

CHAPTER ONE

Introductory

Khoi-san (Khoikhoi), Hadza/Sandawe, Sirikwa, Bantu, Nilotes

Khoi-san (Khoikhoi)

Writing about the hunter-gatherers in the Lake region, Professor William Ochieng has said:

We learn from linguists and archaeologists, however, that in the last millennium B.C, a people like the Khoikhoi of South Africa sometimes called 'bushmen' were scattered in the plains and higher parts of Nyanza. The majority of these hunters and gatherers were later displaced by pastoralists who came to Nyanza with their cattle from the direction of the Ethiopian Highlands.¹

Writing in the Kenya Museum Magazine Kenya Past and Present, Daniel Stiles has stated:

The archeological record tells us that much of East Africa and the Horn was occupied by hunting peoples before the arrival of Cushitic pastoralists. Linguistics suggest that Khoisan speakers did occupy part of eastern Africa before the arrival of the various present day linguistic groups. Ehret (1974) has proposed that pastoral southern Cushites expanded into East Africa beginning by at least 2000 B.C displacing and/or absorbing Khoisan-speaking hunters. The presence of Dahalo in a small area of Lamu District adjacent to the Boni suggest that at one time this area contained both Khoisan and Southern Cushitic speaking peoples. The Dahalo today speak a southern Cushitic language that contains a dental click, thought to be a residual Khoisan trait, and they have traditions indicating a long standing occupation of the area (i.e. no migration legends, and traditions of having been there before any of the surrounding peoples.) (Ehret 1974: Stiles 1980)

Hadza/Sandawe

Writing on the Hadza/Sandawe in the Kenya Past and present magazine, David Stiles has recorded:

The hunters-gatherers of Kenya probably spoke languages related to Sandawe and Hadza, heard today only in Tanzania. Some Hadza are still hunter-gatherers and the Sandawe were in the recent past. The classification of the languages is debatable, but because they contain clicks, most linguists think they are directly related to Khoisan, the language of the Khoi and san ('Bushmen') in southern Africa. The pastoralists descending the Rift Valley probably spoke southern Cushitic. Those coming in from Sudan and Uganda presumably spoke southern Nilotic that later gave rise to Kalenjin.¹

In step with the main message in this book, Stiles concludes his article by stating that:

Since these phenomena have been happening in Kenya for the last 3000 to 4000 years, there is no such thing as a "pure" tribe. Except for the most recent immigrants, it is safe to say that all tribes in Kenya contain a mixture of Bantu, Kalenjin, Eastern Nilotic and Eastern Cushitic elements, with a small amount of Southern Cushitic and Hadzan thrown in. Linguistics and comparative

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ethnography bear this out, as historical evidence of language and cultural borrowings from one group to another is unmistakable.

Sirikwa

Before the Maasai era, Sirikwa had been the dominant population of the western highlands of Kenya. The Sirikwa region extended from Sotik in the south through Kericho, Nandi and Uas Nkishu to the slopes of Mount Elgon and Cherangani hills in the north and to the North end of the Mau Hills and Nakuru in the east. The so-called "Sirikwa holes" are common in much of the western highlands of Kenya and the Hyrax Hill near Nakuru.

These livestock-herding people had a long lasting relationship with the Ogiek of the forested areas they lived in. This relationship contributed to the history of the highlands from past centuries to recent times. John Sutton writing in the Kenya Museum magazine Kenya Past and Present in an article titled "The Sirikwa and the Okiek in the history of the Kenya Highlands" has stated:

It is not suggested that the Sirikwa of old were Okiek or a branch of them. By speaking of relationship, perhaps even a symbiosis, a definite contrast in economy and ecology is implied. It was a contrast between those who inhabited the forest and knew and exploited its products, and those who pastured cattle, goats and sheep on the adjacent grass-lands — a situation inviting exchanges and mutual respect and communication through a shared language. That was an early form of the Kalenjin tongue. Thus, though the Sirikwa are no more, their language in effect survives, being maintained by the Okiek groups.¹

In explaining the disappearance of the Sirikwa in the same magazine, Sutton has noted:

The Sirikwa have not simply died out, or been the victims of massacre in the Maasai era, as some have mainly imagined. Rather they were assimilated into the newly emerging ethnicities of the 17th and 18th centuries, thereby losing their Sirikwa identity. Some, especially in the Nakuru area, would have been absorbed into the expanding Maasai groups and lent their experience of the region's ecology and resources, and of methods of tending cattle and small stock there . . . The Sirikwa language, it can be inferred would have been an early dialect of Kalenjin. That is the only reasonable deduction from the overall distribution of Sirikwa remnants, which are mostly in distinctly non-Maasai territory now populated by Kalenjin, and in particular from the telling strength of memory of the Sirikwa and accurate understanding of their archaeological relics — provided by Kalenjin elders.²

Due to this historical consciousness, when Kenya became independent, the name Sirikwa was chosen by the Kalenjin for the council created to serve the districts of Nandi, Uas Nkishu, Trans-Nzoia and Elgeyo-Marakwet in the Rift Valley. By then Kericho was administered from Nyanza Province. Sirikwa county council was later broken up.

The Kony sub-group of the Kalenjin people according to their oral tradition extended from Mount Elgon and adjoining Western territory across the Uganda borders to Kapenguria and Kitale and they represent the remnants of the Sirikwa people. The Ababukusu people of Western Kenya's tradition is that in their migration movement into Kenya, they first arrived at Esamoya (Jinja) and changed course and walked backwards through Bugishu (in Uganda) to the northern

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side of Mount Elgon and then proceeded to Mbayi and Sirikwa where they settled. In those days they were known as Babayi Basilikwa (Babayi of Sirikwa). The former member of Parliament for Webuye Constituency Mr. Joash Wamang'oli who is a Bukusu traces his ancestry to Sirikwa people.

As it has been established elsewhere in this book, the Sirikwa people who are known to have also settled in the areas of the North end of Mau Hills and created the so-called "Sirikwa holes" in much of the Western highlands of Kenya and the Hyrax Hill near Nakuru, were assimilated into the newly emerging Maasai and other ethnicities of the 17th and 18th centuries thereby losing their Sirikwa identity. These Maasai ethnicities included the Keekonyokie section of the Maasai who before colonial appropriation of their land in 1905 occupied the Kinangop (Kinopop) area of the Nyandarua range adjacent to M[rang'a, (thaya and Tet[areas of Ny[r] (Nyeri) and neighbouring Laikipia plains formerly homes to Laikipiak (Wakuavi) Maasai. In these Ag[k[y[areas, the name Thirikwa (Sirikwa?) is found as a male name such as that of the former member of Parliament for Ndaragwa constituency Hon. Thirikwa Kamau indicating absorptions and assimilations of the Sirikwa people by the Ag[k[y[from the Maasai neighbouring communities in Nyandarua and Laikipia areas.

Bantu

Historians have provided evidence that the place of dispersal of the Bantu peoples' language is the Congo – Niger complex. According to Greenberg, as quoted by Professor Ochieng, the most convincing evidence is that which is based on geographical location of the most closely related languages. He has referred to the analogy made by W.R. Bascom and Herskovits in Africa on the basically similar methods that may be used to establish the homeland of the English language as being similar to finding the originating home of the Bantu thus:

In similar fashion, the relationships of Bantu point, first to the Nigeria and the Cameroon's, and finally, to the Niger – Congo family, whose distribution centres is West Africa rather than in East Africa.¹

Professor R.W. Ochieng on the same subject has written:

According to Joseph Greenberg, Peter Murdock, Malcolm Guthrie, and Roland Oliver, it would appear that the original dispersal zone of the Bantu speaking people was contained within the Congo-Niger complex. Influenced by his discovery of a number of apparently unrelated West African languages, Greenberg, concluded that the "pre-Bantu" families originally lived in the Cameroon and Nigeria area, where they probably spoke some "pre-Bantu" language. If it is assumed that the Tiv, Batu, Ndoro, Bitare, Mambila and Jawara dialects are the vestiges of some earlier language, fragments of which were absorbed into various languages at some time in the pre-historical period in West Africa, then Greenberg says that such a language might also have been the source of "Proto-Bantu". We have therefore to imagine from the above assumption that the speakers of the "pre-Bantu language" moved in two directions, some to "proto-Bantu" area "in the bush country to the south of the equatorial forest," and others to West Africa.²

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The first stage of expansion of the Bantu started from the original homeland in the Cameroon highlands towards the end of the last millennium B.C. They travelled by canoe along the Ubangi River to the Congo, then along the Kasai River to northern Shaba woodlands of the Republic of Congo where they settled. The parent Bantu language was formed here before major dispersal took place. According to Roland Oliver, this took place between A.D. 400 and 1000. During this period, the proto-Bantu reached the shores of the Indian Ocean and some followed the Indian Ocean coast line northwards, and are reported by the Arab geographers to have reached the Juba River by the 10th century A.D. Some migrated to the East African Great lakes region as far north as lake Albert and beyond while others settled in Central and Southern Africa where they are found today.

Nilotes

The Nilotes are people who immigrated into Kenya from areas of the Nile River in Sudan and hence the name Nilotes. Some settled along the Lake Victoria areas while others settled in the highlands of Kenya and hence the descriptions as Lake and Highlands Nilotes respectively. These people in Kenya are the Luo and Kalenjin communities. The Plain Nilotes are the Maasai, Turkana, Samburu and Jemps who are pastoralists and herd their livestock in the grassland plains. Iteso live in Western Kenya and Nubi in Kibera in Nairobi.