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Role of Ethnic Grievances in the Instigation of Political Violence in Nairobi County: Case of Mathare and Kibra Informal Settlements

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Abstract:

This study emerged in response to knowledge gaps on the role of ethnicity in the recurrent political conflicts in Mathare and Kibra, the worst of which occurred during the post-election violence of 2007. In solving the research problem, a systematic and methodical investigation on the causes of the recurrent political violence in the study area was done using a mixed research design. This analytical exercise involved testing of hypothesis about the relationship between quality of life differences and ethnic grievances. And qualitative interviews were informative on factors of conflict formation, escalation, and de-escalation. In testing the instrumentalist theory of conflict, it was observed that statistically significant differences existed between ethnic groups in conflict—the in-group and out-group—about horizontal inequalities and ethnic grievances. The in-group had a higher standard of living than the out-group, and the out-group had higher levels of ethnic grievances than the in-group. Importantly, it was found that there was a statistically significant relationship between horizontal inequalities and ethnic grievances in the study area. Revealed in qualitative interviews was that the relationship between horizontal inequalities and ethnic grievances is significant because it reflects the fears of the in-group of being dominated by the out-group and the frustrations and resentment of the out-group at being dominated by the in-group. The findings have defined the causal mechanism that is basic to the instigation of political violence, ethnic grievances borne of horizontal inequalities between the in-group and out-group. Entities like the National Integration and Cohesion Commission have a better understanding of the conflict dynamics that are basic to political violence in the study area and to other informal settlements that have experienced or are susceptible to political violence.

Keywords: Horizontal inequalities, ethnic grievances, in-group, out-group, political violence

1. Introduction

Globally, there is an appreciation in the literature that ethno-political violence grows out of political cultures in which ethnicity is politicized. Political identification and mobilization would see political elites marshalling their ethnic groups in political contests. In these cultures of politics, the elite from the in-group, those in control of the country's economic and political resources, would neglect or marginalize the political elite and members of the out-group, those seeking power (Cederman, Wimmer, and Minn, 2010). In the African region, researchers have related such discriminatory political cultures to socio-economic inequalities of out-groups; inequalities have tended to breed group, generating ethnic or grievances. Feeling marginalized, the elite from the out-group would mobilize their kinsmen or ethnic supporters to engage in political actions against the elite of the in-group, actions that could include or result in violent protests or actions (Østby, 2008).

In the Kenyan case, the political dynamic of the in-group and out-group has characterized Kenyan politics since independence. The return of competitive elections seemed to have heightened its salience. The perceived discriminatory allocation of state resources has served as a platform upon which political elites have mobilized their ethnic supporters for political action (Stewart, 2008). In the 2007 general election, for example, political elites from the Luo, Luhya, and Kalenjin communities mobilized their ethnic supporters to capture political power, a move, if successful, would have seen these elites discard their out-group status. Nevertheless, when the electoral authority released results that declared the incumbent the winner of the disputed election, the leaders of the opposition found their ambitions frustrated and moved to encourage political demonstrations, which turned violent. In Mathare and Kibra, the announcement of the disputed 2007 presidential elections saw supporters of the defeated presidential candidate attack supporters of the supposed winner of the election. The post-election violence displayed the power of the simmering ethnic conflict in Mathare and Kibra: the slum areas all but imploded, the violence the worst seen in an urban area in the history of Kenya (CIPEV, 2008).

Nairobi's informal settlements, especially Mathare and Kibra, are known to be theatres of conflict (Okombo and Sana, 2010). The episodic nature of violence during electoral cycles, such as in 1992 and 1997, issued chiefly from a rent dispute, involving tenants and property owners that turned violent. The conflict in 2001, for example, saw mostly Luo and Luhya affected a rent boycott to protest

high rents. These groups perceived the Kikuyu, who were the majority property owners, as beneficiaries of irregularly public land, land which the former acquired at their expense (Law Society of Kenya, 2002). Political elites have used such socio-economic imbalances or quality of life differences as campaign platforms on which to engage in legitimate and illegitimate forms of political action, with the latter either inciting their ethnic supporters to engage in political behaviour or sponsoring ethnic militia to perpetrate violence. For instance, statements by politicians, before and during a rent dispute in 2001, energized political violence in Kibra. Weeks of brutal fights between tenants and youth, hired by property owners to effect evictions for non-payment of rent, left many seriously injured, hundreds displaced, and tens of fatalities (Shilloh, 2008). Just before the 2007 presidential election, property owners issued Luo and Luhya tenants with quit notices, apprehensive that a win for the opposition leader would tone up the determination of these two communities to boycott paying rents. In no mean way, this anticipatory step escalated ethnic animosities associated with the 2007 post-election violence (CIPEV, 2008).

Research on the political violence in Mathare and Kibra is undeveloped about the causal mechanism. This area of deficiency in knowledge on the conflict situation in Mathare and Kibra form the background from which this present study grew out of and provides the context in which the research problem, described below, is defined, justified, and made relevant.

2. Statement of the Problem

Unattended, the conflict situation in Mathare and Kibra would likely re-escalate. For the National Steering Committee on Peace Building, renewed fighting in Mathare and Kibra would likely poison the conflict situation and leave it unyielding to conflict transformation. Indeed, “after crossing the threshold of violence, the conflict dynamic becomes not only more destructive, but also very costly and difficult to transform” (National Steering Committee on Peace Building, NSC, 2010: 4). Renewed violence could entail serious spillover effects. Re-escalation of political conflict, as (Miall, 2004: 7) rightly avers, tend to “broaden (suck in new issues), widen (suck in new actors), and intensify (suck in new victims)”. In Mathare and Kibra, rent disputes have previously morphed into ethno-political disputes, which have then diffused to other slum areas (Dafne, 2009). The possible spiralling of the conflict situation, in Mathare and Kibra, needs to be stemmed.

Ignorance about the causal network and consequences of the recurrent political violence in Mathare and Kibra is detrimental to understanding the interplay and weight of factors that trigger political violence and the conflict’s structures and dynamics. There is ignorance too on the role of agents of the conflict, whose actions are instrumental to conflict escalation and de-escalation. The lack of detailed analyses means there is an inadequate understanding of how conflicting parties define, interpret, and respond to conflict issues and controversies. Given these gaps in knowledge, the researcher undertook a systematic and methodical analysis of the causes of the conflict situation in Mathare and Kibra by analyzing the role of ethnicity in the political violence in the study area.

3. Research Objectives

The general objective was to analyze the role of ethnicity in the perpetuation of political violence in Mathare and Kibra. The specific objectives were to assess the variations in quality of life of ethnic groups in relation to ethnic grievances that are presumed to be basic to the political conflict in Mathare and Kibra.

4. Theoretical Framework

The researcher applied the instrumentalist theory of political violence, propounded by Ernest Gellner (1964). The components of political violence, the theory argues, are “modernization, economic factors, and elite ambitions” (Eriten and Romine, 2008). Ethnic conflict, the theory holds, arises due to partisan governance, in which the ruling elite deprive some ethnic groups of access to state resources (Bratton and Kimenyi, 2008).

Theorizing about political violence places the state at the core of the causal mechanism of conflict: not only does the state initiate conflict, but also, it is the reason over which ethnic groups fight. As Cederman, Wimmer, and Minn (2010:2) rightly posit, “competing ethno-nationalist claims over the state constitute the driving force behind many internal conflicts”. The proper place to begin any analysis of political violence conflict is a political culture marked by the in-group and out-group mentality and phenomenon. This culture is characterized by partisan governance systems in which political elite in power favour some ethnic groups at the expense of others. Given their origin, manoeuvre, and purpose, these conflicts can rightly be classified as political violence. Political violence conflict could occur even in seemingly democratic societies, those in which elections are held regularly, those in which elections are presumed to be the peaceful mechanism for transferring power. The partisan institutional norms, structures, and procedures in such quasi-democracies encourage asymmetrical distribution of state resources, of which differentiated quality of living, between the in-group and out-group, would signify. A central pillar of the instrumentalist theory is that communities that form the in-group would generally enjoy a higher quality of life compared to the communities that are in the out-group”. Marginalized communities, the out-group, would thus have a lower standard of life, relative to the favoured ethnic groups, which spawns grievances that political elites use in political mobilization to capture state power. At the same time, political elite from the in-group, keen to keep the status quo, mobilize their ethnic groups to retain power, hence the “we” versus” them mentality in political contests (Robinson, 2009). Establishing whether there were differences in living standards between in-groups and out-groups exist was basic to establishing the theoretical and empirical validity of the instrumentalist theory in any setting of ethno-political violence. These grievances are a central component of the inequality-conflict discourse because they imply the existence of horizontal inequalities, which engenders a heightened sense of collective consciousness at perceived mistreatment. In addition, political elites exploit these grievances to achieve political objectives. The best way to explore the dynamics, structure, and agency of political violence in the study area would be by

testing a theory to ascertain the relationship between quality of life differences and ethnic grievances.

5. Research Methodology

To investigate ethnic conflict in the study area, quantitative and qualitative cultures of inquiry were employed. Using a mixed methods research design yielded a more nuanced understanding of the initial conditions of political violence. Quantitative methodology involved descriptive and inferential analysis. This methodology is suitable because it allowed the researcher to test a hypothesis and develop a causal narrative about the role of quality of life differences in causing ethnic grievances, the initial situation of political violence. Entailed in the quantitative analysis was a proportional stratified random sample of (n=766) respondents, a sample of people who voted in the 2007 national elections and who were heads of households in the study area. Systematic sampling was used to determine the starting points and logic of sampling in each village. The sampling interval was computed and then a statistical random number generator was applied, using Microsoft Excel 2010. The sequence of specific households was determined and sampled.

	Villages in Kibra	Number of Households	Ratio of Households of Village to total	Sample of HHs targeted	Villages in Mathare	Number of Households	Ratio of Households of Village to total	Sample of HHs targeted
1.	Kibra	3,237	5%	19	Mathare	31, 426	36%	138
2.	Lindi	11,551	18%	69	Mabatini	9,809	11%	42
3	Makina	25,242	13%	50	Mathare 4B	6,617	8%	31
4.	Siranga	6,164	10%	38	MlangoKubwa	15,000	17%	65
5.	Laini-Saba	9,927	16%	61	Mathare 4A	5,627	6%	23
6.	Gatwikiria	15,597	25%	96	Mathare North	18,450	22%	84
7.	Kianda	8,237	13%	50				
	Total	62, 729	100	383	Total	86,929	100	383

Table 1: Proportional Distribution of Households in Study Area

Source: Researcher 2012

The sample was divided into the following groups as 1) in-group, 2) out-group, and 3) other-group. The sample for the quantitative study (n=766) was comprised of in-group (n=296), out-group (n=268), and other groups (n=202). The breakdown of ethnic groups in this fashion permitted was in line with the theoretical framework. If ethnicity defined political identity in ethno-political violence, then there would be an in-group and an out-group (Blagojevich, 2009). In procedure, data obtained from the qualitative phase of the study was used to give perspective to the findings of the quantitative data, and vice versa (Elliot, 2005). Qualitative analysis employed a sample of 65 respondents--members of the provincial administration and community leaders. These interviews analyzed the subjective reflections of respondents on the problem of political violence in the study area, delineating the antecedents, structures, factors, triggers, and consequences of conflict in the study area.

6. Results

6.1. Scale Validation

Two scales—on quality of life differences and ethnic grievances—were developed and validated through explanatory and confirmatory factor analysis. Concerning the Quality of Life Scale, the following five (5) factors were deemed basic to its composition (1) “Access to Human Development Services” (2), “Cost of Living”, (3) “Social Wellbeing”, (4) “Lack of Financial Resources, and (5) “Poor Living Conditions”. The goodness of fit indices was satisfied. The non-normed fit index NNFI (0.993**), the comparative fit index CFI (0.998**), and the root mean square of approximation RMSEA (0.036**), and the SRMR (0.0174) all met the higher threshold (Schermelleh-Engell and Muller, 2003). Regarding the Ethnic Grievance Scale “Perception of Respondents of Governments Treatment of Ethnic Group and Political Elite”. For factor 2, the items seemed to be measuring the “Attitudes towards Government”. The two-factor model for ethnic grievances was validated. The non-normed fit index NNFI (0.993**), the comparative fit index CFI (0.994**), and the root mean square of approximation RMSEA (0.0196**), and the SRMR (0.15*) met the higher threshold.

6.2. Analysis of Ethnic Groups vis a vis Quality of Life Differences

In exploratory analysis, it was observed that the quality of life of the in-group ($M=37.65$, $SD=6.1$) was higher than the quality of life of the out-group ($M=34.7$, $SD=7.32$). On this question, the researcher had expected to see the out-group with a lower quality of life than the in-group. In a t-test, for comparison of means of the in-group and out-group, this difference was found to be statistically significant, $t(564) = p < 0.01$. On the matter of ethnic grievances, the researcher had expected to find the out-group with higher ethnic grievances than the in-group. But the researcher observed that it was the in-group ($M=30.05$, $SD=8.59$) that had higher ethnic grievances than the out-group, ($M=23$, $SD=7.5$). Furthermore, cross tabulation was used to establish whether there was a statistically significant result between ethnicity and dimensions of quality of life: 1) livelihood, 2) education, and 3) monthly earnings. In confirmatory analysis, it was observed that ethnicity could explain differences in education, $\chi^2(10, 766) = 27.539$, $p < 0.02$, and it could explain differences in livelihood, $\chi^2(6, 766) = 45.751$, $p < 0.00$. Ethnicity did not however differentiate the respondent's monthly earnings, $\chi^2(6, 766) = 9.932$, $p < 0.128$. The findings suggest ethnicity was influential in explaining the predicates of quality

of life, education, and livelihood, but not helpful in accounting for differences in the most immediate form of index of quality of life, that is, monthly earnings. This finding coincides the evidence generated by factor analysis, which showed that differences in quality of life were about access to agents of development and betterment, such as access to human development services, water, and education, rather than the ultimate fruits of such agents, disposable monthly incomes.

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Correlation analyses were used to test the relationships quality of life differences and ethnicity. For the study area, as a unit, quality of life and ethnic grievance had a moderate positive correlation $r(764) = 0.62$, $p < 0.1$. Regarding the in-group and out-group as different units, the following was observed. For the in-group, quality of life and ethnic grievance were moderately correlated, $r(294) = 0.458$, $p < 0.01$, with the coefficient of determination (r^2) standing at 0.23 (23%). For the out-group, the quality of life and ethnic grievances have a moderate positive correlation: $r(267) = 0.493$, $p < 0.01$. The coefficient of determination (r^2) was 0.24 or (24%), implying that quality of life accounted for (24%) of the variation in ethnic grievances in the out-group. This means that the relationship between quality of life and ethnic grievances was marginally stronger in the out-group than in the in-group. Nonetheless, statistical tests of the difference in the correlation coefficients of the in-group and out-group did not find statistically significant differences between the coefficients for the in-group and the out-group.

6.3. Hypothesis Testing of Relationship between Quality of Life Differences and Ethnic Grievances

- Hypotheses Relating Quality of Life and Ethnic Grievances
 - H_0 : $\beta=0$ (Quality of life is not a useful predictor of ethnic grievances)
 - H_a : $\beta \neq 0$ (Quality of life is not a useful predictor of ethnic grievances)

Significance Level: $\alpha=0.05$ (Reject the null hypothesis if p -value is less or equal to 0.05)

6.3.1. Study Area

To test the hypothesis on whether quality of life significantly predicted ethnic grievances, simple regression analyses were done in three parts: regarding the study areas a unit and regarding the study are decomposed as 1) in-group, 2) out-group, and 3) other-group.

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	14865.901	1	14865.901	294.783	.000 ^b
	Residual	38478.099	763	50.430		
	Total	53344.000	764			

Table 2: ANOVA Results for Relationship Between Quality of Life and Ethnic Grievances in Study Area

a. Dependent Variable: Ethnic Grievance Study Area;

b Predictors: (Constant), Quality of Life Study Area

The findings showed that the independent variable significantly explained and predicated the dependent variable, $r^2 = 0.278$, $F(1, 763) = 294.783$, $p < 0.01$ (Table 2). Therefore, about (27.8%) of the variation in ethnic grievances in the study areas as a unit was attributable to quality of life differences. There was ground to reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternate hypothesis: quality of life differences could explain and predict the ethnic grievances of ethnic groups (Østby, 2008; Cederman, Weidman, and Gleditsch, 2010). If so, then, there is evidence that the initial situation related to outbreak of ethnic grievances—horizontal inequalities—were true in the study area.

6.3.2. In-Group

The researcher also undertook a regression analysis for the in-group and out-group. Regarding the in-group, the findings show that that quality of life differences influenced outcomes in ethnic grievances.

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	8258.269	1	8258.269	186.264	.000 ^b
	Residual	13034.866	294	44.336		
	Total	21293.135	295			

Table 3: ANOVA:^a Relationship between Quality of Life and Ethnic Grievances of the In-group

a. Dependent Variable: Ethnic Grievances the in-group; b. Predictors: (Constant), Quality of Life The in-group

Source: Researcher 2012

Quality of life significantly predicts a significant proportion in the variance of ethnic grievance scores, $r^2=0.388$, $F(1, 294)=186.264$, $p<0.01$. The coefficient of determination (R^2) is 0.386; therefore, about 0.386 of the variation in ethnic grievances can be attributed to quality of life.

6.3.3. Out-group

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Significance
Regression	3546.86	1	3546.86	80.66	0
Residual	11081.01	252	43.97		
Total	14627.87	253			

Table 4: ANOVA: Relationship between Quality of Life Differences and Ethnic Grievances in Outgroup
Source: Researcher 2012

For the out-group, the findings show that quality of life differences is a significant predictor of ethnic grievances, $r^2= (0.49)$, $F(1, 267)=80.66$, $p<0.01$ (Table 4). Comparatively then, the strength of the relationship between quality of life differences and ethnic grievances was stronger for the out-group than it was for the in-group (Stewart, 2008; Muhula, 2009).

The findings support the theoretical model—instrumentalist theory. That is, horizontal inequalities would generate ethnic grievances among the in-groups. However, the findings seem to clash with the theoretical model on one point: the in-group can have higher ethnic grievances than the out-groups, due to in-group's interpretation of how their quality of life would change to the disadvantage, were the political elite from the out-group to take over state power.

7. Conclusion

Systematic analyses of the conflict situation in Mathare and Kibra were wanting. Policymakers and peace and conflict analysts and practitioners needed to understand better the causes and consequences of political violence in these informal settlements. Horizontal inequalities are a factor in political violence in the study area, because they reflect the fears of the in-group of being dominated by the out-group and the frustrations and resentment of the out-group at being dominated by the in-group. Qualitative evidence shed light on the role of community actors in conflict formation, perpetuation, escalation, and escalation. Quality of life differences seems to illustrate the points of conflict between the communities, and ethnic grievances seem to draw their energy and or vitality from pre-existing animosities between the key ethnic groups in conflict in the study area: the Luo and Kikuyu. It seems historical animosities between the two communities, growing out as they do, from political differences among their political elites, also inform ethnic grievances observed. This study has filled an important gap in the literature about the undercurrents of conflict behaviour, particularly why political economy controversies at the national level trigger violence at the sub-national level (Rubenstein, 2008). The study has likewise provided useful evidence and information to fill a literature gap about the operational sing of ethnic identity and showing how this identity shapes conflict behaviour (Herera, Johnstone, and McDermott, 2006). Overall, ethnicity has a significant role in the recurrent political violence in Mathare and Kibra informal settlements. Differences in quality of life between the warring ethnic groups, in-group and out-group, creates ethnic grievances, which are an initial phase of ethno-political conflict and which periodically escalates into political violence. The property-owner and tenant relationship symbolizes and energizes the conflict dynamic.

8. Recommendations

1. To ease the ethnic friction caused by the property-owner and tenant relationship, there is need for resource distribution to be done transparently, fairly, and equitably, including land allocation and lease.
2. To reduce the salience of horizontal inequalities, there is need for equitable distribution of resources—especially health, water, and education. Through confirmatory factor analysis, these factors were identified as most influential in defining horizontal inequalities.
3. Appointments to senior executive positions, including cabinet officers and senior security positions, need to be ethnically-balanced to reduce ethnic grievances. And members of the provincial administration serving in the study area need to be ethnically balanced.

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