The Social Impact of Ethnic Stereotypes and Prejudices on Social Harmony: A Case Study
Eldoret Township, Kenya

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Abstract
This paper examines the impact of ethnic stereotypes and prejudice on social harmony in Eldoret Township. Ethnic stereotypes and prejudice are major determinants of ethnic relationships in Eldoret. Ethnic stereotypes and prejudice are a common development since the inception of multiparty democracy in Kenya in 1991, especially during the electioneering periods. This matter has, however, not been given sufficient scholarly attention to establish the exact impact stereotypes and prejudices play in people’s lives in Eldoret Township. The study adopted an ethnographic inspired qualitative research design. Gordon Allport’s Theory of stereotyping and prejudice employed in data generation and analysis. Structured and semi-structured questionnaires, open-ended questionnaires, oral face to face interviews and observation schedules were the research instruments used for data generation. A purposive sample of five clusters of ethnic group concentrations from which a random sample of twenty five respondents, five from each ethnic group living at Kimumu area of Eldoret Township was chosen. The ethnic communities comprised of Kalenjin, Luhya, Kikuyu, Luo and Kisii. Respondents were randomly drawn from the local learning institutions, jua kali (informal) industry, public transport and churches. The findings of this study show that ethnic stereotypes and prejudices impact negatively on social harmony in Eldoret Township; it causes displacement of persons, loss of lives, disruption of economic activities, violence, balkanization, avoidance, discrimination and underdevelopment. It is hoped that the results of this study will benefit researchers in applied linguistics, social psychologists, political scientists and policy makers.

Key words: Stereotypes; Prejudice; Ethnic Conflicts; Eldoret Township; Social Harmony

Introduction
Stereotypes are beliefs held about specific individuals or certain ways of doing things which may or may not always reflect reality. The concept stereotypes is believed to have originated from the Greek word ‘stereos’, which means solid and firm; ‘typos’, which means impression. The 1850s saw the first reference of the word stereotype in a noun meaning ‘image perpetuated without change’. It was not until 1922 that the word stereotype was first used in modern psychological sense by American journalist Walter Lipmann (1922). According to Dovidio (2010), stereotypes are the sets of knowledge, beliefs and expectancies that we attribute to social groups and that we apply to all group members respective of their individual differences. They overgeneralize character traits to group members. Stereotypes are related to other types of inter group attitudes such as prejudice and discrimination (Allport 1954: 117). Whereas stereotypes represent the cognitive component of inter group attitudes, prejudice and discrimination respectively represent the emotional and behavioral component such as insults and exclusion, (Chin, 2010).

The most cognitive component that occurs without conscious awareness is stereotyping. On the other hand, prejudice is the affective component of stereotyping and then discrimination is one of the behavioral components of prejudicial reactions. This forms a tripartite view of inter group attitudes where by stereotypes reflect expectations and beliefs about the characteristics of members of groups perceived as different from one’s own. Prejudice represents the emotional
response and discrimination refers to actions. The three components are related although they can exist independently of each other. Stereotyping leads to ethnic prejudice when people react emotionally to the name of a group; ascribe characteristics to members of that group and then evaluate those characteristics (Lepore & Brown, 1997). The most common stereotypes are gender stereotypes, religious stereotypes, ethnic stereotypes, national stereotypes, work place stereotypes among others.

**Prejudice**

Prejudice, generally refers to a hostile attitude or feeling towards a person solely because he or she belongs to a group to which one has assigned objectionable qualities. It is a prejudgment that occurs when a person makes a decision without considering the whole picture and all relevant facts regarding some event, (Allport 1979). 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 (Myers, 2012). Prejudices can be overt and subtle. Prejudices have social sources which are tightly connected with social inequalities, class difference and differences in welfare levels. Motivations for prejudice are aggression, frustration and the feeling that one person is superior to the other. Others sources of prejudice are categorization, distinctiveness and attribution. Prejudice has consequences that include stereotyping and inadequate people perception.

Basically, prejudice is a problem of personality formation and development (Allport, 1979). According to Hall and LaFrance (2012), prejudice is an issue of economic and social class considerations. A cross-disciplinary perspective can be ideal for understanding a complex phenomenon like prejudice (Brown, 2010). Factors which may be evolutionary, psychological, sociological and rhetorical bring about prejudice. Communication and the way people behave is central in each of the causes, highlighting the need for communicative understanding of prejudice.

Evolutionary approach look at prejudice as an inherited trait that could possibly be genetic. In this approach, groups seek to preserve themselves, for instance, because of fear of strangers. The exclusion of strangers may help to preserve a group’s existence. This approach is sometimes used by politicians as a rationale for conservative politics and creates a notion of “us” and “them” to exclude others, in order to preserve the way of life of a dominant group within a culture or nation (Fishbein, 2002).

Psychological phenomenon of prejudice falls into two major categories. The first one is psychodynamic which suggests that prejudice serves as a mechanism for individuals to meet psychological needs. This is linked factors such as ambivalence parents’ rigid personality structure and a need for authority (Allport, 1979; Adorno et al., 1950). This is reflected through Kenneth Burke’s (1967) approach to rhetoric in analysis of Hitler’s campaign against Jewish people as a means of diverting negative emotions related to economic and political difficulties from the mainstream Germany people to Jews.

Cognition or perception forms the second aspect of the psychological approach. This contains a range of possible influences on prejudice that includes selective attention, perception, recall of the negative behavior of out group members and the notion of attributional biases that impact how meanings to the behavior of those of our in group and those of out groups are given.

Categorization of people is at the center of those explanations. They are divided into cognitive groups such as in-groups and out-groups. Social Identity theory by (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) suggests that we cannot think of ourselves apart from the groups to which we belong. People engage in intergroup comparison as a means of making them feel better about their group. If their
group does not compare well to the group that they admire or rely on in some way, they strategize to reclaim a sense of pride for their group or keep distance from it (Kastel, 2012). Categorization in Social Identity theory is not a form of prejudice. It is the mental placing of people, things, actions and characteristics into mental boxes. Those boxes are closely related to the stereotypes that cling to groups (Balvin, & Kahima, 2012).

Prejudice is an affective feeling towards a person or group member based solely on their group membership. The word is often used to refer to preconceived, usually unfavorable of their sex, gender, beliefs, values, social class, age, disability, religion, sexuality, ethnicity, language, beauty, nationality, occupation, education, criminality, sport team affiliation or other personal characteristics. In this case, it refers to a positive or negative evaluation of an individual based on their perceived group membership. Prejudice can also refer to unfounded beliefs that may include any unreasonable attitude that is unusually resistant to rational influence. According to Shapiro and Williams (2012:57-61), prejudice is characterized by symbolic transfer of a value – laden meaning content onto a socially formed category and then on to individuals who are taken to belong to that category, resistance to change and overgeneralization.

The first research conducted on prejudice was in the 1920s. The research attempted to prove white supremacy over the black. The research concluded that the white people were mentally superior compared to the black people. This and other related studies at the time led many psychologists to prejudice as a natural response to inferior races. In the 1930S and 1940s, theorists such as Theodore Adorno believed that prejudice spammed from an authoritarian personality. He believed that people with authoritarian personalities were the most likely to be prejudiced against groups of lower status. Gordon Allport (1954) linked prejudice to categorical thinking. Allport claimed that prejudice is a natural and normal process for humans. He argued that, the human mind must think with the aid of categories. Once the categories are formed they become the basis for normal prejudgment.

Prejudice stems from subconscious attitudes that cause a person to ward off feeling of inadequacy by projecting them onto target group (Pettigrew, 2016). One may use certain people or group as scapegoats. Normally those without power are unfairly blamed. People are blamed as the source of problems that a person is facing. Social research worldwide has indicated that prejudice is related to low self-esteem. People enhance their sense of self-worth and importance by hating certain groups mostly the minorities. There are more common social factors that contribute to the presence of prejudice;

Prejudices seem to be passed along from parents to children. The media, including television, radio, movies and advertising perpetuate demeaning images and stereotypes about women, ethnic minorities, the elderly and the disabled. Prejudices also originate from conforming behaviors. Prejudices may bring support from significant others. Shying away from prejudice may lead to losing social support. Economic benefits are another source of prejudice. Direct competition for resources and jobs by groups may lead to prejudice. This explains why prejudice increases dramatically during times of economic and social stress (Steele, 2011). Authoritarian personality is another source of prejudice. People with an authoritarian personality rigidly conform and submit without question to their superiors, reject those they consider to be inferior and express intolerant religious, tribal, cultural and sexual opinions. Authoritarian personality may have its roots in parents who are unloving and aloof disciplinarians. The child learns to control his or her anxieties through rigid attitudes.
Language, Stereotypes and Prejudice

Language is a way by which people communicate in order to get their opinion across the audience. Language is the tool through which ideas can be conveyed. Typically, language encompasses both verbal and nonverbal communication. According to Merrian-Webster Online Dictionary, language can broadly be understood as “a system of words or signs” that humans use to communicate their “thoughts and feeling” to each other. Ngugi (1972: 16) argues that language is “a carrier of values fashioned by a people over a period of time”. It is a powerful tool for stereotyping and prejudice. Stereotypes and prejudices represent a set of qualities perceived to reflect the essence of a group. The way people perceive, process information about and respond to group members is systematically influenced by stereotypes and prejudices. They are transmitted through socialization, the media and language discourse.

Hall (1997:19) perceives language as that which gives sign to the meanings that we have in a form which can be communicated to other people. In other words, Hall regards language as that which makes available as a social fact/a social process the meanings that we make of the world and events, without which meaning cannot be exchanged. Language, in the context of this study, refers to the language of dialogue, visual images and one that applies figures of speech. In that respect, this study is primarily concerned with language as a system used to communicate meaning.

Language operates as a representational system. In language, we use signs and symbols - whether they are sounds, written words, electronically produced images, musical notes, even objects to stand for or to represent to other people our concepts, ideas and feelings. Language is one of the media through which thoughts, ideas and feelings are represented in a culture. Representation through language is therefore central to the processes by which meaning is produced (Hall 1997:1). It is argued that language is the social institution above all others. In addition, language plays an important role in the transmission of stereotypes and prejudices. When communicating, people focus on the traits viewed as the most informative. Because stereotypical and prejudicial traits are distinctive to a group, people are more likely to use them in social discourse than traits perceived as unrelated to group membership. Stereotypical and prejudicial traits are generally high on communicability, viewed as interesting and informative, contributing to persistent use (Schaller, 2002).

Allport’s Scale of Prejudice and Stereotyping

Situma (2017) notes that prejudice and stereotyping is a hostile attitude or feeling toward a person solely because he or she belongs to a group to which one has assigned objectionable qualities. He stresses that this hostile attitude is not merely a hasty prejudgment before one knows the facts. It is a judgment that resists facts and ignores truth and honesty. Thus, prejudice blinds one to the facts and creates a kind of poison in a relationship. Although prejudice in daily life is ordinarily a matter of dealing with individual people, it also entails unwarranted ideas concerning a group as a whole. Negative religious, ethnic, or racial prejudice (based on grouping by religion, nationality, or race) is an antipathy based on faulty and inflexible generalization or stereotyping.

According to Situma (2017), prejudice and may be felt or expressed, and it is directed toward a group as a whole or toward an individual because he or she is a member of that group. Prejudice gives an individual a false sense of identity and self-worth; that is, a person may discriminate against others to make himself feel more powerful and to elevate his own self-esteem. Also, categorization and stereotyping often offer a convenient scapegoat for individual or group problems. Prejudice, then, is generally the way one thinks or feels about a particular person or group. Discrimination is acting on that negative prejudice. Negative prejudice and discrimination
are expressed in escalating levels of violence. These escalating levels of discrimination move from spoken abuse to genocide in the following order:

**Spoken Abuse (Antilocution)**

Most people who have prejudices and stereotypes of this nature talk about them with like-minded friends, occasionally with strangers, they may express their antagonism freely. But many people never go beyond this mild degree of antipathetic action. Antilocution is often believed to be harmless. Directing derogatory speech commonly known as hate speech and making ethnic jokes about another community is part of antilocution. This can harm the self-esteem of the targeted group and can clear the way for more harmful forms of prejudice. Continued antilocution is dangerous hence can degenerate into a serious conflict. According to Allport (1979: 83-90), prolonged and intense verbal hostility always precedes riot. Antilocution also involves hate speech emanating from politicians. This is a kind of hate propaganda that promotes animosity and foments social unrest. Hate language targeting groups promotes discrimination against them.

**Avoidance**

The second rung of the ladder of prejudice and stereotyping is avoidance. At this level people seek to avoid the group that has been stereotyped. Like speech, this seems harmless at the beginning. One has a right to choose one's friends, and choosing not to be friends with a particular group of people does not seem so awful. The trouble is lack of contact and friendship with a group leads to ignorance about them. And the more ignorant people are, the more they 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. Business premises, schools, medical facilities and places of worship are avoided because members of a certain community do not like members from other communities. 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 dislikes. He takes the burden of accommodation and withdrawal entirely upon himself.

**Discrimination or legalized (institutionalized) racism/ ethnicity**

Here the prejudiced and stereotyped person makes detrimental distinctions of an active sort. He undertakes to exclude all members of the group in question from certain types of employment, from residential housing, political rights, educational or recreational opportunities, churches, hospitals, or from some other social privileges. Segregation is institutionalized form of discrimination, enforced legally or by common custom. Avoidance leads to the third rung, *discrimination*. The unwanted group is kept out of some neighborhoods, shopping areas, social clubs, gathering places, and public centers. A group of people is discriminated upon 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.

**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. Their properties are vandalized. Villages and homes are destroyed through acts of arson. Physical harm is done to members of the minority group. Examples are lynching of blacks, pogroms against Jews in Europe and British Loyalists in the 1700s.
Extermination or Genocide
This is the systematic attempt to destroy an entire people through lynching, pogroms and massacres. Allport (2017) 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, which 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 a common occurrence throughout human history. Extermination is the last step on the ladder which entails lynching, massacre, attempting to kill members of the unwanted group. This is the final and the most intense level of prejudice and stereotyping.

There exists a concern in Kenya on the role of ethnic gender stereotypes in fuelling ethnic tensions leading to tribal clashes especially during the electioneering period. Gender ethnic stereotypes by members of one community towards members of another community 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 election. 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 and particularly Eldoret. The aim of this study is to examine how gender ethnic stereotypes impact on people’s lives in Eldoret Township. The objectives were to establish the role of gender based stereotypes in ethnic conflicts in Eldoret and to interrogate how gender based stereotypes impacted on people’s lives in Eldoret Township.

Methodology
The study was premised on descriptive qualitative research. The data for this study was drawn from Kimumu area in Eldoret Township. A purposive sample of five clusters of ethnic group concentrations from which a random sample of twenty respondents, four from each group were chosen. The primary data was obtained from one of the researcher’s native knowledge of the usage of ethnic Luhya stereotypes and secondary data from the Kalenjin, Kikuyu, Luo and Kisii communities by use of secondary sources. The researchers used qualitative research techniques in conducting the research because the research was not a controlled one, and thus dealt with data in form of words and not numbers and statistics.

Results and discussion
Ethnic conflicts have a myriad of effects on the communities in warfare. There is a direct linkage between ethnic conflicts and its impacts including economic growth and development of a country. The social impact of ethnic stereotypes and prejudices on social harmony in Eldoret Township is discussed as per the following themes:

Displacement of Persons
Ethnic stereotypes and prejudices are contributory factors in ethnic conflicts in Eldoret Township. Due to battles arising among the communities living in Eldoret namely the Kikuyu, Kalenjin, Luhya, Luo and Kisii victims are often displaced from their homes. In Eldoret Township, literally every community, among the Kalenjins, Kikuyus, Luhyas, Luos and Kisiis were displaced by the conflicts. Displacements came before and after actual polling day. Displacement comes with a number of consequences on the affected people.
Results of this study indicate that continued ethnic polarization after years of tribal conflicts have made communities migrate in large numbers to certain segregated neighbourhoods where they feel safer. Neighbourhoods such as Ya Mumbi, Kipkaren and Huruma are peopled by specific clearly defined compartmentalized ethnic communities. Most such people live, own businesses, and buy land where there is a high concentration of members of their ethnic communities. The same people further tend to attend ethnic specific churches, schools, hotels, and shopping centres. Results further indicate that stereotypes and prejudices beget a violent culture as communities prepare to defend themselves from real or imaginary enemies who are their neighbours and who "hate" and are ready to harm them.

**Intolerance and inhibition of social interaction**

Results of this study indicate that there is minimal interethnic socialization and tolerance as a result of age old held stereotypes and prejudices. Interethnic marriages are not encouraged and when they happen they are frowned at. Friendship along ethnic lines is rare. People hardly engage in interethnic businesses because of these stereotypes. The consequence of these outcomes is discrimination and avoidance. In Eldoret Township, land ownership has been a very sensitive issue since independence. The advert of multiparty politics in 1991 did not help the situation but made it worse. Ownership of land by communities assumed to be outsiders is not encouraged by the members of the Kalenjin community. Members of the Kikuyu, Luhya, Luo and Kisii communities tend to be discriminated upon when it comes to owning land.

Blatant discrimination within Eldoret Township stems from unemployment. Within the township there is Moi Teaching and Referral Hospital, Rivertex Textile Company, Eldoret National Polytechnic, University of Eldoret among other potential employers. At Moi Teaching and Referral Hospital and the rest, clerical, manual jobs are a preserve for members from the local community. Discrimination was also cited among members of the Kalenjin community-inter ethnic discrimination. Whenever employment opportunities emerged, members of the Keiyo community would look at their own. Nandi, Tugen, Kipsigis and Marakwet sub-communities would do the same. Those from the other Kalenjin sub-tribes could not easily get employed at Kenya Pipeline.

**Disruption of economic activities**

Previous conflicts in Eldoret and elsewhere have always impacted severely on the economy due to destruction of business facilities. In the past, rails have uprooted, banks and learning institutions looted and burnt down, homes and plantations torched and worst of all, lives taken away. Close to a million working Rwandese people were killed in the ethnic genocide. Many died in the 2007/8 Kenya’s post-election violence (PEV). Ushahidi report (March 2008) records that in the year 2007/08 there was a major ethnic civil war in Kenya that was ignited by the announcement of the winner of the presidential elections. This was mainly in Nairobi and Kisumu but later spread fast to the Rift valley where organized groups in Eldoret, Naivasha, Nakuru and Molo started fighting.

This war though triggered by allegations of rigged elections seemed to have come out of a long time of ethnic tension due to land issues or economic marginalization of some people. The stand-off between the sworn in president, Mwai Kibaki and the leader of opposition, Raila Odinga took two months after which a deal was signed to sharing of power. KNHCR report (2008/2009) indicated in a report that the warfare was highly planned before the elections and its management and execution showed that a force behind the scene was evident. Politicians, businessmen, local leaders were the engine of the warfare. Exclusion therefore fueled this conflict.
There were major ramifications to the ethnic strife; many people were killed, displacement of people, properties torched, livestock and harvested crops stolen, business premises razed and vandalized among others. Roads were also barricaded, dealing a huge blow both to locally and regionally, since goods could not be transported to Rwanda, Burundi, Congo, South Sudan and Uganda. Tourism sector was equally affected as well as international trade. According to Apollo (2010:49), war interferes directly with food production by not allowing farmers to plant and harvest on time. This assertion was supported by one of the respondents.

During times of conflict, farmers could not cultivate, weed or harvest their crops as they were always on the run to save their lives. Those who keep animals cannot take them out for grazing due to fear of being killed or their animals stolen by their foes. Famine was experienced in conflict areas such as Uasin Gishu due to limited agricultural activities. Disruption of agricultural activities also led to the drop in supply of raw materials to industries in Uasin Gishu such as Kenya Cooperative Creameries and maize millers industry. This in turn resulted to the increase in prices of such commodities.

Another respondent noted that the cosmopolitan market centers such as Kiambaa, Huruma, Langas, Kikiparen, Mailinne and Kimumu ceased to provide a large pool of customers on daily basis, and the harvested crops could not reach the market because of barricaded roads. Ethnic conflicts affect communities’ welfare. There is a direct linkage between ethnic conflicts and slowed economic growth and development of a country. Any economic, social or political development requires an environment of stability and peace. War breaks structures created for economic development and destroys both lives and infrastructure.

Oucho (2002) notes that countries like Nigeria, Congo, Rwanda, Syria and parts of Kenya have had instances of underdevelopment precipitated by ethnic conflicts. While it is true that ethnic conflicts affect economy, economic interests of a country or community may play a big role in ethnic conflict and leading to even more destruction into the economy. It ends up being a never ending vicious cycle. Easley (2000) says that ethnic conflict has been considered the greatest contributor to the slow pace of development in Africa. Many decades after independence, ethnic conflicts are still in the news today from central Africa to Nigeria. The effects of these conflicts have impacted on income, growth and economic policies. During conflicts, the warring communities divert their resources and energies to fighting with each other and hence lose out on meaningful economic activities.

Ethnic conflict engender tension and this scares the investors away. For instance, many investors moved out of South Sudan and Dinka and Nuer started fighting, a conflict that brought the economy of the oil rich country down. In Rwanda, in the year of 1994, when the greatest African ethnical fight happened, French and other major investors left the country and for other nations with others going back to Europe. After the horrific genocide of 1994, the country was at the blink of annihilation economically.

Generally, results from this study reveal that ethnic stereotypes and prejudice tend to escalate hatred and mistrust among communities; there is a lot of dislike and fear of other communities. People tend to be secretive among themselves for fear of leaking information to the other tribe. Results from this study reveal that minimal interaction between communities largely suppress interethnic businesses leading to a certain degree of underdevelopment. The verbal abuses, discriminations, avoidance and outright violence are equally harmful to business and subsequent development.
Conclusion
Eldoret is a multi-ethnic and Multilanguage environment in which diverse ethnic communities live side by side and where ethnic conflicts are common. These conflicts are partly as a result of ethnic stereotypes and prejudice. Continued stereotyping and prejudice leads to escalation of the conflicts. This further leads to mutual suspicion and distrust among communities. Highly stereotyped and prejudiced groups are anger prone, hostile and resentful to groups that look down upon them. The effects of stereotypes and prejudice on individual’s emotional and psychological state of mind are anger, frustration, irritability and hostility towards assumed enemies.

This study reveals that there are low levels of literacy coupled with high levels of illiteracy among these people; a multitude of them know little about other ethnic groups and have never travelled outside their ethnic enclaves. Competition for valuable and limited resources results in conflicts and group selfishness; groups that have more are resented and this makes them feel threatened and is protective of their wealth. Prejudiced groups receive second class medical care, an inferior education, and fewer social privileges. The net result of the stereotypes and prejudices corroborates Allport’s (1954) scale of prejudice starting with mild verbal abuse, avoidance, discrimination, violence and outright ethnic cleansing and mass murder, popularly known as genocide.

The results of this study demand concerted effort of all in order to restructure the stereotyped and prejudiced mind set of individuals and groups. In addition literacy levels among groups need to be raised so that people’s perceptions of others can be improved.

REFERENCES


