents who were not ready to give information to the researcher due to the fear of disclosing secrets about their communities in some cases was a challenge. Language barrier was another challenge as in some places especially in some communities in which an interpreter was required to aid in interpreting some indigenous terminologies.

1.6 Assumptions of the Study

The study was based on the following assumptions:

- i. The targets respondents would cooperate and give correct and valid information.
- ii. The samples taken were reasonably enough to represent the entire population.
- iii. The methods used in data collection would give accurate results. other communities interacted

1.7 Justification and Significance of the Study

The study will be used for reference among academicians, scholars and historians who will wish to have knowledge on the history of interactions between various indigenous communities living in Kenya, more so the Abagusii and the neighboring communities.

The study will be used as a means of improving Archival sources for studying cultural interactions in history. This information will be handy information which will be used by future researchers working on ethnographical studies.

Theoretical Perspective Sociologists have been studying cultural integration patterns of immigrants at least since the late 19th century, especially in the context of immigration into the United States. Economists have instead been traditionally mainly interested in assessing the direct impact of immigration flows on market outcomes (especially on the labour market) or on fiscal transfers and public goods provision. The basic question of assimilation, for economists, has been then framed in terms of economic assimilation, namely the dynamics of immigrants' earnings and socio-economic positions relatively to natives. Recently, however, economists have been recognizing that, beyond interactions directly mediated through markets, prices, and incomes, other non-market social and cultural interactions could also be important determinants of the socio-economic integration of immigrants. For instance, specific patterns of cultural

attitudes of immigrants' groups can significantly affect their labour market performances or their investments in education and human capital. As a matter of fact, the common social phenomenon of "oppositional" identities, by which certain minority individuals actively reject the dominant majority behavioural norms, can produce significant economic and social conflicts as well as adverse labour-market outcomes.

More generally, social scientists have dedicated a lot of attention to the fact that immigrants' integration patterns can significantly alter the design and the political economy of public policies in the host society. An example of this issue concerns the sustainability of welfare state institutions in the context of multicultural societies. Cultural diversity may indeed affect the sense of community and social solidarity which constitute founding pillars of democratic welfare state systems. This could lead to the erosion of the social consensus for redistribution and diminish the political support for universal social programs. Public policies aimed at correcting for horizontal inequalities, across cultural groups, might end up substituting for vertical redistribution, across social classes. For these reasons, several observers favour explicit public policies promoting, even requesting, the cultural assimilation of immigrants to the cultural attitudes of natives. Other observers however argue that welfare state institutions should be designed to accommodate cultural diversity.⁷ These policies would facilitate contacts across communities, promote tolerance, trust and respect towards other groups and, in the end, would help develop new national identities. In either case, the study of cultural and socio-economic integration patterns of immigrants seems of paramount importance, given that such patterns determine how the expression of cultural differences is translated into individual behaviour and public policy.

The imperatives that current immigration trends impose on European democracies bring to light a number of issues that need to be addressed. What are the patterns and dynamics of cultural integration? How do they differ across immigrants of different ethnic groups and religious faiths? How do they differ across host societies? What are the implications and consequences for market outcomes and public policy? Which kind of institutional contexts are more or less likely to accommodate the cultural integration of immigrants? All these questions are crucial for policy makers and await answers. In this context, the purpose of this book is to provide a modest but

⁷Berry J.W.(1997), "Immigration, Acculturation and Adaptation", *Applied Psychology*

-International Review no 46.

nevertheless essential contribution as a stepping stone to the debate. Taking an economic perspective, the collection of essays in this book presents a first descriptive and comparative picture of the process of cultural integration of immigrants in Europe, as it is taking place. We provide in the country chapters a detailed description of the cultural and economic integration process in seven main European countries and the United States. The European countries include France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and United Kingdom. We then provide in the conclusion of the book a cross-country comparison of the integration process using a unified database, the European Social Survey. The conclusion estimates the interplay between the cultural and economic integration process across European countries, and how those variation dimensions of integration correlate with specific national policies aimed at immigrants' integration.

This Study utilized a variety of theoretical perspectives that deal with interactions. Some of these included Cultural-Historical activity Theory. This is used for studying a group that exists largely in virtual form. This theory is used in qualitative research methodologies. It provides a method of understanding and analyzing a phenomenon, finding out patterns and making inferences across interactions.

The theory of Multiculturalism which took shape in the latter half of the twentieth, examines the cultural diversity of communities within a given society and the policies that promote this diversity. As a descriptive term, Multiculturalism is the simple fact of cultural diversity. This theory encourages ideologies and policies that promote diversity. Two main different and seemingly inconsistent strategies have developed. The first focuses on interaction and communication between different cultures. Interactions of cultures provide opportunities for the cultural differences to communicate and interact and create multiculturalism. This approach is known as Interculturalism. The second one centers on diversity and cultural uniqueness. Cultural isolation can protect the uniqueness of the local culture of a nation or area and also contribute to global cultural diversity. Assimilation theories also explain how group relation might develop, assimilation is a process in which formerly distinct and separate groups come to share a common culture and merge together socially. As society undergoes assimilation, differences among groups decrease. The above theories were handy in the study of the interaction between the Abagusii and their neighbouring communities.

Conflict theory was also utilized in this study. Scholars such as Kakai have agreed that Conflicts helps persons in a given society to adjust and know more about their state. This is because

people should understand their relationship. Conflict is known in to have influence on peoples way of life. When conflicts emerge, they affect both positive and negative co-existence in any given community. Kakai informs us that the origins of conflict perspective was postulated by early western philosophers of Christian era who included; Niccolo Machiaveli Thomas Hobes, Polybius and Heraclitus.⁸ These theories will be meaningful in studying the Abagusii' encounter with neighbouring communities in historical periods.

1.9 Literature review

Scholars from diverse backgrounds have discussed African community interactions from different stand points. Sheriff asserts that for many millennia, the many communities in Kenya adjusted themselves to their ecological niches (Sheriff, 1985)⁹. As a consequence communities such as the Agikuyu and the Mijikenda developed agricultural economies. Others, including the Maasai and the Samburu practiced pastoralist forms of production. The majority such as the Luo and the Abagusii adapted themselves to a mixture of crop cultivation and livestock keeping. Besides there the Ogiek who thrived on hunting and gathering. Production was primarily for collective subsistence rather than individual accumulation. The kinship system was the basis of ownership of factors of production which included land, livestock and labour. Labour was largely cooperative within the family and the larger kin group. It was also manual. Surplus was quantitatively small and imposed limitations on trade. Regional and long-distance trade involved prestige goods and influenced society only minimally. The rewards of labour were mostly redistributed in kind and according to need. There existed little differences in wealth possession. Classes, if they existed, were largely incipient.

According to Smith, reciprocity and the egalitarian ideal ensured that individuals never slid into abject poverty (Smith 1975). There was very little impetus for large-scale state formation. Instead the largest political unit was the collectivity of a few families related by blood. Communities were highly a cephalous or segmented. Centralized kingdoms were mainly found in the inter-lacustrine region to the west of Lake Victoria. The ethnic boundaries among pre-colonial Kenyan communities were fluid. Inter-ethnic interactions were characterized by trade, intermarriages and limited and intermittent warfare. The histories of migrations and settlement were about continuous waning and waxing of the various ethnicities. Society was anything but

⁸ Kakai, Op.cit, pp.18-19.

⁹ Collier, Paul and Lal: (1986) *Deepak .Labour and Poverty in Kenya, 1900–1980*. Oxford U. Press

static. Colonialism only gave new shape, meaning and direction to the communities' inherent dynamism.

As far as inter-ethnic relations is concerned, a number of studies tackle causes of the conflicts in various regions of the world. The best example is Yugoslavia. Studies indicate that as early as 1948 president Josif Tito feared conflicts that would unfold as a result of Montenegrin and Croatian populace resisting unification. Indeed, in the early 1970s there was tension that connoted a conflict over the future of Yugoslavia. In 1977, the Serbian leadership grumbled against the constitution. In 1980, it seized on the death of Tito as a signal to begin the unravelling of the federalist era. Banac contends that by 1991 when communism declined in Eastern Europe and the victor of the opposition in the 1990 elections in Slovenia, Croatia, Macedonia and Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Serbia and Yugoslav people's army became increasingly isolated and determined to reject further confederation. When Slovenia and Croatia declared independence in June 1991, war erupted prompting an obituary for Yugoslavia in the **Serbian Cultural Weekly**. The foregoing analysis indicates that ethnic tensions and conflicts do not just happen. They develop gradually over time. In tackling ethnic relations in Bungoma, Mt. Elgon and Trans Nzoia districts, there is need to bear this in mind.

Kemal Kurspahic argues the various ethnic and religious groups in Bosnia-Herzegovina had for centuries lived together in mutual tolerance, he further asserts that the Bosnian conflict that resulted in many losses of human lives and properties was externally imported because of the 'Greater Serbia' project that was developed in Belgrade and aimed at conquest of other territories by force of arms. This work appears useful to this study. It further notes that its treatment of Bosnian case broadens the way inter-ethnic relations in Bungoma, Mt. Elgon and Trans Nzoia district is interrogated.

Mazrui (1969b) argues that ethnic relations leading to tensions and conflicts are a global affair facilitated by two revolutions of communications and identity explosion. He cites the 1967-1970 Biafra war in Nigeria as being an equivalent of the Scottish attempt at getting greater autonomy from Britain. On the side of Nigeria, Mazrui argues that the 'story of Biafra and the Ibo ethnicity is in part a story of the decline of Nigerian nationalism'. He further states that such decline could only be understood against a historical background (Ibid: 6).

Moreover, Mazrui and Tidy (1984:203-207; 219-222) depict gloomy effects on Biafra War in Nigeria as well as the Hutu and Tutsi ethnic relations in Rwanda and Burundi respectively.

Central in this work is similarly the question of identity. how does ethnic identity affect nationhood? This is an aspect that ought to be borne in mind in the course of research about inter-ethnic as well as intra-ethnic relations in any area of study.

Another useful analysis of ethnic relations in Nigeria is by Rotimi T. Suberu (1993). Suberu traces Nigeria's ethnic relations from 1914 to 1993. He argues that the need to consolidate the Muslim Hausa-Fulani, the Christian Igbo, the religiously bifurcated Yoruba and the minority ethnic groups into one single country sparked off various ethnic suspicions, tensions and conflicts, he points out that the minority communities felt that the bigger Nigerian communities neglected them.

He claims that the ensuing ethnic imbalance in the post independence Nigeria contributed to the collapse of the first Republic and the imposition of military rule in 1966 and the Biafra War of 1967-1970. This study is broad in scope for it discusses various ethnic groups in the entire Nigeria. However, our research is limited to three districts in Western Kenya though it has benefited from some insights from Suberu's work.

Ryan (1971) tackles social relations in the Horn of Africa seeing *how* the external factor contributed to the souring of ethnic and racial relations in the region. Referring to (the Sudan.

he brings out race and religion but not ethnicity as the main cause of the civil war. According to him, conflict in the Sudan has been caused by racial and religious sentiments. The Southerners claim that the Arabs in the Sudan are not Africans, but imperialists and racists who wish to maintain the social consequences of their enslavement of Africans. Southerners are

opposed to attempts by certain Northern elements to Arabise and Islamise the South that is Christian and traditionalist. Coming out of this work as a factor militating against harmonious relations in the Sudan is an aspect of culture. Ryan's text is useful in this study because it may guide reflections and analysis to be made in this study on the role of culture in facilitating or hampering inter or intra-ethnic relations.

Several works on ethnic relations in Somalia exist. However, only two are reviewed here.

- Dualeh (1994) discusses the history of Somali clan relations since the pre-colonial times. He identifies the Hawiye, Digil, Dir, Rahanweyn, Darod, Isaq as among the main clans. These clans were sometimes suspicious or hostile to each other. Dualeh argues that each clan has within Somalia another clan it considers its traditional enemy. But, Dualeh's main thrust in this book centres on how Siad Barre employed inter-clan intrigues to dismember the once

peaceful Somalia. Today, Somalia is perhaps the only existing country in the world without a central government (Ihonvberc, 1994).

Peter J. Schracder (1993: 13-17) also discusses ethnic relations in Somalia. He argues that the overthrow of Siad Barre regime did not end the conflict in Somalia. The blunder undertaken by the Hawiye to unilaterally appoint Ali Mahdi Mohamed as President incensed the warring factions. The tense relations between the Isaaq dominated Somali National Movement (SNM), the Hawiye United Somali Congress (USC) and the Ogaden dominated Somali Peoples Movement (SPM) worsened. In May 1991 the SNM declared the former British Somaliland as an independent territory which was to be known as the Somaliland Republic. Yet the inter-clan and intra-clan conflicts in Southern Somalia continued to disturb peaceful existence.

This latter work on Somalia was limited in scope. Nevertheless, the two works are vital in challenging and stimulating further reflections in the collection of empirical evidence in the field. In Uganda, Okuku (1974: 48-49) argues that ethnic relations in Uganda worsened because of the British colonialists who strengthened the idea of 'chosenness' or belonging to a royal family in some communities. The author states that during the colonial time, the Baganda believed that they were a 'super-tribe' because of their advantages over the rest of Uganda. At independence, the Baganda wanted their Kabaka Mutesa to become the ruler instead of Milton Obote. But the reluctance of the Uganda Peoples Congress (UPC) to make Mutesa the President was the beginning of Obote-Mutesa conflict which eventually threw the entire country into a lot of ethnic strife and violence which have continuously dominated inter-ethnic relations in Uganda.

Yoweri Museveni (1985), on the other hand, holds the view that the conflict that had existed in Uganda under the influence of his National Resistance Army (NRA) was a war against injustice, repression and dictatorship. He asserts that the war was 'anti-tribalism' and that it involved all Uganda citizens. The works of Okuku (1974) and Museveni (1985) are useful in this study for provision of adequate examples to understand the nature of the Kenyan inter-ethnic relations. Literature on ethnic relations in Kenya is increasing. Soja (1968) argues that in traditional African societies there was a constant state of flux. Cohesive communities were appearing and disappearing, blending and breaking off as a result of an almost ubiquitous competition for land and animals. Organised raiding, efforts to resist it and the need to expand into new grazing or agricultural land created a fluid distribution of population and group loyalties. Apart from this, Soja further argues that conflicts and fighting took place not only among ethnically unrelated groups such as pastoralists and agriculturalists but also within groups who shared a common cultural background. For instance, the Maasai often engaged in conflicts among themselves

over grazing land or other issues.

Esele, (1994) analyses ethnic conglomerations as having both merits and demerits. On the merits, he argues that ethnic groups promoted and nurtured the social, economic and political advancement of ethnic groups. He cites examples of the Luo Thrift and Trading Corporation (LUTATCO), the Gikuyu, Embu and Meru Association (GEMA) and the North Kavirondo Chamber of Commerce (NKCC) to bolster his argument. These ethnically based organisations not only assisted individuals in acquiring wealth and political power but also served as challenges to the Asian monopoly of retail and wholesale trade. This paper is useful in discussing various issues in this work.

Directly relevant to this study are the works of Odinga (1967) and Jan de Wolf (1977): Odinga (1967) mentions the existence of ethnic tensions between the Abaluyia and the Kalenjin ethnic groups in Western and parts of the Rift Valley provinces. But this work is sketchy and patchy on this aspect of inter-ethnic relations. Wolf argues that Masinde Muliro's claim of Trans Nzoia as part of Western Province sparked off inter-ethnic conflicts between the Kalenjin subethnic collectivity and their Abaluyia counterparts.

Kakai argues in his study that the Sabao of Mt. Elgon burned down houses, destroyed crops and drove away cattle belonging to Babukusu in the early 1960s. Wolf does not delve deeper into the whole issue of inter-ethnic relations bringing out how various ethnic groups related over time.

1.10 Research Methodology

1.10.1 Research Design

This study used a descriptive survey design. This design was chosen because it allowed the collection of information about people's attitudes, opinions, habits or any of the variety of education or social issues as Orotho states. The study took a descriptive qualitative approach by looking at the history of pre-colonial interactions between the Abagusii and neighbouring communities.

1.10.2 Research Locale

The study took Gusiiland as its area of study Abagusii, who are designated as Bantu speaking people, live in Kisii. This region is occupied by nine districts. These are; Kisii Central, Kisii South, Masaba North, Masaba South, Marani and Borabu, Sameta, Nyamache and Gucha. The area has a climate of the highland equatorial zone. It has rainfall of up to 1500mm. Gusiiland has an highland which lies between 2000 and 2,350 metres above sea level. The area has permanent

streams which include; Gucha, Sondu and Mogonga. Gusiiland is endowed with unique rock structure. For example soapstone, used for carving and making electric installations. The region is endowed with many resources. For instance it has pleasant climate with a variety of attractive features. It has well-drained and fertile soils. The area has woody and bushy grasslands.

1.10.3 Target Population

The target population entailed the elderly community leaders, historians with knowledge about the Gusii Oral history and other community members thought to be the custodians of the knowledge about early contacts between the Abagusii and neighbouring communities in the past. The sample size entailed 30 community elders, 30 historians and 30 youth. For the purpose of this study, data was collected in two Counties: Kisii and Nyamira. The choice of these two counties was that the study focused on the Abagusii who reside in these two counties. The researcher adopted the multiphase sampling technique whereby both probability and non-probability sampling design were used as below. In a stratified sample, the sampling frame was divided into overlapping groups or strata that is age groups and gender. In this regard, the researcher used stratified sampling to select the elders for the study. Purposive sampling was also utilized in getting information for the study. Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling technique that is used to select individuals from a given population who have unique characteristics and hold specific information desired for the study. The power of purposive sampling lies in selecting information rich cases in-depth analysis related to the central issues being studied. For this reason the , purposive sampling was used to select respondents in Gusiiland.

3.5.3 Simple Purposive Sampling

In simple random sampling, each item or element in the population has a chance of being chosen at each draw. A sample is random if the method for obtaining the sample meets the criterion of randomness (each element having an equal chance at each draw). The actual composition of the sample itself does not determine whether or not it was random, therefore simple random was again used to select the youth.

This study made use of questionnaires and face to face interviews to collect data. Document review for secondary data will also be used to gather data that has been recorded in the institutions that were contacted. The questionnaire was preferred because they are easy to administer, cheaper and less time consuming. Pilot testing means pre-testing the instruments with a few respondents to test their accuracy; of data collection instrument (questionnaire). After

successful piloting the researcher gave the research instruments to all selected research participants (sample population). A pilot study was done differently from the real population.

A pilot study was carried out independent of the main study to check the durations and key areas that need attention. The validity of the instrument was tested using pilot tests. Reliability as a measure of the degree, to which a research instruments yields consistent result after repeated trials. Reliability in research is influenced by random error. As random error increases reliability decreases. Random error is the deviation from a true measurement being addressed by the researcher.

Errors may arise from inaccurate coding ambiguous instructions of the subject, interviewer's bias and interviewer's fatigue. In designing and administering the instruments the researcher took care of these errors.

To establish the reliability of questionnaire the pre-test was done by using of re-test method. The questionnaires were given to non-sampled same questions were given to them again and population result. The questionnaire for elders was used to gather data from the elderly people who had information about the pre-colonial period. The questionnaires had both open-ended questions and closed questions. The Questionnaires had the following questions regarding the history of Kisii .Questionnaires were also used to gather data from knowledgeable people about the Gusii history and interaction with their neighbouring communities to provide information. The questionnaire gathered the background data of the respondent, including gender and age. The questionnaire had both open-ended and closed questions regarding interactions in the pre-colonial period.

1.10.3 Data Collection Procedure

A research permit was obtained from the Faculty of Social sciences in Kisii University. Thereafter the selected targets were visited. Both Primary and Secondary techniques were used in data collection. Primary data were derived from field work done through face to face interviews and focus group discussions. As far as Secondary data is concerned, Materials, like publications Questionnaires were administered and face to face interviews were conducted on the respondents. The respondents were assured that strict confidentiality would be maintained in dealing with the responses .the filled in questionnaires were collected after one week. Journals, text books and articles. The historian records gave information for the data that was needed .The data derived was then transcribed to avoid errors.

1.10.4 Data Analysis Techniques

This study generated both qualitative and quantitative data hence both qualitative and quantitative techniques were used to analyze the data obtained. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The purpose of descriptive statistics is to enable the researcher to meaningfully describe a distribution of scores or measurement using statistics. The process of data analysis required the use of a computer spreadsheet and for this reason the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20 which was accurately used was used.

Data obtained from the field was thoroughly checked and edited for validity. The data was analyzed using qualitative methods. Data was presented and analyzed using simple statistical techniques like frequency tables, pie charts and graphs. This technique was used because the sample size was suitable for it. The data was then arranged in various themes in line with the objectives of the study.

CHAPTER TWO

GEOGRAPHICAL SETTING AND THE EVOLUTION OF THE GUSII COMMUNITY

2.0 Introduction

The Abagusii presently occupy an area in Nyanza Region in Kenya which is characterised by a high degree of physical diversity.¹⁰ This area extends over approximately 800 square miles with a mean altitude of 1,950m feet above sea level. Gusiiland according to H.O. Ominde seems to be among the most fertile and agriculturally productive areas in the western Kenya. It is well endowed with permanent rivers and seasoned streams draining into Lake Victoria. The regions main rivers are Kuja, some times referred to as Gucha, Sondu and Mogonga.

Structurally, Gusiiland is hilly with several ridges especially in the east. The plateau is bounded on the south-west by the Vinyo escarpment, a great cliff which rises to 300m feet above the plains of Kamagambo and its foot, and breached by the gorge of the Guja. To the north-west the plateau is bounded by the Manga escarpment. From here, the country falls down in a succession of terraces to Kendu Bay, on the southern shores of Nyanza Gulf, a distance of some twenty-three Km.¹¹ The ridges are separated by deep flat bottomed valleys occasionally choked by swamps, streams and rivers, fed by more than 800mm of rainfall annually. The appearance of Gusii highlands has been likened to that of Scottish Highlands Gusiiland has a cool highland equatorial climate. All months have more than 100mm of rainfall which concentrated in two seasons. March to June constitute the short rainy season. Long rains, are expected in the month of October all the way to December. This abundant and reliable rainfall pattern sustains a continuous flow of swift streams and rivers and as such support a variety of agriculturally related economic pursuits¹². The Gusii drainage system is largely dominated by river Guja and its feeders. This winding river traces its source in the North Mugirango and Kipsigis hills, traverses the Highland District by touching on all Gusii locations except Wanjare and eventually enters Lake Victoria at Kadem.

The geological base structure of Gusiiland consists of the Bukoban, Granitic, Nyanzian and Kavirondo rocks. The dominant rock is the Bukoban type. The Bukoban rocks were formed

¹⁰S.H. Ominde, "Land and Population in Western Districts of Nyanza Province of Kenya" - A Ph. D thesis University of London, 1963, p.18.

¹¹ S.H. Ominde, Ibid. pp. 20-21.

¹² E.Nyamwaka, Songs and Dances Among the Abagusii of South Western Kenya; A Historical Study, a Master of Arts thesis, Egerton University, Kenya, 2000.

during the Precambrian era but are far younger than the Nyanzian and Kavirondo systems. Some Granites exist, having been ejected through the crust during the Precambrian age. The Kavirondian system consists of alternating lands of grit or sandstones with huge lenses of water-lain conglomerates. Soapstone, used for carvings electrical insulators and chalk, is available in Tabalca in the Southern part of Gusiiland.

Most Gusiiland soils are quite fertile. A large part of the region is covered with dark red friable clay over the Bukoban rocks. These soils are deep and are rich in organic matter. A sizeable area is covered with red-to brown friable clays with black clays in the plains. These organic matter content. Black cotton soil abounds in alluvial plains. Because of the fertile soils, food and cash crops can be grown in all parts of Gusiiland.¹³

The above, broadly, is the geographical character of Gusiiland and it was this feature according to W.R. Ochieng which conditioned the pattern of Abagusii settlement, their economy and to some extent, their political and social organisations songs and dances inclusive.¹⁴

2.1 Origins, Migration and Early Cultural History of the Abagusii

Indeed, the origins and early cultural history of the Abagusii is quite interesting. A study of socio-economic and political conditions of the community forms a background to the understanding of these people and their history. The origin, migration and early cultural history of the Abagusii discussed in here is based mainly on oral sources supplemented with written works.

The Abagusii are Western Bantu ethnic group who inhabit the south western part of Kenya. Presently, they occupy over twenty sub-counties in Kisii and Nyamira counties in the former Nyanza Province which is the currently known as Nyanza of Kenya. From interviews conducted in the field, it was evident that the Abagusii have settled here since they migrated from their mythical cradle land in the 'North' which they also refer to as 'Misiri'.¹⁵

According to Abagusii tradition, Mogusii was the founding father of their society. This was the person after whom their community is named.¹⁶ Similar sources imply that Mogusii was the son of Osogo. Osogo is believed to have been the son of Moluguhia, son of Kigoma, son of Riabaka,

¹³ D. Nyamwaya and C. Wanjala

¹⁴ W.R. Ochieng, A Pre-Colonial History of the Gusi of Western Kenya from C. AD 1500 - 1914, (Nairobi, 1974), p. 176.

¹⁵ Oral interview with Iriasi Mogire, at Bogeka Village, Kisii Central, on 11.11.97.

¹⁶ W.R. Ochieng, Op. cit., p.12.

who was the son of Kintu.¹⁷ The Abagusii tradition further asserts that Kintu first inhabited the ‘big river valley in Misiri’ (presumably the River Nile Valley in Egypt). It was this man who led the migration of the community from ‘Misiri’ to Mount Elgon where they first settled before moving to their present homeland. In this region, the Abagusii appear to have lived for three to four generations before dispersing finally to the various destinations. Gusii traditions also indicate that Moluguhia, Mogusii’s grandfather, had sons who became the founders of the various Baluyia clans who now inhabit south western Kenya. The elder sons of Moluguhia were Osogo and Mogikoyo. The Abagusii, Abakuria, Abalagoi, Abasuba and other related communities became the descendants of Osogo. The Agikuyu, Aembu, Ameru, the Akamba and other related communities are believed to belong to Mogikoyo’s ancestry line.¹⁸

From Mount Elgon, the Abagusii sources indicate that their ancestors and those of the Abakuria, Abalagoli and Abasuba moved southwards along the course of river Nzoia. By the eighteenth century they had settled on the eastern shores of Lake Victoria. They finally moved eastwards and settled at Goye in Yimbo. Their settlement extended to Urima, Olowo Sare, and Ramogi. The Luo invaded the area and hostility developed between the two communities. The Abagusii later moved southwards. They further moved to the shores of Lake Gangu in Alego and hence to Sakwa, Asembo, Seme and Kisumu. They are believed to have stayed at Kisumu from about 1640 to 1755. The Abagusii tradition further indicates that Nyakemogendi, the mother of Mogusii and Mogusii died at Kisumu.¹⁹ Due to severe famine, drought and plague, the ancestors of the Abagusii left Kisumu for Kano plains in search of food and a better home.

The Abagusii migration to, and settlement at Kano, is thought to have lasted for four decades, presumably between 1760 and 1800 A.D. They settled by the lake shore from Dunga to Nduru, and spread into the interior along streams. Their furthest settlement inland was at present day Kibigori. They had a thin population and they led a scattered life. A family unit consisted a man, his wife and their children. They had mud earthen huts and very little contact with each other. According to W.R. Ochieng, the Abagusii pattern of settlement was largely influenced by Lake Victoria, and the rivers and streams that flowed into the Gulf of Nyanza while the majority of people crowded along the shores of the Gulf. A substantial number occupied river valleys. For instance they lived in scattered homesteads along rivers Miru and Ombeyi.²⁰ The Abagusii

¹⁷Oral interview with I. Mogire, at Bogeka Village, on 11/11/97.

¹⁸ W.R. Ochieng, *Op. cit.*, p.14.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 44-45.

²⁰*Ibid.* pp. 50-54.

settled down in this area to graze their large herds of cattle, to hunt the large herds of wild animals, and to eat fish that were plenty in this area.

The Abagusii's stay at Kano witnessed a remarked evolution of the community. The period was characterised by expansion and transformation of individual family units into small but distinct clans. There was also the evolution of small groups, which had migrated from Kisumu under recognised leaders, into a number of "corporate" clans which later developed into sub-tribes headed by various clan elders.

During their stay in Kano plains, the Abagusii had a mixed economy. They reared cattle mainly for meat and milk²¹. They grew such crops as finger millet, sorghum, millet and roots. They hunted a large number of animals. Hunting, mainly done by the young energetic men and boys, was mainly for Chingera (Buffaloes), Chingabi (Gazelles), Ebisusu (Rabbits), Chiguto (Anti-bears), Ebirongo (Porcupines), and Chinchogu (Elephants). Most wild animals were hunted for food, some for their skin which was highly valued for making shields, costumes for song and dance and for sale to the neighbouring Luo community. Lions' and Leopards' skins were used for ceremonial purposes. The Abagusii entered into various hunting groups. They celebrated over the spoils of the hunt and distributed them to the beneficiaries immediately after the hunt.²²

Various birds were trapped or killed using sling shots. This was mainly the work of young boys. Birds like Amachore (Weaverbirds), Amaruma (Doves), Chingware (Ducks), and others fell victims of traps.²³ All these supplemented the Abagusii diet. Interviews carried out in the field indicated that the Abagusii women also gathered wild vegetables which included Chinsaga (spider flower), Rinagu (black night shade) and Ototo (East African Spinach).²⁴ However, the kind of food that was hunted and gathered was never enough to satisfy people, it only comprised a small portion of the Abagusii diet.

The Abagusii Community adopted traditions connected with the founders of their community. A totem played an important role in the evolution of the Abagusii. A totem here has been defined as 'a class of material objects which primitive societies regarded with superstitious respect, believing that there exists between individual members of their society an intimate obligatory, and all together special relationship'.²⁵

²¹E.Nyamwaka,Op.Cit.,p.25.

²²Oral interview with P. Nyamatana, Mwaboto, Nyamira, 13/11/97.

²³ S.M. Omwoyo, "The Colonial Transformation of Gusii Agriculture", M.A. thesis, Kenyatta University, 1990, p.33.

²⁴Oral interview with T. Gechemba, Bonyamasicho village on 16/11/97.

²⁵ "Encyclopaedia Britannica", 9th edition, see under Totemism.

A totem may be a feared, emulated or dangerous hunted animal, and edible plant or any staple food. For our purpose, the clan totem, thus, is an object revered by a group of people who believe themselves to be of one blood, descended from one common ancestor, bound together by a common responsibility for each other, and are united by a common faith²⁶. Sometimes the members of a totem group may refer to themselves by the name of their totem, commonly believing themselves to be descended from the totem, and therefore related to it. In such circumstances a man naturally treats the totem with reverent respect, the totem becoming an animal or a plant he will not kill or eat. It is however believed that totem animals could be kept as pets and would be treated with an almost religious respect, being things connected with founder ancestors. In this respect, leading Abagusii families are especially believed to have tamed and kept their totem animals in their homes, a symbol treated with a lot of respect. Disrespect to a totem would lead to a military defeat against the clan of a disrespectful man.²⁷ The connection between a man and his totem is generally regarded as mutually beneficial. The totem protects the man in a number of ways, for example by revealing to him in dreams the fortunes or misfortunes that are imminent. The man, in turn shows respect to the totem in a number of ways, usually by not killing it. Working against this was followed by a penalty. Functionally totems have a unifying role, especially as members of a totem clan would regard each other as kinsmen, and are therefore bound to help and protect each other. A totem is thus ancestral to the clan and also to the individual, especially since it is connected with the “instituted morality, the totem is almost hedged about with taboos of avoidance or strictly ritualised contact.²⁸” In its religious projection a totem constitutes mutual respect and protection between a man and his totem and has consequently been defined as “the mystique of the family projected and extended into larger social forms.”

As a result of increase in population, conflict with their neighbours, the Maasai and the Luo, the Abagusii had to leave Kano plains to the highlands where they are presently. This was just a continuation of their migration. The most probable reasons for their migration were overpopulation, infertility of Kano plains which was caused by overcultivation, lack of security and famine. Justifying why the Abagusii had to migrate from Kano plain, A.A. Onchoke asserts:

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷ W.R. Ochieng, Op. cit. p.57.

²⁸ Encyclopaedia Britannica, Op. cit., see under Totemism.

There was neither food, fruits
nor crops. it was a terrible famine.
The story goes that whoever had his
brother got hold of his hand and started
after their relatives who had gone before.²⁹

According to Abel.Nyakundi Onchoke ,Abagusii's migration from Kano plains by a few clans was mainly caused by external attack from the Luo and tropical diseases such as Malaria. The Abagusii left Kano plains and moved to Gelegele near Sotik From here a small group infiltrated the highlands, but the majority moved to Kilgoris. This kind of division could have been probably caused by internal conflicts between the migrating clans. The clans that had moved to Kilgoris which is in the present day Trans-mara district settled at Ngararo in 1820. From here, after unstable and strained relationship with the Isiria Maasai characterised by cattle raids on both sides, the Abagusii were scattered during the battle of River Migori. They moved into the highlands, while some took refuge under the Kuria, and others among the Luo of Kabwoch near Nyagoe forest. Throughout the rest of the century, when the majority of the Abagusii were already in the highlands, they gradually spread out within the whole territory and were joined by the group that had taken refuge among the Luo in Kabwoch. Between about 1820 and 1850, these groups again re crossed the Gulf separately to most of the present locations where they are found.³⁰

At the beginning of nineteenth century, the Abagusii were either settled or nearly settled in most of their present homeland. The Abagusii had been migrating as clans and over three centuries of migration, clan identity assumed a prominent form. Such clans as Kitutu, Nyaribari, Mogirango, Bassi, Majoge and Wanjale were prominent in Gusiiland.³¹

In the years just preceding colonial rule, Abagusii did not have any centralised political organisation. To a large extent, they derived their values mainly from religious experiences and beliefs. This view is supported by the scholars who have studied the Abagusii society such as P.Mayer³², R.A. Levine³³and W:R. Ochieng. The community was made up of a collection of many political units, based on exogamous patrilineal clans or clan groupings, each of which

²⁹Oral interview with A.N. Onchoke at Kisii town, on 16/5/97

³⁰ Oral interview with J. Moraa , at Rigena market, 23/11/97

³¹S.M. Omwoyo, OP cit. p.27

³²P.Mayer, The lineage principle in Gusii Society (London,1949), pp.20-25,

³³R.A. Levine, Nyansongo: A Gusi community in Kenya. (New York, 1950)

often consisted of a large clan with a number of small clans or sub-clans or families, usually occupying a distinct territory over a ridge or succession of adjacent ridges.

T. Bosibori observes that no one time did the entire Abagusii community fall under one 'tribal' leadership. This means that there was no ethnic authority which: overruled clan authority either in dealings with neighbouring ethnic groups or in the management of internal affairs. The clan then was the most effective political unit.³⁴

The Abagusii clans were aware of having originally a common ancestor, and they were connected by bonds of intermarriage and common beliefs and practices in such a way that they considered themselves as a unit in contrast to the surrounding groups with whom they did not maintain such bonds. The leader of each political unit was locally called Omoruoti or Omogambi, a title equivalent to a chief. This was a man who was accepted publicly and performed religious and political roles. Omogambi was assisted by council of elders, etureti. The etureti met when there was need to solve social, political and religious problems. Omogambi were regarded as living representatives of the original lineage founders and were believed to be men who were divinely sanctioned to lead clans in communal sacrifices. and social activities. They would be the first to cultivate, the first to sow, to taste crops on maturity and the first to harvest³⁵

Besides the Amogambi, there were other notable leaders locally called Abarai. W.R. Ochieng has defined these leaders as persons who were talented or had qualities of leadership, played a directing role, wielded commanding influence, or had a following in any sphere of activity or thought³⁶. They consisted of 'prophets' (for example Sakawa) elders, seers and rainmakers. The Gusii homestead was an internally self-governing unit. Omogaka (the father of the home) was the head of the family. He was assisted by his wife (Omokungu) to look after the children . A family consisted of husband, wife or wives in case of a polygamous family and children Omosacha (the 'husband') of the family had the role of looking for food and other family needs. While Omokungu had a duty of doing domestic work such as cooking and looking after the children. Conflicts, between members of a given home were handled by parents. Those of different homesteads were taken to the elders' council headed by the Omogambi³⁷

Religion was another unifying factor among the Abagusii. They believed in one God called Engoro who was believed to be the Supreme Being. Engoro was the creator of the world.

³⁴Oral interview with T. Bosibori, Nyankononi market, on 10/12/97.

³⁵W.R. Ochieng, Op. cit, p. 196

³⁶Ibid. P. 197.

³⁷ Oral interview with N. Ogeturenki at Bogeke, on 13/12/97.

According to C. Nyabonyi³⁸ Engoro among the Abagusii governed man's destiny, he brought rain to him and gave him all that he desired. W:R. Ochieng' holds the view that Engoro sent to man rain or storm, well being or famine, health or disease, peace or war depending on what he chose to give him³⁹

The Abagusii believed that God's continued operation in the physical world was executed through his agents, the ancestral spirits (ebirecha). These spirits were believed to have great influence on the social and economic lives of the Abagusii. In the event of a calamity or disease, a seer or a diviner (Omoragori) could be consulted on the wishes of the ancestors, who more often than not were believed to be behind the calamity⁴⁰ Sometimes, the Sun stood for Engoro and the two terms were used interchangeably.

In the words of G.A.S North-cote, 'God among the ancient Kisii people seemed to have slid on the scales of meaning between sun and ancestor worship'⁴¹ Individuals had direct access to God throughout the year by means of prayer. The Abagusii offered sacrifices to God which were conducted mainly by the heads of the various homesteads. At harvesting time or the start of a given year there were always thanks giving to God in form of sacrifices which was followed by festivals involving singing, dancing and beer drinking.⁴²

Among the Abagusii, the family was a social arena where all important human events such as birth, initiation, marriage and death took place in the pre-colonial period. These were marked with celebrations, feasting, singing and dancing. The entire Abagusii indigenous education acquired through infancy to marriage stage was put into practice throughout life. It was tested, refined and perfected.

³⁸Oral interview with C. Nyabonyi, at Nyacheki market, on 17/12/97.

³⁹W.R. Ochieng OP. cit, pp 184-185

⁴⁰R.A. Levine, OP.Cit, P.60.

⁴¹KNA/DC/KSI/1/1908.

⁴²Oral interview with J. Kimanga, at Nyamira market on 21/12/97.

CHAPTER THREE
INTERACTION BETWEEN THE ABAGUSII AND NEIGHBORING COMMUNITIES,
1850 AND 1895.

3.0 Introduction

This chapter discusses the early interactions between the A bagusii and their neighbouring communities and how this interactions transformed the way of life of the community and also in adopting military tactics for defensive purposes.

Archival sources as well as oral tradition do indicate that in the Kano plains where the Gusii settled after their long time of migration,they came across a number of other Bantu speakers who inhabited the areaat the foot of Ramogi hills,an area believed to be the original homeland of the Nilotic speaking linguistic group.These communities were already practising economic activities ranging from fishing along the lakeshores,cultivation of crops such as bananas ,millet and cassava.They also raised livestock which provided them with milk,meat and by products for domestic use⁴³.It is belives that the Abagusii and the people they found merged through assimilation.

As the Abagusii settled in in Kano plains,they had a devastating encounter from the warlike luo,led Ramogi Ajwang',a seasoned warior of that time.This encounter led to some bantu communities to move to safer places.Some of the bantu communities living in the region were assimilated by the Luo who were a cattle rearing community.As the Luo moved along the lakeshore,another important expansion involving the Maasai was taking place along along the rift valley,mainly to the East of the Hill.The Maasai fought and displaced the Nandi,a Kalenjin speaking ethnic community and robbed them of their animals.The Nandi are said to have invaded Gusii homesteads and got away with large herds of animals to replace theirs which had been taken by the Maasai.This scenario caused a lot of agony and anguish to the already devastated Gusii.

So around 1770, Gusii elders called a big community meeting to find out what the people felt about a move southwards. They sent scouts to see where they could settle in peace. The best place seemed to be country near Kabianga in Kericho district.

⁴³O,i with

3.1 The years of warfare

The Gusii found Kabianga wet and cold throughout the year. They tried to plant millet and pumpkins in their new gardens, but these crops did not do well there (the area was originally densely covered with rain forest, which has nowadays largely been cleared for tea plantations). And as many of their cattle died at the same time as their crops failed, famine broke out. So many of the Gusii died.

Living alongside the Gusii were Isiria Maasai. The arrival of the Kipsigis, cousins of the Nandi and who are now also part of the Kalenjin, plunged the whole region into military turmoil. One day in a fierce battle the Gusii killed the Maasai war-leader, Ole Kericho (after whom, by one version, Kericho town is named). After that the Gusii and Maasai lived side by side for many years. The Gusii were stronger and better warriors than the Maasai, who used to attack at night for this reason. The Gusii built thick thorn fences and dug deep trenches around their homesteads.

But the real threat lay not with the Maasai but with the Kipsigis, who were similarly attached to cattle and believed, like the Maasai, that all the cattle in the world belonged to them. So they began to raid both the Maasai and the Gusii for cattle; and even the Luo, whom the Kipsigis feared, had to reckon with Kipsigis night raids on their homesteads. The Kipsigis eventually drove the Maasai away from the area (nowadays called Buret), then tried to do the same to the Gusii, who they called 'Kosopek'.

The first encounters initiated were by the Kipsamaek clan of the Kipsigis, and took place near Kabianga. The Gusii defended themselves with arrows, which they fired from a safe distance. But the Kipsigis had very heavy shields made of buffalo hide, which they used to protect themselves against Gusii arrows and spears. Their strategy was to wait until the Gusii had thrown all their arrows and spears and then attack, so the Gusii had to retreat into their homesteads. To protect themselves the Gusii built heavy stone fortifications, called *orwaki*, round their villages. These were guarded on the outside by deep trenches. They had tall, stout walls of stone and mud, on top of which were strewn heavy acacia thorns. The forts were repeatedly stormed by the Kipsigis, but it took several years of raids, ambushes and counter-ambushes before the Gusii were finally forced to migrate southwards beyond the area of present-day Sotik. And even here the Kipsigis did not leave them in peace.

These attacks divided the Gusii once again: one group stayed in the region of Kericho, where they eventually became one with the Kipsigis. But the majority headed south to the present-day Gusii Highlands. They argued that it was easier for them to defend their homes on the high ridges of the highlands than on the rolling tableland of Kericho and Sotik. There, initial years of great hardship in clearing the land to make it suitable for agriculture were followed by better times, which saw the development of a strong economy based on cultivation, which survives to this day.

Another group refused to go to the highlands because of the cold conditions that prevailed. They migrated southwestwards and established themselves along the banks of the Migori River (sometimes spelled Mogori), at a place called Chimanga Chia Miehina, in the Trans Mara triangle. Today this is in Tanzania. Living across the river, in the plains to the south, were the Kwavi Maasai. The Gusii began to fight once again with the Maasai over cattle thefts. William Ochieng' notes⁴⁴ that one day Ngararo, a renowned Gusii warrior, killed the leader of the Maasai, Ole Sekur Sadimo. Sadimo's brother, Omoburogo, decided that he would revenge the murder of his brother. Disguised as a Gusii warrior, he made his way into the homesteads of Ngararo, whom he found eating with his children. Omoburogo stabbed Ngararo in the back and also in the stomach several times. His death-cry is said to have drawn the attention of the entire Gusii settlement, who, on finding Omoburogo still within the fort, 'mercilessly slashed him to pieces'.

The Gusii were very angry; they attacked and burnt the nearby Maasai homesteads, and murdered any Maasai they found inside. The Maasai quickly assembled every available moran (warrior), and together swooped on the Gusii in a solid mass, knocked down the Gusii fortifications, set fire to the huts, rounded up the cattle, and killed everybody who stood in their way, men, women and children. The remaining Gusii, in a panic-stricken frenzy, scattered in headlong flight.

This tragic battle, which once and for all destroyed the corporate identity of the Gusii, is called the Battle of Migori River. It took place in about 1820. The site of Ngararo's stabbing is still a place of animal sacrifice, known as 'the place of Ole Ngararo'.

⁴⁴.W.R.Ochieng'

By the middle of the nineteenth century, the Kipsigis had established themselves as a "force to reckon with". They were steadily encroaching into the Gusii Highlands and raiding cattle from their Luo neighbours.

They burnt houses, killed people, even cut to pieces all old livestock which they could not drive away quickly. The Gusii, who were still reeling from the shock of Battle of Migori, were in no state to offer effective military resistance. But if the Gusii were to survive, something had to be done about the Kipsigis.

The elders agreed that a meeting should be called in which leading elders and warriors from all Gusii sections should be invited. The meeting was chaired by the legendary prophet Sakawa (also called Mugo wa Kibiru), who was later to foretell the coming of the "White Man" (see below). At the meeting, which was held at Manga, the various Gusii representatives agreed to join forces in fighting the Kipsigis.

Between 1889 and 1892, a rinderpest epidemic swept through East Africa decimating herds of cattle. Finding themselves with very few remaining livestock, the Kipsigis decided to organize a huge raiding expedition to Gusii and Luo country. S.C. Langat describes the assembled force:

"Experience of the past encounters, whence the Kipsigis had emerged victorious - gave the Kipsigis a sense of careless ease in their attitude to battle with the Gusii. In expectation of sure victory the Kipsigis prepared a great raid on the Gusii. Young boys were enlisted to drive the cattle home, and women were also enlisted to carry away the captured stores of food. The raiding party was headed by Malabun ara Makiche from Sotik. At Buret, Chesengeny arap Kaborok and his warriors joined the band. At Belgut more warriors joined. Most of the young men were of the Kapkoimet age-set, while the older ones were Sawe"

The Kipsigis march, which started in the afternoon, reached Gusii country at dusk. As they marched they were followed by a large number of vultures - a sure sign of bad luck. Chesengeny tried to convince Malabun to abandon the raid but Malabun would have none of it. In Gusii-land the first phase of the raid (in Mugirango and Kitutu) was successful, and they destroyed many Gusii villages, but then things began to go wrong.

Two leaders of the Kipsigis raiders disagreed, and as a result one party returned home, while the other, led by Malabun Arap Makiche, went on to raid the Luo.

Back in the hills the Gusii were blowing their horns and drumming to summon all their warriors. Knowing that the Kipsigis had crossed to Luo-land the Gusii laid a trap for them. By the early hours of the morning the Gusii warriors were lining the eastern edge of Manga Escarpment in ambush.

At dawn a large "kelele" was heard, it was the Luo chasing the Kipsigis raiders. As the Kipsigis started to ascend the escarpment along the valley of the Charachani River, they fell upon the Gusii at Getwanyi in Kitutu. The Luo arrived at the battleground when the fight had already started. With both the Luo and Gusii at battle, and with the well laid Gusii ambush, the Kipsigis force was practically wiped out. Very few managed to escape. It is said that some of the survivors hid among the corpses of their fellow tribesmen, others jumped into the rivers and hid in the swamps until nightfall. During the nightfall they escaped back to Kipsigis land. So great was the loss of life that the Kipsigis elders ordered the 'premature' initiation of young boys into warriorhood, and encouraged young men to marry early so as to increase the population of the tribe.

The Gusii, who had never before achieved such a victory, were extremely happy, and as each Gusii group left the battlefield they garlanded themselves with flowers and sang this song as they made their way home:

They used to follow us ee sanyera,
But we said do not follow us ee sanyera,
They used to disturb us ee sanyera,
But we said do not disturb us ee sanyera,
They always disturbed our ancestors sanyera,
They have always followed our fathers sanyera,
Oo oo sanyera banto, sanyera.

The indigenous communities interacted in various ways during the pre-colonial periods as result of migrations. The Abagusii interacted with other communities through intermarriages, sports, trade, warfare among other forms of interactions. The Kipsigis and the Abagusii co-operated in solving common problems that affected them. Okemwa noted that the Gusii who exchanged grain for livestock and milk from the Kipsigis and the Maasai. The famine made the Abagusii to turn to *Amakongiro*, wild plants for food and as a milk supplement; hence the name *Nyamakongiro*. *Amakongiro* (singular- *rikongiro*) are a type of drought resistant weed among the Gusii.

During the famine of about 1890-1892 which Abagusii popularly called *Nyamakongiro*, there was an acute shortage of food among both the Gusii and the Kipsigis. This forced us to co-operate with one another in order to survive. The Kipsigis sold some of their children to the Abagusii in exchange for food.

As Ochieng' puts it, during *amakongiro* famine, the Gusii would barter their children, particularly male children whom they integrated into their military sets. Ochieng' however differs on the idea of the Kipsigis bartering their children to the Abagusii. He notes that, the Gusii would have nothing to do with the Kipsigis, whom they regarded as wicked people.⁴⁵

⁴⁵W.R.Ochieng'.Op.Cit.

CHAPTER FOUR
ABAGUSII INTERACTION WITH THE BRITISH AND THEIR NEIGHBOURING
COMMUNITIES DURING THE COLONIAL PERIOD, 1904- 1963.

4.1 European Invasion In Gusiland

The coming of the Europeans in Kenya had been predicted by the prophets of various Kenyan communities and therefore, their coming was not a surprise. Among the Kikuyu for instance, prophet Chege wa Kibiru had prepared his people to expect 'white strangers who look like butterflies'. He said that these strangers would take the land of the Kikuyu, but warned the Kikuyu not to fight with these white people, 'for if you do so they will kill you with their fire', meaning their guns. In Luo country the prophets, orjobilo, had issued a warning that 'some white people are coming but they must not be fought. If you oppose them they will kill you with their sticks which vomit fire'. The arrival of the Europeans and 'a long snake' (the Mombasa-Kampala railway, which brought with it colonialism) were prophesied by a Kamba sage and chief called Masaku, and the Embu medicine man Mwenda Mwea similarly saw 'a black snake coming', as well as 'a bird with a metal beak flying this way,' and 'all our cattle gone. Plundered from us by red people.'

Although no European traveller, trader or missionary had visited Gusii country in the nineteenth century, the Abagusii, like the other African groups, had known through their prophet that some white people would come to their country. Sakawa used to collect his followers at the site of present-day Kisii town and tell them where the future police lines, the hospital, the offices and churches would be built. He lit fires in a long line in order to show where electric poles and lights would follow. He also prophesied that the Gusii warriors would be disarmed by the white strangers if they showed resistance, 'but these white people', he said, 'will stay and later leave for their country, leaving us to rule ourselves as we have always done in the past'.

All these prophecies came true. Sakawa, who was born around 1840, disappeared mysteriously in 1902. It is believed that he died on one late November night, but when people came the following morning to bury his body they did not find it. Some people believe that he ascended into the skies and that he will come back one day. Indeed in 1921 many of the Gusii were expecting his return. Whatever had happened to his body, it is known that two years after Sakawa died, the British arrived in Gusii-land. The Gusii had forgotten that Sakawa had warned

them not to oppose the white men, and when the Gusii warriors took their spears to defend their independence many were killed by the British who were fighting with guns. Together with the Giriama, the Taita, the Kamba, the Kikuyu, the Nandi and the Elgeyo, they were on the receiving end of murderous 'patrols' which many times ruthlessly killed men and women and exterminated their stock. By 1907 the Gusii had been brought under British rule, although resistance continued in the form of the 'Gusii Revolts' until 1914.⁴⁶

The Gusii ,after being incorporated in the umbrella of the British, development was embraced. Under the European rule, the Abugusii became labourers, housemaids and they were also assigned petty blue collar jobs that needed only elementary education. The settlement of the Europeans thus triggered the growth of Kisii town, because of the love they had for it, because it resembled Mt. Kenya Highlands and thus permanent settlement and used it as a place to administer The Gusii.

The presence of Colonial administration altered the foundations and relations between the Abugusii and their neighbouring communities. The British occupied fertile lands and pushed the Abugusii into areas where they came into direct contact with other ethnic communities. This created some elements of the ethnic tensions . The colonial Administrative divisions such as provinces and district were formed without regard for the wishes of Kenyan communities. It made Kenyan communities to struggle for scarce resources and further perpetuated conflicts. The missionaries and mission agencies such as the Roman Catholic Church, the Seventh Adventist Church and the Friends Mission introduced Christian cultures and taught the Gusii to love their neighbours. These teachings helped to reduce tension between the Abugusii and their neighbouring communities especially among the early convert. The Abugusii traditionalists, who did not embrace Christianity, continued to engage in conflict with their neighbouring communities to perpetuate ethnic interests. This scenario contributed to the centrality of ethnicity in the region.

The coming of the British into Gusiiland coincided with the period when there was famine and diseases in Gusiiland. There were also large flocks of birds such as vultures, cranes, hawks and weaver birds which destroyed most of the Abugusii crops on their land thus leading to famine. These impending problems were associated with the coming of the

⁴⁶ Brooks, C. AV (1970)., "The Conquest of the Abugusii 1900- 1914". B.A. Dissertation, University of Nairobi,.

Europeans. The Abagusii had to cooperate with their neighbouring in order to get food and other resources that they needed. In 1907, the British decided on effective occupation of Gusiiland. The British sent the District Officer G.S. Northcote to Kisii where he established an administrative centre. Northcote chose Getembe as the new administrative centre, naming it "Kisii Boma" .

From April 1907 Northcote remained in charge of Gusiiland as an Assistant District Commissioner. He spent the remaining part of the year in constructing the necessary government buildings at the station site and in laying the foundation of British administration among the 'hostile' Abagusii. He had to select the chiefs and headmen for the various administrative locations. Northcote found it extremely difficult to decide on who among the clan elders of the sub-tribal units should be made chief. Gusi tradition has it that the elders from each sub-tribe met and proposed names of the people they wished to lead them. Results indicated that Oyugi was appointed the chief of Wanjare, Angwenyi

Chief of Kitutu, Chore of Bassi, Nyamosi of Majoge, Ndubi of North Mugirango and Sotik, Nyamwamu of Nyaribari and °ketch the chief of South Mugirango. Ombati became the chief of Mokerero. By the end of 1907 a start had been made to administer Gusiiland. With the appointment of chiefs and headmen, the collection of hut taxes started. Some Abagusii had begun to bring civil and criminal cases before the Assistant District Commissioner for settlement .

Despite these advances, however many of the Abagusii people remained hostile to the British administration and refused to accept it. This further diverted their attention from interacting with their neighbours and focused more on dealing with the white settlement into their land. Northcote had, for example, great difficulty even in making contact with any prominent individual in several parts of Kitutu the nearest subtribe to the administrative office. On 12th January 1908, Northcote, the sole European in the area, which was one of the least known parts of the protectorate, decided to make extensive tours of the Gusi territory, accompanied by only a handful of policemen. A man from Bogeka clan called Otenyo successfully ambushed and speared Northcote. Unfortunately for Otenyo and Abagusii, Northcote did not die as assumed by some after the incident. The Abagusii who assumed Northcote dead composed a song and sang with great joy to mark the major achievement in their history whereby their hero, Otenyo had speared a white man.

When the Abagusii realised that Northcote was still alive after being speared by Otenyo, they were very much disappointed. Six days later Downing Street, London had received a cable from Governor Sandler informing them of the incident. In Kenya the news of the "revolt" had reached

John Ainsworth, the Nyanza Provincial Commissioner at Kisumu, on 14th January 1908. He immediately dispatched Dr. H.S. Beerderker to Kisii under escort to attend to Northcote. A Company of the 3rd K.A.R based at Kabianga had to be sent to Kisii immediately. Ainsworth also ordered W.R. Foran the head of the police detachment at Kisumu, to hurry to Kisii with all the available police. In total a column of fifty-four African police and 150 porters - all under W.R. Foran's command left Kisumu for Kisii. On the 15th January 1908, Foran's column arrived in the troubled district where several attacks by the Abagusii were "repulsed and casualties inflicted". They found that Northcote's wound was not serious though he was suffering much pain. To punish the Abagusii for this unbecoming behaviour the British reacted under Lieutenant Colonel J.

Mackay, through a force which consisted of 14 British Officers, 327 NCO, a doctor, 50 Nandi levies and some 500 porters¹⁹³. The British appeared determined to teach the Gusii a memorable lesson. As they marched towards Kisii boma they burnt huts, destroyed crops, killed anyone who tried to stop them, and captured any cattle they came across. In assessing the effect of the attack Maxon writes:

Taken almost completely by surprise, the Abagusii suffered heavily from this day's operation. Large numbers of stock were captured by the force, many houses and cattle bomas burned and some 20 men according to the British estimates, killed.

The punitive operations lasted from January 15th to February 13th, 1908, when the K.A.R and the Kenya Police were withdrawn. During the whole offensive the Abagusii faced their predicament with outstanding intelligence and courage. Although they attempted to defend, individually, their houses and herds, the Abagusii did not organize defensive action against the invading forces. Their cattle were seized and their huts and granaries were burnt down.

When the invading forces were finally withdrawn, the police wing was entrusted with the task of escorting to Kibos the captured stock - some 5,636 heads of cattle, and 3,281 sheep and goats. It was estimated that about 160 Abagusii had been killed during the operations, and many more were wounded¹⁹⁵. Indeed the massacre of the defenceless

Abagusii men and women were outrageous. Even the Kitutu; who remained indifferent to the British were molested and butchered. Even the very victim of "native treachery" G.A.S Northcote, was very upset by the "inhuman behaviour of the punitive forces." He wrote:

It would take too long to describe the absolute idiocy, obstinacy and want of military operations in this country which they showed.

When W. Churchill received some information of this "merciless expedition", his outburst was:

I do not like the tone of these reports.

No doubt the clans should be punished

but 160 have now been killed outright

Without any further casualties

encountered it looks like

a butchery, and if the House of

Commons gets hold of it, all our Plan in East Africa Protectorate will be under cloud. Surely it cannot be necessary to keep on killing defenceless people on such an enormous scale.

As far as the Abagusii were concerned this was definitely a butchery as many people died at a thing which had never happened before in their history. Most of the Abagusii praised Otenyo for making an attempt to kill Northcote so as to defend the community from falling into the hands of the 'foreigners'. Although Northcote never died, Otenyo's action brought a lot of glory and honour in Gusiiland. According to the Otenyo's action brought a lot of glory and honour in Gusiiland. According to the Abagusii tradition, Moraa, a foster mother to Otenyo, and a prophetess, decided to use Otenyo to accomplish her desire against the British who despised her prophecy. It was no wonder that in the morning of 126 January 1908, Moraa gave Otenyo beer and medicine to protect him against the bullets⁴⁷. When Northcote appeared in the neighbourhood, Otenyo ambushed and speared him. He was tried in Kisii court for his action, and later in Nairobi where it is believed that he was shot. The prophetess was brought to the boma, now the Kisii headquarters for interrogation. Due to her advanced age, she was severely reprimanded and set free. But the Abagusii interpreted this release as a betrayal of her foster-son, the leader of the anti-British movement; they felt that Moraa became a collaborator. Accordingly, they composed a song in which they condemned Moraa's disloyalty to their course.⁴⁸

The Abagusii's second defeat made them learn a lesson of an armed resistance against superior weapons. But the British never trusted the acquiescence. They stationed a full company of soldiers in Gusiiland until September 1908. Immediately he recovered, Northcote proceeded with the establishment of the British administration in the district.

⁴⁷W.R. Ochieng, Op. cit., p. 236.

⁴⁸W.R. Ochieng, Op. cit., p. 240.

Chiefs were provided with armed retainers and ordered to begin collecting taxes. Courts were established for peaceful settlement of disputes. Every branch of administration was firmly laid. Gusi territory was rapidly transformed from its former fragmented nature to a set of chiefdoms with specialised political rallies operating within a system of colonial administration, the district was thoroughly explored, a network of roads planned and some built. Dispensaries and offices were erected

4.2 Abagusii's reaction to the British settlement in Gusiiland

Abagusii reaction to the British settlement in Gusiiland was mixed feelings, that is, collaboration and indifference. The favourable possibilities of allying with the British appear to have been recognised by weaker Abagusii sub-tribes. Ombati of the "bufferstate" of Mukesero lost no time in appealing to the British for assistance against their powerful neighbours, the Kitutu. Nyamosi of Majoge, whose country had been torn by civil strife since 1902, visited Karungu in 1904, with overtures of friendships. The larger Abagusii sub-tribes like Kitutu and Nyaribari remained indifferent. Although no European traveller or trader had visited the Gusiiland by about 1820 to 1860, the Abagusii, like other African groups, had known through their diviners, that "strangers with red skins" would visit their country. Among the Kikuyu Cege wa Kibiru had prepared his people to expect "white strangers to look like butterflies. The strangers will take your land" he warned, "do not fight them, for if you do, they will annihilate you with their sticks." In Luoland the diviner (Jobilo) had issued injunctions that nobody should show any "hostilities to the invaders lest they incur the wrath of the ancestors".

Like the Kikuyu of Kabete and the Luo of Central Nyanza, the Abagusii also had their prominent diviners. Names of Abagusii prophets like Sakawa of Nyakoe, Moraa of Bogeka and Bonareri wife of Owura, ranked high in the Abagusii traditions. Sakawa for example had foretold the advent of "white strangers" and like the Kikuyu and Luo Diviners, he had advised strongly against any hostilities against the "white strangers." He prophesied that there were to be police lines, hospitals, offices and churches in Gusiiland.

Sakawa's prophecy also revealed that the Abagusii warriors were to be disarmed by the "white strangers" if they showed any resistance. All these prophecies are believed to have come true. Judging from Sakawa's popularity and advice the Abagusii were to receive the British in their land in the same way as many of the Luo sub-tribes in Central Nyanza had done²⁰². It was unfortunate however, that violent entry by the British was destined to destroy the ground, which Sakawa had unwittingly prepared for them.

At the time the British entered into South Nyanza, they had largely abandoned their so called "peaceful policy of gradually bringing the natives" under their control "without using absolute force at once" and had come to rely increasingly on punitive measures as appropriate methods of bringing peace. It was this "sword and fire" policy which the British used to control the Abagusii when the latter strongly opposed the entry of the British into their land. For example S.S. Bagge, the Sub-Commissioner for Kisumu Province, dispatched a punitive expedition to Gusliland towards the end of 1904. On receipt of the news that some Kavirondo tribesman who supported the British policy had been murdered by the Abagusii. This expedition was characterised by wanton burning of huts, seizure of livestock and senseless massacre of the Abagusii.⁴⁹ This automatically poisoned the relationship between the Abagusii and the British administration throughout the colonial era²⁰³. P.M. Gordon asserts that even after the Abagusii had been warned several times that they were a subject people and that they should stop molesting other subject people, they did not stop conducting "daring cattle raids" deep into Luo, Maasai and Kipsigis territories. If the British Protection of these groups was not to be a mockery, these predations had to be stopped⁵⁰.

W.R. Foran noted:

The attempts by South Mugirango People of the Abagusii to enquire about the intentions of "ed strangers" were answered with bullets, indiscriminate shooting, the burning of huts and granaries, and the seizure of cattle. When one Nyaruba of South Mugirango protested when policemen seized his fat bull he was shot dead on the spot and many others also suffered the same fate.

Official estimate, which according to Gusii tradition would appear conservative, put the number of the Abagusii who were killed at 100 and 3000 heads of cattle captured. For the operation the platoon under Captain Jenkins was issued with a bar (Kisii, 1904) in recognition of the fact that they had dealt successfully with revolt of the Kisii in Kisumu Province.⁵¹

This kind of shooting was extended into Wanjare territory. When the Wanjare warriors realised that the British were out to finish them, they immediately organised a make-shift opposition

⁴⁹B.A. Ogot, 'British administration in Central Nyanza District of Kenya', *Journal of African History*, Vol. No. 2. 1963.

⁵⁰₂₀P.N. Gordon, *Op cit.*

⁵¹W.R Foran, *The Kenya Police 1887 - 1960*, (London, 1962), P.26.

against the insolent invaders who had unjustly meted brutal treatment to the Mugirango people, when they advanced on their camp, the British troops opened fire on them killing hundreds.

At this point, it should be realised that not all the Abagusii were against the establishment of the British rule in Gusiiland. Some of the Abagusii had associated the coming of the British in Gusiiland with fortune and development so they were not opposed to the British rule as such. For example Ombati mentioned above was friendly to the British that he had to tell them more "secrets" of the Abagusii. Ombati's interview with S.S. Bagge at Kisumu for instance provided the British with just the pretext they had been looking for. For some time, the administration had cast a covetous eye on the land of Sotik and the related Abagusii people as "an area of excellent land-which should be opened up to settlers. In fact Governor Stewart had addressed a letter to the foreign office in which he stated that it was important that the Gusiiland should be opened up since it was 'well adapted to European settlement'. He however noted with regret that while some of the Abagusii were friendly and wanted the administration to establish "a

Government Post in their country, a large portion of the tribe was 'inimical' and would most likely give trouble"⁵². It was against this background that Mumboism gained a lot of popularity and foothold in Gusiiland. In the context of its spread and in the light of its manifestation among the Abagusii, Mumboism was an anti-European and therefore an anti-colonial movement. It was a radical movement with far reaching political ramifications. Onyango Dunde started it in Alego in 1913. Mumboism clearly rejected anything to do with Christianity, missionaries and European traders. The colonial administration often referred to it as 'a perverted form of Christianity' (or a type of bastardised religion) and a wholesale vicious movement surrounded by superstition, ill will and mysterious "dawa" (medicine).⁵³

In September 1914, the British evacuated Kisii town on the approach of a German force. At the outbreak of the First World War, the Abagusii were completely convinced that Mosi would Auma, the cults' high priest in South Nyanza was a true prophet and that the European regime was over. Nyanchwa, Nyabururu and Asumbi missions, trading centres of Riana and Rangwe and many government offices were plundered, sacked and burnt down. As soon as the battle between the British and the Germans over Kisii town was over and Germans had been chased back to Tanzania, it was decided that some action had to be taken against the Abagusii and the Luo for the looting of missions and trading

⁵²G. H. Mungearn, *British Rule in Kenya*, (Oxford, 1996) p. 30.

⁵³W.R. Ochieng, *A History of Kenya*, Op.Cit. PP. 96-97.

centres.

The Abagusii continued to have mixed resistance and collaboration to the British in the period of 1914 and after. In 1927 when the chief of Nyaribari died, the British placed the area under the control of chief Nzugu of neighbouring Kitutu, amalgamating two locations. A few people in Nyaribari were happy with the change. Protest in various forms followed and in response the chief native commissioner held a baraza (public meeting) in Nyaribari where he emphasised that the union would stand⁵⁴. But Nyaribari opposition continued and by the end of 1929 the district commissioner was forced to admit that the majority of the inhabitants still refused to recognise the new administrative boundaries⁵⁵. In 1930, the chieftainship was re-established with Nyaribari as a separate political division. By this period the British authorities had revised the judicial structure operating among the Abagusii. A central court had been established for all civil cases.

The Abagusii opposition of these colonial policies was continuous and strong culminating . Until 1961, the Abagusii were administered with the South Nyanza Luo in what was until 1948 called South Kavirondo when it became South Nyanza in 1961. It was divided into two creating a separate Kisii District. In a petition to the governor of Kenya to return the system of location tribunals . In response to this, colonial officials abolished the central tribunal and reconstructed the local courts, and this remained in effect even after the Second World War.

4.3 Abagusii Interaction with their neighbouring communities during the colonial period

The Abagusii continued to interact with their neighbouring communities by both peaceful co-existence and conflicts. They traded with each other, they intermarried with each other and also fought against the European invasion into their lands. In most cases, they were in conflict over competition for scarce resources whenever they came into contact with each other. The effective occupation of the British in Gusiiland, the Abagusii ended up in a geographical location unique among Bantu groups and also surrounded by sporadically hostile Nilotic communities like the Luo, Kipsigis, Nandi and Maasai

⁵⁴Nyanza Provincial Diary (19th June 1927).

⁵⁵₂₀₉South Kavirondo District Annual Report (here after SKDAR)

CHAPTER FIVE

INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the relation between the Abagusii and their neighbouring communities in post independent Kenya, 1963-2007.

5.1 The Abagusii status in the Early Years of Independence

According to, the dawn of independence witnessed African leaders ascended to power immediately after decolonization. These administrators were guided by the constitution that was prepared by the colonial masters. This was enforced by untrained persons and soldiers of colonial mentality. Kenya inherited problems such as poverty, ignorance and disease from colonial masters. Inadequate national resources, poor infrastructural facilities, inadequate human resource capacity, shortage of capital, lack of education and health facilities and bad governance. The scramble for the scarce national resources and facilities intensified and ethnicity became the main vehicle through which the dominance and preservation of power as well as resources could be achieved. The ruling elites in post-colonial Kenya have often relied heavily on ethnicity to remain in leadership positions or settle a dispute with their perceived enemies.

Abagusii and their neighbouring communities were always in conflicts due to the scarce resources that were passed to Kenya by the British colonialists. Differential distribution of scarce resources traced back from the colonial period perpetuated this scenario. Demarcation of land and the introduction of settlement schemes drew the Abagusii nearer to their surrounding communities. The peaceful co-existence witnessed in the pre-colonial and colonial period was weakened.

It should be noted that, the Abagusii and their neighboring communities sometimes co-existed more especially during trade contacts in the border markets.

The two communities also engaged in trade especially at Kamukunji, Ndanai, Ole Miriri and Centre markets. Kipruto (O.I, 2014) noted that, During the Kenyatta and Moi times, we co-existed with the Abagusii irrespective of some instances of animosity between us. From long time ago even before independence, we used to sell our items and even cattle to them in exchange for food during periods of famine more especially maize, beans and finger millet. We used to trade (we still trade) with them at Kamukunji, Centre, Ndanai and Ole Miriri markets. Our women went (and still go) with donkeys to Gusiiland to buy the cereals from house to house. Although sometimes they feared coming to Ndanai when there was tension between us or when we had initiated our boys.

Momanyi (O.I,2014) also supported this assertion by observing that, In most instances there was co-existence between the Gusii and Kipsigis. We took our milk to KCC for weighing in Kipsigisland at a place called Centre. This was 46

This assertion has been supported by Omwoyo's (2000) work which noted that, items such as pots, arrows, spears, pangas and swords were acquired from the Gusii in exchange for beads and other ornaments. Much of this barter trade took place in peace time. The Kipsigis land appears to have experienced periods of epidemics, drought and famine in the second half of the 19th century. In such situations, the Kipsigis people went to the Gusii for food. Such food was either purchased in exchange with livestock or other trade items. These assertions therefore indicate that, the two communities engaged in trading activities even from the pre-colonial period. Even though they co-existed peacefully in such an economic activity, it did not mean that they could not disagree on some issues. As illustrated, the trading activities were restricted to peaceful times as they could not engage in the same when there was fear and tension which is common in every society.

In farming activities, the two communities interacted cordially and peacefully. The fact that the Kipsigis economy is skewed towards livestock keeping, most of their land was uncultivated as it was left for grazing livestock. Due to the reducing livestock population, some of the Kipsigis started cultivating the land for food production while others leased it out to their neighbours- the Gusii. The Gusii sought for land to lease because of their growing population which rendered the available land inadequate. However, the Gusii could not purchase the land from the Kipsigis across the border for fear of losing it during 47 times of manifest conflicts. The idea of land leasing became more prevalent after 1990s due to decline of livestock among the Kipsigis. Due to the occasional conflicts between the two communities, it forced some Gusii to lease and even buy land among the Maasai in Trans-Mara (Ng'eny O.I, 2014).As Nyamweno (O.I, 2014) argued, Sometimes, the Kipsigis women came to work on Gusii farms especially in weeding of finger millet and maize in exchange for food. This was mostly the grains. The Kipsigis men who owned tractors were also hired to till land for theGusii at fair prices than their Gusii counterparts. This co-operation between the two communities can be said to be of a symbiotic nature as both of them benefited for survival. This is because the farm produce from the land cultivated by the Gusii more especially the grains benefitted both communities. As illustrated earlier, the Kipsigis could get these grains through trade or by providing labour on Gusii farms in exchange for the grains.

The Abagusii and Kipsigis also interacted with each other in intermarriages. In the pre-colonial period, there were very few cases of intermarriages between the two communities. However with time, it became a common practice between them. Actually, according to Mwanzi (1977), the Kipsigis of Sotik are Kalenjinised Gusii partly through intermarriages. Some respondents who had married from their neighbouring community said that, the intermarriages had worked in favour of them. This was so because, in events of manifest conflicts between the two communities, their homesteads were spared as they belonged to both communities. This means that the intermarriages between the Abagusii and Kipsigis promoted more peace than conflict between them; hence, the need to be encouraged. This could be so because, they were founded on love as people were not coerced to marry each other. The children who were born to these couples could identify themselves with both communities and this could enable them to be agents of peace in their families.

In the post-independent Kenya as noted by Ombuki (O.I, 2015), the two communities also interacted in religious activities. This was the case of the Seventh Day Adventist Church (SDA) which was a Gusii- dominated denomination. It established some Sabbath schools in Kipsigisland and a church along the border at Kamukunji after Ng'eny donated land for the same. Other than religious activities, the two communities had merry-go rounds (chamas) especially among the small-scale business women. These brought the women from the two communities together as they visited each other in addition to the saving contributions they made.

From the foregoing discussions, it can be noted that, the Abagusii and Kipsigis have never been at peace with one another. They have however tried to co-exist in times of decreased animosity or threats. This historical background gives us a better understanding of the relations between the Kipsigis and Abagusii from the pre-colonial period to the post- independence period. From the study, many factors were identified to be behind these conflicts and the researcher categorized them into two. The remaining part of this chapter handles some of the political factors that contributed to the conflicts between

There was also cultural exchange between the Abagusii and other communities. First Luo borrowed various words from the Abagusii like the Kisii refer to maize as 'ebituma' while they call it 'oduma'. The Abagusii borrowed the term 'oboruoti' which means kingship from the Luo who refer to 'Ruoth' which means leadership

Names were also borrowed like names like ‘Ochiengi’ among the Kisii was borrowed from the Luo word ‘Ochiengi’. Also the name ‘Ondieki’ among the Abagusii was borrowed from the Luo name ‘Ondiek’.⁵⁶

The Abagusii also borrowed from the Kalenjin the term they use to refer to a cooking stick. The Kisii call it ‘omogango’ while the Kalenjin refer to it as, ‘Gango’.

The Abagusii also learnt growing sweet potatoes from the Luo, they also learnt the growing of sorghum from the Luo. The Abagusii also borrowed the skill of fishing from the Luo while the Luo learnt the art of iron working from the Abagusii.⁵⁷

The Kisii also learnt the art of making decorating and using calabashes as drinking vessels from the Luos’, they also borrowed the art of making pots, ropes from the Luos. The Kisii community also Borrowed the art of making protective marks on the body from the Abakuria.

The Abagusii also learnt the skill of making ropes and making of drums from the Kamba community the calling of God Nyasaye among the Abagusii was borrowed from the Luo. They also learnt how to cultivate sweet bananas from the Abaluyhia community

5.2 Negative Interactions between the Abagusii and the Kenyan Indigenous Communities

5.2.1 Introduction

As much as these communities interacted peacefully there were cases in which these communities got into conflicts for some reasons like sometimes they fought over grazing land, pasture, land etc. These communities sometimes engaged in warfare, raiding and hostile attacks against each other.

5.2.2 Warfare

In pre-colonial Kenya, the tools that were produced by the Abagusii contributed to warfare in pre-colonial Kenya.⁵⁸ The tools made included spears, swords, pangas, shields any many others. These tools were used by warring communities in pre-colonial period in a situation where conflicts arose. These conflicts included fight for grazing grounds, conflicts on territory borders,

⁵⁶ Ochieng W.R op cit

⁵⁷ O.I with Daniel Odhiambo at Ahero Market on 20/09/2014

⁵⁸ Ochieng W.R op cit

scarce resources etc. The Abagusii and the Kipsigis were involved in warfare during the pre-colonial period.

5.2.3 Raiding

Raiding was another negative interaction among the Kenyan communities. Since most communities were pastoralists during the pre-colonial period, most communities would raid other communities to acquire more cattle from them. These raids were usually planned by warriors of the particular community that wanted to raid.

These raids could be carried out unexpectedly and at very late hours of the night when people were deep asleep. The animals that were raided were cattle, goats, sheep. If the community that was raided could wake up to resist during the raid, some of them could end up being killed during the raids. These took place especially between two warring communities' effects of the interactions among the indigenous Kenyan communities.

Similarly, another effect of the interactions was displacement. During warfare, some communities were displaced from their original homelands. Displacement of communities also took place during migrations and even raidings.

Negative interactions among also caused a level of anxiety and misery among the people of Kenya during the pre-colonial period. Both warring and non-warring communities were always looking over their shoulders as they did not know when another community could attack.

Misery came as a result of the property that was destroyed during warfare and also the livestock stolen during raiding. Lives that were lost during war also caused misery among the affected communities.

5.3 Historical Ramifications of Interaction between Abagusii and their Neighbouring communities in Post-colonial Kenya

5.3.1 Displacement of some communities

Similarly, another effect of the interactions was displacement. During warfare, some communities were displaced from their original homelands. Displacement of communities also took place during migrations and even raidings.

In the post-colonial Kenya days most Kenyan indigenous communities were hybrid and had pure blood running in their veins .After these communities met and interacted through various ways like intermarriages trade and many others, this ended up bringing up of communities that were mixed in nature. Prolonged interactions among these communities actually led to assimilation of some communities by others leading to formation of new mixed communities in the pre-colonial period.⁵⁹

Negative interactions among also caused a level of anxiety and misery among the people of Kenya during the post colonial period both the Abagusii, warring and non-warring communities were always looking over their shoulders as they did not know when another community could attack.Misery came as a result the property that was destroyed during warfare and also the livestock stolen during raiding. Lives that were lost during war also caused misery among the affected communities.

Famine was a negative outcome from the animosity between the Abagusii and their neighbouring communities. This came about from the negative interactions especially warfare .It is evident that prolonged warfare among the Kenyan communities led to famine as most of the communities especially the Abagusii abandoned farming to engage in warfare. This led to lack of food for subsistence usage .In extreme cases this famine led to numerous death of people and also animals especially during 2007 post election violence.

During raiding, some communities went to the extremes of destroying other communities' property. Burning of houses was a common way of destroying property in the olden times and this was experienced by mostly warring communities who had conflicts with one another like struggle for grazing land and many others.⁶⁰The Abagusii,especially suffered this fate especially during the 2007 post election vilolence along the Kisii-Kiligolis and the Borabu sotik borders.

Hostility developed between the Abagusii and their neighbouring communities during the post colonial era colonial period in Kenya, this came about as a result of neocolonialism and political tension. Up to date this hostility is still experienced up between the Abagusii ,the Luo and the Kipsigis communities⁶¹

⁵⁹ O.I with Petro Ndegerege at Nyeri Town on 21/09/2014

⁶⁰ O.I with Eunice Chemtai at Tongareni Scheme on 21/09/2014

⁶¹ Langat S.S op cit

CHAPTER SIX

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the summary of the study findings, conclusions, recommendations and suggestions for further studies.

6.2 Summary of the Study

The purpose of the study was to establish the history of the interaction between the Abagusii and the neighbouring Kenyan indigenous communities and the outcome of their interaction from the early beginning to 2007.

This study is an incisive historical study of the socio-cultural interactions between the Abagusii of the western Kenya and the other neighbouring indigenous Kenyan communities.

From this study, it was realized that there is enough evident information that shows and proves that there was indeed interaction between the Kenyan indigenous communities that can be called upon in the study of African History with no written historical records.

It is evident that during the pre-colonial period, the indigenous communities interacted in different ways like throughout that period. The study in its quest to investigate how the Abagusii interacted socially and culturally with other Kenyan communities adopted the activity theory, multiculturalism theory and assimilation theories.

These theories assisted the researcher in the conclusion that there was indeed social cultural interaction between the Abagusii and the indigenous communities, As Tyler states, these communities interacted through trade, commerce, warfare, absorption and even migrations.

It was found out that these interactions reflect the changes that took place in the many spheres of life among the Abagusii. It was also found out that these interactions between these communities led to absorption of some communities and formation of some communities apart from the hybrid ones, assimilation of some communities by other communities and other communities were also displaced.

6.3 Conclusions

Based on the results of the research, the researcher arrived at the following conclusions: first, there were social cultural interactions between the Abagusii and other communities, Secondly these interactions included the communities interacting through trade, intermarriages, migrations and warfare.

Thirdly, these interactions were not only conflicts but they were also peaceful interactions. It was found out that it was rare to have a conflict interaction among these communities. Fourth these interactions had effects and outcomes on the various communities including the Abagusii community during the pre-colonial period.

It is evident there were positive interactions between the Abagusii and other communities like the Luo, Abakuria the Kamba and even the Luhya. These interactions led to peaceful co-existence between the indigenous Kenyan communities during the pre-colonial period. These positive interactions included cultural exchange, trade and intermarriages. It is indeed evident that there were negative interactions between the Kenyan indigenous communities though they were very rare.

6.4 Recommendations and Suggestions for Further Studies

In order to find out whether there was interaction between other communities in Kenya during the pre-colonial period. Similar studies should be conducted in other communities. Further researches should also be carried out on the various ways in which the indigenous communities interacted.

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b) Primary sources

i) Archival Sources

The following is a list of Kenya National Archives’ files available at the Kenya National Archives’ in Nairobi. They provide vital information of the life of the Abagusii during the colonial period. They form a source of Archieval materials at the understanding of the traditional life of the Abagusii. Before independence, Gusiiland was part of the South Kavirondo District in which the report comes from.

- KNA/DC/KSI/1/1 South Kavirondo District annual Reports, 1908-1912
- KNA/DC/KSI/1/2 South Kavirondo District annual Reports, 1913-1923
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ii) Field interviews

The following information provides the list of informants who were interviewed during

the field research. The information tabulated in terms of name, age, sex, Dates of Interview and nature type of information covered by each informant.

Name of Interviewee	Age	Sex	Date	Major area Covered
Nyamari Chrysantus	76	M	15/8/2014	Interactions
Yohana Mutua	53	M	16/8/2014	Interactions

Petro Ndegerege	50	M	16/8/2014	Cultural exchange
Ogaro Ogaro	70	M	16/8/2014	Interactions
Daniel Odhiambo	40	M	16/8/2014	Cultural Exchange
Lucia Gachocho	65	F	16/8/2014	Interactions
Charles Hassavana	67	M	17/8/2014	Migration
Hezekiah Monda	64	M	17/8/2014	Settlement
Franviscah Kemunto	49	F	17/8/2004	Customs
Zablon Monda	63	M	17/8/2004	Marriage
Wafula Wanyama	54	M	17/8/2004	Interactions
Kimtai Yegon	62	M	17/8/2014	Migration
Nicholas matoke	78	M	17/8/2004	Circumcision
Richard Obindi	41	M	18/8/2004	Customs
Paul Mbaka	70	M	18/8/2004	Absorption
Ben Angwenyi	68	M	20/8/2004	Culture
Denis Oira	53	M	21/8/2004	Creative Arts
Mary Ratemo	83	F	23/8/2004	Assimilation
Sabina Ogake	60	F	26/8/2004	rites
Kimtai Yegon	40	M	29/8/2004	pre-colonial period
Eunice Chemtai	60	F	30/8/2014	warfare
Clemensia Moturi	58	M	3/8/2004	trade

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 : LETTER OF INTRODUCTION

Sharon B. Nyagosia,
Kisii University,

P.O Box 408,

Kisii.

Dear sir/Madam,

REF: Study of the history of the interaction and Social cultural relations between the Abagusii and the neighbouring indigenous communities in the pre-colonial period

I am a post graduate student pursuing a Masters Degree in History at Kisii University .My area of study is stated above.

I hereby kindly request you to fill this questionnaire which will enable the researcher to obtain information for the research.

The information offered will be treated with utmost confidentiality and will not be disclosed. The information will only be used as pertaining this study and not otherwise.

Your assistance and cooperation will be greatly appreciated

Yours Faithfully,

Sharon B. Nyagosia.

Signature.....

APPENDIX II: QUESTIONNAIRE FOR THE ELDERS

Answer all questions where necessary your answers will be treated confidentially and with respect.

1. How old are you? Tick appropriately .Between 50 – 70 years
Above 70 years
2. How many races are there in Kisii?
3. What has triggered the coming of immigrants to Kisii?
4. How can we improve in developing of kisii town?
5. Which economic factors does kisii rely on for it to urbanize?
6. Is Kisii facing any challenges in its development?

EARLY HISTORY OF THE ABAGUSII

7. Who were the original inhabitants of present day Gusiiland?
8. From your knowledge of the Abagusii's past comment on the origin, migration and the settlement of the present day Gusiiland.
9. How did the Abagusii people relate socially, politically and economically with the following communities?
 - (I) The Luo
 - (ii) The Nandi
 - (iii) The Maasai
 - (iv) The Kipsigis
 - (v) The Kuria
10. Describe the
 - (a) Social
 - (b) Political and
 - (c) Economic organization of the Abagusii.
11. Describe the cultural values that the Abagusii cherished.

APPENDIX III : QUESTIONNAIRE FOR THE HISTORIANS IN KISII TOWN

Instructions

- Answer all questions where necessary
 - Your answers will be treated with confidentiality and respect.
1. Was there interaction between the Abagusii and the neighbouring Kenyan communities?
Yes
No
 2. What is the History of the Abagusii?
 3. Which are some of the ways in which Kenyan communities interacted in the Pre-colonial period?
 4. Are there any major changes that took place during the interaction in the Pre-colonial period? If any give..
 5. What is the outcome of the interaction between the Abagusii and the neighbouring Kenyan communities?

APPENDIX III: QUESTIONNAIRE FOR THE YOUTH

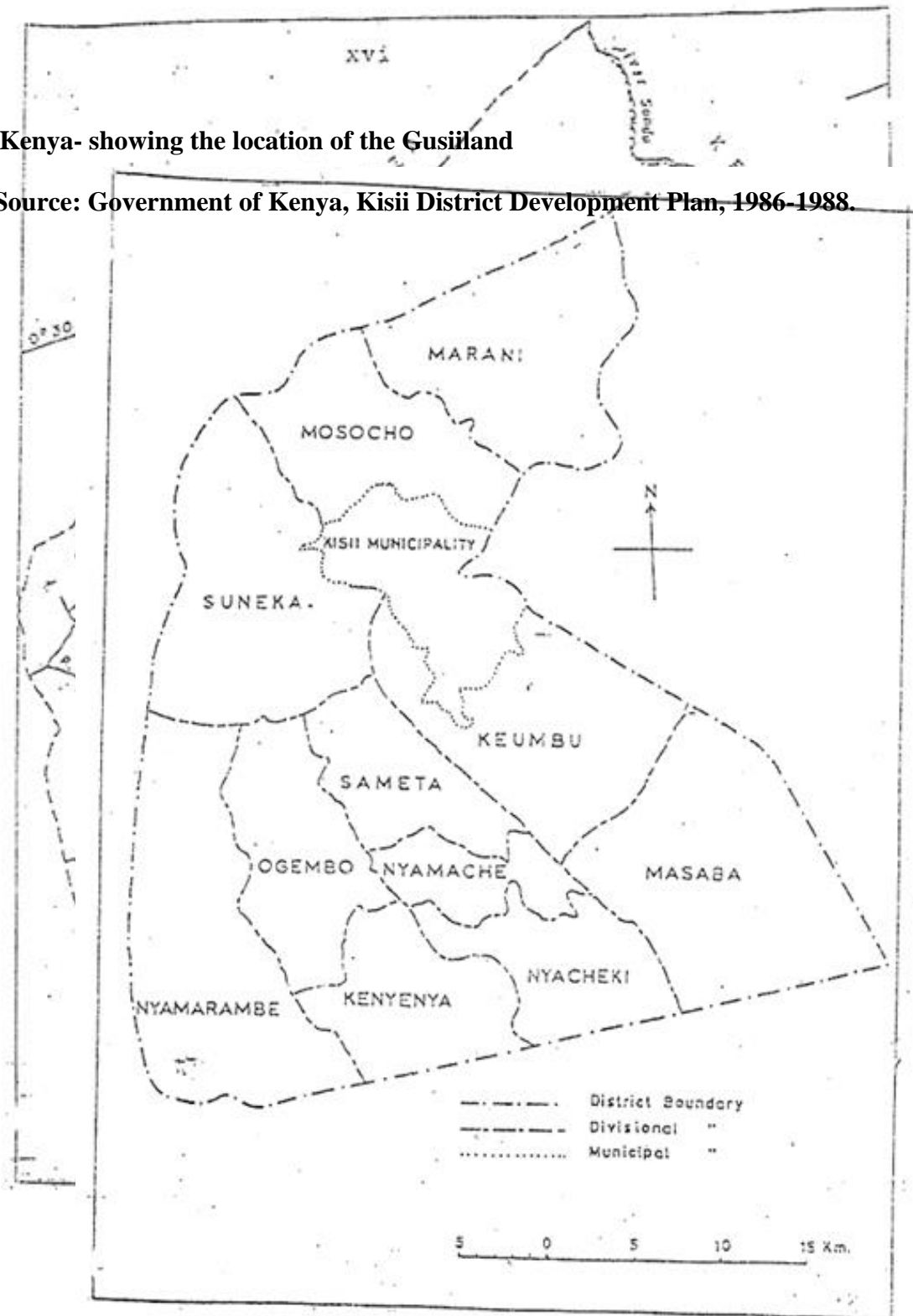
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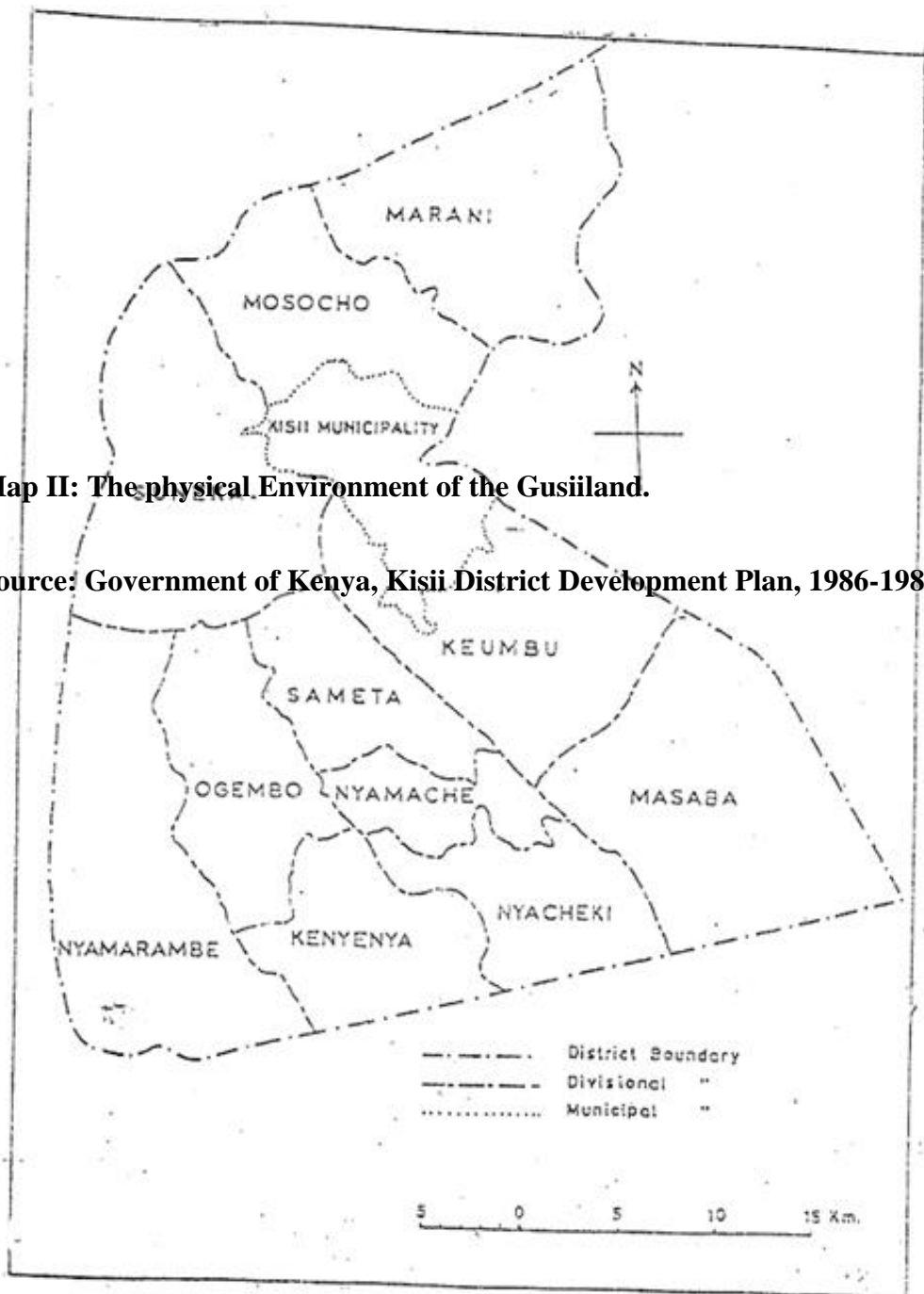
- Answer all questions appropriately
- Your answers will be treated as being private and confidential towards promoting this academic research.

1. What do you understand by the term pre-colonial period?
2. .What do you understand about interaction?
3. Which are some of the communities that Abagusii interacted with in the pre-colonial period?
4. How did the Kenyan communities interact in the pre-colonial period?
5. Was the outcome of the interaction negative or positive? Give reasons for your answer?

Map I: Kenya- showing the location of the Gusiiland

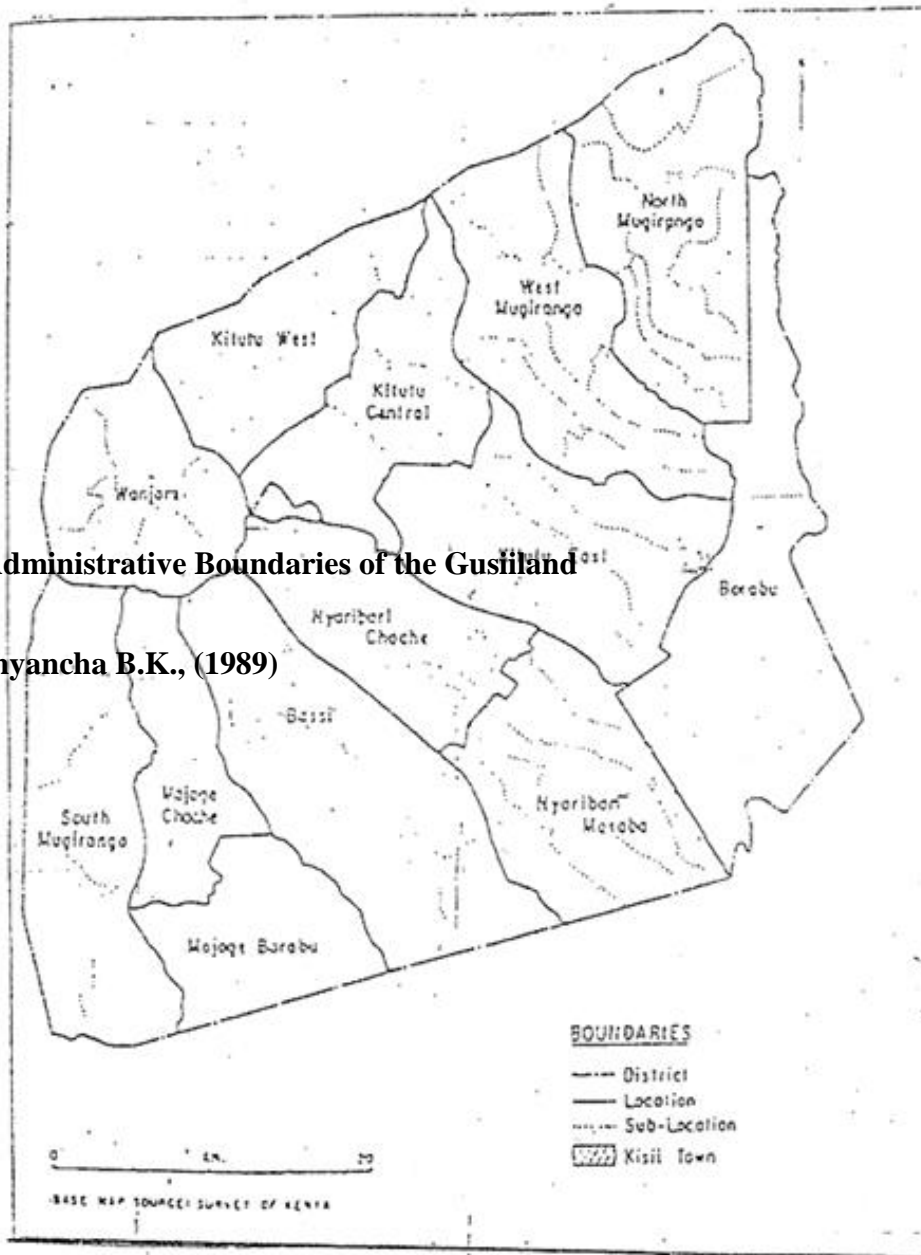
Source: Government of Kenya, Kisii District Development Plan, 1986-1988.

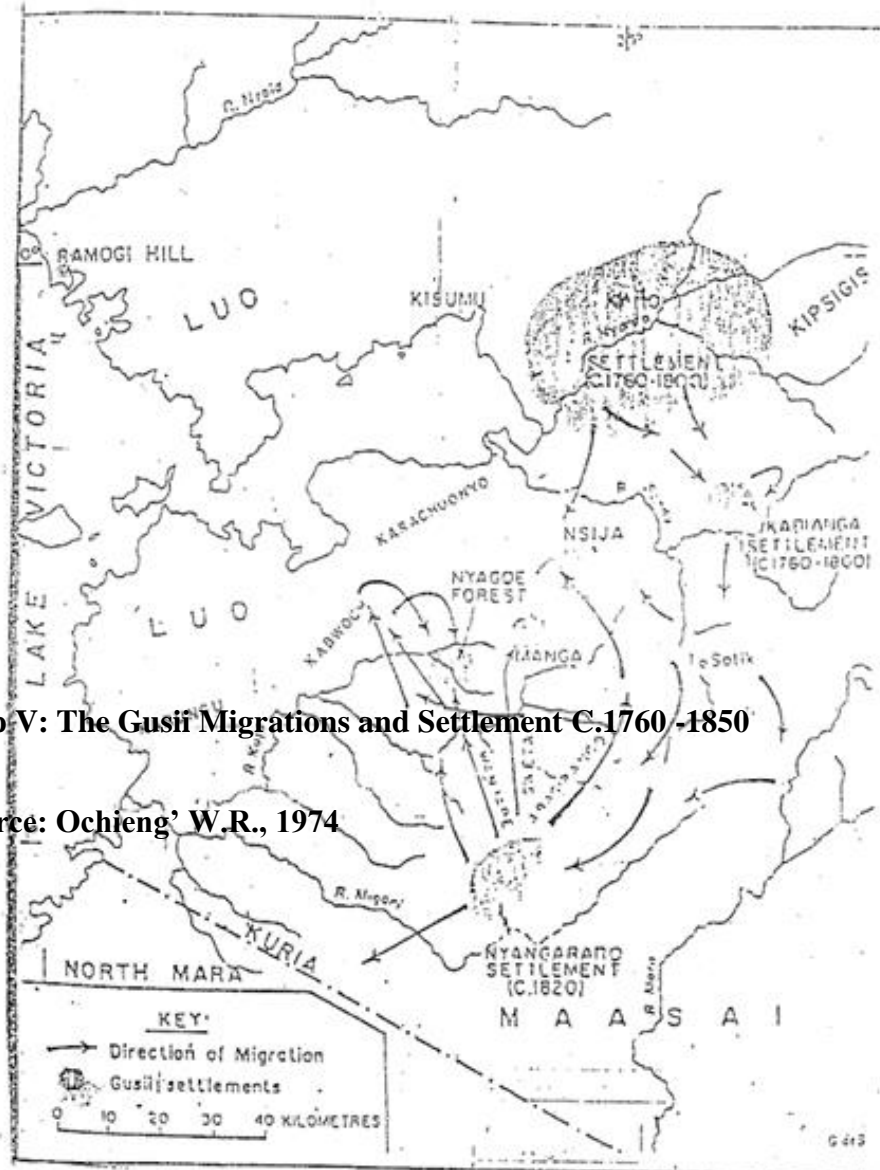




Map III: The physical Environment of the Gusiiland.

Source: Government of Kenya, Kisii District Development Plan, 1986-1988.





Map V: The Gusi Migrations and Settlement C.1760-1850

Source: Ochieng' W.R., 1974