

# Narrations of Precolonial Society among Terik of Western Kenya

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The present work considers the present-day oral recollections of Terik informants on aspects of their precolonial society and relating them to the scant available written evidence. Four important themes emerged from the interviews conducted among Terik people between 2013 to 2016. Firstly, concerning land ownership and usage, present day Terik narrations emphasize their pastoralist past and the oral evidence shows an egalitarian and communal form of land ownership at least until the early colonial period. Even then, most Terik seem to have practised some crop farming which they seek to understate in the present. Secondly, hierarchy seems to have been dispersed at various levels, but two broad categories are discernible, which can be described as juridical-political versus ritual. Thirdly, relationships between Terik and neighbouring communities (particularly Luhyia sub-groups) seem to have been fluid and to some extent complementary in the precolonial period, alternating between mutually beneficial exchange of land, warriors and wives. Finally, informants frequently said that aside from natural calamities or wars, the one social event that brought all the Terik together in one activity was the circumcision ceremonies (*tumndo*). The importance of *tumndo* is found in two of its basic functions; first, as a rite of passage from childhood to adulthood and, secondly, the very conferment of personhood and obligations.