

## Nandi Age Set System and Ethnic Conflict in Contemporary Kenyan Politics

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### Abstract

*Kenya is known as home to a number of age-set communities. Among them are the Kalenjin, a speech community made up of eight culturally related groups. Traditionally, the community categorized its members into different distinct age groups and age grades based on annual generational initiation rites. The young community members went through circumcision which marked transition from childhood to adulthood. The male initiates in this community defined their specific generation and age set or grade. This system contributed significantly to the development of male identity and intra-set solidarity, created warriors to protect communities, to carry out raids, and regulated behaviour between generations. It also reinforced the mystical, and judicial status and power held by the community elders. The age set system further curbed inter-group and intra-group conflict while at the same time providing models for conflict resolution and restoration of social harmony. Despite a long history of colonization and globalization, age set/grade principles continue to influence male identity and inter-generational relationships among members of this community. This paper draws upon ongoing research on the Kalenjin groups in Kenya with the interest of exploring the role that male age set identity played in the activities surrounding the 2007 Kenyan General Elections. Key informant interviews were employed to collect primary data from the Nandi sub-ethnic group of the Kalenjin between November 2007 and April 2009. The research findings indicate that politicians manipulated the age set system for political objectives and this has partly eroded the age set institution. The paper recommends the development of a new curriculum for circumcision rituals that can provide some alternative role models for members of contemporary male age sets/age grades and avoid the future misuse of the age set system. It is hoped that these new rituals and intergenerational identities can provide a foundation for a more harmonious response to future social strife especially those that relate to politics.*

**Key Words:** Age Sets, Age Grades, Conflict, Ethnic group / community.

### Introduction

Generational age sets and age grades are traditional socio-economic and political systems practiced mainly by African communities. These systems have not been studied adequately despite their significant role in stabilizing African societies. It has been argued that apart from kinship, African societies were tightly held together by generational age set systems (Chebet & Dietz, 2000). An age set is a social system that groups individuals circumcised within a specific period of time into a generational unit identifiable through a communally defined name. It refers to a named group or groups of social units comprising boys or girls who were circumcised within a given span of time and therefore go through different stages in life as a socially knit group.

Kituyi (1990:15) defines an age set as a group of men who are initiated into youth during a definite span of time and as a result, share constraints and expectations of life together as a group. The Maasai community's age sets for instance comprises Initiates who fall within

approximately a ten year time period in terms of both birth and time of initiation. Age sets are formally organized groups of men or women of comparable age. Age sets are determined by initiation. It comprises people who not only have a similar age but also share a common identity, maintain close ties, and pass through the same series of age related statuses (age grades).

The Kalenjin use the term *ipinda* to refer to generational age sets. There are however separate names for specific age sets for men and women. The Kikuyu use the term *riika* to refer to the same; a term which applies to both boys and girls who have undergone initiation in a given year. The most conspicuous and distinctive feature of the generation age set among the Kikuyu is the *ituika*, which is a handing over process held every thirty to forty years in which one age set hands over to its successor the reins of power to conduct political, judicial and religious functions for the community. This is similar to *sagetab eito* ceremony among the Kalenjin. The Embu and Mbeere of Kenya have age sets which they call *Nthuke* (Muruiki, 1976: 126-130).

There are various age sets within a given generation. Each age set comprises various age grades that mark the various stages which individuals pass through in the course of their lives. Individuals advance in age grades as permanent members of an age set and/or a generational age set. Members of an age set move up the hierarchy of age grades when new age sets are formed. Examples of age grades are junior warriors, senior warriors, junior elders, and senior elders. Age grades are therefore statuses which members of an age set go through progressively.

Age sets created life-long feelings of solidarity, identity and brotherhood among members. This communal identity contributed to the avoidance of conflict and the protection of communities. The members acted as a group during all their age grade stages and this helped to avoid conflicts within the age set. Furthermore, as the age set progressed through the youth, warrior, and elder grades, they acted together to protect their community. Junior age sets were educated to respect the authority of the elder age sets whereas the elder sets used their positioning as forms of social capital as a basis for social control. For example, the elder sets could sanction or prohibit the behaviour of junior (warrior) age sets by either providing or withholding their blessing to the warriors (*morans*) before they went to war. The age set system therefore curbed intra-group and inter-group conflict and provided models for conflict resolution and restoration of social harmony.

### **Who are the Nandi?**

The Nandi sub ethnic community is one of the Nilotic groups that form the Kalenjin speaking ethnic community. The word 'Kalenjin' literally means 'I tell you'. The other principal groups that make up the Kalenjin community include; Tugen, Kipsigis, Keiyo, Marakwet, Pokot and Sabaot. The Kalenjin are believed to have migrated from Ethiopia and Sudan (Ng'ang'a 2006:310) and travelled through the Nile valley to Mt Elgon in Kenya. It is from here that they dispersed to their present areas of occupation in western parts of Kenya. The Nandi are referred to by other Kalenjin groups as '*Chemngal*', which means people who talk a lot (Rono 2007: 216).

The Nandi are organized according to territory (*emet*), clans (*pororiosiek*), and age sets (*ipinda*). The twelve clans of the Nandi are; *Kamelilo*, *Kapchepkendi*, *Kakittalam*, *Koileke*, *Kakipoch*, *Kapianga*, *Kapsile*, *Tipingot*, *Cheptol*, *Kipngoror*, *Kakimno* "Murk" *Ap Tuk* and *Kaptumois*.

They have settled in Wareng, Soin, Emgwen, Mosop, Aldai and Chesumei, which are parts of Uasin-Gishu and Nandi counties (Rono, 2007: 217).

The Nandi are considered a hospitable community especially when it comes to hosting visitors. Strangers who happen to pass by their community are often treated to a drink of sour milk, a valued drink within the community which is referred to as '*Mursiik*'. They are a very observant and patient people. Whenever the Nandi adopted an outsider, they performed a ceremony to integrate them within the community and the adoptee was named *Chelule*. Despite their generosity the Nandi are considered a proud people. According to Ng'ang'a (2006), the Nandi have exceptional ethnic unity and military prowess and are reluctant to associate with their neighbours. They are slow to respond to provocation but when they react, they do so with devastating consequences.

Traditionally, the Nandi are pastoralists and as such, they have often migrated to other regions and also expanded their region of settlements. Presently, the Nandi are found not only in their traditional territory in Nandi and Uasin Gishu counties, but also in parts of Tanzania, Uganda, and Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Despite their migration to other areas outside their traditional territory, the Nandi jealously guard their ancestral land because they consider their security and that of their territory as a primary responsibility of everyone within the community.

### **Methodology**

The objective of the research was to specifically explore the roles that the male age set identity among the Nandi played in events and activities leading up to and during the 2007 Kenyan General Elections. The following questions were central to the study: How did politicians draw upon age set identity during the anti-colonial era struggles and pre-1992 General Elections? Secondly, what roles did the Nandi age set identity play in the 2007-2008 post-election conflicts? Finally, what role did the Nandi elders play to help in bringing resolutions to these conflicts? Consequently, what strategies are available for usage in case of future political violence?

The study collected data from thirty six key informants who were interviewed. The data collected from these interviews were analyzed qualitatively. This number was considered adequate for an in-depth qualitative research. According to Bailey (2007:65), the number of cases selected in purposeful sampling should be small for in-depth examination. Bailey recommends starting with a sample group of twenty cases and thereafter, the researcher interviews other respondents until such a situation where at least five new cases fail to add anything new to the analysis. Bogdan and Biklen (1992:68) supports this when they state that the researcher continues with additional five cases until the researcher reaches 'the point of data saturation' where additional information obtained becomes redundant.

Key informants comprised leaders of Nandi clans as well as elders and the youth. This method was used because key informants have rich information by virtue of their positions in society. An equal number of key informants were selected to represent the clans, the elders and the youth. Since the Nandi have twelve clans, twelve clan elders were selected. In addition, twelve elders and twelve youths were selected through snowballing method. They were subsequently interviewed. The age distribution of the key informants is as seen on Table 1:

**Table 1: Age of Key Informants**

<b>Age bracket</b>	<b>Number of Key Informants</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>18-35</b>	12	33.33
<b>36-45</b>	4	11.11
<b>46-55</b>	5	13.89
<b>56-65</b>	12	33.31
<b>Above 65</b>	3	8.33
<b>Total</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>99.97</b>

*Source: Author's Field data*

The sampled key informants chosen were 33.33 percent youth, while a similar percentage represented clan leaders. Elders in total had a similar percentage but distributed in the age bracket of 35-45, 46-55 and those above 65 years. The Structural Functionalism theory guided the research

### **Theoretical Framework**

The Structural Functionalism theory has been used to explain how social structures and institutions have a role to meet the social, economic and political needs of society. The age set system is one of the social institutions of society that exists to satisfy the needs of society and is therefore relevant to the theory. Its importance is derived from the function of maintaining the stability of society. Radcliffe-Brown explains that society is made up of parts that relate to one another and the function of the part is to maintain the whole (Radcliffe-Brown, u.d.). The theory views society as an entity composed of functionally interdependent institutions. Radcliffe-Brown sums up by noting that an institution functions to maintain society as a system. Institutions have norms and rules that guide the behaviour of individuals.

The theory however assumes that there is consensus on the purpose of social institutions and that everyone in society holds the same values, norms and understanding. Despite this criticism, social institutions have purposely aimed at contributing to the total welfare and proper functioning of society. Institutions can however fail to perform the expected roles due to factors within or outside an institution. For instance, in the case of age sets, the colonial government in Kenya banned *sagetab eito* (sacrifice of the white ox) in 1923 which was an important ceremony in the age set system. The British thought that the Nandi would use the ceremony to mobilize young men for military purposes against them. This affected the functioning of age sets as the ceremony marked a change of functions of the members of age sets.

In reality, institutions can fail to function in the way they should when individuals and groups in society compete for resources, wealth and power. Despite this, the theory explains that institutions, in cases where all other things remain equal, should perform the roles they were created to perform in an ideal situation.

### The Role of Nandi Male Age Set Identity in the Colonial Era and Pre-1992 National Politics

A brief exploration of the role of Nandi age set identity in the colonial era and national politics prior to 1992 will provide the context for our detailed exploration of the role of age set identity in the activities surrounding the 2007 General Elections. Age sets were and still are important ways of stratifying men in Nandi society. During the colonial period, circumcision was a major feature that defined an age set every twelve to fifteen years. Circumcised men were stratified not only according to age sets but also according to seniority based on the period of circumcision. Thus *Changiniiek* were the senior most group within an age set. They were followed by *Kiptaro*, *Tetagat* and *Kiptaito* all of whom formed one age set (Rono, 2007:218). The Nandi age sets produced warriors who helped not only to protect the community, but also carried out raids whenever it was considered appropriate. According to Wolf (1980: 307), the age set system was a useful source of military power.

The Nandi have seven clans (*bororiosiek*) who meet whenever there is a problem affecting their community. These clans occupy Nandi and Uasin Gishu counties. The clans incorporate seven cyclical age sets, *Maina*, *Nyongi*, *Chumo*, *Sawe*, *Kipkoimet*, *Kaplelach*, and *Kipnyigeu* as shown in Figure 1.

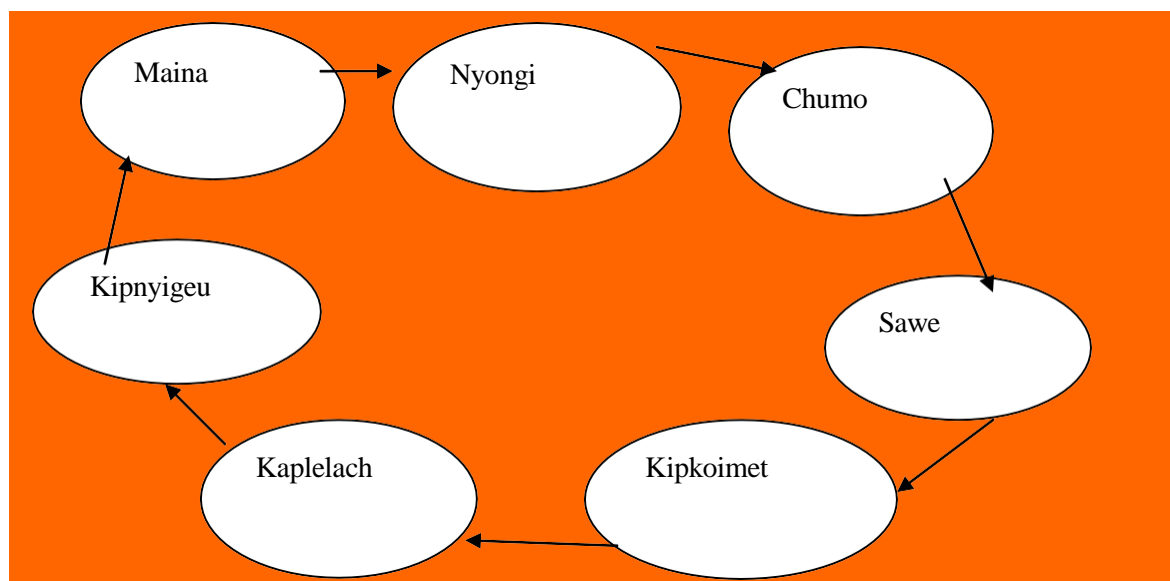


Figure 1: The Nandi Age Sets.

Source: Developed from Makumba (1989)

At the present time, most members of the *Nyongi* age set are dead but new members are expected to be born in the next decade. A few members of the *Maina* and *Chumo* age sets are alive today and are regarded as senior elders. The members of the *Sawe* age set are the current elders and the *Kipkoimet* age-set are the junior elders. *Kaplelach* and *Kipnyigeu* are the current warrior age sets. The former are within the age bracket of 30 to 45 years, while the members of the latter age sets are in their twenties.

Prior to British colonialism, Nandi participation in offensive and defensive conflicts required the cooperation of all age sets. The elder age sets blessed the warriors and advised them on war

tactics and ethics. The junior elders organized the warriors into battalions and deployed them into conflict and the warrior sets did the actual fighting. Nandi prophets (*orkoik*) were given presents and were consulted before the warrior sets were sent into battle. Both the advice of the elders and the support of the prophet were considered crucial to the success of specific conflicts. When warrior age sets came back from war, a cleansing ceremony was conducted. From the late 1800s, the Nandi drew upon the visions of their prophets and the strength of their age set system to resist and repel British efforts to occupy their land and build the Kenya-Uganda railway.

Before the clash with the British, the Nandi in the 1870s had fought and expelled the Maasai from Uasin Gishu and the areas surrounding it (Rono, 2007: 218). The region attracted the British because of its fertility and plentiful water. The strongest reason for the Nandi clash with the British was however the construction of a telegraphic line and the Kenya-Uganda Railway that ran through their territory (Rono, 2007: 218). As a result of the ferocity of the warriors, the British unsuccessfully fought the Nandi for ten years between 1895 and 1905. The Nandi were eventually defeated when Colonel Meinertzhagen tricked the Nandi leader Koitalel *Arap* Samoei to attend a peace negotiation meeting organized by the Colonel. Colonel Meinertzhagen's men used the opportunity and shot Samoei and his advisers. This was followed by punitive British expeditions on the Nandi that led to the death of 1,117 people and the loss of thousands of cattle and sheep which were captured. It also led to land alienation on the part of the Nandi community members and subsequent European occupation and settlements. This produced squatters that consequently led to the Nandi warriors uprisings between 1923 and 1938 (Rono, 2007: 218-220).

Land became a source of conflict in Kenya following the state policy of developmental colonialism which focused on the interest of European settlers at the expense of indigenous local communities. European settlers increased their acreage while young white settlers were allocated land. This continued to increase the large reserve army of landless and discontented populace in Kenya (Atieno-Odhiambo, 1995:27). '*The squatters however regarded the white highlands not only as their home but also as their property. In 1946, there were 250,000 African squatters living in forests and settler land in Kenya.*' This made the colonial government to introduce anti-squatting laws (Atieno-Odhiambo, 1995:27-28).

Literature indicates that the age set system and particularly the *Sagetab eito* ceremony provided an opportunity for the handing over of age set roles from one set to another. This involved the graduation of young men aged between 15 and 25 into warriors while the middle aged men (then warriors) transitioned to another stage (Rono, 2007: 222). Usually after the ceremony, the young warriors would go immediately to raid in order to prove their prowess. Koitalel *Arap* Samoei's son *Arap* Manyiei who was the Nandi Orkoiyot in 1923 was arrested and detained and later deported to Meru in Central Kenya because the British feared the military uprising that was to follow if *Sagetab eito* ceremony was to take place. This however did not stop conflicts between the Nandi and the British.

After Independence in 1963, Nandi warriors became dedicated to protecting the usurpation of their land by other Kenyans. Since the Nandi prophet, Koitalel *Arap* Samoei died in 1906, some Nandi elders now turned to specific biblical passages to support their efforts to protect their land from non-Nandi intruders. One contemporary clan elder stated that 'in the future, everyone will

go to his ancestral territory' (*Tun kuwendi chi tugul korenyin*) and quoted the following verse from the Bible as his authority

The foreigners living in ... will run away to their own countries, scattering like deer escaping from hunters, like sheep without a shepherd. Anyone who is caught will be stabbed to death. When they look on helplessly, their babies will be battered to death, their houses will be looted, and their wives will be raped.

(Isaiah 13: 14- 16)

Since 1963, both elders and politicians have influenced the participation of the warrior age sets in regional and national politics. They supported the debate in favour of creation of regional government in Kenya as a way of protecting their ancestral territory. Politicians from other ethnic groups viewed regional government as a vehicle for evicting non-Kalenjins from the Rift Valley and so they resisted this development. Nandi warrior age sets continued to resist the settlement of non-Nandi in their territory with the support of politicians including Hon. Chelagat Mutai and the late Hon. Marie Seroney. The two politicians in particular resisted Kenyatta's organized settlement of the Kikuyu community in the then Rift Valley Province in 1970s. Marie Seroney was later detained for stating in parliament that KANU, the then ruling party was dead. Although the two politicians were detained by the Kenyatta government for different reasons, the Nandi took the land issue to be the underlying reason for their detention. The detention of these politicians therefore became a rallying point for the Nandi. From that historical time, the Nandi used have used the county's General Elections and political disagreements as forums for the expression of their resistance to the presence of 'foreigners' on their land.

### **The Role of Age Set Identity in 1992-2008 Election Conflicts**

Ethnic conflicts related to the struggle for power intensified in Kenya with the advent of multi party politics in 1992. The Nandi, like other Kalenjin sub ethnic groups, resisted the introduction of multi party system in 1992 because they perceived it as a move aimed at removing then then President Moi from power. To counter this move, the Nandi agitated for regional government (*Majimbo*) which other ethnic communities resisted as they feared the Nandi would use this system, if introduced, to evict them from Nandi and Uasin Gishu Counties. Debates on the two issues prepared the ground for violence that followed in 1992 and 1997 General Elections. Generally, the violence in the two counties was between the Nandi and other ethnic groups particularly the Kikuyu, Luhya and Luo. A brief description of cases where the Nandi age sets and politicians played a role in conflicts that took place between 1992 and 2008 is hereafter provided.

In December 1992, ethnic conflict between the Nandi and the Kikuyu erupted at Rironi in Uasin-Gishu County. Several clan elders reported that before the violence started, the Nandi warned the Kikuyu community in Rironi to vacate the area or they would face forceful eviction by the Nandi warriors. The Nandi considered Rironi their ancestral territory and were not happy with the name 'Rironi' which was given to the area by the Kikuyu community. This community was settled at this place by Kenya's first President, who was himself a Kikuyu. Senior *Kaplelach* warrior age grades from the Nandi clans from such areas as Mogobich, Chereber, Koilot, Tulwet, Kapserton, and Lessos carried out the evictions. The junior age grade of *Kaplelach* from Rironi did not participate as this group was said to have been in their circumcision camp. After the evictions, the Nandi re-named the place *Kaplelach* to signify the warrior age set that was in circumcision at

the time and to honour the senior age grades that carried out the evictions. Consequently, the Kikuyu community in Rironi became displaced and the majority of them relocated to major towns in the country. Thereafter, they either sold or exchanged their land with the Nandi who owned land in Nyahururu, Laikipia, and other places in the Rift Valley.

Between December 2007 to February 2009, violence erupted again in Kenya following the disputed 2007 General Elections. The Nandi had supported the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) Presidential candidate against the Party of National Unity (PNU) candidate. According to a youthful key informant, the Nandi age sets, particularly *Kaplelach* and *Kipnyigeu* participated in the violence as warriors purporting to evict PNU supporters. Besides, as mentioned earlier, the Nandi took the election disputes as another opportunity to reclaim what they considered their 'lost territories'. Politicians in the whole country took sides on either side of the divide in the conflict. Like others, Kalenjin politicians helped in fuelling the 2007/2008 ethnic conflicts by using proverbs that incited people through the media and public gatherings. Terms such as *murgelta* (people with coloured teeth), and *ngeta kwan* (men whose fathers are uncircumcised) were used as they were considered derogatory to other ethnic communities. The details of the actual role played by Nandi politicians in the 2007-2008 violence will never be known. Researchers observed that the Nandi are very secretive; one elder indicated that a revelation of the role of various actors in conflict would be a violation of the Nandi tradition called '*Nir Mang'et*' that refers to the situation where what happened during war cannot be revealed to anybody, particularly an outsider because word will pass from one person to another person until the whole community is exposed. The Nandi believe that violators of this tradition will be cursed with consequent death or insanity. Circumcision songs are usually sang to mention and reinforce the curses during the season for initiation.

It is however observed that the Nandi had differing perspectives on the roles played by Nandi elders in the post-election violence in Nandi and Uasin Gishu. Some believe that the elders did not condone the violence because the warrior age sets were not blessed by the *Chumo* and *Sawe* elders before the violence started while others were of the opinion that the violence was both a spontaneous and an immediate response to allegations of vote rigging. Those supporting the latter view observed that the youth were so agitated that they went to war with or without the blessings of the elders and the counsel of the *orkoiik*. One elder remarked:

The current warrior age sets were rebellious, volatile and did not listen to counsel. They were ready to go to war with or without the blessings of the elders or the counsel of the *orkoiik*. As a result, some of them engaged in looting, rape, and theft which were forbidden in conflict, according to Kalenjin traditions. This led to the loss of lives and property.

The sentiments above are emphasized by reports that the *Kipnyigeu* age grade had just graduated from circumcision and they were ready to prove their abilities to protect the Nandi territory by carrying out evictions of 'intruders' in their areas. This age set was considered very large and able to fight without assistance from any other group. The re-naming of Kamuyu settlement area that had been occupied by the Kikuyu to *Kipyigeu* in 2008 was another example which indicates that the Nandi were dissatisfied with the occupation of their land by 'outsiders'.

The reasons for the intensity of the 2007-2008 violence, in Uasin Gishu County, even after the government had deployed many policemen from non Kalenjin communities could be explained by several factors. First, the Nandi believe that warriors were not supposed to surrender and they were therefore able to fight the government soldiers. Besides, the aim of the Nandi warriors was to evict the 'outsiders' and not to kill them. Deaths that occurred were explained to have been caused by organized resistance and retaliations. Second, there were allegations of external participants such as Pokot warriors, *Mungiki* members, and the Ugandan army which is described briefly.

The Pokot, a sub ethnic group of the Kalenjin joined the conflict with their warrior age sets linking up with the Nandi warriors as a show of male age set solidarity. It is believed that politicians helped to transport the fearless Pokot warriors to Eldoret. Reports indicate that the Pokot politicians incited the volatile Pokot warriors by asserting that *if the Nandi and Keiyo have no men, then we will come to evict the non Kalenjin for them*.

Local people in Nandi believe that the violence was also exacerbated by the presence of Ugandan soldiers who came to help the Kenyan police and army to stop the violence. This was further fuelled by allegations that a group of Kikuyu vigilante groups (*Mungiki*) were in police and General Service Unit (GSU) uniform and had been transported by PNU supporters to terrorize the Kalenjin in Eldoret. Surprisingly, apart from the Kikuyu and Kisii, the Nandi did not evict other ethnic groups. This indicates that the political influence of the violence was strong as majority of the other ethnic groups in Uasin Gishu supported the same political party (ODM) with the Nandi. Apart from reasons related to the age set system and the nature of the Nandi people, it is also noted that youth unemployment contributed to frustrations which made the youth to engage in activities which fuelled the violence

Despite the influence of politics in the age set system, Nandi elders helped in the management of ethnic violence in 2008. First, the elders who belonged to *Chumo* and *Sawe* age sets talked to the warriors' age sets and warned them against engaging themselves in acts which were against Kalenjin traditional war ethics. Thus, when the contending presidential candidates agreed to form a coalition government, the local mood for peace in Nandi and Uasin Gishu had been established and therefore the ethnic conflicts ceased although suspicion and tension persisted. This is because the issue of land and territory which have been long term sources of conflicts remained unresolved.

Interviewed clan elders reported that the Nandi age grade warriors performed their own cleansing ceremony which involved the slaughtering of oxen, eating, and singing war and circumcision songs. The songs were meant to praise their age sets, parents, friends, and the brave men in the Kalenjin community. Traditionally, it is the elders who were allowed to perform a cleansing ceremony. The 'self cleansing ceremony' therefore suggests that the warriors behaved contrary to tradition and were acting without the sanction of the elders. It also suggests that the unrestrained behaviour of the warrior sets was the result of a decline in the traditional role of the age set system and ideology.

Many Nandi people thus believe that a repeat of violence and evictions of other ethnic groups will continue again in future until there are no longer intruders in the Nandi territory. It is observed that the Nandi considered other ethnic groups who settled in ‘their territory’ as *toek* (visitors) and as was expected, visitors were not supposed to settle permanently but were required to visit and thereafter leave. The Nandi therefore do not understand when visitors come to stay permanently. It is also observed that, according to the Nandi, the ‘visitors’ in the Nandi territory include all Kenyan ethnic groups and the sub-ethnic groups of the Kalenjin who occupy the Nandi and Uasin-Gishu counties. During the 2007/2008 post election period, the Nandi age sets focused not only on the evictions of other ethnic groups but also emphasized that in future, they would target other Kalenjin sub ethnic groups, that include Kipsigis, Keiyo and Tugen who occupy land in Uasin-Gishu county.

Despite views expressed by the Nandi age sets, key informants, particularly among the elders agreed that if components of new values were introduced and taught to age sets, then the youth would be trained to focus on the need to fight other evils affecting the community rather than look at land as the solution to all problems. The new curriculum is justified because it is noted that the current Nandi warrior age sets have deviated from their traditional functions due to the following two factors: One is that the age set warrior groups no longer observed the ethics of war / conflict but deviated to acts of looting, rape, and theft which are against the ethics of war in the Kalenjin community. Secondly, Western education and religion has influenced and adulterated traditional education as age groups spend less time in circumcision and circumcision related issues due to demands of western education. The time the initiates spend learning traditional education is far too short for them to conceptualize and internalize the cultural doctrines/ teachings. Further, some elders who have been influenced by western education do not believe in age set instructions. Such people circumcised their sons in seclusion either in hospitals or their houses and exposed them to western media especially the radio, television, and newspapers. The youth who were circumcised in this manner, it was alleged, did not understand the Kalenjin traditions. Consequently, the age set system has continued to be disorganized but continue to survive in different forms.

### **Areas to be considered in a New Circumcision Curriculum**

In the African traditional curriculum for the rite of passage for males, boys were taught how to behave as adult men because circumcision transformed them from childhood to adulthood (Gachiri, 2006: 108). This was appropriate as the initiates were normally aged between 16 and 19 years. Circumcision prepared initiates to take up new roles including the role to be a husband and parent.

In contemporary period, most initiates are aged 14-16 years (usually standard eight primary school graduates). In my opinion, it does not make sense to teach very young adolescent youth to behave like adults and yet they have not yet reached the age of adulthood. Furthermore, the traditional circumcision education teaches the initiates to be courageous in military activities which may not be relevant in contemporary society, unless the initiates were going to join the Kenya Defense Forces when they reached the desired age.

Gachiri (2006: 11) proposes a curriculum for the rite of passage for Christian males that emphasizes the need for initiates to remain together as a life long support group in good times

and difficult times. She also suggests that initiates should be taught to be courageous by persevering the pain, stress, and fear of circumcision and in life. Lastly, she recommends a rite of passage where circumcision will be there for boys who desire it. The proposed curriculum should, however, emphasize the symbolism, physical and medical aspects of the new system of education.

A new curriculum for circumcision should, therefore, focus on creating a positive change in the character of initiates. This requires the inculcation of integrated religious and traditional values that can be agreed upon by the community. Such values should be discussed and agreed upon in seminars by stake holders. Negative aspects which include ethnic chauvinism and expression of manhood through engaging in raids should be discouraged. Instead, emphasis on success in education should be central. It is hoped that religious teachings can bring change so that instead of placing emphasis on creating warriors, circumcision will create an individual with a strong moral character.

Noting that conflicts in many parts of Kenya are land related, the Constitution of Kenya which was promulgated in 2010 addresses the issue of land injustices for all communities in Kenya. Chapter five of the constitution specifically guarantees the security of land rights and encourages communities to settle land disputes through local community initiatives. The chapter requires the establishment of a National Land Policy to implement these principles. It is hoped that with new laws and a reformed curriculum for circumcision, a progressive change towards a peaceful society in Kenya shall be established.

### **Conclusion**

This paper has examined the role of Kalenjin male age set identity, particularly the contemporary roles of age sets, among the Nandi sub ethnic group. The paper noted that politicians have manipulated age sets in various ways including using it as a campaign tool because age sets are useful in the maintenance of group solidarity. The changes which continue to take place in this system are the continued loss of control by the elders and the *orkoiik* and the new emerging role of politicians in the mobilization of age sets. The traditional roles of age sets of instilling discipline among members, as a source of stability in a community, and as a means of protecting society has been eroded by these new roles. Although age sets continue to survive in different forms, the effect of political influence is destructive to the system. This paper recommends the re-examination of the curriculum of male circumcision to ensure that changes that reinforce the positive roles of age sets are taught and negative political roles are avoided.

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