The History Of The Isukha And Idakho Clans: Among The Abaluyia Of Western Kenya

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MR. MWAYUULI AND THE HISTORY OF CLANS

AN INTRODUCTION

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I. The manuscripts

This book is entirely based upon the typed manuscripts of Mr. M.S. Mwayuuli. He explained in his "Preface" that his manuscripts were mostly written in the years of 1966 to 1971. Therefore when I was shown them in 1987, some of them were already more than twenty years old. They were written on different kinds of papers, by different kinds of typewriters, and even in different writing styles. Some of them had corrections of English by hand and the rest had not. These all clearly show the manuscripts had been written over a long period, certainly longer than the Preface suggests because some of the manuscripts were written after the Preface was drawn up.

The contents of the manuscripts are the history of each clan which is found in present-day Isukha Location and Idakho Location of Kakamega District, Western Kenya.

What I did as an editor were three things. Firstly, I divided the manuscripts into three parts, which correspond to three chapters of this book, namely "history of Isukha clans except the Abamakhaya", "history of the Abamakhaya clan", and "history of Idakho clans". Secondly, I corrected grammatical and other kinds of anomalies in his writing. I tried my best to save original compositions. The "Preface" is an exception in this regard. This part was made from two different manuscripts of about 10 pages in all. One was what can be called preface proper and the other was his autobiography. I cut up the sentences and connected them again, while changing the order of the sentences and omitting some unnecessary parts. Thirdly, I wrote this introduction.

He has been eager to publish this manuscripts for many years, but it seems that he has not had a chance. I met him in 1987 through the introduction of his own daughter, Mrs. Elithabeth Shyamala, then The Deputy Headmaster of Lirhanda Girl's High School in Isukha location. I have studied in Isukha since 1977 as a social anthropologist. I myself have tried to collect the Isukha clan history, but the result was not prospective. Certainly some elders had very extensive knowledge about their own ancestors, but it was mostly generations of male names. Except in rare cases, as far as I knew, there were few stories and episodes of ancestors which could be suitably called "history". I thought that the history in Isukha was very practical in the sense that only the genealogy of a clan, and with it the internal relations of sub-groups of a clan, are kept by memory of names of successive ancestors.

It was with a feeling of surprise, therefore, when I read the manuscripts, especially the very long history of the Abamakhaya or even of the shorter ones like the Abamilonje. After examining this whole body of the clan histories, I thought it very valuable and worth
publishing in a form of a book. I had the manuscripts photocopied and I brought the copies to Japan for printing.

I don’t know exactly how Mr. Mwayuuli conducted the research for this history, but from his writing I suppose that collecting materials was mostly done by interviewing a group of elders who belonged to a particular clan. He always mentioned names and ages of these elders at the end of each clan history. I know from my experience that this kind of interview is not always easy and successful. I think that the difficulty reflects the regrettably short histories of some of the clans.

He also didn’t forget to add the development of a clan in recent years. He explained invariably how the clan people worked hard to develop their agriculture, business and education, mentioning names of persons who contributed to the developments. For him this is a part of the clan history. This makes us feel that his history is not only a result of his life-long interest in the historical study but also a result of concern about his fellow-farmers’ endeavours to catch up with modern changes and developments.

II. Features of the Abamakhaya clan history

There are many interesting features in the composition of Mr. Mwayuuli’s history. Two of the salient features are that he wrote a particularly long history of his own clan, the Abamakhaya (or, Vamakhaya, according to the current spelling), and that he had a clear intention of writing a combined history of the two “sub-tribes” of the Isukha and the Idakho. As I will explain, these two features are deeply connected in his motive for writing the history, but firstly I will examine the Abamakhaya clan history to some extent.

It is quite natural for him to be able to write a long history of his own clan. One obvious reason for it is that in Isukha generally there is no specialist who is responsible for the keeping a clan history. In other words maintaining the oral traditions is not clearly institutionalized like in some societies. Therefore, as I also personally experienced, it is difficult for a person other than members of a clan to know who is the best elder to ask about the history. Even worse, as there is no authentic history about a clan there could be conflicting stories among elders of different sections of a clan. Mwayuuli’s history also shows this difficulty in the historical descriptions of some of the other clans, like the Abalimbuli, the Abakuusi, the Abashitaho and the like, in which there are names of ancestors but few stories about them.

On the other hand, in the history of these clans we see a skeleton genealogy of successive ancestors from the founder of a clan. Typically, the genealogy shows branches of every generation which were caused by a disperse of brothers. Any of these branches can form a lineage(‘inzu’or house) which is an important section of a clan. Though many names of ancestors and lineages are left out in these clans’ cases, the basic structure of the historical tradition of the Isukha clans is visible.
Compared with the history of these clans, that of the Abamakhaya is not only extensive in its contents but also different in its style. I would like to examine it while I point out some interesting features in the Abamakhaya history from its beginning.

It begins, as is told in the traditions of some other clans, with Egypt ('Misiri' in their language) being the starting point. I am not sure how much this was affected by the Bible, as is proved by his using the word "exodus" and Middle Eastern place names, but it is a well-known fact that many clans belonged to the Baluyia as well as other tribes in East Africa claim Egypt as their original place (cf. Osogo 1966:21). If "Egypt" is the password for any part of the Nile valley, this tradition can be an original.

What is more interesting is that the first ancestor is claimed to be a Masai by the name of Ngoroli. This is one of cases in which a clan founder is suggested to have belonged to a linguistic group other than the Bantu. The examples are, the first ancestor of the Abichina from the Masai, that of Abamironje from the Masai, that of Abashirukha from the Nandi and so on. The extraordinary thing with the Abamakhaya's case is that Mwayuuli tells us of a surprisingly detailed process of assimilation.

The son of Ngololi called Siola is said to have been given by God, bracelets (umukasa kwobwami) and a special robe (ubucheka, or ingubu yo bwami) which were emblems of the ruler (mwami). Personally I have never seen these emblems in Isukha, but these things remind me of the fact that the same kind of objects were used as emblems of political leaders by northern ethnic groups like the Babukusu.

Siola's son was Amakhaya. His name is obviously the origin of the clan name, Abamakhaya. This kind of tradition of an eponymous ancestor is very common in Isukha clans. Amakhaya actually entered into the present Baluyia area from somewhere around Tororo and Mbale of Uganda. Therefore he seems to be an actual founding ancestor of the clan, except for the fact that his family has not yet been described as members of the Baluyia, but of the Masai.

There are some complicated stories about Amakhaya's sons, that is, desertion of some of the sons, their meeting again, and their disagreement. I think the main point is that among the real inheritors was Wibaiu, but interestingly, the episodes about his sister, Wimalia are dominant throughout the story. She was described as an extraordinary lady who was physically and intellectually superior. She was beautiful and ever smiling, and she led her Munyala husband instead of being led by him. In fact she appears to have been a very strong co-leader with her brother, Wibalu.

Women in Isukha traditions are usually mentioned only as someone's mother or wife. It is very rare for a woman to be mentioned as an independent and competent person like Wimalia. I think there is a reason for Wimalia's prominence. She seems to be a female eponymous ancestor of the clan called Abimalia, though there is a complication in Mwayuuli's explanation regarding this point (he tells us that descendants of Wimalia, the wife, no longer
existent, but that the present Abimalia are descendants of another of Nyonga’s wives. This explanation seems, however, to be a compromise between different traditions of the Abamakhaya and the Abimalia). The territories of the Abimalia and the Abamakhaya are still close to each other and there seems to have been an intimate relationship between the two clans.

Then the story goes on to the next generation, in which Wibalu’s son called Namang’ana is the successor to his father’s position. We are told that the family of Namang’na was still regarded as foreigners, being called “murua”, that is, Klenjin or Masai people. They did not know about the local language, the circumcision or the cultivation of crops, depending entirely upon their cattle. In the course of time Namang’na started adopting the local ways of life. Firstly he started cultivation. Secondly he had his sons circumcised.

There is a fairly detailed description about the circumcision. After circumcision the sons became known to, and accepted by the local people. The circumcision is apparently regarded as one of the most important steps of their incorporation to the Isukha. However, it is told that Namang’na’s sons were circumcised in the Idakho style. What does it mean? I would like to write its implication later on, but I only add that there are still small differences in the ways of the circumcision of Isukha and Idakho, and, like the Abamakhaya, some of the Isukha clans practice the Idakho ways.

The next step of their incorporation into the Isukha people was made by the generation of Namang’ana’s sons, among whom Luteya was the leader. Luteya was described as a great leader whom the neighboring people came to acknowledge.

One of his family’s achievements was to give assistance to poor and needy people, or to disabled or sick persons. There was a kind of clientship in the form or rich man harbouring poor unmarried men (musumba), supplying them with foods, houses and sometimes a bride—wealth, in exchange for their menial labour. Luteya and his family is suggested to be wealthy because of their cattle. As a rich man he was able to be a benefactor to his neighbours.

Luteya was also a wise man who could bring peace among conflicting people. He proved his ability in this by introducing peaceful order at the place where people used to get salty water (isukura) for cattle and for domestic use. He attained this by using his wisdom as well as by using force.

Another great feat was defending people from the attack from the Nandi and the Masai. He and his brother saved other clans’ families by fighting against the invaders. He and his brothers proved to be fine warriors. Especially Luteya showed his ability as a war—leader. Traditionally the Baluyia in general had been harrassed by intruders from the neighbouring areas for the purpose of cattle stealing, and it was most necessary for them to defend themselves in a warlike situation. Therefore a competent war—leader was crucial for the successful defence of their own society. He was called, with the greatest respect “mwami” not only by his own clan members but also by neighbouring people who had to depend on his ability on the occasions of the enemy’s attacks.
These three achievements were enough for the local people to accept the Luteya’s family as an Isukha clan. The scene of the acceptance by the Isukha people is described very vividly by the author. They stopped calling Luteya “murua” and started treating his family as Abamakhaya for the first time.

I feel the historical account from Luteya’s generation becomes more realistic, because some serious conflicts among the Abamakhaya are recorded. Luteya himself was killed by sorcery (bulochi) of the other group of Abamakhaya (Amachina’s group). The successor to Luteya, this time, was not his son but his brother, Atsinikulu. His leadership is explained in his dangerous but successful journey to Tiriki in quest of food at a time of famine.

In Atsinikulu’s period there was confusion, during which his son murdered his brother and then the former was revenged by the latter’s sons. Perhaps because of this confusion, the leadership returned next to Luteya’s son, Suula, although enmity and fights continued between Suula and Atsinikulu’s sons.

The author tells us that after Suula’s reign every Makhaya tried to make himself a ruler. In other words there was no widely recognized leader in the clan, except self-styled leaders. This period overlaps with the coming of the Europeans and with it the political scene in Isukha changed dramatically. Before entering into this stage I would like to make a summary with the following genealogy.

After reading the history of the Abamakhaya upto Suula, I think there are two main points that Mwayuuli has made. One is pointing out the foreign (that is, Masai) origin of their ancestor and the other is their natural qualification as rulers. These two points are not peculiar to his history. As I have already noted, the history of some clans is very explicit about its ancestor’s foreign origin, and there is no reason to hide it because all clans acknowledge their immigration from outside of Isukha anyway.

The extraordinary thing about Mwayuuli’s story is the particularly long and detailed explanation about their Masai ancestors and the process of their incorporation into the Isukha society was described as if their ancestors were stranger–kings. The author actually used words like ‘king’, ‘noble’ and ‘palace’. It is interesting to note here that these ‘stranger–kings’ were incorporated not because of their strangeness, as it is sometimes claimed, but because of their conformity to their hosts’ customs.
Some Abamakhaya leaders have nicknames like king’s (eg. Amakhaya, the great; Suula, the Young; Muchika, the Brave). Even the rulership is claimed to be divine, as the royal emblems of bracelets and robes were given by God.

The Abamakhaya history was written according to the above genealogy. This genealogy can be used for a reference of the generation depth or for counting a time depth, one generation multiplied by 30 years or so, as is commonly done by historians who rely on oral traditions only. The main question about this genealogy is that it is not aimed at illustrating all the branches of the clan but to explain the genealogy of the rulers in particular. This also reflects the author’s special concern in the development of the political leadership in Isukha.

All these things point to the fact that Mr. Mwayuuli’s history of the Abamakhaya intends to be a kind of ‘dynastic’ history, so to speak, and this makes it rather different from the rest of his clan history. Therefore we can see that in the Abamakhaya part he is especially interested in writing about the heroic acts of the rulers, the legitimate succession of the rulership and the natural fitness of each ruler.

A traditional ‘ruler’ was called ‘mwami’ and indeed the mwami is one of the popular themes in the Isukha clan history in general. However, Mr. Mwayuuli’s interest or description of the rulers is by far intensified compared with the common clan history. What is the reason behind his intensified interest in the rulership? The answer is obviously Milimu, who was the most able administration chief of a part of Isukha and Idakho in the colonial age.
Milimu was a member of the Aabmakhyaya clan. According to the author, Milimu was appointed chief after a confusion under the first chiefs of the colonial government. These first chiefs were Ichibini of the Abakhoombwa clan who was in charge of Isukha and Shibachi of the Abashumuli clan who was in charge of Idakho. When these two chiefs were unable to control the confusion caused by the feuds, one victim of which was Milimu's father, he voluntarily acted as a mediator between the government forces and the disturbed local people. Milimu was picked up as a chief because he was not only able but also royal to the government. From Mwayuuli's account we get the impression that he was favoured by the government officers because of his good cooperation in the works assigned by it.

The story of how Milimu became a chief is one of the impressive passages of Mwayuuli's history. It shows the resistance of the local people against the duties imposed by the colonial government such as collecting food and fire wood and carrying loads. Many chiefs who undertook the government assignments failed because of this non-cooperation of the residents. On the other hand, it also shows that the position of the chief itself was an object of competition because of its power to command others.

There were many troubles before Milimu was confirmed as chief. Firstly, there were cases in which people who were oppressed by the government forces who revolted against Milimu's rule. Secondly, there was tension among the people who were jealous of his new position. Mwayuuli's story suggests that there was serious factional strife even among the Abamakhaya themselves.

In order to make peace, a big gathering took place with many representatives from various clans of Isukha and Idakho. The public address in support of Milimu made by Milimu's uncle, Namusende at this occasion was recapitulated. He started mentioning the name of Amakhaya the first ruler and went on paying honour to Wibalu, Nmang'ana, Luteya and Suula. By doing so he was demonstrating the legitimacy of Milimu's chiefship. In other words he claimed that Milimu was a proper candidate for chief because he was a direct descendant of the successive generations of effective rulers.

It is now apparent that this is also Mwayuuli's most emphasized point in his history. This point seems to be very natural for him to take, because anyone is very proud when his clansman becomes an administrative chief. What I am interested in is his way of linking the 'mwami' with the administrative chief as if the rulership had not been interrupted through the age of pre-colonial to colonial time. Traditionally in Isukha and Idakho there was no real political chief who could command a whole society or a clan. The mwami was not a chief in this sense but a war-leader whose only role was to lead his clansmen and neighbours for defending his own community against intruders. The power in other fields such as judging and punishing wrongdoers was held collectively in the hands of clan elders. I think, therefore, that the traditional war-leader and the colonial chief were very different in character. In fact Milimu himself was a very different type of a person from that of a war-leader. Many war-leaders opposed the government forces and were then punished by them. Milimu was, on the other hand, farsighted and intellectually adept in handling troubles. Connecting Milimu to the
line of war-leaders is, in a sense, a very natural development of the idea on the Isukha leadership, but it is also intentional or ideological in the sense that his supporters would benefit from it.

When Milimu was appointed as a chief he was assigned an area which comprised of the western part of Isukha and the northern part of Idakho. The reason for his anomalous territory might be like this. At that time there were already two chiefs in Isukha and Idakho respectively. Milimu was the third chief who needed his ruling area newly created from both Isukha and Idakho. That area was to be also the Bamakhaya's neighbourhood. The colonial government saw Yala river as a natural boundary for the area and decided to give Idakho of the north side of Yala to his ruling. This decision caused, however, unrest for the next several decades.

This was one of the instances of the unrest about bordering the ethnic groups and domination of foreign colonial chiefs in Western Kenya in the 1930's. In this case the Abidakho opposed chief Milimu who was a Mwisukha, in demanding the rule of their own chief, Shibachi. There was a gathering by the government officers to hear the complaint. As the author suggests, the government favoured Milimu's rule mostly because of his good work and loyalty to the government. He continued to rule his area until his resignation in 1937, when the Idakho part of his area was finally integrated into the rest of the Idakholand.

The Abidakho's resistance against Milimu never stopped during his being in office. Their concerted action of the boycotting of Milimu's rule clearly demonstrates the importance of the ethnic problems in the politics of the middle of the colonial era.

Mr. Mwayuuli's concern for the Abidakho firstly derived from honouring chief Milimu, and therefore their rebellion against Milimu was ironical to him. He seems to contend with the fact that Milimu completed his career as a chief without loosing the Idakho part of his area.

In his writing Mwayuuli often uses a word “Kakamega” which nowadays denotes either Kakamega Township or Kakamega District, but in his case it means the people of Isukha and Idakho together, especially in the from of “Abakakamega” (that is, Abisukha plus Abidakho). The latter usage was an old one especially at the time when Milimu was chief. Using the word “Kakamega” and writing a combined history of Isukha and Idakho have the same root in the author's idea that both areas should not be separated politically.

I would like to say therefore that his writing of the history, especially the history of the Abamakhaya, was a mixed result of his innate interest in history and his sense of duty to honour Milimu's chiefship. This might mean also that it was written by a historian as well as by a story-teller. As a story-teller he was very good at narrating the Abamakhaya heros' feats and adventures dynamically and in detail. I think this is one of the attracting features of his history.
In fact his interest in the modern chiefship can be seen also in the history of the Abashumuli of Idakho. Shibachi, the chief of Idakho at the time of chief Milimu who was in a position of competing with him, was a member of this clan. It is narrated that the ancestors of the Abashumuli were also the Masai in origin and they were natural rulers. Mwayuuli explicitly says “in many respects the Abashumuli were matched with the Abamakhaya”. An interesting table which correlates each generation of leaders of both clans is quoted at the end of the Abashumuli history.

III. Aspects of the history of Isukha and Idakho clans

Mr. Mwayuuli’s interest in the history of the two ethnic groups, the Abisukha and the Adidakho, leads us to an inevitable question; what does actually differ between these two groups? It is generally thought that these two sub-tribes are in close relationship with regard to their customs and language. When I asked about the differences, people could only mention the differences in the circumcision customs. Their language is almost identical and they intermarry frequently.

It seems that in the past too the identity of the Abisukha (or the Abidakho) itself was not so apparent. One of the reasons for it is that there has not been a tradition of the founders and ancestors common to the whole Isukha, nor a traditional political alliance which covered the whole sub-tribe. This is in good contrast with the cases of the Maragoli (the Baragoli) and the Babukusu.

In the case of the Maragoli sub-tribe, there is a legend of the first ancestor called Mulogoli. He is said to have had eight sons (Wagner 1949: 59), or four sons (Osogo 1966: 51), or more than 24 sons (perhaps 32 sons, Were 1967: 8). In any case the legend says that from all the ancestors of each Maragoli clan derived. This is a powerful idea which could consolidate the identity of the Maragoli people as a whole. Comparing with this the traditions of the clans ancestors in Isukha are different in that there hasn’t been any common ancestor of the whole Abisukha (except in a recently invented tradition of the Maragoli-type ancestor called Mwisukha, cf. Were 1967: 55). Each clan has its own peculiar tradition of ancestors and migrations, and it suggests that the Abisukha have been a congregation of various people who came from all directions and at different times.

Comparison with the case of the Babukusu sub-tribe is also useful. There is a vague tradition of a tribal ancestor of the all Babukusu, but there has been a more effective system of incorporation (cf. Makila 1978 chap. 3). This system consists of six clusters of clans to one of which every Bukusu clan, old or new, should affiliate. A clan cluster has a tradition of corporate achievements in wars, migratory movements, calamities, assimilation of emigrants or new clans through marriage and kinship, and so on. The six clan clusters cover over a hundred clans of the Babukusu and clan clusters represent certain values common to the whole Babukusu. By comparison the Isukha clans seem to be ideologically more separated. There is no such center or cluster of clans, nor systematic ways of incorporation.
into common group values. Here each clan is ideally more independent and equal despite the fact that there are actually differences in size and influence among their clans.

In Maragoli and Bukusu, like in Isukha, there had not been a king or a political chief who attracted an overall loyalty of the whole tribe, but with the strong ideology of the tribal founder or the clan clusters it would be easier to discern their identity.

What made, then, the identity of the Abisukha or the Abidakho? It seems that there was no single eminent element of it. What I can imagine is a synthesis of many customary and political elements. I will pick up these elements one by one from Mwayuuli’s clan history.

a. Boundary --- This is the most definite mark to determine the identity of the Abisukha, at least at present. In the past too the boundary should have been very important, especially between the traditional enemy, the Nandi, though its boundary was not a line, but a sort of a buffer zone. However, the most striking fact was that there was a clear boundary between such similar and friendly tribes, the Abisukha and the Abidakho. This was amply demonstrated in the border conflict between them in the colonial era. Though the colonial government gradually came to understand the territoriality of the Baluyia clans and tribes, the local officers at first underestimated it by giving them the natural border of the Yala river, which actually cut across the Abidakho’s territory. I have already briefly explained what happened in the next several decades in the last section, and it clearly shows how much the original boundary was decisive and necessary to the Abidakho.

The priority of the boundary means the secondary nature of the clan affiliation with regard to the identity of the ethnic group. There are numerous examples of the clans migrations in Mwayuuli’s history. In the course of the migration it split and went in different direction. Though the memory of the same ancestry among the splitter groups did not disappear so soon, their identification changed gradually according to where they settled and this resulted at last in the change of their group (clan) names. On the other hand if the splitter groups still remained in Isukha, they never changed their clan identity. In other words, as long as they were Abisukha, a clan never split and became a new clan. They were only different sections (lineages) of the same clan.

b. Marriage --- There are many remarks in the clan history concerning which clan a certain daughter married into, or which clan a certain man’s mother came from. This reflects the importance of affinal as well as kinship (through mother’s side) relations among the Isukha clans. We can detect a tendency of a kind of marriage policy in which a man deliberately distributed his own daughters to various clans as their members’ wives. For example Cheche of the Abassakala “had ten most beautiful daughters” and married them to ten influential clans, of which nine were those of the Abisukha (Abamakhaya, Abitsende, Abatsunga, Abashilukha, Abimalia, Abasulwa, Abamahalia and Abakhoombwa) and one was of the Abidakho (Abashimuli). This kind of intermarriage would encourage a cohesion of the Abisukha to a certain degree. However, the marriage could not be a definitive element of the Isukha cohesion because an in-marriage (endogamy) rule has never been practiced.
among the Abisukha. There are, in Mwayuuli's history, so many examples of marriage with women or men of Idakho, Nyala, Tiriki and the other Abaluyia, though marriage with the Nandi was exceptional.

c. Circumcision —- In West Kenya there is a marked difference among ethnic groups which practice circumcision and those which do not. The Luo and the Teso are the main groups which belong to the latter. Some of the Baluyia groups such as the Samia also don’t have this custom. It is a notable fact that those groups which practice (male) circumcision, take it seriously for group identification, following their traditional way to minute differences. Here are the differences of the customs of the Abidakho and the Abisukha. The former uses a knife with a single-edged blade, and makes young men stand in front of the trees called 'musutsu' or 'museembe', when they are to be circumcised. The latter uses a knife with a double-edged blade, and makes young men stand either in front of a house or in front of the trees called 'mukumu'.

The difference in circumcision practice is, as I have already remarked, almost only one explicit trait which makes any distinction between the Abisukha and the Abidakho. Still, this trait is not an absolute difference because there are several Isukha clans which follow the Idakho way of circumcision. One of them, the Abaruli, is a splinter group of an Abidakho clan. This means that the Abaruli still retains a custom of the original tribe, while it is now regarded as one of the Abisukha clans simply because its habitation is in Isukha. There is no need to change its circumcision custom.

However, in the past, the circumcision was instrumental in incorporation of 'foreigners'. There is a very interesting description in the Abamakhaya history, in which Luteya and his brothers were for the first time circumcised and it became the first step for them to be accepted by the local people. There are similar stories about the circumcision. The ancestor of the Abamilonje was of the so-called Uasin-Gishu Masai. When Shilaro of this clan wanted to live in Isukha, the circumcision was arranged for him. Akhivisende, the founder of the influential Abitsende clan, is described as, at first, a stranger and uncircumcised. When he decided to stay at a host's home he and his sons were circumcised. These examples all show that the circumcision was used as a way of incorporating 'strangers' into the Isukha society.

It should be added here that, despite circumcision and unlike the Maragoli or the Babukusu, there has not been any age organization or age grade in Isukha which would have worked as a medium to produce a stronger common feeling beyond the union of a clan.

d. Defence —- In precolonial time, defending their cattle and homes against invaders like the Nandi and the Masai was most crucial to their continued existence. This kind of defence was easier and effective when people of neighbouring clans cooperated and followed competent war-leaders. The cooperation in defence was a marked contrast to the conflicts between clans among Isukha or Idakho in the sense that the former contributed to the unity among themselves while the latter was a cause of their separation. In Mwayuuli's history we can find many wars and killings in which the enemy was of other tribes. These wars were mostly
fought by war-leaders (‘mwami’) and behind them there were many allies of neighbours. The best descriptions of it are seen in the Abamakhaya history, but I know there are numerous traditions of these war-leaders among most Isukha clans.

In a rather short history of the Abammbale clan of Idakho the author wrote the following story. Just before the colonial time, the Abatsotso and the Abamarama sub-tribes with the help of the Kalenjin warriors attacked the Abammbale clan in order to occupy their land. The Abammbale successfully resisted it by asking the help of the Isukha clans including the Abamakhaya. This historical account presents an interesting alliance among the ethnic groups in the Abaluyia themselves. The Abisukha and the Abidakho seems to have allied (but not as an ally of whole tribes, but an ally of some of the clans) against the invaders of the other tribes. This was a kind of union which would make a consciousness of the Abisukha or the Abidakho (but not making a difference of the two tribes).

Another point of importance about the defence mechanism was that there had not been a permanent alliance of Isukha clans for defending themselves nor had the alliance covered the whole Isukha. The defence alliance seems to have been made on occasion, and only among neighbouring clans. The mwami had not become a political chief, and its influence was limited in the war effort. Defence or war itself seems to have been not enough or the Abisukha to unite politically.

e. Clientship — The clan in Isukha and Idakho has been politically the most influential system. Though it has not an eminent leader of a clan, it has a territory, elders' councils and internal hierarchical divisions based on the patrilineal descent. As is seen clearly in Mwayuuli’s writing, a clan is ideally a unit of political activities and is mostly independent with regard to other clans. In a sense the clans had been in a constant state of conflict each other. However, in Mwayuuli’s history we find many cases of patronage between a powerful and rich man and a poor man of another clan or a wanderer who became later a founder of his own clan. This is a kind of clientship between men of different clans.

A good example is seen in the case of Kasamu who was an ancestor of the Abashumuli (an Idakho clan). When he wandered from place to place in search of a good living site, he came across a man and his son. They were Imaalo and Muchenya of the Abashisiira clan. They at first threatened to kill him, but after they found him harmless they brought him home and made him their servant. Kasamu worked hard and was allowed to have his own settlement. He collected his party and made his own village near Imaalo’s. This was the beginning of the Abashumuli.

When we read the Abamanyisi (Idakho clan) history, we find its ancestor called Anzala harboured, in turn, by men of the later generation of the Abashumuli. Wandering Anzala was found and helped by Ndunde of the Abashumuli. Anzala worked as his family’s servant and was given his sister as his wife. As a result Anzala had two sons who became the second generation of the clan, but he was killed later on in a battle between the Abashumuli and the Abashisira.
In these two stories can be seen an interesting chain of the clientship. First the Abashisiira took a client of the ancestor of the Abashumuli. Then the Abashumuli took a client of the ancestor of the Abamanyisi, while by this time the Abashisiira and the Abashumuli were fighting each other. The stories about the clientship show us that it was one of elements which pulled strangers and made them stay, and it regulated relations between the two clans. However, it is also apparent that the ancestor’s clientship did not constitute a permanent union between the clans.

f. Peaceful relations across different pre-colonial ethnic groups —— It is sometimes said that the ‘tribe’ is a colonial product, that is, the result of the colonial policy of ‘devide and rule’. It is true that the division and the territory of ethnic groups was fixed after the colonial era and, naturally, many have changed in their ethnic relations. It is therefore my interest as to what were the pre-colonial relations among the different ethnic groups.

We can perceive some of them from Mwayuuli’s history. The first to notice is the free migratory movements. The impression after reading numerous migratory stories is that in the past people moved from place to place without bothering about language barriers. For instance, when three brothers of the third generation of the Abarimbuli (an Isukha clan) arrived at an overflowing Lukose river, they decided to go in different directions. The first brother went to Maragoli, and some of his descendents went further south to the Gusii country. The second brother settled in Isukha, but most of his descendents went to the Nandi country and the Luo country. The third brother went to Tiriki. Among the tribal names of the above descendents the Nandi and the Luo are non-Bantu and the Gusii is non-Baluyia. The Abarimbuli dispersed widely across boundaries of language differences.

There are some informative stories about interchange of members between enemy groups. Once the Nandi warriors attacked the Abakhulunya clan. Nambala, a young man of the clan, unable to ran away, fell in to a deep ditch. The Nandi warriors, instead of killing him, brought him back to their place. He was adopted by a Nandi family and brought up as a Nandi man. He even married with three wives. However, he couldn’t forget his native place and one day he decided to return home. At home he lived happily for sometime with his brothers. He practiced iron-smithing which he had learned in the Nandiland. Then there happened some troubles with his brothers, which eventually made Nambala return to the Nandiland. His descendents are still recognized by the Isukha counterparts.

A similar story is found in the Abayokha history. Mareeba, a young man, being accused by his brothers of sorcery, intended to kill himself. When he saw the Masai warriors invading he threw himself upon their power, thinking simply he would be killed. The Masai found him fit to be a future warrior and brought him back to their place instead of killing him. He was adopted and brought up as a Masai warrior. However, he one day met a group of persons from his native place and they recognized him as lost Mareeba. He eventually returned to Isukha and was welcomed by his kinsmen.
These two stories suggest that there had even been a possibility, though small, of changing the ethnic identity by capture. What I would like to point out is that in the past people seemed to change their affiliation from one ethnic group to another according to their practical needs. Nambala of the above story returned to the captor’s place when he had serious troubles with his brothers at home.

There were more practical ways of changing the ethnic identity, for example, by immigration or by marriage (especially for women). All these ways and means suggest that the people in the pre-colonial time had some customary rules for changing the affiliation to a tribe in which territory they were obliged to move for some reasons.

Lastly I would like to add an interesting feature of the inter-ethnic relations. In the history of the Abakuusi of Isukha we find the following description. In the past the clan enjoyed a position as mediators between the Abisukha and the Abidakho. However, this position was an envious one and people set a trap against the Abakuusi so that the clan should fight a neighbouring clan.

What does this position of being mediators mean? It is not so apparent but for me the fact that there was once a clan which was regarded by others as mediators of the two tribes is instructive. A mediator in general presupposes both separation and cohesion of two groups. The separation in the Abakuusi’s case was a kind of clear distinction between the Abisukha and Abidakho in the past. From this we can affirm that in the pre-colonial time too there was a kind of socio-political distinction between these two ethnic groups apart from cultural distinctions. The cohesion in this case, on the other hand, suggests that the antagonism was not so bitter as that with the Nandi. The Abakuusi’s territory is situated just near the border with the Abidakho. With this geographical position it seems that the clan made it a principle not to take up arms against neighbouring clans. This could give it a position of mediators between the two tribes, and it was an envious position to other clans.

This reminds me of the position of the Abamakhaya. According to the description by Mr. Mwayuuli this clan also took a mediatory position between the Abisukha and the Abidakho. Their territory is situated on the border of the two groups, and though they are Abisukha they practice the Abidakho way of circumcision. With these geographical and customary advantages one of their members was given chiefship by the colonial government to rule a part of Isukha and Idakho. Seen from this angle it is understood that the Milimu’s chiefship had a traditional ground of political mediation.

These are elements which would have regulated the relations of ethnic groups. What I have tried so far to do is to see how much Mr. Mwayuuli’s history is useful in understanding conditions of the precolonial, as well as colonial, society of Isukha and Idakho. His history of clans is indeed a rich mine of oral traditions and forgotten facts. There are repeated remarks on the walled settlement with a moat, which has now completely disappeared even in a form of ruins. The story of ‘isukura’ (a place of acquiring salt water) tells as much about social relations as about the alimentary conditions of the past.

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There are many other topics to be found for considering the past of the Abisukha and the Abidakho. This is possible because Mr. Mwayuuli carefully collected traditions of each clan and presented them separately. As far as I know, this simple but affective way of presentation has not been done in any Abaluyia historical studies, though there are already many excellent works which synthetically cover origins and movements of most of the Abaluyia clans in general or of a particular sub-tribe’s clans. I hope that there will be more publications of the histories of individual clans, if this way of presentation of the clan history is recognized as having as many possibilities in the historical study as that of the origins and migrations of a people.

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NOTE: I used here ‘Aba—’ type of writing for a clan name, instead of the more commonly used ‘Va—’ type of writing (ie. Abamakhaya, instead of Yamakhaya), according to the way of the author, Mr. Mwayuuli. He also uses the spelling of ‘Itakho’ (and ‘Abitakho’) instead of the more usual ‘Idakho’.

REFERENCE