A PRE-COLONIAL HISTORY OF ABATACHONI, I500-1900 A.D.:

A STUDY IN SOCIO-CULTURAL CHANGE

BY

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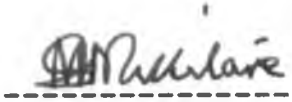
DECLARATION

THIS THESIS IS MY ORIGINAL WORK AND HAS NOT BEEN SUBMITTED FOR A DEGREE IN ANY OTHER UNIVERSITY.



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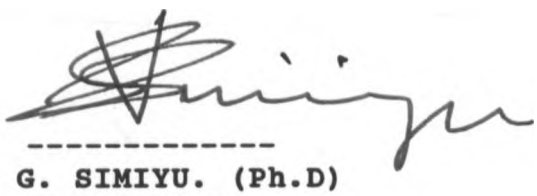

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my father **Edward Fwamba** and my mother **Robai Nanyama**, for their love, care and devotion to my upbringing and education.

ABSTRACT

This thesis is a survey of the pre-colonial history of Abatachoni from A.D. 1500 to 1900. The thesis set out to trace the origin, migration and settlement of Abatachoni from the Uasin Gishu plateau of Rift Valley Province to modern Western Kenya.

The main theme of the thesis is that Abatachoni were originally Kalenjin speakers who have been Bantuized through a broad process of cultural interactions with Bantu speaking peoples.

The findings, from oral interviews plus archival material and other published works, show that Abatachoni were of Kalenjin origin but have, through a long period of cultural interaction, been assimilated by the Bantu. The study shows the vestiges of Kalenjin cultural traits, values and practices within the new Bantu hybrid community that is now known as Abatachoni.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The Abatachoni are one of the seventeen sub ethnic groups that make up the Abaluyia[1]. Their oral history claims that they originally came from the Kalenjin. They stay both in Bungoma and Kakamega Districts of western Province of Kenya. A majority, however, are concentrated in Bungoma district. Existing works on them are fragmentary, scattered and disjointed. That is what this study is set to bridge.

Bungoma District is situated on the southern slopes of Mt Elgon. It is bordered by Uganda to the northwest and Trans-Nzoia district of Rift Valley Province to the north-east. To the south-east, it borders Kakamega district while Busia district lies to the south-west.

The district measures 3,074 Sq Km, out of which 547 Sq Km is Government forest reserve[2]. The altitude ranges from 1,200 metres to the west and south-west to 4,000m in the north. Mt. Elgon is the most notable physical feature in the district. River Nzoia, whose source is in the Cherenganyi Hills of Trans-Nzoia District, is of great historical importance to both the district as well as to Abatachoni under study as will be seen in later chapters. Other rivers include Kibisi, Kiminini and Sosio, all being tributaries of River Nzoia.

The soils comprise a mixture of dark brown sandy loams and dark clay, making it one of the areas with great agricultural

potential. Among the crops grown are maize, coffee, bananas, sorghum, millet, vegetables tobacco and fruits. The temperatures vary between 20°C - 30°C. The annual rainfall records range between 1250mm and 1,800mm per year. The area receives ample rains throughout the year. The long rains begin early March up to late June while the short rains start in August to late October[3].

This study is an outline history of Abatachoni and will seek to trace their origin, migration and settlement in modern Bungoma and Kakamega Districts. The study will address itself to socio-cultural changes the Abatachoni underwent to evolve into an entity as a sub-ethnic group of the Bantu-speaking Abaluyia.

The Abatachoni under study are largely found in Tongaren and Webuye divisions of Bungoma district. Within these two divisions also live the Babukusu with whom they have had immense and long-time cultural interactions. In Kakamega District, pockets of Abatachoni are found in north Kabras Location of Malava division and Lumakanda, Lugari and Sango settlement schemes of Lugari division. Here again they stay amongst other Luyia speaking groups especially the Kabras.

In this study emphasis will be laid upon the theme of origin, migration and the process of cultural assimilation. It is the contention of G.S. Were, and one this author shares, that the emergence of the Abuluyia should be understood within the context of broad socio-cultural interactions and changes between several groups of heterogeneous origins[4].

The oral traditions of Abatachoni claim that these people

split from Kalenjin speakers at Sengeli, in modern Trans-nzoia District, before moving into their current settlements in Bungoma district[5]. Those in Kakamega also claim the same origin but have for a long period stayed and interacted with the Kabras, as is the case with their counterparts with the Bukusu in Bungoma District. This process of socio-cultural interactions between the Abatachoni on the one hand and the Babukusu and Kabras on the one is still going on. The chances that Abatachoni may one time in future disappear amongst the Babukusu or Kabras are quite high.

1.2. MEANING OF THE TERM ABATACHONI

It is not certain by what name these people were known in the pre-colonial days. They, however, appear to have been known by different names to different people and at different times. According to one tradition, the Maasai referred to them as Olg-Tasho[4], meaning "those of the other bank" of the River. The River is Nzoia which for a long time formed a natural frontier between Abatachoni and the Uasin Gishu Maasai as well as the Nandi. Today, the same river is the boundary between Bungoma and Kakamega Districts, bisecting Abatachoni into two; some in Bungoma and other in Kakamega.

The Babukusu, used to refer to them as Barwa[7] and at a later time as Bayumbu[8]. By the heyday of colonialism, the latter name (Bayumbu) appears to have overshadowed that of Barwa, and it came to be widely used even by Abatachoni themselves till the coinage of the name Abatachoni.

To the west of Abatachoni territory lived the Wanga of Kakamega District and other Luyia communities. These groups, particularly the Wanga, referred to Abatachoni as *Abeekwe,* "those of the east". This means the Abatachoni lived to the east of the Wanga. Other traditions point out that they were known as *Abamwalie* after a place called Mwalie, where they claim to have stayed and evolved into a distinct group. Suffice it to say that the name Abatachoni is a coinage of colonial times.

A majority of respondents, however, argued that the name Abatachoni comes from the word *Sitabicha*, a place of cool and deep water, chosen on a river where young circumcised boys and girls are taken for a ritual that is a climax of initiation into adulthood. This ritual, known as *Okhulichana*, takes place at a place known as *Esitabicha*[7]. It is therefore argued that the Abatachoni acquired this name due to the practice of the ritual. It seems likely that the word *Sitabicha* was corrupted to *Sitabchoni* to refer to the people who practice the ritual. In Sabaot and Nandi, the word means a place. How and when the coinage took place is, however, not clear. It should, however, be known that *Okhulichana* as a ritual whose drama begins at *Esitabicha* is an exclusively Tachoni practice amongst all the Luyia community and is one of the practices that bear evidence of their origins from the Kalenjin as we shall seek to show. There are some Bukusu clans who practice the ritual and whose oral accounts are closely related to those of Abatachoni. Indeed, these are some of the clans that were assimilated by the

ancestors of the Babukusu. All the Kalenjin groups also practise a similar ritual *Okhulichana,* although there are variations.

According to the oral traditions of Abatachoni, these people are an extraction of the Kalenjin speaking groups who originated in the Uasin Gishu plateau, somewhere to the north-west of present Lake Turkana. G.S. Were argues that from Mt Kamalinga[10], which is somewhere north-west of Lake Turkana, the earliest Kalenjin groups migrated into the Western parts of the Rift Valley. Other groups migrated as far as the Lake Victoria region, the land that is now inhabited by the Abaluyia. These earliest groups are said to have settled in Bungoma and Kakamega Districts among Bantu-speaking peoples. Amongst these Kalenjin-speaking migrants were the Tiriki and Abatachoni. Others are the Bongomek, the Bok and the Kony who, together, form the Sabaot of Mt Elgon region of Bungoma District.

While the Bongomek, Bok and Kony have remained largely as distinct Kalenjin groups, the Abatachoni have been Bantuized, as have the Tiriki to a certain extent. While these, groups moved to far off places, others remained behind at the dispersal point. Among these are the Sebei, some of whom moved into, and still live, in Uganda, on the northern fringes of Mt Elgon. Others are the Bok and Kony who are on the Bungoma side of Mt Elgon.

The oral accounts of Abatachoni point out that after heaving off from the Kalenjin they migrated to a place called Sirikwa and thence to Mbayi, Kitale and then to Kamukuywa and Mwalie of

modern Bungoma.

From Mwalie, the accounts indicate they moved into Kakamega at places like Khaaka and Khaumo while others entered Busia at places like Mundika and Mungatsi as will be seen in the next chapter. All these movements of the ancestors of the modern Abatachoni should be seen as movements that took place for a considerable period of time. Some groups moved, leaving others behind, while those who moved tended to retract their routes back to where they had come from. Their traditions are full of such accounts, where people appear to have been at one place at least more than once.

By the end of the first half of the present century, the Abatachoni would appear to have finally settled in their present day homes. By 1894 they were staying around the present Webuye township before being forced to move further by the Europeans who were pursuing the Babakusu, for an alleged theft of rifles from the colonial government, then stationed at Mumias[11]. A fierce battle was fought between the British soldiers and the Bukusu at Chetambe fort, in which the latter were defeated and finally surrendered. This signalled the final and decisive resistance against the imposition of colonial rule in Bungoma district. Meanwhile, Abatachoni moved to occupy their present homes in Ndivisi, Naitiri and Ndalu locations. Those who crossed R. Kibisi to settle in Naitiri and Ndalu locations of Tongaren division were later forced back into Ndivisi location when the colonial government alienated these lands for white settlement.

In this study, we shall be primarily concerned with examining the socio-cultural change that Abatachoni have undergone from A.D 1500 to 1900. This period has been taken for some reasons. First, existing history on the Kalenjin, from whom the Abatachoni claim descent suggests, that latter began to disintegrate and disperse into their modern homes from 1500 A.D.

Secondly, the Abatachoni, appear to have been assimilated into Bantu speakers between 1500 A.D. and the beginning of the 19th century. This same period was one of active interactions amongst the Maasai, Kalenjin and Bantu speaking peoples within the present region of Western Kenya. These interactions were in form of wars, marriage, trade and travel.

G.S. Were contends that Kalenjin speakers who lived north of present Luyia land preceded the Bantu-speaking groups in the area, notably the ancestors of Babukusu. This is estimated to be between c.1598 - 1625, whereas the Bukusu began to settle in modern Bungoma between c.1760 - 1841[12].

By the late c1600, there were waves of Bantu-speaking immigrants entering modern Luyia land from eastern Uganda. It was these immigrants from eastern Uganda who hastened the process of assimilation of the earlier Kalenjin speakers that were already living in northern Luyialand. This had an impact on the ancestors of Abatachoni who eventually had to adapt to a new cultural environment. One such form of cultural adoptation was the abandonment of their Kalenjin language in favour of a Bantu one. they also took up other practices from the Bantu as will be seen

later.

In its attempt to trace and examine the socio-cultural change, of Abatachoni, this study will emphasize those cultural traits that bear evidence to the fact that these people are a mixture of Bantu and Kalenjin peoples.

1.3 JUSTIFICATION OF THE STUDY

This study will be the first single and comprehensive work on the history and culture of Abatachoni. Any works on them have been very scanty and scattered and therefore our knowledge of their history is limited. The study will therefore provide more data on Abatachoni and the Luyia community in general. The custodians of this knowledge on Abatachoni are elderly people whose lifespan is limited. We must therefore record their oral knowledge before it disappears.

1.4 HYPOTHESES

The following will be the hypotheses;

1. The initial ancestors of Abatachoni were Kalenjin-speaking peoples.

2. The Abatachoni are a hybrid society which emerged through a process of socio-cultural interactions amongst diverse and heterogeneous groups, notably Bantu and Kalenjin.

3. Abatachoni are still undergoing a phase of cultural assimilation that may finally see them becoming Bukusu on the one hand and Kabras on the other.

1.5 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A study of socio-cultural change such as this requires an understanding of the concepts used. Culture and society are interwoven and inseparable in both use and definition. According to Taylor culture is defined as:

> the complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, art, laws, morals, customs and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society[13]

The idea of acquisition should be seen as being both external as well as internal. Men as individuals and also as members of a society, continuously interact with other within their own societies or those of different societies. On the other hand, Kroeber defines culture as:

> the mass of learned and transmitted motor reactions, habits, techniques, ideas, values and the behaviour they induce[14].

For both Taylor and Kroeber, culture is the whole milieu of a people in any given setting which tends to show commonality as opposed to others.

Society, as a concept, is broader in scope than culture. A society may be defined as an aggregate of social relationships of a group or groups[15]. The concept of society thus embraces or can embrace several people of different cultures. In practice,

however, culture and society are indistinguishable although conceptually they are distinct. Culture can be seen as having traits which are acquired through innovation and spread by diffusion. It can be seen as either dynamic or static.

Studies of cultural change recognize three conceptual theories. First, the evolutionist theory assumes that complex societies develop out of simple ones. This theory is the root of the Euro-centric view of looking at African, Asiatic and Latin American societies as being simple" and primitive while European societies are seen as being "complex" and civilized. This Euro-centrism tends to overlook basic issues of socio-cultural change and does not even provide a universal yardstick for measuring civilization or primitivity.

The second theory, the diffusionist, assumes that cultural traits diffuse from a common origin or origins into societies. Its shortcoming, however, is that it runs the danger of over-emphasizing one origin more than the other. A process of diffusion should be looked at as having a measure of reciprocity. Where a certain trait diffuses from one society into another, there must be a similar process in the opposite direction. Use of diffusionist theory may easily mislead one into thinking that all traits found in one society B diffused from society A. This is one of the controversies in African history of the *Hamitic* myth[14].

The third theory is the sociological one, which assumes that society as a unit has different parts which are related. This

means that there is functional unity of all the parts of a society. An inherent problem of this theory is that it is accused of atomizing culture into elements. In any given society, the various parts serve more than one cultural role. Moreover, it is not enough to segment society into parts, each intended or thought to be fulfilling a certain cultural function. Indeed, there are parts of society whose functions greatly overlap.

Together with the three theories of socio-cultural change, there are equally three conceptual approaches. The first approach postulates that dynamics of culture are due to forces of repetitive change operating in an unaltered society. The second approach stipulates that change in culture comes about due to immediate or partial disintegration of existing society given in new forms which are a blending of the new and old elements. Thirdly, it is postulated that change is as a result of forces of opposition and that revolutionary changes are always inevitable. This is a radical approach which is coloured by the marxist doctrine of dialectical materialism.

In this study, socio-cultural change is assumed to be a function of diffusion of ideas, belief values and traits through a systematic process of interaction. The study will also work within the second theoretical approach which assumes that change occurs due to partial disintegration of existing societies giving rise to new ones blending new and old elements.

Most studies on modern Kenyan societies by renowned scholars such as Godfrey Muriuki[17], J.E.G. Sutton[18] and G.S. Were's[19] show

that they have evolved into their modern forms within the above theoretical approach. The histories of modern ethnic groups of Kenya reveal one common factor; that they are hybrid societies born out of a series of interactions between several diverse groups.

Sutton asserts:

> A tribe emerges not by maintaining the pure blood of its ancestors, not by sedulously avoiding contact with its neighbours, but by successfully assimilating its diverse elements. To survive, a tribe must continually adjust to surrounding circumstances[20].

And so it is that Abatachoni came to be part of the Abaluyia through this process of assimilation. Breaking away from the Kalenjin speakers, the ancestors of the modern Abatachoni were exposed to a Bantu environment and through years of continuous contacts and cultural interaction, they were finally Bantuised but retained some traits of the Kalenjin culture.

1.6 LITERATURE REVIEW

A considerable amount of work has been written about the Abaluyia. There is, however, no single and comprehensive work that exists on Abatachoni. Much of the literature on the Abatachoni is found within the broad works of the Abaluyia in general. G.S. Were's[21] works on the Abatachoni are not an exclusive and detailed study of these people. Instead, he treats them within the broad and general field of the whole Luyia

Community.

The concentration of Were's works on the larger Luyia Community thus leaves alot of information about the smaller sub-ethnic groups that make up the community.

Other scholars that have written on Abatachoni include Simiyu Wandibba[22], John Osogo[23] and F.E. Makila[24]. Wandibbas' work on Abatachoni only deals with their traditions of migration and settlement plus a small section on their pre-colonial economy. The work is however, not without some shortcomings. One such short-coming is his attempt to find the genesis of the name Tachoni. Wandibba argues that Abatachoni are descendants of a man called Kiboriti who led them from Sengeli to their modern settlements.

However, Wandibba does not indicate whether the ancestors of Abatachoni moved away as a single group or as small independent groups. Moreover, his reasons for their breakaway from the Kalenjin is not commonly shared among all Tachoni clans. This study will seek to see if the tradition of a domestic quarrel over cattle is exclusively linked to Abangachi clan or to all the clans[25]. The claim according to Wandibba that Kiboriti was the eponymous founder of Abatachoni requires deeper research. It is reported by Wandibba that Kiboriti had three sons; namely, Waila, Khumayi and Were who now represent the three sub-clans of Abangachi. Whence then do the other clans emerge?

Apart from the history of migration and settlement, Wandibba's work ignores the social, political and cultural

institutions of Abatachoni. This study will seek to bridge this gap. On the issue of clan composition, Wandibba states that Abangachi are the "core" clan of the Tachoni. He does not seek to qualify what he means by core. Though Abangachi are the most populous of all Abatachoni clans, they may not by their numbers become a core clan.

On the economy of Abatachoni, Wandibba briefly mentions that they kept animals, collected honey and did some hunting. This study will go beyond this to see how pre-colonial Abatachoni agricultural as well as livestock keeping and trader. When recounting the migration of Abatachoni, they are said to have moved to Kaptama where they met Abahabiya, who now form one of the Tachoni clans. This is so far true. But who were these Abahabiya before becoming part of Abatachoni? He also says that Abahabiya now monopolize the art of iron smelting. It is hoped this study will attempt to see whether other clans practise.

Finally, the issue of migration and leadership is worthy of mention. Wandibba, in his work, gives a catalogue of leaders that are said to have led Abatachoni on their migration from Sengeli, Sirikwa, Mbayi up to their modern homes in Bungoma. The contention of this study is to see whether the ancestors of Abatachoni appear to have moved in trickles of small and independent groups or as a large population. A people who migrated from one place to another in different groups are not able to share one single leader as they moved. The names given by Wandibba are genealogically those of Abangachi clan. It seems

tempting for a reader to infer that Wandibba's list of Tachoni leaders is that of Abangachi clan. It is, therefore, probable that Wandibba was using the traditions of one clan to superimpose it on the entire sub-ethnic group.

Wagner's work on Abatachoni is to say the least of little value. Apart from over-generalization, he treats the whole Luyia community as if their origins were homogeneous. The work is centred more on the Bukusu and Maragoli on whom he heavily relies to draw generalizations for all Luyia. On Abatachoni he errs in fact and understanding that they come from Western Uganda among the Ziba tribe that now lives on the western shores of Lake Victoria[26].

F.E Makila[27] and John Osogo[28] have one thing in common. They fail to understand that though Abatachoni and Babukusu are closely related, they are not one and the same thing. The two communities, it should be understood, have been neigbours in mutual interactions for a very long time. There has been a high degree of cultural borrowing and loaning between the two through marriage, trade and other relations. This cultural interaction has led to sections of Abatachoni being absorbed by Babukusu. Babukusa on the other hand, especially those who live among the Abatachoni, have been greatly influenced by the latter's culture. The net result of all this process has been a remarkable state of cultural similarity of the two communities.

The Babukusu are more numerical than their Tachoni neighbours. If this trend continues, which is certainly going to

be, it is quite likely that the Babukusu will at one time in future swallow up the Abatachoni. This is, however, rather hypothetical. It is worth noting that those Tachoni clans who border the Babukusu are partly Tachoni. Secondly, those Tachoni clans who remained in areas that were taken up by the in-coming Bubukusu have hitherto become part of the latter except by name. For those clans that stay neither on the fringes of the Bukusu nor within areas inhabited by the Bukusu are strongly distinct as a cultural entity despite the similarities.

Mention should be made here in passing, about Makila's account of how Babukusu discovered Abatachoni, then staying at Mwalie hills. The author says that while Babukusu were staying at Bwayi (near Toro) in eastern Uganda, they used to see fire and smoke kindled by people whom they called Barwa. This name Barwa (Abarwa in Tachoni) was used to denote the Maasai and Kalenjin. The Barwa later turned out to be Bayumbu and subsequently Abatachoni.

It is given by Bukusu traditions, according to Makila that one day, the Babukusu sent an emissary called Kitimule wa Wetoyi to go and find out who these people were. Kitimule is said to have gone and lived among the then Barwa and finally married one of their daughters before taking his findings back. His findings showed that the Barwa were people who spoke a language akin to theirs and were probably their cousins whom they had parted with, somewhere at Mbai-Silikwa. From then on, the Barwa became known as Bayumbu. This tradition may be a way of "telescoping" a

historical process of what really happened. The Kitumule mission may have been carried out at a time when the initial Abatachoni had now been culturally assimilated by their earlier Bantu migrants of the region, probably the ancestors of the Babukusu and Bagishu of Uganda.

The main borne of contention is how the Barwa turn out to be cousins? It is highly tempting to infer that the ancestors of modern Abatachoni had been Bantuized by the original Bantu settlers in the area. This Bantuization included the loss of their language for that of the Bantu. Moreover the Tachoni version of the Kitimule story is quite different. According to the traditions of Abatachoni, Kitimule was suspected of espionage manoeuvres and was arrested. As punishment, he is said to have had his toes cut off and left to go back where he had come from. No traditions among the Abatachoni talk of Kitimule as having married a Tachoni lady. The famous saying amongst both the Abatachoni and Babukusu that "*Rebanga Kitumule Wenyoa ebuyumbu*" i.e "ask Kitimule who first pioneered the land of Buyumbu" is taken to sound as a warning. Amongst the Abatachoni it has come to assume a didactic value to both the youth and the old which means "do not poke your nose in matters which do not concern you or you do not know".

John Osogo[29] like Makila tends to treat Abatachoni as if they were Babukusu. As for Makila, suffice it to say that his work heavily ignored the existence of Abatachoni as an entity and finally assumed their non existence.

Existing literature on the Kalenjin do not directly mention the Abatachoni. Their breakup into their modern groups is said to have started in the present millennium[30]. The earliest of these Kalenjin groups to reach modern Luyialand are said to have been the Nandi, whose influence is reflected in the loan-words among the Bantu-speaking Bukusu and Abatachoni[31].

The Kalenjin are divided into ten sub-ethnic groups namely; Kipsigis, Nandi, Nyangori (Terik), Elgeyo, Tugen, Marakwet, Pokot, Sebei, Kony or Saboat and the Okiek. The Differentiation into these current groups and their subsequent expansion into some parts of modern Luyialand brought about a process of cultural assimilitation where some of them were absorbed by the numerical Bantu[32]. The resultant communities of this assimilation process are the Tiriki and Abatachoni[33]. The ancestors of Abatachoni appear to have come from the Saboat, Sebei and the Nandi. However, available literature on these communities does not mention the Abatachoni. But a good deal of their oral accounts of origin, dispersion and settlement tally with those of Abatachoni[34].

1.7 METHODOLOGY

This research was mainly based on oral interviews. It is however supplemented and reinforced by archival sources and an analysis of existing works on both Abatachoni in particular and Abaluyia in general. An incisive analysis of works on the Kalenjin has been done to corroborate certain evidence.

Oral interviews were derived from structured and unstructured questionnaires. The researcher used open-ended questions punctuated by probe questions for purposes of clarity. Individual as well as group interviews were employed where it was convenient. The former was, however, preferred to the latter because in the latter one, the most outspoken respondent carried the day against the rest. Besides, it tended to suppress the real facts because some informants could not speak of certain things in the presence of others. A case in point is when a group of informants comprised members of Abangachi who are looked upon as rather domineering and tend to treat their clan history as if it were the history of all Abatachoni.

There are forty two clans that make up Abatachoni, out of all these, ten elders were selected to represent each clan. The ten elders were then chosen by random method. These elders were chosen on the basis of their age, the minimum being 50 years and above. This was the group that was more conversant with the oral traditions of Abatachoni.

Both male and female respondents were asked similar questions which at times were re-shaped in the course of the interviews. Amongst the interviewees also were Babukusu, the Kabras and the Sabaot, to counter check certain issues. More helpful, however, were the services of *Omuseni Womuse* who is traditionally regarded as the official custodian of the ethnic history.

All the elders representing each clan were sampled by

identifying clan and each was visited at random without prior information. In some other cases, group interviews were also organized, with at least each clan being represented in the group interviews.

The source material used therefore is in two forms.

1. Primary Sources:

   The primary sources include the oral accounts derived from the field interviews. Alongside this are the archival materials, including annual reports of the then Kavirondo district, hand over reports, political records as well as personal communications between field administrators of colonial times. The methods of dating was based on age sets which was derived from the eight cyclical age set system. It is argued as will been seen elsewhere that there are eight cyclic age sets amongst Abatachoni. Each age set has six age grades. To complete one cycle of eight sets it takes 100 years which is a full century. It is on this basis that dating was obtained.

2. The second source is the published works that are available on Abatachoni in particular and Abaluyia in general as well as the Kalenjin.

FOOT NOTES

1. These are the Maragoli, Marachi, Kabras Idakho, Isukha, Marama, Banyore, Kisa, Wanga, Batsotso, Abatachoni, Bakhayo, Banyala, Tiriki, Batura, Samia and Bukusu.

2. G.S. Were (ed), Bungoma District Socio-cultural profile (Nairobi:Institute of African Studies, University of Nairobi 1991) pp 1-4.

3. V.G. Simiyu, "Geographical setting and Historical background" in G.S. Were, ibid P5.

4. See G.S. Were, "The emergence of the Luyia" in Kenya Historical Review Vol.2 No 1, 1974) pp 39-44 and A History of the Abaluyia of Western Kenya. (Nairobi: E.A.P.H., 1967) chapters one and two.

5. Shadrack Kapchanga O.I. Sept. 16th and 22nd 1986. and Were G.S. Op cit pp 1 - 4.

6. Shadrack Kapchanga O.I. Sept. 16th and 22nd 1986.

7. Barwa or Abarwa in Tachoni language was a word used to denote both the Kalenjin and Maasai during the 19th century; a emphenism for enemy.

8. See chapter two of this thesis.

9. Weramondi, A.K., O.I. Sept. 10th and Nov. 11th 1986.

10 Ibid P.

11. C.W. Hobley, Kenya from Chartered Company to Crown Colony. (London: H.F. and Witherby, 1929) pp 76-97.

12 Were, G.S. History of Abaluyia of Western Kenya, (Nairobi, E.A.P.H., 1967) p.58

13. E.B. Tylor The origins of culture. (New York, Harper, 1958) pp 1 - 3.

14. E.L. Kroeber, The nature of culture. (Oxford: University of Chicago Press, 1952) p.18 See also B. Malinowski, A Scientific Theory of Culture. (Chapell Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1944.), pp 8 - 9.

15. A. Onwuejeogovu, The Social Anthropology of Africa: An Introduction. (London: Heinmann 1975) p. 6.

16. J.E.G Sutton, "Hamites and the Hamitic myth" in B.A Ogot and J.A. Kieran (Eds) ZAMANI (Nairobi: E.A.P.H., 1968) pp 95 - 97.

17. G. Muriuki, A History of the Kikuyu 1500 - 1900 A.D. (Nairobi: O.U.P., 1974).

18. J.E.G Sutton "The settlement of East Africa" in B.A. Ogot and J.A. Kieran, (Eds) Op cit p. 94.

19. Were's works on the Abaluyia include: A History of Abaluyia of Western Kenya (Nairobi: E.A.P.H., 1967) Western Kenya Historical Texts (Nairobi: E.A.P.H., 1967). "The Maasai and Kalenjin Factor in the settlement of western Kenya" in Journal of Eastern Africa Research and Development Vol.2 No 1 1972.

20 J.E.G. Sutton, "The settlement of East Africa in B.A. and J.A Kieran, (Eds) op cit p. 94.

21 G.S. Were, op cit all the works mentioned under footnote 19.

22. S. Wandibba, History and Culture in Western Kenya (Nairobi: G.S. Were Press). pp. 18 - 33

23. J. Osogo, A History of the Abaluyia (Nairobi: O.U.P., 1966) pp. 90 - 96.

24. F.E. Makila, An Outline History of the Babukusu (Nairobi: K.L.B., 1978) pp. 55 - 57.

25. S. Wandibba, Op. cit pp 19 - 20
26. G. Wagner, The Bantu of North Kavirondo (London: Oxford University Press, 1949) p. 23.

27. F.E. Makila, Op cit pp. 134 - 162
28. J. Osogo, Op cit pp. 90 - 95
29. Ibid.

30. C. Ehret, Southern Nilotic History (Evanson: North Western Press, 1971) pp 66 - 69

31. Ibid. pp. 130 - 133
32. J.E.G. Sutton, "The Kalenjin" in B.A. Ogot, (Ed) Kenya Before 1900 (Nairobi: E.A.P.H., 1976) p. 41.

33. Ibid. p. 41
34. See C.W. Hollis, The Nandi: Their Language and FOUR - lore (Oxford: Claredon Press, 1909), W. Goldschmidt, Culture and Behaviour of the Sebei (Berkley: University of Califonia Press, 1976) pp. 11 - 16, C.B. Huntingford, The Nandi of Kenya (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1953 and S. Naibei, Oral interview, October 25th 1986.

CHAPTER TWO

2.0 INTRODUCTION

2.1 ORIGINS, MIGRATION AND SETTLEMENT

The oral traditions of origin, migration and settlement of Abatachoni indicate that they originated from the Kalenjin. They came from a place called Sengeli in modern Trans-Nzoia District. They then travelled as far as present day Bungoma, Busia and Kakamega districts of Western Kenya. This chapter will look into their origins migration and settlement. A look into the linkage between the history of early Kalenjin groups as it is related to the oral accounts of Abatachoni will also be attempted.

2.2 ORIGINS

The oral traditions of Abatachoni argue these people were originally part of the Kalenjin from whom they broke away at a place called Sengeli[1]. This tradition is also shared by some clans that make up the Babukusu such as Bakimweyi, and Baliango, among others. Sengeli now is within the Uasin Gishu plateau that runs across present Trans-Nzoia and Uasin Gishu districts of Rift Valley Province. It is recalled by these traditions that while staying at Sengeli, the break away Kalenjin group that later became the Abatachoni were neighbours to the Kamasya (Tugen) Abasawinyi (Sebei), Abakonyi (Kony), Abalaku (Bok) Abang'oma (Bongomek) and the Pokot. All these now constitute some of the groups that make up the Kalenjin[2]. The dispersion from Sengeli

is said to have been caused by internal quarrel over cattle[3], but more importantly by Maasai cattle raids[4].

The incessant Maasai cattle raids forced them to split and begin moving in small groups in search of peaceful grazing lands. These small groups seem to have moved at different times. The history of the ancestors of Abatachoni can therefore, be arguably said to be closely linked to that of the Kalenjin. The oral traditions of the Sebei who live on the border of Uganda and Kenya around Mt. Elgon also point out that some of their members originally came from Mbayi. In fact Mbayi is one of the clans that make up the Sebei of Uganda[5]. On the other hand oral traditions among the Abatachoni, point out that after dispersing from Sengeli they moved on to Mbayi and then Sirikwa which are both within the Uasin Gishu plateau. The oral accounts of the Kony of Mt Elgon show that they came from Sengwer (Sengeli). And their migrational routes together with place names of settlement tend to tally with those of Abatachoni[6]. If this be the case, it would be arguable with a considerable measure of certainty that the history of Abatachoni cannot be divorced from that of the Kalenjin.

2.3 THE EARLY HISTORY OF THE KALENJIN

Christopher Ehret[7] using a linguistic approach to reconstruct the history of the Southern Nilotes, to whom the Kalenjin belong shades some light by observing that:

> Between the end of the proto-southern Nilotic period and the end of the proto-Kalenjin period, a span of

> time running from the first millennium A.D to the early part of the present millennium, southern Nilotes came finally to replace the Southern Cushites as the dominant peoples of Western and Central Kenya. Not only did the ancestors of the Kalenjin expand in the Western highlands at the expense, apparently of Southern Cushites, but other descendants of the Southern Nilotes, came to control large areas of central and northern Kenya, from the Rift Valley to the plains of Central Eastern Uganda[8].

The ancestors of Abatachoni, being originally from the Kalenjin has been stated, would appear to be among the latter descendants of the Southern Nilotes (Kalenjin) who Ehret mentions above.

It is contended by Ehret that by the start of the present millennium, the Kalenjin peoples were living some where in a belt of land running South-west of Mt. Elgon into the Rift Valley. This belt, is what is known as the Uasin Gishu plateau. It is within this belt, at a place called Sengeli that the traditions of Abatachoni broke away from other Kalenjin peoples. Their traditions therefore tally with Ehrets linguistic accounts.

To the West of these Kalenjin groups in the Uasin Gishu plateau, Ehret point out, there lived a people closely related to them referred to as the Kitoki[9]. It is not certain who these Kitoki were. But Ehret says they were closely related by language to the ancestors of modern Kalenjin. It is probable that these Kitoki, were one and the same people as the Kalenjin, in the absence of real evidence to disqualify the assumption. The Kitoki are believed to have been living between the Winam Gulf and Mt. Elgon by the end of the last milleniun A.D.

However, they were overshadowed by the more mobile and expansionist Kalenjin. This region, corresponds with present Western Province of Kenya in which the process of assimilation of the ancestors of the modern Abatachoni into Bantu speakers took place.

This is not, however, to suggest that the process of assimilation took place at this early time. While the Kalenjin were spreading in this general area between Lake Victoria and Mt Elgon, there lived scattered Bantu-speaking peoples, perhaps the ancestors of modern Luyia and Gishu communities.

By the early centuries of the present millennium, the modern Kalenjin had began to break into their present groups[12]. The language differentiation into the current dialects was virtually complete by 1500 A.D. It is therefore fitting to infer that the history of Abatachoni began during this break up; in the sixteenth century.

Once the Kalenjin group broke up into different entities with closely intelligible dialects, they began spreading into new places of the Rift Valley and highlands west of the Valley. The spread of these Kalenjin-speaking peoples appears to have been more to the Rift Valley while other took up areas in highland areas between Mt. Elgon and Lake Turkana. These include the Pokot and Kony. Some offshoots, however, travelled into modern Luyialand where they settled among Bantu-speaking groups. The result was a gradual assimilation of these people into Bantu. Examples of these are the Tiriki (Terik), Bongomek and

Abatachoni. Whereas the Tiriki and Bongomek have become bilinguists i.e. speaking both Kalenjin and Bantu languages, the Abatachoni have completely lost their original language.

The ancestors of Abatachoni would appear to have broken away from the Kalenjin as small independent groups. Their movements appear to have been in trickles of small independent groups which later re-grouped at Mwalie hills of modern Bungoma District. Common about all these groups was their close culture and language, which acted as a focal point of unity, amidst a predominantly Bantu-speaking environment[13]. This may probably explain how they lost their language completely to that of the Bantu and also why they lacked a common name of identity in Pre-colonial days.

2.4 MIGRATION AND SETTLEMENT

As it has already been observed earlier, the oral traditions among Abatachoni claim that these people dispersed from the Kalenjin at Sengeli. From here they claim to have moved to a place called Mbayi and thence to Sirikwa both on the Uasin Gishu plateau. Both Mbai and Sirikwa are interchangeably used, making it highly probable that they must have been very close to each other. While at Mbai-Sirikwa, they were assailed by the Maasai whose raid were centred on their cattle[14]. These Maasai cattle raids appear to have been launched unabated, forcing Abatachoni to disperse further into lands far away. Some of them moved as far as modern Bungoma District and settled at Mwalie, where they

were eventually assimilated by the numerically superior Bantu. They abandoned their language for that of the Bantu and also took to fullscale agriculture as opposed to nomadic pastoralism which was their earlier occupation[15].

Before settling at Mwalie, the oral accounts point out, the ancestors of Abatachoni passed through various places which need mention here. From Mbai-Sirikwa, they are said to have moved to Siligoi whence they encountered some Maasai groups who repulsed them forcing them to change their course. They therefore changed direction towards modern Kitale township. The traditions remember that near Kitale they met some of the present Bukusu clans, who took a northerly direction via Mt Elgon thence to modern Uganda. These clans include Bakitwika, Bakimweyi and Baliango who, together with others, claim to have come from Mbai-Sirikwa[16]. They later re-entered Kenya from eastern Uganda.

Some of the oral accounts of the Abatachoni[17] also point out that some of their groups moved into Uganda and stayed briefly at Mt. Tabasia before retracing back in Kenya via Kenyorus on the Kenya-Uganda border. They camped at Mt. Kaptama, eventually acquiring a name after the mountain-Abakatumi (Abakaptami)[18]. This group is now known as Abahabiya. At Mt Kaptama, they are said to have been joined by other groups before moving on to modern Kitale town. It would, however, seem like some section of them remained behind in Uganda[19]. Traces of this can be found in the occurrence of people known as Basiu, Bashoya and Bangati amongst the Bagishu of eastern Uganda. These three clans are

also found among Abatachoni and are known as Abasiu, Abasioya and Abangachi[20].

From Mt. Kaptama, some groups moved to Chengalale Namanjalala and spread over to cover the general area that is present day Kitale. In this flat tableland, dominated by the white thorny acacia trees, they stayed for some time, the area being of good pasture for their cattle. Due to the dominant acacia trees the area is remembered to have been called *Chichitale* which was later corrupted to Kitale by the coming Europeans[21]. Kitale was, however, abandoned due to wild animals notably elephants and buffaloes which were said to have been a menace.

They then moved on to Siboti where they stayed with the Kony who had earlier moved to occupy the more hilly part of Mt. Elgon after dispersing from Sengwer, which is claimed to have been their original homeland[22]. Another reason given for leaving Kitale was the poisonous thorns of the indigenous trees, especially the acacia species[23].

Their stay at Siboti does not seem to have been long enough as they were forced out by the stinging scorpions which are said to have made life unbearable[24]. After leaving Sibot, they moved to Kamukuywa, a place named after the tree *mukoywet* which is Kalenjin for *ficus capensis*[25]. Oral accounts of the Kony attest to this. From Kamukuywa they spread to take up the area in which now lies Chesamisi Secondary School. The name Chesamisi is said to derive from a certain shrub in Kalenjin known as *chesmiet*

whose flowers emit a rather pungent ordour[26]. Thus, Chesamisi means a "stinging place". While at Chesamisi an epidemic is said to have killed their cattle almost to decimation, prompting them to move away. They left the Chesamisi area and settled in the lowlands of present Kimilili Market along River Kimilili. This area was full of leopards after which its name was derived. *kimelini* means leopard in Kalenjin language[27]. Whereas the ancestors of Abatachoni seem to have moved along the low lying valleys and ridges of modern Bokoli and Kimilili locations, the Kony on the other hand appear to have taken up the higher hills of the Mt. Elgon. Their traditions however, concur that they both settled in these areas as described above.

While at Kimilili, they spread over and occupied areas such as Matili, Misikhu, Kamusinde and Bokoli. In these regions, their traditions claim they met the remnants of a people known as Abakinisu, who were actually the Uasin Gishu Maasai. They are remembered as being expert iron smelters. Their houses are said to have been flat topped with mud dug into the ground. In the local parlance of Abatachoni, these structures are known as *Amatokho* which are Maasai dwellings.

It is recounted in the traditions that they also moved away from the Kimilili area due to competition over cattle and land with a section of the Kony and the Uasin Gishu Maasai. This section of the Kony is remembered as *Abakamiliongo*[28]. The competition for pastures appears to have been occasionally resolved by war. This eventually made Abatachoni move into the

plains and ridges that form part of what is Bokoli and central Bungoma locations. As they settled in these regions, they passed via Bituyu and Kibingei hills, thence to the falls of river Teremi. Some of them settled here permanently and were later to be known as Abateremi[29]. Others moved west of Mt. Elgon and settled at Mwalie hills of modern Bungoma District. Mention should be made here that there was a section of the Kony that was also known as the Teremi[30].

Whereas Abateremi stayed behind, the rest moved on further west and settled in a place of multi-coloured sedimentary rocks. The multi-coloured rocks were known as *Emwialie* and from it the place came to be known as Mwalie[31].

Today, the area lies in the general area of Malakisi shopping centre and Amagoro Division of Busia District. On settling at Mwalie other groups of Kalenjin origin, notably Abang'oma (Bongomek) and Abalaku (Bok) had already pioneered to settle along River Luakhakha and in the area of modern Bungoma town. The name Bungoma is said to derive from the inhabitants - Bongomek[32]. The Bongomek are said to be the earliest inhabitants of present central Bungoma district[33].

It would seem from tradition that the ancestors of Abatachoni might have stayed at Mwalie for a span of time probably exceeding a century. The area, however, does not seen to have been peopled by them in one wave. It is not possible to determine from oral traditions when they exactly settled at this place. The traditions, however, show that the Kolongolo and

Chuma age sets were all circumcised while they were staying at Mwalie[34]. The Abatachoni, be later have eight circumcision age sets which are cyclical. The period taken to complete all the eight age sets is one hundred years which is a full century. Kolongolo age set is normally the first while Sawa is the last. The Chuma age set members were initiated in the late years of the eighteenth century while a new Kongolo began A.D 1800. This would mean Mwalie was settled probably in the eighteenth century or much earlier.

The settlement of the Abatachoni ancestors at Mwalie was a turning point in the history of their progeny. Firstly, having left as pastoralists, these Kalenjin groups gradually began to adopt agriculture as their main economic activity[35]. Though they had earlier been planting, grain such as millet and sorghum, the tempo with which they shifted to other agricultural food crops was unprecedented. Secondly, their ancestors came into prolonged contact with Bantu speakers who gradually loaned them some cultural traits. Such traits include abandoning of the Kalenjin language for that of the Bantu. They also began to use the hoe as a tool for agricultural production.

Thirdly, due to incessant cattle raids from the Maasai of Uasin Gishu and later the Nandi, they developed a defence strategy of building forts as a way of wadding off the enemy. It was also at Mwalie that traditions recall they came increasingly in contact with the Bantu-speaking Babukusu, who came from the direction of eastern Uganda[36]. The coming of the latter, more

than anything else, eventually signalled the fate of these early Kalenjin migrants. Not only did Babukusu hasten the process of assimilation, they also encroached on their lands, displacing them further into Kakamega and Busia districts. At this time, the pioneer column of the Bukusu are said to have referred to the Abatuchoni as Barwa. Later, the name was changed to Bayumbu[36]

According to G.S. Were, the number of clans that make up Abayumbu is twenty seven[37]. However, it should be borne in mind that from Mwalie, Abatachoni, then known as Bayumbu were forced to move into Kakamega and Busia districts before retracting back into modern Bungoma. Along the way they may have absorbed certain Bantu elements within their ranks, hence swelling up the clans the number this study gives.

The coming of the Babukusu is said to have been peaceful, but rapid, something that led to the pressure on the land of Abatachoni. Finally, Abatachoni moved away from Mwalie to other hills of Bungoma district as well as Busia and Kakamega districts. This is what can be termed as the second wave of migration. At this time, Abatachoni had evolved into a distinct entity of Bantu but with strong Kalenjin cultural traits.

The single most important factor to this movement away from Mwalie was land pressure caused by the incoming Babukusu. These people, on their part, were also moving away from eastern Uganda as a result of the expansionist Iteso. The expansion of the Iteso became apparent in the eighteenth century and by the turn of the nineteenth century, it was a manifest force to reckon

with. These people began to encroach on the lands of Babukusu, who were then in eastern Uganda, who in turn were compelled tomove into the lands occupied by Abatachoni[40].

Perhaps it is important at this point to state briefly what the two societies i.e. the Bantu and early Kalenjin migrants were like before the latter were assimilated. According to Christopher Ehret[41], the contacts between the Kalenjin and Bantu have been the indebtness of the Kalenjin or Southern Nilotes to the Bantu for innovations in agriculture. The early Kalenjin speakers practiced herding of animals and grain cultivation as the main economic practise. This kind of economic practice was quite convenient for their lifestyle since it enabled them to be mobile while in search of more pasturelands. Ehret observes that ("such an economy requires at least local mobility because of the continual need to find grazing land for their stock"[42]).

The Bantu, on the other hand led a sedentary lifestyle that dictated them to adopt the cultivation of crops. These crops included bananas and root crops. For the Bantu, therefore, cultivation of crops was of primary importance while herding was secondary. A mixture of these two types of economic activities thus bespeaks in part on how the emergent group called Abatachoni came to adopt both the two different economic activities.

It would seem that between the period 1750 A.D and 1850 alot of cultural interactions took place between the Bantu and the forefathers of modern Abatachoni. Eventually, as the Abatachoni

evolved into a distinct Bantu entity, the cultural practices as well as their economic activities were to depict a remarkable reflection of their heterogeneity. The language, for example, is Bantu but enriched with a considerable number of Kalenjin vocabularies.

The table below shows certain vocabularies that are found in the language of Abatachoni, but whose origins can be traced to the Kalenjin.

	TACHONI	KALENJIN	ENGLISH
1	Sekhe	Sek	Beer straw
2	Subeni	Supen	Young ewe
3	Enyatuni	Nyetung	Lion
4	Baya	Pai	To keep cattle
5	Saya	Sai	To pray
6	Sera	Ser	To raid
7	Taiywa	Ta-iywa	Rooster (Cock)
8	Khulata	Lat	To castrate
9	Kibeu	Kipai	Rhinoceros
10	Eei	Aeyi	Ox
11	Sikiri	Dig-d	Donkey
12	Isunu	So.no	Barren cow[43]

It is observable from the table above that those vocabularies retained in the Tachoni dialect bear direct significance to their ancestors economic cultivators. Being herders and grain cultivators, it is least surprising to find the

retention of words related to herding such as castrate, barren cow, young ewe and wild animals like Rhinoceros. The word to raid is reminiscent of perhaps the endless cattle raids that the history of the Kalenjin is replete with. Cattle raids as we have seen, and shall see later, were a constant cause of wars and movements.

Besides the vocabularies cited above, there are numerous other Kalenjin vocabularies which are found in the circumcision songs of Abatachoni. Such words include *Omusinde* which is a corruption of *Musindet* meaning an uncircumcised person in Kalenjin language.

The Bantu on their part loaned quite a considerable number of cultural practices which are manifested in the vocabularies of the modern language of Abatachoni. Most important of all is the language, a sedentary lifestyle and a good range of food crops, especially the root crops which the Kalenjin did not grow. Such words like *Obusie*, which means flour, was corrupted into Kalenjin as *Pusia* while *Busela* - gruel or porridge was currupted to *Muser* in Kalenjin.

In all probability, most Kalenjin words found in the Tachoni language have more to do with the culture and practice of pastoral peoples. This can be seen as is evident with the language of the Abatachoni. This contention is aptly put by Christopher Ehret where he argues that historical linguistics can be used to help write a peoples history by making inferences from inherited features and those borrowed words.

The second wave of migration of Abatachoni began when they had evolved into an entity as a Bantu group with a Bantu language. This movement began at Mwalie where they evolved and took some as far as Busia and Kakamega districts of present day Western Province. This second wave of movement appears to have began by the second half of the nineteenth century. By the turn of present century, this movement appears to have been complete as traditions do not talk of any further movements. By the establishment of effective colonial government over Bungoma District, then under North Kavirondo, the Abatachoni were permanently settled in their current homes[45].

Their second wave of movement from Mwalie, it has been observed earlier, was due to land pressure as occassioned by the incoming Babukusu and Iteso. Secondly, the traditions point out it was also caused by the Nandi from Uasin Gishu who were after their cattle. It is true that nineteenth century Western Kenya, as well as highlands west of Rift Valley, were dominated by Maasai and later Nandi cattle raids. Many parts of these regions were never spared from Maasai and Nandi cattle rustling[46]. In this kind of conditions, Abatachoni were forced to leave Mwalie. Not all, however, left Mwalie. Those who remained behind were assimilated by the Babukusu. These include clans such as Bachemwile, Batulu, Banyangali, Basonge and Bayumbu. Although Abayumbu at one time was used for the entire Abatachoni, there is a clan that has retained the name and are recognized as one of the clans that make up Abatachoni.

On leaving Mwalie, the oral accounts state that Abatachoni passed via Kimaeti, Siboti, Likhwee and Myanga. All these areas lie in West Bukusu Location of Bungoma District. Some of the people are said to have crossed river Nzoia into Kakamega District while others entered Busia district. In Kakamega Abatachoni occupied such areas as Lusunu, Elukongo, Khaaka and Khaumo. In these places, they erected forts which they had developed as a defensive strategy since staying at Mwalie[47]. The Abangachi clan for example, claim to have built some big forts at Khaumo and Khaaka. The Abasioya on the other hand entered modern Busia District along River Sio as far as its mouth. A fort was erected at what is now Sioport, at the mouth of the river Sio. Both the port (Sio) and the river are said to derive their names from Abasioya (Sio-ya)[48].

Khaumo and Sio places were later abandoned due to several factors. First, was the defeaning lightininge accompanying thunderstorms. Second, was the stinging mosquitoes, which caused malaria. Third, was the expansive waters of Lake Victoria. It was felt by the people that bordering such an expansive sea water mass was dangerous at the hour of attack by enemies for one could have no place to escape to. This worry was compounded by the combined hostility of the Wanga and Maasai. It is said in their oral accounts that the Wanga men wanted to marry the Tachoni women by force. The latter refused owing to the fact that Wanga men were not circumcised.

This uneasy relations between the Wanga and Abatachoni made

the former enlist the services of the Maasai to attack and raid the cattle of the latter. All these factors were deemed as unbearable, forcing Abatachoni to retract their way back into modern Bungoma. Some, however, remained in Kakamega but moved away to the east into modern North and South Kabras location of Malava division. On their way back, they passed through Mungatsi, Ekhulera all in present day Kakamega, while those in Busia passed via Mundika and Bukhayo. A majority crossed River Nzoia in Bungoma settling at Bumula, Kabula, Wabukhe, Mateka hills and Sibembe[47].

There is no doubt that as they moved back into modern Bungoma, Abatachoni absorbed among their ranks, many more Bantu speakers of Kakamega and Busia. Some traditions attempt to show, but not so convincingly, that amongst the Abasang'alo clans, some were absorbed from Abatura. The Abasamo also are said to have Samia elements in their numbers. But there is no doubt that these migrant Abatachoni assimilated some other Bantu-speakers in all these areas they were passing through.

While staying at Sibembe the oral traditions recall that they were neighbours to a people called Abalasi. These Abalasi later became known as Kabras by Europeans[51]. After staying at Sibembe for some time, they spread into South and West Bukusu locations of modern Bungoma. A majority of them, however; took on an east bound route, settling in modern Webuye and Ndivisi locations. The movement from Sibembe is said to have been sparked off by a fight during a liquor drinking party.

One man called Mmasi of Abasamo clan, allegedly attacked and killed a Bukusu leader called Mukite wa Nameme. This incident brought the two communities to a brink of war, but peace was reached before things went out of hand. A fine was imposed on the Abasamo clan, who paid a total of twelve animals. Abatachoni, however, appear to have feared a possible Bukusu revenge. This made them move away to the east while others crossed back into Kakamega where they joined others who had remained there[52]. Sibembe was where the current Kabula Secondary School lies.

Those groups who went east into modern Webuye passed via Khalaba and occupyied Sangalo hills. From these hills, members of Abatachoni who lived here came to be known by the name of the hills. To-day, they are called Abasang'alo whose origin is said to be in Kalenjin, meaning a hill or mountain bear of vegetation - *Sang'ale*. Others occupied a place called *lichina samo (Samo rock)* from it they were later known as Abasamo. It is not known what *samo* means but oral accounts claim that the place has a granitic rock with astonishing layers with a mark of cattle hoof and a human footmark.

The Abasamo, after *Lichina Samo* moved to Mulwanda meaning a place of rocks, thence to Ndengelwa. Others took up land where the current Mabanga Farmers Training Centre is built. At Mabanga, they were attacked by the Maasai, an attack which Abatachoni repulsed but with heavy loss of human life. This is remembered as the biggest and one of the bitterest fights between

the Maasai and Abatachoni. The whole river (Mabanga) is said to have been turned red by human blood. From this, both the river and the place were called *Mabanga*, which means blood in the dialect of Abatachoni -*olutachoni*[83].

This Maasai attack appears to have hastened the movement of Abatachoni. This movement took them to Milo, Yalusi, Mumbwi, Makuma, Kakimanyi, Muchi, Maraka which are all in Webuye location today. Others occupied Chebuyusi, Bokoli, Lugulu, Sirisia and Misikhu, which are adjacent to modern Webuye township. On top of Webuye escarpment, they erected a big fort named after a man called *Chetambe*. It was in this fort that the British colonial administration fought their last and decisive battle against the Babukusu who had for long defied their hegemony (see chapter seven). The British Bukusu battle at Chetambe was in 1895. This means that the areas described were settled by Abatachoni probably during the last half of the nineteenth century. The Chetambe battle seems to have forced Abatachoni to move further east into lands of Ndivisi, Naitiri and Ndalu locations that they live in now. By the time of the establishment of the colonial government in Western Kenya, they were already living in present Kimilili division, Webuye division as well as Tongaren division. The last one lies in what was later taken up as white settlement areas, forcing them to come back to Ndivisi location[84].

For those groups that remained in Kakamega district, they too, moved eastwards, but favouring the lowlands adjacent to the bank of River Nzoia. They occupied areas such as Chebuyusi,

Mwikonyole and Musaka. Others settled at Khukulumbeni, Makhukhuni, Musibilie and Ekalenda. Their easterly movement continued, settling in the area that now lies in modern Kiliboli. These include Nambilima, Chekulo, Mukhalanya, Chebwayi, Vihiga (not of Maragoli), Kivaywa and Matiti. Others settled on the Tombo-Shibanga escarpment. The Abamachina clan, which inhabits these areas, has now been assimilated into the Kabras, while others crossed River Tombo to Chimoi and thence to Masauli, Lukhikho and Sihungai all in Luandeti Sub-location. This general movement extended to other nearby areas of Siandike, Makungwi, Mahanga and Lugari. The last name is derived from said to mean *agari* which means middle in the Tachoni language. The area lies in the middle of Rivers Nzoia and Kipkaren-Chekalini, hence "the land in the middle of two rivers[53].

The settlement of Lugari area must have occurred at the same time the other Abatachoni in Bungoma were taking up land in modern Naitiri and Ndalu locations. This period is somewhat shortly before the arrival of Europeans. At the same time, pockets of Abatachoni had moved in to occupy the Mautuma-Mbakara region, now lying in Lugari division of Kakamega District. The areas near Tundubari (Turbo) and Sango - Mwise, which are a few kilometres north west of Eldoret town, were also settled about this time. Pioneer groups also appear to have gone to areas near Soi such as Mtoni Pilisi, Siligoi. These areas are near Moi's Bridge in Uasin Gishu Plateau[54].

On the advent of colonial administration, many of these

areas were declared fit for white settlement and Abatachoni were evacuated to the area where they are now largely found. Those who were in Tangaren division of Bungoma district were also evicted back into Ndivisi and Webuye locations of the Webuye Division. These people, it would seem, were not in great numbers as their traditions do not show a mass exodus of them being evicted from these white settlement areas.

2.5 CONCLUSION

The emergence of the modern Abatachoni as we know them now represents a wider historical phenomenon that took place in Western Kenya over several centuries. By the late nineteenth century, the ancestors of the present Abatachoni had sojourned at Sengeli of modern Uasin Gishu Plateau, as far west as modern Bungoma-Busia-Kakamega districts. By the turn of the current century, these migrants of former Kalenjin extraction had evolved into Bantu speakers but with a strong Kalenjin influence. This evolution may have taken place between A.D. 1500 and 1800 within which migrants of Kalenjin origin seem to have come into increasing contact with numerous Bantu migrants. These Bantu were pouring into western Kenya from eastern Uganda. Through trade and marriage, the minority Kalenjin speakers appear to have lent and borrowed certain cultural traits to and from their Bantu neighbours. This process led to the hybridization of the emergent Abatachoni.

Amongst the most notable traits from the Bantu include

adoption of fullscale agriculture, a Bantu dialect called *Olutachoni* and a sedentary lifestyle. Others include the elaborate burial ceremony and probably the art of manufacturing the iron hoe, though they already knew iron smithing. This cultural assimilation did not completely erode the Kalenjin cultural identity. An indication of this lies in their strong cultural attachment to cattle despite the agricultural practice. The Abatachoni also depict a high resemblance of their names with those of the Kalenjin, They too, like the Kalenjin practise clitoridectomy and circumcision as rites of initiation for both girls and boys into adulthood. Abatachoni face the East during circumcision, where their traditions claim they came from while their neighbouring Babukusu face West, where they too, claim to have come from.

(After every circumcision period, Abatachoni practise mysterious rituals which climax the process of initiation called *Okhulichana*. This is exclusively a Tachoni practise and is quite similar in content and form to that of the Kalenjin[57]). The cyclic age-set system of Abatachoni is also anchored in Kalenjin origins and there is no doubt their Bukusu cousins might have borrowed them from ancestors of the former. Besides these the ceremonial songs of Abatachoni during circumcision are full of Kalenjin vocabulary, an indication of the latter's influence within the former. It can be inferred therefore that in trying to understand the evolution and emergence of Abatachoni as a sub-community of the Abaluyia, two factors, notably the Bantu and the

Kalenjin, cannot be underestimated. The fusion of the two considerably led to the blending of the hybrid community that came to be known as Abatachoni.

FOOTNOTES

1. Wekesa Chenoni, Oral Interview, 24th Sept 1986.

2. See more about the composition of the Kalenjin speakers in "The Kalenjin" by J.E.G. Sutton; B.A. Ogot (Ed) Kenya Before 1900, (Nairobi: E.A.P.H., 1976 pp 21-52).

3. Walucho Buriah, Oral Interview, Sept 6, 7, 8 and 9th 1986.
4. Ibid

5. Walter Goldschmidt, Culture and Behaviour of the Sebei (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976) pp. 11 -16.

6. S. Naibei, Oral Interview, Oct. 25, 1986.

7. C. Ehret, Southern Nilotic History. (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1971). The whole book is a comprehensive use of historical linguistics as a source of history.
8. Ibid p 48.
9. Ibid p 68.
10. Ibid p 63.

11. Ibid pp 63 - 82 and G.S. Were and D. Wilson, East Africa through a thousand years. (London: Oxford University Press, 1968). See also W.R. Ochieng. History of the Rift Valley (Nairobi: K.L.B., 1975 pp. 56 - 57).

12. C. Ehret Op cit p. 66
13. Walucho Buriah O.I. Sept. 6th 7th 1986
14. Ibid Sept 9th, 1986
15. Ibid Sept 9th 1986
16. Ibid Sept 6th - 9th 1986.
17. Ibid Supt 6th - 9th 1986.
18. Ibid Sept 6th - 9th 1986.
19. Ibid Sept 8th 1986.
20. Ibid 7th 1986.
21. Ibid Sept 6th 1986.
22. Shadrack Kapchanga O.I 16th Sept 1986.
23. S. Naibei O.I. Oct 25th 1986
24. S. Kapchanga O.I. Sept. 16th 1986.
25. S. Naibei Opp cit Oct. 25th 1986.

26. Ibid.

27. Walucho Buriah Op cit. 6th - 9th 1986. and S. Naibei, O.I. Oct. 25th 1986.

28. S. Naibei, O.I. Oct. 25th 1986.
29. W. Buriah O.I. Sept 9th 1986.
30. S. Naibei O.I. Oct 25th 1986.
31. W. Chenonoi O.I. Sept 24th 1986.
32. W. Buriah O.I. Sept 9th 1986.

33. G.S. Were, Western Kenya Historical Texts (Nairobi: E.A.P.H., 1967) pp. 17 and 181.

34. S. Kapchanga O.I. Sept 22 1986.
35. W. Buriah O.I. Sept 6th - 9th 1986.
36. S. Kiptuli O.I. Jan 3rd 1987.

37. It will be noteworthy from this point to refer to them as Abatachoni as we know them now since the original Kalenjin groups had by now been Bantuized.

38. G.S Were, Op cit P. 173 and 174.

39. S. Wandibba, History and Culture in Western Kenya, (Nairobi: G.S. Were press, 1985) p.29.

40. C. Ehret, Op cit pp 83.
41. Ibid p. 84.
42. Ibid pp.84.

43. Ibid, pp 130 to 149. The appendices in Ehret's book have a comprehensive catalogue of Kalenjin loan words within the Bantu language as well as those of the Bantu within the Kalenjin.

44. C. Ehret "Linguistics as a tool for Historians" in B.A. Ogot (Ed) HADITH 1 (Nairobi, E.A.P.H. 1986 pp. 119 - 133.

45. See chapter seven of this thesis.

46. W.R. Ochieng' Op cit. pp. 30 - 42 and G.S. Were, A History of Abuluyia (Nairobi, E.A.P.H. 1967, Chapter six).

47. Walucho Buriah O.I. Sept 9th 1986.
48. Ibid O.I. Sept 9th 1986.
49. Ibid
50. G.S. Were, Western Kenya Historical Texts (Nairobi E.A.P.H. 1967) pp 91 - 95

51. Walucho Buriah O.I. Sept 6th 1986.
52. Ibid

53. Ibid
54. S. Kapchanga, O.I. Nov. 23rd 1986.
55. A.C. Wekesa, O.I. Sept. 24th 1986.
56 A.K. Weramondi, O.I. Nov. 11th 1986.

57. See W. Goldschmidt, op cit pp. 69 - 299. See also J. G. Peristiany, The social institutions of the Kipsigis (London: George Routledge 1939.) Section on initiation.

FIG. 1 THE AREA INHABITED BY THE LUYIA OF WESTERN KENYA

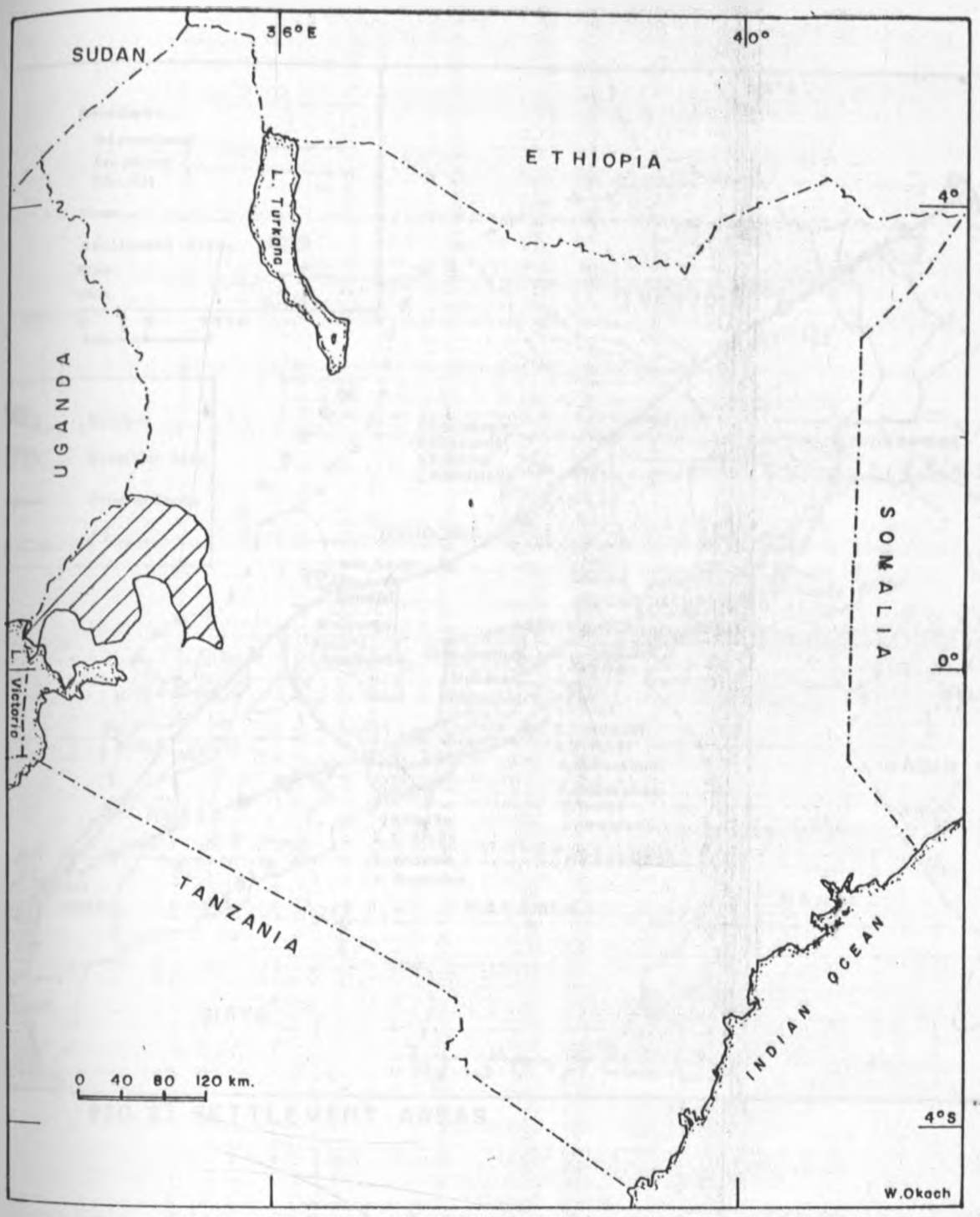

FIG. 1: LOCATION OF STUDY AREA

FIG. 2. MIGRATIONAL ROUTES OF THE ABATACHONI

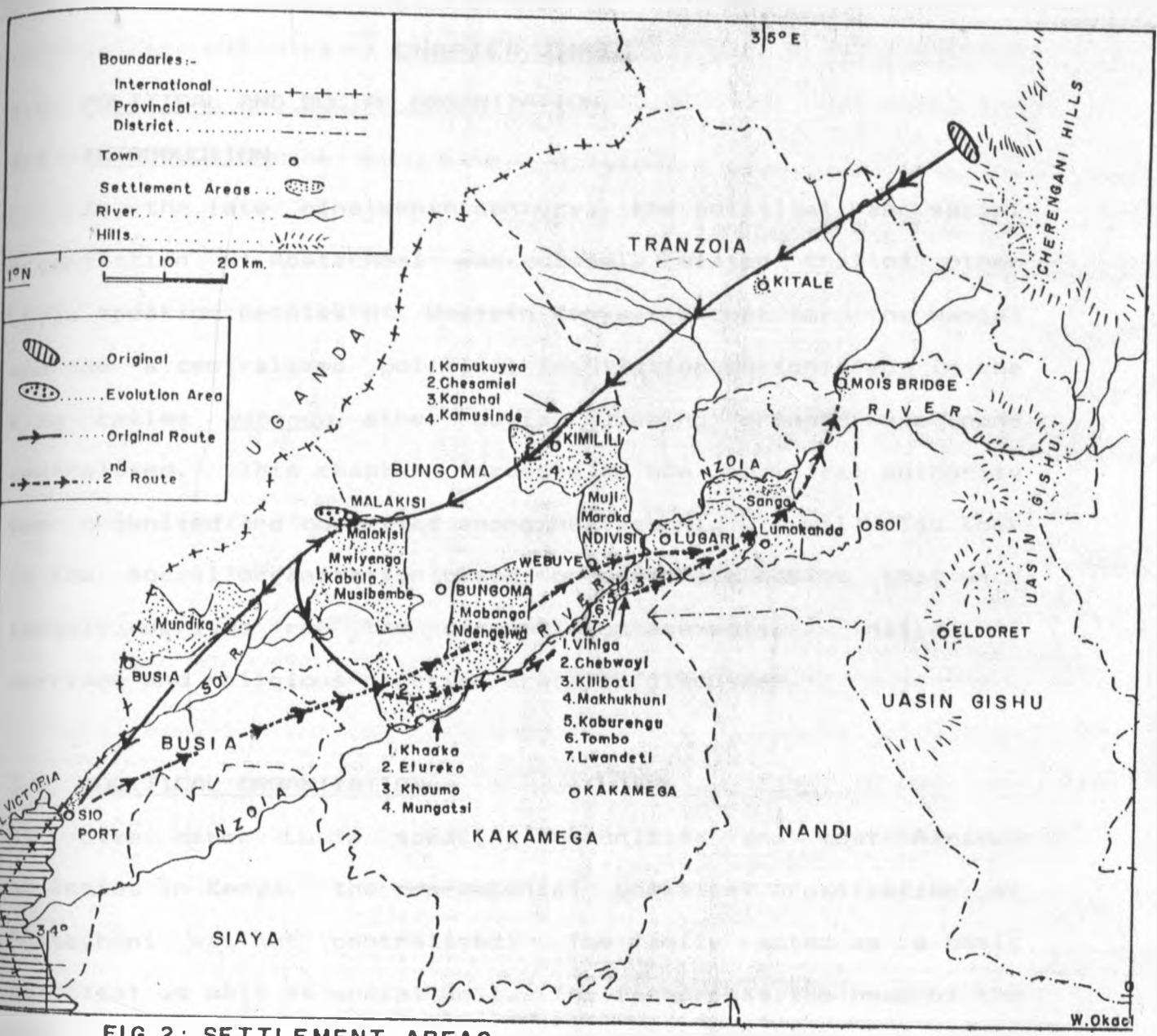

FIG. 2: SETTLEMENT AREAS

CHAPTER THREE

3.0 POLITICAL AND SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In the late nineteenth century, the political and social organization of Abatachoni was closely related that of other Luyia speaking peoples of Western Kenya. Except for the Wanga[1] who had a centralized political institution personified in the King called *Nabongo*, other Luyia speaking groups[2] were non-centralized. This chapter focusses on how political authority was organized and conceived among Abatachoni. It will also look at the social organization based on corporate bodies that were largely derived from the circumcision age-sets. Initiation, marriage and religious practise are also discussed.

3.2 POLITICAL ORGANIZATION

Like other Luyia speaking communities and most African societies in Kenya, the pre-colonial political organization of Abatachoni was not centralized. The family acted as a basic political as well as social unit. The father was the head of the family which comprised the wives plus the children. The family size varied from place to place owing to the fact that polygamy was a socially sanctioned institution. The father as head of the family, was therefore charged with the running, of the day to day affairs.

Several families with a common lineage constituted a clan which acted as an umbrella organization for all its members. The

society was thus patrilineal as well as patriarchal. Elder members of each clan held the responsibility of overseeing the welfare of the whole clan. They arbitrated in matters which were beyond the ability of the father or village head.

During the late nineteenth century, probably by the start of 1850s Abatachoni and their closely related Babukusu were staying in walled fortifications called *Chingoba* (sing. *Olukoba*). It is estimated by early observers like Wagner[3] that one fort could accommodate between seventy to eighty families. In this case therefore, a fort constituted a much bigger political unit as it comprised several families. Each fort was headed by a man called *Omwami Wolukoba*[4]. This man acted as the final court of appeal and presided over cases that were brought by the village headmen. To facilitate his duties, he was assisted by a council of elders *Abakhulundu bomuse.* The institution of *Omwami Wolukoba* was not hereditary but was elective by a council of elders. This power to elect the head of a fort enabled them to fire him if he became incompetent, stubborn or unpopular. This would be done by calling clan elders to a public meeting where the leader would be told his shortcomings followed by a public announcement of his dismissal. Wandibba argues that *Iyaya* of the Abangachi clan was elected to replace Wachilonga while at Mwalie because of the latter's unpopularity. In the day to day dispensation of his duties, *Omwami* was assisted by subordinates. At the village level were headmen called *Abakasa*. Each headman of a village worked in liaison with self-appointed assistants called *Abakasa*

bolubira who were, in actual sense, heads of some sections of a big village.

Ultimate authority in this case rested in the head of a fort. But because of the powers invested in the council of elders who actually elected him, it was not a position of excessive political power. However, matters of justice, war and other political decisions were handled by him under the guidance of the council of elders. *Omwami* was therefore expected to be impartial and humane in the arbitration of disputes. He was a man who, by force of his personality showed the qualities of humility, patience, hospitality and greater understanding but also of great moral courage. He was also expected to show extra ordinary military prowess, moral courage, amicable social conduct, and bravery from the time of initiation[6].

A young man of these given qualities, once spotted, was chosen by elders and groomed till at an age when he would be invested as *Omwami*[7]. The ceremony of investiture was announced publicly and the man was annointed by a man called *Omuviti*[8] who actually conducted the "Swearing in" ceremony. It was *Omuviti* from Abasioya clan who gave the new leader his royal regalia. These included a skin of a colobus monkey (Ekutusi) a flywhisk and a four-legged round stool. He was also given a hat called *esitai*, made of leopard skin and decorated with ostrich feathers. In some cases, a walking stick was given with a bangle of copper. The last two, particularly the copper bangle must have been of recent origin, when copper bangles began reaching the interior

with the Swahili coastal traders in the late nineteenth century.

While the "Swearing-in" ceremony went on, milk was also poured on the royal stool and his head was shaven by either his nephew or younger brother[9]. As this ceremony went on the *Omuviti* uttered the following words to the newly crowned *Omwami*:

> This is leadership bestowed unto you. Love your people, other people's children as you love yours. Your love be to all; children, men and women. These, before you are your people and leadership is for the good of all. Run your family with dignity. Always seek proper counsel[10].

Following the investiture, the whole congregation went into feasting and drinking as individuals thronged into their leader's home with gifts and presents in form of animals, grains and other goods. It was thus important on the part of the council of elders to choose one such man that deserved this kind of coronation. *Omwami* was therefore a symbol of social justice and peace. He regulated the standard moral and ethical practices of the society. On this he was told during coronation to seek proper counsel, obviously from elders[11].

3.3 CRIMES AND PUNISHMENTS

Every member of society was by social obligation supposed to observe the laid down customary laws. It was the duty of every elder to teach the young all the accepted mode of behaviour. Counselling of the young was not an exclusive preserve of their parents, but rather, that of all the elderly people. Any social evil had its own form of punishment that was traditionally accepted. That is why for any verdict to be given, the arbiter-

Omwami was supposed to seek the advice of elders who made up the council of elders. In most cases, punishment for social evils was meted out in form of fines, payment of which was done in cattle, chicken, sheep or goats. In more grave cases, the criminals could be ostracized.

Though petty crimes could be punished by imposition of small fines, grave cases were given extreme punishment. Incest, for example, was punishable by a grueling and arduous ordeal on the part of the victims. If people were convicted of incest, they were forced to lie in the cavity of a disembowelled slaughtered cow. This occasion was made public and witnessed by all, including parents of both parties. The two were then cursed and ostracized from society[12]. The progeny of the two were also held to be afflicted by the potency of the curse.

Apart from incest, killing was also one of the most dreaded social evils. Killing was conceived in two ways; murder and manslaughter. In the latter case, where the accused could not have committed the act deliberately, the punishment was normally a fine of twelve head of cattle. If the accused failed to raise the cattle, his clan paid. In the first type of killing, capital punishment was meted out. A man who killed his fellow kinsman was speared to death if found. If he escaped into another land, the clan of the deceased could claim a fine of twelve head of cattle.

In some cases, if the fine was not forthcoming, members of the deceased man's clan could ambush a person of the same sex

from the clan of the murderer and kill him to avenge their person. The victim of such an ambush was taken to be of commensurate age, and physique to the one killed[13].

3.4 CLANS AND SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

Social organization of Abatachoni did not differ much from that of other Luyia communities. Clans acted as larger extensions of families with common lineages. According to their oral traditions, some of the clans that make up the Babukusu and Kabras were originally Abatachoni. The process of cultural assimilation has through time made them become part and parcel of either Bukusu or Kabras communities. Despite all this, the traditions aver that Abatachoni are made up of forty-two clans. These are, Abahabiya, Abasioya, Abangachi, Abameywa, Abakafusi, Abamwongo, Abasamo, Abasang'alo, Abatulu, Abakobolo, Abakavino, Abachambai, Abacharia, Abamakhanga, Abaluhu, Abachemuluku, Abasaniakia, Abasonge, Abaengele, Abamweya, Abakusi, Abasamo Abayumbu, Abalukulu, Abarefu, Abasakali, Abamutebi, Abakibeti, Abakipemuli, Abachemai, Abaabichwa, Abamalicha, Abamakhuli, Abamarakalu, Abasiu, Abakhusia, Abakamukong'i, Abakubwayi, Abachemwile, Abamachina, Abachewa and Abasituyi[14].

Out of these clans, those who are found among Babukusu and have been assimilated include Abachemwile, Abayumbu, Abasonge, Abalukulu, Abaengele, Abusituyi and Abatulu. The Kabras on the other hand have assimilated some clans such as Abasonge, Abamachina, Abasamo, Abaluhu and Abakhusia[15].

Be that as it may, in both marital and legal matters, both men and women were considered equal. This equal status of men and women transcended almost all aspects of life. Men owned all the property in the homestead and had the power to dispose of it. As a rule, women could not claim ownership of property while the husband was alive. If a man died survived by children, the first born male was installed to look over his father's property in trust of his younger brothers[16]. This was done by clan elders who also appointed a brother to the deceased man to guide the first born son in the daily affairs of the family. In case of a polygamous family, the son of the eldest wife was normally chosen to assume the legal-political status bequeathed by the father.

The social roles of men and women were clearly and distinctly defined. A man could be shunned by others if he was engaged in female related duties. The work of men was among others to clear the fields, herd the animals, build forts, houses, granaries and ensure the security of the homestead. Women, on their part, were to cook for the family, sweep and clean homesteads, draw water and till the gardens. The planting and harvesting of staple crops was done jointly by both sexes[17].

All men belonged to corporate bodies of age-sets. Membership to the age-sets was on the basis of initiation through circumcision. This membership to an age-set transcended real age or family relations and gave mates a life-long social bond. There were (are) eight cyclic age-sets which, according to seniority, are, *Kolongolo*, *Kikwameti*, *Kananachi*, *Kinyikeu*,

Nyange, *Maina*, *Chuma* and *Sawa*. At any time and all the years, there was hierarchical arrangement of men in terms of seniors and juniors, based on these age-sets. An uncle and a nephew who both belonged to one age-set grew up recognizing each other as equals. Each member of an age-set related to the other on the basis of either equality or seniority. One age-set comprised six sub-sets. These sub-sets were called *Amavaka (sing-Livaka)*[18]. An age-set was known as *Eselukho* while a complete cycle of eight age-sets was known as *Likhula* or a century.

There are fundamental similarities in terms of age-sets organization between Abatachoni and those of the Kalenjin, which lends support to the possibility of the origins of the former within the latter. A brief mention of such similarities is perhaps worthy at this stage. Within some Kalenjin speaking groups such as the Nandi[19], Kipsigis[20], Sebei[21] and Bantuised Tiriki[22], there are seven cyclic age-sets which constitute the basis of their socio-political as well as military organizations. This is the same with Abatachoni who drew political, social and military organization from the age-sets. Initiation by way of circumcision of boys and clitoridectomy of girls was a cardinal rite of passage for entering into a new social status of adulthood in both communities.

For both the Kalenjin and Abatachoni men entered into membership of an age-set from the time of circumcision till death. Women on the other hand belonged to the age-set of their husbands. As already noted, each age-set among Abatachoni was

sub-divided into six sets called *Amavaka*. The Kalenjin, on the other hand, also have such sub-sets called Mat[23]. The difference between the two is, however, that among the Kalenjin, such as as the Nandi, an age-set has four sub-sets but not six as is the case with Abatachoni. It is estimated by studies on the Nandi[24], Kipsigis[25], Kony[26] and the Tiriki[27] that a full cycle of seven age-sets takes a total of about 105 years. This is on the basis that a circumcision period lasts for 15 years so as to make one age set. Given therefore that there are seven age-sets, a full cycle logically gives 105 years. Among the Abatachoni a circumcision period takes 12 years except for the Chuma age-set which is said to take 16 years. According to one tradition, the Chuma age-set had to be prolonged at one time in history because the elders could not inaugurate a new age-set of *Sawa* because one older member of the same age-set called *Matukutu* was still alive[28]. It is argued by the same tradition that in actual practice, the inauguration of a new age-set was supposed to be done only when all the older members of the same age-set were already dead.

An argument like that above sounds convincing in the sense that if boys were circumcised at the age of between 15-20 years, it is quite likely that by the time a new cycle of age sets began, the first group to be initiated who could be very old were expected to have all died. A full cycle among Abatachoni takes about 100 years, a difference of five years with that of the Kalenjin. It can be argued that the basic similarities that,

bear testimony to some assertions by oral traditions of Abatachoni that they were originally Kalenjin that culminate into circumcision together with the greater resemblance in names of their age-sets. The table below shows the names of age-sets among Abatachoni, Nandi, Kipsigis and the Tiriki:

	TACHONI	NANDI	KIPSIGIS	TIRIKI
1.	Kolongolo	Kipkoiimet	Koimet	Golongolo
2.	Kikwameti	Kiplelach	Kaplelach	Kabalach
3.	Kananachi	Kimnyike	Kimnyikeo	Jiminigayi
4.	Kinyikeu	Nyonki	Nyonki	Nyonje
5.	Nyange	Maina	Maina	Mayina
6.	Maina	Juma	Chumo	Juma
6.	Chuma	Sawe	Sowe	Sawe
8.	Sawa	-	-	-

According to Hollis and Huntingford, the Nandi originally had eight age-sets, the first one being called *koronkoro*. About 1770, the two scholars argue, the Koronkoro warriors are said to have been attacked by the Maasai, an attack that they are said to have heavily lost. This led to the abandonment of the name of the age-set and its members were merged into that of the Kipkomiimet[29]. Peristiany[30] found a similar story among the Kipsigis.

The importance of the age-set in both communities lies in

the hierarchical arrangement of society which facilitated easier military organization because the age-set members already provided a basis for military recruitment. On the political scene, members of the senior age-sets provided the cadres of the council of elders from which heads of forts were drawn.

3.5 INITIATION

Initiation as a rite of passage was the most dramatic and outstanding experience in the life of every Tachoni youth. The cultural value of the ceremony lies in the practical experience through which the candidate underwent, something that imparted a lasting impression of profound transformation. This feeling of transformation was recognized by a change of social status from that of childhood to that of adulthood. For every young boy or girl, such an experience was one that lasted a lifestime. Perhaps more important was the fact that only after initiation could they be allowed to marry as well as have sexual intercourse with their suitors.

Prior to the coming of Europeans, Abatachoni used to initiate their youth by circumcision for boys and clitoridectomy for girls. Not until the 1920s did the female practice of circumcision end after the missionaries prevailed upon the colonial government to slap an official ban on it. However, until this time, female circumcision was a practice that lent evidence to the fact that Abatachoni drew origins from the Kalenjin. Female circumcision or clitoridectomy is an age-long

practice among all Kalenjin speaking peoples. Though the Bantu speaking Abaluyia do practise male circumcision, only Abatachoni among all the Luyia did practise male circumcision and female circumcision in pre-colonial days. It is quite likely that this practice, among other things stands out as a vestige of Kalenjin origins among Abatachoni. If it were to be argued that Abatachoni borrowed the practice, then one wonders why their close neighbours such as the Kabras did not also borrow it. It is therefore not substantive to suppose that female circumcision among Abatachoni was a borrowed practice. The Kabras share similar age-set names of male circumcision with Abatachoni but did not practise female circumcision[34]. The rites that culminate into circumcision are quite exclusively unique among Abatachoni as compared to those of the Kabras, or the whole Luyia community in general.

In the following pages we seek to attempt a brief survey of the similarities of initiation rites between Abatachoni and Kalenjin speakers. Special emphasis is put on the studies among the Nandi, Kipsigis, Kony and the Sebei. For both Abatachoni and the Kalenjin, initiation of girls and boys was a process comprising a series of rites that lasted over a year. The climax of these rites was the actual ritual of circumcision followed by others in which boys and girls were taught the general code of moral and ethical behaviour. Among the Kalenjin, as well as Abatachoni, the initial stage of initiation was marked by a seclusion of the candidates for a period of time before actual

circumcision[32].

On the whole, Peristiany gives a total of seven rites that make up a full initiation ceremony among the Kipsigis[33]. Myttle Langle[34], on the other hand, tabulates a total of thirteen stages that make up initiation among the Nandi. However, the series of rites are so closely interwoven and often overlap that in actual sense one recognizes only seven rites. Peristiany also gives a similar number of different stages through which the[35] Kipsigis youth undergo during initiation.

Whether in the case of Abatachoni or the Kalenjin, the seclusion of the boys and girls is a preparatory stage in which they undergo some teaching of the traditional lore and secrets of the society. This period of seclusion involves selection of a place in the bush where a special hut is constructed in which the boys stay. This hut is known as *Menjit*[36] among the kalenjin. Abatachoni call it *Erumbi* while the Bantuized Tiriki call it Lirumbi[37]. As the boys stay in their special hut of seclusion, parents are busy stocking food, fermenting flour for beer and storing milk for the ritual of circumcision. The details of how the boys are treated and what they are taught are well recounted by Hollis[38], Langle[39] and Peristiany[40]. The following is a parallel of the salient factors that seem strikingly similar among Abatachoni and the Kalenjin.

In their hut of seclusion the boys are under an appointed man who looks over their welfare. This man is known as *Matorinek*[41] among the Kalenjin and *Chemeli* among Abatachoni.

When all is set for the circumcision, a day is appointed by a council of elders among the Abatachoni while the Kalenjin seek permission from their spiritual leader called *Orkoyot*[42]. Following this, people are invited from all over the village and beyond for the occasion of circumcision. Among Abatachoni, the exercise of invitation was by boys who go round peoples homes as they ring bells called *Chinyimba*. The bells are struck against metal rings put around their wrists. The boys may move alone or in groups as they sing while running.

On the eve of circumcision, each of the other boys visit their maternal uncles where they are treated to a rigorous nerve killing ordeal. This is intended to establish if the boy(s) is (are) strongly prepared to stand the ritual of circumcision. The main emphasis being that it would be a disgrace to oneself or one's parents and society if the boy cried or feigned pain during the real operation[43]. The boy is therefore asked to change his mind if he thinks he is likely to cry. To prove this firm determination he is asked if he can stand being burnt one of his fingers by fire for some minutes equivalent to the period the actual operation takes. This ritual at the maternal uncle is akin, though not in totality, to what is called *Labet apeun*[44] among the Kalenjin.

After all this is over, a maternal uncle or his cousin in case the former is not present, gives the boy a present called *Likhoni*. In daily practice, a young bullock was slaughtered for the boy. A piece of meat from a bullock's sternum was put around

the neck of the boy from which the word *Likhoni* is derived. In some cases, however, the boy could be given a live animal which he goes home with. It is worthy of note that girls, on their part, do not go to their maternal uncles. This is also observable among the Kalenjin. In the evening of the same day, all the invited people converge at one chosen home where dancing and feasting go on all night. Early in the morning the boys are taken to a river where they are immersed into water, and their bodies smeared with cold mud from the swamp[43]. The logic behind this is to benumb the nerves of the boys. It is a kind of anesthesia aimed at minimizing bleeding during the operation.

As the immersion ceremony goes on, back at home, elders prepare special places where each boy will stand for the operation. These places are known as *Chitianyi* and comprise a mixture of ash and other material that few of the people except old people have a right to know. The mixture of ash and the material is sprinkled on specially marked up spots where grass has been dug up. At about 7 a.m. the boys are all ready at each spot for the operation. Depending on the arrangement, several boys would be circumcised at one home. They are told to face the East, never to blink, fidget or otherwise shake their bodies during the circumcision[44]. Among the Nandi, the boys are held by somebody standing behind. After circumcision of all the boys, the whole crowd joins in defeaning songs of jubilation and dancing to praise the boys' show of bravery. If a boy in the process of the operation cries, he is scorned and abused while

his friends receive praise and gifts from friends, parents plus invited guests.

The boys are later taken back to their hut, *Erumbi*, where they stay for more than five months, pending healing. It should be emphasized here that among Abatachoni, male circumcision was done jointly with that of girls[47]. The Kalenjin, on the other hand, appear to have performed female circumcision separately from that of boys. During circumcision, the boys were operated upon first before the girls. Special care was taken to ensure some privacy during the operation of girls by women crowding the "operation theatre" as opposed to boys who were exposed to the sight of everybody. Girls were operated on while lying on their backs on animal skins.

Once the circumcised boys (Abafulu) return into *Erumbi*, they continue to learn more about the community folklore and the secrets of the society. This is a process of learning that all the adult members of the society undergo while here. They are not allowed to eat using their hands, but special pointed sticks made from local trees. They are also not supposed to wash their bodies with water but often smear them with red ochre to distinguish them as circumcised boys in seclusion. For the five months in the hut, their parents prepare food, mainly gruel, meat, milk, blood and ugali to take to them. The girls, on the other hand, stay in a house of one old lady where they too, are treated and taught their social obligations. After the five-month stay in *Erumbi*, there follows a rite called *Okhuba amachi*[48]

(literally splashing water). This is when the boys are fully healed and are now allowed to wash their bodies with water. This is done by the immersion of the boys into water. The ritual is carried out separately for both girls and boys.

For the boys, a place of deep cool water in a river is chosen, where a structure called *Esitabicha* is constructed. The boys are led in a line each, passing through the structure before immersing himself in the water. The details of what goes at the *estabicha* is strictly secret and confidential. The boys who partake of such ritual are warned and take oath never to reveal what they see and what they are told. On taking the oath of secrecy, the boys ask the dead ancestors and the evil spirits to strike them if they ever divulge such knowledge to other people.

Later in the night, the boys undergo another ritual called *Okhulichana*[47]. Here, they are given final secrets of their role in society and the meaning of the whole process of initiation as they are expected to keep and perpetuate the cultural practice. The proceedings of *Okhulichana* are never known by anybody except those who have undergone it before. This is the most secret of all the rites of initiation for it is restricted in the numbers of the participants; only the elderly members of the society and the members of the senior age-sets at the time take part. The boys are challenged to a duel with a "leopard" as a test of their bravery, courage and fierceness, which are the main characteristics they are supposed to show in their lives.

In the early morning of the next day, the boys are shaven

and given new clothes, and then handed over to their respective parents. This marks the official end of the seclusion from society which began a few months before the actual circumcision. This official end of seclusion is thus an official recognition of the boys as adult members of society[50]. It is an analogy of what is known as *Tilet ap Korokwet* among the Kipsigis or "Welcome back" among the Nandi.

Whether it is among the Kalenjin or Abatachoni, the whole initiation ceremony is punctuated by a series of rites. The process is completed when the initiates come out of confinement and seclusion from the society. Despite some basic variations in the rites and the entire proces of initiation, the format of going about it still remains basically similar among both communities. Perhaps most important of all is the ritual of *Okhulichana*, whose mystery has always remained a striking feature among Abatachoni when treated as part of the Luhia community, except for the Tiriki. If one looks at the descriptions given by Hollis about the Nandi or Peristiany about the Kipsigis and compares them with the initiation rites of Abatachoni or Tiriki, there emerges a basic similarity in the rites, with only minor differences. But the minor differences could be said to accrue from the fact that both the Tiriki and Abatachoni have had prolonged interactions with the Bantu to the extent that some of the practices have been abandoned. However, it attests more to the factor of Kalenjin origins for both Abatachoni and Tiriki.

In either case, the initiates receive the end of their

seclusion with a sigh of relief. It completes a long story of an ordeal that all live never to forget. The whole ceremony of initiation fosters a sense of togetherness among the initiates, something that remains for the rest of their lives. To all, therefore, the importance of the initiation and the secret rituals they undergo make them feel they have shared an experience and knowledge of things that strangers have not yet learned. It is this experience that helps build up a sense of unity and ethnic cohesion. Indeed, the process of initiation with all its rites has for a long time remained an exclusive cultural practice of Abatachoni which has fostered ethnic cohesion and solidarity as a sub-ethnic entity within the other Luyia speaking groups.

3.6 MARRIAGE

Young men and women were eligible for courtship and marriage after both had undergone initiation. This initiation, was a process of several rites. In all probability, marriage and initiation ranked first among other cultural rites of passage among the Tachoni society.

According to oral traditions, there were two ways by which men and women found their respective suitors. Prior to any marital union, parents of the man could scout around for a possible wife for him. Their choice was suggested to the man, and his consent meant preparation for discussions between parents of the man and of the girl. In most cases, the choice of the

parents often prevailed over the man.

In essence, therefore, precolonial marriages among Abatachoni were purely prearranged except in minor cases where a man and a woman chose to elope secretly through their own private arrangements. This type of marital union was, however, often detested and scorned upon[51].

The first form of marriage in which parents of the man approached parents of the girl after making their choice was called *esiselelo*. If the girl's parents consented, there followed discussions for bridewealth. The most important thing in such discussions was the agreement upon the things to be paid as bridewealth. This bridewealth was mainly in the form of cattle, beer, and goats. In traditional practice, bride wealth was supposed to be paid before the two were officially declared as married. Payment of cattle was therefore a traditional way of formalizing the marital status of the couple.

Following payment of bride wealth, an occasion was chosen when the bridegroom was escorted by his peers to the home of the bride. The contingent was met on the way by a group of youngmen, normally age mates of the bride. There followed a feigned struggle over the bride between the two parties, which often ended in the victory for the bridegroom's side[52]. They could then go to the home of the groom where they were treated to a party of beer and food. The bridegroom then puts his partner in the house where they would stay as wife and husband.

The second form of marriage was known as *Okhwitikhisia.*

This was just the equivalent of eloping. Marriage of this kind, which involved private arrangement between the couple, was quite unpopular since it was a constant source of public scorn and derision amongst mates and relatives. For any of the two types of marriage, there were customary laws and rules that governed the institution. A man could not marry from his own clan. Such a thing was treated as an act of incest because a clan was merely an extended family of the nuclear family. Certain clans which claim common lineages also discouraged intermarriages between themselves. Such a practice was traditionally upheld because there are some clans which became independent of others although they trace origins to one eponymous founder. For example, a man of the Abasamo clan cannot marry from that of Abakhusia because these two claim descent from a common lineage. Equally, Abayumbu and Abaluhuu clans do not marry from each other[53].

It was also against customary law for brothers to marry sisters. If a man was polygamous, it was a general practice not to have the two wives from the same clan because members of the same clan were related by blood. As a rule also, a man could not marry the daughter of a fellow member of an age set. Fathers were obliged by custom to pay bridewealth of the first wife for their sons. If a man chose to marry other wives, the subsequent wives' bridewealth was paid by the man himself. During the pre-colonial period, bridewealth consisted six head of cattle, a goat and beer. But since colonial days, the number of cattle shot up to thirteen, and one has also to pay some money and goats[54].

3.7 RELIGION AND COSMOLOGY

The traditional religion of Abatachoni before the advent of Europeans was called *Omusambwa*. This means veneration of the spirits of the ancestors. During the pre-colonial times this traditional religion was quite transcendental to all aspects of life. In the daily use of the word *Omusambwa*, members of the society, when taking part in any cultural or social practices, always believed they were, in a way, practising religion. This was summed up in the phrase *Okhwisaya omusambwa*, (lit. imploring *omusambwa*)[55].

In all practical matters, whether it was celebrating a good harvest or a successful raid, or cleansing a certain immoral act, any form of participation in the ceremony was held as practising religion. The practice of the religious rites was therefore quite inseparable from that of observing cultural festivals. The pattern of supplication involved of invoking a supreme diety called *Wele*. *Wele* was believed to be reached via the spirits of the dead ancestors. Once people died, it was believed they went into a world of ghosts and spirits where they dwelled, acting as the bridge between the living and their gods. There was a common belief among Abatachoni that these spirits of the dead were benevolent at all time but could sometimes turn out to be malevolent due to the actions of the living, such as committing incest, failure to appease them by naming children after them or slaughtering animals as sacrifice to them. In such related cases, the spirits of the dead were invoked to intervene and save

the living from some unusual sickness or happenings[56].

Praying to god (*Wele*) was done by the head of the family on its behalf or, occasionally, every person on his or her own could ask *Wele* to bring health, fortune and other benefits. On rare occasions like times of drought, the society could congregate in numbers and implore the supreme being for intervention. During such occasions, a ritual could be held at a traditional shrine comprising a fig tree plus three sacred stones which symbolized the church. Sometimes, in the absence of a fig tree, a small structure was constructed behind a house to the east where the sun rises. This hut structure was grass thatched with a projecting stick on the kingpost. It was known as *Inju yo musambwa* or *Namwima* among Babukusu. According to Huntingford, the Nandi also built a similar hut called *Kot am musambaik*[57].

The Tachoni religion was polytheic in that god was concieved of in two forms. There was the god of good or *Wele mulayi* and the god of evil (*wele kubi*). *Wele mulayi* or god of good was also known as *Khakaba* (the provider). He was held as the ultimate source of life and held the destiny of all things on earth and in the sky. *Khakaba* was the source of fertility in men and women as well as the land.

On the other hand, god of evil was associated with all the bad things that befell man. This god of evil was held to dwell in the sea (*Inyanja ya walulwe*), which is supposed to be Lake Victoria. On the contrary, god of good was believed to reside in the sky (*Ikulu*). The god of evil was believed to gain

prominence with the advent of darkness, god of good was personified in the sun. Every sunrise was regarded as a blessing as it heralded the presence of *wele khakaba*. This personification of god in the sun (Enyanga) is similar to the Nandi concept of god Asis[58]. 'God' was prayed to by way of spitting saliva to the East and West early in the morning by either a father as head of the family or the mother. As one spat the saliva, one uttered such words as;

> "*Eh wele okhulinde obulai*"
> Oh god protect us well
>
> "*Nina kosela omundu wamwene manya*".
> If ever I wronged somebody let your wrath befall me.
>
> "*Mbula esikhonde khuyesi nomwana womundu*".
> I carry no grudge to anyone nor hate any one's child.
>
> *Khuwe ikhabi munju muno nende abandu bosi*
> Bring good health, fortune to our family and every body[59].

Late in the evening, the same words are repeated but for the last, god, personified in the sun is asked to recede well in peace as the sun sets. The interpretation of night as symbolic of evil and day as that of peace may have derived from the experience that during the day, men laboured and went about their daily activities in peace and harmony while night was seen as embodying a world of the unknown, full of risks and uncertainties. For a people who constantly faced unabated night attacks from external enemies, such a perception of life could

have arguably represented the only way of seeing into the world beyond ordinary understanding. Such a perception is not unique to Abatachoni. Amongst the Greek of classical times and even medieval Europe, light and darkness are treated as symbols of good and evil respectively.

3.8 DEATH AND THE WORLD OF SPIRITS

The conception of death and life hereafter among Abatachoni and the Nandi gives one an idea of sameness. This likeness lies in how the living conceived the souls of the dead[40]. It was held that a human being was in two forms, the physical form (*Omubili*) and the soul (*esimakombe*). Abatachoni perceived death as a crossing over point into the world of spirits (*Emakombe*). *Emakombe* therefore denotes a world of ghosts and spirits where intangible forms exist in a timeless world. These spirits were regarded as intermediaries between the living and god. They were, however, expected to reincarnate into new-borns[41].

Like the Nandi, Abatachoni believed that the spirit of the dead could come back to the world of the living in the form of rats and snakes. These animals were used as mere vehicles of the dead ancestors but not as the expression of the spirit itself[42]. The reincarnation of the dead ancestor into new born children of their descendants was believed to be recognized by the living contemporaries of the dead person. The new child could be seen to manifest certain aptitudes such as physical appearance, size and mannerism of the dead relative.

Both Abatachoni and Kalenjin speakers held that spirits of the dead were benevolent to the living unless when angered. One way of expressing their wrath to the living was to cause barrenness in women, deformity of the new borns, sickness in both women and men or natural calamity such as drought or crop failure. In such cases the ancestors were appeased by slaughtering an animal. The ancestors in the form of spirits, thus, controlled a greater portion of the welfare of the living. They were, as it was among the Nandi, behind the legal sanctions, and acted as guardians of public safety. This gave them a ritual and social value expressed in their fear and observation of things that were held to provoke them. This sacred veneration is what some Europeans incorrectly called ancestor worship[43].

It seems quite arguable that among Abatachoni and other African societies, god could not be approached without intermediaries. The power to link the living man and his god was thus the spirits of dead ancestors. That is why the living took extreme caution never to commit anything that could be construed as being sinful in the eyes of the spirits. Such sins include homicide, incest or failure to observe a certain taboo. There exists a paradox among Abatachoni in the way they conceived death. On one hand, death was perceived as an end of one's life at which point the living are transformed into spirits that dwell in the underworld. On the other hand, man is held as if he were meant to live forever. When death struck, therefore, it was seen as emanating from somewhere. An individual, despite the age, was

not held to die unless the death was caused by a malevolent force. Though *Wele* (god) was regarded as the ultimate source of life and death, man was conceived as if he were immortal. Death was therefore seen as a demonstration that man's destiny was governed by an omnipotent force, hence to understand the force behind death was to know the mysteries of death[44].

For every member that died, therefore, there were feelings of awe and bewilderment, but against a background of an illusion that human beings were to live forever. In which case, every moment of grief and mourning was centred on the unjust death of the relative or friend. Whatever age a person died at, it was held that it had been caused by some evil force. This conception has been eroded by christian teaching which entrusts the cause of death as the work of God calling his people back to eternal peace[45].

In looking at certain aspects of the Abatachoni culture, we can conclude that some of their practices have heavy Kalenjin origins. The initiation rituals and the eight cyclic age set system are some of the living testimonies of this Kalenjin influence.

FOOTNOTES

1. G.S. Were, A History of the Abaluyia of Western Kenya. C 1500 - 1900 (Nairobi: E.A.P.H., 1967) pp 99 - 117.

2. W. Buriah, O. I. Sept. 6th 1986

3. S. Wandibba, (Ed) History and Culture in Western Kenya. (Nairobi: G.S. Were Press, 1985).

4. A.K. Weramondi, O. I. Sept. 10th 1986
5. Ibid.

6. The Institution of *Omuviti* was confined to the clans of Abasioya, Abagachi, Abahabiya and Abakafusi. The holders of this Institution are, however, secretly selected.

7. G.S. Were, Western Kenya Historical Texts (Nairobi: E.A.P.H., 1962) see section on "Abatachoni of Ndivisi". The pouring of milk was to symbolize purity of heart and keeper of Justice.

8. A.K. Weramondi O.I. Sept 10th 1986.

9. W. Buriah, O.I. Sept 6th 1986, S. Kituli O.I. Sept 12th 1986, Wekesa Chenonoi, O.I. Jan. 7th 1987 and Namutala Samiuta, O.I. Oct. 22nd 1986.

10 Ibid
11. S. Kituli, O.I. Sept. 24th 1986
12. M. Malike, O.I. Oct. 27th 1986
13. F. Namasaka, O.I. Sept. 7th 1986
14. S. Kisiangani O.I. Sept. 18th 1986
15. D.W. Tawayi, O.I. Jan 6th 1987
16. I.K. Palia, O.I. Sept 16th 1986
17. Ibid
18. S. Namutala, O.I. Oct 22nd 1986

19. W. Goldschmidt, Culture and Behaviour of the Sebei. (Berkley: University of California Press, 1976) pp 102-108.

20. W.H. Sangree Age prayer and politics in Tiriki of Kenya. (London: O.U.P., 1966) pp 48-82.

21. C.W. Huntingford, The Nandi of Kenya (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1953) p. 58.

22. M.S. Langley The Nandi of Kenya. (London: Hist and Company, 1979) see the section on initiation.

23. J.G. Peristiany, The Social Institutions of the Kipsigis (London: Roulledge and Kegan Paul, 1939) p. 30.

24. S. Naibei, Oral Interview, Oct. 25th 1986.
25. W.H.Sangree, op. cit p. 67
26. C.W. Huntingford, op. cit p. 74
27. Peristiany, op. cit pp.42-43
28. A.K. Waramondi, O.I. Nov. 11th 1986

29. Hollis, The Nandi (Oxford: Claredon Press, 1909) p. 52
30. Peristiany, op. cit p. 6-29
31. J. Karani, O.I. Dec. 6th 1986
32. M.S. Langley, op. cit pp. 18-40
33. Peristiany, op. cit pp. 6-29
34. Hollis, op. cit p. 52
35. Sangree, op. cit pp. 52-60
36. Hollis, op. cit pp. 52-60
37. Langley, op. cit pp.18-40
38. Peristiany, op. cit pp. 4-29
39. Hollis, op. cit p. 52
40. Huntingford, op. cit p. 63
41. Peristiany, op. cit p. 14

42. This rite is the analogy of "Immersion" among the Nandi. see M.S. Langley, op. cit pp. 38-40

43. M. Fukwo, O.I. Sept. 20th 1986

44. This ritual is the culmination of the whole process that begins with seclusion up to circumcision. After this, both boys and girls are now welcomed back by their parents and are officially declared as adult members of the society.

45. P. Khasewa, O.I. Oct. 6th 1986
46. A.N. Kerre, O.I. Nov. 26th 1986
47. Z. Kimokoti, O.I. Oct. 24th 1986
48. Huntingford, op. cit p. 132
49. Ibid, pp. 44-47
50. S.M. Lutubula, O.I. Dec. 2nd 1986
51. Z. Velia, O.I. Oct 10th 1986
52. Hollis, pp. 64-68
53. H.M. Wangila, O.I. Oct. 22nd 1986
54. Ibid
55. S. Kapchanga, O.I. Nov. 23rd 1986
56. Ibid
57. Hollis, op cit pp 64-68

58. R.S. Obler, "Women, men property and change in Nandi District" (London: Ph.D. Dissertation, Temple University, Philadelphia, 1982) pp. 126-130.

59. I.K. Matinyi, O.I. Sept. 16th 1986.
60. Hollis, op cit pp. 63-67
61. Y. Mukoyani, O.I. Oct. 18th 1986.
62. Ibid
63. M. Lichuma, O.I. Oct. 24th 1986.
64. Ibid
65. N. Mulagu, O.I. Sept. 11th 1986.

CHAPTER FOUR

4.0 MILITARY ORGANIZATION

4.1 INTRODUCTION

For a century before the coming of European rule, 1750 -1850 AD, the Abatachoni had adopted certain defence strategies to contain aggression from their neighbours. These strategies included, among others warrior, institutions based on circumcision age groups, forts and the manufacture of various weapons. This chapter addresses itself to the significance of forts, weapons used and military organization.

4.2 WAR MOTIVES

Looking at the oral history of migration and settlement of Abatachoni, one inherent theme is that of external aggression. From the time they claim to have broken away from the Kalenjin at Sengeli, up to the coming of Europeans, much of their history is that of continued insecurity posed by hostile neighbours. Many of the motives for this external aggression were centred on cattle, which was their economic mainstay. Most notable of these aggressors were the Nandi, the Maasai and the Kony[1].

4.3 FORTS AND THEIR MILITARY IMPLICATIONS.

Before the coming of Europeans in the late 19th century both Abatachoni and their neibouring Babukusu were living in walled fortifications called *chingoba*[2]. It is not certain when

Abatachoni began building their forts although Simiyu Wandibba argues that the Babukusu started building forts while staying at Sirikwa in Uasin Gishu Plateau[3]. Given that accounts fail to state when fort building began, it is quite likely that it may have been borrowed from the Babukusu.

Be it among Abatachoni or their Bukusu neighbours, the art of building forts grew out of the need to ward off repeated aggression from hostile neighbours. For about one or two centuries before the coming of the Europeans, both communities had witnessed constant cattle raids from the Maasai and the Nandi of Uasin Gishu Plateau. The oral traditions of Abatachoni are replete with the theme of Nandi and Maasai cattle raids. They provided a buffer zone between the Nandi and the Babukusu and so they bore the most bitter brand of the Nandi aggression. Moreover, many of these attacks were always launched without warning and often at night.

Once settled in modern Bungoma, Abatachoni evolved the fortbuilding technology as the only pragmatic form of self-defence against the Maasai and the Nandi. By the coming of Europeans, walled fortifications were a common way of settlement which, in essence, consituted defence as well as socio-economic units of organization. This was equally the same with their Babukusu neighbours.

Oral traditions among both Abatachoni and Babukusu do not suggest any hostile relations between the two, which suggest a shared history of facing a common foe[4]. It is therefore, not

surprising that Abatachoni accepted Babukusu to seek refuge in their fort of Chetambe in 1895 after being routed out of their Lumboka fort by the Europeans[5].

The military significance of the forts was that they acted as a strong hold which the external attackers could not easily break through. The forts were oval in shape, and varied in size from one to another. It is estimated that one given fort could accommodate between seventy to eighty families. The walls of the forts were made of mud mixed with small murram. Surrounding the walls, about three metres away, moats were dug out about two metres deep and four metres wide. This was intended to make it hard for external attackers to cross and enter the fort. Occupants, however, knew how to get around the problem of entering. Some places were chosen out where artificial bridges called *Omufunje* were erected to enable people cross. The building of the forts was done by men while the women drew water and worked for the men[6].

The sites of the forts were carefully examined before being chosen. These were sites that offered conducive conditions for surveillance and easier routes of escape in case of seeming defeat. Open lands and hill tops were often preferred because they provided excellent distant surveillance[7]. Good examples of such places were *Ndengelwa*, *Mabanga*, *Lugulu*, *Chetambe Hill* and *Muchi*. On Chetambe Hill, a famous fort was constructed and named after a man called Chetambe This is where Babukusu fought their last battle against the imposition of colonial administration by

the British[8].

Each fort had a certain number of gates depending on its size. At certain points around the walls small holes were made through which people could shoot arrows or spears in case of a siege. Inside the forts, houses were constructed plus animal kraals. When all the animals had receded from their pastures and all members of a fort returned, the gates were "bolted" by use of heavy logs of wood. Late-comers were supposed to identify themselves by use of institutionalized code names or signals. For a people whose life was tormented by cattle-hungry enemies, no defence strategy could perhaps have matched that of one of constructing forts. This is why one can certainly argue that unabated insecurity posed by external aggressors was quite instrumental in the need to build these forts as a defence arrangement[9].

4.4 MILITARY STRUCTURE

For Abatachoni, whose traditions trace common origins from Kalenjin speaking peoples, their military structure bears some resemblance that of the latter. Both Abatachoni and the Kalenjin derived military organization from the circumcision age-sets. The military structure of Abatachoni was not so elaborate and sophisticated as that of the Kalenjin, however. This was because they appear to have organized their structure more for defence other than offensive purposes as the Kalenjin, especially the Nandi.

Oral traditions of Abatachoni do not portray them as expansionist or warlike as was the case with the Maasai and the Nandi in pre-colonial days[10]. If external raids were ever launched by them, then they may have been done specifically to retrieve stolen animals or avenge earlier attacks, but not to seek to expand territorially at the expense of their neighbours. Moreover, such raids were done by small forces of people rather than on a large scale.

Several villages that made up a fort therefore constituted a defence unit. All men in each fort formed what one could call a "people's militia". They were always on the alert to rise to the defence of their fort. Warriorhood was entered on initiation by way of circumcision. Each and every man at all times belonged to one of the eight cyclic age-sets. Among the attributes of a good warrior were the ability to stand the rigours of initiation, particularly actual circumcision. Young men who flinched during the operation became a constant source of scorn among fellow age-mates. Warriors, particularly young ones, were expected to show courage, bravery and enormous endurance in hard times such as war. The bravest of the brave were known as *Abarunyi* and were the ones who made up the advance party in a military engagement. In either offensive or defensive operations, an army was split into two. A group of fifty to a hundred warriors was called *Enyatuti*, usually under a leader called *Laeiterani*. Several of these *enyatuti* made up *Ekhamari*. This was a section of people charged with spying purposes, and comprised several warlords or

Jaiterians[11]. These ones studied their opponents' strategies and signalled when and how to attack.

Unlike the Nandi, Abatachoni did not perform a handing over ceremony of warriorhood from one age group to another. Once one was initiated into an age-set, one remained as a warrior into old age. However, it was the young energetic warriors that provided the bulk of the army rather than the old ones. The young warriors were constantly at the service of the society and derived most of the war tactics from their seniors, alongside whom they fought. Martial arts in preparation for warriorhood began much earlier, even before the age of initiation[12].

4.5 WEAPONRY

Until the arrival of fire arms in the second half of the 19th century, the weapons of war among Abatachoni comprised shields, clubs, long spears, arrows and bows, and spears called *Amasakha* (sin. *Lisakha*). The spears were of two types, those which were broad and thin-faced ones. Many of these spears appear to have been locally manufactured although there is no doubt some were acquired from the Nandi and the Maasai. One tradition recounts that barbed arrows were borrowed from the Nandi as opposed to plain arrows which Abatachoni used primarily for bleeding and hunting small game[13].

The broad faced spears were more popularly used than the small ones. Shields were obtained from skins of buffalo, hippopotamus and another animal called *imbili*. Shortage of these

animals, however, compelled Abatachoni to turn to the use of cattle skins for the shields. The shields varied in size and shape. As Joseph Thomson observed:

> Their shields are of all shapes and sizes, though the characteristic form is enormous in dimensions and weight. It consists of an almost entire buffalo skin, four feet long as much broad, bent so as to form an angle, thus surrounding the bearer completely except in rear. When advancing to attack, nothing but his head is seen[14].

Every warrior carried with him a shield, two spears and a club. Use of these weapons was an art one acquired after repeated drilling and training from older members of the society. War tactics as a whole were formally acquired in the process of one's growth, from youth to warriorhood.

4.6 WARFARE

Broadly speaking, one can discern about three motives for war. First were the wars that were launched to avenge past attacks. These wars were aimed at retrieving cattle, which was the chief cause of all the conflicts. Another motive for war was defence. According to oral evidence, Abatachoni have fought more defensive wars than offensive ones. These defensive wars were directed against the Nandi, the Maasai and the Elgon Kalenjin (Kony)[15]. The third and last motive was war for territorial expansion. Oral evidence is lacking on any war that was fought between Abatachoni and any of their neighbours over territorial expansion. Had there been any war over land, this would have

been between them and the Babukusu who displaced them from their lands of Sang'alo, Malakisi and West Bukusu.

4.7 WAR WITH THE NEIGHBOURS

During the 19th century, Abatachoni suffered attacks from the Nandi and the Maasai of Uasin Gishu Plateau. The causes of these wars were due to cattle. There is no evidence available to ascertain as to when exactly these wars did occur. However, oral accounts are still fresh with the atrocities that the people faced at the hands of the marauding Nandi cattle rustlers. The most remembered of all these attacks was the war of Mabanga. This one was fought at modern Mabanga, where the Farmers Training Centre now stands, on the Bungoma-Webuye road. Alot of people are said to have been killed in this war.

Another memorable Nandi attack was that which came while Abatachoni were staying at Mwalie (modern Malakisi). Here, the Nandi were said to have been repulsed with heavy losses. Abatachoni, however, lost one of their leaders called Manyei of Abangachi clan[15], plus several herds of cattle. To this day, the incident is still remembered in a war song called *Sisenda ya Manyei. Sisenda* is said to have been a very big and fat bull of Manyei which was part of the herds of cattle that the Nandi took off with. According to their oral evidence, not less than ten wars were fought between Abatachoni and the Nandi. The last of these may have occurred by the close of the 19th century at the Mautuma area of the present day Lugari Division in Kakamega

District. This area (Mautuma) was formerly known as Silungai. A Tachoni-Nandi war was fought, where the former were led by a man called Kituyi Se Ngosia of the Abahabiya clan, whereas the Nandi were led by one Arap Ngeny. The war ended in the loss of Arap Ngeny, and this generated animosity for years. The Nandi launched a revenge attack later against some bands of Tachoni hunters after they had settled at Lugari[16].

About 1900 AD, these Tachoni-Nandi wars over cattle were concluded by "signing" of a peace treaty. This involved a ritual where both parties held a puppy dog across a stream of water. The dog was then cut into two halves, each party going with one of the halves as they renounced hostilities with the other[17]. According to the oral traditions, the Nandi were led by two men, one called Masoni Kiptur and another called Weramondi. Today, the men who were born around this time are named after Kiptur and Weramondi, some of whom were my informants. Abatachoni were, on their part, led by Mulati Se Ngosia and Se Welahuche[18].

Abatachoni also fought occasional wars over cattle with the Elgon Kalenjin, notably the Kony. These conflicts were also resolved when Soita of the Kony "ate a dog" with Iyaya of Abatachoni on river Sosio. This river formed the boundary between Abatachoni and the Kony. This same truce is also recalled in the traditions of the Sebei of Eastern Uganda[19]. No oral evidence suggests war-like relations between Abatachoni and the Babukusu except for one incident at Sibembe, when the two came to a brink of war. However, strained relations always

existed between the two owing to the fact that Abatachoni often saw the Babukusu as expanding at the expense of the former's. These strained relations continued without sparking off any explosive confrontation, however. It has already seen how Abatachoni even gave shelter to the Babukusu in their fort called Chetambe.

Though Abatachoni never faced the impact of the Teso wars of expansion directly, the wars with Babukusu affected them indirectly. The Teso expansion from eastern Uganda into Kenya sent a chain reaction that finally affected Abatachoni. While displacing the Babukusu from their lands, the latter in turn pushed Abatachoni further into Kakamega, Busia and into their modern homes. The Teso expansion was resolved through fierce battles with the Babukusu. The Iteso are remembered for their notorious surprise attacks upon Babukusu, which forced the latter to enter a military pact with Abatachoni[20]. In the ensuing offensive, the joint Tachoni-Bukusu army launched a surprise mid-night attack using fire-burning arrows that set ablaze the houses of the Iteso. This tactic paid dividends as the allied forces managed to repulse the Iteso. Not until such a strategy of night attacks using fire was adopted did the Teso slow down their pace of encroachment upon the Bukusu territory. They were, otherwise, remembered as intrepid fighters who gallantly fought to the last warrior. Oral accounts repute them to have had mastery of blocking the enemies spears with such artistry that baffled both the Babukusu and Abatachoni alike[21].

CONCLUSION.

In the foregoing pages, the military organization of Abatachoni before the advent of British colonial rule has been discussed. It has observed that continued insecurity as posed by hostile neighbours compelled Abatachoni to adopt defence strategies that were aimed at warding off external aggression. One of these adoptions was the building of forts which was a common place fashion both among Abatachoni as well as Babukusu.

External aggression was originally from the Nandi, the Maasai, the Kony and later the Iteso. The significance of the forts as a military defence initiative has been underscored. We also looked at was the military structure, organization of warriors and the basis of recruitment into warriorhood. All this points out that like the Kalenjin, Abatachoni derived their military organization warrior recruitment from their circumcision age sets. The nature of the wars plus the parties involved indicate that Abatachoni intensely interacted with the Kalenjin through wars and other forms even, after breaking away from them. This has left a lasting Kalenjin cultural influence upon them.

FOOTNOTES

1. See chapter 2 on migration and settlement.
2. S. Wandibba, "Bukusu Forts", (B.A. Dissertation, Department of History, University of Nairobi 1972) p.26.
3. Ibid p 4
4. Most informants interviewed did not recall anytime in the past when the Bukusu and Abatachoni ever fought.

5. C.W. Hobley, Kenya: From chartered company to colony (London: H.F and Witherby, 1939) p.82. See also A.K. Nangulu, "The imposition of colonial rule in Bungoma district", B. A. Dissertation, Department of History, University of Nairobi 1986.

6. M. Murasame, O.I. Oct. 20th 1986.
7. Ibid
8. C.W. Hobley, Op. cit p. 82.
9. F. Namasaka, O.I. Sept. 7th 1986.

10. The oral accounts have quite little of the Abatachoni having waged repeated attacks agains to their neighbours as was the case against them.

11. K. Weramondi, O.I Nov. 11th 1986.
12. S.M. Mukhisa, O.I. Sept 7th 1986.
13. W. Buriah, O.I. Sept 9th 1986.

14. J. Thomson, Through Maasailand, (London: Frank Cass, 1968) p. 280.

15. W. Buriah, O.I. Jan 6th 1987, Wekesa C., O.I. 7th Jan 1987 and M. Malele, Oct 27th 1987.

16. Kapchanga, O.I. Sept. 22nd 1986.
17. A.K. Weramondi, O.I. Nov. 11th 1986.
18. W. Chenonoi O.I. Jan. 7th 1987.

19. W. Goldschimidt, Culture and Behaviour of the Sebei (Berkley: University of California Press, 1976) pp 20-21

20. A.K. Palia, O.I. Sept. 17th and 25th 1986.
21. Ibid, W. Buriah, O.I. Jan 6th 1982 and K. Weramondi, Nov. 11th 1986.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE ECONOMY

5.1 INTRODUCTION

For a greater part of the late 19th century until the establishment of colonial rule, the economy of Abatachoni principally hinged on agriculture, livestock keeping and barter trade. Since there was no medium of exchange such as money, trade was basically that of barter in which goods were exchanged for others. In this chapter, an attempt is made to discuss the salient features of the pre-colonial economic structure of Abatachoni. The chapter focuses on land tenure, agriculture, livestock keeping, trade and local industries. These were the major occupations whose products provided the basis of economic activity.

5.2 LAND TENURE

In both social as well as economic relations, land was an important factor in the pre-colonial Tachoni society. Land was owned as communal property, hence providing the focus for social interactions as well as economic activities. It was the lifeblood of the people for it was from land that people got their food and reared their animals. In theory, land was owned by the community on the basis of clans. In practice, however, individuals owned portions for their exclusive use. However, ownership of such portions was rooted in the community or clan,

which possessed the powers of allocation and disposal[1].

The communal land tenure system, while recognizing exclusive land use by individuals of their respective portions, also recognized certain areas that were for public use. Such areas included grazing lands like moorlands, salt licks, rivers and open forest lands. People grazed their cattle freely in the fields as nobody could claim individual rights over them. Open forests were also exploited for wood , hunting and grazing as a communal property[2].

The occupation of any given land was a function of who first cleared the field for settlement. Any clan elder who first sighted an area for settlement provided the impetus for other clan members to join him and so make the area recognized as land belonging to his clan.In most cases, however , it was possible for people of different clans to occupy a common area. During the 19th Century, Abatachoni, together with their closely-related Babukusu were staying in walled-fortifications called *Chingoba*[3]. One fort could harbour people from different clans who, in turn, owned both grazing lands and agricultural fields as a community. On the whole, therefore, whereas the community or clan possessed the powers of land allocation and disposal, in the long run, an individual retained the rights of use and each one's portion was generally held in respect as an individual's property[4]. A head of family was regarded as the owner of his portion of land and retained the prerogative to subdivide it among his wives or sons or to decide what crops to plant on the piece of land[5]. Women,

in practice had no rights of their own land, but used their husbands portions for usufructual gains. Land, like any other property, was owned by a man or his sons due to the traditional practice of the society. Being a patrilineal society, property ownership and its inheritance was defined along male lines as stipulated by customary law and practice. In polygamous families, for example, sons of each wife inherited those portions of their mother as allocated by the head of the family[4]. This was by the father himself if alive or clan elders if the father was dead.

5.3 AGRICULTURE

Agricultural production among the pre-colonial Abatachoni was basically for subsistence. No motive for profit played a role in the process of producing food crops as it later did after the introduction of the cash economy in the present century. Food crops were only grown to provide enough for consumption within a season. Among the crops that were grown include simsim (Chinuni), bananas, sorgum (Amabele), millet (Obule), ground nuts (Chimbande), cassava, beans, peas, sweet potatoes. The most important crops were, however, sorghum, millet and cassava from which gruel and *Ugali* were made. From sorghum and millet was also made the local beer which was a popular drink at feasts, marriage and other local cultural festivities. Food crops such as cassava, ground nuts and bananas were often exchanged for other goods or used as payment in kind, for any social labour an

individual rendered to another. It was a common practice in traditional society to express gratitude and satisfaction for any help from one by giving him or her some quantity of foodstuff[7].

As already seen, agricultural lands were communally owned, although individuals tilled their own portions either as a family unit or as groups of families depending on the understanding between families. Farming was done outside the forts, normally at a place not far away. Men under clan heads went out to clear and prepare the fields for cultivation. Each man allocated his portion to his wife or wives in his capacity as the head of the family. Each family had its own plot distinguished from the others by a ridge of untilled land[8]. The fields ran parallel to each other, the length of which was decided by a man by throwing a lump of earth up to where it fell. The whole area under cultivation was enclosed by all men on a communal basis. This enclosure was done by use of an artificial hedge of thorny trees and logs of wood.

To keep off birds from destroying the crops, young uncircumcised boys were always on the lookout till the crops became ready for harvesting. Wild animals as well as domestic ones, were kept off by digging moats or trenches called *Ovuko* about a metre from the hedge. The trenches were intended to either scare off the animals or trap them[9].

5.4 DIVISION OF LABOUR

In the whole process of agricultural production, there was a well defined role-structure based on sex and age. Clearing of the fields was done by men, while the women did the tilling. One of the factors that determined the size of a woman's portion was her industry in tilling the land. Apart from clearing the fields, men also erected the enclosure and built the granaries for storage of the crops[10]. Cultivation, weeding and harvesting were done by both men and women. Young men, on the other hand, did the grazing of cattle while others helped their elders in the above mentioned duties. Women, however, did much of the work in the whole production process. Besides tilling the land, they stored the food and did the cooking for their men as well as cleaning the home-stead drawing water and fetching wood[11].

The cultural setting thus determined the division of labour in which the youth grew up adopting the socially sanctioned duties on the basis of sex and age. The young girls grew up learning from their mothers duties like gardening, cooking, housekeeping, grinding millet as well as fetching fire wood[12]. Boys, on the other hand, learned from their fathers how to clear fields, herd animals, and built granaries and houses. They were also taught martial arts as a preparation for warriorhood which they joined after initiation[13].

Weeding and harvesting was done by both men and women, though women did the greater part of the work. In some cases, women formed groups to weed the crops of one family after

another. This assured them a shorter time of weeding or harvesting a yield that would have otherwise taken a much longer period. In some families where labour was scarce individual families could call friends, neighbours or relatives to come for help. Such help was paid for in kind by either giving the helpers some portion of the crops at the end of the yield or slaughtering an animal whose beef was given to the helping families[14]. As people went about the harvesting, energetic men carried the crops from the fields to the forts for storage in granaries. Construction and repair of the granaries was often done three months prior to the harvest. This was between the months of August and October, with real harvesting starting in November[15]. This was a major harvest as the fast maturing crops were harvested as early as August. Each family had two granaries, a big one for millet and a small one for sorghum. In some cases, men built their own granaries into which excess yield was stored. Such storage of excess produce assured the family of food sustenance during lean periods like when the crops failed, drought or other catastrophes[16]. In homes where the excess produce was quite reasonable, men as family heads would sell off the surplus to other needy members of the society. Sometimes, however, this duty of selling would be delegated to the wives. In such cases, foodstuffs like grains, cassava and groundnuts were bartered for animals like chicken, goats and sheep.

According to the oral accounts of Abatachoni, agriculture was initially practised as a secondary occupation prior to their

settlement in modern Bungoma[17]. This is also true of the Kalenjin speaking peoples in pre-colonial days. The Kalenjin as is known from their early History, kept cattle as their primary occupation[18]. Agriculture was not a major economic activity. Their migratory lifestyle in pursuit of pasturelands was not conducive to fullscale agriculture. But by of 1800 AD, Abatachoni had been assimilated into Bantu agriculturalists. The use of the iron hoe and switch to fullscale agriculture is one of the main and lasting influences of the Bantu upon Abatachoni.

The adoption of agriculture as opposed to keeping livestock was due to climatic, ecological as well as cultural conditions.

The oral traditions of Abatachoni point out that while staying at Sengeli, Kitale and Mt. Elgon, their economy primarily depended on livestock. It is argued by historians that ecology, climate and other factors influence a people's mode of economic adoption[19]. Christopher Ehret[20] argues that from AD 1500 to AD 1800, the western part of Kenya witnessed a lot of ethnic cultural interactions that caused wide ranging changes. Apart from these ethnic interactions the ecology and climate of this region also played a major role in shaping the economic activities of the people in the area. This greatly affected Abatachoni under study.

Between 1600 and 1800 AD Abatachoni were settled in modern Western Kenya. They had come in increased contact with other peoples, notably of Bantu origin. The change from livestock keepers to sedentary agriculture is one of the wide ranging

changes that have been mentioned above. This came about gradually and must have taken a considerable period of time. In the first place, the early Kalenjin that later became Abatachoni were a minority living in an area that was largely settled by Bantu agriculturalists. With the passage of time, more and more Bantu speakers kept on settling in the area thereby increasing the chances of assimilation[21]. The earlier ancestors of Abatachoni thus found themselves hemmed within a cultural environment. Due to prolonged contacts through trade, marriage, war and travel, the earlier Abatachoni subsequently adopted some aspects of the Bantu culture, including economic practices. The net result of all this was a progressive constriction of land for cattle keeping. In such circumstances of human overcrowding, it became rather impracticable to sustain an economy that was essentially based on animal husbandry. Besides, the soils and rains of the area were most suitable for agriculture and this which became the most appropriate economic activity. This, however, does no suggest that Abatachoni abandoned livestock keeping completely. Emphasis on agriculture as a better alternative to livestock keeping was a matter of convenience for a people that were left with limited options. Indeed cattle is still of strong cultural attachment among Abatachoni. This affinity to livestock keeping is an age long practice among the Kalenjin.

5.5 FARMING TOOLS

The farming tools in pre-colonial Tachoni society were not sophisticated. Until the introduction of the iron hoe in the first half of the 18th century, people were using digging sticks called *emilo (sing. omulo)*. Animal ribs, especially those of elephants and other big wild animals, were also used[22]. Clearing of fields was done by use of big sticks or clubs. The use of iron hoes, which was borrowed from the Samia[23], revolutionalized agricultural production. Not only were Abatachoni able to clear larger fields for cultivation using iron slashers and matchets, but the earth was prepared much more easily using the hoes. This increased the acreage as people were able to plant more. Subsequently, the output increased manifold, ensuring a steady supply of food.

The hoe technology is said to have been imported from the Samia of modern Busia district[24] marking a progressive reliance on agriculture which, assumed a predominant preference over livestock keeping. The increased use of the hoe as a farming tool may suggest an adoption as well as a growing dependence on root and tuber crops. The emphasis on root or tuber crops was an economic activity that was borrowed from the Bantu by the early Kalenjin that inhabited western Kenya between 1500-1800 AD[25].

5.6 LIVESTOCK KEEPING

The keeping of livestock has been an inseparable aspect of Tachoni history from time immemorial. If has from their oral accounts of migration and settlement, the dominant theme is that of cattle raids. They moved from one place to another either in pursuit of pasture or running away from external attacks focused on their cattle. During the 18th century and the earlier centuries, livestock keeping continued to be an occupation of immense cultural attachment as well as economic value. The animals that were kept in those pre-colonial days included cattle, sheep, goats, fowl, dogs and cats[24].

Cattle were the most important of all the animals. Whereas dogs were used for hunting, cats were kept as pets. The importance of cattle lay in their economic value. They were kept for milk, blood, ghee, and the skins that were used for making beddings, straps and clothes. More importantly, cattle were used as an index of social status. The traditional society of Abatachoni measured wealth by the number of herds a man had. Moreover, cattle were the standard medium of transacting marriages, bridewealth was paid in form of cattle. Only by its payment could the suitors enter matrimonial union. Besides transacting marriages, cattle were also used for cultural sacrifices such as cleansing a violation of a taboo, placating hostile ancestral spirits or paying fines that were for crimes such as murder, adultery, incest or manslaughter[27].

Animal grazing was done collectively by men accompanied by

young uncircumsized boys. The grazing lands were open for communal use. The logic behind collective grazing was to boost security for the cattle for which sudden raids were launched by the Maasai and the Nandi. During the 18th Century, the Maasai, and later the Nandi, often raided modern Western Kenya for cattle. These raids were waged unexpectedly. This brought about the need for collective grazing to ensure that men were to defend and guard their herds against external attackers. Besides, since the land tenure system was not individualistic, no one could lay monopoly over any given grazing land[28].

Animals were driven out of the forts to the grazing fields early in the morning, after the women had finished the milking. If the grasslands were far, men carried their packed lunch of milk and smoked meat. While some did the herding, others were on constant look-out for external aggressors or did hunting. Since cattle were kept more for milk and blood than for meat, the latter was derived largely from hunting wild game.

By about 5 p.m., the animals were expected to be back in the stalls to enable early milking and tethering of the calves. Men could then eat supper before relaxing with a gourd of milk or beer, if any. Immediately after sunset, the gates to the forts were "bolted" till the following day when the men would take out the animals for grazing[29].

As already indicated, social wealth was measured in cattle. As such, Abatachoni attached cultural as well as symbolic importance to cattle. The less fortunate members who did not own

a herd could enter a contract with those who had several to be loaned a cow. One would then rear the cow on behalf of the owner as it gave birth to calves. Later, the owner could take one or two of the cow's offsprings and give it to the loanee. This social contract was known as *Okhwechekha* and was a very common way of owning cattle[30]. Otherwise people without cattle could exchange a cow or bull against a number of goats and sheep or even grains. In most cases, young men who sought to marry and had no cattle for bridewealth often went out to raid so that they get enough to pay for their wives. This need for cattle, whose importance lay in its cultural and social value, was a constant cause of conflicts between the Abatachoni and their neighbours, especially the Nandi and the Kony.

5.7 TRADITIONAL INDUSTRY AND TRADE

Before the coming of the Europeans, there were traditional industries in the Tachoni society that specialized in manufacturing tools and implements to meet the local demands of the people. Though basically traditional, these industries relied on a technology that was relevant to peoples felt needs. Despite its crude nature, the technology was a product of the whole cultural development of the people.

The most important local industries were those that manufactured iron tools. Besides animals and agricultural products, the tools of these industries played a leading role in the local trade, either among Abatachoni themselves or with their

neighbours. The system of exchange was that of bartering the tools and implements of these industries against each other or against animals[31].

IRON INDUSTRY

According to their oral traditions, Abatachoni claim to have known the art of iron smelting since time immemorial. Other traditions, however, point out that the art was learned from people known as *Abakinisu*. These are said to be Kalenjin related people who pioneered Abatachoni in settling in modern Bungoma District. The Tachoni traditions claim to have come across *Abakinisu* in the general areas of modern Chesamisi, Kimilili, and Kitale[32]. No data are, however, available to suggest when this was. Be that as it may, it is possible that Abatachoni never did iron smithing on a large scale till much later. Among the iron tools were spears, plain and barbed arrows, curved knives for harvesting called *Chinjeso*, stabbing spears called *Amasakha*, clearing slashers (*Emiolo*), neckbells for cattle, ringing bells for boys who were candidates for initiation (*Chinyimba*), anklets and circumcision knives (*Amahalo*). Other products were for aesthetic value such as earrings[33].

The trade in iron products was confined to a small section of the society based on clans. The clans had, in turn, individuals who were said to be possessed with the spirits of iron smithery. Women did not practise the art as it was arduous and time consuming. Black smiths were expected to observe some

given taboos which were held as part of the secrets surrounding the profession. The smiths enjoyed exclusive social privileges and could by virtue of their trade become wealthy individuals. This was because the tools of their trade were exchanged for animals such as goats, sheep and cattle[34].

CITING THE ORE

The selection of iron are (*Oburali*) was done by a thorough study of the rocks in the locality. If the rock had hard black stones, it was broken up and subjected to some heat for testing[35]. If the rock turned out to give some molten material then the area became a source of the ore. People could then transport the ore to specially built workshops where furnaces for smelting were constructed. These workshops were built of sticks with a grass thatched roof[36].

Bellows were built so that they would be blown or fanned to provide a steady and regular blast of air for burning logs of wood or charcoal. The bellows were made of softened animal skin with clay pipe ends through which the pressure for fanning was done by contracting the bellows. As one squeezed the bellows, pressure fanned the burning fire to the required temperature for the ore to melt. After intensive heating, the malleable iron was collected in special structures and then allowed to cool slowly.

The iron could then be taken away for storage or to an ironfounder for heating again to make various tools and implements as one wished. The land occupied by Abatachoni during

the 19th century appears to have not had rich deposits of the iron ore. Abatachoni thus heavily relied on supplies from the Samia of modern Busia district[37]. However, small quantities were found locally to meet their demands. For example, one area to the east of Chetambe Hill had some good deposits of the ore[38]. Several furnaces were constructed in this general area to cater for the local demand for iron objects. The area is now known as Mikuva, reminiscent of the bellows. The name *emikuva* means bellows in Tachoni language[39].

Men could therefore buy and store the iron which they would later take to an ironfounder to have tools forged for them. Otherwise people would go and buy any particular tool from the black smiths directly. The iron slug (*amasengeli*) were kept sometimes for building and other cultural practices. The various tools that were forged by the smiths were exchanged for goods such as animals and foodstuffs as we shall see in the section under trade.

LEATHER TANNING

Until the introduction of cotton material for clothing by the Europeans and Arab-Swahili traders Abatachoni heavily relied on animal skins and hides for clothing, bedding and other social aesthetics[40].

For clothing, there were distinct skins for men and women. The skins for different sexes sold at different values. Amongst the different types of clothes were a man's skin covering the

bust as far as the knees. This was called *Olware* which was softened by constant pounding and had the fur removed. One was worth two sheep or goats. In terms of foodstuffs it was equivalent to two big baskets of grains. Other clothes included *Likutu*, which was a full skin of an animal sawn to be worn around the body, mostly by oldmen. *Esumbati* was a skirt like skin clothe worn around the waist by young warriors, while *Esiboywa* was a skirt worn by women[41].

Wild animals, notably the buffalo, rhinoceros, colobus monkey and leopard were hunted for their skins. Both the buffalo and the rhinoceros skins were used in making shields. According to one informant, one buffalo skin could yield up to four or five shields. A shield was equivalent to one sheep or one goat. The leopard skin and that of a colobus monkey were used in the making of hats that were associated with royalty. These hats worn by leaders were called *esitai* and the ceremonial gown was called *ekutusi*. The latter was normally worn by the holder of the institution of ethnic counsel known as *Omuseni Womuse*[42]

Skin straps were also used in tethering of animals, decorating milk gourds or tightening any household structures. Arrow quivers as well as shoes were also made from animal skins.

POTTERY

Pot making was a monopoly of women, though men at times engaged themselves in the craft. Pots were made from soils which were known to be hard after being subjected to heating. Due to

the supply of clay soil in the low lying lands occupied by Abatachoni, these people became an important source of pottery for both the Nandi and the Kony. The last two inhabited areas of soils that were unsuitable for pot making. As a result, a good deal of trade flourished between Abatachoni and their above named neighbours[43].

The pot making industry produced implements for four basic uses:- water storage, cooking, beer drinking and eating. There were small hallowed pots that were used for cooking potatoes, beans and meat called *Chinungilo* (*sin. Inungilo*). Various pots with big 'bellies' and narrow 'necks' were used for storing water and were called chinyungu (*sin. Inyungu*). There was a smaller pot with handles used for cooking rats called *eyambeva*. *Yimbanga* was a big pot with large open mouth used for beer drinking. It would be fixed in one house at the centre of the living room where men with straws would sip their beer. There was a smaller pot called *Intenjekho* which was used for storing beer for special occasions such as initiation, marriage or any cleansing ceremony. Another small pot called *yisache* together with another one called *namunwambili* were used for boiling herbal medicines[44]. Apart from pots, smoking pipes were also manufactured and used by both men and women for tobacco-smoking. Due to their wide range of domestic uses, pottery products were in high demand and each family exchanged either food or animals for them.

Pots for storing water (*chinyungu*) were bartered for chicken or baskets of grain. A big pot for beer (*Yimbanga*) was exchanged

for a goat or a sheep while the one for boiling herbal medicines could be exchanged for two to four hens or two big cocks[43].

WOODCARVING

Besides deriving cooking fuel from trees, the pre-colonial Abatachoni manufactured some important wooden implements for domestic use. Some of these wooden implements included plates and bowls called *ebililo*, drinking cups called *emiendo*, chairs, musical flutes (*emilele*), hunting clubs (*ebikong'o*), walking sticks (*chindabusi*), spear shafts and arrow sticks. Until the widespread use of iron spear heads Abatachoni used wooden shafts as their weapons. Most important of all these tools, however, were the three legged stools, spears, arrows, drinking straws and plates[44].

Spear shafts were obtained from hard and tough trees that were normally straight. Among the trees popularly used include *Omwilima*, *Omuswa*, *Omikhutu*, *Omusamuri*, *Omunyuvuti*, *Omutare* and *Omusitati*. For a society whose defence weaponry comprised primarily of spears, arrows and clubs, the wood industry was a busy and booming one because the artisans had to produce enough to cope with the local demand[47].

5.8 BARTER TRADE.

A majority of Kenyan societies in pre-colonial times traded in goods primarily in form of barter exchange. Barter trade silently continued both within each society, on one hand, and

between neighbouring societies, on the other.

The pre-colonial Abatachoni did not have a standard medium of exchange such as money. Until the introduction of the cash economy by Europeans in the late 19th century, various goods were exchanged against one another at varying equivalents. By mid 19th century the Swahili-Arab traders had penetrated the interior of western Kenya via Mumias. These caravan traders were Uganda-bound and their economic activities do not appear to have affected Abatachoni's trading pattern profoundly.

Moreover, many of the goods that the Swahili-Arab traders sold were those with no premium attached to them. These included clothes, copper, bangles, and beads. These goods were, however, exchanged for animal skins, elephant tasks and food which earned the Coastal traders more money than their goods. On the local scene, Abatachoni traded among themselves in goods of various kinds and types. Of particular importance was the trade in foodstuff, animals and products of the local industries that we have seen above. For foods such as grains, the standard measure was small and big baskets called *ebikono*[48]. Depending on what the tool or animal was being exchanged for the grains, a certain number of either big or small baskets were taken as the equivalent. The table below shows some of the exchange rates between certain goods:

ITEM	EQUIVALENT VALUE
1 cow	10 big baskets of millet
3 hens	1 small basket of millet
1 goat	5 baskets of sorghum
1 spear	4 small baskets of millet
5 spear	1 young cow
3 goats and 3 sheep	1 bull
1 cock	2 ringing bells *chinyimba*)
2 hens (young)	2 ringing bells
1 hen (big)	1 neckbell (*esikhutu*)[48]

The nature of economic transactions did not take place at any established trading centres. However, the need and demand for the supply of goods and services did exist, necessitating the exchange of goods either within or between neighbouring societies. Sometimes, people in need of certain goods would travel all the way to where these were manufactured. People who wanted iron or pottery implements, for example, took the trouble to look for experts of these industries in their homes in case of pottery, the following is how the exchange was done;

ITEM	EQUIVALENT VALUE
1 cooking pot	2 small baskets of cassava
2 cooking pots	2 baskets of millet
1 cooking pot	2 hens or a cock
1 beer pot (*intenjekho*)	3 sheep
2 beer pots (small)	3 big baskets of sorghum[50]

The skin-tanning industry also exchanged the skin products with foodstuffs and animals at different rates. A man's skin cloth, for example, was exchanged for three sheep. In terms of foodstuffs, it was equivalent to one big basket of grains. One sword sheath made of skin was exchanged for an equivalent of two hens, while a basket of cassava or two of groundnuts were exchanged for skin bag for carrying food. A cock was exchanged for one arrow quiver[51].

Of all the skin products, perhaps shields were the most highly traded in. The importance of shield lay in their use as weapons for both offensive and defensive purposes. Shields were not exchanged among Abatachoni alone, but even between the Nandi, the Kony and Babukusu. One shield was exchanged with for goats or sheep. Sometimes, one shield was exchanged for up to ten barbed arrows, notably from the Nandi. From the Maasai, one big shield was exchanged for two broad faced spears[52].

5.9 TRADE WITH NEIGHBOURS

The kind of trade that boomed between Abatachoni and their neighbours was much like the one among themselves. The commodities of trade were more often than not, very similar. The market forces therefore conditioned one to by what one needed most, and perhaps sell a similar good to the same person during another season. On the whole, Abatachoni and their neighbours symbolically co-existed, exchanging goods on a willing-seller willing-buyer basis[53].

Between them and the Nandi, Abatachoni traded in animals, iron tools, honey and grains. The Nandi animals were, however, often resented by Abatachoni as they hardly survived the *ambient* temperatures of the low lying lands of Abatachoni. The Nandi region of Uasin Gishu was much cooler owing to the higher altitude than that of the land in which Abatachoni lived[54].

Trade between the two was therefore, more in food, honey and iron tools than in animals. Whereas the Nandi sold arrow heads and honey to Abatachoni, they got in return millet, sorghum and groundnuts. Shields and spears from the Nandi were exchanged for goats, sheep or food from Abatachoni. Abatachoni also sold things such as spears, neck bells, arrow heads and pots to the Sabaot who, in turn, gave them animals, honey and millet.

The Samia heavily supplied Abatachoni with iron hoes for which they had established a monopoly during the 19th century[55]. These hoes were exchanged for either food or animals. Apart from the Samia, Abatachoni also traded in agricultural products like cassava, bananas, simsim and groundnuts with the Babukusu, Wanga and Kabras.

In conclusion, it can be argued that the pre-colonial economy of Abatachoni was largely dependent on agriculture and animal husbandry. Agriculture was basically for subsistence and quite communal in its productive forces. Agricultural products were exchanged for either animals or products of traditional industries like iron smithing, pot making, wood work and skin tanning. The motive behind these local handicrafts was not

profit making, but merely producing for society to cope with the demand. The capitalistic motive of profit making or sale of surplus value for maximum gains was non-existent.

Internal trade was centred on exchange of goods for others at generally agreeable rates. Such trade existed both within Abatachoni themselves and with their neighbours. As was common practice, the equivalent value of one commodity in respect of another was something that was agreed upon between the seller and the buyer.

FOOTNOTES

1. Tawayi, A.W. O.I. Jan 6th 1987
2. Ibid
3. Simiyu Wandibba, (Ed) History and culture in Western Kenya. (Nairobi: G.S. Were press, 1985) pp 31-32, see also C.W. Hobley Kenya From chartered company to crown colony. (London: Frank Cass, 1929) pp 23 - 85
4. Wangilla, H.M. O.I. Oct 22nd 1986,
5. Ibid
6. Wanyama, S.J. O.I. 24th Oct. 1986.
7. Ibid
8. Wangila op cit
9. Walekhasia K., O.I. Jan 3rd 1986.
10. Sahani, P.M. O.I. Jan 3rd 1987.
11. Ibid
12. Sindani, E. (Mrs) O.I. Nov. 22nd 1986.
13. Ibid
14. Tawayi, A.W. op cit
15. Wambani, M. O.I. Jan 9th 1986
16. Ibid
17. Murunga, M., O.I Oct 27th 1986
18. C. Ehret, Southern Nilotic History (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1971) pp 63-66
19. B.A. Ogot (Ed), Ecology and History in East Africa, (Nairobi: Kenya Literature Bureau, 1979) pp 9 - 23, 24 - 40, 40 - 63, 64 - 76 and 77 - 107.
20. C. Ehret, op cit p. 16

21. G.S. Were, History of Abaluyia of Western Kenya, (Nairobi: E.A.P.H., 1967) Chapters 3 and 4.

22. Walucho Buriah, O.I. Oct 23rd 1986
23. Ibid
24. Ibid

25. C. Ehret, "Aspects of Social and economic change in Western Kenya". AD 1500 - 1800 in B.A Ogot (Ed), Kenya Before 1900 (Nairobi: E.A.P.H.,) pp 1-20.

26. Mutuli, M., O.I. Oct 9th 1986
27. Mukongolo, K., O.I. Nov 11th 1986
28. Kapchanga, S., O.I. Nov 23rd 1986
29. Ibid
30. Namatiliki, R.(Mrs) O.I. Sept 11th 1986.
31. Ibid
32. Walucho, B., O.I. Sept 9th 1986.
33. Ibid
34. Nandokha, D. O.I. Nov 29th 1986
35. Ibid
36. Ibid
37. Palia, I.K. Sept 17th and 25th 1986
38. Kimokoti, O.I. Oct 24th 1986
39. Ibid
40. Velia, K.Z., O.I. Sept 15th 1986
41. Ibid
42. Rosoa, S., (Mrs), O.I. Sept 26th 1986
43. Ibid
44. Tunai, K.W., O.I. Sept 11th 1986
45. Wanyama, S.J., O.I. Oct 22nd 1986
46. Murunga, S., O.I. Oct. 18th 1986
47. Wekesa, A.C., O.I. Sept. 24th 1986
48. Kapchanga, S., O.I. Nov. 23rd 1986
49. Ibid
50. Ibid and S. Wadibba, op cit p. 31
51. Sindani, S., O.I. Sept. 12th 1986
52. Ploti N., O.I. Jan. 3rd 1986
53. Sahani, P.M., O.I. Jan. 3rd 1986
54. Ibid O.I. Jan. 3rd 1986

55. P. Were, "The origin and growth of iron industry and trade in Samia, B.A. Dissertation, Department of History, University of Nairobi 1972.

CHAPTER SIX

6.0 ESTABLISHMENT OF COLONIAL RULE.

6.1 INTRODUCTION

Between the last half of the 19th century and the first half of the present century, drastic changes took place in Kenya which fundamentally affected most African societies. These changes were brought about by an era of European penetration into the interior of Kenya and the subsequent colonization of the country. This era of drastic changes did not spare Abatachoni. Western Province of Kenya was brought under British rule due to the strategic importance of Mumias which was used by the imperial East Africa Company (I.B.E.A.C.) as a centre and depot for re-stocking caravans enroute from the East Coast to Buganda and Vice-versa.

Prior to the coming of Europeans, the only alien people to have reached present Western Kenya were Arab-Swahili traders from the coast. These traders reached the area in pursuit of slaves[1] and ivory. In pursuit of their commercial interests, the Arab-Swahili traders used Elureko as their stronghold[2]. Here, they enjoyed the courtesy and warm hospitality of the rulers of the Wanga dynasty, notably Nabongo Mumia after whom Elureko was later named. When the Europeans of the I.B.E.A.C. later arrived, Mumia again welcomed them at his court and finally became a firm tool in their hands for furthering their selfish interests. Mumia was later rewarded for his job when he was made a paramount chief by the colonial government.

6.2 BACKGROUND TO ESTABLISHMENT OF COLONIAL RULE.

Modern Western Kenya, was brought under British colonial rule as a result of a broad historical process which shall be recounted here briefly. Following the Anglo-Germany agreements of 1886 and 1890, the Uganda Protectorate was established in 1894 and the East Africa Protectorate in 1895[3]. Modern Kenya was then known as East Africa Protectorate, except for some parts which geographically fell under the Uganda Protectorate as will be seen later.

East Africa was therefore split into 'spheres of influence' between the British and the Germans. British interests in East Africa were by then mainly focused upon the Kingdom of Buganda. Indeed, the object of granting a charter to the I.B.E.A.C. was to tap the economic potential of Buganda and the surroundings[4]. The stretch of land between the coast and Lake Victoria was considered as a useless tract of land to be got through on one's way to Kampala in Uganda[5].

By 1894, the I.B.E.A.C. was virtually bankrupt, having been bailed out by the missionaries in Buganda, before surviving on the subsidies of the British government. The government thus took up the company assets and declared Buganda plus the surroundings a British protectorate. This followed the report of Sir Gerald Portal who had earlier been sent, in 1893, to study the possibilities of the company's withdrawal. In July 1895, one year after the declaration of the protectorate over Uganda, Western Kenya was also brought under British protectorate. This

area was referred to as the Eastern Province of the Uganda protectorate.

The incorporation of Western Kenya into Uganda protectorate was a turning point in the history of the entire region. In the first place, it underscored the importance of the region with regard to Buganda, upon which British commercial interests were mainly focused. More important was the presence of Mumias which was used as a depot and a centre from which to re-stock the march to the coast via Kikuyu and back to Uganda[6]. Chief Mumia, apart from providing shelter and food to the Europeans, also helped them with young men who were recruited as askaris upon whom the Europeans heavily relied to bring vast areas of Western Kenya under British colonial administration.

The centrality of Mumias and the help that Mumia accorded the Europeans was very decisive in bringing western Kenya under British administration. The work of conquest was done by Spire and later by C.W. Hobley, who succeeded the former in 1895. By the turn of the 20th century, the area called Kavirondo had virtually been brought under colonial rule by Hobley[7]. Except for the Babukusu, Bungoma District was brought under colonial rule with very little resistance from the local people. In 1895, while pursuing the recalcitrant Bukusu, Hobley and an army of Sudanese, Maasai and Wanga mercenaries, launched the most decisive battle against the former at Chetambe fort[8]. This battle clearly affirmed European superiority in terms of weaponry and marked the acceptance of alien rule by the local people. The

British had been pursuing the Babukusu who had resisted the imposition of alien rule in their area of Lumboka. This had led to earlier clashes between the two culminating into the 1895 Chetambe battle[9]. Chetambe was a Tachoni fort into which the Babukusu had sought refuge from the pursuing British expedition.

This Chetambe battle appears to have forestalled the later response of Abatachoni to the British. In the eyes of Abatachoni, the brutal savagery with which the British inflicted defeat upon the Babukusu convinced them that the former were lethal and invincible at the time. This psychological fear of the whiteman and his maxim gun greatly contributed to the easy subjugation of Abatachoni by the British. Moreover, Abatachoni had all along been living in a continuous state of insecurity due to Maasai and Nandi cattle raids. By the coming of the Europeans, they were war-weary. Besides, they lacked proper political organization and able leadership that could mobilize a concerted effort to ward off the imposition of colonial administration.

On 1st April, 1902 the territory then known as the Eastern Province of Uganda Protectorate was transferred to the East Africa Protectorate under the names of Kisumu and Naivasha Provinces[10]. In September of the same year, the two provinces were sub-divided into four and three districts, respectively. Kisumu was divided into Mumias, Fort Nandi, Kisumu and Fort Ternan. The last district (Fort Ternan) was labelled a military zone due to the insecurity situation owing to the Nandi

resistance against the British in their early years of penetrating the Rift Valley[11]. Following this sub-division the "Headman Ordinance" was enacted in the same year, and empowered the commissioner to appoint any native or natives headman/men of any village or group of villages and make such an official subordinate to the headman of any other village[12].

By the enactment of this ordinance, all the areas that had been conquered were brought under effective colonial rule. Headmen became tools or agents of furthering colonial interests as they came to represent symbols of British colonial rule based on the concept of indirect rule, which the latter had successfully used in Buganda. The success of this mode of administration in Buganda was, however, due to the elaborate local bureaucracy together with a well defined political leadership in form of the King (Kabaka) and his subordinate appointees of Saza chiefs. This type of political hierarchy in Bunganda was absent in all parts of Western Kenya, except for the small Wanga Kingdom.

Headmen where thus picked from people who were regarded as most conspicuous or who ranked first among equals from within the societies. Given the clause of the ordinance that a provincial commissioner could subordinate any headman to another or village, group of villages to one headman, some minority societies found themselves surbordinated to different chiefs and sub-chiefs at different times. For example, Murunga, half brother of Mumia, was imposed upon Babukusu, Abatachoni, the Saboat and Iteso, as

their headman. On the other hand, Mumia himself was made chief of the Bakhayo, Samia, Marachi, Wanga and some sections of the Luo[13]. As such, it did not take long for the local people to resent the imposed headmen and sub-chiefs. In 1909, Mumia was elevated to the rank of Paramount chief to oversee all the headmen under the above named administrative units.

In 1908 Sir Geoffrey F. Archer, then acting District Commissioner, divided Luyialand into ten administrative units as locations[14]. Following the sub-division, Murunga was appoint as sub-chief of North Kitosh Location in which lived the Babukusu, Iteso, Sabaot and Abatachoni, while Sudi, son of Namachanja, was made sub-chief of South Kitosh. In 1909, Kisumu Province was further sub-divided into Kisumu District and Mt. Elgon district. The latter district roughly corresponds to modern Western Province. The following is how Mt. Elgon district was sub-divided according to Sir Archer's report of 1909.

No	CHIEF	SUB-CHIEF	REGION
1.	Mumia		Wanga, Marama, North and South Ugenya, Marachi, Samia, Uhehe, North Unyala and Kakalewa.
2.	Murunga		North, Kitosh,Walagu, Wangoma, Ekony, North Wamia, Tatsone.
3.	Sudi		South Kitosh
4.	Kivini		East Kakamega
5.	Milimu		West Kakamega
6.	Wambani		Watsotso
7.	Tomia		Mukulu
8.	Shindu		Kabras
9.	Odero Sante		West and East Gem
10	Ng'ong'a		Alego, Usonga, and South Unyalla[15].

The area under Murunga, i.e., North Kitosh is the one under which Abatachoni lived. Other people were the Bok (Walagu), Bongomek (Wang'oma), Kony (Elkony), Iteso (Wamia).

Mumia of Wanga not only carried eminent political and administrative power, but also exercised jurisdiction over a relatively larger area than any other chief. This eminence was seen when he was appointed Paramount chief in 1909. This was a reward for his collaboration with the British in their efforts to bring the area under colonial rule. Almost all the appointed sub-chiefs or headmen were either his blood relations or people he knew personally. Where there was none of the two his own Wanga agents were hand picked and imposed on the people.

Such was the case for Murunga and later Walucho in North Kitosh location. Here too, it did not take long for the people of such regions to begin petitioning for headmen and chiefs of their own. Murunga appears to have carried out his work with a mixture of brutality and unjustified force. This impressed the colonial government officers so much so that they paid glowing tribute to his work. For example, Geoffrey F. Archer, acting District Commissioner, had this to say of him:

> Murunga is a most capable chief who has done very excellent work in a very short time in the unsettled northern areas. I recommend him as one of the most useful men in the district[14].

Whereas this is what Murunga was to the acting D.C. , other people saw him differently. Among Abatachoni, Murunga is remembered with extreme hatred as a man who forced people to work

on public works such as roads, recruited people forcibly to work on European farms and, above all, collected tax with untold avarice. People's animals were forcibly taken away for failure to pay tax and some had their houses set ablaze for failing to pay it. Murunga's tenure as sub-chief was so brutal that upto now there are songs that were composed to depict his iron hand. This hatred of Murunga was observed by K. Dundas as follows:

> There is no disguising the fact that Murunga is the most cordially disliked person by Kitosh, the chiefs and elders resent very bitterly the somewhat arbitrary division of their country.....It is common talk throughout Kitosh that Murunga will one day be murdered[17].

These two observations by Archer and Dundas represent two angles of the same thing. That in the eyes of the government, Murunga was a dedicated servant, worthy of praise. Conversely, the people upon whom he was imposed, saw him as an oppressor and a very unlikeable ruler. There is no doubt, however, that Murunga was an instrumental force in enforcing colonial rule in North Kitosh location. The work he did for the government was to say the least, so creditable for it served its intended purpose of effective colonial administration. This was aptly put by John Spencer, the D.C., when handing over to Hon. A. Bruce on 7th February 1916. Spencer said:

> Chief Murunga is enlightened and progressive and by far the best native chief I have met in this Protectorate[18].

The idea of best native chief here means most obedient and instrumental in carrying out his superiors' orders. As for being progressive and enlightened, the D.C. only observed that he used

typewriters for corresponding with the former's office.

The area under Murunga was too large to be effectively administered by one single person; so Walucho, another Wanga agent was accredited to Murunga as his assistant. The two diligently carried out the government's policy of administrating natives with a firm hand. By the end of the third decade of this century, the Bok, Iteso, Abatachoni, Bongomek together with the Babukusu were petitioning against Murunga and Walucho and asking for their own headmen. In 1925, Walucho was fined for embezzling funds of a baraza in Kimilili. In the following year, the post of headman was abolished and Walucho was designated as assistant chief while Tendetti was made assistant chief of the Kony[19]. As for Abatachoni, Murumba was appointed as an assistant chief, succeeding his father Sifuma who had been headman.

The succession of Murumba as an assistant chief was a more welcome choice to the government than his father, who D.C. H.H. Horne accused of sabotaging government efforts. According to the Horne Sifuma was a very old man who still gave trouble by quarrelling with his neighbours and preventing his son Murumba from carrying out government orders[20]. Sifuma was thus a stumbling block in the eyes of the colonial government and was therefore worth of replacement. The D.C. observed that Sifuma's people (Abatachoni) were still inclined to refuse all authority and he (Sifuma) made no efforts to get the people to do government work like road-making. The son, the D.C. said, was not a capable man but would do far better if his father were out

of the way[21].

Given such an attitude of the D.C. towards Sifuma and Abatachoni as a whole, it delighted the colonial government most when Sifuma passed away, paving the way for his son's succession. Indeed, the succession of Sifuma by Murumba brought about increased government administration when hundreds of able-bodied Tachoni men were conscripted into public works while others went to work on European farms. The installation of Murumba as assistant chief enhanced the colonial governments's grip upon Abatachoni as he was more easily manipulable than his father.

What followed thereafter was a systematic disintegration of the entire socio-political structure of the Tachoni society. The appointment of local administrators was based on the choice of the government rather than the will of the people. The political authority that formerly rested in the hands of elderly wise men was 'usurped' by young inexperienced government appointees. The result was people's defiance of orders and lack of co-operation. This was met by arbitrary arrest, force and brutal harassment of the people[22]. Socially, the structure of kinship organization began to crumble as people began to be de-tribalized by being taken to far places to work as squatters and colonial askaris.

Economically, the communal ownership of land began to face the test of individualism due to the introduction of a market economy based on growing of cash crops. This dealt a blow to the age- long subsistence economy. The work of missionary activities in the area gradually eliminated the old traditional religion as

well as reducing the incidence of polygamy. The initiation of girls by way of clitoridectomy was also banned as a result of an orchestrated campaign by missionaries[23].

The establishment of colonial administration thus fundamentally transformed the social structure of Abatachoni and signalled a new era of adopting cultural values of the Western World in which political authority, cultural organization and economic production were all guided by the principles of the so called Western civilization.

In conclusion, one could argue that the coming of colonial rule had far reaching consequences upon Abatachoni as was the case with other African societies. The superiority of European weapons accompanied by the will power to colonize was decisive in the conquest of the area under Abatachoni. On the other hand, lack of organized political authority and able leadership contributed to the loss of their freedom. Once under colonial administration, Abatachoni lost their age-long freedom and were now subjects of a new established political order. Things were never to be the same again. The introduction of Wanga agents greatly undermined their traditional organization.

FOOTNOTES

1. While Were talks of slaves, Abdallah disputes this fact. See M.A. Abdallah, "Some aspects of coastal and Islamic influences in Mumias from the late 19th Century." B.A. dissertation, Department of History, University of Nairobi, 1970.

2. Ibid

3. Roland Oliver and Gervase Mathew (eds), History of East Africa vol.I (Oxford: 1963) pp. 352-350

4. The Imperial British East Africa Company (I.B.E.A. CO.) was formed in 1888, with a capital of 250,000 (British pounds). On 3rd of September the same year, it was incorporated as a chartered company. See J.S. Galbraith, Mackinon and East Africa, (1878-1895) (London: O.U.P., 1972), and W.M. Ross, Kenya From Within. (London: Frank Cass, 1968), pp. 34-35.

5. M. de Kiewiet, 'The British Sphere' in R. Oliver and G. Mathews (eds), History of East Africa, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1963) pp. 408; and V. Harlow et al, History of East Africa (Oxford, Clarendon, 1965 vol 1. chapters 1 and 2)

6. M. Kiewiet, op. cit p. 413.

7. C.W. Hobley, Kenya: From Chartered Company to Crown Colony. (London: Frank Cass, 1970) pp. 76-97.

8. See A.K. Nangulu, Resistance to the Imposition of Colonial Rule: the case of Lumboka - Chetambe war, B.A. Dissertation, Department of History, University of Nairobi, 1986;
R. Nasimiyu, The Tradition of Resistance among the Babukusu. B.A. Dissertation, Department of History, University of Nairobi, 1980, and S. Wandiba, "Bukusu Forts," B.A. dissertation, Department of History, University of Nairobi, 1972.

9. Ibid p. 18 see also C.W. Hobley, op. cit pp. 81-82.
10. This was Gazetted officially on 1st April 1902.

11. See works by A. Matson, on Nandi Resistance to British Rule (Nairobi: E.A.P.H., 1972), The Nandi Campaign against the British 1895-1906. (Nairobi: Transafrica Pub. 1974), and W.R. Ochieng, "The Rise of a Cultural State in Pre-colonial Kenya: a Case of the Nandi", Historical Association of Kenya. Annual Conference papers, 1976.

12. Official Gazette Vol.iv No. 72 1902.

13. Kenya National Archives, DC/NN/3/1. Political Record Book: North Kavirondo District.

14. G.S. Were, A History of the Abaluyia of Western Kenya. (Nairobi, E.A.P.H. 1967) pp. 175-76.

15. Kenya National Archives, DC/NN/3/1. Political Record Book; North Kavirondo District.

16. Kenya National Archives, DC/EN3/1/3.
17. Ibid
18. Ibid
19. Kenya National Archives DC/EN3/1/
20. Kenya National Archives DC/EN3/1/3.
21. Ibid

22 The colonial appointees in Kenya and elsewhere have one common characteristic; that of mere 'functionaries' or tools to carry out the instructions or orders of their colonial masters. Some, however, made excessive material gain due to self aggrandizement. See B.E. Kipkorir (ed), Biographical Essays on Imperialism and Collaboration in Colonial Kenya. (Nairobi, K.L.B. 1980), particularly chapter one by the editor.

CHAPTER SEVEN

7.1 CONCLUSION

In looking for the historical evolution of Abatachoni, the period A.D. 1500 to 1800 is of major significance. Within this period of three hundred years, a people that were originally Kalenjin gradually evolved into a new-sub ethnic group of Bantu-speaking AbaLuyia. From the beginning of the 16th century, groups of Kalenjin-speaking peoples began to disperse from the Uasin Gishu Plateau, a region between Mt. Elgon and Lake Turkana. A majority of these groups took up much of the Rift Valley while others remained around the area of dispersion and the adjacent highlands. Amongst the former group are the Nandi, Kipsigis, and Tugen. Those who remained behind include the Sebei and Pokot.

There was, however, a third group which broke off and migrated to the general area of modern Western Province of Kenya and settled there permanently. Among these groups are the Bongomek, the Tiriki and ancestors of Abatachoni. One thing about the break away of Abatachoni from Sengeli is that their ancestors did not heave off as a single big group. Rather people draw their origins from the various larger groups that now make up the Kalenjin. Abatachoni are, therefore, made up of groups of closely related people with a common Kalenjin ancestry. This common ancestry was quite decisive in moulding them together as a distinct group against a predominantly Bantu-speaking environment. When they re-grouped at Mwalie in modern Bungoma, the process of integration as a common people amongst their Bantu

neighbours became even more manifest. Living as minorities amongst the numerically Superior Bantu led to gradual assimilation by the latter, although they still envolved as a distinct group with Kalenjin cultural influences. The Bantu overwhelmed them hence forcing them to lose their original language.

The fragmentary nature of their migration, together with the sporadic periods of arrival and settlement, may explain why they lacked a common name in pre-colonial days. Thus, they came to be referred to by different names at different times by different people. The oral accounts of migration among Abatachoni unequivocally point to the Uasin Gishu plateau as being their area of dispersion. The names of stop-over places on their migrational routes neatly concur with other Kalenjin groups, notably the Bok, Kony, Bongomek and Sebei. Indeed, the regions they occupied as their oral accounts suggest, clearly fit with historical linguistic findings of Christopher Ehret[1].

Ehret gives a survey of the Southern Nilotic history based on a historical approach. His findings show that groups of Kalenjin -speaking people's were staying in the Uasin Gishu plateau by the 16th century. By the turn of that century, these Kalenjin groups, had split into to the current sub-ethnic groups. The findings also show that after the split-up, these groups began to occupy areas in the Rift Valley, some remained around Mt. Elgon, while others moved into modern Western Province. Evidence of these Kalenjin people is seen by the loan words among

the Bantu languages of Western Kenya and Eastern Uganda[2]. Abatachoni of Bungoma and the Tiriki of Kakamega represent the descendants of these early Kalenjin immigrants.

It is not, however, possible to estimate precisely when the ancestors of Abatachoni settled in modern Bungoma. But it is quite likely that by the end of the 16th century the early immigrants had already settled there. From this time to the beginning of the 18th century, the area now known as Western Kenya began to be increasingly settled by Bantu speaking groups mainly from the direction of eastern Uganda. These groups included the forerunners of the Babukusu, Marachi, Samia and the Wanga. For those early immigrants of Kalenjin origin that preceded these in-coming Bantu, the story of the day was that of gradual assimilation, either through trade, marriage or both. The result was the emergence of hybrid communities with a cultural heritage that was both Bantu and Kalenjin. Examples of such communities are the Tiriki of Kakamega[3] and Abatachoni of Bungoma and Kakamega.

The history of Abatachoni, therefore, begins with the differentiation of the Kalenjin into the current groups and their subsequent dispersion. By the turn of the 19th century, Western Kenya had undergone tremendous cultural interactions between diverse ethnic groups of Bantu, Maasai, Kalenjin and Luo origins[4]. The emergence of the heterogeneous Luyia community was a product of this complex phenomenon and the seventeen sub-ethnic groups of the community is a clear indication of this. This

proves the point raised by C. Ehret when he argued that:-

> If there is one lesson which must be drawn, which applies to all, it is that all people come, in history's long run, out of a variety of ethnic backgrounds, intermingled. History brooks no claim of ethnic purity and it has no chosen people[5].

It can, therefore,be asserted that Abatachoni did not escape such historical inevitability to claim ethnic purity. They are a product of cultural interaction between the Kalenjin and Bantu peoples. Their evolution and emergence as a distinct entity by the turn of the century is part of a broad cultural phenomenon that took place in the entire region of Western Kenya. Though they are part of Bantu-speaking Abaluyia some aspects of their Kalenjin culture still persist. These include initiation rituals, particularly that of *Okhulichana*, which only they and the Tiriki practise among the Abaluyia. Secondly, the initiation of girls by way of clitoridectomy was a common practice till it was discouraged by missionaries and later banned by the colonial government. The age-set system of initiation together with their names are clear vestiges of Kalenjin origins. Together with these are the ceremonial songs during initiation which contain many vocabularies of the Kalenjin language though in corrupted form[6].

The great cultural affinity attached to livestock together with the love of milk and blood are basically a Kalenjin cultural practice. Perhaps more interestingly are the names of most Tachoni men and women which are in all probability essentially kalenjin. Such names include Kimokoti, Tendetti, Kiptuli,

Chemai, Chesing'ara, Chenonoi, Chebukwa, Chesomeki, Sunguti, Chemwani, Kisiang'ani, Kimingichi, Cheche, Ngutuku, Cheteki, Toili, Khwateng', Kimingui, Siragutu, Buteki, Kapchanga, Kiliswa, Masoni, Soita, Sabiri, and many other.

Another practice that is common among Abatachoni is that of cutting the lower lobe of the ear which was a Kalenjin cultural practice. The practice was, however, weathered down by the influence of western eduction and has now practically ceased.

From the Bantu, the emergent Abatachoni adapted agriculture, clan pattern of settlement and, more importantly, the language. The fulltime agriculture also affected the lifestyle, making these people become sedentary agriculturalists other than nomadic pastoralists. The 19th century walled fortification was most probably also borrowed from the Bantu.

FOOTNOTES.

1. C. Ehret, Southern Nilotic History (Evanston: Northwestern University press, 1979), pp. 63-82.
2. Ibid. (see the appendices)
3. W.R. Ochieng', An outline History of Rift Valley of Kenya (Nairobi: E.A.L Bureau, 1975), pp. 65-69
4. G. S. Were, "The Maasai and Kalenjin factor in the settlement of Western Kenya" in Journal of Eastern African Research and Development Vol. 1 No. 2 pp. 1-11; see also by the same author "Emergence of the Abaluyia" in Kenya Historical Review Vol. 2 No 1) pp 39-44 and A History of the Abaluyia of Western Kenya (Nairobi, E.A.P.H 1967) chapters 2-4.
5. C. Ehret, "Aspects of Social and Economic change in Western Kenya" in B. A. Ogot Kenya Before 1900 (Nairobi, E.A.P.H. 1976) pp. 17-18.
6. See section on intiation, chapter three of this thesis.

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APPENDIX

QUESTIONNIRE

SECTION A Meaning and origins of Abatachoni

1. What does the name Abatachoni mean?
2. Who was the founder of Abatachoni?
3. Where did they come from?
4. Where did they settle before their present land?

5. Who did they come across on their way? How were these people living and which language did they speak?

6. What reasons prompted their movement away from their original land?

7. From whom did Abatachoni originally come?
8. When settling in their present day homes, who settled where?
9. How many clans comprise Abatachoni?
10. Which ones are the original clans?
11. How did those clans which make up Abatachoni come about? Did they merge together to form the Abatachoni or have they been growing in number from a single clan?

SECTION B (a) Political and Military Organization

12. What was the name given to the leader of Abatachoni?
13. What were the duties of this leader?
14. Did the leaders rule alone or with a council of elders?
15. How was justice carried out?
16. What was done to maintain law and order?
17. What was the role of a father?

18. How were various cases arbitrated? Was there any chance for appeal?

19. Can you name some of the worst crimes one could commit? What kind of punishment was meted against offenders?

20. What was normally done if war was looming?
21. What kind of weapons were used during warfore?

22. How was an army raised?, who controlled it and on what basis were soldiers or warriors recruited?

23. What was the relationship between the young and the elders, men and women?

SECTION B (b) INITIATION

24. How were young men and young women initiated into adulthood?
25. What form of initiation did (a) boys and (b) girls undergo?
26. How was initiation related to age sets or age groups?
27. Where did the rite of initiation in boys and girls originate?
28. Was initiation borrowed or was it internal to Abatachoni?
29. When did initiation begin?
30. Was initiation done yearly or after a given period?
31. What were the rituals associated with initiation?
32. How many age-sets and age-groups are there? Can you name them?

SECTION C -(a) RELIGION

33. What is the name for God in Tachoni language? what is their religion called?
34. Is there any difference between christianity and their traditional religion?
35. Are there any rituals that are associated with praying?
36. Was praying a daily process?

(b) - BELIEFS

37. What beliefs do Abatachoni have?
38. Are there any ritual animals?
39. What taboos are there among the Abatachoni?
40. Of what significance are those taboos to the society?

SECTION D (a) ECONOMY

41. What did Abatachoni depend on for a living?, Has this changed through time?
42. What factors caused the change in their economic lifestyle?
43. Did they grow any crops? which ones?
44. Did they keep any animals? which type? where did they get their pastures?
45. When and where did they begin (a) keeping animals and (b) growing crops?
46. What were the animals kept for?
47. Did Abatachoni practise hunting?
48. What tools of hunting were used?
49. What was hunting for? and which animals were popular for hunting? Why?

(b) - LAND TENURE

50. How was land owned?
51. Who was the first to get land?
53. What was done to claim ownership of land?
54. What was the role of men, women and the youth in relation to land?
55. When was one supposed to be given his own land?
56. How was the inheritance of land done?

SECTION E Social-cultural changes

57. Do you see Abatachoni having changed?
58. What changes do you think they have undergone?
59. What new traits do you think Abatachoni have copied? From whom have they copied?

60. Are there any beliefs, religion or language that the neighbours of Abatachoni have borrowed from them?

61. Are there certain things that Abatachoni have copied from the Kalenjin, Maasai or Babukusu?

62. What was the nature of interaction between Abatachoni and the above named people?

63. Was there any war between them, i.e, Abatachoni, and others?
64. What were normally the causes of wars?

65. Did the winning side ever take war captives? How were they treated after capture?

66. What in your opinion makes the Abatachoni different from other Luyia communities?

67. What aspects of Tachoni culture do you think have been abandoned?

68. What has caused this abandonment?
69. Do you see Abatachoni remaining as they are now in future?

70. Is the language Abatachoni speak now the same as the one their ancestors spoke?

71. Do Abatachoni practise all the cultural aspects as they used to? Why has there been change, if any?

72. What changes have occurred in
(a) Land ownership (b) Religious practice, (c) livestock keeping (d) Marriages and (e) language.