# Gender Based Prejudice and Stereotypes in Ethnic Conflicts: A Case Study in Eldoret Township, Kenya

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## Abstract

*This paper presents the results of an investigation into the role of gender based prejudice and stereotype in ethnic conflicts in Eldoret Township, Kenya. Ethnic conflicts are a common phenomenon in Eldoret, especially during electioneering periods when the prejudices and stereotypes are part of that conflict. The exact role of these prejudices and stereotypes, however, has not always been clear since this matter has not been given sufficient scholarly attention. The aim of this paper was to investigate the role of gender based stereotypes in fuelling ethnic conflicts in Eldoret Township. The study adopted an ethnographically qualitative research design against the backdrop of Gordon Allport's theory of stereotyping and prejudice. There was a purposive sample of five clusters of ethnic group concentrations from which a random sample of fifty respondents; ten from each ethnic group was chosen. The groups comprised the five dominant communities living in Eldoret Township. The ethnic groups were the Kikuyu, Luo, Luhya, Kisii and Kalenjin ethnic groups. Respondents were randomly drawn from local education institutions, informal trade, local leadership, religious organizations and medical institutions. The main instruments of data collection comprised structured and semi-structured questionnaires, observations and face to face interviews. Results indicate that gender based stereotypes play a significant contributory role in ethnic conflicts in Eldoret. It is hoped that the results of this study will benefit researchers in applied linguistics, political science, social psychology, policy making and the general public.*

**Keywords**: Eldoret Township, ethnic conflicts, gender, prejudice, stereotypes.

## Introduction

Stereotype is a conception usually held in common by members of a social group based on simplified perception of reality that is often evaluative and based on prejudice and incomplete knowledge (Allport, 1954: 63). Women, for example, are stereotyped as weaklings because of the roles they play in the society. Traditionally in Africa and many other parts of the world, a woman's place is at home. Women are supposed to cook, tend to their children and run several other errands at home. The culture of a person will influence the way they perceive gender (male/female) roles in society. A cultural assumption is when we assume that a person has particular abilities, values and attitudes based on their cultural background.

Stereotyping a group involves not seeing members of the group as individuals. According to Blum (2004: 276), it involves seeing members through a narrow and rigid lens of the group based on image rather than being considerate of the range of characteristics constituting each member as a distinct individual. All stereotyping hence involves masking of the individuality. For example, one might have a negative stereotype of men as promiscuous and dangerous or a positive stereotype of them being helpful and protective. Both these stereotypes prevent recognition of men in their individuality.

Allport (1954) defines prejudice as a hostile attitude or feeling towards a person solely because he or she belongs to a group to which one has assigned objectionable qualities. Prejudice is not based on truth and honesty. According to Allport, prejudice may be felt or expressed, and it is directed towards a group as a whole or towards an individual because he or she is a member of that group. Prejudice occurs in many contexts and generally assumes

negative or hostile attitudes of one person to the other on the ground of sex or something else without even communicating with the person and knowing him (Wood & Eagly, 2010).

The notion of prejudice refers to the situation when one person judges or expresses opinion about the other on the basis of some external characteristics without even knowing him or her (Pettigrew, 2016). Prejudice gives an individual a false sense of identity and self-worth; that is, a person may discriminate against others to make himself or herself feel more powerful and to elevate his/her own self-esteem. Prejudice and stereotyping often offer a convenient scapegoat for individual or group problems (Sleeter & Grant, 2011). Allport (1954) explains that negative prejudice and discrimination are expressed in escalating levels of violence.

According to Tausch and Hewstone (2010: 94-99), men and women are considered different from one another. Men are characterised as being aggressive, decisive, independent, assertive, forceful, tough, arrogant, courageous, forceful, boastful and having high handedness. Women, on the other hand, are characterised as kind, helpful, sympathetic, warm, affectionate, sensitive, appreciative, fussy and nagging. Gender stereotypes mainly focus of the place and role of women in the home and the role of men outside the home (Dovidio, 2010).

Gender stereotypes are beliefs about attitudes of masculinity and femininity. Psychological traits, manners and characteristics of men and women are built on ideas based on gender stereotypes (Brown, 2010). They act as an agent in conceptualizing and defining the terms 'woman' and 'man' thereby establishing the social categories for gender. Negative perceptions and ethnic stereotypes in Kenya are a major cause of ethnic tension that have led to bloodshed and displacement of people, particularly women and children  in Kenya for many years, the Truth Justice and Reconciliation Commission (TJRC, 2011) report states.

This study was premised on the fact that there is need to investigate the role of ethnic gender stereotypes and prejudices in fuelling ethnic conflicts in Eldoret, Kenya. Gender ethnic stereotypes and prejudice by members of one community towards members of another community in Kenya often result in isolation, discrimination and violence. Eldoret was the epicentre of the near genocidal violence in 2007/2008, meted at particular communities following the results of the disputed 2007 general elections. Although ethnic gender stereotypes have been blamed in case of ethnic tensions and violence, no in depth linguistic study exists on their role and impact in fomenting ethnic tension and violence in Kenya, particularly Eldoret.

The main aim of this study was therefore to examine how gender ethnic stereotypes impacted people's lives in Eldoret Township. Specifically, the study examined the role of gender based stereotypes and prejudice in fuelling ethnic conflicts in Eldoret; and also interrogated how gender based stereotypes impacted on people's lives in Eldoret Township.

## Allport's Scale of Prejudice and Stereotyping
According to Allport (1954: 63-64), stereotypes and prejudices are graded in five levels that are identified as: spoken abuse (antilocution); avoidance; discrimination; violence against people and property; and extermination or genocide.  These levels are hereby explained.

### Spoken Abuse (Antilocution)
The first rung on the ladder of negative action is speech. This often takes the form of talking or joking about a group as if all members of that group were one personality or had one set of features. Spoken abuse or antilocution is often believed to be harmless. In the current study, directing derogatory speech commonly known as hate speech and making ethnic jokes about another community is considered part of antilocution. Continued antilocution can degenerate into a serious conflict. According to Allport (1979: 93-99), 'a bite (from a dog) is preceded

by barking'. Spoken abuse includes all of the following: Degrading names; verbal attack; stereotyping; music/songs that are degrading; jokes; rumours; and ascribing all manner of evil to one group as if they were one personality.

Spoken abuse leads to antagonism. They constitute a clear form of hostility and when combined with non-verbal expressions of antagonism, they can create a hostile environment in learning institutions, villages, workplaces and neighbourhoods (Gibbs, 2014). Verbal and non-verbal hostility are first steps of inter-ethnic harm doing. The two are reliable indicators of discriminatory effects. In Eldoret Township, Kalenjins are insulted as primitive, foolish and uncivilised, by members of the other communities. Kikuyus are stereotyped and prejudiced as thieves; Luos are branded as unclean because Luo men do not undergo circumcision; Luhyas are stereotyped as those who like eating; and Kisii are branded as those who practise witchcraft.

### Avoidance

At this level, people seek to avoid the group that has been stereotyped. Like spoken abuse, avoidance seems to be harmless at the beginning. The trouble is lack of contact and friendship with a group, which leads to ignorance about them. And the more ignorant we are, the more we begin to believe in the stereotype. In this case, a group of people are actively avoided by members of another group. Harm is done through isolation and preparing the way for more harmful acts. If the prejudice and stereotyping is more intense, it leads the individual to avoid members of the disliked group, even perhaps at the cost of considerable inconvenience. In this case, the bearer of prejudice does not directly inflict harm upon the group he or she dislikes.

Avoidance refers to choosing the comfort of one's own ethnic group (in group) over interaction with another ethnic group (out group). People in a group are actively avoided by members of another group. Harm is done through isolation and by preparing the way for more harmful acts. Xenophophia or fear of foreigners or strangers or of that which is foreign or strange, results in exclusion (Sutton & Vingneswaran, 2011). Avoidance appears harmless in any given situation but when it persists across situations, it leads to long term exclusion and segregation. In particular, it may be a problem in situations in which social networking matters such as employment, educational opportunities and promotions. In work settings discretionary contact may force out-group members into lower status occupations (Nieftagodien, 2011).

During tensions heightened by political activities, some communities living in Eldoret Township avoid one another. At social places, market centres, learning institutions and at health facilities, they avoid one another due to prejudice and stereotyping. During the 2007/2008 post-election violence, there was a lot of avoidance amongst communities in Eldoret. Colleagues working in learning institutions could not see eye to eye with each other. It took time for everyone to recover from the trauma and stress suffered during and after the violence. Most teachers from the Kikuyu, Luhya, Luo and Kisii communities left Eldoret to go back to their home districts to avoid contact with their Kalenjin colleagues and other locals. At health facilities, most patients avoided medical personnel who did not hail from their communities.

### Discrimination

Avoidance leads to the third rung, *discrimination.* Here all members of the discriminated group in question are excluded from certain types of employment, from residential housing, political rights, educational or recreational opportunities, churches, hospitals, or from some other social privileges. The unwanted group is kept out of some neighbourhoods, shopping areas, social clubs, gathering places, and public centres. A group of people is discriminated

against by denying them equal access to opportunities and services. Discrimination is intended to harm a group by preventing it from achieving goals, getting education or jobs.

Discrimination occurs when people actively exclude members of a disadvantaged group from the allocation of resources and from access to institutions. A group is discriminated against by denying them equal access to opportunities, goods or services. Discrimination is intended to harm a group by preventing it from achieving goals, getting education or jobs. In the United States, explicit discrimination is expressed through verbal and non-verbal antagonism and through racial avoidance and denial of certain opportunities because of race (Todisco, 2015). Members of a disadvantaged community may face statistical discrimination or profiling. In this particular situation, a person or a group uses overall beliefs about a group to make decisions about an individual from that group (Hanson & Hawley, 2011). It is assumed that the perceived group characteristics to apply to the individual. Hence, for instance, if an employer believes people with theft traits will make unsatisfactory employers, believes that i.e. Kikuyus on average are more likely to have criminal records compared to Kalejins and Luhyas and cannot directly verify an applicant's criminal history, the employer may judge a Kikuyu applicant on the basis of group averages rather than his or her own qualifications.

### *Violence against People and Property*
In this stage, members of a majority group will feel justified in violently attacking a member of a minority group, vandalizing and burning their property. People from targeted groups are attacked and beaten and their properties are vandalized. This is known as hate crime. Groups are the victim of vandalism, the burning of property or violent attacks on someone's physical integrity such as lynching etc. Historically, prejudice and stereotyping in several countries in the world has led to physical attack. In the past, it happened in Europe during Holocaust, where Jews and other nationalities were attacked physically, 1992, in the former Yugoslavia when Croats and the Serbians attacked one another, the 1994 in Rwanda and the Kenyan case of general elections in 1992, 1997 and 2007/2008. At times even in our neighbourhoods, hatred as a result of prejudice leads to discrimination.

### *Extermination or Genocide*
Allport contends that minor forms of prejudice such as spoken abuse have a way of growing into more virulent and destructive forms of discrimination and violence. The ultimate consequence of prejudice and stereotyping is genocide. Genocide refers to one group attempting to murder all members of another group because of their race, ethnic relations, national affiliation, or religious beliefs (Adrian, 2013). Genocide has been an all too common occurrence throughout human history. Extermination is the last step on the ladder which entails lynching, massacre, or attempting to kill members of the unwanted group. This is the final and the most intense level of prejudice and stereotyping.

Extermination or mass killings based on ethnic hostility do occur (Allport, 1954). The extermination of a group of people through genocide, ethnic cleansing, have been witnessed in several parts of the world (for instance, the holocaust, the Rwanda conflict, former Yugoslavia). In the 1992 general elections, Kenya went through a difficult moment. There were interethnic clashes in different parts of the Rift Valley area because of hatred brought by prejudice. Hundreds of Kenyans lost their lives during that time. In all these places, there were certain communities fighting one another. In parts of Trans-Nzoia, the Kalenjins fought the Kikuyus and the Luhya. Hundreds were killed and property worth millions burnt. In Kericho, Molo and Nakuru, interethnic fighting pitted the Kipsigis against the Kisii, Luo, Luhya and the Kikuyu.

**Methodology**

Kenya is a multilingual community with about forty four indigenous languages. Additionally, both English and Swahili serve as lingua franca, where both of the two languages are official languages and Kiwahili is additionally the national language. Whiteley (1974:27) categorizes the indigenous languages of Kenya into four families; Bantu, Nilotic, Para-Nilotic and Cushitic. Bantu languages are the majority. They include; Embu, Meru, Kamba, Gusii, Kikuyu, Luhya, Taita, Kuria, Mbere and Mijikenda. The Para-Nilotic group is composed of languages such as Turkana, Samburu, Teso, Pokot, Maasai, Kalenjin and Njemps. Cushitic languages include Galla, Dahalo, Rendille, Somali and Gabra. Luo is the only Nilotic language in Kenya. Kenyans cherish their ethnic languages regardless of these language families. These languages offer their speakers a means of expressing their ethnic identities which many are proud of.

The sample for this study was drawn from members of the Kalenjin, Kikuyu, Luhya, Luo and Kisii communities living in Eldoret Township. There was a purposive sampling of five diverse ethnic based clusters from which fifty respondents were randomly chosen from the five major ethnic communities living in Eldoret Township. The town's population is estimated at 389,145 (KNBS, 2010). The sample comprised ten (10) respondents each from the Kalenjin, Luhya, Kikuyu, Luo and Kisii communities to make a total sample of fifty (50) respondents. Each cohort of ten (10) respondents from the ethnic groups cited was drawn from any one of the following areas: the local secondary schools; churches; local trade; local community leadership; hospitals; administration; Jua Kali industry; hawkers; idlers and public transport. The respondents comprised those aged between 14 and above 60 years old. This age bracket was considered because ethnic stereotypes and prejudices are used by both the young and the old in the society. Each section of society identified supplied both male and female respondents. Interviews were carried out with the purposively sampled respondents from each group.

The main instruments of data collection comprised structured and semi-structured questionnaires, observations and face to face interviews. Open ended questionnaires comprised specific open-ended questions and short answers. Questions asked were specifically about ethnic stereotypes and prejudices, with regard to what motivates members of one community to stereotype and prejudice members of another community. Open ended questionnaires were administered personally to respondents in their places of residence during day time.

The researcher prepared an interview schedule to be administered on purposively selected respondents in the areas of Langas, Kipkaren, Mailinne, Yamuumbi, Kimumu, Kapsereret, Kiambaa and Huruma in Eldoret Township. Four respondents; two male and two female from each cohort of 10 respondents from the ethnic groups cited were interviewed daily. Each interview took between 35-45 minutes. The local research assistants assisted the researcher to familiarize with the respondents, create a good rapport and also do the translation during the interview sessions since the researcher did not speak Kalenjin, Kikuyu, Luo and Kisii languages. They were thus four who were each drawn from the relevant communities already identified. Conversations during the interview were recorded on a tape recorder and in a note book for use during data analysis.

The researcher carried out observations, asked questions and took notes. In some situations, the researcher carried out interviews and took photographs. Observations were done at market centres, looking at patterns of behaviour during the buying and selling of goods. Health centres and *Jua Kali* (an informal sector) industry were also targeted for observation. During this process, ethical considerations were put in place by informing the subjects what the research entailed and their responses were only for the purposes of

research. Participation in the research by respondents was voluntary. The participants were assured of anonymity and confidentiality.

The main data was be arranged in cohorts comprising cohorts from the settlements, sex based cohorts from each settlement and cohorts based on ethnicity from each locality. These were thereafter categorized in terms of Allport's levels of stereotypes (Allport, 1954) which include antilocution, avoidance, discrimination and subtle aggression, physical attack and extermination. These levels involve jokes and hateful opinions about another community, avoiding members of another community in preparation of harmful acts, denial of equal access to opportunities, communities becoming victims of vandalism and violent attacks and extermination of groups of people through ethnic cleansing and genocide.

Collected data was translated and interpreted with the help of the research assistants. Ethnic stereotypes are mostly communicated using coded language. Interpretation was done after translation. Utterances in coded language were assigned meaning during interpretation. At the same, each utterance was handled from the words, phrases, sentences, systematically until the whole text was done.

## Results and Discussion

In this study, a number of themes emerged due to stereotypes and prejudice. These were the theme of violence, thievery, witchcraft, backwardness, servitude, exploitation, and the theme of 'childishness' that are hereafter discussed.

## Theme of Violence

In this theme, women from various communities have suffered physical and verbal attacks on the basis of prejudice and stereotype directed against them. Data obtained from this study indicate that women from all communities are stereotyped as weak and on the basis of this stereotype, a lot of violence is usually meted against them at both family and community level. Women are sometimes undressed in public purportedly due to their 'indecent dresses'. Sometimes wives are beaten by their husbands when meals are late or other flimsy excuses. On the basis of other stereotypes, women from particular communities carry the burden of stereotype from their communities and end up as direct recipients of violence directed at their communities.

Data from the study indicates that in general, Luo community is stereotyped as violent. This is supported by the following example:

**Example 1**

*Mawe yana kazi tofauti Luo Nyanza; kuna ya kuita mtoto na ya kupiga adui.*

*Translation*

Stones have different tasks in Luo Nyanza; there are stones for calling children and for attacking enemies.

On a closer analysis, respondents in this study apportioned certain levels of violence on Luo women. Some of them attributed verbal abuse or discrimination or avoidance or disproportionate violence against Luo women on the basis of the perceived violence them. Kalenjins (men and women) are also stereotyped as violent arsonists. In the following stereotype, Luhyas and Kikuyus stereotype Kalenjins by the following terms:

**Example 2**

(i) Luhyas stereotype the Kalenjins as *Bosyanju (those who burn houses)*

(ii) Kikuyus stereotype the Kalenjins as *kabila choma (people who burn houses)*

The inference in the stereotype 'kabila choma' is that Kalenjins are people who are not friendly. They are violent, they destroy other people's property through arson and kill those they feel are their enemies (read political enemies). Respondents who were non-Kalenjins claimed that Kalenjin women usually stay in the rear feeding their men in violent confrontations with other communities. The consequence of this stereotype is a shunning of Kalenjin women by other communities on the basis of the perceived violence.

The theme of violence is in line with level 4 and 5 of Allport's scale of prejudice and stereotyping that talk about violence in the form of physical attack which at times end up in genocide. At Allport's fourth level of prejudice and stereotyping, individuals and property are subjected to attack. At level five, systematic killing of a group takes place. This includes the murder of individuals. At times individuals are also driven by their experiences of prejudice and discrimination to suicide. This level also includes situations where people are driven out from an organization or from a community (or country).

## Theme of Thievery

Theft is common among all communities in Kenya, though only a few are mentioned as thieves in ethnic stereotypes and prejudices. Most of the people mentioned in stereotypes to do with theft are members of the Kikuyu community. Kikuyus are stereotyped and prejudiced as pick pockets, bank robbers, packers (prostitutes) and those who steal land. Such stereotypes and prejudices have in the past fuelled enmity resulting to violence against members of this community.

While the word 'thief', which is a normal term in day today life is used, it emerged from the study that communities such as the Kalenjins, Luos and Luhyas have terms that connote negative emotive feelings when referring to members of the Kikuyu community. For the term 'thief', the Luo use the term *Jakwo*, while the Kalenjins use the term *Chorindet* and the Luhyas the term *Kimikondo*. These terms tend to stir ethnic animosity anytime they are used to refer to members of the Kikuyu community.

In one incident, one respondent demonstrated how the general statement below which was about ordinary thieves was interpreted as a code word to mean all Kikuyus as a prelude to ethnic attacks directed at members of the Kikuyu community:

## Example 3
*Wezi wote huku Rift Valley wachomwe.*

## *Translation*
'All thieves' (Kikuyus) in Rift Valley should be burnt.

Generally, the inference made from the above stereotype is that members of the Kikuyu community are thieves. A thief is a person who is dangerous. The tag 'thief' is used to refer to various kinds of thieves namely; pickpockets, armed robbers, land grabbers, amongst others. In many instances, the punishment meted out to a thief lynching. The Kikuyus in Rift Valley are stereotyped as those who steal land that belongs to Kalenjins. The Kalenjin people on several occasions have therefore burnt their homes, killed them and vandalized their property in order to chase them away from the from the Rift Valley as witnessed in the electioneering periods of 1991 and 2007.

With respect to women, the theme of thievery has variously been used against them. As the following example uttered by a Luo man in reference to Kikuyu women shows, Kikuyu women as much as Kikuyu men are disproportionally stereotyped as thieves:

**Example 4**

> *Ukienda kudance na msichana kwa night club Eldoret muulize jina. Akisema Njoki, dance like this……. (With both hands in your pocket).*

*Translation*

> When you go dancing with a girl in a night club in Eldoret, ask her, her name. If she says she is Njoki (a Kikuyu female name), dance like this ……. with both hands in your pocket (to forestall Njoki pick pocketing you).

> This is a stereotype joke people will comprehend through the world of knowledge since the girl has identified herself as Njoki; a Kikuyu. The inference of the stereotype is that Kikuyus are known to be thieves. The audience is aware that the dancer keeps his hands in the pocket when dancing. Njoki being a Kikuyu is likely to pickpocket him, hence he better be on the lookout. Generally, Kikuyu women are avoided in social places in Eldoret because of the anticipated danger of being robbed.

## Theme of Witchcraft

Witchcraft as a theme has featured among the respondents as a stereotype associated with members of certain communities living in Eldoret. Members of the Kisii community are stereotyped as those who practise witchcraft and sorcery. It is alleged that witchcraft among the Kisii people has led to deaths of relatives and neighbours. Those who lose their beloved ones do not take it lightly. They consequently vent their anger on the suspects by lynching them and burning their homes. In Eldoret Township, according to respondents from the Luo and Luhya communities, both male and female members of the Kisii communities are accused of being night runners along with practising witchcraft. Kisii elderly women are particularly targeted in this stereotype.

> One of the respondents at Mailinne in Eldoret Township during data collection alleged to have lost his dairy cow through death because of witchcraft meted out by a neighbour from the Kisii community. A respondent from the Kipsigis community talked of the Kisii people feeding on the dead bodies of their victims killed through witchcraft. Respondents from the Kalenjin community also accused the Luhyas of night running, which is a kind of witchcraft. The Luhyas also allege that the Luos practise witchcraft.

> In general, respondents from different communities felt that witches, where women are disproportionally represented, are dangerous in the society thus making people fear and avoid them. This is in line with Allport's levels 2 (avoidance), 3 (discrimination) and 4 (physical attack) of his scale of prejudice and stereotyping. As will be seen in the next example, the commonest Kisii stereotype is that they are witches as stated by Kipsigis (Kalenjins) respondents. A respondent who was Kipsigis confirmed that some of the Kisii neighbours indeed practised witchcraft.

**Example 5**

> *If you share a border with a Kisii and you disagree over small issues and refuse to ask for forgiveness, then you will be sure that when milking your cows, you will get blood instead of milk and if you have plantations then your crops will never do well.*

> This stereotype about witches of the Kisii is scary. Results of this study indicate that, in general, it is believed by the members the Luo, Kalenjins and Luhya communities that Kisii people, especially women, are dangerous because of being associated with witches. Those who believe that witchcraft exists say that victims may, for instance, die or run mad. It is in this regard that people will scorn, beat up, burn and chase away those who are suspected to practise this vice. Their properties are also vandalized. In the case of Eldoret Township, the

mentioned communities dislike the members of the Kisii community because of being stereotyped with witchcraft and night running.

## Theme of Backwardness

There are tribal stereotypes by the Luhya and Kikuyu stereotype the Kalenjins as backward. The word *bekamarandule* (those with torn ears) is derogatory and very annoying and provocative to the targeted group. The term *bekamarandule* refers to foolishness and backwardness. Anybody with mutilated ears is assumed to be foolish because he/she cannot understand anything taught. This stereotype results in avoidance of Kalenjin women by other communities living in Eldoret or openly abusing them.

The following tribal stereotype is by the Kikuyu towards other tribes: Kalenjins, Luos, Luhyas and Kisiis:

## Example 6

*The Kikuyus refer to other communities; Kalenjins, Luos. Luhyas and Kisiis as Nyamu cia ruguru (animals).*

According to this stereotype, Kikuyus refer to other communities as animals. The inference of this stereotype is that the Kalenjins, Luos, Luhyas and Kisii are equated to animals, whose thinking capacity is very low hence regarded as being backward. This stereotype is offensive because it equates other communities to animals. Such like stereotypes have often left the targeted communities annoyed as it is demeaning and offensive. The inference drawn from this stereotype is that *Rumbwa* (those who eat dogs), is demeaning and provocative and thus, the Kalenjins retaliate through violence. Animals are perceived to be uncivilized, dirty, uncouth, stupid and primitive.

## Theme of Servitude

Luhya men and women are best stereotyped as suited for the jobs of watchmen and nannies respectively. These stereotypes are used to demean the Luhya community. In the following example from one of the respondents, Luhya men and women are stereotyped as fit for menial jobs.

## Example 7

| | |
|---|---|
| Teacher: | *Wasike (name of a male Luhya person), what would you like to become when you grow up?* |
| Wasike: | *I would like to be a watchman who wears uniform* |
| Teacher: | *What about you Nekesa (name of a female Luhya person)?* |
| Nekesa: | *I would like to be a maid who wears uniform.* |

It is said that members of the Luhya community are the most trusted domestic workers as well as security guards, and that people from other communities may not be employed as watchmen and nannies respectively, especially Kikuyus because of being associated with thievery traits. In turn, members of the Luhya community are discriminated against or avoided in serious jobs in the belief that they are only fit for menial jobs. This outcome agrees with Allport's levels 2 (avoidance) and 3 (discrimination) of Allport's scale of prejudice.

## Theme of Exploitation

In this stereotype, Kikuyus are referred to as *Sangari* (couch grass weed, unwanted plant species). *Sangari* is a type of weed that is not required by farmers especially in maize fields.

This weed is dangerous to the survival of a crop and it is upon the farmers to uproot it before it suffocates the crop. Since weeds are problematic and usually choke the healthy plants, they are usually uprooted by farmers. The soil is however useful, so all one does is shake off soil from the weed and then burn the weed. If a farmer does not weed them out, then the yield will be very low. In this stereotype, Kikuyus in Eldoret Township are like *sangari* (couch grass weed).

The Kalenjins have always felt that the Kikuyus are domineering in business and farming, thereby denying them opportunities in their own land. In the years 1992, 1997 and 2007/2008, the Kalenjin community in Eldoret Township fought for this 'dangerous weed' to be uprooted, soil shaken off it, put together and burnt; all in reference to the Kikuyu people. This is why occasionally they would rise up against the Kikuyus, fighting them fiercely to remove them from their land. In this stereotype, Kikuyu women bear the blunt of violence or spoken abuse for giving birth to Kikuyus. They are seen as agents of this pervasive weed (the Kikuyu tribe). There have been reports of communal rape of Kikuyu women during conflicts or even splitting open of tummies of pregnant Kikuyu women to kill their foetuses in the hope of removing this *sangari* (couch grass weed).

### Theme of 'Childishness'
Members of the Luo ethnic community who culturally did not use circumcision to initiate the youth into adulthood as a rite of passage have repeatedly been referred to as childish. . According to many respondents, various communities portray all the men in the Luo community as children, premature and not fully developed. In this regard, the Kikuyus use the term *Kihii*, the Kalenjins use the term *Ngetik*, while the the Kisii use the term a*bachabu* and the Luhya use the term *Kimisinde* in reference to Luos as 'children' as the following example demonstrates:

### Example 8
>*Jaluo zote ziko bonde la Eldoret zitoke polepole. Coz lazima mtahiri na mabati ata mkose kuanza fujo. Iyo nikitu imepangwa vizuri.*

### Translation
>All Luos in Eldoret you better start moving out of there because you will be forcefully circumcised using iron sheets even if you don't cause chaos. This is something that has been well planned.

The above hate speech message in form of a threat which was noted down by the researcher at one of the social places in Eldoret was in both Kiswahili and English. It was a political warning calling for violence against members of the Luo community residing in Eldoret Township before the 2017 general elections. The following example from a respondent was a warning against Luo leadership purportedly because Luo men are seen as children:

### Example 9
>*Mjaluo akitaka kutawala hi nchi ni heri aende akatahiri kwanza.*

### Translation
>If a Luo wants to rule this country, then he should go and get circumcised first

In Kenya, men from communities that do not practise circumcision have always been stigmatized and regarded as lesser and weaker men and therefore incapable of leading or are unsuitable to take political leadership of the country. This stereotype has not only been used on the political arena to discredit politicians from communities that do not practise male circumcision, but it has also fuelled targeted and barbaric forms of violence against members of such communities. Such violence was meted out particularly to the members of the Luo community in 2007/2008 post-election violence at Huruma area in Eldoret Township. Members of the Luo community men have suffered because of avoidance, discrimination and physical attack which are in line with Allport's scale of prejudice and stereotyping.

### Conclusion

Majority of ethnic stereotypes and prejudices which were gender based carried negative expressions of contempt, insult and sometimes outright violence against members of the target communities. Most of the coded terms used in stereotypes are historical and deeply rooted in the sense that they have been passed on from one generation to another. In congruence with Allport's (1954/1979) thinking, the study noted five levels of gender based ethnic stereotypes and prejudice reported in Eldoret conflicts; open insults, avoidance, discrimination, violence, and outright ethnic cleansing.

From the deliberations in this paper, it is clear that gender based ethnic stereotypes are very common in Eldoret, Kenya. Stereotypes and prejudice against a particular ethnic group differ depending on whether the individual is a man or woman because of deeply rooted traditional beliefs on gender. It is evident that stereotyping and prejudices have a negative impact on the society and concerted effort should be made to minimize their effects.

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