

Coexistence Between Migrant Agro-pastoralists and Farmers in Kilombero Valley, Tanzania: Does Identity Matter?

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Abstract

Migration among agro-pastoralists has led to resource competition which has resulted in deadly conflicts with communities in destination areas. The identity of agro-pastoralists is a key factor in coexistence, as it can lead either to peaceful coexistence, or to further contradictions. This article uses a case study of the Kilombero Valley, Tanzania, to examine the space of identity in the coexistence between two groups. Focus group discussions, in-depth interviews, and transect walks were employed to collect data from a purposively selected sample of migrant agro-pastoralists and farmers. The findings reveal a mixed understanding of 'migrant' as a social label. This label conceals the identities of the Sukuma, foreigners, corrupt individuals, and witches that prevail in the study area. The findings further show that identity is structured within conflict-mediating processes and institutions. Identity perpetuates conflicts and affects coexistence. Hence, coexistence in the Kilombero Valley in particular, and Tanzania in general, should be understood from the prism of social identity and not exclusively from a resource-competition viewpoint. This more nuanced approach to deconstructing the co-existence between migrant agro-pastoralists and farmers is relevant in formulating policies that reduce tensions between two groups that live side by side.

Keywords: *coexistence, identity, conflicts, migrants, agro-pastoralists*

1. Introduction

Agro-pastoral and pastoral migration to agricultural communities has been a growing phenomenon in Africa. The key determinant of this migration is the deterioration of pastoral systems, driven by climate change and encroachment on traditional grazing areas used by agro-pastoralists and pastoralists (Brottem, 2020; Nwankwo & Okafor, 2022; Rweyemamu et al., 2024). These movements have led to resource-use conflicts that have often resulted in deadly consequences. At the broader regional level, the Sahel region in Africa is often considered a worst-case scenario for conflicts between agro-pastoralists and farmers, where 175 members of the Fulani agro-pastoralists and farmers were reported to have been killed. In Tanzania, deadly conflicts and mass killings have been reported among Maasai pastoralists and farmers who live side by side (Benjaminsen et al., 2009; Saruni et al., 2018).

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Conflicts have not only dominated the literature on the coexistence between agro-pastoralists/pastoralists and farmers, but have also influenced policy formulation. For example, in Tanzania, the livestock policy (URT, 2006) emphasizes the need for clear demarcations of settlements between migrant agro-pastoralists (MAs)¹ and farming communities. The understanding is that MAs are bad people in a foreign territory, and should therefore occupy a different social and physical landscape. Despite these negative sentiments, natives in destination areas have invariably found themselves in mutual economic benefit with MAs/pastoralists, as reported elsewhere (see, for example, Brottem, 2020; Massawe, 2023).

Historically, the two livelihood strategies – i.e., farming, and agro-pastoralism – complemented each other through market exchange for crops, animal products, animal traction, and crop residues. This implies a significant level of interdependence between the two systems. Despite this interdependence, conflict is a salient feature of the coexistence between the two groups, as farmers generally hold prejudicial attitudes and resent the arrival of MAs, identifying them as violent and anti-development. This is, in fact, a preconceived label that defines the co-existence of farmers and agro-pastoralists in Africa (Benjaminsen et al., 2009; Akov, 2017; Eke, 2020; Massawe, 2023).

In making a case for the coexistence-identity nexus, this article engages with two distinct entry points. First, it reviews the literature on migration and cultural identity. The aim here is to position the identity issue as part of migrants' assimilation. If migrants assimilate and are well accepted in the destination communities, there will be fewer conflictual interactions. Second, it adopted the sociological theory on culture and identity as applied elsewhere in identity studies (Hallajow, 2018; Sestito, 2025). The purpose is to use the Kilombero Valley as a case for building a theoretical understanding that could explain the intricate interactions between the two groups, which are often overlooked in resource-competition-based analyses. Using the framework of social identity, this article explores what it means to be a MA, and the implications it has for coexistence in the Kilombero Valley. Specifically, the article aims to identify and describe key attributes that shape identity in coexistence, and to examine the roles that conflict mediation plays in identity formation.

The rest of this article is organized in four sections. The next section presents literature review, including the theoretical framework of the study. Section three focuses on data collection and analysis, while section four presents the results and their discussion. The last section is devoted to the conclusion and policy implications.

¹ MAs represents abbreviation for migrants agro-pastoralists; a singular form is denoted by MA.

2. Literature Review

The literature review here revolves around three key concepts as they relate with the subject matter of this article. These concepts are coexistence, identity, and agro-pastoralists. Both migration and sociological literature on identity have been evoked to build conceptual understanding. In sociology, coexistence has been conceived as a situation in which different groups live together, whether in conflict or cooperation, in a social system (Nechansky, 2017). Literally, this implies that no group should try to destroy another. Considering an ethnic perspective on identity formation in the context of MAs and farmer interactions, this article adopts a conception of coexistence that encompasses both exchange and contradiction as described in ethnographic literature (Mutie, 2003). The second concept that has caused widespread confusion and conflation in migration literature is identity. Nonetheless, identity is best understood in ethnographic literature as a set of meanings applied to the self in a social role (Stets & Serpe, 2013). It thus entails prejudicial attitudes that may lead to real actions, such as exclusion or discrimination against minorities. This definition is more appropriate in our context since agro-pastoralists are considered as a minority group, and are likely to be identified more with ethnicity than with production strategies. Lastly, MAs – who are central to this analysis – are conceived as pastoralists involved not only in raising livestock but also farming. Farmers are essentially crop cultivators who may be smallholders or large-scale farmers.

2.1 Theoretical Literature on Coexistence

Following the approach described by Jenkins (2014) in examining group conflicts, the social identity theory is adopted in the context of coexistence between two groups that differ not only in ethnicity but also in livelihood strategies. Social identity is shaped by both internal and external influence. Internal factors that affect identity include personal values and meanings, as well as the expectations associated with group membership. Identity standards are essentially about the urge to be accepted (Goffman, 1969, cited in Weizman, 2006; Hallajow, 2018). Individuals associate with and form bonds within similar groups, and detach from others who coexist. This pattern prevails in Kilombero, where MAs and natives are separated by a very porous border. Identity is therefore socially constructed and shaped by the perceptions of the native community, which may label alien migrants as not part of 'their own'. With this sort of labelling, MAs' behaviour will not be accommodated, thereby perpetuating conflicts.

Consistent with sociological literature on identity formation (Jenkins, 2014), this article considers social space when examining identity as well. With this approach, the article leans towards the primordialist view (Bayar, 2009; Vanhanen, 1999) rather than the constructivist view (e.g., Chandra, 2012), and argues that identity and ethnicity are deeply rooted among agro-pastoralists and,

because of that, they may hardly assimilate with native farmers. As a result, acculturation (one group adopting the other's culture) is unlikely to prevail among MAs in Kilombero. The basis of this argument is found in Jenkins (2014), where identity is perceived as essentially individualistic; and shaped by interactions and institutions. This characterization has been featured in some studies on identity among pastoralists and agro-pastoralists in Tanzania (Massawe, 2023; Homera & Mollel, 2024). Hence, this article deviates from the traditional trappings of the resource-scarcity narrative of farmer-herder coexistence that is common in the literature and focuses on identity.

As pointed out earlier, identity is not only about internal factors but also about people outside the 'self' in society (Stets & Serpe, 2013; Jenkins, 2014). In the Tanzanian context, Massawe (2023) has observed that externally generated identity imposed on MAs fosters resilience and aids collective struggle among farmers. This implies that farmers, as external agents, can assign labels to migrants for the purpose of collective struggle. In this case, MAs in Kilombero are likely to develop intense feelings of belonging, and to seek identity of their ethnic group.

2.2 Empirical Literature Review

Literature on coexistence and identity has paid more attention to pastoralists than to agro-pastoralists. This empirical section draws extensively on the literature on pastoralist-farmer coexistence, but, for emphasis, it will, on occasions, restrict its focus to agro-pastoralists to describe the Tanzanian context. This makes sense since behavioural patterns with respect to identity between the two groups (agro-pastoralists and pastoralists) do not differ much in their interactions with farmers in destination areas. Both migration and ethno-cultural literature have revealed different labelling, and the implications of these labels for coexistence.

In Africa, the question of identity has featured prominently in West Africa and the broader Sahel region. In Sahel, Berry (2018) gives an example of how social relations based on group membership affect coexistence in an environment where exclusionary identity politics determine local conflicts. In the perspective of politics, Eke (2020) and Nwankwo and Okafor (2022) provide evidence on how leaders have rationally used identity to secure votes from the majority of native communities in Nigeria. This is, in fact, a reality in African politics due to cultural diversity. In extreme cases, native farmers and politicians in the area of origin have used 'foreigner' as a label for migrant Fulani pastoralists in West Africa (Arowosegbe, 2016; Eke, 2020). As foreigners, migrants are perceived as cohesive and present an axis of conflicts (ibid). These sorts of narratives intend to legitimize violence against migrants. Onwuzuruigbo (2023), and Higazi and Lar (2015), provide further realities of indigeneity on violence in Mali and Burkina Faso. The purpose of all this is for farmers to exert power in coexistence.

Apart from the so called 'foreigner' identity, religion has been presented as a label among Muslim Fulani, and Christian farmers in West Africa. While ethno-religious identity matters among Fulani (herders) and farmers in West Africa, religion-based identity in the context of Kilombero is unlikely to prevail, as there has never been deep-rooted enmity between these religions in Tanzania, whether socially or historically. Apart from treating religious identity as a point of departure from West African studies, this article focuses on an agro-pastoralist group, and not exclusively a pastoralist group.

The overriding tendency in East African literature has been skewed to a materialist approach in characterizing coexistence between MAs and farmers. Whereas some authors (Komba & Mahonge, 2019; Munishi & Jewitt, 2019; Ntumva, 2023) have approached the relations of MAs and farmers from the narrow lens of resource competition, others (Benjaminsen et al., 2009; Shillingi & Mwakasangula, 2023) have broadly used political ecology to characterize coexistence. Indeed, resource competitions resulting in crop damage by MAs/pastoralists matter in Tanzania (Saruni et al., 2018; Komba & Mahonge, 2019; Ntumva, 2023), and in Kenya (Mwikali & Wafula, 2019; Maelo, 2026). However, it is important to emphasize that resource-based analysis in coexistence between these two groups presents two obstacles. First, it may lead to a mechanical approach to addressing the tangible resource-based dimension of conflicts, an approach that is likely to fail as it creates deep-rooted grievances between the two parties (Akov, 2017; Saruni et al., 2018). Secondly, the root cause of identity is likely to be mimicked by preoccupation with competition over resources.

The question of social identity has rarely been framed broadly enough to explain coexistence between MAs and native farmers in East Africa. This is despite the role that identity plays in fostering mutual exchange and, consequently, peaceful coexistence; as shown by one of the few attempts to tackle the identity question in East Africa by Mutie (2003). The author adopted an ethnographic approach to provide evidence of identity in coexistence between the Maasai and the Kamba in Kenya. Unlike Mutie's study, this article is framed in the context of the *Sukuma* ethnic group, which differs markedly from the Maasai not only in identity but also in livelihood strategies. The Maasai are exclusively pastoralists, while the *Sukuma* are agro-pastoralists.

3. Methodology

This study adopted a case study design. The study area represents a typical case of coexistence of MAs and native farmers in Tanzania, and this justifies the selection of Kilombero as the case. The approach is cross-sectional where primary data were gathered to fit the social identity theory. The qualitative data were collected using different techniques as described in section 3.3. Also, different techniques were employed so as to achieve triangulation.

3.1 Study Area

This study was conducted in Kilombero Valley, one of the most agriculturally productive wetlands of global significance in Tanzania. The valley is about 300km from the commercial city of Dar es Salaam; stretching between longitudes 34.563° and 37.797° E, and latitudes 7.654° and 10.023° S (Wilson et al., 2017). Because of its ecological significance, the Kilombero Valley is protected under the Ramsar Convention (which recognizes wetlands of international importance), to which Tanzania became a signatory in 2002 (Ramsar site Information Service, 2014). According to this convention, the wetland should be protected without jeopardizing the community's livelihoods (Mombo et al., 2011). It thus made sense to conduct this study here since understanding dynamics of coexistence would reduce tensions in the valley that has been grossly degraded as a result of influx of the Sukuma agro-pastoralist migrants from Western Tanzania (Munishi & Jewitt, 2019; Msofe et al., 2024).

3.2 Sampling

Within the broader Kilombero Valley, the Malinyi Village was purposively sampled because it has more pronounced interactions and conflicts between the two groups. Within Malinyi, two sub-villages were purposively sampled as they represent attributes of interest. These were Kitiliwele, which is dominated by MAs, and a farmers' sub-village of Malinyi. Besides these attributes, these sub-villages are close to one another, thereby allowing unobstructed observation of coexistence and mutual exchanges. A convenient sampling was employed to select 30 MAs in Kitiliwele sub-village. Since MAs were usually suspicious and reluctant to talk to strangers (as they fear eviction from the village land), only those who were willing to participate were sampled. Twenty eighty (28) farmers, whose farms were in the MA neighbourhoods – and hence were most likely to have regular interactions with MAs – were also purposively sampled. The Village Chairperson and Village Executive Officer (VEO) were also included in the sample as these were expected to provide data on formal mediation of conflicts. In addition, two traditional leaders were also sampled.

3.3 Data Collection and Analysis

The article utilizes data collected from focus group discussions (FGDs), interviews, and a transect walk. Two FGDs were held for each group. Since women are traditionally reserved, they were not involved in the FGDs conducted with MAs. The FGDs were useful in capturing the broader and shared understanding of ethnic and identity issues that could not be captured in in-depth interviews. The FGDs data were supplemented with key informants' interviews (KIIs) held with traditional leaders, the Village Chairperson and the VEO. These leaders provided information on institutional arrangements that shape identity. The collection of data was conducted between October 2023 and October 2024 to capture seasonal activity variations affecting mutual exchanges between the two

groups. The ages of the respondents ranged from 17 to 75 years, with different levels of schooling and socio-economic status. In some circumstances – especially among MAs – an interpreter was available for those who preferred the vernacular. The data collected from interviews were recorded and transcribed; then deductive codes were applied to construct emerging themes. In deductive coding, predefined attributes are identified as related to the pre-existing social identity theory. These themes were reconstructed to obtain the prevailing identities as defined in the theory.

4. Results and Discussion

The presentation and discussion of the results utilize thematic analysis of data with the aim of arriving at unifying themes that capture coexistence. Through deductive coding, the interviews with MAs and farmers led to the construction of broader categories that characterize identity in coexistence. The approach in this section aims first to identify identities as themes. These identities are reconstructed within the social identity theory context in describing how agents (institutions, individuals and social structures) shape identity formation in the Kilombero Valley.

4.1 Migrant Agro-Pastoralists as Sukuma in Identity Formation

At a broader level of identity formation, two broad categories emerged. These are ‘migrants’ and ‘Wasukuma’.² MAs are of the Sukuma ethnic group, one of the biggest ethnic groups originating from the western and central regions of Tanzania. Farmers prefer to profile them by ethnicity, rather than by livelihood strategies (herding and farming); and because of this, they are identified as ‘Wasukuma’. One would have easily identified them as livestock keepers, based on their livelihoods, which could make sense since their livelihood strategies are a key issue in resource completion than their ethnicity (Izumi, 2017). This, however, is not the case in Kilombero. In both FGDs conducted with farmers, the word ‘Sukuma’ always reverberated in farmers’ minds as quoted in the following, verbatim:

“They were invited to come here by their fellow Sukuma, who was the Regional Commissioner of the region.”

“The Sukuma are very destructive to the environment; they don’t want to see trees.”

“Sukuma’s children don’t go to school. Their job is to herd cattle.”

“The Sukuma are very uncivilized.”

“We invited the Sukuma in our village.”

One will note that farmers use this identity of ‘Sukuma’ in a derogative manner so as to isolate them. One could overhear participants in the FGDs joking among themselves by saying, “You behave like Wasukuma.” This would be a comment to describe someone’s seemingly weird behaviour. During the FGDs held with

² *Wasukuma*, is a plural form of *Msukuma*, an individual belonging to the MAs ethnic group. But this identity often metaphorically symbolizes ‘uncivilized’ person in Malinyi, and its use is often derogatory.

MAs, the *Wasukuma* seemed to be very despondent; and claimed that farmers isolated them. One of the participants gave the following comment:

These people despise us; why are we not identifying them as Bena and Pogolo as they call us? We simply call them farmers. They feel their tribe is superior to ours; but we help them, they rent our ox-ploughs (FGDs with an MA in Kitiliwele, September 2023).

The *Sukuma* label is externally generated by farmers who consider themselves as a superior and civilised ethnic group so as to leverage collective struggle against MAs. In essence, even the farmers themselves are not ethnically homogenous. They belong to two distinct ethnic groups: Bena, and Pogoro. But when it comes to their interactions with MAs, the farmers consider themselves as a homogenous group, and this gives them a sense of belonging. Indeed, as described by Jenkins (2014), feelings of group belongings matter in identity formation; and in Malinyi this implies that MAs are uninvited not because of their destructive livelihood strategies, but rather due to their ethnicity. Coexistence needs mutual respect and recognition, but in Malinyi this is hardly the case because of the ethnic identity that farmers, as external agents (as shown in Figure 1), impose on MAs. To the farmers, migrants are not agro-pastoralists – they are *Sukuma*. If this is the prevailing case in Malinyi, then the future of coexistence in Kilombero may not be a product of destructive environmental practices or agro-pastoralists’ livelihood strategies, as some authors (Munishi & Jewitt, 2019; Msofe et al., 2024) have predicted, but rather on their identity. That is, they are *Sukuma*, and because of that they are ‘destructive’, ‘nasty’, ‘uncivilized’ and ‘brutish’. Consequently, coexistence in Kilombero is deemed to be under threat.

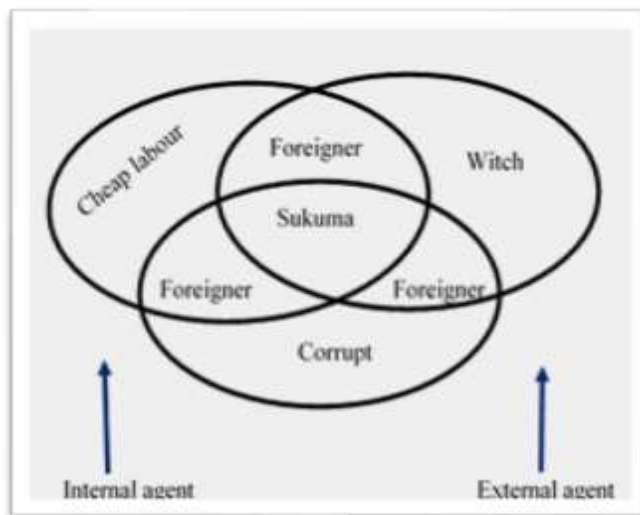


Figure 1: Identity Formation in Migrants Agro-Pastoralists Destination

4.2 Foreigners and Cheap Labour as Labels in Identity Formation

Results further revealed that 'foreigner' is another label that originates from both MAs themselves and farmers. The situation where identity formation originates from MAs has been well articulated in Jenkins (2014), in which case individuals only recognize themselves and their social position and contribution to society if they perceive their identity in relation to external members beyond their ethnic group. Farmers, as external agencies, impose a foreign label on MAs as well. As articulated during FGDs with farmers, they are categorized as foreigners and merely visitors despite the duration they have been living in the village. This is typified by the following comment that was made during one FGDs:

Most of these are not permanent residents. They keep migrating every day, for example, next year they will move to Lindi. They are foreigners with no intention of establishing themselves. You can see they don't even build permanent houses. Thus, there is no need to allocate them larger lands in the fertile part of the village, because they will eventually desert the area (FGDs with a male MA in Kitiliwele, September 2023).

It should be noted that, although this comment was made by one member, it was a consensus view in FGDs held in Malinyi. Migrants have settled in Kilombero Valley since the late 1990s (Jackson, 2025) and the process of migration still continues as there are new arrivals every day, as was observed in a Malinyi bus stand during the transect walk.

Identity formation also involves space. It was revealed that MAs are not only pulled to marginal land, but they also have their homesteads very far from the village's economically vibrant centre. As they generally live on farms, MAs can hardly build networks with farmers, who on some occasions are very accommodating. The only reason for this isolated physical space is that, as alluded to earlier, 'they are foreigners'. During one interview, the implications of the 'foreign' label were revealed, as quoted below:

I moved here in 2012, and when I went to the village office to apply for land allocation, they gave me a farm whose soil is very sandy. I hardly grow rice; it [the farm] only serves as a ground to graze my cattle. But farmers themselves own fertile land close to the Furua Riverbank, and they can grow crops all year round (Interview with a male MA in Kitiliwele, September 2024).

MAs are not only segregated in terms settlement; they are also isolated from social services. This implies that there is deep-rooted identity formation in educational institutions as well. A leader was quoted giving the following statement during an interview:

... because they don't want to send their children to our school, we have built a school for them in Kitiliwele. This is a school for the children of the Sukuma. We have also built a secondary school for their children (Interview with a Village chairman, September 2024).

During a transect walk along MAs neighbourhood, a school was sighted in their sub-village. The village leader was proud that they had constructed a school for 'them'. It is clear that this reflects institution-based identity. Even local institutions accept this kind of foreigner categorization. One might have expected a school to be built midway between farmers' settlement and MA's neighbourhoods. This would foster greater integration and pave the way for assimilation among children of different ethnicities, thereby reducing identity-based conflict in the future. This kind of prejudicial 'foreign' labelling is not unique to the Kilombero Valley. Evidence has shown that Fulani pastoralists (who occasionally practice farming) were expelled as foreigners in Ghana, despite having lived there for over a century (Akov, 2017). There is thus a strong association between space and identity: what Capello (2019) calls 'territorial identity'. It is an arrangement in which migrants are confined not only to physical space but also to social space. The prevailing social structure among farmers in Kilombero has given rise to territorial identity. With this narrative, it is not a question of resource distribution that separates the two groups, but rather identity. Since Malinyi is not a heavily populated area that demands demarcation, and migrants are not exclusively livestock keepers (in fact, most do more farming than livestock keeping), the two groups could ideally live side by side. In this way, they would be able to recognize and appreciate each other's diversities, and strengthen ties in coexistence.

Borrowing the concept from Bayar (2009), agro-pastoralists in Kilombero can be considered to behave in a primodalistic mode, in which they remain strongly attached to their values and traditions, regardless of how long they coexist with farmers. This attribute cements their 'foreign' identity; and from this viewpoint identity is stagnant and cannot be reconstructed. Since MAs have their lives cocooned in their own social space, they can hardly assimilate or move outside their ethnic circle. In addition, since they are confined to a narrow social structure, inadvertently this leads them to feel inferior and adopt individualistic attitudes. The effect of this is greater isolation, hatred, and conflicts. In fact, farmers use this opportunity to assign labels to MAs so that they can relegate them to an inferior position; and marginalize them in physical, social and economic space. Some farmers even take advantage of identity to benefit from cheap labour. During one FGD, the following comments were made. One that was by a farmer said:

If you want to weed your paddy field, just talk to the Wasukuma. They are very cheap. They are foreigners here, so we should benefit from them. We also hire them during tillage and for harvesting. Compared to the Wasukuma, locals are not hardworking, and are expensive to hire (FGDs with female farmers in Malinyi, October, 2023).

Another participant raised the question of the low price they were getting from selling their farm products:

During the food-scarce season, they [Wasukuma] sell us groundnuts and sweet potatoes at a much lower price than locals. With TZS 500 one could buy enough sweet potatoes to last a week's consumption. Locals would charge TZS 3000 for the same amount (FGDs with female farmers in Malinyi, October, 2023).

These two quotes present a case in which MAs are labelled as 'cheap labour'. Because they mostly live in remote areas of the village where farmers have their paddy fields, they are therefore readily available for labour-intensive paddy farming activities. This identity is not only externally imposed but also constructed within the MAs themselves: they present themselves as having migrated to search for work. This is supported by an interview with one MA who said the following:

I have come here to work, since I only have a few cattle and eight children and my other wife is still in Meatu, but she could join me any time now. I only need money to buy food. I will do any work. Locals hate us because we do work and we demand less than they would do. After all this is their land (FGDs with a male MA September 2023).

One may note that this identity is driven by a strong desire to earn cash to support their large families. Through observation, it became apparent that MAs have a high fertility rate; with an average household size of 16. This was also observed by Izumi (2017) among the Sukuma, and it is well beyond Tanzania's total fertility rate of around 4 (URT, 2024).

It should also be noted that this sort of identity has intensified competition in the farm labour market. The effect of this labour competition is the lowering of local farm wages, a phenomenon that has also been observed among migrant pastoralists in Southern Tanzania (Komba & Mahonge, 2019). At the local level, this identity jeopardizes coexistence, as rural unemployment is a major issue. In Malinyi, farm labour is an important off-farm activity among native farmers, as noted in a survey conducted in Kilombero Valley (Msinde et al., 2016). This sort of labour competition could not be unveiled in analyses that dwell on physical resource competition.

4.3 Identity, Institutions and Conflict Mediation

As it has been noted elsewhere in MAs studies in Tanzania (Rweyemamu, 2019; Ntumva, 2023; Rweyemamu et al., 2024), the common conflicts reported in the Kilombero Valley are those related to crop damage and land competition. This has been extensively presented elsewhere (Hamman & Haruna, 2018; Brottem, 2020) where MAs coexist with native farmers. The focus in this study is on the space of identity in conflict resolution and mediation since this matter is closely associated with coexistence. The findings reveal that conflict resolution is a two-pronged structure, with formal and informal mechanisms as illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1: Identity in Conflict Mediation Involving Crop Damage

Mediating Institution	Details of Mediation	Label assigned to MAs
Village community development committee	A village extension officer will visit the farm and estimate the cost of crop destruction, and the perpetrator will compensate	corrupt
Village police station	Police investigate as a criminal offence, mediate conflicting parties and take the case to court if mediation has failed	corrupt
Village primary court	Adjudicate and prosecute as a criminal offence	corrupt
Traditional leaders	Engage conflicting parties and impose sanctions on the offender	witchcraft
Disputing parties	Perpetrator and victim reconcile themselves	witchcraft

In most cases, as revealed during an interview with the Malinyi VEO, farmers who are often victims of crop damage will present their case to the village community development committee, which has five members. The village chairperson or executive officer would instruct the ward extension officer to visit the site of damage and conduct a valuation for compensation. This is level one of a formal mediation. The second level of jurisdiction is mediation by the police. The victim would report the case to the police as a criminal matter; the police would mediate, and if mediation fails, they would forward the case to the village primary court, where criminal prosecution begins. MAs accused in this jurisdictional process are not safe from being labelled by natives, who are always victims of crop damages that occur as herds graze on cropping land. This behaviour can be interpreted as either negligence or arrogance among MAs, as presented during FGDs.

Pastoralists do not value our crops. They have no fear, and we have to stay up all night to protect our farms. If you don't, you will find nothing left in the morning. And if you have identified a culprit, they will entice you to go and report to their traditional leader, who stays with them. But their leader will favour them. If you insist on going to court, they may bewitch you if they are punished (FGDs with male farmers in Kitiliwele, September 2023).

In the same FGDs with farmers, there were complaints on corruption, as one participant testified:

Agro-pastoralists are very rich; they own large herds of cattle. You don't see their herds here; they are kept in protected areas because they pay game rangers to allow them to graze. They are ready to sell cattle at any time to evade penalties and compensation. They bribe the police and the courts. The police do not investigate cases of crop damage; and if they do they take a long time. My case was not investigated, so I lost everything. I was told by a neighbour that my accused Msukuma owned a very large herd and had to sell 10 cows to get money to give away as bribe (FGDs with male farmers in Kitiliwele, September 2023).

The interpretation here is that formal mechanisms are fraught with corruption. There is no trust among farmers. Self-serving behaviour and corruption have

also been reported by Rweyemamu et al. (2024) as a drawback in resolving conflicts between MAs and farmers in Tanzania. The formal procedure in Malinyi is bureaucratic and corrupt. Farmers accuse the police of accepting bribe from wealthy MAs, and of dismissing their cases. Cases of police bribery in conflicts involving farmers and agro-pastoralists/pastoralists seem to be common in Tanzania, as also reported by Saruni et al. (2018) and Massawe (2023). In the FGDs held with farmers, one participant shared experience of this unfairness. Thus, if farmers feel the mediation process is corrupt, hatred develops and coexistence is threatened. This identity is externally assigned by farmers, since MAs will never associate themselves with corruption. From an identity perspective, corruption is the subjective impression that farmers have towards MAs. In fact, this reflects reality in the Kilombero Valley, and is not merely a prejudicial feeling. Table 1 illustrates the kind of mediations different institutions handle, and details of the actual mediations.

The other dimension of conflict mediation is through an informal mechanism. This is adopted if a farmer is willing to engage the MA's traditional leader, known as *mtemi*. This is a trusted MAs traditional leader who applies traditional dispute mediation procedures that may impose sanctions acceptable to the relevant member's ethnic group (see Table 1). This way is used when other mediation processes fail. Farmers often mistrust this mechanism, as it is often characterized with corruption.

The other trajectory of institutional-based identity that threatens coexistence is the perception of witchcraft. Farmers feel that MAs are negligent and recklessly graze their herds on cropland because they are arrogant. They have what FGD participants in Malinyi and Kitiliwele call witchcraft. One farmer complained during an FGD: "... if you report them they pay compensation, but that will be the end of working on your field as you will harvest nothing because they bewitch your farms." Another member complained of developing an unknown sickness because of a quarrel he had with an MA whom he had accused of grazing cattle in his farm at night. So, generally there was a consensus view on this subject of witchcraft. Farmers identify MAs as witches, and because of that they become complacent about the situation when there is a problem of encroachment. It is an identity that is constructed from outside the ethnic group. However, MAs do not perceive themselves this way. An interview with the village chairperson, who had lived in the village his entire life, revealed that witch-hunting was common among the farmers themselves as well.

4.4 Identity Meanings in Coexistence

Generally, the findings in this article reveal a mixed understanding of the 'migrant' as a broad social label that mimics specific identities. It has been revealed that identity does not only determine livelihood strategies, but it is also

construed within conflict mediation approaches, and thus MAs identity presents a major barrier to peaceful coexistence in Malinyi. The five identified labels – ‘foreigners’, ‘Sukuma’, ‘cheap labour’, ‘corrupt’ and ‘witch’ – shape the process of assimilation, and thus coexistence.

Perceptions of identity are individualistic, shaped by interactions and often institutionalized. Identities in Kilombero are inexorably tied (see Figure 1), externally and internally generated, and thus they should not be treated separately. To some extent, MAs as a community form their own identity to leverage and strengthen their position within the existing social structure, thereby gaining command over resources. On the other hand, farmers develop identity labels to MAs as aspiration for collective struggle to defend their territory against ‘enemies’. Both of these aspirations threaten coexistence.

In summary, the question of identity is deeply rooted in interactions and institutions, and indeed affects conflict resolution. Specific Tanzanian studies (Ntumva, 2023; Rweyemamu et al., 2024) that have analysed the dynamics of conflicts in the political ecology approach have ignored identity, which matters a lot in ethnic diversity between antagonistic groups. It is not that these studies are careless in their analyses, but they give the impression that can lead to misguided policies focusing solely on materialism and resource competition. Identity, though prejudicial, matters for understanding the coexistence between MAs and farmers as it affects interactions between groups. The intention behind creating these identity labels is to enable natives to occupy a dominant position in the social structure. Generally, the results in this study align with evidence provided by Homera and Mollel (2024) in which identity was the source of conflicts between agro-pastoralist migrants and farmers in Southern Tanzania. In a perspective, identity formation in Kilombero is a multi-layered process: it starts with migrants positioning themselves within their ethnic circle, and then the process is shaped by social interactions. Lastly, it is propagated by institutions. This layered identity process has ramifications for coexistence between these two groups. It creates distrust and makes it harder for MAs to integrate with natives.

5. Conclusion and Policy Implications

This article has revealed the lived experience of identity among MAs in Kilombero Valley, Tanzania. Generally, social structure and institutions matter in identity formation. MAs are labelled as foreigners, cheap labour, Sukuma, and witches. These labels originate from the migrants themselves, as individuals within their ethnic group, and from native farmers. Labelling and categorization do not only deny migrants the opportunity to assimilate and integrate, but also propagate conflicts and present a barrier to conflict mediation. Thus, analysing coexistence through the prism of social identity at the intersection of farmers and

agro-pastoralists provides a much broader avenue for a comprehensive understanding of coexistence, and for preventing conflict escalation. This approach to understanding coexistence moves away from traditional approaches of stylising coexistence among MAs and farmers, which are anchored in political ecology. It has been shown here that resource-based analysis, rooted in the political ecology approach, is overly deterministic and cannot identify the root causes of conflicts often purportedly attributed to MAs.

The findings in this article call for a new trajectory in designing policy that reduces tension between MAs and farmers. The social identity approach will probably prevent policymakers from erring on the side of MAs as victims. The current livestock policy (URT, 2006)—which is geared towards establishing a physical border between two coexisting groups—is based on political ecology, which assumes that resource conflicts dominate interactions. This assumption and policy direction should be treated with caution, because identity is indeed the source of grievances and it propagates MAs' destructive behaviour. Thus, from a policy perspective, a middle ground has to be sought as the questions of resource-related competition, community conflicts, and ethnic identity can hardly be separated in creating a harmonious relationship between migrant agro-pastoralists and farmers.

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