

## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

### **Hunter-Gatherers**

**( Yaaku, Dahalo, Elmolo, Waata, Aweer, Lowland Nyika, Ngiwakinyang, IK, Ngibotok, Dassenech, Ogiek)**

Until about 5,000 years ago, all of the East African territory was peopled by hunter-gatherers who knew the behaviour and habitats of the animals that provided meat, skins and horns which they used for their daily lives. They also knew where and when to find the plants that supplied them with grains, tubers, nuts and berries for food and bark cloth, dyes, cosmetics, incense and medicines. The bands of people moved around the land with the sophisticated knowledge of where to find the stones for tools and whatever else was needed. For each ecosystem, the people adapted to the plants and animals found in the territory in which they found themselves living in. Their social and political organisation was as effective as any other. Daniel Stiles writing in the Past and Present Kenya Museum magazine on the hunter-gatherers in Kenya has written thus:

From what has been seen and recorded, it would appear that hunters-gatherers in East Africa were not socially stratified. There were no chiefs nor headmen nor even wealthy people. Food and possessions were shared and distributed according to need. Strict social rules enforced compliance. The male elders, with advice from their wives, made decisions by consensus on community matters such as the next move. Certain individuals, both male and female, could gain prestige and influence within the band by having unusual skill in such things as oratory, wisdom, hunting or curing. Their reward was not material possessions, but favoured access for their families to food and other resources from the redistribution system.

While the pre-history of Kenya is contained in fossils, rocks and stone tools in museums, in scholarly conjectures and archaeological excavations, the history of Kenya continues to live in its people and cultures. Andrew Fedders and Cynthia Salvadori in their book Peoples and Cultures of Kenya have written thus on the hunters-gatherers :

The most prolonged past of any of the peoples of Kenya is that of the hunter-gatherer groups. It is not so much that some of them may be the survivors of the Stone Age, the direct descendants of an ancestral race once inhabiting parts of Kenya, but rather that elements of stone Age cultures have survived through them and their way of life.

### **YAAKU (MUKOGODO)**

Yaaku are known as Mukogodo because they live in the Mukogodo forest near Don Dol on the Laikipia Plateau. They are called Dorobo by the Maasai and local European farmers. The Mukogodo themselves prefer to be simply called 'Mukogondo' while the government groups them and their co-occupants of Mukogodo area, the Mumonyot, as 'Mukogodo Maasai'.

Before the invasion of their part of the country by the Laikipiak Maasai in the mid to late nineteenth century, the Mukogodo lived as one people with a group called the Kirrimani. They lived mainly in the lowlands east of their current home where they herded goats, kept bees, hunted and gathered. The area of their habitation centred on a small hill near the Engare Ondare

## **KENYA ETHNIC COMMUNITIES: FOUNDATION OF THE NATION**

called Oldoinyo Sorge. At that time they spoke Yaaku, an Eastern Cushitic language (Greenberg 1963, Heine 1974). Daniel Stiles in Kenya Past and Present has written:

Their linguistic ancestors moved to the central Highlands about 2,000 years ago. Since 'Yaaku' is supposedly a Southern Nilotic term for hunter, they probably had some sort of contact with Okiek ancestors in the Mathews-Maralal area before migrating to the Laikipia plateau. There is linguistic evidence that the Yaaku were in contact with both Hadzan and Southern Cushitic speakers in the Central Highlands 2,000 years ago. In the past, some Yaaku were pastoralists as well as foragers. Stone cairn graves on the Laikipia plateau could have been built by their ancestors.

When the Mukogodo were defeated by the Laikipiak Maasai, the part of the group called Kirrimani went north and intermarried with the Rendille, while those who became Mukogodo moved to Mukogodo Hills and began to live in caves. Although they may have kept some goats and sheep with them in their caves, it is certain that they did not have cattle. At that time Mukogodo lived as nuclear families, moving often from cave to cave. They lived on wild animals, honey and wild plants. Sometimes between 1910 and the 1930's, the Mukogodo began to obtain and keep increasing numbers of stock, including cattle and to adopt the Maasai language and cultural traits. Lee Cronk in a paper titled "A preliminary report on Research among the Mukogodo" stated:

Still, during even the later years of this period Mukogodo herders were far from big-time pastoralists. According to evidence given to the Kenya Land Commission in 1932, the ratio of adult men to cattle among the Mukogodo was only 1:0.6, while those for their neighbours, the Digiri, Mumonyot and Ilngwesi, all labelled 'Dorobo' by the British, were 1:21.26, 1:19.76 and 1:14.96, respectively. The ratio for Mukogodo small stock was 1:1.27, while those for the other groups were 1:28.15, 1:15.41 and 1:8.74 respectively.

As they acquired stock, the Mukogodo moved out of the caves and constructed manyattas, similar to Maasai structures, near pastures. They obtained stock by marrying their daughters to herders in exchange for animals, by trading forest products and later, by earning cash from European-owned ranches and doing other work. By the 1940s or so, the Mukogodo had almost entirely changed from the old subsistence practices, save bee keeping. They saw the advantage of having a food source with them where they lived, instead of chasing animals in the forest.

Before the 1920s or so when a Mukogodo man married a Mukogodo girl, he paid a few beehives as bride price. From the 1920s or so however, the Mukogodo began to marry their daughters off at a more considerable bride price to neighbouring pastoralists, who gave livestock, rather than beehives. Few fathers were willing to settle for beehives when they could obtain livestock and this encouraged Mukogodo to obtain and keep livestock in order to ensure that they and their sons would be able to acquire and keep wives. In the meantime, the British administration was established in the Mukogodo area in 1936 when Chief Silangei Le matunge was installed in the area. This reduced warfare in the area thereby increasing the rate of intermarriage, especially between the Mukogodo and their former Laikipiak Maasai enemies and the mumonyot, who "became friends" henceforth.

## **KENYA ETHNIC COMMUNITIES: FOUNDATION OF THE NATION**

## **KENYA ETHNIC COMMUNITIES: FOUNDATION OF THE NATION**

Alienation of much of the Laikipiak plateau and nearby mountain highland areas by the Europeans forced many people to move closer to the Mukogodo hills and hence into greater contact with the Mukogodo. Lee Cronk has written:

This is certainly true for the Ilngwesi, who originated in Meru and who now border the Mukogodo on the south (worthy, no dates, Kenya Land Commission) and it is probably also true for the Mumonyot, who border Mukogodo on the west and northwest. The fact that two Mukogodo lineages' entire traditional territories were now in Ilngwesi and Mumonyot areas as defined by the government attests to this crowding. Natural population growth would have added to this effect.

### **ELMOLO**

The Elmolo, numbering about 700 people and living in a small area to the north of Loiyangalani on the eastern shore of Lake Turkana, at an earlier time spoke a Cushitic language (as do the Rendille). Today they speak Samburu [Maasai] and have acquired a number of cultural features of Samburu society. They have also begun to acquire small numbers of cattle and small stock, though to all intents and purposes their livelihood is still rooted in the traditional fishing economy. In recent years, they were a community most socially cut off from their neighbours. By 1958, the only new-comers to the Elmolo in living memory had been three Turkana men. No women had been married off to other groups. Altogether there were 143 persons living in two villages 3 miles apart on the south eastern shore of the Lake. They comprised 36 adult males, 40 adult females, 37 unmarried boys, and 30 unmarried girls. On the Elmolo, Daniel Stiles has written thus:

Today most Elmolo speak Samburu, but their original language was an Eastern Cushitic one most closely related to that of the Dassenech and Arbore people who dwell around the northern end of Lake Turkana in Ethiopia. Historically, they have lived from fishing and the hunting of hippopotamus and crocodiles. They represent a modern variant of the Late Stone Age 'Wavy line' pottery people of 6,000 to 10,000 years ago. They keep a few goats, but an increasingly important business for them these days is selling trinkets and charging tourists for photographs. Eastern Cushitic linguistic ancestors of the Elmolo, called 'Baz' are thought to have been around Lake Turkana from as early as 2,500 years ago. They subsequently split into Dassenech along the northern shore. Incursions of Gabbra, Samburu and Turkana have forced the Elmolo into a tiny area and the Dassenech into Ethiopia, though they still come into the Ileret-Koobi Fora area to fish and further in to raid the Gabbra. In the late 19th century the Elmolo absorbed many destitute Samburu following the cattle epizootics that hit eastern and southern Africa. That explains their superficial Samburu cultural traits and language. When Teleki, the first European to see Lake Turkana, visited the area in 1886, the Elmolo were living on offshore islands. They have little contact with the Samburu today.

The Elmolo claim to belong to four Samburu clans (Lokumai, Masula, Lorogushu and Longeli) and their men of different ages claim to belong to the appropriate Samburu age-sets. In 1958, the oldest living men only remembered several words of their old language. Middle-aged men only knew that there had once been another language, while a number of the younger men were not even aware of this fact. Paul Spenser on Elmolo cultural borrowing has written:

## **KENYA ETHNIC COMMUNITIES: FOUNDATION OF THE NATION**

## **KENYA ETHNIC COMMUNITIES: FOUNDATION OF THE NATION**

Regardless of this cultural borrowing, the structure of Elmolo society is altogether different from Samburu. While one can speak of named age-sets and phratries following the Samburu, one can hardly speak of an age-set system or a segmentary descent system. Among the Elmolo, association with any age-set or phratry does not regulate a man's behaviour towards others. There is no development and in no way does it regulate marriage. A number of Elmolo simply did not belong to any of the phratries.

Although the Elmolo and Samburu have had contacts since the last part of the 19th century, relations have been distant, with the Samburu showing little interest or respect for the Elmolo and the Elmolo mistrusting the Samburu. In 1921, Samburu moran killed six Elmolo men, for which the Elmolo were paid 3,000 goats as compensation. Due to the obvious dependence on the Lake products exclusively and isolation from other neighbouring communities, Elmolo genetic health has not been encouraging. Paul Spencer on this has written:

To any visitor, the most noticeable feature of the Elmolo is their diseased appearance: their lips are blotchy and their teeth discoloured; apart from those born with deformities, younger men complain of weak legs, middle aged men are distinctly bow-legged and older people can no longer walk. The high degree of inbreeding may partly be responsible for this, but it is generally accepted that a major cause is their unbalanced diet. One theory is that because of the low calcium carbonate content of the Lake, their bones suffer from a calcium deficiency; another is that alkaline lake water has caused a disease called 'flourosis' and a third is that like the Eskimos, they have too much protein from their fish but too little calories.

From the written records of Hohnel, Neumann and Maud, there appears to have been three principal groups of Elmolo: the Samburu Elmolo who returned to the cattle economy at the turn of the twentieth century, the Reshiat Elmolo who have been banished from Kenya into Ethiopian and an earlier generation of the group known as the Elmolo today.

### **WATTA (WAATA)**

There are two groups of Watta (Waata) hunter-gatherer communities, with one living in symbiosis with the Oromo-speaking (Boran) pastoralists in northern Kenya while another Watta group is found scattered in the coastal hinterland and is usually known as Waliangulo.

The Watta living with the Boran are a case of complete acculturation, more complete than even the case of the Gabbra and Sakuye, although acculturation does not necessarily amount to assimilation. Boran traditions remember the Watta as the original inhabitants of the lands that the Boran occupy today. Among the Boran they are identified with practically every new thing that the Boran first came across including the sighting of new territories or new potential sources of grazing and watering. They are also identified with the founding of the original Qallu by the Boran. Hence to date during religious ceremonies commemorating the founding of Qallu, the role of the Watta is symbolically acknowledged by a gift of one leg of the bull that has been slaughtered for the occasion. The fact that the Watta were the first to see the Qallu is one important factor which has endeared them to the Boran over the centuries. On the cultural level they are recognised as members of the various clans, moieties and sub-clans of the Boran. They perform and participate in most of the Boran ceremonies that are held from time to time. But

## **KENYA ETHNIC COMMUNITIES: FOUNDATION OF THE NATION**

despite the close relationship between the Watta and the Boran, Paul S.G. Goto has observed the following important point:

But an important point to realize is that as a rule Boran proper do not intermarry with the Watta. They despise them as a people who eat practically anything that crawls, ranging from elephants to porcupines. The Boran themselves have very strong taboos regarding animals they may eat.

On the coastal hunters and gatherers known as Waliangulo, Daniel Stiles in Kenyan Past and Present has described them as follows:

There are several Oromo speaking (Eastern Cushitic) sub groups of Waata living along the western side of the Tana River and on the coastal hinterland down to northern Tanzania. They are called Ariangulo by the Giriama and Langulo by the Duruma and Digo, Waata by the Orma and themselves, Juan by the Aweer, and Oriothotanyi by the Dahalo. They are the famous elephant hunters recounted in Dennis Holman's *The Elephant People*, who together with the Aweer, were the main suppliers to the coast of ivory for export. The hunting (poaching) bands of the Taru-Tsavo area were broken up in the 1950s-1960s by the colonial government and today the Wata scratch out a living on small farms or work for Mijikenda farmers. They are being assimilated by the Bantu Mijikenda (Nine Tribes) through intermarriage, and have lost much of their interdependence with the Orma.

The origins of the coastal Waata are not clearly known, but their ancestors are probably made up of a root group of southern Cushitic-speaking hunter-gatherers, referred to in oral traditions as Laa near the coast and Asi or Degere in the interior up to the Taita Hills, with additions from Waata who followed the Orma on their migrations south from the Tana. The Laa/Asi made a language shift to Oroma as they established trade and cultural relations with the more powerful pastoralists, and mixed with or became absorbed by the immigrant Waata between 17th and late 19th centuries. They also took in various Orma and Bantu people who were destitutes, outcasts or runaway slaves. According to the legend of Watta, their ancestors were Boran who became hunters when their cattle turned into wild animals. It is known that passage from pastoralism to hunting is a common process and that the ivory trade flourished in the Tana region and was largely under Oromo control from at least the 17th century. The ancestors of the Watta might have followed the Oromo traders as clients towards the coast or possibly could have been sold as slaves to Arab traders for use as elephant hunters before eventually being emancipated. As Giriama farming expanded, Watta were progressively pushed from the coastal fringe and followed the vanishing elephant herds into the Tsavo-Galana area. In the meantime they had lost contact with Oromo pastoralists who had left Tana/Galana area and established blood pacts with Giriama and Duruma.

At the opening of the last century, the Watta were exchanging ivory for manufactured goods, iron, tobacco and flour and for goats and cattle which they slaughtered for food rather than keeping as wealth.

**AWEER (BONI)**

## **KENYA ETHNIC COMMUNITIES: FOUNDATION OF THE NATION**

These people inhabit the area near the Dahalo in the forest hinterland between Lamu and the Somali border. Linguistically the Aweer (also called Boni) are related to the Somali and the Rendille. The Aweer and the Somali constitute the Eastern Sam speakers (Somali, Rendille and the Aweer). The ancestors of the Aweer were groups of migrants who for reasons yet unknown abandoned pastoralism and became hunter-gatherers. Whatever the origin of the Aweer, they too have been subject to the influence of a succession of dominant neighbours and the effect of these contacts and cultural influences are evident today.

David Stiles in the Kenya Past and Present magazine has described the Aweer (Boni) thus:

. . . these Eastern Cushitic-speaking people live north of the Tana River in Lamu District and extend into Somalia as far as the Juba River, where they call themselves Kili. There are about 2000 Aweer in Kenya and may be another 1000-2000 in Somalia. They are called Wasanye or Waboni in Swahili and by the Wata, Wata by the Orma, Boni by the Somali and Ogoda by the Dahalo. They were divided into 10-11 groups in Kenya and four dialect groups, which probably were territorial bands in the past. At least one of them, the Kijee, is of Oromo origin. Since the 1960s they have lived in Pandanguo and villages along the road to Kiunga. They practise slash and burn cultivation and seasonal labour in Kenya and pastoralism in Somalia.

Daniel Stiles in the same magazine has also written:

The Aweer were probably relatively independent up to the late 16th century, interacting with the Bantu-speaking Bajun and Swahili in an area called Shungwaya, but the expanding Oromo (Boran/Wardai, later called Orma) pastoralists then took over the Juba-Tana hinterland. The Aweer adapted to the new situation by adopting superficial Oromo cultural traits and establishing institutionalized exchange relations. In the 19th century the Aweer were again in contact with their Somali cousins, as these people pushed the Oromo south and west. The Aweer established trade relations with the Somali; but no institutionalized relationship appears to have developed in Kenya.

### **LOWLAND NYIKA**

Lowland Nyika are found in very small number in the Acacia-Commiphora thorn bush area in the land from the coast which was traditionally the home of the Wata and Degere in the past. Before the Wata and Degere, various southern Cushitic groups who no longer exist, except the Dahalo lived there.

Very little of these peoples' origin and history is known but they seem to be more of an Oromo caste than a separate cultural group. They appear to be distantly related to the Wata of the coast. Daniel Stiles who has conducted interviews in the area believes a link existed not long ago in the past, represented by the Garre and Ajuran pastoralists, both Somali/Oromo mixtures, to whom they could formerly have been attached. Linguistic evidence also suggests a connection between the northern and coastal Wata, as they share unique language features. The Acacia Commiphora thorn bush area inland from the coast was traditionally the home of the Wata and Degere described above, and before them various Southern Cushitic groups who no longer exist in Kenya, except Dohalo.

### **NGIWAKINYANG**

## **KENYA ETHNIC COMMUNITIES: FOUNDATION OF THE NATION**

## **KENYA ETHNIC COMMUNITIES: FOUNDATION OF THE NATION**

Ngiwakinyang have been described by Daniel Stiles thus:

Living along the west and southwest side of Lake Turkana, this small group of Turkana-speaking fishing people also hunt hippo and crocodile. They derive from a people that lived in the area before the arrival of the Turkana in the 18th century, and their ancestors might be related to the Eastern Cushitic Elmolo and Dessenech, who have the same lake adaptation. The Ngiwakinyang used to have a taboo against eating goats' meat, but today they keep goats and eat the meat. Very little is known of these people.

### **IK**

The IK are called Teuso by their Eastern Nilotic related neighbours (Teso, Turkana-Karamojong). Early colonial administrators called them Dorobo who noted that they were smaller than their Nilotic neighbours and that their skins were lighter. They live mainly in northern Uganda, but sometimes enter western Kenya to trade or herd the goats of the Turkana. Daniel Stiles on them has written:

They are hunter-gatherers and practice a little sorghum agriculture and bee-keeping, an adaptation similar to the Okiek. Their language is Eastern Sudanic that is related to Nilotic, and classed in a tiny group with only another language, Nyangiya. They are remnants of a pre-Nilotic migration, which began in that area 3000 years ago.

### **NGIBOTOK (NKEBOTOK)**

Ngibotok (Nkebotok) speak Turkana and are hunters and gatherers in the upper Turkwel river basin. Apart from foraging in the thick bush in the Turkwel Gorge area which they find more rewarding, they also practise some agriculture and pastoralism. Daniel Stiles has written:

With the dam and reservoir now in existence, their life will change considerably. No study of them has ever been made, though their existence has been known since colonial times.

### **DASSENECH (DASNACHI - SHANGIL)**

The Dassenech - Shangil (Dasnachi) who numbered 418 in the 1989 population census are an offshoot from Ethiopia at the Turkana border. Dassenech ancestors called 'Baz' are thought to have been around Lake Turkana from as early as 2,500 years ago. The Dassenech lived along the north eastern shores of Lake Turkana. Incursions of Gabbra, Samburu and Turkana has forced the Dassenech into Ethiopia, but they come into the Ilet-Koobi Fora area to fish, and further in to raid the Gabbra.

### **OGIEK (Dorobo) groups**

The Ogiek, or Dorobo as they are popularly known are hunters and gatherers found in wide areas of Kenya and to a lesser extent in Tanzania. They inhabit areas of high altitude from about 6500 feet (2580 m) up to 10000 feet (3050 m) in forested environment. The majority of the Ogiek speak a Kalenjin-related dialect as their domestic language. Most local groups also live near one of the Kalenjin tribes such as the Kipsigis, the Nandi, the Tugen and the Marakwet, and their

## KENYA ETHNIC COMMUNITIES: FOUNDATION OF THE NATION

kalenjin dialect will tend to be more similar to that of the neighbouring tribe. Those who live in close proximity to the Maasai in Mukogodo and Narok speak Maasai dialects and not kalenjin languages but they claim to be of the same historic origins as the Kalenjin-speaking Ogiek. There are Samburu Dorobo who live on mount Nyiru, Laikipia Dorobo, the Digiri, formerly associated with the Agikuyu of Nyeri and the Purko Maasai.

The term Dorobo is the Swahili-derivative of the Maasai term, i.e. Torobo, meaning a poor person, a person who has no cattle. The Swahili traders and Europeans were introduced by Maasai-speaking interpreters to Torobo as "Dorobo" and the term was appropriate enough i.e. for traders interested in the ivory which the forest dwellers could supply. The name has been perpetuated as the name of the community to date. The people themselves use Ogiek (Ogiot-singular) as their name.

Ogiek history pre-dates the arrival and settlement of the Bantu, Maasai and Kalenjin in Kenya. They have been identified as a race which has for a long time ranged over East Africa high altitude areas hunting and gathering. Historians also acknowledge the proto-Dorobo's close contact for a period of time with the "Sirikwa phenomenon" prior to the arrival of the proto-Kalenjin and the pastoral Maasai. R. H. Blackburn on this has written:

Most informants just say that Okiek were here before other known tribes, implying that they would not be related to any known tribe, since those tribes came to this area after the Okiek. They do assert that from time to time some Okiek who have acquired cattle have "become Maasai". . . Culturally, socially and technologically, the Mau Okiek have more similarities to the Kalenjin peoples, especially Kipsigis, than to any other tribes. Those who have lived near Maasai for a long time and speak Maasai as their domestic language, have proportionately more Maasai characteristics than do the other groups. These Maasai characteristics tend to overlie, not displace, basic Okiek characteristics, especially those relating to hunting and the cultural and social significance of honey.

The main-stream Ogiek are divided into some thirty-six sub-sections as follows:

- |                                      |                           |                     |                   |                 |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| (1) Cherenganyi,                     | (2) Kinare,               | (3) Digiri,         | (4) Lalaroik,     | (5) Suiei,      |
| (6) Omotik,                          | (7) Kipchorwonek,         | (8) Kony,           | (9) Kipkurerek,   |                 |
| (10) Loliin,                         | (11) Kinsankasa,          | (12) Kakimengirin,  | (13) Mediaki,     |                 |
| 14) Kipsanan,                        | (15) Masula,              | (16) Werkile,       | (17) Tinet,       | (18) Nosubukia, |
| (19) Mosiro or Kisankasa or mediaki, | (20) Koibate or Kaivatet, | (21) Kaplelach,     |                   |                 |
| (22) Sisiyuet,                       | (23) Kapsupulec,          | (24) Narianda,      | (25) Chepkurerek, |                 |
| (26) Kierisho,                       | (27) Tembuet,             | (28) Merishionick,  |                   |                 |
| (29) Lorkumi,                        | (30) Kipchowonekil,       | (31) Oldonyo Purro, | (32) Longiye,     |                 |
| (33) Kapsayon,                       | (34) Lanat,               | (35) Saleta and     | (36) Degere.      |                 |

With the exception of the Omotik, the Mosiro in Tanzania and the Digiri in Narok and Don Dol who mainly depend on pastoralism, the Okiek groups live in or adjacent to high altitude forests in all the highland areas of Kenya over 7,000 feet (3,100 m). The Ogiek are geographically separated into local groups, most of which have lost knowledge of all other Ogiek except those with whom they live in proximity.

The Lorkumi, Nosubukia and Salata are adjacent local groups who speak only Maasai and live a semi-pastoral existence in the East Mau area. They acknowledge (especially Saleta) a relationship

## KENYA ETHNIC COMMUNITIES: FOUNDATION OF THE NATION

## **KENYA ETHNIC COMMUNITIES: FOUNDATION OF THE NATION**

to another contiguous local group, the Kierisho, who live farther up the Mau and who speak Maasai principally, but who sometime in the past spoke a Kalenjin dialect as their domestic language. Like the other three groups, the Kierisho are in the process of adopting Maasai-like dependence on cattle.

About these ancient people, Daniel Stiles has written the following:

Linguistically, the Ogiek are remnants of the Southern Nilotic immigration into the Kenyan highlands some 2500 years ago. Until the arrival of Maasai speakers, including the now extinct Sirikwa, Ogiek were Kalenjin speakers living in interaction with Kalenjin groups such as the Nandi and Kipsigis. It has been proposed that their way of life, and presumably some genetic input, reaches back to the Eburran Late Stone Age culture dating from about 9000 to 3000 years ago. The Eburran people might have spoken a click language similar to Hadzan. Over the millennia there has been intermixture with incoming Southern Cushitic, Southern Nilotic and Eastern Nilotic people.

### **Social and Political Organisation**

All Ogiek people identify themselves not only as Ogiek in general but by their local group affiliation. The sense of identity which members of a local group feel in their daily interactions is reinforced by an awareness or knowledge of historical affinities which differentiated one local group from other adjacent ones. Within a local group there may be six to twelve lineages which are the principal social institutions of the Ogiek people. Huntingford (1951) reports that for the local group that he studied on the edge of the Tinderet forest, the clan (oret) was the most important social unit. R. H. Blackburn has written:

For the Ogiek on the Mau, the lineage is the land-holding unit, the social unit responsible for giving girls in marriage, negotiating and paying compensation in legal cases, and the unit of residence. Though the oldest male in the lineage acts as an informal spokesman for his lineage, decision making is a function of all adult male members of the lineage. Typically, a lineage will include a man and one or two of his father's brothers sons plus their children and children's children. If it is a large lineage it may include families of distant paternal cousins as well. Lineage size varies from 50 to 80 members in most lineages. Most male members tend to live in the general vicinity of each other, in or near their lineage territory, though some individuals live with their wives' parents.

Land rights include rights to collect honey and natural materials, such as trees and bark for the manufacture of hives. A lineage has the option to bequeath the right of honey collection in its territory to other persons or lineages. On occasion, this would be for several reasons such as legal compensation or bride price payments. While rights over lineage territory do not extend to the exclusive use of the territory for residence or hunting by the owning lineage in all areas, there is a universal restriction on honey exploitation in another's lineage territory in all areas. In Ogiek culture and society, honey is by far the most important substance whose value exceeds that of any other commodity. It is the most valued food and medium of trade.

The Ogiek have age-set systems similar to those of Maasai or the Kalenjin Ipinda. Their initiation ceremonies show superficial resemblance to both Kalenjin and Maasai initiation ceremonies and their initiated young men (muranik) act as the community police against feuding between lineages, and first line defence against attacks and raids by other local groups or tribes. The age-

## **KENYA ETHNIC COMMUNITIES: FOUNDATION OF THE NATION**

## **KENYA ETHNIC COMMUNITIES: FOUNDATION OF THE NATION**

set system also acts as the basis for peer group relations among the men who grow up together as friends, sharing activities in hunting, honey collecting, raiding, dancing and socialising. The society even today has diffused authority and is devoid of centralised authority with such roles as those of chiefs or formal councils of elders. At no time do all the members of a local group, or representatives of these members, participate in formally organised activities, whether these be economic, political or religious.