**‘Tribes are, in a sense, ethnographic fictions’: Identity transformation and land tenure among hunter-gatherers of Kenya**

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The enduring presence of hunter-gatherers –or “Dorobo” as they are typically referred to in the literature– in what is now Kenya has long been established. Many of the groups that made up that population are said to have “disappeared”, “gone underground”, or been “driven away”. Certainly, groups with a known past of hunting and gathering are few and far between in Kenya today. Despite their geographical proximity, these groups seem to have fared with their changing environment differently. While few groups, such as the Okiek, are still recognisable entities today –though they are no longer relying on hunting and gathering for their subsistence-, others seem to have all but disappeared. This suggests that we are faced with many possible scenarios of ‘disappearance’ and ‘adaptation’ to a changing human, political and natural landscape. The primary aim of the present paper is to bring this variability to the fore by investigating, in three cases, the strategies of adaptation that they devised to cope with new circumstances: Mukogodo (Laikipia), Matthews Range Dorobo (Samburu), Cherangany (Trans Nzoia, Elgeyo-Marakwet, West-Pokot). Further the article argues that ‘Dorobo adaptation’ and identity transformation should at least be seen as part of a fight to maintain access to land.

**Keywords:** hunting and gathering, indigeneity, land tenure, Identity transformation

**Introduction**

The enduring presence of hunter-gatherers in what is now Kenya has long been established. Early travellers, hunters and colonial administrators all took note of the “Dorobo” as these hunters have come to be known in the specialised literature. Yet the identities and characteristics of these hunting ‘Dorobo’ communities were -and to a large extent remain- poorly understood. Their occurrence in the specialised literature has been sporadic, though a few monographs have been published on some of these groups, most notable among which are perhaps Corinne Kratz’s study of Okiek rituals, *Affecting Performance* (2010), Roderick Blackburn’s various publications on the same groups (see bibliography), and Lee Cronk’s *From Mukogodo to Maasai* (2004). These have highlighted some aspects of the cultural complexity and multi-faceted identities present among the various groups of hunter-gatherers in Kenya. Yet what is perhaps most striking when perusing through both the early and more recent literature on the Dorobo (or Ndorobo’, ‘Wandorobo’, ‘Dorrobo’, ‘Il-Torrobo’ …), is the confusion that seems to surround this label and the ambiguity with which it is applied. Together with ‘Okiek’ (or Oggiek, Ogiek…), a Kalenjin term also commonly used to refer to the hunting communities of Kenya, ‘Dorobo’ is usually associated with forest-dwelling hunter-gatherer communities, who are popularly believed to be indigenous to a given area. However the two terms have also been variously used to refer to: a particular set of hunting groups who live in the central highland forests, particularly the Mau escarpment (Okiek) or the hunting communities of central/northern Kenya (Ndorobo); the entirety of the peoples with even a minor history of hunting and gathering; or sections of pastoralist groups who might have resorted to hunting after having lost their cattle and who have a lower social status in the region in which they live. This confusion is not a recent phenomenon. An ethnographer of the colonial period, H.S. Lambert, candidly remarked in 1949 that:

“There has been much confusion and lack of definition (…) Some would lump all the Dorobo together with the trapping tribes and call them aboriginal hunting of a bushman type (…). Others (including many Africans) think that difference between them and other tribes is simply one of culture not of origins, that the Dorobo stay a step behind, while the others, due in part to population pressure, moved from the hunting-trapping-gathering stage to that of herding or herding-planting”.[[2]](#endnote-1)

This insistence in finding a neat category in which to place the problematic ‘Dorobo’ stemmed out of a typical colonial reflex, namely the assumption that Africans are by nature ‘tribal’. Yet, Vail, in his influential *The Creation of Tribalism in South Africa* showed how, “through creating written languages and cultural identities, through specification of ‘custom’ and ‘tradition’”, missionaries and the colonial states “replaced older organising principles that dependent upon voluntary clientage and loyalty and which, as such, showed great plasticity”, with “firm, non-porous and relatively inelastic ethnic boundaries, many of which were highly arbitrary”.[[3]](#endnote-2) In the present article, taking three communities as case studies– the Yaaku/Mukogodo of the Mukogodo Forest, the Dorobo (Suiei) of the Matthews Range and the Cherangany (also known as Sengwer) of the Cherangany Hills[[4]](#endnote-3)-, I will argue that ambiguity surrounding the “identity” of so called “Dorobo” communities is not only due to the fact that the label has been applied to a variety of sometimes very distinct groups, but it is also partly a consequence of some of the strategies of adaptation that these various groups devised to cope with new circumstances. Further, I will argue that identity manipulation and socio-economic transformation are part and parcel of these groups’ relationship to land and are part of a fight to cling to it. This is a tendency that has been observed from the earliest recorded history all the way to the 21st Century when, in the words of Gabrielle Lynch, community leaders started to self-consciously employ “a global discourse of indigeneity – and associated ideas of territorial association, marginalisation and especial vulnerability – to strengthen moral and legal claims to land and resources”.[[5]](#endnote-4)

**Dorobo Communities in Historical Perspective**

Tracing pre-mid-19th century history is a notoriously hazardous affair. As far as the ‘Dorobo’ are concerned, sources of information are particularly few and far between, being essentially derived from early travellers’ writings, oral history and archaeology. The term ‘Dorobo’ was first made known to a wider world through the writings of late 19th and early 20th century travellers, in which ‘Dorobo’ is imbued with a contradictory variety of meanings. Joseph Thomson, the first European visitor of the Masai land in 1883, described the Dorobo as “a small race of people scattered over Masailand, who gain their entire livelihood by the chase” and who “always find neighbouring tribes less skilful in hunting, eager to exchange vegetable food for game”.[[6]](#endnote-5) To the Austrian explorer Ludwig Von Höhnel, Dorobo was a name used by the Maasai to describe “poor folk without cattle or other possessions”.[[7]](#endnote-6) Similarly, the American Doctor/hunter Arthur Donaldson Smith stated: “I use the term Wandorobbo to designate the poor of any tribe who live by hunting and fishing”.[[8]](#endnote-7) On the other hand, many accounts of the Dorobo by early visitors are based on the assumption that the Dorobo are the remnants of an original single group of aboriginal hunters which scattered as the result of the intrusions of other, more powerful, groups.[[9]](#endnote-8) The archaeologist G.W.B. Huntingford, for example, suggested the possibility that there once was “a race of hunters who ranged over East Africa from whom are descended not only the Dorobo (Okiek), but also the lowland hunters near the coast known as Boni, Sanye and Ariangulu, as well as the Watta of Abyssinia”.[[10]](#endnote-9) In summary, pre-colonial and colonial observers tended to consider the Dorobo to be impoverished members of their associated groups who, having lost their cattle, had resorted to hunting and gathering while, at the same time, there are also references to ‘true Dorobo’.[[11]](#endnote-10) John L. Berntsen’s work on the Maasai has highlighted the fact that the term ‘Dorobo’ had several meanings for the Maasai: it could refer to non-Maasai hunter-gatherers who traded with them; to hunters who have some cattle and live in the Maasai area; to pastoralists who hunt or gather honey; or to those Maasai who have lost their cattle and became “Dorobo” for their survival. In this way, it seems Maa-speakers used the term Dorobo, not as a tribal label so much as a class designation and deployed it to refer, in a pejorative way, to a variety of groups in Kenya and Tanzania.[[12]](#endnote-11) British colonialists, however, mistook the term for an ethnic label and lumped together all Kenyan hunter-gatherers. The colonial view of Dorobo as a single tribe was both ideological and practical: not only did it reflect the widespread colonial belief in the fixity of tribes, but the concept of the ‘tribe’ as a discrete entity was also a necessary assumption both for tax collection and for the assignment of Africans to native reserves. In this way ‘Dorobo’ was manufactured into a rigid ethnic label and systematically applied to a series of groups, with scant regard given to whether these had any historical or social connections. Thus, in order to discuss the “Dorobo” adequately, we must first realise that there is no such thing as a discrete ‘Dorobo identity’, except for some supposed shared hunting past and a perceived low-socio-economic status in the region where they are found. What does exist are several, at times conflicting, definitions of what “Dorobo-ism” entails, the latter having to a very large extent been defined either by neighbours or administrators.

If we accept the term ‘Dorobo’ as loosely referring to any community in East Africa who has, or has had, some connection to hunting, rather than as a homogeneous entity, some observations can perhaps be made. Indeed, observers and researchers have identified and commented on what seems to be common ‘tropes’ of history, as well as some common characteristics and particularities generally shared by those to whom the term Dorobo has been applied (which is a factor that undoubtedly contributed in part to their amalgamation in the minds of observers and the confusion regarding their identity). One such ‘trope’ is a certain degree of flexibility, cultural exchange and intermigration. Based on the writings of such early visitors as Thomson, Chanler, Neumann and Stigand, Paul Spencer argues:

“From the time that the first Europeans visited the area to the present, observers have noted that the Dorobo (…) groups have social relations with certain neighbouring pastoral and agricultural tribes. (…) There is also evidence in the early literature of a certain degree of intermigration between tribes, especially between Dorobo and others.”[[13]](#endnote-12)

Though referring to the Dorobo of Laikipia and Samburu, Spencer assumed that similar mechanisms had probably been at work in all the hunting and gathering communities of Kenya, including the Galla, Watta and the Okiek who live in the Mau escarpment of western-central Kenya. Indeed, all Mau Okiek, who are composed of as many as three dozen local groups, have adopted some characteristics of the groups inhabiting the plains between them, principally the Masai and the Kipsigis, through exchange and intermarriage. Blackburn also recorded a large amount of items “that are produced by both groups in excess of their needs” and traded between them, ranging from skin products such as shields, ivory, and most importantly honey which the Maasai and Samburu do not know how to produce but used as an essential ritual substance during circumcision or marriage ceremonies.[[14]](#endnote-13) Similar tendencies of exchanges in the form of intermarriage and trade are reported across the entire spectrum of Dorobo communities, so that, Spencer pointed out, “one has only to accept that this state of affairs has probably been in existence for an indefinite period and analysis is enormously simplified”.[[15]](#endnote-14)

These social mechanisms would have been of particular use in times of hardship. In fact from the late nineteenth century, some events that affected large chunks of the East African populations are comparatively well documented. One event of particular importance was the defeat of the Laikipiak Maasai, a group that used to dominate the Mount Kenya area, by the Purko and Kisongo Masai, which probably occurred between 1874 and 1876. From Borana, Samburu and Rendille traditions, it appears that the Laikipiak followed their defeat with an attack on their northern neighbours, probably in an attempt to rebuild their herds and recover some of their former territory. Both the Rendille and Samburu record victories against Laikipiak intruders in the 1880s and 1890s, after which the Laikipiak were routed and are said to have disappeared, though it is more likely the majority of the survivors were absorbed into other groups, acquired new names, identities and new forms of subsistence.[[16]](#endnote-15) While some Laikipiak sought refuge among their Maasai victors and other communities such as the Meru or the Kikuyu, others joined existing bands or formed their own communities of hunting and gathering *iltorrobo*.[[17]](#endnote-16) And indeed a Masai man named Njugna Lenaimundo testified to the Kenya Land Commission that “Ol Doinyo Losoit (Matthews Range) is inhabited mostly by Dorobo and very few Samburu (…) they are Laikipia Dorobo, not Samburu Dorobo”.[[18]](#endnote-17) Eventually, however, they seem to have adopted most of the trappings of Samburu culture: they spoke Samburu, used Samburu age-sets (from 1921, according to Paul Spencer), possibly because of their being in a Samburu area, though it is also likely the Laikipiak and Samburu had very similar practices and languages in the first place. At the same time as these events were unravelling, the ramifications of the coastal trade in slave, ivory and other commodities were penetrating further and further inside the East African territory. Significantly, in addition to making internecine fighting rife, the trade allowed the apparition and propagation of diseases. Smallpox and Cholera claimed many casualties, affecting especially those who inhabited areas adjacent to trade routes and forcing many to flee (…). Perhaps most devastating of all, however, was the bovine pleuro-pneumonia that devastated the cattle populations. This cattle plague affected all pastoral tribes of northern central Kenya but seems to have been particularly dramatic in Northern Kenya. Neil Sobania’s informants among the Samburu in 1975-7 described how, in the 1890s, the valleys and forest retreats on the mountains of the region teemed with impoverished Samburu and Laikipiak who had retreated from the destruction caused by the spread of Rinderpest. All these events seem to have contributed to create a comparatively large pool of herdsmen without herds, forcing large numbers of pastoralists to disperse in order to survive or to seek alternative modes of subsistence, or both.[[19]](#endnote-18) These developments probably explain the many pockets of Dorobo communities whom colonial officials found in the Samburu area. Indeed virtually all Dorobo communities of the Samburu District, and a number of other communities in adjacent districts, such as Laikipia, claim either origins among, or significant linkages to, the Laikipiak. Other members of the same communities claim a range of other origins: Borana, Meru, Samburu, Kikuyu etc. All see their acquisition of Dorobo status as recent.[[20]](#endnote-19) “This notion of a significant element of one-time pastoralists drifting off to various hunter-gatherer groups, as well as to neighbouring herding pastoralists”, Sobania argues, “is consistent with the adaptations that pastoralists have always made to recurrent crises”.[[21]](#endnote-20) Indeed, these changes of subsistence would have been aided by fluid social mechanisms and the possibility to navigate between identities.

Crucially this general pattern of associating with neighbouring groups also suggests that ties to one particular area are more important for the hunting and gathering communities than for the purely pastoral ones. Indeed the fact that the Dorobo groups tended to remain closely associated to the hunting grounds and to adapt themselves socially to their new surroundings is probably linked to the restrictions that a hunting and gathering lifestyle imposes. Regardless of whether forest skills had to be acquired because of changing economic circumstances, or whether they had been inherited from a long line of forest-dwelling ancestors, these skills were necessarily specific to a particular environment. Therefore the fact that hunting and gathering requires specialised knowledge, coupled with the fact that bees can only be cultivated in one spot over a number of years, have the effect of tying the individuals engaging in these activities to the specific stretch land that is familiar to them. As Blackburn put it: “a Maasai left in the forest without cattle might starve in the midst of what the Okiek consider abundant food, but abundant only for those with the specialised knowledge and technology to exploit it”.[[22]](#endnote-21) Another possible reason for the tendency to ‘stay put’ is security. Besides providing food in the forms of roots, berries and wild game, the high forested areas were a more easily defensible sanctuary, and since they were unfavourable for keeping cattle, they were not likely to attract the interest of pastoral groups. In this way, it made sense to maintain comparatively friendly relations with powerful neighbours to whom the hunter-gatherers were unlikely to constitute a threat anyway. The term Dorobo has been applied to a variety of groups who shared a connection -at times a very loose one- with hunting, and which might have encompassed one or several supposed ‘Dorobo’ characteristics. What is more, at times, the dividing line between herders and hunters may become very thin and is easily crossed

“Ethnicity does not, then, entail being situated on one side or another of a boundary, or of simply crossing over, changing identity as one changes one’s residence, one’s occupation or one’s speech. As Kratz (…) points out, Okiek are not really ‘Maasai’ (or Kipsigis or Kikuyu) but ‘everyone, including the Okiek, wants to keep the question open and the lines between them slightly obsfucated.’ We see ‘ethnic shifting’, the strategic drawing on codes of competence, practice and affinity to claim a particular identity qualified by context and motive. Herding and hunting practices are easily interchanged when warranted, and aspects of assimilation or separation can be highlighted as the contexts of unity or difference demand. The negotiation of such conceptual boundaries, while involving subtle graduations of attribution. Are not ‘fluid’, but rather are complex in very specific ways.”[[23]](#endnote-22)

One commonality that emerges however, regardless of the way in which ‘Dorobo’ communities came about - whether they are so-called ‘true Dorobo’ or have taken up hunting and gathering activities in the more recent past – is that attachment to land and association with others seem to be a structural feature of their existence.

**The Forsaking of Hunting and Gathering: A Strategy of Survival**

In the course of the first half of the Twentieth-Century, most remaining hunting and gathering societies saw their eponymous activities diminish until they became just a notch above marginal in the early independent period. Central to these developments was colonial intervention. The ‘Dorobo’ came to play an important role in the justification of British settlement in central Kenya. Indeed the creation of the ‘White Highlands’, as they came to be known, was based on the idea that pre-colonial Kikuyu-speakers had forcefully purchased much of the land from previous hunter-gatherer owners, particularly two distinct groups which Kikuyu tradition remembers as ‘Gumba’ and ‘Asi’ or ‘Athi’.[[24]](#endnote-23) The first Kenya Land Commission of the 1930s largely dismissed Kikuyu claims to land in the central Highlands on the ground that they had ‘bullied’ and expelled its ‘original’, ‘rightful’ owners.[[25]](#endnote-24) Yet, despite their central position in the justification of the colonial enterprise, the Dorobo proved to be a constant headache for the colonial administration because they eluded easy categorisation. Eventually, despite the colonial belief in the immanence of tribe, the “Dorobo problem”, as it was referred to in colonial circles, was in most cases solved by denying them the status of tribe. Instead the investigators of the first Kenya Land Commission recommended that since the Dorobo were “usually scattered families with no tribal organisation”, “wherever possible, the Dorobo should become members of, and be absorbed into, the tribe with which they have the most affinity”. It was argued that it was in the Dorobo’s best interest that they be absorbed by “culturally-superior” peoples.[[26]](#endnote-25) At the same time, a few reserves for ‘true Dorobo’ were also created, such as the Mukogodo and Leroghi reserves in the Rift Valley Province. In this way and in a very short time, colonial policy created a whole set of new circumstances for the Dorobo to cope with: new land distribution and practices, new understandings of which resources to preserve, food innovations, new subsistence opportunities, and, most salient of all, intensification of interaction with other groups. I will briefly outline how this scenario played out in three distinct cases, only one of which has hitherto received extensive scholarly attention.

*The Mukogodo – Yaaku of Laikipia*

Between the mid-1920s and mid-1930s, the Mukogodo underwent a rapid transition from being hunter-gatherers and beekeepers who spoke their own language, Yaaku, to being Maa-speaking pastoralists. This transformation in mode of subsistence took a mere decade, while the switch to Maa as main vernacular took no more than two generations.[[27]](#endnote-26) In his publications on the Mukogodo, Lee Cronk shows how the Mukogodo transition must be understood as a two-pronged strategy – one in which the Mukogodo used a Dorobo identity to manipulate the British, on the one hand, while striving to lose the stigma of the *il-torrobo* label and achieve greater acceptance among Maa-speakers, on the other. Today, the Mukogodo live in the Mukogodo Division of the Laikipia County, formerly known as the ‘Doldol’ (after the Division’s main town) or Mukogodo reserve. They share the Division with several other groups who also have a hunting history: the *Ilng’wesi*, who claim to have associated with the Laikipiak; the *Digirri*, who are possibly of the same historic origins as the Okiek; the *Mumonyot*, who claim to hail from the Laikipiak; the *LeUaso*, also a group of hunters associated with the Laikipiak.[[28]](#endnote-27) The Mukogodo area, at the turn of the Twentieth century, had been inhabited by the Mukogodo and the LeUaso. The Mumonyot had also drifted towards the Mukogodo Hills after the Laikipiak defeat but had not hitherto allied themselves to any particular extent to the Mukogodo. However, when the creation of the White Highlands displaced large numbers of Kikuyu and others, a domino effect was created in which one group’s displacement led to the displacement of another so that the Digirri and Ilng’wesi were pushed to the Mukogodo area. Although both groups had a history of hunting and gathering, by the time they became neighbours with the Mukogodo, they had become Maa-speaking pastoralists. Therefore the Mukogodo found themselves geographically closer to a range of pastoralist groups than they ever had been before. [[29]](#endnote-28)At the same time other British policies had the unintended effect of encouraging not only contact but also intermarriage between Mukogodo and their pastoral neighbours. Since the administration thought of tribes as rigid units, the only attempts to administer the area consisted in repeated efforts to move non-Mukogodo groups to what was assumed to be their rightful reserve. From the 1910s all the way to the 1950s, the area was systematically depopulated of Maasai and other ‘intruders’ from Samburu, Kikuyu etc.[[30]](#endnote-29) The Mukogodo, on the other hand, were seen as the rightful owners of the reserve, and were the only ones never to be deported from it.

“For the Dorobo”, Spencer pointed out, “this policy now entered a new and sinister phase. It was based on the European notion of ultimate Dorobo descent and aboriginal rights to live in the district. On these terms very few members of the reserve could claim an indisputable right to remain”.[[31]](#endnote-30) It is clear that Mukogodo and their neighbours were well aware of the way in which ‘Dorobo’ had now been equated to ‘ancientness’ and, therefore, land ownership. The testimonies garnered by the Kenya Land Commission are particularly revealing. The Mukogodo chief, Selengei Ole Mutungi, made the following statement: “We claim to be the original inhabitants of the Mukogodo Hill area. (…) we have no affinity with the Masai and speak a different language”.[[32]](#endnote-31) The Ndigirri and Ilgnwesi representatives, for their part, could not claim to have come to the Mukogodo forest first; instead, they emphasised their ‘Dorobo’ origins: “We are pure Dorobo – not Masai”, said the Digirri representative, Rono Ole Kifaru,[[33]](#endnote-32) echoed by the Ilngwesi representative, Mungai Ole Theorori: “We are of pure Dorobo extraction. We are not Masai or Meru”.[[34]](#endnote-33) Weakest of all was the Mumonyot defense:

“We are a branch of the Laikipiak clan (…) But we have no desire to go to the Masai reserve. It is not our original habitat. (…) We have occupied the area we are now living in for 40 years”.[[35]](#endnote-34)

As a result, besides claiming Dorobo ancestry, another response to the threat of deportation was to marry the only undisputable ‘rightful’ inhabitants of the region: the Mukogodo. In this way, while marriage between Mukogodo and non-Mukogodo was unheard of before 1900, it became common in the first four decades of the Twentieth Century. By 1931, livestock had become the only acceptable form of bride wealth and from the 1930s onwards, livestock keeping came to replace hunting and gathering as the Mukogodo’s main mode of production. In this way, according to Lee Cronk, “for individual Mukogodo men the adoption of pastoralism represented a response to a rapidly changing social environment in which they either obtained livestock or failed to marry”.[[36]](#endnote-35)

*The Dorobo of the Matthews Range, Samburu*

Whereas, in the case of the Mukogodo, assimilation and cattle acquisition were unintended consequences of colonial policy, in the case of the Matthews Range Dorobo, assimilation and cattle acquisition *were* colonial policy. Soon after the onset of colonial rule, though the white presence in Samburu was less important than in Laikipia, the Samburu became notorious for their armed resistance to the establishment of the colonial administration. The *Lkileku* age-set in particular (c.1921-1936) was marked by unrest, so much so that by the mid-1930s the colonial administration took energetic measures to bring the Samburu District under control. In 1936, the administration demanded that a new age-set be initiated; this new age-set, *Lmekuri* (1936-1948), was then brought directly under administrative control through the massive enrolment of its members, both Samburu and Dorobo, in the King’s African Rifles. This trend continued during the following age-set, *Lkimaniki* (1948-c.1961), many of whom found themselves fighting against the Mau-Mau.[[37]](#endnote-36)

At the same time, in the same year that young men started being whisked away to the army, it was decided that the Dorobo should be removed from their mountainous forests. The enterprise was couched in the discourse of ‘progress’, as the wording of the 1936 Samburu District annual report illustrates:

“There were numbers of these people living almost the life of animals in all the mountains of Samburu [the Matthews Range]. They lived on meat, roots, and honey and were nearly always near starvation. It was decided to try and settle them at Wamba (Uaraguess). … Government gave them Famine Relief (Shs. 1500/-) to see them started at a settled life. They have now got a good many acres of cultivation at Wamba and have started to eat a little of the first fruits of their labour. There are over 300 of them in the settlement. A few still remain in the Hills”.[[38]](#endnote-37)

A later report, however, was a lot more candid as to what the real intended goals of the move were: “in 1936 the Dorobo who lived by hunting up and down the Matthews and Ndotos ranges were turned out of the forests and concentrated against their will on an agricultural settlement at Wamba. Presumably the object was two-fold: to preserve the game, and the forests, which latter suffered by the honey-gathering activities of the Dorobo. It was hoped that the Dorobo would gradually acquire stock, inter-marry with the Samburu and be absorbed”. “This”, he added, “has not happened”. Worse still, “at Wamba the crops far more often fail than succeed”, and it was therefore “frequently necessary for Government to feed the impoverished Dorobo”.[[39]](#endnote-38) By 1946, this state of affair had not changed and a plan began to form to move the Wamba Dorobo to the other Dorobo reserve that had been established on the Leroghi Plateau, north of Mount Kenya. “Agriculture at Wamba is pretty hopeless”, commented the Laikipia-Samburu District Commissioner, and “it should be our policy to remove the non-propertied Dorobo from Wamba to Leroghi where they have a chance of becoming self-supporting by agriculture”.[[40]](#endnote-39) This was unsurprisingly not met with excessive enthusiasm by the Dorobo. After holding a *baraza* in October 1946, the District Commissioner reported that:

“It is quite clear that there is unanimous and very strong opposition to any move (…) The reaction to this [the move] was as follows:

1. Nothing will induce any of us to move – this is our country. We were here long before the Samburu or the Europeans.
2. We will not be absorbed into Samburu sections – we are wandorobo not Samburu – we have our own chief and our own country”.[[41]](#endnote-40)

Despite their claims of a separate identity, the Dorobo had by then started adopting Samburu identities. Between 1936 and the eve of independence, Dorobo families gradually integrated Samburu clans, probably on an *adhoc* basis, depending on who they had most interactions with.[[42]](#endnote-41) At the same time, having stock and associating with the Samburu meant less risk to be deported. The District Officer in Maralal wrote on March 31 1947:

“The Dorobo moved from Wamba shortly after the barazas last October 1946, presumably as they were afraid they would be forcibly removed to Leroghi. They are now back in and round the Matthews with the Samburu and living on their cattle and honey (…) I recommend that from now on they be treated in exactly the same way as the Samburu, with whom they may gradually become amalgamated. At the present Wandorobo call themselves Samburu, when it suits them, and use Samburu sectional names”.[[43]](#endnote-42)

*The Cherangany/Sengwer of Trans-Nzoia, West Pokot, and Marakwet*

As was the case in the Matthews Range, Cherangany[[44]](#endnote-43) colonial history was one of land alienation and assimilation. The Cherangany Hills, which the Cherangany call their ‘ancestral land’, are gently rolling slopes in the Western Highlands of Kenya spread across four administrative counties in the Rift Valley Province: Trans Nzoia, West Pokot, Marakwet and Uasin Gishu. Endowed with a clement climate and plenty of natural resources, it was not long before the Cherangany area saw the mushrooming of European farms, breeding European types of cattle and cultivating coffee and maize on a large scale and mostly distributed across the plains of the Cheranganis, around the edge of the forest, and stretched up the lower slopes of Mount Elgon.[[45]](#endnote-44) This was possible because the land was seen as ‘empty’, as Arthur Cecil Hoey, who had been the first European visitor to the area in 1906 and had subsequently reserved a large piece of land for himself, suggested to the Kenya Land Commission in 1934:

“*Chairman*: Were there any Cherangany on the areas which are now European farms?

*Mr Hoey:* there were a few on the top of my farm, but not on any of the other farms. The Cherangani had been driven right back into the mountain here [because of raids] (…). They simply lived there with no stock of any sort; they lived entirely as Dorobo”.[[46]](#endnote-45)

Yet, C.H. Adams remembered the process differently:

“I was the first Administrative Officer to be posted to Marakwet (…) the land survey of the N.E. corner of the Trans Nzoia took place about the beginning of 1913, and I remember that a little more land was being taken into the farm area than should be the case, thus depriving the Marakwet and Cherangani of land of which they were making use”.[[47]](#endnote-46)

In addition, not only were the Cherangany barred from the plains, they were also ‘encouraged’ to abandon the forest, at first not so much, it would seem, as part of a worry to preserve the forest, as much as a way to integrate them into the colonial economy. In 1926, H.B. Hosking, then assistant District Commissioner, Elgeyo and Marakwet, wrote to the Provincial Commissioner, Kerio:

“All Government Officers in charge have striven to persuade the Cherangani who remained in the forest to leave their Dorobo haunts and habits and become cultivators on the slopes, owners of cattle, payers of taxes and respectable members of society”.[[48]](#endnote-47)

Simultaneously, in much the same way as the Mukogodo and Matthews Range Dorobo, the Cherangany were brought into increased and transformed contact with their neighbours. The farming sector provided a major arena for these new social interactions. The Cherangany, both men and women, were hired in large numbers by the farmers for whom they performed a variety of jobs: harvesting crops, herding cattle, keeping watch, growing vegetables, etc. There they would share their living space, work, and indeed their lives, with a number of members of other groups who had been attracted by the job opportunities: Pokot, Nandi, Marakwet, Elgeyo…[[49]](#endnote-48)

If these groups all shared cultural affinities, being part of what would be later known as the ‘Kalenjin’ group, their being geographically brought together led to increased rates of intermarriage and at times the blurring of such practices as age-sets. The Pokot in particular became a much more conspicuous presence around the Cherangany. This was especially the case after 1927, when the colonial administration leased out 150 square miles of ‘traditional’ Cherangany land as a grazing area to drought stricken Pokot herdsmen. In 1930, the District Commissioner of Elgeyo-Marakwet met some of the Cherangany elders who “lost no opportunity of voicing their sense of grievance that Government had thought fit to deprive them of their land and hand it over to another tribe which had no shadow of title to it”.[[50]](#endnote-49) Soon afterwards, some of the Cherangany who had remained in the forest were faced with the first forest conservation policies:

“Following (…) the establishment of Native Forest Reserves in (…) Marakwet District, it became necessary to move certain Cherangani families from the forest areas (…) The Cherangani agreed to evacuate the Forest areas, and to surrender all rights thereto – provided they were allowed to move into West Suk (…) The conditions upon which the move to West Suk was agreed to, were, that the Cherangani should be merged with the Suk, and receive no separate tribal recognition, and that they should be subjects to Suk chiefs, and Tribal Custom. To these conditions, the Cherangani agreed”.[[51]](#endnote-50)

Paul Spencer during his period of fieldwork in the early 1960s witnessed a general pattern in Dorobo migration and assumed that this pattern probably reflected their behaviour during much of the colonial period: Dorobo groups tended to remain closely associated to their traditional hunting grounds and to adapt themselves socially to new immigrant groups. In the three cases presented above, the acquisition of a new identity and new livelihood was a consequence of the efforts on the part of so-called ‘Dorobo’ to retain possession of what they perceived as ‘ancestral land’. The association with more powerful groups, which reached varied degrees of comprehensiveness, served, on the one hand, to counter the hostility, contempt, or both, expressed by the new groups with whom colonial policies was forcing them to cohabit. On the other hand, it represented a strategy to secure continued access to the land and associated resources which their hunting and gathering lifestyle had made them deeply familiar with and connected to. Thus, the case of the ‘Dorobo’ draws attention to the precise conditions under which the notion of ‘tribe’ became salient in the minds of indigenous actors and the instrumental use that they made of it. As we will see in the following section, the ambiguities of the ethnic categories produced by the colonial administration provide an important background to some of the political debates of the post-Independence era.

**The Dorobo since Independence**

Former hunter and gatherer communities today are for the most part living as cattle herders and cultivators. After independence in 1963, some tendencies that had started in the colonial period, such as education, the protection of wildlife and the introduction of new foodstuff, really started taking root. As a result, hunting, which up to the 1960s had provided a supplementary source of food, all but disappeared as a significant economic activity in the decades that followed independence. However, as pastoralists, former hunting and gathering communities are met with new types of challenges, both environment- and human-originated, and had to design new coping strategies. For one thing, since independence, environmental factors have had greater impact. In the last half century or so, drought spells have become increasingly common, the most devastating and best remembered of which took place in 1984-5 (many more followed). Concurrently the rains have reportedly become increasingly unpredictable as well as diminished in volume, while at the same time there have also been occurrences of protracted and torrential rains.[[52]](#endnote-51) Concurrently, the human and cattle population grew at a very fast pace, thereby “placing greater strain on scarce land resources”.[[53]](#endnote-52) As a result cattle numbers are starting to diminish particularly in arid regions,[[54]](#endnote-53) pastoral groups such as the Samburu are engaging in increasingly wide and desperate grazing migrations in the dry seasons and voices are increasingly heard predicting the impending end of the nomadic pastoralist lifestyle altogether.[[55]](#endnote-54) Moreover, as new sources of food have become available, there is a tendency for formerly mobile pastoralist communities to become more sedentary (only the warriors move with the cattle).[[56]](#endnote-55) As a result, ‘forest’ peoples also have to contend with a growing population of ‘non-forest’ peoples permanently settling in once exclusively ‘Dorobo’ land and asking for an equal share of local resources: Samburu, Kikuyu, Meru etc. in the Mukogodo Forest, Samburu in the Matthews Range, Pokot, Elgeyo and Marakwet in the Cherangany Hills. While this phenomenon is not new, population growth and dwindling resources are giving it a more dramatic dimension. In addition, there is a strong sense of marginalisation among these ‘forest peoples’, who bemoan a lack of recognition not only on the part of their neighbours but also on the part of the Government.

One powerful expression of such marginalisation are evictions. Two controversial cases are those of the Mau and Mount Elgon Okiek, who are regularly threatened with evictions to make way for government’s conservation plans.[[57]](#endnote-56) However it is the Cherangany, - or rather a section of the Cherangany who prefer to be referred to as ‘Sengwer’ (see below) - who are the most visible case. At the beginning of 2005, a group of so-called Sengwer were forcibly removed from Kapolet forest, on the border of Trans Nzoia and West Pokot on the grounds that they were endangering the environment by felling trees for timber and clearing areas for cultivation in a gazetted Government Forest of particular importance since it is one of Kenya’s five ‘Water Towers’.[[58]](#endnote-57) Other such evictions were reported over the next decade.[[59]](#endnote-58) One of the most controversial occurrences took place just days before a World Bank-hosted Colloquium on “Deepening Dialogue with Stakeholders in the Forest Sector in Kenya” was to start in Eldoret (March 4-6 2015). The colloquium’s avowed purpose was to provide “a unique opportunity for the forest-dependent communities to engage constructively with the government and other stakeholders on contentious challenges in the management and sharing of forest resources”.[[60]](#endnote-59) One exception to this cycle of evictions are the Mukogodo, or ‘Yaaku’, as they prefer to be referred to today. The Yaaku stand in contrast to most other forest-dwelling communities as they are one of the only communities allowed to live in their forest. They have a contract with the Government which will expire in 2018, at which point the state of the forest will be assessed. Whether the Yaaku will be allowed to keep on living in the forest after this, is, at this stage, less than certain.[[61]](#endnote-60)

In the context of these developments, it is crucial to examine the defence mechanisms that have been put into place by ‘forest peoples’ communities. The last two decades have witnessed an increase of political agitation on the part of these communities. This must be seen in the context of the Kenyan Government’s emphasis on ethnic identities and more recently ‘indigeneity’. In 2010 a new Constitution of Kenya was promulgated, which recognised the status of “ancestral lands and lands traditionally occupied by hunter gatherer communities”.[[62]](#endnote-61) This followed the adoption by the UN General Assembly of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, which was promulgated on September 13 2007, after more than two decades of negotiations.[[63]](#endnote-62) Consequently, and the number of forums, organisations, declarations and strategic guidelines that focus on indigenous issues, conferences bringing together representatives from Kenya’s self-professed ‘indigenous’ communities, such as the above-mentioned March 2015 conference, continues to grow and the last two decades or so have witnessed a marked tendency on the part of former hunting and gathering communities to emphasise their distinctiveness and ‘indigenous’ status. This has been particularly the case among communities associated with the larger Kalenjin grouping of western Kenya: the Sengwer, Pokot, Endorois, Mount Elgon Ndorobo and Ogiek communities. In addition, the Yaaku, the ‘Sengwer’, and the Ogieks have acquired an internet presence (that is less the case for the Matthews Range Dorobo). The choice of language employed on this new platform is highly significant: ‘marginalisation’, ‘minority rights’, ‘indigeneity’, and ‘environment protection’… all have become virtually synonymous with formerly hunting communities. Other common tropes are the promotion of their hunting and gathering past and the expression of pride for ‘ancestral culture’. Revealingly, the first image greeting the visitor to the website of the Okiek people is a romantic black-and-white depiction of a man holding a bow and wearing a skin garment.[[64]](#endnote-63) Also crucial is the presentation of ‘forest’ communities themselves as the best possible conservationists because of their alleged ‘deep knowledge’ of the forest. “The Ogiek”, their website claims, “pose not only no environmental threat, but are actually the guardians of these forests since time immemorial” (Ibid). In this way, hunting and gathering communities have chosen to emphasise their historic links with the forest and other ‘Dorobo/Okiek’ groupings, over their connections to their Maasai, Samburu, Kalenjin etc. neighbours.

This new tendency is in stark contrast with the earlier, colonial-times trend towards associating with bigger, more powerful groups. In his work on the Mukogodo, Lee Cronk has described the efforts that the latter put in avoiding being labelled ‘Dorobo’. Some of his informants even argued that since bees are a form of livestock and their ancestors always had beehives, they were never really Dorobo.[[65]](#endnote-64) “Since the Mukogodo transition to pastoralism”, he argues, there has been “an increasingly widespread acceptance of the relatively new idea of a common Mukogodo Maasai identity”.[[66]](#endnote-65) In 1971, a coalition of Mukogodo Division politicians obtained from the government to agree to refer the people in the Division as Mukogodo Maasai rather than Mukogodo Dorobo.[[67]](#endnote-66) Nowadays it is the name ‘Yaaku’ that is put to the fore. To some extent, it can be argued that the Yaaku are trying to re-invent, or perhaps simply invent, ‘Yaaku-ness’. Revealing in this regard are the ways in which people are perceiving the loss of the Yaaku language. Every single one of my informants, of every age and gender, bemoaned the loss of the language and expressed vividly their wish for the language to be revived, some getting upset at the mere mention of this loss. One man severely criticised his parents’ generations for having chosen to teach their children Maasai rather than Yaaku.[[68]](#endnote-67) Yet, apart from the language, it seems that there is no other aspect of the ‘old’ Yaaku culture that people particularly want to see revived. This is an indication that what is really at stake is perhaps not so much culture revival as much as official recognition. “Without a language, we are not a tribe” is how Kisembe Leitiko put it. The following statement made in an article on Yaaku revival on the website of the *Kenya Forest Service* is also revealing: “Kenya’s new constitution, adopted in a referendum three months ago recognizes indigenous peoples’ rights to their ancestral lands. The Yaaku have learned that cultural identity is a weapon”.[[69]](#endnote-68)

The Cherangany-Sengwer are another identity currently being negotiated. Along with the Okiek of the Mau and Elgon, it could be argued that they are among the most militant of the forest groups. Yet the way in which this militancy is being expressed is far from being uncontroversial and the ‘identity’ of the group –Sengwer- in whose name grievances are expressed is far from being straightforward or undisputed. This, too, must be put in the context of a history of perceived marginalisation and fight for the spotlight. As noted in the previous section, the Cherangany, estimated to be between 30,000 and 50,000 today, live in an area stretched across several Counties. Despite the fact that the Cherangany community attempted to rectify this situation in the first days of independence by asking to be provided with a district or a constituency of their own, this was refused on the ground that the Cherangany “have always lived happily together with the Marakwet and Pokot”.[[70]](#endnote-69) This made the Cherangany a minority group in all the Counties in which they live and therefore, in their own words, “politically and administratively weak”. There is a general sense among the Cherangany that they are constantly being cheated of employment opportunities and generally discriminated against in West Pokot, Marakwet and Trans Nzoia Counties alike, because these Counties are dominated by the larger groups: the Pokot, Marakwet, Nandi and Luhya.[[71]](#endnote-70) The fact that they lack any leadership or any community representative higher than two Members of the County Assembly is universally and sorely lamented. As a result, as Lynch argued, “among the Cherangany, an articulation of ethnic difference, espoused in contests for symbolic and material resources, has developed in the last few decades”.[[72]](#endnote-71) Brandishing history as the crucial deciding factor, the Cherangany argue that they are ‘indigenous’, while the Pokot and other communities are ‘immigrants’, and therefore the land should be theirs:

“Whereas the Cherangany were dispersed and remained unsettled over a wide area under different administrations, it must herewith be noted that the Pokot and Marakwet communities never bordered, nor did they lose any land in Trans Nzoia or Uasin-Gishu for that matter. They cannot therefore make any claim whatsoever, moral or historical”.[[73]](#endnote-72)

Despite such appeal to historical memory, however, the community leaders and activists are far from showing a united front. In fact, there has been a considerable amount of tensions surrounding the question of what the ‘real’ name of the community is. In recent years, a section of the Cherangany community living around the Embobut forest, where most of the evictions took place, decided that their real, ancestral name was not Cherangany -a name, they said, that was given to them by the Maasai and perpetuated by the Colonial administration- but ‘Sengwer’. Accordingly, ‘Sengwer’ is the name appearing on all international platforms, to the dismay and frustration of those who call themselves ‘Cherangany’. Consequently there has been many accusations that the ‘Sengwer’ leaders are confusing their people for personal and/or political gain and are simply trying to attract attention and benefit to themselves at the expense of the rest of the community.[[74]](#endnote-73) Confusion has reached high enough levels for the Cherangany and/or Sengwer to receive not one but two codes in the State Registry after the 2009 census: 603 for “Cherangany” and 616 for “Sengwer”.[[75]](#endnote-74) In official documents, they are now usually diplomatically referred to as ‘Sengwer-Cherangany’, or some variation thereof. In this way, the Cherangany-Sengwer are a powerful example of how land and resources are of vital importance in the formulation of identity.

The case of the Matthews Range Dorobo is a little different. The Matthews Dorobo, and indeed, all Samburu Dorobo, have been a lot less present on the political scene. This may be in part because their roots as ‘Dorobo’ do not reach as far as the others and because their claims to indigeneity therefore rest on slightly wobblier grounds. It may also be, as Bilinda Straight has argued, that “in contrast to Dorobo groups living near the Maasai, Samburu Dorobo identity is more fully entangled with their identity as Samburu (and many rely almost completely on livestock husbandry for their subsistence)”.[[76]](#endnote-75) Indeed many members of the Matthews’ youngest generation (*Lkishami*) are barely aware of the Dorobo past of the community and have forgotten that, before integrating Samburu clans, the Dorobo had had their own distinct clans: Suiei, Lgoyo, Lwarges, Lmalon, Lgwenya. It should be noted, however, that this is different for the Suiei clan, whose members live in a more isolated area, further away from the developments of Wamba, and who are now increasingly perceived as a different group. This has led to a growing sense that, as one my informants told me, there are three groups living on the Matthews Range today: “the Samburu, the Dorobo and the Suiei”.[[77]](#endnote-76) Yet, despite their comparatively small presence in the political arena, the Matthews Dorobo were perhaps the ones who went through the most serious case of isolation and economic turmoil in the post-independence era. Forcibly relocated to an area largely incompatible with hunter-gatherer subsistence strategies as well as nearly impossible for consistent cultivation, the situation did not improve when independence ushered in an era of droughts and unpredictable rainfall. As a result, much of the Samburu population has become dependent on famine relief and development initiatives.[[78]](#endnote-77) In fact Wamba was the headquarters for the largest development organisation operating in Samburu District: the German sponsored GTZ (*Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit*). In its thirty year career in the Wamba Division, from the mid-1970s to the mid-2000s, GTZ has initiated a wide variety of projects, many of which have been explicitly focused on livestock development, while others included water catchment, soil conservation, and school building projects.[[79]](#endnote-78) Though these projects were not solely aimed at the Dorobo, such projects usually target ‘marginalised’ people, and who is more marginalised than the Dorobo? The very fact that GTZ chose Wamba as centre of operations means that the Dorobo must have represented a significant proportion of those involved in or affected by the programme. In Kibartare, a very isolated settlement in the middle of ‘Suiei’ heartland, a well became a source of tension. The fact that this well must be shared with the Samburu living in the same region and that they have to walk all the way to the Suiei area has reportedly turned the well into an area of confrontation and bickering between Samburu and Suiei.[[80]](#endnote-79) The reaction of one Samburu man I asked directions from was also instructive: “Why are the Dorobo always getting all the attention? We are marginalised too!”

Therefore on the eve of the 21st century, it is perhaps in the realm of words that most Dorobo communities are fighting their battle. The stake, however, has not changed: access to land and resources. Ethnicity, which formerly went against the interests of these community, had, be the end of the 20th century become a useful tool, under the cover of discourses of ‘indigeneity’. Despite the fact that at the outset of independence, ‘tribalism’ was largely regarded as “little more than an irrelevant anachronism, an atavistic residue deriving from the distant past of rural Africa”,[[81]](#endnote-80) it was far from discarded in the postcolonial period. “Because of the essentially artificial nature of the postcolonial states” Leroy Vail argued, ‘”Ethnicity became the home of opposition in states where class consciousness was largely underdeveloped”.[[82]](#endnote-81) If we add to that more recent global discourses of indigeneity, minority rights and environmental protection, the way in which these factors can come together to strengthen certain communities’ claims to territory and resources becomes clear. Former hunting and gathering communities in this regard are aided by their seemingly more sedentary lifestyle, which allows them to be more strongly associated with a particular stretch of land than their pastoral neighbours. Indeed hunting and gathering communities are not the only ones claiming to be ‘indigenous’. Other communities such as the Maasai and the Pokot have long clamoured for their ‘indigenous status’ to be recognised but are hindered to an extent by their well-known and endorsed past of migration. In this way, ‘indigenous’ land claims in Kenya must be understood within their historical context and must at least in part be viewed as a strategy to reclaim land and contest established landownership, underdevelopment and limited democracy at the local level on the basis of ethnicity. Therefore this new tendency to revive a ‘hunter and gatherer’ identity, *i.e.* claim ‘indigenous status’, is not only ideological. It is part of a fight for survival.

**Conclusion**

The case of the Kenyan hunter-gatherers is a powerful reminder that, as Lynch put it, “ethnic identities are best understood as complex and contested social constructs, perpetually in the process of creation”.[[83]](#endnote-82) Not at any point in remembered history was the identity of these communities straightforward. Instead these identities have varied, been transformed and utilised in a large variety of ways, and it is likely that this has been the case for a long time. While it is possible that some hunting groups may indeed at one point have constituted populations whose historical roots are distinct from surrounding pastoralists and farmers, there is also some evidence that at least some of them have consisted largely of disenfranchised pastoralists, rather than being descendants of ancient populations who have hunted since ‘time immemorial’. Even if there was indeed once an ‘aboriginal’ hunting and gathering group in Kenya, as Paul Spencer pointed out, “the extent of the intermarriage and intermigration (…), and the constant interchange of cultural and even institutional features between groups makes any search for racial origins futile”.[[84]](#endnote-83) However, all those to whom the term ‘Dorobo’ has been applied shared some similarities, which led to the idea that there existed some ‘universal’ Dorobo characteristics. Chief among these is the tendency to stay attached to a certain stretch of land and adapt to new circumstances rather than moving, a tendency which at first was undoubtedly linked to the specificities of the hunting and gathering lifestyle but which also endured in later years.

While boundaries between groups seem to have displayed a great deal of fluidity in the past, colonialism not only made ethnic or tribal identities increasingly rigid but the notion of ‘tribe’ was made to become a salient factor in competition for rapidly diminishing resources. Thus Vail’s analysis of the artificiality of tribalism which he observed in Southern Africa is equally valid in the Kenyan case:

“Empirical evidence shows clearly that ethnic consciousness is very much a new phenomenon, an ideological construct, usually of the twentieth century, and not an anachronistic cultural artefact from the past. As an offspring of the changes associated with so-called ‘modernisation’, therefore, it is unlikely to be destroyed by the continuation of these same processes”.[[85]](#endnote-84)

Although tribalism is often denounced as out-of-date and dangerous, access to land -and therefore resources- is more often than not considered through the prism of rights to ethnic ‘territories’. This was not lost on forest peoples activists. Since neighbouring communities are all regarded as having migrated into the current area, statements of being Ogiek or Ndorobo can be deployed as a basis for claims to original residency. In this way images and representations which might have at times played against the ‘Dorobo’, have also imbued hunting and gathering communities with a powerful sense of ‘ethnic primogeniture’.

In this context, it is important to understand some of the processes involved in the formation of Dorobo identity as well as the way in which ‘Dorobo’ has been understood by all actors at different times. Though a Dorobo identity as such does not exist, perceptions of the meaning of the word have had, and continue to have, great practical political impact. In all three study cases, the ‘Dorobo’ communities fought for their land and access to resources by using identity as a weapon or argument against neighbouring groups on the one hand and the colonial and independent states on the other. All used a mixture of association and (partial) amalgamation with other groups and public assertion of a unique identity at various times, sometimes in parallel. When association with more powerful groups was the safest option, they went along with it, but when emphasising separateness became a fruitful strategy, then they fully embraced it, at least when talking to state and international interlocutors. Therefore, as Lynch argues, “a high degree of ambiguity surrounds questions of ethnic identity. It is this ambiguity and the room for the negotiation and renegotiation of ethnicity, which makes it such a valued political resource in the dramaturgy of Kenyan politics”.[[86]](#endnote-85)

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<http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2015/03/09/forest-communities-kenyan-government-hold-promising-talks-on-sharing-forest-resources>.

## UN Human Rights. “Declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples”

Accessed on June 15 2015.

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/IPeoples/Pages/Declaration.aspx>.

1. \* Email: eguene@uni-koeln.de [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. As quoted in Van Zwanenberg, “Dorobo hunting and gathering”, 12. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
3. Vail, *The Creation of Tribalism,* 12. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
4. Most hunting and gathering community of Kenya have been called a variety of names. Here I will use the names that they most commonly used to refer to themselves at the time of writing. The hunters and gatherers of the Matthews Range in particular are usually just called ‘Dorobo’. Consequently this is the word that I will be using here. In addition, as will be described below, there is a dispute among the inhabitants of the Cherangany Hills as to whether their ‘historical’ name is Sengwer or Cherangany (also spelled as Cherangani). [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
5. Lynch, “Kenya’s New Indigenes”, 148. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
6. Thomson, *Through Masailand*, 447. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
7. Höhnel, *Discovery by Count Teleki*, 260. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
8. Smith, *Through unknown African countries*, 303. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
9. Beech, “Pre-Bantu occupants”; Dundas, “Notes on the origin and history of the Kikuyu and Dorobo tribes”; Hobley “Notes concerning the Eldorobo of Mau”, “Further notes on the El Dorobo”, “Notes on the Dorobo people”. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
10. Huntingford, “The social institutions of the Dorobo”, 4. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
11. Chang. “Nomads without cattle”, 276. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
12. Berntsen, “The Maasai and Their Neighbours”, 3; Blackburn, “Okiek History”, 53; Cronk, “From true Dorobo to Mukogodo Maasai”, 32. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
13. Spencer, *Nomads in Alliance*, 199. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
14. Blackburn, “Okiek History”, 53-4; Blackburn, “In the land of milk and honey”, 287, 294, 299; Kratz, *Affecting Performance*, 64. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
15. Spencer, *Nomads in Alliance*, 200. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
16. Paul Spencer’s oldest Samburu informants in 1960 remembered this event when they were small children which would place it during the Samburu Lmarikon age –set (c.1879 to 1893). [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
17. Sobania, “Defeat and Dispersal”, 105-7; Spencer, *Nomads in Alliance*, 154-7. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
18. *Kenya Land Commission*, Vol. II, 1608. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
19. Sobania, “Defeat and Dispersal”, 114; Spencer, *Nomads in Alliance*, 200-1. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
20. This statement is based on my own interviews carried out in the Matthews Range and the Mukogodo area between March and May 2015. However other researchers who have worked in Samburu and Laikipia have reported the same. See Grillo, “Pastoralism and Pottery Use”, 110; Hodder, *Symbols in Action*; Paul Spencer, *Nomads in Alliance*, Appendix. [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
21. Sobania, “Defeat and Dispersal”, 115. [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
22. Blackburn, “Okiek History”, 61 [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
23. Galaty, ‘The Eye that Wants a Person‘, 187 [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
24. Dundas, “Notes on the origin and history of the Kikuyu and Dorobo tribes”; Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu*; Muriuki, *The History of the Kikuyu,* 37. [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
25. See *Kenya Land Commission*, Evidence, Vol. I. [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
26. Breen, *The Politics of land,* 92-3; *Kenya Land Commission,* Vol.III, 2131-3. [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
27. While reports from the early century (Hobley) indicate that the language was still very much alive, by 1969, all Mukogodo spoke Maa. Today only a handful of old people have retained some knowledge of the language and no native Yaaku-speaker remains. [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
28. Cronk, “From true Dorobo to Mukogodo Maasai”, 30; MSS.Afr. s. 2311 Spencer, 1-3. It should be noted that the population of the Mukogodo Division has also incorporated members of many other groups, particularly Samburu, to whose District, the Mukogodo Division is adjacent, but also Kikuyu, Somali, Meru… [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
29. Cronk, “From true Dorobo to Mukogodo Maasai”, 35; Spencer, *Nomads in Alliance*, 209-10. [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
30. The Samburu were deported in 1912, 1921, 1935, 1940, 1946, 1955, 1958 and 1959. Ilng’wesi were deported to Meru district in 1925. Some Digirri were deported once to the Maasai reserve (1912). The Mumonyot three times to the Masai reserve (1912-3, 1925-6, 1929) and five times to the Samburu District (1935, 1935-6, 1939, 1940, 1946). LeUaso were deported once to the Samburu District (1935). See Spencer, *Nomads in Alliance*, 210; DC/NKI/3/2 Worthy: 3.1. 4.1 6.1. [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
31. Spencer, *Nomads in Alliance*, 211. [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
32. *Kenya Land Commission*, Vol. II, 1570 [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
33. Ibid., 1571. [↑](#endnote-ref-32)
34. Ibid*.* [↑](#endnote-ref-33)
35. Ibid., 1572. [↑](#endnote-ref-34)
36. Cronk, “From true Dorobo to Mukogodo Maasai”, 36-7. [↑](#endnote-ref-35)
37. Spencer, *Nomads in Alliance*, 161-5. [↑](#endnote-ref-36)
38. DC/SAM/1/2, 1936, 8. [↑](#endnote-ref-37)
39. DC/SAM/2/1, 1944, 8 [↑](#endnote-ref-38)
40. PC/NKU/2/I/31, 1946, 2. [↑](#endnote-ref-39)
41. PC/NKU/2/I/31, 1946, 11. [↑](#endnote-ref-40)
42. This, most of my informants remembered, was done because the Samburu were ‘hostile’, constantly raiding and attacking them, so that it was both easier and safer to present themselves as being part of the same group in order to cohabitate with them while still living on the edge of the forest. [↑](#endnote-ref-41)
43. PC/NKU/2/I/31, 1946, 14. [↑](#endnote-ref-42)
44. For ease of reading, the term Cherangany will be used here. However it should be noted that a section of this community, known as Sengwer, contests the use of that name. [↑](#endnote-ref-43)
45. Holmes, “Land Tenure”, 137. [↑](#endnote-ref-44)
46. *Report of the Kenya Land Commission*, 1994. [↑](#endnote-ref-45)
47. Letter of December 15 1925 as quoted in *Memorandum of Cherangany Community*, 22. [↑](#endnote-ref-46)
48. As quoted in *Memorandum of Cherangany Community*, 24. [↑](#endnote-ref-47)
49. Interview with Abraham Mworor Maina 03/07/2015; Kapsoyo Ruto Sinyei 04/07/2015; Paulo Saisi Kapkom 06/07/2015. [↑](#endnote-ref-48)
50. Letter of 16 April 1930: 2, as reproduced in *Memorandum of Cherangany Community*. [↑](#endnote-ref-49)
51. West Suk Annual Report 1935, as quoted in Lynch, “Negotiating Ethnicity”, 52. [↑](#endnote-ref-50)
52. NEMA, *Effects of Climate Change in Kenya,* 5. [↑](#endnote-ref-51)
53. World Bank, *Strategic Environmental Assessment of the Kenya Forests,* xii. [↑](#endnote-ref-52)
54. ILRI, *An Assessment of the Response to the 2008-2009 Drought in Kenya,* 21. [↑](#endnote-ref-53)
55. For a study of the historical fact that pastoralists in Eastern Africa have become increasingly sedentary, see Fratkin and Roth, *As Pastoralists Settle*. [↑](#endnote-ref-54)
56. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-55)
57. Medard, “Indigenous Land Claims in Kenya”, 19-36; REDD Monitor, “Ogiek Threatened with Eviction from Mau Forest Kenya”. [↑](#endnote-ref-56)
58. Kenrick, “The Case of the Cherangany Hills, Kenya”, 11. The other water towers are Mount Kenya, the Aberdares Range, Mount Elgon and the Mau complex. [↑](#endnote-ref-57)
59. This was especially the case after the start of a *World Bank*-funded project called *Natural Resource Management Project* (NRMP). Running from 2007 to 2013 the NRMP’s aim was to aid the Kenyan Forest Service to protect the Cherangany Hills in order to secure their key water catchments functions. Yet at the same time as the NRM Project was operating, evictions from forested area, particularly the Embobut forest, by the KFS were reported. See Kenrick 2014. [↑](#endnote-ref-58)
60. Lynch, “Negotiating Ethnicity”, 51; REDD Monitor, “Just Days before a Meeting to Resolve the Crisis in the Embobut Forest”; World Bank, “Forest Communities, Kenyan Government Hold Promising Talks”. [↑](#endnote-ref-59)
61. Interviews with Thomas Napoituri 08/04/2015 and Georges Rambei 07/04/2015. [↑](#endnote-ref-60)
62. *Constitution of Kenya* 63.4b. [↑](#endnote-ref-61)
63. ## UN Human Rights, *Declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples*.

    [↑](#endnote-ref-62)
64. *Ogiek.org*. “The Ogiek People”. [↑](#endnote-ref-63)
65. Cronk, “From true Dorobo to Mukogodo Maasai”, 40. [↑](#endnote-ref-64)
66. Ibid., 42. [↑](#endnote-ref-65)
67. Ibid., 43. [↑](#endnote-ref-66)
68. Interview with Kisembe Leitiko, 01/04/2015. [↑](#endnote-ref-67)
69. Kenya Forest Service, “The Yaaku People of Mukogodo – Laikipia Reclaim their Language”. [↑](#endnote-ref-68)
70. Letter from the Civil Secretary, Rift Valley Region October 15 1963 as quoted in *Memorandum of the Sengwer Ethnic Minority Hunter-Gatherer Indigenous Peoples*, 4.1. [↑](#endnote-ref-69)
71. Lynch, “Negotiating Ethnicity”, 55. [↑](#endnote-ref-70)
72. Ibid., 56. [↑](#endnote-ref-71)
73. *Memorandum of the Cherangany (Sengwer)*, 4. [↑](#endnote-ref-72)
74. Interview with Solomon Cherongos & Benson Kenyatta Krop, 30/06/2015. [↑](#endnote-ref-73)
75. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-74)
76. Straight, *Altered Landscapes,* 146. [↑](#endnote-ref-75)
77. Interview with Lmanisi Lesowapir, 15/04/2015. [↑](#endnote-ref-76)
78. Straight, *Altered Landscapes*, 153. [↑](#endnote-ref-77)
79. Ibid., 71. [↑](#endnote-ref-78)
80. Interviews with Lkitelen Lepale and Meidimari Lenangoisa, 21/05/2015. [↑](#endnote-ref-79)
81. Vail, *The Creation of Tribalism*, 1. [↑](#endnote-ref-80)
82. Ibid., 2. [↑](#endnote-ref-81)
83. Lynch, “Negotiating Ethnicity”, 49. [↑](#endnote-ref-82)
84. Spencer, *Nomads in Alliance*, 200. [↑](#endnote-ref-83)
85. Vail, *The Creation of Tribalism*, 3. [↑](#endnote-ref-84)
86. Lynch, “Negotiating Ethnicity”, 61. [↑](#endnote-ref-85)