

Full Length Research Paper

Ethnocentrism: Significance and effects on Kenyan society

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This study investigates the significance and effects of ethnocentrism in the Kenyan society. The usual concept of ethnocentrism combines the belief that one's culture is superior to other cultures with the practice of judging other cultures as inferior to one's own culture. This concept does not address the underlying issue of why people do this but emphasizes that people make false assumptions based on their own limited experience about others. Ethnocentrism is a major reason for divisions amongst members of different ethnicities, races, and religious groups in a society. Kenya is a multi-ethnic society with more than 40 ethnic groups. Historically, members of Kenya's ethnic groups co-existed, traded and intermarried often in symbiotic relationships between pastoralists and agricultural communities. With the advent of the multiparty democracy in 1991, Kenya has experienced a series of ethnic and political conflicts. This is a theoretical study based on descriptive analysis of the widely available literature on ethnocentrism and related concepts. The key finding of the study is that the effects of ethnocentrism on the Kenyan society have a two-fold perspective. One, Ethnocentrism has acted as medium rather than a cause of ethno-political conflicts the country has experienced. The main cause of these conflicts is the interaction between ethnocentrism and socioeconomics. Two, ethnocentrism has adversely affected socioeconomic development of the country especially during the 'Nyayo'era through the mismanagement of national resources.

Key words: Ethnocentrism, multi-ethnic society, ethnopolitical behaviour, socioeconomics and national resources.

INTRODUCTION

Ethnocentrism and related concepts

The overall objective of the study is to investigate the significance and effects of ethnocentrism on the Kenyan society while the specific objectives include drawing policy initiatives and recommendations from the study

findings. A couple of while the specific objectives include drawing policy initiatives and recommendations from the study findings. A couple of countries in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) have experienced state weaknesses or failure and

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eventual collapse. This experience was partly catalyzed by the persistence of ethnocentrism in governance and politics (Yieke, 2008). In their efforts to build nations and nationalisms after attaining their independence, most of these countries have not been able to overcome the challenge of integrating ethnic identities into concepts of nation state, citizenship and common good.

Ethnocentrism is a widespread tendency for people to favour their own group over another group on the belief that one's own ethnic group or one's own culture is superior to other ethnic groups and cultures. It denotes a cultural narrowness in which the ethnically centred individual rigidly accepted those of the in-group while rejecting those of the out-group (Ogretir and Ozcelik, 2008). This tendency has variously been labeled as ethnocentrism (Sumner, 1906), inter-group bias (Rabbie, 1991), in-group favouritism (Tajfel, 1981, 1982), or in-group and out-group differentiation (Rabbie, 1991; Tajfel, 1981, 1982; Dougherty and Pratzgraff, 1996). Ethnocentrism has many commonalities with prejudice, stereotyping, racism, discrimination, xenophobia. For example, prejudice refers to negative attitude toward an out-group and results in a harmful, detrimental or unfavourable view of an outgroup; a stereotype is a rigid image of typical characteristics of group members; discrimination refers to behavior that disadvantages individuals (Taylor, 1997). Racism is generally the belief that one's race, ethnic group, culture or biologically-determined group is supreme and all others are innately inferior and therefore has the right to dominate, exclude or even exterminate members of other groups (Hooghe et al., 2008). Racism is a form of prejudice. Prejudice can result from ethnocentrism and is often accompanied by discrimination. Many prejudices are based on stereotypes (Hooghe et al., 2008; Taylor, 1997). Ethnocentrism produces adverse effects of burdening one with the belief that one's culture, race and way of life is superior to those of others. Further, it prevents understanding and incites conflict when actions and words are seen as threats rather than different ways of experiencing life. It also creates tendency of manipulating ethnic identities for private interest. Overcoming this prejudice is necessary for the unity of a nation which entails prevailing over the challenges of integrating ethnic identities into concepts of nation state, citizenship and common good. The word ethnocentrism derives from the Greek word, *ethnos*, meaning 'nation' or 'people' and the English word, *centre* and is commonly used in circles where ethnicity, inter-ethnic relations and similar social issues are of concern. "Ethnic" refers to cultural heritage and "centrism" refers to the central starting point. The way people behave is particularly governed by their social-cultural backgrounds (Jhingan, 2009). The term ethnocentrism was first used in 1906 by Sumner to describe a cultural narrowness in which the ethnically centred individual rigidly accepted those who were culturally alike while just as rigidly rejecting who were culturally different (Ogretir and

Ozcelik, 2008). Hooghe et al. (2008) distinguishes two major components of ethnocentrism, cultural ethnocentrism and economic ethnocentrism. Cultural ethnocentrism has its origin in the belief that one's own cultural norms and attitudes are superior to the cultures of other societies or groups and often expresses itself in symbolic manner such as clothing, religious symbols and so on. Economic ethnocentrism is tied more closely to the perception that other groups can be seen as economic competitors and should be limited in their capacity as economic actors. The usual concept of ethnocentrism according to the anthropologists is the tendency to assume that one's own culture and way of life represents the norm or is superior to others. Sociologists and social-psychologists extend the term ethnocentrism to group attitudes shown by religious, economic, racial, caste and class group within a larger social order. In social psychology, ethnocentrism is generally referred to as group relations (Adorno, 1982). It is concerned with numerous groups toward which the individual has hostile opinions and attitudes but equally with groups toward which he/she is positively disposed. Ethnocentrism is a silent problem in that many people are not aware that they are even judging other cultures before being aware of ethnocentrism and its adverse effects, they also not aware that they are being ethnocentric and they do not understand they do not understand. The usual concept of ethnocentrism emphasizes that people make false assumptions based on their own limited experience but does not address the underlying issue of why people do this. Barger (2008) provides a more explicit definition of ethnocentrism which is the tendency of making false assumptions about others' ways of life based on own limited experience. The problem with ethnocentrism is that it leads to misunderstanding others by falsely distorting what is meaningful and functional to them in that their ways of life are seen in terms of 'own' life experience. Ethnocentrism is a nearly universal phenomenon or syndrome (Chinchen, 1997; Axelrod and Ross, 2003) as can be deduced from incidents such as the ancient biblical story of the Egyptian Pharaoh who ordered the killing of Hebrew males, the 1990 to 91 Gulf war, the 1994 genocide in Rwanda and Burudi, instances of turmoil experienced in Yugoslavia and in former Soviet Union as well as a series of after-election ethnic conflicts experienced in Kenya (Kasomo, 2012). Although natural and universal, ethnocentrism is neither morally correct nor logical. Ethnocentrism is a major reason for divisions amongst members of different ethnicities, races, and religious groups in a society. In international relations, ethnocentrism creates conflicts and inhibits resolution of conflicts. There are extreme forms of ethnocentrism that pose serious social problems such as racism, colonialism and ethnic cleansing. It is extremely difficult to completely prevent ethnocentrism but its severity can be decreased by raising awareness for it. This will lead to discovery that people flourish within societies, customs and cultures that

have nothing to do with one's own culture and that different ways can produce happy and productive lives.

Profile of the Kenyan Society

Kenya is a multi-ethnic society with more than 40 ethnic groups. In ethnic lines, the country is divided into six large ethnic groups that constitute 78% of the population including Kikuyu and related groups (21%), the Luhya (14%), the Kalenjin (13%), the Kamba (10%), the Luo (10%) and the Kisii (10%) (Council of Foreign Relation [CFR], 2013). Historically, members of Kenya's ethnic groups co-existed, traded and intermarried often in symbiotic relationships between pastoralists and agricultural communities (Lonsdale, 1981). Before 1991, the political and economic factors encouraged internal migration in Kenya without causing danger of ethnic clashes. The long-term socioeconomic trends show that the country experienced stable economy between 1963 to 1982 period at average growth rate of about 5%, fluctuating economic growth recording a low of below zero rate of growth between 1983 to 2002 period and a recovering and growing economy over the last 10 years with average growth rate greater than 3%. The corresponding poverty levels over these periods were below 40% in the first period, rapidly growing poverty recording a high of more 56% in the second period and declining poverty levels in the third period recording 46% in 2005/2006 (Republic of Kenya, various issues of Statistical Abstract) and currently at 43%. Before attaining self-rule in 1963, Kenya was a colony of the British Empire. By employing the policy of 'divide and rule', the colonial powers in the African continent created "tribes" and put traditional enemies under one roof (Ott, 1998) with view that these people could never be detribalized or able to gang up against the colonial authorities (Wakano, 1985). In Kenya, the British divided the country along ethnic lines into eight provinces creating a different ethnic group as a majority in each province (Yieke, 2008). Each province was subdivided into districts according to ethnic groups. For instance, the Luo were based in Nyanza province which also is the home of the Kisii, the Kikuyu in Central province, the Somali in the North Eastern province, the Luhya in Western province, the Mijikenda in the Coast province. The Rift Valley province was dominated by the Kalenjin but also the Masaai, Turkana and Samburu. The Kamba share the Eastern province with the Meru and Embu among others. Nairobi is the most cosmopolitan province with the Kikuyu forming a plurality. The colonial powers created disparities between tribes in the way they assigned roles (Kasomo, 2012). Some tribes were seen to be good cooks and watchmen, others as being good shamba boys while only the selected few could serve in clerical capacities. At independence in 1963, these disparities were manifest. Some people found

themselves disadvantaged because of the roles they had been assigned by the colonial powers (Kasomo, 2012). The churches also followed the colonial policy of 'divide and rule'. For instance, the Methodist took Meru while the African Inland church (AIC) took Kamba and Kalenjin lands. The Luo and Kisii were identified with the Seventh Day Adventist (SDA). The Islam took the coast region while the Catholic church was present in lesser or greater sense here and there. The presidency in many countries in SSA, Kenya included, is not seen as a symbol of unity and leaders are accused of nepotism and ethnic favouritism (Ayedemo (1993). In Kenya for instance, the general public perception for the president is a symbol of "eating", a perception that has led to ethnic clashes (Kasomo, 2012). After 28 years of self-rule under a one party-political system, Kenya ushered in the multiparty democracy in 1991. With multiparty democracy, new political parties emerged that were essentially marked by ethno-regional interests. According to Adar (1999), the multiparty democracy was the advent of violent ethnic clashes in Kenya, initially referred to as tribal clashes. During the 1992 general elections (the first general election under multiparty democracy), violent ethnic clashes emerged in the Rift Valley province and in some parts of Western and Nyanza provinces. The violence was an ethnicised expression of political conflict where ethnicity was a medium of political conflict rather than a cause (Yieke, 2008). The first cases of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) perceived as "outsiders" were experienced in Kenya. Since 1992, a self-perpetuating ethnicity system has emerged for sharpening ethnic identity and chauvinism as well as promoting "doctrine" that specific regions of the country belonged to groups that originally occupied them and all other groups were essentially "outsiders", "foreigners" or "aliens" regardless of legal land ownership or the governing constitutional rights of all Kenyans to live in any part of their choice within the country (Ndegwa, 1997). The proximate and root causes of large-scale inter-ethnic violence in Kenya can be said to be intrinsically related to democratization and electoral cycle that is, politically instigated rather than primordial (Yieke, 2008). With multiparty democracy, Kenyan politics historically became contents in which the leaders of the country's largest ethnic groups form ethnic coalitions among themselves and with the leaders of smaller groups to dominate their rivals. This trend has resulted in a polarized electorate and outbreaks of violence between members of rival ethnic groups (CFR, 2013). In response to the distributional grievances that have contributed to political strife, Kenya enacted a new constitution in 2010 focusing on decentralization and far reaching institutional and public finance reform. The constitution embarked on fundamental devolution of power dividing the country into 47 counties to which both political power and government functions are devolved (Ndi, 2010). The new constitution created two distinct and interdependent levels of political authority, national

and county, as equal partners before the constitution to engage on basis of consultation and cooperation. It is critical that the devolution delivers on the promise of a more equitable distribution of national resources and development outcomes.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical aspects

This section highlights theoretical issues related to ethnocentrism in society, theories of ethnocentrism, ethnocentrism in history, ethnocentric behaviour, ethnocentrism and conflicts in the African perspective, and overcoming ethnocentrism.

The behavior of people is governed by their social-cultural background (Jhingan, 2009), that is by their sense of belonging, nationalism, patriotism, social values, political progress, development, and so on. Ethnocentrism leads to misunderstanding others, falsely distorting what is meaningful and functional to other peoples experience and ways of life seen only from one's own context. Lack of understanding can inhibit constructive resolutions when conflicts emerge between social groups. People are not aware that they can develop more valid understandings about how they experience life. Ethnicity reinforces a people's social-cultural background in charting out their destinies with regard to national unity and progress but can also be source of violence and instability in a society when, for instance, out of misguided individual egos, it is used for mischief bordering on corruption, mismanagement and greed for power (Kukubor, 2006). It is human nature to assume that any group to which we belong is the standard against which all other groups should rightfully be compared. Sumner (1906) came up with the term ethnocentrism to explain the phenomenon of differentiation between "us" and "them". One of the issues to consider is that ethnocentrism is often exploited to foster conflict and promote the power of a particular group. History shows that promoting an "us versus them" perspective, the political, religious and other groups, foster discrimination and conflict to benefit themselves at the expense of others. Social conflicts and wars usually have ethnocentrism at their core which, overtime, usually proves to be self-destructive for all concerned (Barger, 2008).

Ethnocentrism is one of the common characteristics of relations between different groups especially when one group holds more power, has more privileges or more resources and uses the difference as a legitimation to dominate or marginalize others (Van Dijk, 1993). Ethnocentrism is what Kenyans have regarded to as negative ethnicity (Wa Wamwere, 2008) and can be combated (Saro-Wiwa, 1989). The ethnocentric have no insight into their own prejudice and believe that their prejudice is

based upon objective backgrounds that cannot be compromised. By this strong fixation, an ethnocentric is capable of violence and other forms of crime towards members of other ethnic groups he/she holds to be "inferior" and can easily support the use of force to dogmatically maintain their "superior" belief (Yieke, 2008). Kenya as a nation, experienced this type of scenario during the 2007 general elections. Lavine and Campbell (1972) summarize the psycho-analytical and psycho-dynamic theories (approaches) that explain the issue of ethnocentrism and related concepts. These theories include the satisfaction of inclination to aggression theory (commonly referred to as Freud's psycho-analytical approach about group processes), the object relations model, the personality dynamics theory and the theory of frustration and aggression displacement. In the theory of satisfaction of inclination to aggression, the term ethnocentrism is a relationship of group-centredness with self-centredness where the self-love of the individual is expressed as antipathies and aversions toward strangers but when a group is formed, this intolerance toward others vanishes as the individual equates himself/herself with other members of the group (Lavine and Campbell, 1972). By means of this approach, cohesion among members of the community is made easier; hostility toward out-groups is one inevitable outcome of in-group cohesion (Freud, 1930). There is a psychic bond that attracts the individuals to the group and its members and by identifying with the group, individuals are able to enhance their own sense of worth (Freud, 1921/1922).

The object relations model relates to identity formation. Identity formation involves a continuous conflict with powerful negative identity elements. This can give rise to suitable targets of externalization (STEs) or reservoirs of images in which a child externalizes unintegrated good and bad images of himself and others (Volkan, 1988; Barash, 1991). People who are positive STEs are seen as allies, friends and leaders while people who are negative STEs are regarded as enemies. In times of aggravated crises, negative STEs can arouse in a man a murderous hate of all kinds of 'otherness' in strangers and in himself (Deutsch, 1990). In personality dynamics theory, Levine and Campbell (1972) explain that the mechanism for out-group hostility lies in guilt over ambivalence and its consequences are manifested through effects on cognitive processes with sharp category boundaries. For instance, early in a child's life, the parent who is over-concerned about social status and proper behavior and uses harsh autocratic discipline to rear socially acceptable children, such children become ethnocentric but will suppress their hostilities toward their parents and project aggression into powerless minority groups such as the Jews and Blacks (Fisher, 1990). The theory of frustration and aggression displacement assumed that aggression is always a consequence of frustration and that frustration always leads to some form

of aggression. For this theory, ethnocentrism and prejudice is a result of universal intra-psychic processes such as scapegoating. According to scapegoat concept, prejudice toward members of the out-group is the result of a displacement of aggression from a powerful frustrator to a powerless minority group. For instance, transgressions and sins of Israelites are transferred to the goat, and the goat is sent into the wilderness (Rothbart and Lewis, 1994). The scapegoating of Jews in Nazi Germany was due to the displacement of aggression toward them (Taylor and Moghaddam, 1994).

From sociological perspective, theories that have a bearing on ethnocentrism include the social-conflict theories with the basic premise that society is composed of competing groups which are not harmonious. The focus of the theories is on equalities in society and the struggle to gain control over scarce resources. Once a group achieves dominance over others, it seeks to use the available mechanisms of social control to its own advantage in order to maintain a dominant position. For instance, the social identity theory assumes that ethnocentrism is the result of a strong identification with the in-group of the actor which almost automatically leads to negative feelings and stereotyping toward members of the out-group. In contrast, the realistic conflict theory assumes that ethnocentrism is triggered by a real or perceived conflict between various ethnic groups competing for scarce resources in society (Hooghe et al., 2008). Karl Marx (1818 to 1883) is the most famous social-conflict theorist. Each of these theoretical approaches points to different factors as causes of ethnocentrism. According to Ogretir and Ozcelik (2008), the theorists who have assumed that inter-group conflicts stem from biologically based dispositions common to human species or universal conditions of human life, believed that aggressive and ethnocentrism tendencies cannot be eliminated as a major factor in group behavior. Whereas, the theorists who have assumed that inter-group conflicts are patterns of group behavior developed and retained for its adaptive value in the course of man's sociocultural evolution, believed that ethnocentrism should disappear under environmental conditions in which it is maladaptive. According to several researchers including Seddens (2011), almost every conflict the world has experienced has been because of ethnocentrism. Some key examples include the following: the present day politics, European imperialism, the Mandate of Heaven, Nazi German, developed countries. In the present day politics, America was bombed on 9th November 1989 because the terrorists selfishly believed they were better than Americans and that the Americans must be demolished. Since its inception, the United States of America has often thought of itself as more powerful, more economically sound, and just generally "better" than other nations. Imperialism, the practice of taking over others' lands, was heavily practiced by Europe starting in the 16th century. For instance, several

colonies in the United States and lands in Africa were some of the regions the Europeans tried to control. The Europeans believed both Africans and the Americans to be primitive societies based on hunting and farming, and felt that they needed to take over these nations in order to bring them up to speed with modern technologies. When the US was settled by the British in the 1700s, the colonists terrorized the Native America because they thought the natives were savage, unworthy people. One of the most prominent examples of ethnocentrism was the Sinocentric system developed out of the idea of the "Mandate of Heaven" proliferated by the Chinese philosopher, Confucius. The "Mandate of Heaven" meant that the Chinese felt that they had received divine power which entitled them to exert heavy rule of the citizens, and that they had power over the rest of the world. While this system of government formally ended in the 19th century, some scholars believe that the Chinese ethnocentrism lives on. One of the most well-known and most horrible examples of ethnocentrism to ever occur was during the Nazi Germany. Adolf Hitler decided that he hated the Jews, as well as some other groups of people, and had many innocent people slaughtered on concentration camps. These people did not deserve the torture they received and this was clearly an extreme case of ethnocentrism. People in developed countries in Europe and America tend to despise other nations and their customs terming them queer and foolish just because they are different from their own. It is believed that ethnocentrism is a major cause of problems between the western industrialized countries and the developing countries (Kasomo, 2012).

Axelrod and Ross (2003) define ethnocentric behavior as cooperation with members of one's own group (in-group favouritism) and noncooperation toward members of other groups (out-group hostility). According to Levine and Campbell (1972), behaviours entail cooperative relations with the in-group and absence of cooperative relations with the out-group. Membership in the group is evaluated in terms of observable characteristics such as language, accent, physical features, religion, and so on, that are regarded as indicating common descent (Sumner, 1906; Hirshfeld, 1996; Kurzban et al., 2001). Axelrod and Ross (2003) enumerate ten distinct mechanisms that can support cooperative relations including central authority such as state or empire (Hobbes, 1651; Tilly, 1992); inclusive fitness based on kinship (Hamilton, 1964); barter and markets (Smith, 1776; Samuelson, 1947); principle agent mechanism (Spence and Zeckhauser, 1971); reciprocity based on continuing interaction (Trivers, 1971; Axelrod, 1984); decentralized enforcement and including norms (Axelrod, 1986; Hatcher and Opp, 2001), informal institutions (Ostrom, 1998) trust (Hardin, 2002) and social capital (Coleman, 1990; Putnam 2000); group selection (Sober and Wilson, 1998); docility (Scinon, 1990); reputation (Nowak and Sigmund, 1998) and; in-group favouritism (Axelrod and

Ross, 2003). According to Levine and Campbell (1972), ethnocentrism is a special but almost universal example of in-group favouritism and out-group hostility. Ethnocentrism is implicated in ethnic conflict (Chiro and Seligman, 2001; Brewer, 1979a), war (Van der Dennen, 1995), consumer choice (Klein and Etthnson, 1999) and voting (Kinder, 1998). In most Africa countries, ethnocentrism is a key factor in political struggles and distribution of resources (Aquiline, 2008; Lamb, 1984; Cohen, 1981). For instance, the introduction of multiparty democracy in 1990s opened a competition that has shaped the context of struggle for political power among political leaders and ethnic communities. Under the influence of ethnic politics, voters do not appeal as much to the criteria of economic performance, provision of social services and common good as to enabling their members to control the state (Aquiline, 2008). The rationale used is to ensure that many from their ethnic group control government affairs. Political leaders convince ethnic groups to believe that they rule the country on their behalf. The president is seen as an ethnic ruler. People believe that if one of theirs holds a high post, it is held in trust for the benefit of their community.

Similarly, political parties become ethnic parties slated for ethnic bargaining to acquire political power that allows them to “loot” the state. It is from this perspective that a number of political parties promote ethnic politics and regard the introduction of multiparty democracy as a way of decentralizing the state in favour of ethno-nationalism. Such practices create mutual mistrust between ethnic groups. Those who belong to less dominant ethnic groups feel left out and discriminated by the system. In turn, they feel obliged to act, legally or illegally, to ensure their survival. The tendency of self-assertion emerging from different ethnic groups for survival is the one of the root causes of widespread ethnic conflicts in most of the countries in the SSA region. Ethnocentrism is also the root cause of the phenomenon of ethno-political competition, discrimination and violence that has been experienced in several of the so called “weak” or “collapsed” states in SSA, for instance, Rwanda, Burundi, Somalia, Sierra Leone, Ethiopia (Aquiline, 2008). Some of the manifestations of ethnocentrism commonly found in the “weak” or “collapsed” states are citizenship crisis, lack of political consensus, economic insecurity, lack of an agreed upon concept of the common good. In the post-colonial period, most countries in SSA have faced ethnic competition for scarce economic resources and political power, each ethnic group tending to struggle to control the state. Ethnic strategies often are connected with control of the economy including employment, education, lucrative office jobs, argues Aquiline (2008). Ethnic leaders practice ethnic discrimination by promoting ethnic demarcation and regionalism. The phenomenon of ethnic discrimination comes into play, for instance, when each region is identified with a certain ethnic group and

whenever political misunderstandings emerge, those belonging to “out-groups” are considered as “foreigners” or “aliens” and always forced to go to their ancestral land.

Ethno-political violence is a deliberate political strategy intended by desperate groups to effect change in the political system that marginalizes them in terms of unequal distribution of resources, explains Aquiline (2008). According to Aquiline (2008), Okullo (1987) and Cohen (1981), ethnocentrism is not a result of primordial communal sentiments that obstruct unification of the state but rather is the result of incomplete structural integration between ethnic identities and national identity. A nation is not an aggregate of individuals but rather a unity of independent institutions of which ethnic group is one, argues Okullo (1987). Ethnic groups form a strong foundation upon which a strong nation can be built but it is a necessary condition to know how to effectively distinguish between that which belongs to ethnic group and that which belongs to the nation. The practice of manipulating ethnic identities or the thought that nation affairs could be dictated from the view point of one ethnic group is a mistake, explains Okullo (1987). Cohen (1981) emphasizes the need to respect the diversity of ethnic identities as an important factor in forming a cohesive political society. Ethnicity has great potential for shaping social cohesion as well as in forging understanding of citizenship as a process involving consensus building between similarities and differences in ethnic group identities. The failure to recognize the power of ethnic identity will continue to foment political instability and exacerbate situation of civil unrest as has prevailed in most “weak” states of the SSA region (Aquiline, 2008). Essentially, ethnocentrism is due to the failure to modify ethnic identification in favour of national identity while not undermining the diversity of ethnic identities. The authors contend that, contrary to what has been portrayed by the forces of colonization and post-colonial politics, ethnic identities are not evil in themselves, because if constructively appropriated, they could become a national treasure while manipulated for self-interest, they become harmful. The emergence of ethno-political violence could be linked to the competing process for distribution of resources among ethnic groups by three key factors: ethnic identities, loyalties and interests (Aquiline, 2008). Ethnic identities are political in character and act as a pole around which members are mobilized and effectively compete for the control of state power and economic resources. Leaders at national level allocate to their ethnic groups considerable resources to maintain their political influence as well as the control of the ethnic groups concerned. Such leaders aim at maximizing their support and access to resources in competition to rival politicians. The practice breeds destructive competition and conflict.

In the post-colonial era, ethnic loyalties have increased incentives more compared to the colonial era, for instance, a quick promotion in one’s status at work place.

Loyalties can be influenced by interest groups, cultural groups, religious groups as well as self-interest when one uses others as a ladder to acquire power and wealth. The success of political leaders in winning popular backing depends upon the trust which they inspire and their ability to obtain material benefits for their groups in form of government jobs, schools, clinics, roads, electric supply, etc. This is patronage politics commonly referred to as model of politization of ethnic identities (Cohen, 1981) where economic resources are used as a political tool to enable the leaders to buy support for their policies. It is a key principle of manipulation used by some political leaders to serve their own interests. One of the consequences of using these methodologies is that the ethnic groups are trained to acquire an attitude of concentrating on winning favours and fighting for limited national resources. On the other hand, the participation of the politicians in public affairs is reduced to a game of advocating ethnic interests rather than in building structures that can generate equal participation, justice and development for all (Aquiline, 2008; Cohen, (1981). People no longer see hard work as the source of economic success. Addressing ethnocentrism is not a matter of trying not to be ethnocentric because it is a bias that inhibits people from understanding of other peoples' life experiences. People do not understand that they are falsely assuming something that is not the case but only out of context (Barger, 2008). People will always have their assumptions about life based on their existing limited experience, that is, they will always be ethnocentric. The recognition and control method for addressing ethnocentrism entails people catching themselves when they are being ethnocentric and controlling for these biases and seeking to develop more valid and balanced understandings. The first step is for people to recognize that they do not understand, to become aware that they are falsely assuming something that is not the case but out of context, to become consciously aware of something that is happening subconsciously (Barger, 2008). By observing their reactions (positive or negative) towards others people get clues that they are not understanding and become aware that they are assuming something and their assumptions are not working in the situation. For instance, cross-cultural encounters reveal more about a group's perspectives in terms of its values and emotional investments than about others' groups and provides unique opportunities to learn about itself.

The next step is for people to control their biases once they realize that they do not understand and to seek to develop more valid and balanced understandings. According to Barger (2008), the best way for controlling the biases is to ask other peoples for their explanations about their meanings and adaptive functions of the behavior and situation. There are many meanings of any behavior often very deep in peoples' subconscious and difficult to put into words. Differences in meanings are the

basis of ethnocentrism. Adaptive functions help adapt to life challenges ecologically, biologically, economically, socially, psychologically, and so on. There are many functions of any given cultural practices including ecological, biological, economic, social, psychological, and so on, functions that help a group adapt to life challenges and can lead to the greatest insights into others' cultural systems. By understanding and considering how others' ways and experiences are meaningful and functional in life, people can grasp that there are many valid ways in which human beings can experience happy and productive life and can help developing a functional understanding to interact successfully with others. One goal that is achievable is establishing valid and balanced understanding in the context of recognizing what people do not understand. For instance, many immigrants who have become functional members of the American society demonstrate this is possible (Barger, 2008). Where there is more valid and balanced understandings, there is more sound basis for identifying the common overlap areas where effective agreements and solutions can be reached. Self-determination is one of most effective means of social change for all parties concerned.

Politization of ethnic identities creates conflict or imbalance between concrete commitment to public life (or national identity) and concrete commitment to ethnic identities, loyalties and interests (or ethnic identity). This obstacle is the basis of the problem that several of the SSA countries have faced in the post-colonial era of integrating ethnic identities, loyalties and interests (or simply ethnic identity) within the structure of the nation state (Aquiline, 2008; Cohen, 1981). For social cohesion to take root, a balance between competing national identity and ethnic identities, loyalties and interests among various ethnic groups is necessary. Such a balance can be achieved and maintained by developing social structures founded upon the principle of overlapping loyalties (Aquiline, 2008).

This principle entails weighing between the competing loyalties (ethnic) and competing goods (national) and acting in a way that attends to their rightful claim. The need to respect the diversity of ethnic identities is an important aspect of forming a cohesive political society. According to Cohen (1981), the process of harmonizing competing loyalties must be achieved by maintaining a balance between the state identity and ethnic communities. Henry Shue (1980) contends that access to a multiplicity of goods promotes a diversity of interests that enables each group to participate in the common structure laid down by consensus. Political consensus can articulate new perspectives and preferences necessary to enhance the balancing process by dissolving ethno-political competition and creating institutions that can guarantee equal citizenship, participation and justice. A balance of interests achieved by free bargaining between ethnic groups creates a comprehensive conception

of the common good as a way of lessening competition and tension between ethnic groups. The task of African societies, Kenyan included, is to formulate an inclusive concept of the common good based on ethnic identities and political consensus without suppressing ethnic differences. This entails developing profound unity that respects ethnic diversity; a unity that cherishes participation and creativity in the interest of common good (Haverwas, 1974).

METHODOLOGY

Empirical aspects

This section highlights empirical evidence on various issues including ethnocentrism as a catalyst of inter-community conflicts, the role of ethnocentrism in community conflicts, danger of ethnocentric politics, identity formation and politics.

Available empirical evidence shows that cultural differences contribute significantly to inter-communal violent conflicts in Sub-Saharan Africa compared to economic and political differences (Atiku et al., 2003). In Sub-Saharan Africa, state weakness or failure and eventual collapse is partly catalyzed by the persistence of ethnocentrism in governance and politics. This persistence has been one of the key challenges of the post-independence period SSA efforts have been focused on building nations and nationalisms that have relied less on ethnicity and ethnic patronage. Yoku (2009) investigates the role of ethnocentrism or tribalism in community conflicts in SSA using proxy measures for the level of social distance between social groups and Kenya, Nigeria and Zimbabwe as test cases. The social distance between ethnic groups is the effect to which members of one ethnic group would accept a member of another ethnic group metaphorically and geographically. Group membership boundaries or social distance become increasingly salient the closer the spatial contact between groups (Tajfel, 1982). The precise measures of social distance among ethnic groups in Africa are not available. The proxy measures used include the strength of ethnic identification defined as 'the specific group you feel you belong to first and foremost besides nationality' or the strength of ethnic attachment defined as 'the identity group to which you feel much stronger ties to other people than people of your nationality'. Representative sampled data including all ethnic groups as well as rural and urban dwellers from the Afrobarometer surveys in 1999 to 2001 and 2004 to examine the extent to which ethnocentrism was prevalent in a few SSA countries experiencing violent inter-communal conflict. Results show that 2 out of 10 Kenyans consider their ethnic identity as foremost compared to 1 out of 2 in Nigeria but more Kenyans chose occupational group as foremost. The author concludes that socioeconomic aspects have perhaps more to do with violent inter-communal conflict than mere ethnicity due to the fact that one's occupation determines earnings and socioeconomic rank as a result. If strong identification and attachment to ethnic group plays a role in violent conflict in Kenya, it must interact with occupational or economic dissatisfaction or differences. Political parties are organizations formed to seek influence in government policy through an electoral process. It is common to find individuals with common political aspirations coming together to form such associations to nominate candidates and attempt to seat them in political office. Individuals with similar ethnic, geographical, educational, ideological, religious and many common beliefs easily come together to form a political party to seek mandate of a people to lead them. The danger of ethnocentric politics is that there are individuals who would do anything for the sake of gaining political power. Cases of the danger of ethnocentric politics in the recent

history of Africa include the 1994 Burundi and Rwanda genocide, the post-election violence (PEV) in Kenya's 2007 general elections, and cases in Nigeria and Ivory Coast. Some of the most important empirical findings related to in-group and out-group processes include group affiliation as central to identity formation (Howard, 2000) and identity politics (Lactin, 1998; Monroe et al., 2000) such that individuals as members of an in-group are more likely to contribute to collective welfare even at the cost of individual advantage (Brewer and Kramer, 1986; Kramer and Brewer, 1984). Sheriff (1961) indicate that both in-group favoritism and out-group hostility tend to be stronger in competitive situations or in the presence of external threats. Bentley (1987) found that people validate their membership in an ethnic group by pointing to some set of attributes, usually overt cultural traits that members believe they share in common. Tajfel (1982) showed that group membership boundaries become increasingly salient the closer the spatial contact between groups. Cashdan (2001) found that in-group favourism and out-group hostility (xenophobia) are somewhat different processes and appear to be empirically uncorrelated. Guimaraes (1996) studied racial discrimination in the Brazil focusing on restriction of individual rights, politics of discrimination and geography of racism and anti-racism and found cases where persons were restricted from circulating freely, the right to consume certain goods and services was denied, discrimination in its various forms and types (in the workplace and professional practice, between equals and with inverted hierarchy reflected in physical and verbal aggression as well as in the context of market and interpersonal relations and in the public sector). Social identity was constructed in reference to the concept of race in that social belonging was determining by it (Guimaraes (1996). Gurr (1993a, 2000) developed an interactive model of ethnopolitical behavior built around four key determinants in civil conflict including identity, capacity, incentives and opportunities. Capacity refers to the capacity of groups to mobilize their members in support of collective action (Tilly, 1978). The premise related to incentives is that conflict will result when relative inter-group inequalities generate grievances that give groups the incentive to rebel (Gurr, 1970). Opportunities refer to factors external to a group that influence decisions about how to pursue ethnopolitical objectives. The model posits that ethnopolitical action is more likely to develop within those groups that have strongest and most cohesive identities, the greatest extent of grievances supplying the incentive to organize, the most elaborate networks and leadership capabilities that give them the capacity to successfully mobilize, and a set of external factors furnishing the opportunities to mobilize against the state. Gurr (1993b), Lindstrom and Moore (1995) and Gurr and Moore (1997) found that ethnopolitical rebellion diminishes the more a state penetrates society. Gurr (2000) found that the cohesiveness of the group's identity acts as a crucial resource facilitating the capacity of leaders to mobilize the group. Incentives are primarily grievances from relative deprivation (Gurr, 1970).

Conceptual framework

This paper is a theoretical study based on descriptive analysis of available literature on ethnocentrism and related concepts. The key premises governing the study include the psycho-analytical and psycho-dynamic theories (Levine and Campbell, 1972), social conflict theories (Rabbie, 1991) and the interactive model of ethnopolitical behavior (Gurr, 1993a, 2000). A theoretical framework showing the interrelationships of the variables employed in the study is conceptualized as presented in Figure 1. Ethnopolitical action (behavior) is direct product of grievances, mobilization and opportunities. Grievances are a function of collective disadvantages and state penetration. Collective disadvantages (inequalities) are influenced by two variables: socioeconomic aspects and the interaction (product) of socioeconomic aspects with ethnocentrism.

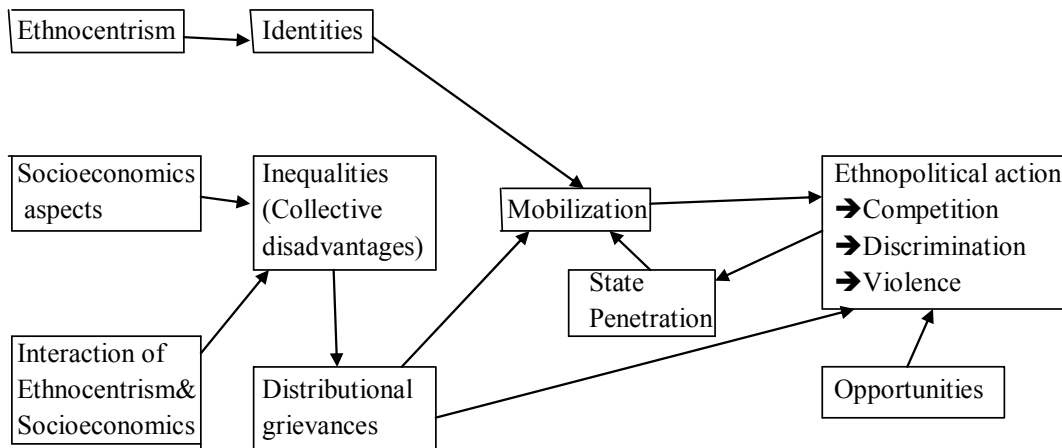


Figure 1. Theoretical Framework of Effects of Ethnocentrism in Kenya

Mobilization is directly influenced by the strength of groups' identity, the groups' grievances and state penetration.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Introduction

Kenya is a multi-ethnic society where many communities have lived in harmony for many years as a result of cherished practice inherited from the diverse indigenous cultures where ethnic identity was a symbol of communal solidarity and security. The meaning and nature of these practices become clear on considering the cultural, socioeconomic and political changes the country has experienced from a triple historical perspective: pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial periods. During the pre-colonial period, ethnic groups were more rural, homogeneous and less competitive among themselves for scarce resources than today. There was recognized art of living in reasonably peaceful way without a state structure than in the way understood today (Lonsdale, 1981). During the colonial period, small ethnic groups were forced to merge. The post-colonial period has witnessed competition for scarce resources and political power, each ethnic group tending to fight to have a president from their group. Since independence in 1963, political life in Kenya has been marked by cases of ethnopolitical competition that degenerated into competition, discrimination and violence as witnessed during the 2007 general elections (Aquiline, 2008).

Ethno competition and discrimination (political favouritism)

Ethnocentric politics in Kenya was not manifest during the first 28 years of self-rule but with the advent of the

multiparty democracy in 1991, the scenario changed drastically. Political power and rights shaped relationships among Kenya's ethnic groups. Jomo Kenyatta, the first president of Kenya showed political favoritism to the Kikuyu, his ethnic group (Holmquist and Oendo, 2001; Haugerud, 1995). Similarly, Arap Moi, the second president of Kenya, increasingly favoured the Kalenjin during his presidency. Political favoritism has proven unavoidable since 1992 and Kenyans invariably support the political candidate of their own ethnic group such that political parties are divided along ethnic lines. Kenya started to experience emergence of several political parties based on ethno-regional interests. For the ethnic group, the president would "loot" the state resources for the group as general public perception held that the president is not for the state but his/her ethnic group. This has been a root cause for the struggle to control the state. In recent years, the dominant ethnic groups have been on the forefront in fighting for political power, fighting to control the state while the relatively less dominant communities have been playing the card of opportunism (Aquiline, 2008). Ethnic strategies are often connected with resources of modern economy such as gaining employment, education, securing loans, seizing appointments for the lucrative office jobs, and so on. The practice of ethnic discrimination became live in form of ethnic demarcation and regionalism promoted by ethnic leaders. Since most of the regions are identified with a certain ethnic group the phenomenon of ethnic discrimination comes into play whenever political misunderstandings emerge in some regions, those identified as "outsiders" or "foreigners" or "aliens" are always to go to their ancestral land. For instance, efforts were witnessed in the 1990s to marginalize one of the dominant ethnic groups in Kenya where such utterances as 'the members of that ethnic group must lie low as an envelope' and several cases IPDs were experienced.

Ethno-political violence

Since early 1990s, the nature of the Kenyan political system can be described as having been intrinsically linked to ethnic violence and electoral cycle. A significant increase in severity of such violence was witnessed after the introduction of multiparty politics in early 1990s. For instance, the attacking, displacing and killing of the Kikuyu community by armed Kalenjin community during the first multiparty elections in 1992. This was a primary ethnic violence caused by the desire of the Kalenjin dominated Government to displace the Kikuyus who, they felt were wrongfully occupying traditional their lands. Under Jomo Kenyatta, Kikuyus acquired large tracts of land in the Rift Valley and the Moi regime saw the multiparty election as an opportunity to regain their traditional lands. The elections in 1992 left 1,500 people dead and more than 300,000 displaced in the Rift Valley province (Africa Watch, 1993). The most significant ethno-political violence witnessed since Kenya's independence from Britain in 1963, was the 2007-2008 Kenyan crisis. The political rallies and campaigns for Kenya's 2007 general elections were marked by ethnocentric behavior reflected in cooperative relations in form of in-group favoritism and out-group hostility. The support mechanisms for the cooperative relations included inclusive fitness based on kinship, social capital and in-group favoritism. Some of the determining factors for membership were, for instance, 41 ethnic groups against 1, the two key political parties (Party of National Unity – PNU and Orange Democratic Movement- ODM). The leader of the ODM, Raila Odinga, constructed a pan-ethnic coalition of the 41 Kenya's ethnic groups against the Kikuyu community under the incumbent president and leader of the PNU, Mwai Kibaki (Hawke, 2013). The combat against the Kikuyu drew on historic opposition to their (perceived) economic and political dominance since independence. Ethnocentrism was implicated in ethnic conflict and voting process which eventually resulted in disputed elections that triggered near political crisis in Kenya. Several people were killed and property was destroyed including burning of homes. More than 500,000 people were displaced from their original homes. The emergence of ethno-political violence in Kenya relates to a long-term link to a competing process among ethnic group identities for control of state power and economic resources as a result of politicization of ethnic identities, a practice that breeds destructive competition and conflict.

Ethnocentrism and socioeconomic

Two important relations between ethnocentrism and socioeconomic can be distinguished in the Kenyan situation. One is the interaction effect of ethnocentrism and socioeconomic and the other is the influence of

ethnocentrism on socioeconomic development. Evidence available in the literature suggests that the interaction between ethnocentrism and socioeconomic is one of the real causes of ethnic and political conflicts in Kenya. Empirical work by Yoku (2009) shows that ethnic identity (ethnocentrism) is less important to Kenyans than occupation and concludes that socioeconomic aspects are a more of determining factor in violent conflicts in Kenya than ethnicity. Only when ethnocentrism interacts with socioeconomic dissatisfaction is its role in conflicts becomes clearer. Yieke (2008) also supports this finding indicating that ethnicity is only a medium of political conflicts than a cause. The interaction effect of ethnocentrism and socioeconomic can be comprehended better in the general public perception of the symbol of the president. The president as a symbol of "eating" (Kasomo, 2012) has socioeconomic implications that have influenced profoundly ethnic politics and struggle for political power among communities. The president is seen as an ethnic ruler and a most appealing criterion for voters is to enable their members to control government affairs with the belief that the community's socioeconomic benefits would be maximized. From this perspective, one can understand the reason that the series of ethnic and political conflicts witnessed in Kenya during the last 4 general elections (1992, 1997, 2002 and 2007) related closely to ethnic competition for control of the state power and resources. The influence of ethnocentrism on socioeconomic development in Kenya is viewed from its possible implication on the management of national resources which in turn impact socioeconomic development. Only two indicators for socioeconomic development are considered: economic growth and poverty levels. Kenya's long-term socioeconomic development trend (1963 to 2012) indicates poor performance over the 20 year period, 1983 to 2002, in terms of low economic growth rates and rising levels of poverty compared to other two periods: the 1963 to 1982 period and the 2003 to 2012 period. The 1983 to 2002 period falls in the famous "Nyayo" era where the common feature among ethnic groups was sharply marked by one ethnic group holding more power and privileges in resources control and used these as tools to dominate and marginalize others. The period was also marked by serious mismanagement of national resources impacting adversely both on national unity and socioeconomic development. For instance, talking in "whispers" was a common phenomenon for fear of victimization by the ruling power.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Ethnocentrism is a natural and universal phenomenon and often a major factor in the divisions and violent conflicts, ethnic or political that has been experienced amongst members of different ethnicities and social groups. In Kenya, the effects of ethnocentrism can be

seen from a two-fold perspective. One, Ethnocentrism has acted as medium rather than a cause of a series of ethnic and political conflicts the country has experienced especially during general elections. The main cause of these conflicts is the interaction between ethnocentrism and socioeconomics where ethnic groups indulge in protracted competition for control of resources and political power each ethnic group tending to struggle to control the state. Two, ethnocentrism has adversely affected socioeconomic development of the country especially during the 'Nyayo'era through the mismanagement of national resources. Some important recommendations can be drawn for addressing the ethnocentrism in the country such as follows. Raising awareness for ethnocentrism in the sense that awareness and knowledge would lead to discovery that in a cross-cultural society, people can flourish without concern for one's own culture and that different ways of life can produce happy and productive lives. Promoting social cohesion and forging understanding of citizenship as a process involving consensus building between similarities and differences in ethnic group identities. This would enhance integration of ethnic identities and national identity without undermining the rich cultural diversity. Creating a process of balancing competing national identity and ethnic identities to dissolve ethno-political competition and guarantee equal citizenship, participation and justice. This entails accessing a multiplicity of goods and promoting diversity of interests. The new constitution of Kenya is a critical factor in the creation of such balancing process. The constitution seeks to take power to the people and giving some level of economic autonomy to the 47 counties. It provides an excellent balancing strategy in that virtually all ethnic communities and their elites would have access to national resources and everyone would be able to 'eat' without necessarily winning the presidency.

Conflict of Interests

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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