THE MEANING OF VIOLENCE: A JOURNEY OF UNDERSTANDING THROUGH THE RIFT VALLEY OF KENYA

by

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Abstract

On the 30th December 2007, following the disputed presidential election fought between Raila Odinga of the ODM Party and Mwai Kibaki of the PNU Party, violence erupted in the Rift Valley of Kenya. Focusing on the Kalenjin and Kikuyu ethnicities this paper takes a hermeneutical approach and argues that explanations of violence will always be incomplete without a prior understanding of what violence means for the different communities involved. It argues that this understanding comes from the dominant traditions of violence that people grow up in, which are constructed and held in narrative form.

From this theoretical approach and building on five weeks of fieldwork conducted in the Rift Valley of Kenya in the September and October of 2010, the argument proceeds that in both the Kikuyu and Kalenjin communities storylines were constructed by the elites and opinion makers, building on existing narratives and framing events and experiences. These storylines were then reproduced at a local level and constructed violence as legitimate, necessary and directly led to fighting. From this conclusion, the final part of this paper suggests that by comprehending the compelling narratives leading to violence, persuasive counter-narratives can be introduced and strengthened, which might deconstruct violence as legitimate and make communities want peace. Overall, it is suggested that a hermeneutical approach to violence is valuable and must be pursued where the overriding goal is peace and human dignity.

Foreword

Through my upbringing, and particularly over the last year, I have begun to comprehend the immense debt that Britain owes to its colonial history. Specifically, much of its wealth originates from the years of exploitation of the colonised and the people of Britain, myself included, continue to live prosperously and in luxury in part thanks to centuries of slavery and theft. The historical injustices of the past continue to provide opportunities and benefits for all British citizens, whilst many in the 'post-colonies' continue to live in abject poverty.

Beyond this economic legacy, imperialism aimed at the utter destruction of the colonised ways of life. It was "violence in its most natural state" (Fanon, 2001, p. 48). It tore through the social and cultural foundations of pre-colonial communities and implanted an utterly exploitative system of rule. Finally, at independence power was transferred to the hands of a corrupt and nespotic elite who continued to mistreat their citizens to the fullest extent.

Thus, when I read about the 2007-08 violence in Kenya and I hear about the plight of those suffering, I cannot help feel a certain degree of responsibility – partly from the mess that British colonialism created, and partly from the privileges that this mess has generated for me.[1] As such, this project is a very personal journey, attempting to come to terms with the atrocities that my country has committed and striving to contribute whatever I can to a process of correcting the wrongs of the past, the wrongs that continue to aid my existence in the world.

Unfulfilled by reading what I felt were overly generalised and deterministic accounts of the violence, I decided to take a different approach and travel to Kenya to let those involved in the violence talk for themselves. From this background this project was born and after many hours of correspondence I found a sponsor – the Centre for Conflict Resolution Kenya. With their wonderful support and hospitality and with the kind help of many Kenyans who gave up their time to talk to me, this paper finally came about. My argument detailed below is based on those conversations held in Kenya in September and October of 2010.

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[1] As a personal example, the beautiful City of Bristol where I completed my undergraduate studies was largely built on the riches of the Atlantic Slave trade and the University's first Chancellor and major donor, H. O. Wills III, received much of his wealth from his role with the 'Imperial Tobacco Company.'

Preface

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*Dedicated to all those who have suffered and continue to suffer
from the events of the Post-Election Violence*

1.   Introduction
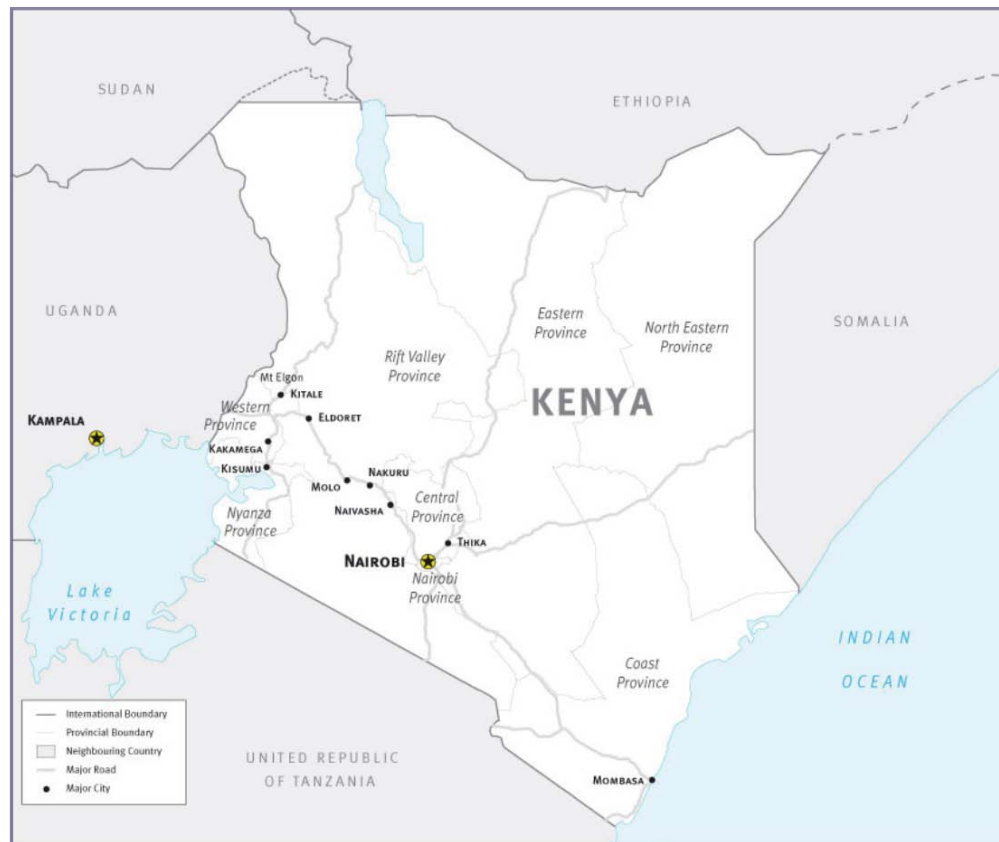
Figure 1: Map of Kenya[2]

[2] Source: Human Rights Watch (HRW), 2008, p. 1. Observing this map, the Luo community are most populous in Nyanza region, West of the Rift Valley. The Kalenjin community dominate the Rift Valley from the rural areas North of Eldoret down to Molo. From Molo to Nakuru to Naivasha the populations are very mixed. The Kikuyu heartland is Central Province, North of Nairobi. Out of a total population of 38.6 million people, the Kikuyu are the largest ethnic grouping with 6.6 million, the Luhya are the second largest with 5.3 million, the Kalenjin are the third largest with 4.9 million and the Luo are the fourth largest with 4 million (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2009).

They [the Kalenjins] came from 5 to 11 at night and then they came back before 6 in the morning when we were still asleep. We started hearing them screaming, they come screaming and throwing stones. When we heard their voices we woke up and went to see what was happening…. There were thousands of them.[3]

Immediately after our President won they [the Kalenjins] started burning our property and chasing us away. It started on the 30th December. That was the day my Dad was killed, he was set ablaze, we could not even bury him.

I was with a group of [Kikuyu] men and they asked a Luo man a question: 'Would you choose to die or be circumcised?' He chose to be circumcised. So they chopped him and then told him to run to the hospital. Before he reached there he fainted and he died because of the bleeding.

On December 30th 2007, barely minutes after the announcement of Mwai Kibaki's re-election as President, violence erupted in the streets of Kenya. In the settlement of Burnt Forest in the North Rift Valley, groups of youths calling themselves *Kalenjin Warriors,* armed with machetes, arrows, and containers of kerosene, began attacking Kikuyu people and property (International Crisis Group [ICG], 2008, p. 11). It was in this area that one of the defining events of the conflict occurred, as a Kalenjin mob set fire to a church where Kikuyu residents, including many elderly, women and children, were sheltering. At least 30 people were burnt alive (HRW, 2008, p. 41). Simultaneously, in the Nyanza region of Kenya, groups of young Luo men attacked the properties and businesses of Kikuyus and forced the Kikuyu population to flee the area. In response to these attacks, groups of armed Kikuyu youths cast themselves as defenders of the community and attacked Kalenjin and Luo settlements. These reprisal attacks largely took place in the urban areas of Naivasha and Nakuru where bands of Kikuyus sought out Luo and Kalenjin people and property and 'revenged' for

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[3] Unless otherwise noted, the quotations are from my research conducted in the Rift Valley of Kenya during September and October of 2010. For the safety of interviewees, I have not included the names of any of those who testified, with the exception of the concluding section of this project, where I include the names of some peacebuilders who are striving to prevent future violence breaking out. Where names are included, I received the prior consent of those concerned.

the loss of their 'brothers' in other parts of Kenya. These revenge attacks were often extremely brutal. Numerous Luo men were forcibly circumcised at the roadside with crude instruments like broken bottles and many of these victims bled to death. In another defining moment of the conflict, a house in Naivasha was set on fire as 19 people cowered inside. All were burnt to death, including a two year old child (HRW, p. 47). For the next few months, violence persisted across the country, resulting in over 1,000 deaths and more than 300,000 internally displaced people many of whom are still living in tents today waiting to be resettled (ICG, 2008, p. 1).

Post-independence, these occurrences of internal violence have been sadly regular occurrences across the continent of Africa and have attracted much scholarly attention with explanations often revolving around factors of ethnic and tribal hatred, poverty and the potential for economic gain, land grievances, political instability and ideology.[4] Within the Kenyan context and the 2007 Post-Election Violence (P.E.V.), similar debates have occurred. Karuti Kanyinga argues that the "politics of land rights especially in the former white highlands" made the violence "predictable" (2009, pp. 341, 339). Susanne Mueller claims that the fighting was a direct result of the diffusion of violence away from the state, personalized presidential power and ethnically driven politics (2008). Nicholas Cheeseman highlights a combination of salient factors: "weak institutions, historical grievances, the normalization of violence, and a lack of elite consensus on the 'rules of the game' [that] all came together to create a 'perfect storm'" (2008, 167).

Yet, despite some very detailed and well-constructed arguments, these accounts fail to answer the fundamental question, why violence? Why do communities who have coexisted side by side largely peacefully for many years suddenly turn on each

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4 For example, see Collier & Hoeffler, 2004; Frances, 2000; Kaldor, 1999; and Fearon & Laitin, 2003.

other and inflict brutal violence? Factors like historical injustices or tribal differences or economic inequality may explain conflict between groups but these conflicts do not inevitably turn violent. As Carolyn Nordstrom importantly notes, there is a significant difference between the two. "Conflict is inherent, for example, in the democratic process, and even in the most basic disagreements of opinion." What we really seek to understand is under what conditions conflict leads to violence (Nordstrom, 1994, p. 1). Thus, whilst the arguments of academics like Kanyinga, Cheeseman and Mueller perhaps demonstrate the necessary preconditions for violence to occur, they do not critically challenge the concept of violence and actually show the process by which the P.E.V. came about in Kenya in December of 2007. This approach appears to be symptomatic of a general weakness in political science, whereby scholars do not often look for meaning in fighting and do not try to understand why people do the things they do. At its worst, this mindset leads to some academics seeing violence as being completely devoid of any meaning, with one recent report labelling the Kikuyu response, "senseless revenge killings" (Klopp, Githinji, & Karuoya, 2010, p. 8).

In this paper I argue for an alternative approach, suggesting that violence is never senseless; rather, it is always purposeful and full of meaning and explanations of violence will always be incomplete without a prior understanding of the meaning of violence for the communities involved.[5] The phenomenon of violence has been understood in many disparate ways. Here, I argue that the nature and essence of violence is not abstract and metaphysical, "inherent to human nature or society…a fixed entity unchanging across time and space" (Nordstrom, 1994, p. 39). Rather, violence is "a fluid human construct" (Ibid.) that is "given form, shape and meanings inside the institutions and conventions of society" (Aijmer, 2000, p. 8). It is a

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5 Here, I limit my focus to political violence, which I define as "acts of violence that are carried out primarily as a means of achieving political influence or power and usually entail[ing] a group-component" (Hansen, 2009, p. 2).

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meaningful "social behaviour ... set in a universe of cultural meaning and communication" (Walraven & Abbink, 2003, p. 18). The meaning of violence "is not an unchanging, 'natural' fact but a historically developed cultural category," forever evolving, ruptured and altered through social interaction (Blok, 2000, p. 33). Therefore, violence can be understood as a part of the cultural webs that men and women are not only suspended within, but are also constantly spinning and interpreting (Geertz, 1973, p. 4). Accordingly, in this paper I seek to engage with people's understandings of this web of violence and I question, how do the people of Kenya understand the meaning of violence?[6]

To tackle this question, I adopt a hermeneutical approach. Hermeneutics teaches us that understanding must proceed from one's own prejudices or pre-judgements as "it is our prejudices that constitute our being" (Bliecher, 1980, p. 133). Prejudices are assumptions or expectations acquired through growing up in a set of traditions that act as a frame of reference, where traditions are a "means [of] transmission…of things said, of beliefs professed, of norms accepted" (Ricoeur, 1995, p. 8). They are "proposals of meaning" (Ricoeur, 1988, p. 227). Hence, our understanding of the world is to a large extent pre-structured by what has occurred before. As Gadamer puts it, "history does not belong to us; we belong to it. Long before we understand ourselves through the process of self-examination, we understand ourselves in a self-evident way in the family, society, and state in which we live" (Gadamer, 2004, 278). Therefore, hermeneutics provides a theory of "*how* we think." It details "the *way in which* understanding takes place," where "[u]nderstanding is ... the placing of oneself within a process of tradition, in which past and present are constantly fused" (Piercey, 2004, pp. 272, 271; Gadamer, 2004, 186). As communal beings "we think in the mode

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[6] To specify, I take the meaning of violence to broadly include what kind of violence is legitimate, against whom, for what reasons and for what aims.

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of tradition, in that we inevitably take up certain projects and preoccupations from the past, and then continue them, modify them, or break with them" (Piercey, 2004, pp. 272, 271). In this context, Kenyans will understand the meaning of violence from within the Kenyan traditions of violence.

To express this differently, people may have varying motivations for taking part, which "can all be subjectively understood…[where on one level] there are no common meanings" (Unger, 2005, pp. 53-53). However, at another level, a societal or communal level, there is a common meaning of this violence, a shared understanding of what the violence means, why they are fighting and what they aim to achieve. Drawing on the work of Charles Taylor, we can call this the intersubjective meaning of violence in the given context and I propose that this meaning is derived from the traditions of violence present in the cognitive realms of a community.

The key question, then, is what are these traditions and where do they come from? I suggest that the traditions of violence are not natural or unchanging. Rather, they are continuously produced and reproduced through the dominant narratives and stories that exist in a community and that frame violence.[7] Narratives of violence hold and express a body of knowledge built up and moulded over a period of time detailing how the community intersubjectively understands violence. The traditions of violence only exist in the sense that they can be narrated and, through narration, tradition is recreated in the present. Therefore, narratives are the medium through which and in which traditions of violence are held, produced, challenged and reinvented. Building on these theoretical insights, in this paper I seek to engage with the narratives that framed violence in Kenya and demonstrate the influence that they had on people's

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[7] For the purpose of this paper, I use the terms "story" and "narrative" interchangeably. I define these concepts very simply as a set of alleged facts with a temporal dimension.

actions and behaviour during the events of 2007-08.[8] In doing so, I am heeding the call of Jerome Bruner to undertake "the daunting task…to show in detail how, in particular instances, narrative organizes the structure of human experience" (1991, p. 52).

1.1 Outlining the Argument

To do this, in the first part of this paper I present a brief history of Kenya and demonstrate how the policies introduced by the colonial regime and reproduced by successive post-colonial governments generated tensions between the Kikuyu and Kalenjin communities and defined them as bitter rivals. I argue that these policies have created the necessary conditions for violent conflict in the Rift Valley of Kenya. However, these conditions only created the possibility of violence and as I have already suggested, conflict only turns violent when the dominant narratives and stories that build on this history frame events and experiences in such a way that construct violence as legitimate and desirable in the minds of people. Thus, in the second part of this paper I discuss a selection of the stories present in the Kalenjin and Kikuyu communities, which legitimised ethnically based fighting and directly led to the P.E.V. in Kenya. I argue that the opinion leaders and elites of these communities largely shaped the meaning of violence through constructing a storyline, which was then reproduced and strengthened at a local level, building on pre-existing and available traditions that framed violence as necessary and warranted. Thus, in the final part of this paper I use this evidence to suggest how these narratives of violence might

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[8] This hermeneutical approach has been given significant weight in recent years through scientific developments in the field of cognitive neuroscience, where researchers are coming to understand that "we cannot avoid thinking in terms of wider frameworks and narratives that are socially embedded and historically developed" (Rasmusson, 2009, p. 10).

be tackled and the meanings of violence reconstructed so that peace can start to be established in the minds of the communities involved.

1.2 A Note on Methodology

According to Gadamer, when the goal is understanding and when one is "pulled up short," in the sense that the available analyses of the P.E.V. do not fully explain why communities fought, what is required is a meaningful dialogue (Davison, 2009, p. 97). For this research, that dialogue took the form of 30 conversations held with 48 people who experienced the violence in 2007-08. I conducted these conversations during a five week period spent in Kenya in September and October of 2010. I focused my research in the Rift Valley area because that was the epicentre of the violence, where the fighting originated and was most intense and where there were most casualties and displaced persons. Within the Rift Valley, I focused my research on two communities - the Kalenjins and Kikuyus – firstly, to narrow my investigation and make it manageable and, secondly and most importantly, because these were the communities who most experienced the fighting, both as perpetrators and victims.

These conversations took the form of one on one and group dialogues held in the towns of Naivasha, Nukuru, Molo, Njoro and Kericho. Unfortunately, the distance was too great to travel to the North Rift, so I took the best alternative and held phone conversations with communities in Burnt Forest and Eldoret. During the conversations, I had a range of themes to touch on, but mostly I let the dialogue flow and allowed participants to touch on the issues they wanted to discuss. I felt this approach was important because I did not want to dominate the interviews with my prejudices concerning violence, and through this approach I allowed the participants to explain in their own words their understandings of violence and the events of 2007-08. Overall, my research was led by the epistemological underpinnings of

hermeneutics that "a 'common language' or mutual understanding [can be] arrived at through meaningful discernment and dialogue" (Davison, 2009, p. 97).

The argument that I present here is based on my interpretation and understandings of the stories that I heard during my trip, supported by other narratives that I have encountered since returning.[9] The argument that I present is not exhaustive. I do not claim that these are the *only* traditions of violence operating within these communities in the Rift Valley. To do so would go against the overall aim of this paper. However, I hope to show that the stories and traditions that I do present had a pivotal role in leading to the P.E.V. and, thus, I argue that a hermeneutical approach to violence is both worthwhile and necessary.

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[9] In particular, I am greatly aided by a collection of narratives recorded and produced by Twaweza Communications and edited by Kimani Njogu (2009). I also draw on a report by Pascale Hurter aired on the British Broadcasting Corporation World Service (BBC, (2008). The reports published by HRW (2008) and the Kenyan National Commission on Human Rights (KNCHR, 2008) were also of immense help.

2.   The Roots of Conflict

2.1 Colonialism

The informal colonisation of Kenya began in 1888 when the British East Africa Company arrived in the region; however, it took another 32 years for Kenya to become a formal British Colony. This period of colonialism is pivotal if one seeks to understand the roots of the P.E.V. because, as Peter Ekeh argues in his hugely influential work, "It is to the colonial experience that any valid conceptualization of the unique nature of African politics must look" (Ekeh, 1975, p. 93). Colonialism "form[ed] the historical background from which Africa … advance[d] to modernity…. [It] determined the peculiar characteristic of modernity in each of these areas," and marked an epoch in the history of Kenya (Ekeh, 1972, p. 93). Thus, it is to this colonial experience that we first turn.

In the words of Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, the renowned Kenyan author and post-colonial theorist:

> [C]olonialism forced many in African cultures into a crisis. The people had been militarily conquered and politically subjugated. Their lands and labour were seized and commandeered to serve the interests of the conquering nations of Europe. The economic and political basis of their pre-colonial cultures was destroyed or distorted beyond repair. So also the pre-colonial social institutions. Languages and values they carried were maimed. In the words of novelist Chinua Achebe, colonialism put a knife in things that held us together, and things fall apart (Thiongo'o, 1997, p. 127).

Through conquest and the resulting changes to the social, economic and political conditions, colonialism attacked and dismembered pre-colonial ways of life and the cultures that defined and structured people's lives. Significantly, this meant that pre-colonial meanings of violence started to break down. That is, the prior rules, values

and norms that structured previous social relations and gave meaning to life began to be eroded as they were replaced with new traditions and a new way of life.[10]

One profound change in social relations is observed in the shifting of ethnic identities. Whilst there were clear differences between tribes in the 19th century, these were not the same differences as the colonialists perceived. Pre-colonial tribal divisions were fluid and non-essentialised, providing the opportunity for movement between groups. John Lonsdale has suggested that groups like the Kikuyu and Kalenjin should be understood pre-colonisation as "peoples, not tribes, potential nations rather than actual dispersions of related lineages" (Lonsdale, 1992, p. 19). The British, however, "inscribed political identity and morality on the body" and adopted policies representing this belief (Ibid.).

In this regard, the most significant British policy was the allocation of resources on the basis of ethnic groupings. For example, land was allocated to different tribal groups and areas like Kikuyuland or Maasailand emerged exclusively for exploitation by Kikuyu or Maasai people, respectively. As a result, tribal identities became the route through which people accessed resources and overtime tribal groups hardened their definition of what it was to be a member of that tribe so as to exclude outsiders from their spoils. Tribal identity became fixed and formalised. Being Kikuyu became "what 'others' could not be" and the Kikuyus became Kikuyus "partly to prevent others from doing so" (Waller, 1993, p. 243). The overall result was the establishment of formalised ethnic identities, where each tribe was in direct competition with the other tribes over the allocation of resources. Borrowing from Mamdani's vocabulary, the British neatly "containerized" the Kenyan population into manageable tribal units

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[10] Factors included urbanisation, forced migration, Christianity, a new educational system, changing employment and new political and economic structures.

and successfully played these units off against each other as a key tool in maintaining power and control (Mamdani, 1996, p. 51).

2.2 Post-Independence

Unfortunately, this policy continued after independence. The Kenyan government developed into an imperial presidency, with Jomo Kenyatta and then Daniel Arap Moi overseeing a patrimonial state, with "the informal establishment of patron-client networks, where clients were rewarded with land, state contracts and other preferential treatment" (Sundet, Norad & Barase, 2009, p. 13). The riches of the State were distributed to loyal supporters of the Government, who were more often than not from the President's own ethnic group and who provided the basis of political support (Ibid). "The treatment of political power as an ethnic resource became legitimised as a practice of politics," and Kenyatta's regime became known as the 'Kikuyu government' whilst Moi's rule was described as the 'Kalenjin government' (Odhiambo, 2004, p. 32).

One example of this ethnicised allocation of resources that has generated the most anger and conflict is the issue of land distribution. During colonialism, the white settler community appropriated a huge portion of the fertile Rift Valley and used migrant labourers, mainly Kikuyus from Central Province, to work and farm this land. At independence, much of this land was available on a 'willing buyer willing seller' basis. However, it became the widely held assumption that Kenyatta deliberately aided his own Kikuyu community in the process of buying land in the Rift Valley and impeded the claims of the Kalenjins, who saw the Rift Valley as their ancestral homeland and theirs by right. This is not strictly true as Kenyatta largely ignored the Kikuyu Mau Mau fighters' claims and many Luhyas, Kisiis and Kalenjins also bought land in the region. Nevertheless, what is remembered is that the Kikuyus "purchased

more [land] and in larger numbers" in the Rift Valley (Chege, 2008, p. 135). Thus, it is now widely believed "that the Kikuyus obtained preferential treatment in government-financed settlement scheme for previously white-owned farms in the Rift Valley" (Ibid., p. 134).

Tribal relations were poisoned even further under the presidency of Moi, who took ethnic politics to its most extreme ends, state-sponsoring election violence of the 1992 and 1997. During this period, Moi's administration worked tirelessly to enhance ethnic divisions and "disunite citizens so that the word 'Kenyan' no longer encourage[d] national unity" (HRW, 1993, p. 63). Essentially, as recognised officially in two government commissioned reports and numerous human rights documents (Klopp & Kamungi, 2007, p. 14), Moi and his posse of patronage henchmen whipped up ethnic hatred using unprecedented levels of intimidation and fear through overt threats of violence. Eventually, he hired ethnic gangs to attack other communities, drive them out of their areas and deprive them of their vote in the election. This ethnic violence created a level of mistrust and hatred between the Kikuyu and Kalenjin people previously unseen. As countless people told me, before 1992 the relations between these tribes were generally very peaceful, as people mixed and socialised and intermarried. However, after 1992, people started to think of themselves much more in their tribal groups as interaction between tribes decreased and negative ethnicity became entrenched.[11]

Progressing towards the present day, in 2002 Mwai Kibaki was elected to Government leading a multi-ethnic coalition on a platform of inclusion and an end to endemic corruption and tribal politics. Unfortunately, this coalition soon disintegrated as the President was once again accused of favouring his own Kikuyu ethnic group

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[11] Negative ethnicity is a phrase championed by Koigi wa Wamwere in his discussion of Kenyan tribal politics. Drawing on his argument, I take it to mean a situation where one groups feels superior or inferior to another purely on account of their ethnicity (Wamwere, 2003, p. 22).

(Mutua, 2008, p. 285). As such, political tribalism is now firmly entrenched in Kenyan political culture. Every community wants one of their own to sit in the Presidential Office because the assumption is that this will be their 'time to eat.' This makes politics and elections in Kenya a 'zero sum game' where one community benefits directly from another's loss and where there is no prize for second place. Finally, the other underlying factor in this equation is the widespread poverty and huge economic class inequality present in Kenya today. As of 2005, the United Nations Development Program estimated that 42 percent of the population lived below the national poverty line and 22.8 percent lived on less than 1$/day (United Nations Development Program, 2005, p. 228). Ethnic politics is such that this poverty is now interpreted along tribal lines. One tribe is considered wealthy and prosperous at the expense of another. A Kikuyu has land and a job because a Kalenjin is landless and unemployed. These factors combined laid the roots of the P.E.V. and created the conditions for fighting to occur.

3. Kalenjin Meanings of Violence

The violence in Kenya was not a homogenous process. It "took different shapes in different political arenas and different parts of the country, developing its own dynamics" (Harnet-Sievers & Paters, 2008, pp. 138-139). Here, I will focus on two specific areas of the violence. Firstly, I will discuss the Kalenjin attack on the Kikuyu community, which some commentators have defined as "a campaign of ethnic cleansing" (Ibid., p. 138). This "ethnic cleansing" began initially in the North Rift Region, in and around the settlements of Eldoret Town and Burnt Forest. In these areas, the attack on Kikuyu people and property started soon after the announcement of ODM's loss in the presidential race on 30th December, a Sunday.[12] Elsewhere, it took a day or two for the ethnic cleansing of the land to begin; however, by the following Sunday the majority of the Kikuyu population had been driven out of these Kalenjin dominated parts of the Rift Valley. Within the Kalenjin communities, my research suggests that there were two major areas around which the stories of violence formed. One focused on Kalenjin 'culture' and what it meant to be a part of the Kalenjin community and to follow Kalenjin values. The other focus, which I will address first, revolved around the economic situation of the rival Kikuyu and Kalenjin communities and fostered a violent negative ethnicity. Within this, three distinct subplots emerged: the distribution of resources, the Kikuyu character and the 2007 presidential election.

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[12] The *Orange Democratic Movement* (ODM) is a political party led by Raila Odinga. During 2007 ODM, supported by the vast majority of Kalenjins, fought against the predominantly Kikuyu *Party of National Unity* (PNU).

3.1 Economic Narratives

3.1.1 The Distribution of Resources

In the early 1990s, under the Government of Daniel Moi, a set of stories became increasingly widespread and dominant among the Kalenjin population, framing their relationship negatively with the Kikuyu people. These stories were re-emphasized in the run-up to and during the P.E.V. Firstly, as already briefly mentioned, a strong belief grew that the Rift Valley belonged to the Kalenjin community. As one Kalenjin young man explained: "We are told this is our place, this is my land, my goats, my cows." Kalenjins believe, however, that the Kikuyus unfairly gained access to this land during the rule of Jomo Kenyatta who "Brought the Kikuyus to [the] Rift Valley," and allowed them to "invade the region." At independence, Kalenjins claim that their land, which the British had stolen, instead of being returned was handed over to members of Kenyatta's Kikuyu community. Thus, whilst the Kikuyus reaped the rewards of independence and gained access to the most fertile plots of land and became wealthy, the Kalenjins had to struggle to survive. This specific memory of the past has bred an immense feeling of injustice, magnified by the cultural importance of land to Kalenjins. Owning land is perceived as a sign of manhood and stature. This belief is very strong: "It is in our blood … we believe in land." To be landless, is to be devoid of dignity and respect.

This narrative of injustice framed the Kikuyus as outsiders in the Rift Valley. It created a rigid division between 'them' and 'us', those who are in the Rift Valley by ancestral right and those who are 'foreigners'. In the campaigning, the politicians played heavily on this narrative and started issuing declarations like, "The Kikuyus are occupying this land which is rightfully yours, why don't you kick them out"; or "This is your motherland and nobody should come in this area and interfere with your way of living." Similarly, one flyer distributed in Burnt Forest in early January 2008,

stated, "We have decided that we will not live with the Kikuyu tribe again…. [The] Rift Valley is our land which we were given by god, as you [Kikuyus] were given Central region…. DEATH DEATH IS HERE!" (KNCHR, 2008, p. 71). Furthermore, the politicians started referring to the Kikuyus as 'Madoadoas,' meaning spots or stains, a phrase first heard in the 1992 violence. If these stains or spots could be cleansed from the land, the region would once again be pure. Finally, ODM politicians reintroduced the 'Majimbo' debate. At independence, this was a discussion focusing on whether "Kenya should be a unitary or federal state" (Bratton & Kimenyi, 2008, p. 282). During the election, though, many people reinterpreted it to mean: "[any] people living outside their homelands will return to where they came from."[13] The politicians preached this message and demanded that all Kikuyus leave the Rift Valley. Overall, this storyline bred much animosity and hatred, which still exists. In Kericho, one man proclaimed, "We cannot live here in peace when others come in and are given land that they never bought." Another man expressed his anger and dismay stating "I have to fight for that right to land that my grandfather passed away without having." Peace seemingly became and remains impossible without the addressing of these historical injustices.

However, this narrative of injustice extended beyond just the issue of land grievances. The Kalenjins feel more broadly that the Kikuyus have been unfairly prioritized in *every* aspect of economic life. As one Kalenjin elder explained to me:

> The issue isn't just land…. The main issue is about development and the fair distribution of resources. The Kikuyus get more because of poor leadership. Here the poverty levels are very high but Kikuyu areas are much better developed. The money is diverted from us and goes into Kikuyu pockets.

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[13] From a sample of 1207 adult respondents in December 2007, almost 25% took *Majimbo* to mean this (Bratton & Kimenyi, 2008, 282).

This idea of unjust Kikuyu economic domination was undoubtedly present in the Kalenjin memory before the 2007 elections, but the rhetoric of the politicians, business leaders and the media significantly widened its appeal. In 2006, Barrack Muluka wrote in a popular column in the *Standard*, one of Kenya's two national dailies, "that Kenya faced a serious problem of regional economic inequality because Central Province, the Kikuyu homeland, took more in development projects from the Treasury than it contributed." Essentially, he claimed that the Kikuyus were "fleecing the less-developed provinces" (Chege, 2008, p. 133). Michael Chege has argued that "none of the figures w[ere] true" and he has provided a range of evidence to support this (Ibid., p. 133).[14] Regardless, ODM politicians took this message and ran with it, highlighting in their campaign message a "Kikuyu domination in banking, government, trade, out-migration, education, and commercial farming." Thus, politicians fed to their people a story whereby their suffering was a direct result of Kikuyu economic oppression and they produced "a reinvented history in which the Kikuyu had set themselves up for resentment and retaliation" (Ibid., p. 134). Raila Odinga, the leader of the ODM Party, even claimed in his presidential nomination acceptance speech that he "would end Kenya's 'economic apartheid,' under which one black group had all the privileges" (Ibid., pp. 134-235). In effect, this sustained attack throughout 2006 and 2007 reinvented the Kikuyu ethnic group as a privileged 'class'. The opinion leaders in the Kalenjin community depicted Kenya "as a country in the throes of a fierce 'class struggle' between the, "the haves and the have-nots…[where]

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[14] Perhaps the most convincing evidence dispelling Muluka's argument was that the "country's total revenue for 2005…was in actuality about twelve times the amount cited in the article" (Chege, 2008, p. 133).

the Kikuyus are continuously getting into the brackets of haves" (Kagwanja, 2008, p. 374; BBC, 2008).[15]

This grand narrative clearly clicked with many members of the Kalenjin community, a large number of whom were living in abject poverty, and at a local level this story was reproduced through a number of rumours and accusations. One widely circulated story claimed that the Kibaki Government was giving free money to the Kikuyu people via a special card, which they could use at Equity Bank ATM's. Many accepted this rumor as fact and I even had one conversation with a secondary school teacher from Burnt Forest who possessed a Bachelors Degree and who was convinced that this was rumor was indeed true. Thus, even many of the very educated in society accepted these baseless and seemingly absurd accusations.

Other versions of this 'class' story highlighted the business practices of the Kikuyus and their attempts to alienate the Kalenjins. One tale described a middle-aged Kalenjin man in Molo, who after being fired from a fairly well paid job went back to his community and lobbied the elders to defend him. He argued that the loss of his job was a Kikuyu attack on the community, his firing being a result of his ethnicity. I heard a similar story in Nakuru, where a councillor was fired for corruption and then went back to his community seeking their support. One young Kalenjin man described this practice to me. "You may have your own individual issues but you bring your issues to the community. Most of the elites defend themselves with their own tribe. They go back and poison their people." Or as another man explained, "The moment

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[15] BBC interview with a young Kalenjin man in Eldoret. It is very difficult to evaluate the truth of these claims of Kikuyu economic exploitation because the data is not publicly available on the ethnic allocation of resources. I would suggest that there is probably some reality to these comments, as some Kikuyus undoubtedly prospered under the Kenyatta regime and had greater access to resources after independence. However, these narratives go too far by claiming that *all* Kikuyus are better developed. In reality, in both communities there are large portions of the population who are extremely poor and a minority who are extremely rich. Unfortunately, the dominant narratives seen here made the Kalenjin group feel that *all* Kikuyus were exploiting them, which is undoubtedly a falsehood.

you've messed up you run back to the community and unfortunately the message clicks with them." Playing on these sentiments, I heard that in the run-up to the election in Eldoret Town wealthy business leaders were organizing meetings with poor Kalenjin youths and questioning: "Why are these Kikuyus rich, why do they own cars and land and have nice things when you are poor? Why don't you take these things from them?"

When combined, these stories of economic exploitation are often portrayed through the language of 'occupation.' The Kikuyus have not come to the Rift Valley to live side by side with the Kalenjins – they have come to take over. One Kalenjin elder explained:

> The old constitution said they could live but could not *occupy* a region. The Kikuyus have occupied here, they lack interaction, they are everywhere, they are the District Commissioners, the Provincial Commissioners, the Members of Parliament, the Councillors, they have taken over the state structure. In the security forces the big man in charge is a Kikuyu and all the rest are Kikuyus. *We have been occupied.*

Many hold the perception that the Kikuyus dominate all the positions of power in the region. The Kikuyus do not appreciate that the Rift Valley is Kalenjin land and they are guests on the land. Rather, they are trying to take over the area and impose their own values and ways of life and control how the Kalenjins live. A phrase commonly heard to explain this Kikuyu practice states, "When you go to Rome you should stay with the Romans." The Kikuyus ignore this, though, and disregard the Kalenjin way of life and try "to impose their own culture." Thus, when "a Kikuyu comes here…[he] says he wants to be the councillor, he wants to be the chief…. He wants to have his way yet he is in a foreign land" (BBC, 2008). Allegedly, the Kikuyus are trying to conquer the Rift Valley and the Kalenjins feel "pushed to the wall … [where] if a Kalenjin accommodates one Kikuyu, this one Kikuyu will bring ten Kikuyus and they form a group. Thereafter, because of their practices, they would want to dominate."

This language of 'occupation' seems to be very powerful because it conjures up memories of the colonial era where the Kalenjins had their land taken and were oppressed and forced to submit to British rule. This language draws parallels between that time and the present and casts the relationship with the Kikuyus as a constant struggle or battle, where the Kikuyus are gradually encroaching further and further onto Kalenjin land and into Kalenjin life. This story seems to end with an eventual takeover, where the Kalenjins are completely and totally subservient to Kikuyu rule. Furthermore, this story suggests that the Kikuyu are *the only* obstacle standing in the Kalenjins' paths to a better life – to more land, more money and a more secure and prosperous future. As a young man in Burnt Forest explained: "During the campaigning [Kalenjin leaders] say that this is *the* community causing you to suffer."

3.1.2 The Kikuyu Character

Interestingly, this storyline of economic oppression and a battle for resources has led to the widespread stereotyping of the Kikuyu population and their character and behaviour as people. Kalenjins often commented: "They are so selfish, they want everything for themselves and they use dubious means to push you out." Or, "They only consider what is theirs." Kikuyus are also seen to be greedy and only interested in money and material gain. There is a common saying among the Kalenjin: "You can only trust a Kikuyu when he's dead and if you really want to see if he's dead, drop some coins by his head." In fact, the prevailing Kalenjin view of the Kikuyus is such that the latter are perceived to happily engage in criminal activities to acquire money. As evidence for this, Kalenjins widely proclaim that where the Kikuyus come from "there are a lot of cases of robbery and violence." Thus, the Kalenjins maintain that Kikuyus are infecting the Rift Valley. "We feel that these people are just coming to our land and they create a lot of problems…If you analyse the cases of robbery, most

of these people who do this come from central province." Furthermore, the Kalenjins regard the Kikuyus as spiteful and malicious people. One man described "an incident about five or six years ago in Kerenget, [when] a Kikuyu axed a Kalenjin cow by the legs." He went on to explain, "[This] is the worst thing you can do to provoke a Kalenjin…. Kalenjins believe in cows and I would even say if you visit any Kalenjin home you will find a cow."

Kalenjins maintain this negative behaviour comes from the loss of Kikuyu 'cultural' values, largely as a result of and through their economic circumstances. "They have lost their culture completely because of money and business…. All they care about is business." Hence, "They call stealing doing a job." This acceptance of violence in their culture is perceived to run so deep that they have no problem even killing: "They even call killing doing a 'job.'" One Kalenjin businessman in Kericho summarized his community's viewpoint for me:

> The Kikuyus are the first people to leave their culture, everybody is trying to live for himself, their culture is dying. For us, culture is still very strong, when it comes to fighting you do not kill an elderly person, you do not kill small children, you do not kill cows or wild animals. So the reason why you find the Kalenjins normally hate these people is because they do not follow their culture, their culture is dying so you find they can kill a small child, they can even kill an elderly person, they can even kill a cow, which is why people hate them. Their culture is already dying.

In Kalenjin minds, this drive for money and resources has utterly changed who the Kikuyus are as people. The Kikuyu have become an individualistic and ruthless group who have lost all respect for the life and wellbeing of others. The Kalenjins still retain a large part of their culture and, thus, "still have a human heart" and are "peaceful people." In contrast, the Kikuyus have lost their cultural values and have left their traditional ways of life to such an extent that they can do anything and kill anyone – "They are killers."

Overall, these narratives played a significant role in framing the P.E.V. and making violence desirable in the minds of many Kalenjin communities. The following observation by a peaceworker in Kuresoi is apt:

> [T]his violence I would say is from what they hear. If I am your grandfather and I sit down and I say you know these people did this to us. We had a neighbour and these are the ones that killed him, these are very bad people. You know, they have been poisoned from the talk in family, from the talk by the more elderly in the community. It is the poisoning, their minds have been poisoned. So when they get an opportunity they want to go and revenge. Now they believe these Kikuyu are dangerous people, these are bad people.

3.1.3 The 2007 Presidential Election

However, this story so far is still missing one important thread – the influence of the election. During this time, politicians tried to instil a fear in their communities of the ramifications of losing the vote.[16] Kalenjins came to believe that the Kikuyus were seeking to expand their occupation of the region. In Kericho, I heard that people were warned: "These bad [Kikuyu] people will come and take more land." Thus, the cost of losing the election was five more years of poverty and further loss of land. This was contrasted with the potential gains of victory. Many were told and came to believe that if ODM was victorious, "the Kalenjins would regain all of their stolen land." For example, a Kalenjin councillor told his constituents in the Eldoret region that "if elected, the ODM would 'remove the roots' of local Kikuyu communities 'so there would be only one tribe there'" (HRW, 2008, p. 35). Therefore, as Klopp and Kamungi have noted, "[t]his made the contest for the presidency a particularly high stakes game" (2007, p. 13).

The Kalenjin population was certainly well aware of the stakes. In Kericho I heard the following:

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[16] See Klopp & Kamungi, 2007.

> Each person that comes to power focuses so much on their own community. We believed that if we campaigned for this person to go to power, this person will assist us to be exposed, in terms of education and water and electricity, those necessities that are required. But when the opposite occurs, because we have forever experienced the Kikuyu reign and as Kalenjins we have not benefited from that, because they concentrated so much on the Kikuyus. So when Kibaki took power we realised that it was another situation where we had not been heard when we are crying out to be assisted in.

This loss of the election was made even more unacceptable by the supposed nature of defeat, as it was reported that the Kikuyus and PNU stole the presidency. The fear of this occurring was rife before the election and for the Kalenjins with whom I spoke, "it was clear that the votes were stolen" because the counting "was going in this direction [towards ODM] and then all of the sudden the results changed." For most, this was completely intolerable. Not only was power slipping away but now it had been stolen by their 'enemies', who they had accommodated peacefully for so long, even when pushed to the wall.

At this point, these multiple strands of a storyline based on economic suffering merged and cultivated a violent negative ethnicity. The historical narratives of victimization and exploitation synthesised with the Kalenjin beliefs about the inherent evilness of the Kikuyu character and the theft of the presidential seat. Stories focusing on past exploitation fused with charges of recent and ongoing treachery and misconduct. The negative realities of daily life – poverty, hunger, unemployment, landlessness – all became explained through Kikuyu past and present wrongdoing. Every Kikuyu, even the kind neighbour or the class friend, lost his or her individuality and took on the weight of history, becoming responsible for past injustices as well as current suffering. The storyline concluded with a simple demand: 'remove or destroy the Kikuyu population and all of your problems will be solved.' In the shared narratives and intersubjective meanings of the Kalenjin community, a rampage of

looting, burning and killing suddenly became a dutiful and heroic crusade against the enemy of their people. As one Kalenjin in Kericho explained, "We are always peaceful except when it becomes too much. In 2007 it just became too much."

These economic narratives were very convincing, especially when we consider that most of those who fought were young men between the ages of 18-25, many of whom were jobless and extremely poor and, thus, had much to gain through looting and forcing the Kikuyus off the land (KNCHR, 2008, p. 71). Still, this does not fully explain why so many Kalenjins took the decision to fight. To gain a more complete understanding, we must turn to the second storyline that framed the P.E.V.

3.2 Narratives of 'Culture'

This second set of stories revolved around what could be labelled 'traditional culture' – focusing on what it means to be a Kalenjin, to be a part of the Kalenjin community and to follow Kalenjin values and mores. I argue that the violence was not a result of a "Kalenjin cultural disposition towards war," in the sense that the Kalenjin 'culture' somehow made them want war, or that Kalenjin 'culture' is inherently violent, as some have suggested.[17] This argument does not hold up to scrutiny because the Kalenjin community had a peaceful relationship with the Kikuyus before 1992. Rather, I suggest that the history of the Kalenjin people provides an available tradition of violence that the leaders of the community turned to in 2007 to manufacture war.

In this community, the defining moment in a male's upbringing is his circumcision and initiation into manhood. As one young Kalenjin proclaimed, "The initiation ceremony is the biggest event in a Kalenjin's life, in culture we respect a lot the circumcision." Another Kalenjin informed me: "*all* [Kalenjin] boys go for one

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[17] Some of those interviewed by "The Commission of Inquiry on Post Election Violence" (CIPEV), headed by Justice Philip Waki, made this claim (CIPEV, 2008, p. 74).

month to get circumcised and become men." This initiation is focused on training the boys to "learn to be warriors." "[We] go into the wood, build huts and live together as soldiers for a month. There are always people on guard and we become an army. We are taught the signals of war and how to communicate with each other and we learn to become a man." Thus, becoming a man is directly linked to learning how to fight and defend the community. This warrior culture has its roots in the pastoralist history of the Kalenjin people when they used to raid cattle from other communities and fight to defend their own. Cattle raiding has mostly died out in the Rift Valley meaning that this initiation is now more symbolic than practical, but the idea of warriorhood is clearly still very strong in the psyche of the Kalenjin people, with one man explaining, "In this country, the born warriors are the Kalenjins, Maasai and Somalis. It is in their blood." Another man, a doctor from Kericho proudly declared, "Being a Kalenjin is important to me, we are warriors, we go through initiation and we learn to use to spears. I think we are the best warriors in Kenya, that is what separates us from other tribes."

To understand why many Kalenjin groups took the decision to fight in the P.E.V. it is crucial to comprehend this tradition of violence. Firstly, this tradition emphasizes that when the Kalenjins choose to fight they do so with full commitment. The Kalenjins believe that they are brave fighters and many of the heroes of their culture were great warriors, like the legendary Orkoiyot Samoei, who led the resistance against the British, or Chepusit, who led several attacks against the Maasai. These heroes are eulogized and celebrated in a rich oral history that tells tales of feats of bravery. During the violence, the elders would remind the youth of this history.

> They would narrate stories about the past days on how they used to attack.
> This gave us psyche to do it. They told us that if one was killed during
> war, it was a good sign of how one defended their ethnic group. This made

us value our community and we could do anything for it (Njogu, 2009, p. 278).[18]

According to this tradition, a Kalenjin man is, when called upon, a brave and heroic fighter. Many young men with whom I spoke had internalised this belief. I heard statements like: "The culture of our people is peaceful but when we have been annoyed in history we become fierce fighters; when we start war, it is very difficult for us to retreat." Similarly, when the Kalenjins fight they "all fight together and dominate the violence." And, "A Kalenjin when provoked will feel his rights have been taken away from him, he will always want to revenge." This warrior identity is constructed as a fundamental part of their identity as a people and demands that the Kalenjin are very united in times of conflict. "Every Kalenjin believes that if you hit this man or take his cow it is like hitting me or taking my cow." If one member of the community suffers, it is the responsibility of the whole community to support and defend that individual.

This unity and duty of protection was a very important factor in the P.E.V. because it pressured every Kalenjin to fight. It was nearly impossible for an individual to abstain when the community decided that there should be violence. As one 18 year old youth in Eldoret Town stated during a BBC interview: "nobody says 'no, these are our neighbours' because if you say that, you will also be killed" (BBC, 2008). I was told: "The values of the community expect you to fight." If you do not fight "you are ostracized and considered a coward"; you may be "forced out and excluded from the community." This was seen in Molo, where one Kalenjin man who refused to join the warriors "lost all of his property." The mood of the community "in those times" became "you are either with us or against us. You really don't have an option if you are there." In Nakuru I heard a similar story. "One man…refused [to fight] and they

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[18] Interview in Turbo, a settlement just North of Eldoret.

ended up burning his house, a house of our brother, just because I am not with you. So a lot of people were forced into something they never wanted to do." Thus, a Kalenjin in Burnt Forest stated that when the Kalenjins fight, it becomes "total war" in the sense that all are involved. "It doesn't matter if you're a teacher, a banker or unemployed, everyone joins in."

During this 'total war' the older men provide guidance, the women cook and provide for the warriors, the rich businessmen donate transportation and supplies; however, the tradition demands that those who go and do the fighting are the young men of the society – the Morans.[19] This belief is still dominant among the youth. One young Kalenjin man stated, "The Kalenjin culture is strong; [it dictates] all men are called to participate, [whilst] the women are taken to safety." Other Kalenjins testified that when violence begins all the young men "become warriors…. [They all] convert into warriors for the interest of the whole community." Furthermore, this mindset was repeatedly reinforced in the rhetoric of their leaders. For instance, one youth claimed that he was told by his elders in Iten on the outskirts of Eldoret, "Ngot koit punye dong korengun" anangoit ko ne yak o muregeteya (No matter what happens, you have to stay in front so that if anything arises against our community you should defend it as Morans)" (Njogu, 2009, p. 288). Thus, the young men understood that when war broke out in 2007, it was their duty to fight for community. "We organized into groups and we fought like US soldiers."

However, it is not the Morans who take the decision to go and fight. The values of the community dictate that they must listen to their elders and follow orders. The society is still structured very hierarchically. Kalenjins learn this growing up. One man informed me that his community was often narrated tales "of a group of young

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[19] Moran is a 'traditional' Kalenjin word for a warrior.

men who disobeyed the elders and went to war and all died." For him, this story "show[ed] the ramifications of acting without the blessings of the elders." He went on, "The Kalenjin are trained that as warriors we have to obey the elders." Another Kalenjin testified:

> The first thing you are taught growing up in the Kalenjin community is the respect for your parents and your elders. You have to respect them. You are told during the initiation period that you cannot do what you like, you have to follow step by step what the elders say. You cannot do something in culture without asking the elders and following protocol. It is very hard to say no to the elders.

Thus, there could not have been violence, at least on scale that was witnessed, without the blessing and direction of the community leaders. As one youth who was involved in the burning of the Kiambaa church said: "As young men [in] our culture we don't go over what an elder tell[s] us, if an elder say[s] no, we step down but if our elders say yes, we proceed…. Surely I do it because it is something which has been permitted from our elders" (BBC, 2008).[20]

This subservience puts the opinion leaders in the Kalenjin community in an extremely powerful position, commanding the obedience of a legion of youth. "When the leaders want something they can mobilise people very easily … you can't expect a youth to go one way or in one lane against the elders." In 2007, the leaders of the communities under scrutiny here decided that they wanted war. For example, one very prominent Kalenjin leader and elected ODM leader who allegedly spearheaded the organization of violence in the North Rift region,[21] Jackson Kibor, declared in an interview with the BBC:

> People had to fight the Kikuyus because Kibaki is a Kikuyu, people felt that all Kikuyus were the supports of Kibaki so they had to fight them so that Kibaki would feel the pinch.... We will not sit down and see one tribe lead Kenya, we will fight, this is a war, we will start the war … now we

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[20] This is form an interview with a youth involved in the burning of the Kiambaa church in Eldoret.
[21] See HRW, pp. 38-39.

are fighting for power.... We will not let them come back again because they are thieves, we will never let them come back...Kikuyus should be on their own, we will divide Kenya (BBC, 2008).

There are numerous other reports of leaders calling on their troops to fight. One youth claimed that when he went to vote, the leaders were there saying, "If we are defeated there will be fighting." Other leaders predicted the violence "and prepared the locals on what to do at the right time" (Njogu, 2009, p. 286). According to another young man, "Our leaders indeed incited people because they were the ones who planned it and gave out direction on implementation" (Ibid., p. 282). Furthermore, the report by HRW argues: "local elders and ODM organizers in many communities around Eldoret called meetings where they declared that electoral victory for Kibaki would be the signal for 'war' against local Kikuyu" (HRW, 2008, p. 36). This call to fight was strengthened through other mediums. For example, flyers were distributed repeating the call to arms and vernacular radio stations like KASS FM in Eldoret "called on young men to come out to the road, saying 'vita imetokea' the war has begun" and asking them what they were doing at home (KNCHR, 2008, p. 74).

Finally, it was also alleged to me that certain elders incited violence by leading ceremonies to prepare the youth, giving them the strength and the belief to go and fight. One youth briefly described this ceremony to me:

> In Kalenjin culture, there is a plant that they make into a rope, after stepping over the rope there is no turning back. It means you are ready to die for the community. During the ceremony you remove all your clothes and put on Shukas and paint your face and make an oath.

I also heard reports that in some cases elders blessed the youths after the fighting was over, administering a ceremony, "to cleanse you of the bloodshed and to ensure that the spirits do not haunt you." These ceremonies made the violent actions of the youth 'culturally' acceptable and further increased their will to fight.

Overall, the evidence from these accounts strongly indicates that there was a direct call to violence by the leaders of the community.[22] Politicians, business leaders and elders used the available narratives of 'traditional culture' to fortify an ethnic warrior identity and frame the violence as heroic and necessary. These narratives were extremely compelling because in the Kalenjin community 'traditional culture' is still practiced and celebrated. As noted in the previous section, they bemoan that the Kikuyus have "lost their culture" and rejoice that they have maintained their own. Thus, 'culture' is a defining part of Kalenjin identity and any narratives framed around this are bound to be enormously powerful in giving meaning to violence. In the P.E.V. these 'cultural narratives' were deployed to mobilize and incite large groups of young men. When buttressed with the economic narratives of 'occupation' and economic exploitation the conflict became framed as a 'war' demanding that all young men fight against their 'evil' Kikuyu enemy. It became the duty of every young Kalenjin man to arm and defend his community in this 'war' as a brave and heroic warrior, just as his ancestors had done before him and just as he had been taught in his initiation. The fusion of these coherent and persuasive storylines fabricated an intersubjective meaning of violence that called for a violent Kalenjin attack on Kikuyu people and property directly leading to the events of 2007-08.

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[22] For a full list of those alleged to have incited violence see KNCHR, 2008, pp. 177-238.

4.   Kikuyu Meanings of Violence

Inevitably, the attacks by the Kalenjin and Luo communities soured relations with the Kikuyus.[23] However, this alone does not explain why on the 25th January in Nakuru and the 27th January in Naivasha, over three weeks after the initial attacks, the Kikuyu response suddenly turned violent and militaristic. The exact details of the attacks are still unclear; yet, it is undeniable that the assaults were not spontaneous and that local businessmen, politicians and other influential members of the community organized the violence by calling meetings, raising funds and directing the Kikuyu youths on where and who to attack.[24] The attackers were "brought together and given reasons for fighting."[25] Beyond this, the dynamics of the fighting are very complicated, influenced by many disparate and often evolving intersubjective meanings of violence.

When we turn to these meanings it is firstly striking that, mirroring the Kalenjin community, there was a strong economic dimension. Crucially, only the poorer Kikuyus fought with fighting only occurring in the economically deprived areas of these towns. For example, I heard that in the richer estates in Nakuru like 'Section 58' or in the 'Kiamunyi Division' Kikuyus, Kalenjins and Luos all lived side by side as neighbours and came together to agree that peace should be preserved. Thus, poverty seemed to be a necessary precondition for violence.

In some cases, it appears that the perpetrators were led by a fairly narrow instrumental motivation for violence with some youths claiming that they were

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[23] It was beyond the scope of this paper to discuss in detail the Luo attacks on the Kikuyu population in Nyanza Province. Briefly, the ODM party, which the Kalenjins supported, was led by Raila Odinga, a Luo. Therefore, the Luo and Kalenjin communities were united in their protest to the alleged stealing of the Presidential seat. The Luo community in their ancestral homeland of Nyanza Province did launch a series of attacks on Kikuyu people and property and despite these being much less brutal than the Kalenjin attacks in the Rift Valley, they were seen as equally legitimate targets for the Kikuyu reprisal attacks. In fact, the Luos often experienced the worst of this retaliatory violence.
[24] See HRW, 2008, pp. 3, 49; KNCHR, 2008, pp. 86-87.
[25] This was alleged to me in separate interviews in both Nakuru and Naivasha.

mobilized solely around money. One man explained why he fought. "We need something to eat each day … [and] there was a plan to push out the Luos…. We were paid 200 shillings for going to the meeting, and we were told we would get the rest after the job, it was like a business" (HRW, 2008, p. 23). To expand, a peaceworker stated:

> When you are very poor and you cannot put food on the table and you maybe have kids, then every opportunity becomes a very valuable opportunity. If someone is giving you a few coins to go burn a house you go. Furthermore, you can loot shops and houses meaning violence becomes an opportunity.

According to these testimonies, in moments of desperation necessity dictates that one must do anything to survive and for some individuals a monetary incentive was the only reason needed to participate.

In other cases, though, people either fought without payment or payment was not the sole motivating force. In these instances, the perpetrators were still impoverished, suggesting that poverty created the necessary conditions of vulnerability, desperation and anger around which to mobilize the youth, but a turn to violence still required the input of other narratives.

4.1 Narratives of 'Culture'

In the Kikuyu community, there are certainly parallels to be drawn with the narratives that mobilized thousands of Kalenjin youths to fight. Most significantly, as in the Kalenjin community, those mobilizing the violence turned to narratives framed around existing and available traditions of violence rooted in Kikuyu 'culture' and focusing on what it meant to be a Kikuyu. For example, one flyer distributed in Kijabe read: "We shall not be killed during the Mau Mau and [we shall not] be killed today … we shall not leave any Luo alive" (Roberts, 2009, p.7). Rhetoric of this kind was very common during the P.E.V. as mobilizers attempted to frame the conflict through

an available Kikuyu history of brave and heroic resistance. These narratives drew on a popular memory of the Mau Mau uprising where thousands of Kenyans, mainly of Kikuyu ethnicity, fought against British oppression from 1952-1960 and played a significant role in Kenya gaining its independence in 1963. This turn to history was an attempt to construct a tradition of violence whereby ordinary Kikuyu citizens would accept that fighting for their community was a constituent and defining part of Kikuyu identity. Here, to be a Kikuyu is to heroically defend one's community.

This emphasis on Kikuyu history was also powerful in constructing a sense of entitlement to the presidential seat, appealing to the popular Kikuyu belief: we "fought for independence … the rule is ours, others must not gain power." Kalenjin and Luo violence against the Kikuyus was framed as unjust and ignorant as these communities did not understand their place in Kenyan society. By not fighting for independence they had forfeited their right to challenge for political power. This tradition pushed Kikuyus to fight for what was theirs. They fought for the presidential seat once and they should be prepared to fight again. They were made to believe: "now is our time to rule. We must fight for it. Kenya is ours."

Another narrative, which was also visible in the Kalenjin community, focused on youthful masculine identity. Some Kikuyu males explained that they fought because it was their duty being the younger men of the community. According to some, the older generation had stated: "we cannot go to fight [but] you are the strong men, you are the only people who can go and fight on behalf of the community." According to another man, the "old cannot fight anymore" so the young were "asked to step in and fight for them."

For many Kikuyus, these narratives were extremely powerful; however, for a minority, they were especially powerful. For this minority, these narratives built on a

tradition of violence that they experienced during their upbringing, in particular through the 'traditional' initiation ceremony into manhood, where they were taken to the forest, circumcised and taught about Kikuyu history and values. One young Kikuyu man recounted his initiation to me:

> We were told that when you are circumcised you become an adult, [prepared] to defend your home and your tribe. So anybody who rises against your tribe is your enemy. You need to continue because we Kikuyus believe that the first President was a Kikuyu, so we believe that Kenya is our country, we are the government ourselves, so we should not allow other people to come and share … most of the Kikuyus were the ones who fought for the independence…. We fought for freedom so we should not allow other tribes to come and invade.

Thus, a mentality of supremacy was bred proclaiming, 'Kenya is our country, we are the majority, we are the ones who fought for independence, we should rule and as men of the community it is our duty to defend against the enemy.' Many followed these teachings and I was told by one man that in his constituency those who "went to the forest for 28 days [for circumcision] were much more inclined to fight and were often the ones leading the violence and stirring support."

4.2 Stereotyping

The flyer in Kijabe also highlights another important theme, calling the Luo community "uncircumcised beings" (Roberts, 2009, p.7). Again, similar to the Kalenjin community, narratives that negatively stereotyped the 'enemy' were spread. This specific stereotype of "uncircumcised beings" was built on a popular perception, stretching back many years, that the Luos are all children because they do not circumcise their boys, which for most tribes symbolizes the progression into manhood. This narrative had a strong influence on the mode of violence committed, as many Luos were forcibly circumcised, with the attackers claiming that they were "doing the right thing" as they were helping the Luos to become men, whilst

simultaneously punishing them for attacking Kikuyus.[26] Therefore, not only did this narrative lead to violence, but it also helped frame the mode of violence inflicted.

Other negative stereotypes also existed. Another man told me that during his upbringing his parents always declared: "a Luo is a lazy person, he only spends and he cannot think." Another Kikuyu explained that in his childhood he was taught that "the Luos are bad people … so you grow up hating them." Similarly, stereotypes of the Kalenjins were circulated that claimed they are people "always ready for war." Much of this negativity came from experiences of the 1992 and 1997 violence, when the older generations suffered the Kalenjin attacks. Parents remembered these events and transferred their bitterness and hatred onto the younger generation.

Thus, from a young age a Kikuyu learns that the Kalenjin and Luo are 'bad' people and are not to be trusted. These narratives made violence more possible because if "you hate them all … you are prepared to fight." Those who incited the violence played very heavily on these stereotypes and reinforced a hatred of the 'enemy' ethnic groups to deliberately engineer a violent Kikuyu reaction.

4.3 Narratives of the P.E.V.

However, in a significant break from the Kalenjin community, the most compelling narratives that gave meaning to violence were not based on Kikuyu traditions of violence or the 'lessons' of the past, because these traditions were very weak and impotent for most. As Machira Apollos, a Professor of Sociology at the University of Nairobi and a Kikuyu, explained, "We are [now] business people…. The traditional Kikuyu culture is mostly gone." The majority no longer undergo the 'traditional' initiation, many do not speak the Kikuyu language and Kikuyu oral

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[26] A peaceworker informed me that from his discussions with the attackers during and after the P.E.V, this was the reasoning that most had supplied to him.

history is very weak. Most of the characteristics that previously defined them as an ethnic group have been lost. Therefore, unlike its Kalenjin 'enemy' the most persuasive narratives giving meaning to violence came about rapidly in direct response to the events of the P.E.V.

During the campaigning and voting, Kikuyu ethnic identity certainly strengthened due to the tribal nature of Kenyan politics and the 'winner takes all' mentality. However, it was in response to the P.E.V. that a truly strong Kikuyu ethnic identity was constituted. This largely occurred when it became obvious that the Kikuyus were being targeted solely because of their ethnicity. Thus, the Kikuyus unified in a common bond of suffering in the sense that they were all suddenly at risk of attack. As one victim of the violence explained, "I don't see how someone can kill 2 or 3 or 4 or 5 Kikuyus and we are keeping quiet. That shows they are targeting us…. They want to finish our community." In a space of three weeks the Kikuyus evolved from a fairly disparate group with little holding them together into a largely unified and coherent body. They came together as a community in self-defence and a narrative of 'brotherhood' spread proclaiming, "Our brothers are being killed in other places," so we must respond.

This newfound Kikuyu solidarity turned violent as Kikuyus decided that they had to seek revenge. According to one man:

> [W]hen I hear on the television twenty Kikuyus were killed in Eldoret, in my mind that clicks that that is a Kalenjin killing a Kikuyu, so the very first step for me is to look for a Kalenjin and make a revenge. Likewise, a Kikuyu is killed in Kisumu, and he is not killed by a Kalenjin because that is a Luo area, so I must find the Luos here and kill them.

Kikuyus came to desire retribution for the attacks that their 'brothers' had suffered. This retribution encompassed seeking out members of the Luo and Kalenjin communities and inflicting brutal punishment.

However, this feeling did not spontaneously emerge in the minds of individual Kikuyus; rather, it was constructed through a set of powerful narratives. As already stated, the key sources of these narratives were the local business leaders and politicians who organized the violence and directed the youths to attack. For example, according to one Pastor in Naivasha they would call together the jobless youth who idle around at the roadside. As well as offering them payment they would describe the atrocities committed against their Kikuyu brothers and ask them if they will come and fight for their community and their people. A Kikuyu who attended one of these meetings in Naivasha recounted what the organizer told the group:

> They take the episode that has happened in the other place and say look what they have done to you, to our brothers, what if now they gang up and come to you. They want you to feel that pain and scar your mind and increase your anger. They stimulate you … in a way that you feel anger and fight and feel the pain of your brother and you assume that it is you.

The *Mungiki*, a criminal gang of Kikuyu ethnicity, also played a significant role in mobilizing people to fight and allegations are rife that they were operating in alliance with the business and political leaders and carrying out the will of these elites (HRW, 2008, p. 45; CIPEV, 2008, p. 122). I was told that *Mungiki* members were moving around Niavhasa exclaiming, "We want to avenge for the blood of our brothers that has been shed." Furthermore, local language FM stations were pivotal in spreading this message of revenge, with stations like Inooro FM, Kameme FM and Coro FM broadcasting hate speech and airing emotional testimonies of victims of the violence (KNCHR, 2008, p. 195).

Another source of narratives was those victims of the attacks who had fled to Naivasha and Nakuru and demanded a response. As a Kikuyu resident of Nakuru described:

> Some fled and came to take refuge… They partly instigated the violence because they would say 'What kind of people are you, how can you live

with Kalenjins here and they are the ones who I have witnessed killing my parents and my children.'

Similarly, I heard tales of victims going around Naivasha shouting, "No, no, no, why are they chasing our people and these [Luo and Kalenjin] people are still here." This narrative was particularly powerful because many of the residents in these areas witnessed busloads of Kikuyu victims arriving, many with horrific injuries and awful tales of Kalenjin and Luo brutality. This spread anger and resentment and these emotions were channelled into a violent response by this call to arms.

Once these narratives had been introduced they were reproduced and strengthened at a local level as ordinary Kikuyus started making statements like: "How can they kill my brother in Kisumu and here I am with the Luos, so these people must also go"; or "They are killing our Kikuyus in Eldoret and here we are living with the Kalenjin, we have to kill them"; and "Why are we living with these people peacefully and they are fighting us from the other end." Communities began to organize themselves into groups to revenge. A tale of one community response proceeded:

> One Sunday after church I went to the market to buy airtime and I found 600 local youths sitting down planning. The plan was to attack Nakuru blankets, a factory for spreads and blankets owned by a Luo. The intention was to break [through] the wall, kill all the Luos who were inside and then loot. The person who was speaking to the group was a local man, not a *Mungiki* or a politician.

Thus, these narratives of revenge became very powerful, constructing a framework to define and give meaning to the attacks on the Kikuyu population in other parts of the Rift Valley. The stories moulded a mentality where Kikuyus felt, "I had to fight for my people, that is why the war started." A newly emerging Kikuyu identity demanded that it was their duty as Kikuyus to defend their people and revenge for the death of their brothers who had been so brutally attacked. It was preached that the time was over to passively sit back and do nothing. Furthermore,

these narratives created a reality that *all* Luo and Kalenjin people were directly responsible for the actions of their brothers in other parts of the country. "Friends who had grown up together, played soccer together, went to school together and gone to fetch water and firewood in the same point," turned on each other. The community decided, "We cannot live together any longer…. For a longer time we have been friends but at that point we became enemies." Ethnicity became one's defining feature and the Kikuyu people's mindsets shifted, accepting that violence against the Luo and Kalenjin was legitimate and necessary.

As in the Kalenjin case, when combined, we can see a coherent storyline developing, joining multiple subplots to frame the events in such a way that when they relate well to one's reality and material existence, present violence as the right thing to do. One Kikuyu youth summarized this argument for me.

> In Naivasha many youths were jobless, they were idle. And so somebody comes and offers you lunch tomorrow. You have been hustling for a week and the only thing you could have raised is 50 Bob and now someone gives you 500 or a 1000 just to go and loot and chase somebody out of their home or just burn somebody's house.[27] And you feel that this is just a simple thing, after all I am not doing it alone. And then our people have also experienced the same. And then you find that your parents also support you because of the previous history, what they have been having in their hearts for a very long time so now this is a chance to exercise the thing out of you. And so it becomes very very tough to say no…

Overall, these narratives constituted reality. They gave meaning and order to the disorder and chaos of the P.E.V. and demanded that the only legitimate response was retaliatory violence.

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[27] "Bob" is the slang terminology for Kenyan Shillings.

5. Conclusion

> Though we have lost a lot of our members we persevere and we show them love. And all those bad things shall come to an end so that we can encourage one another, so that we don't fear one another as though it's a human being and a beast. We make them feel like people, and they shall make us feel like people, that's why we are persevering.[28]

This paper originated from the initial question, why violence? Why do communities who have for large periods peacefully co-existed suddenly turn on each other and inflict brutal violence? I argued that to answer this question we must turn to meaning to examine how communities understand violence. I showed that this meaning or understanding is socially constructed through the narratives and stories that frame experiences and call for a specific response. Thus, I argued that for the Kalenjins to turn on the Kikuyus, a storyline was introduced into that community by the elites and opinion leaders, building on pre-existing and available narratives and framing violence as legitimate and necessary. Similarly, the violent Kikuyu response to these Kalenjin and Luo attacks required a framing of the situation in such a way that demanded retaliatory violence.[29]

As academics our work must not only strive to analyze events; it must also possess an emancipatory potential and show how future atrocities can be prevented. In this final section, I turn to this latter task. In doing so, I hope to show that a hermeneutical approach to violence, in Kenya and beyond, is not only worthwhile but of paramount importance.[30] Both in attempting to grasp why a violent conflict occurs and, through this knowledge, striving to prevent future violence breaking out.

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[28] Interview with an elderly Kikuyu woman whose property had been destroyed in Molo district during the P.E.V. and who was still living in an internally displaced persons camp in the area.

[29] As a point of reference, research examining the war in the former Yugoslavia has produced similar findings that narratives played a crucial role in breaking down previously harmonious communities and inciting ethnic warfare, where neighbours turned on their neighbours and other innocent civilians. See Semelin, 2003; Lieberman, 2006; Oberschall, 2000.

[30] I suggest this hermeneutical approach to violence can be successfully applied to any case of violence globally. Wherever there is a group dynamic to violence, there will always be intersubjective meanings that researchers can strive to comprehend.

Furthermore, through this focus I seek to escape from the "dominant approach to conflict resolution … [and] peacekeeping today, [which] is based on 'Western' cultures and norms, and even shows ethnocentric and neo-imperialist tendencies" (Tomforde, 2010, p. 450). I propose a new approach based on understanding.[31]

My argument has two specific and important implications for peacebuilding. Firstly, we can aim towards peace by changing the experiences of people so that the narratives that frame these experiences either die out, or become less relevant and powerful. In the Kenyan case, this would involve a long term and systematic attempt to eradicate the conditions leading to violence. When we look beyond ethnicity we see that this conflict was really mobilized around poverty from the maldistribution of resources. The Kalenjin group felt marginalized and turned to violence as a way of seeking justice. And the poorer Kikuyus were incited to revenge. Poverty precipitated war. Thus, the successful reduction of poverty balanced across the Kikuyu and Kalenjin ethnic groups would start to release these tensions and make future political violence in Kenya unlikely. This approach, however, is not only long term, but also requires the full backing of a government committed to ending poverty. Unfortunately, the Kenyan government is "one of the most corrupt regimes in the world," and continually mistreats its citizens to the fullest extent (Kimenyi & Nudung"u, 2005, p. 151). Therefore, in the absence of a systematic policy approach, what else can be done?

I suggest that if narratives can lead to violence, as I have demonstrated in this paper, then counter-narratives can foster peace. The meaning of violence is learned

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[31] This approach has been propounded by Tom Woodhouse who calls for a focus on "peace culture" based on "the promotion of solidarity, understanding and tolerance among all peoples and cultures." In recent years, this focus has also been recognized by the United Nations who call for a culture of peace defined as "a set of values, attitudes, modes of behaviour and ways of life that reject violence and prevent conflicts by tackling their root causes, to solve problems through dialogue and negotiation among individuals, groups and nations" (Woodhouse, 2010, pp. 493, 492).

from the webs of meaning that exist and function in a community, which are constructed and held in narrative form. Thus, counter-narratives can alter these webs. By specifically understanding the narratives that lead to violence peacekeepers can specifically target them with compelling and powerful counter-narratives. Through this focus, peace can be constructed in the intersubjective realms of a community. Below, I give some examples of the specific counter-narratives of peace that could be particularly persuasive in leading the Kikuyu and Kalenjin communities to reject violence.

5.1 Counter-Narratives of 'Culture'

As I have argued, one of the most powerful narratives giving meaning to violence was constructed around traditions rooted in 'tribal culture.' This narrative, however, was based on a corrupted 'culture' – one only focused on the violent traditions of the community. Firstly, in the Kalenjin community there has been a massive corruption of the tradition of warriorhood. Previously, warriorhood was a dignified position, which the boys of the community would train for many months to reach. The 'traditional' warriors learnt strict rules dictating how they could fight and their task was to "protect the weak by overcoming the strong," meaning they could not target women, children or the elderly. To do so was a disgrace (Apollos, 2008, p. 128). Nowadays, though, warriorhood is more symbolic as cattle raiding and 'tribal wars' have largely died out. Thus, there are no longer 'real' warriors in Kalenjin communities. This breakdown was elucidated in the events of the P.E.V. where the Kalenjin youth committed many acts of violence that went completely against their 'traditional culture,' ignoring their values and codes of war. For example, gangs of Kalenjin burnt the Kiambaa Church in Eldoret killing scores of helpless citizens. And a group of Kalenjin elders, who claimed to have opposed the violence, admitted in dismay: "Now a group of youths

may go to a house at night, lock the door, pour petrol on the building and set it on fire. This is completely against Kalenjin culture, it is like a dream, but it still occurred in the violence."

In the P.E.V., there was also a gross corruption of the leadership of these warriors. Previously, the community was commanded by elders, who had reached that position through their age, experience, respectability and knowledge of the cultural and social practices of the community. Now, however, many 'tribal chiefs' are businessmen, politicians or 'elders' of young age, aspiring to political power and wealth. The 'cultural' leadership of the community has been economized and politicized. This corruption appears to run so deep that in the Kaptembwa, a district of Nakuru, I was told that those 'elders' who administered the oathing ceremonies before and after fighting were in fact paid to do so by politicians. Thus, many Kalenjin youths were directed to fight by a corrupted tradition of warriorhood preached by a corrupt band of leaders.

A similar picture emerged in the Kikuyu community. Eliud Ndegwa, a Kikuyu who ran to be the Member of Parliament in Molo Constituency and who now leads a peacebuilding organization called Hope Creator Foundation (HCF) explained:

> The Kikuyu culture is somehow dismantled. It is not very strong. The Kikuyu as a community are people of two worlds. There are people who do not know a lot of their history. The Kikuyu culture does not allow [Kikuyus] to kill or do any harm to other people. It does not even allow to burn somebody's house or steal somebody's livestock.

Therefore, in both communities there has been a general disintegration of pre-colonial values of war and peace and the structures that governed these.

I believe that to prevent future inter-ethnic violence there can be a reification of pre-colonial 'tribal culture' to counter this corrupt 'culture' that is used to incite war. The youth can be educated in the peaceful traditions and values of their ancestors. As

Eliud Ndegwa stated: "If we re-emphasise the ways that we used to fight we could have stopped a lot of the violence…. If we can follow our cultures strictly we cannot go killing, stealing or doing any harm to other people." These narratives could give the youth the ammunition to block the provocation of corrupt leaders and in the next election in 2012 when a councillor asks a group of young men to fight and tells them it is their duty as a Kalenjin or a Kikuyu, they can turn to the 'true' values of the community and reject this incitement. In this sense, narratives of 'culture' that emphasize peace can be supported and spread to trump narratives of 'culture' that demand war.

There is a precedent in the P.E.V. for these 'cultural' narratives being very powerful in preventing killing. Turning briefly to the Luo community, although they engaged in violence, they mostly only looted, burnt properties and threw stones. In Kisumu, where Luo attacks were most severe, very few Kikuyu citizens, if any, were killed or badly injured in the violence (KNCHR, 2008, pp. 97-108). According to the Luos who I questioned, this check on brutal violence derived from their 'cultural' fear of killing. One middle-aged Luo man told me:

> For the Luos it is wrong to kill because of a curse. We are told stories of men who killed someone and then bad things happened in their lives and to their children. We learn through stories and evidence, we see someone who has killed and then we see the bad things happens to his kids. So I believe that killing is wrong.

Every Luo I met expressed the same view, highlighting the immense potential of 'cultural' narratives as a tool for limiting violence.

Therefore, despite the fact that ethnic groups are social constructions, for many they are profoundly real and strongly influence understanding and action. They are real in the sense that they are tangible sources of meaning and identity and traditions that build on these ethnic identities have the potential to be highly influential. In 2007,

the elites in the Kalenjin community were very clever in manipulating this identity to reify a tradition of warriorhood and bring about violence for their own selfish interests. Now, the social reality of these ethnic groups must be utilised to prevent violence. An emphasis must be placed on the potential of this strong Kalenjin 'cultural' identity as a tool for building peace. Kalenjin communities must be helped to rediscover, within their 'culture,' a deep-rooted intersubjective tradition of non-violence, where to be a Kalenjin no longer requires one to fight; instead, it demands that one is peaceful. Similarly, for the Kikuyus, despite the fact their 'traditional culture' is much weaker, there is still a tangible reality and cohesion to their group. This emerging cohesive identity can be utilised to mould a strong mentality opposed to inter-ethnic war.

Going forward, how is this to be achieved? One option is to target the youth directly through dialogue and many organisations are attempting to do this. Another approach, which could be even more effective, is to build these counter-narratives through the family structure. Not only do the youth learn much of their 'cultural' values in this setting, but also many of the young boys who go and fight are still strongly influenced by their parents. In many cases, "The youth still listen to the older people so the old people have actually … the final decision on what will happen. If the old people say go to war then it is war. If the old people say just have peace, it is peace."

The inciters of violence grasped this dynamic clearly. For instance in Molo:

The politicians were passing through the old people from different communities. For example, if they come to me, I am an old man of this area … they will pass all the information to me that you have to do this and that and prepare the youth to attack other communities. And as a result all the problems happened in this area.

Non-Government Organizations like the 'Centre Conflict Resolution: Kenya' (CCR) and the HCF realise the leverage that the older generation possesses and target "the old men and women who are 65 years and above…to educate the young people about their culture." They try to help them rediscover their peaceful 'culture' and relearn their oral history and the songs and stories that previously transferred the non-violent values of the community to the youth. This way, parents can advise the youth to be peaceful. One elder man in Molo, a father of seven, summarised this rational for me:

> We are the parents of the big children at home. We're taking trouble to gather young people to advise them. We come and sit and talk together and address peace and we relearn our peaceful ways.

5.2 Counter-Narratives of Unity

'Cultural' narratives of peace, though, will always lack influence whilst the other set of narratives that caused division and legitimated violence remain dominant and unchallenged. As Jeremiah, a community leader in Molo explained, the roots of the violence formed when, "We decided to look at ourselves as individuals and not as Kenyans. We decided to look at ourselves as people who were more special than the others." In this essay, I have broadly called this negative ethnicity, where one ethnic group feels 'special' and superior to others rival groups and a sense of entitlement spreads. This negative ethnicity was strong before the P.E.V.; however, the events of 2007-08 raised it to another level as feelings of hatred became fortified. Since, these conflictual ethnic identities have hardened where one Kalenjin man told me, "The Kikuyus should live alone in their own place and just go away from here." Trust, respect and unity have withered making the potential of further violence in the 2012 elections a real worry. In fact, Koigi wa Wamwere recently wrote in an opinion piece in the *Daily Nation*, "If fought for and on behalf of communities, the next elections promise to be a bloody battlefield for ethnic warlords and their armies" (Wamwere,

2010). This threat must be addressed immediately and counter-narratives need to focus on deconstructing this negative ethnicity and recreating harmony and interdependence.

As I discussed, the root cause of negative ethnicity has been the perceived inequitable distribution of resources.[32] Since colonialism, ethnic groups have been placed in direct economic competition and resentment resulting from factors like poverty, landlessness and unemployment has been directed at the 'enemy' ethnic group. Particularly from the early 1990s under the rule of Daniel Moi elites have sought to further disunite Kenya and widen rifts by focusing on historical injustices and the supposed Kikuyu domination of business and government. Thus, within the Kalenjin community there is now a widespread belief that their suffering is caused by the continued Kikuyu 'occupation' of the Rift Valley, where Kikuyu existence is a direct threat to the Kalenjin way of life. To respond, counter-narratives must challenge this antagonistic economic relationship and reframe these ethnic identities so that the Kikuyus and Kalenjins are no longer in direct and violent competition for resources and politics is no longer a 'zero sum game' where one's loss is the other's gain. Specifically, the perception can be changed that the Kikuyu community prospered unfairly at independence and stole Kalenjin land. In reality, most Kikuyus who live in the Rift Valley are there as a result of a 'willing buyer willing seller relationship'

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[32] As I mentioned earlier, there is perhaps some truth to this perception that resources have been distributed unequally between the Kikuyu and Kalenjin ethnic groups. Opinion is currently divided over the extent to which the Kikuyus have prospered at the expense of the Kalenjin and it seems likely that *some* Kikuyus did unfairly gain access to resources during the Kenyatta regime. However, the perception in the Kalenjin community, emphasized by elite rhetoric, that *all* the Kikuyus have exploited and stolen the resources of the Kalenjins is a complete fallacy. In the Kikuyu community many thousands of people are landless and extremely poor. Thus, this truth must be emphasized to prevent another situation where impoverished Kalenjins are fighting impoverished Kikuyus in the belief that *all* Kikuyus are to blame for their poverty.

(Chege, 2008, p. 134). The real source of Kalenjin poverty and landlessness, therefore, is not the Kikuyu population at large, many of whom also live in extreme poverty, but certain corrupt politicians and their patronage henchmen who have consistently grabbed resources. This truth can be spread to overcome ethnic rivalry and even refocus anger on the real cause of suffering – the elites who propagate a corrupt political and economic system.

Another approach to reframe this economic relationship can build a narrative emphasising inter-ethnic peace and co-existence as a requirement for any kind of economic development. It can be demonstrated that fighting cannot improve a community's livelihood and violence has only impeded economic development and exacerbated hardship.[33] Currently, new narratives are being spread that, "Peace is the beginning of everything… [we] must know peace or else [we] cannot communicate and achieve anything. Peace is the beginning of any kind of development." This effort can be greatly enhanced by economic co-operation where Kikuyu and Kalenjin "work, live, think together and promote our environments together … [and] will start thinking as a community." I came across several organizations that are launching Kikuyu-Kalenjin joint business ventures striving to make these communities economically interdependent.

Alternatively, this interdependence can be pursued by developing bonds of friendship between communities. One method, which has been very successful in some regions, is to initiate the boys of different ethnicities together. Kalenjin and Kikuyu boys of the same age will reach adulthood as one and will become "brothers … and not see the need to fight." Taking another angle, the CCR holds sporting events

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[33] It has been demonstrated that the 2007-08 violence and political instability in Kenya had significant negative impacts on economic development and growth. For instance, in January and February of 2008 there were "sizeable decreases in income, expenditure and food consumption" (Dupas & Robinson, 2010, p. 120).

where teams made up of different ethnicities compete and build solidarity. Other organisations strive to achieve solidarity through 'cultural days' where the communities come together and share. Mike, the leader of Badlika Youth Group in Kaprires, a district of Nakuru, explained:

> In our area … we ask youth from a different community what do you like in your culture, what do you value most and they come with it. If it is dancing show us how you dance, if it is food prepare it for us…. Let's share and celebrate that moment, the moment of Africa, the moment of we are together, because at the end of the day we are all Kenyans.

Whatever the precise method, the goal is to challenge and breakdown this negative ethnicity where the Kalenjin and Kikuyu groups are defined as bitter enemies. Instead, a new national identity must be constructed where, regardless of one's tribe, people understand that they are all Kenyans and will declare, "When we came to Kenya we became Kenyans." These counter-narratives do not intend to replace ethnic identity or build a post-ethnic state. Far from it, they try to create a space where people of different ethnicities can mutually and peacefully coexist within a united Kenyan nation where Kenyans "value one another as human beings … and look at one another as one people, one nation, with one destiny." With hope, I echo Jeremiah's ambition that through this approach, in future when Kenyans come to vote they "will not consider the community that they come from. Instead, they will know everybody as a Kenyan." It is a hugely challenging task to reach this mentality because of the extent to which negative ethnicity has become entrenched. Nevertheless, it is possible and has already emerged in some youths who I met. One Kalenjin stated: "If there were disputed elections that is the leaders [doing], what can we do about it. You are my neighbour, we share water, we live together so why should we fight." A Kikuyu man mirrored this sentiment. "You cannot convince me to declare my friend an enemy because I understand it's politically driven. Of course I

get angry when I see my people burnt but I know not to take it out on Kalenjins near me." For political violence to be expelled from Kenya, the declarations of these two individuals must grow to become representative of the majority population, at which point, the P.E.V. will become a memory fading into the distant past.

Above all, the events of 2007-08 demonstrate the ease with which groups can be manipulated and incited to turn to violence. Perhaps this sudden turn represents the extreme malleability of the meanings of violence in Kenya, and maybe elsewhere in the 'post-colonial' world, where the discontinuity that these nations have experienced – originating with colonialism – has resulted in the disintegration of the earlier, deep-rooted values and norms that historically limited warfare. I would suggest that Kenya conceivably remains in a state of flux, torn between pre-colonial values based on tribal membership and more recent 'Western' values based on new marketized webs of meaning. As one Bishop put it, "We are in Africa but today many people are living in the West." This flux provides corrupt elites and opinion leaders the opportunity to produce compelling narratives of violence that rapidly tear apart the social fabric of the nation. Thus, regardless of the specific approach adopted, a strong and deep-rooted intersubjective acceptance of harmonious co-existence must be fostered and rebuilt to create long-term sustainable peace. To ignore this call will secure in the grasp of a corrupt elite the tools to turn a peaceful population violent and inflict future suffering and devastation on the people of Kenya.

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