

## Ethnic Mixing and Tolerance in Mathare Informal Settlement in Nairobi City, Kenya

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### Abstract

In any multi-ethnic society, tolerance is regarded as an integral element for achieving social, economic, and political stability within the nation. Today, majority of the multi-ethnic nations in Africa struggle to promote ethno-cultural tolerance and acceptance among the diverse populations. Numerous African nations are embroiled in inter-state conflicts and civil wars stemming from ethnic differences, thereby presenting a dilemma regarding the promotion of ethnic pluralism. This paper focuses on examining whether ethnic mixing in the city can be a potential tool for promoting ethnic tolerance and peaceful co-existence. This can be further diffused to the rural regions and subsequently to the whole nation. The study adopted interpretive study design that utilized qualitative and quantitative methods in the collection and analysis of data. The initial survey involved interviews with 80 participants, while the in-depth interviews included 24 individuals. Participants were rural urban migrants who had lived in the city for more than five years and were at the time of study living in the Mathare informal settlement. Following the contact theory, the study found compelling evidence that exposure to different ethnic group promotes cultural learning and accommodation toward outgroups, resulting to individuals who are more open to diversity. The study proposes

ethnic mixing and the creation of ethnic diverse spaces as an alternative strategy for promoting ethnic understanding and nationhood.

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**Mots-clés:** Ethnicity, Tolerance, Nationhood, Diversity, Cohesion

## **1.0. Introduction**

*“We need to develop the ability to listen to each other and understand the reasons for the differences among ourselves in our opinions. We may not always agree but we can find common grounds that enable us to work together for the good of all. We need to understand that our way is not the only way” (Desmond, 2012)*

African continent is celebrated for its rich diversity of cultures, religion, linguistic differences, and beliefs. While these differences are treasured as valuable assets, almost all African countries have experienced ethnic tensions and conflicts leading to loss of life, property, and economic regression. Themnér and Wallensteen (2014) observe that Sub-Saharan Africa contributes to more than half of the nations across the world experiencing intra-state conflict. This data depicts African nations' failure in their efforts to diminish divisions within and across ethnic groups and cultivate a shared sense of national identity (Miguel 2004). The prevalence of these undesirable experiences, primarily linked to ethnic distinctions, has prompted scholarly and policy researches into ethno-cultural diversity and social cohesion. While some scholars argue that diversity is detrimental to social cohesion (Putnam, 2007; Letki, 2008; Fieldhouse & Cutts, 2010), others have praised diversity for diminishing prejudice and negative stereotypes, fostering opportunities for out-group cooperation, and promoting a nuanced understanding of the other (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; Brown & Hewstone, 2005; Demange & Wooders, 2005). These divergent views on the potential effect of ethnic pluralism pose a policy dilemma on whether to promote or discourage ethnic pluralism. Furthermore, the increasing rate of migration, combined with urbanization and globalization (IOM, 2020; Karsten, 2020), consistently demonstrates the inevitability of multicultural societies. Thus, there is a pressing need to devise strategies that promote ethnic tolerance and peaceful co-existence. Uitermark et al. (2005, p.627) assert that in the modern world, cities have emerged as primary sites for generating, managing, negotiating, and contesting cultural diversity. This study is a deliberate attempt aimed at exploring how the interaction of different ethnic groups in urban areas could provide an opportunity for promoting peace and ethnic integration within the nation. This study hypothesizes that as individuals migrate to urban areas, they are bound to mix with members of other communities in residential spaces, work places, religious spaces, among others. These interactions are anticipated to reduce

inter-ethnic suspicions, foster deeper understanding, and cultivate meaningful co-existence, thereby prompting further inter-ethnic engagements.

### **1.1. Background of the Study**

Kenya, like many other African countries, presents an interesting case of ethnic diversity. The country is home to more than 44 ethnic communities. However, each of these ethnic groups has its distinct culture, language, beliefs, and socio-cultural practices (Lynch, 2006; Ghai, 2013; Kanyinga, 2013). Each of the diverse ethnic community occupies a particular geo-spatial region which is regarded as an ancestral land that requires careful safeguarding and preservation. Despite the growth of capitalism and a thriving market economy that facilitate willing-buyer willing-seller transactions of land, selling land to 'outsiders,' especially in rural ethno-geospatial areas, is often met with disapproval. The rule of thumb states that members of the local community should be given priority in land sales in order to preserve the geo-spatial locality for the 'indigenous' or 'native' community (Kasomo, 2012; Nyaura, 2018). Conversely, in urban areas, land sale operates within a free market economy, which allows anyone to buy and own land in towns and cities. As a result, urban spaces become highly heterogeneous, attracting migrants from both within the country and across national borders. In normal life situations, these diverse urban populations live together in harmony. However, a majority of rural-urban migrants consider themselves as temporary inhabitants of the city and tend to maintain strong ties and networks with their rural folks. They frequently travel back to their rural origins to uphold and strengthen these connections (Owuor, 2007; Francis, 2002). Ethnic identities persist as distinct reference points through which individuals directly or indirectly identify their in-group members. This identification may be based on factors such as names, dialect or accent, rural origins, and at times, physical appearance. Nevertheless, the peaceful co-existence between different ethnic groups is often strained during political campaigns and general elections, resulting in inter-ethnic clashes. During these times, harmony between different ethnic groups is frequently disrupted, with neighbors and friends turning against each other, leading to the displacement of thousands as homes and houses are set ablaze (Kasomo, 2012).

Kenya's history reflects ethnic intolerance persisting from pre-colonial times through the colonial era and into the post-colonial period (Mutie et al., 2015; Wamwere, 2003; Lynch, 2006). Ethnic hostilities in Kenya have been associated with multiple factors, such as the politicization of ethnicity (Miguel, 2004; Wanyande, 2003), selective development by the government, alleged marginalization of some ethnic groups or regions (Kioli, 2012), and the proliferation of small arms (Wepundi, 2012). To date, the ethnic land territories developed during the colonial era still exist and continue to be a

point of reference in the distribution of national resources, appointment to civil service, and in defining political and administrative boundaries. Furthermore, the creation of the forty-seven counties following the nation's 2010 Constitution appears to have preserved ethnic land boundaries originally delineated by colonialists. This seemingly reinforces the notion of ethnic resources, territorial spaces, and entitlements. Today, most ethnic groups perceive the resources within their ethnic land spaces as legitimately theirs and ensure to guard them from other groups.

Kenya's ethnic conflicts are not nationwide but are often more pronounced in some regions than others. In rural areas, ethnic clashes often arise along fault lines or boundaries, notably in the Rift Valley—particularly in areas like Molo, Laikipia, and Samburu. Similar tensions are observed in the Western region around Mt Elgon and Baringo, as well as in the Coast province, particularly in Tana River. Rural ethnic conflicts have been linked to negative perceptions, cultural biases, and animosity toward different ethnic groups. These conflicts intensify during prolonged droughts and famines, as communities compete for scarce resources like pasture and water, particularly among pastoral communities or ethnic land boundaries. Such conflicts include the 1992 conflict between Kalenjin and Kikuyus at Rift Valley, the 2012-2013 ethnic conflict between Orma and Pokomo in the Coastal region's Tana River, and the recurrent Samburu-Turkana ethnic conflicts over land and cattle (IRC, 2008; UNHCHR, 2008; KNCHR, 2017. p.5). In the culturally pluralistic urban areas, ethnic conflicts tend to flare up mostly in the sub-urban informal settlements during the nation's general elections. Such experiences depict ethnic diversity as inherently negative, posing a threat to national peace.

Despite the negative instances of ethnic hostility, there have been numerous occasions when Kenyans showcased a sense of 'Kenyan-ness' and a shared national identity, particularly during times of national crises like floods, famine, and terror attacks. During these moments, Kenyans frequently unite in response to distress appeals from the government and humanitarian agencies, offering assistance to fellow Kenyans through blood donations or financial support. In such occasions, slogans such as *as Kenya for Kenyans, I stand with Kenyans, and One Kenya, one people* continually remind the people of their single national identity. During moments of celebrating national achievements, such as participating in and triumphing in international competitions, Kenyans often showcase unity and solidarity. An exemplary instance is Eliud Kipchoge, a Kenyan marathoner who triumphed in the Ineos 1.59 challenge, Lupita Nyong'o, the first Kenyan to win an Oscar Award, and Barack Obama, the first African-American President of the United States with Kenyan heritage. It is on such occasions that the awareness of being part of a single tribe, 'Kenyan,' becomes evident, and mantras such as *Najivunia kuwa Mkenya* (Proud to be a Kenyan) are reinforced.

Kenya's experience is not different from that of many other multi-ethnic African countries. Themnér and Wallensteen (2014) noted that Sub-Saharan Africa accounted for half of the nation's facing intra-state conflict worldwide, with a significant portion linked to ethnic disparities. Nigeria, for instance, has grappled with prolonged civil unrest and ethnic land disputes, often attributed to the 'indigene-settler' narrative, causing turmoil for decades (Uchendu, 2007; Sijuwade, 2011). In Rwanda, the 1994 genocide was as a result of ethnic rivalry among three indigenous groups: Hutus, Tustis, and Twa (Nowrojee, 1996). Other nations, such as Burundi, Uganda, Sudan, Rwanda, and South Africa, have also faced ethnic conflicts.

This paper examined the potentiality of cities as conceivable spaces for learning to co-exist and to embrace diversity aimed at fostering nationhood. Fully conscious of how globalization, migration, and technology have condensed the world into a smaller community with amplified opportunities for interaction and diversity, the paper investigated the potential of embracing the "*Salad bowl*<sup>1</sup>" concept instead of advocating for the "*melting pot*"<sup>2</sup>. The hypothesis of the study suggested that when individuals of various ethnic backgrounds converge in urban settings, they tend to establish fresh social connections and may adapt or embrace different lifestyles. This 'natural' convergence has the potential to alleviate ethnic and cultural biases, fostering open-mindedness and increased tolerance toward ethnic diversity and cultural pluralism. Consequently, amidst the expanding pluralistic landscapes shaped by migration, urban diversity in terms of ethnicity can serve as a platform for cultivating ethnic tolerance and fostering national unity, while appreciating the richness of ethnic cultural diversities. The study was conducted in Mathare informal settlement in the city of Nairobi, Kenya. Participants were rural-urban migrants who had previously been accustomed to a rural mono-ethnic cultural environment before re-locating into the ethnically heterogeneous city of Nairobi. The paper thus delved into exploring the potential of cities as viable spaces for learning to coexist, tolerate, and embrace cultural diversity, thereby fostering a sense of nationhood. Based on this objective, the study aimed to address the following questions:

1. What are the migrants' interpretations of ethnicity and nationhood?
2. What are the existing avenues for inter-ethnic engagements in the city?
3. What impact do inter-ethnic interactions and engagements have on ethnic-relations?

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<sup>1</sup>Salad bowl is a metaphor that describes contexts where various cultures blend together, akin to the mix of ingredients in a salad, while maintaining their distinct qualities rather than assimilating into a uniform culture.

<sup>2</sup>Melting pot is a metaphor used to refer to a context where a variety of individual cultures, practices, beliefs, and identities assimilate into a cohesive whole.

## 1.2. Theoretical Framework

The study is premised on contact theory by Allport (1954) and Pettigrew (1998). The theory avers that when people of diverse cultural practices are exposed to each other in a variety of ways, they are likely to become more accommodative and less likely to display prejudicial behavior. Pettigrew builds on the perspective of Allport (1954) regarding the power of contact in fostering comprehension and embracing others. The theory provides compelling evidence on the power of interactions among diverse groups. Pettigrew suggests that interpersonal relations between groups of varied cultures have the potential to increase positive attitude and reduce prejudice among opposing groups.

Pettigrew further posits that intergroup contact has several effects:

i) It enables learning about other out groups, leading to a reduction in prejudice and stereotypes.

ii) It diminishes fear and anxiety during interactions with other out groups, subsequently lowering negative evaluations

iii) It enhances people's capacity to adopt the perspective of out groups and empathize with their concerns (Pettigrew 1998). On the other hand, Allport highlighted four key factors that facilitate the reduction of prejudice and negative stereotypes among interacting out group, namely: common goals, equal status, inter-group cooperation and the support of authorities, laws or customs. However, the contact theory has been criticized for over emphasizing positive outcomes without specifying the conditions that are favorable for such outcomes. For instance, Paolini et al. (2010) argue that intergroup contacts can yield both positive and negative outcomes. In certain cases, such interactions may lead to prejudice, potentially causing the negative effects of contact to outweigh the prejudice-reducing effects of positive interactions (Barlow et al., 2012). However, this paper aligns with Pettigrew's perspective on the influential nature of contact by asserting that ethnic interaction is likely to have a positive impact on ethnic relations. This paper supports Pettigrew's standpoints on the power and effect of contact by asserting that ethnic mixing is likely to have positive impact on ethnic relations.

## 1.3. Methodology

The study was conducted in Mathare informal settlement in the city of Nairobi, Kenya. Mathare is among the most preferred locations in the city by first time migrants and low income earners due to its close proximity to the city center and other informal employment centers (Kyuvi, 2017). It is densely populated with migrants across all ages and from diverse ethnic backgrounds, with children and young people occupying the largest population. The dense population within a confined space limits private life and anonymity, leading residents to engage in frequent inter-ethnic encounters, thereby cultivating



daily urban coexistence practices (Amin & Thrift, 2002). Participants for the study were selected from three Mathare villages, namely: Kiamutisya, Mashimoni, and 3C. The study utilized an interpretive study design that enabled the use of both qualitative and quantitative methods for data collection and analysis. The research was conducted in two phases. The study was conducted in two phases. In the first phase, eighty rural-urban migrants, selected purposefully to represent diverse characteristics such as ethnicity, duration of city residence, age, and education level, were interviewed. These individuals had lived in the city for over five years. In the second phase, the researcher used the survey findings obtained in the first phase to select twenty-four participants for the in-depth interviews. Additional qualitative data was obtained from three separate focus group discussions, one conducted in each village. Prior to the study, the researcher obtained the necessary legal permit from the appropriate authority (National Commission for Research, Technology, and Innovation). Furthermore, all participants willingly agreed to take part in the study by signing a consent form. The study adopted a reductionist procedure to analyze and interpret data that involved a step by step data analysis.

## **2.0. Discussion and Findings**

### **2.1. Migrants' Interpretations of Ethnicity and Nationhood**

The study interrogated migrants' understanding of ethnicity and what it means to them to have good ethnic relations. Furthermore, it examined how ethnic socialization, beliefs, cultures, and experiences influenced their interactions with other groups. The participants consisted of migrants from various ethnic backgrounds. This implied difference in rural regions of origin, difference in cultural beliefs and practices, as well as differences in economic practices. The view that ethnicity is the main cause of internal conflicts in Kenya was held by only two out of eighty participants interviewed. Seventy-six cited past social injustices, politics, social-economic inequalities, weak policies, and unresolved disputes as the key contributors to ethnic conflicts. None of the participants agreed on the proposition of dissolving their ethnic identities to form a single national identity. All participants strongly believed that it is possible to achieve national cohesion without dissolving the unique ethnic identities, thus demonstrating high acceptance of diversity. Eleven participants not only acknowledged their ethnicities but also associated themselves with particular regions or tribes within those ethnic groups. Similarly, none of the participants regarded ethnic identities as a threat to national cohesion. Among the eighty participants interviewed, seventy-two defined ethnicities in terms of diverse dialects and cultural practices. Only three participants believed that ethnic diversity posed a threat to national peace. However, they admitted to enjoying the benefits of diversity in the city.

Seventy-eight participants believed that social cohesion was attainable in multi-ethnic nations like Kenya. Only two participants identified ethnic diversity as the primary cause of conflicts in the nation. Among the twenty-four in-depth participants, seventeen shared the view that the key distinctive features in ethnicity include the plural dialects, the cultural practices, and histories of the people.

Migrants expressed that they enjoyed the benefits of diversity in the city through sharing and exchange of skills and knowledge.

In line with the social constructivist perspective on ethnicity, participants did not perceive ethnicity as fixed or acquired solely through ancestry or blood lineage.

However, participants highlighted marriage, migration, individual preferences, and choices as factors influencing individual ethnic identity decisions.

For instance, three migrants identified themselves with more than one ethnic tribe due to their parental origins, while another identified with more than three ethnic groups due to marriage and migration. One of the respondents who had parents from different ethnic back grounds made the following remarks.

*“You see I have always wanted to identify myself as a Kamba and a Kisii at the same time. My mother is a Kamba and my father a Kisii. Am fluent in both languages as I have lived in both rural places. If it were my wish, I would be referred to as a Kisii-Kamba from Nyamira and Kangundo because both of these places are my rural homes and I have relatives in both of them. I keep wondering why people keep insisting that I am a Kisii not a Kamba yet that’s not what I feel. I think we should be given an opportunity to choose who we feel we are..... My mum has been married for so long yet still in Kisii land she is referred to as a Kamba yet she has lived with them and become like them in Language, culture, and residence. I think this is something that needs to change”*  
(Nyaboke, 33-year-old female)

Through Nyaboke's sentiments, a unique perspective emerges on the formation of ethnic identities, suggesting that these identities are not considered permanent or unchangeable. Nonetheless, they are influenced and shaped by various individual life events such as marriage, migration, and personal choices. Ochieng's argument (2010) is supported by these findings, indicating the difficulty in ascribing a pure ethnic identity (such as pure Maasai, pure Kalenjin, pure Kamba, etc.) due to the intricate blend of bloodlines, cultures, beliefs, and languages within communities. Most respondents, with the exception of two, acknowledged the impact of life



events in acquiring new ethnic identities, further affirming the absence of a singular, pure ethnic identity (Suliman, 2011). In addition to the acknowledged ethnic groups, sub-groups emerged within those ethnicities, shaped by historical, ancestral, and dialectical distinctions. These factors influenced group identification and relationships among members, leading them to perceive themselves as distinct from the broader ethnic group.

## **2.2. Existing Avenues for Inter-Ethnic Engagements in the City**

Several scholars have supported the argument that ethnic diversity negatively impacts the harmonious living of people (Alesina & La Ferrara, 2000; 2005; Estabén & Ray, 2017). Kenya's ethnic communities engage in diverse socio-cultural and economic activities. This diversity of activities is influenced by the groups' cultural beliefs, historical backgrounds, and the climatic condition of their native rural areas. Ethnic amalgamation in the urban areas conveys the diverse skills and competences together. This convergence provides an opportunity for individuals to learn from and complement each other. The interactions and exchange of social goods and services have the potential to improve relationships, boost understanding, and overcome stereotypes and misconceptions among the diverse groups (Pettigrew, 1998). In his study on medieval India, Jha (2008) noted that ethnic groups involved in various forms of business tended to establish business associations. These associations not only strengthened bonds between different groups but also contributed to averting inter-group conflicts. Similarly, Demange and Wooders (2005) opine that social mixing has the ability to bring about multiplicity in abilities, experiences, and productivity, which attracts a wide range of talent. Jha (2007, p.3) further notes that when ethnic groups provide complementary goods or services to one another, positive inter-relationships flourish, thereby reducing the incentives for antagonism against each other.

Six different forms of inter-ethnic engagements/interactions were identified and examined in the three villages (Mashimoni, 3C, and Kiamutisya villages), namely: Voluntary community self-help groups, Residential plots, Business ventures, Exogamous marriages, Places of worship, and Learning institution. Participants consistently mentioned these six forms as avenues that fostered an appreciation for diverse cultural practices and beliefs, leading them to embrace each other's differences. Among the twenty-four in-depth participants, twenty-one had first-hand interaction with other out group in the city. The intended and unintended ethnic mixing and exposure to diverse cultures in the informal settlement opened a window for migrants to accept and live with diversity.

### 2.2.1. Mixed Voluntary Community Groups

This study found that voluntary associations and social welfare groups acted as an important avenue for ethnic mixing and learning (*See Table 2.2 below*). All the respondents were members of at least one voluntary community welfare group popularly referred to as *Chamas*, with mixed ethnic membership. These organizations provided buffer zone for cultural learning and experience that extended to the rural regions. Participants described community group membership as a means of broadening social network for support in time of need and a form of security in case of ethnic attacks. Participants leveraged their diverse skills to establish collaborative inter-ethnic ventures within the groups. They commended these mixed-ethnic income-generating initiatives for attracting clients from various ethnic backgrounds, thereby enhancing customer satisfaction and fostering extended ethnic bonding.

**Table 2.2.** Group activities, reasons for joining community groups, and how groups started

Group activities	Reasons for joining community groups	How groups started
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Merry go round</li> <li>• Table banking</li> <li>• Savings</li> <li>• Food mobilization</li> <li>• Children advocacy</li> <li>• Garbage collection</li> <li>• Burial coverage</li> <li>• Community project</li> <li>• Home improvement</li> <li>• Dowry payment</li> <li>• Fundraising</li> <li>• Mental health and emotional welfare</li> <li>• Rural visitations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For unity purposes</li> <li>• To identify with others</li> <li>• Be able to access funding</li> <li>• To mobilize funds and initiate income generating activities and community projects.</li> <li>• Encouragement by government and NGOs</li> <li>• To save money</li> <li>• Psychological support</li> <li>• Means to access handouts such as food, household items, grants etc</li> <li>• Get access to campaign money</li> <li>• Wanting to belong</li> <li>• For security purpose especially during campaigns</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Own members' initiative</li> <li>• Facilitation by local NGO</li> <li>• Referrals and invites by friends</li> <li>• Church initiative</li> <li>• Political influence</li> </ul>

Source: Author's Research Data

### **2.2.2. Residential Plots**

The residential plots were identified as powerful areas for ethnic and communal lifestyle, where ethnic mixed plots were seen as a form of security in case of ethnic conflict. Ethnic segregated areas were described as easy target by rival ethnic groups in case of ethnic conflict. None of the plots was occupied by a single ethnic group. Similarly, there were no ethnic restrictions on residential plots. Therefore, individuals were free to choose their residence as long as they could afford it. This was cited by majority of the respondents (78%) as one of the key reasons for the commendable peace among the diverse ethnic groups.

*‘‘Here you can’t avoid mixing with other tribes, even if you hate them you learn to live with them. No one forces you to but circumstances...We meet in the washrooms, water points, foodstuff kiosks, drinking dens, pool tables.....like almost everywhere. You see like majority of these structures here are owned by kikuyus, so other tribes cannot go looking for houses that are owned by their people or plots occupied by their tribe only. The owners of the plots can’t say they will rent to their people only because its business. Same thing when you are a tenant you can’t dictate who rents the next room.....I remember around 2007 there was a wave among the house owners around here to evict Luos because they feared that if their candidate won the election they will not pay rent. But this trend did not go for a long time. They realized that it can’t work!’’ (George, 46-year-old male from Nyanza region)*

In addition to diverse ethnicities residing in the residential areas, shared community facilities like sanitation blocks, water points, community libraries, churches, and kiosks were present. The crowded living conditions, leaving little room for privacy, led to both intentional and unintentional interactions, fostering positive relationships among the residents.

### **2.2.3. Religious Institutions**

Ninety-four percent of the respondents belonged to religious groups that were ethnically diverse. Only two participants reported churches with a single ethnic group, while the remaining four percent did not belong to any religious organization.

Participants praised religious institutions for fostering ethnic integration, cultural learning, and accommodation through various means. These included promoting and accepting inter-ethnic marriages, incorporating cultural events like circumcision into church activities, providing relief and support for those in need irrespective of their ethnic backgrounds, among other

initiatives. Eight out of the twenty-four participants in the in-depth interviews mentioned that the incorporation of certain cultural practices, such as rites of passage, within religious institutions fosters strong inter-ethnic connections and establishes long-term relationships among various cultures, particularly among the youth. One of these practices, observed within the church, was male circumcision, traditionally considered an ethnic rite symbolizing the journey to adulthood.

Joseph had this to say;

*‘.....you know in the recent times churches introduced boys’ rite of passage (circumcision) in church. This is bringing a big transformation among our youths. When the boys go through the rite of passage together they form a special age set that is not defined by a particular ethnic group, the teachings they receive are not ethnic biased too. So they graduate to adulthood as brothers and friends..... In some way it also saves some boys from particular ethnic groups from public ridicule and negative stereotypes that their culture does not promote male circumcision. It earns them some respect too.....’* (Joseph, 61 years old)

Iminza, a 57-year-old resident of Mashimoni village, shared Joseph's perspectives, highlighting that churches facilitate exogamous marriages, embrace diverse cultural practices, avoid ethnic discrimination, and emphasize peace and unity. Iminza also highlighted that the initiation of boys in church not only fosters cooperation and inter-ethnic bonding among the youth but also serves as a relief to parents from unreasonable cultural demands. These viewpoints suggest that the multi-ethnic nature of religious institutions offers opportunities for ethnic learning and engagement in a variety of social-cultural activities, fostering acceptance and accommodation of diversity.

#### **2.2.4. Work Place**

The workplace became a significant space promoting and celebrating ethnic diversity. Over 90% of the participants who formed strong social connections with migrants from diverse ethnic backgrounds expressed that their city experience marked their initial exposure to living and working alongside individuals from other ethnicities. They forged intimate relationships with people from different ethnic groups in their workplace, leading to a deeper understanding of various cultural beliefs, norms, values, and practices. Respondents seemed to acknowledge the competence and skills associated with different ethnicities and the importance of bringing these skills together. Majority of the respondents preferred mixed ethnic work place than working with a single ethnic group.

## **- . Impact of Inter-Ethnic Interactions and Engagements on Ethnic-Relations**

Existing literature juxtaposes on what happens when people of different ethnicities interact. A number of studies have depicted ethnic activities in ethnic diverse cities as contributors to spatial concentrations and segregation rather than opportunities for interactions and peaceful co-existence. Alesina and La Ferrara (2000) found that inter-ethnic mixing reduced cooperation and the prospects for collective action among ethnic groups. Wessel (2009) posits that when diverse groups interact closely or are in proximity, it has the potential to strengthen divisions based on cultural and ethnic lines. Putnam (2007) suggests that in ethnically diverse neighborhoods, there is a decline in trust among residents, making mutual assistance and friendships less common. This phenomenon, which he describes as 'hunkering down,' leads people to turn inward and be more insular. At the same time, a bulk of literature has demonstrated that individuals who live in multi-ethnic spaces are most likely to develop positive cross-ethnic relationships. Jha (2008) notes that ethnic mixing can lead to positive inter-ethnic bonds, thereby reducing the likelihood of animosity among different groups. Pettigrew (2008) agrees that inter-group contacts may result to both positive and negative results, depending on the conditions of their exposure.

The study findings revealed that ethnic mixing and frequent interactions within the informal settlement had resulted in individuals embracing pluralism, thus displaying greater tolerance toward diversity. This aligns with the perspectives presented by Bisin et al. (2008) and Amin and Thrift (2002). Participants' accounts demonstrated that inter-ethnic mixing in the urban spaces created opportunities for migrants from different ethnicities to interact and build relationships with people from other ethnic backgrounds, which cemented bonds that extended to their rural folks. All participants enthusiastically commended the new cultural learning opportunities and alluring fascinations presented by inter-ethnic interactions in the slum. They also shared multiple positive outcomes of their interactions with people of other ethnic groups. Over 90% of the participants, who expressed the development of strong social bonds with migrants from diverse ethnic backgrounds, indicated that their first experiences of living and working with individuals from other ethnicities occurred in the city. This illustrates that the coexistence of individuals from diverse ethnicities facilitated the dispelling of negative stereotypes, myths, and misconceptions about each other. It also offered migrants an opportunity to reshape their narratives based on personal experiences rather than the preconceived notions they had heard about other ethnic groups.

The findings of this study revealed heightened trust among ethnic groups, an exchange of goods and services encompassing cultural elements, and a notable increase in the appreciation of cultural diversities.

Doris, a member of a community group business venture noted the following;

*“.....As I told you, when we are making our products we divide tasks according to our skills.... at the end of the day, it’s like our cultural background play part in what we are efficient in. You see, our Kamba members are very good in making the beaded necklaces and earrings with very good patterns. Have tried to learn from them but I still can’t beat them in that, same to my Luo fellows. But you see this paintings (pointing at some wall hangings) I can paint like three of them when they are struggling with one.... Others are good in making Kiondos, and two of us are very good at convincing customers and looking for market than making the products. So we know when we don’t work together our production goes down and subsequently our profits. This is why we embrace our ethnic uniqueness... ”.* (Doris, 52 years old)

Five participants indicated that they acquired and embraced certain cultural practices from other ethnic groups. This acculturation occurred naturally through interactions among migrants. Among these, three participants mentioned abandoning some of their original cultural practices entirely in favor of those from different ethnic groups. Notably, this acculturation was a voluntary process, with no participants reporting coercion to adopt new cultural practices. Various reasons for this cultural learning and adoption were provided by the participants, as outlined in Table 2.3 below.

**Table 2.3.** Reasons for Community Group Membership

<b>Reasons For Learning /Adopting Other Cultural Practices</b>	<b>Number of Participants</b>
Because they were more convenient to them than their own	<b>18</b>
Were more rational and non-discriminative compared to their cultures	<b>14</b>
Wanted to experience other cultures and develop a sense of belonging	<b>21</b>
Are not oppressive like their own cultures	<b>2</b>
Created opportunity for earning income	<b>8</b>
For fun	<b>4</b>

**(Source: Author’s research data)**

Positive outcomes of ethnic mixing were evident in the three focus group discussion, with members expressing enthusiasm to share their experiences and views, as the majority nodded in agreement.



Among the twenty-four participants in the in-depth interviews, only two expressed concerns about the potential assimilation of the minority groups to which they belonged. Nonetheless, they also mentioned certain benefits accrued from ethnic mixing. These findings challenge an array of diversity study (Alesina & La Ferrara, 2000; 2005; Estabén & Ray, 2017) findings that link ethnic diversity to negative social consequences.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The peaceful coexistence observed in urban areas, as demonstrated in this study, confirms that ethnic diversity does not inevitably lead to hostility. It provides evidence that achieving national cohesion is possible despite existing ethno-cultural diversities.

Furthermore, the study's findings demonstrated that urban ethnic mixing promotes understanding and peaceful co-existence among different groups. These urban experiences shed light on the positive aspects of cultural diversity and cultural pluralism. Considering the shifting migration patterns due to devolved governance, the Kenyan government and peace advocates could utilize this strategy to foster unity among diverse ethnic communities. Promoting ethnic integration and moving away from segmented land and resources associated with specific ethnic groups could significantly contribute to a unified national identity and diminish tribal affiliations. Similarly, addressing historical ethnic tensions conclusively is imperative to moving forward. It is crucial for political leaders to abstain from ethno-political mobilization and ethnic profiling, as these actions have the potential to escalate hostility and violence among different groups.

This paper underscores that ethnic diversity itself is not inherently negative, nor is it the primary cause of conflict and instability in Kenya. Migrants in the study did not perceive their ethnic identities as permanent or superior to others. In other words, they displayed openness to acquiring and identifying with different ethnicities throughout their lives, notably through intermarriages and migration. This demonstrates that Kenyans, particularly those residing in multi-ethnic urban areas, have the capacity and willingness to embrace diversity. This serves as a solid foundation for fostering a sense of nationhood.

Lastly, given the fluidity of ethnic identities and the findings of this study, it is posited that just as there is no pure ethnicity, ethnic diversity cannot be the sole cause of ethnic hostility. Nations faced with what is labelled as ethnic hostilities should identify the underlying causes of ethnic hostilities rather than demonizing ethnic heterogeneity.

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## Human Studies

Prior to commencement, this study adhered to all statutory and ethical requirements in Kenya, including obtaining a legal permit from the National Commission for Science, Technology, and innovation (NACOSTI).

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**Data Availability:** All data collected was carefully analyzed and informed the final findings of the study.

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