

The East Pokot Pastoralists in conflict siege: Reflections on cultural interpretations of persistent conflict

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Abstract

The East Pokot pastoralists are part of the Nilotic group that belong to the Karamoja cluster. They are found in Baringo County of North Western Kenya. They neighbor the Turkana, Samburu, Il Chamus (Njemps), Tugen and Marakwet. They always have had an acrimonious relationship with the Kenya government from the colonial period to the present. All through they have a conflictuous relationship with all the neighbouring pastoralist and agro pastoral communities over livestock and lately territory. This paper suggests that the intensity, scale and frequency of conflict has continued unabated in the face of government and other actors interventions through a combination of threat of force and/ or negotiated settlement.

This paper, based on primary and secondary data, argues that the motivators of conflict from the perspective of the East Pokot are historically and culturally defined.

While there exist specific cultural interpretations in relation to each community the overall cultural interpretations for conflict are presented as: revival of the sharpening stone, misbehavior and carelessness by the middle age group which has angered *Tororot* (God).

1.1 Background

1.2 Introduction

Ever since the path breaking study by Fukui and Turton (1979) titled *Warfare among East African herders*, the question of conflict among pastoralists has remained high on the agenda and perspectives to understand the motivations remained elusive. The impact of conflict among pastoralists has been well documented and is more apparent as seen in the recent publications by Schilling, Opiyo and Scheffran (2012). Perhaps more than any other pastoralist community in Kenya, the East Pokot pastoralists experience (as aggressors and victims of conflict) more than any other. This is partly attributed to the fact that they are surrounded by other pastoralist communities. This article seeks to elucidate who the East Pokot are as a people, their origin, culture and more importantly their cultural interpretations of the intensity and persistence of conflict. The article is based on empirical and secondary data that were collected partly for Phd work at the University of Nairobi from 2010 to 2013.

The East Pokot Geographic Area and Economy

Geographic area and communication

In terms of communication, the East Pokot is largely inaccessible. There are hardly motorable tracks yet the landscape is dissected by numerous seasonal rivers. The tarmac road from Nakuru abruptly ends just outside the administrative area at Loruk.

Ambruster and Odegi(1995) on this notes that generally, infrastructure is grossly inadequate and in many places non-existent. The economic potential of the area would not justify additional expensive infrastructure, therefore it cannot be expected that infrastructure will be improved and/or expected to improve in foreseeable future.

However, historical and current evidence consistently show that East Pokot have large herds of livestock hence it is not accurate for Ambruster and Odegi(1995) to state that the area has low economic potential to justify infrastructure investment. For instance it is estimated that there are 7000 donkeys, 3500 camels, 20,000 sheep, 100,000 goats and 50,000 cattle in East Pokot (Saltlick, 1991). These estimates have further grown as captured in Table 1 below which shows the figures as recently as 2008/2009.

Table 1: Livestock population (estimates)*

Livestock species	Number 2008	Number 2009	% + or -
Cattle(indigeneous)	115,000	110,900	-3
Goats	199,500	182,300	-8.7
Sheep	99,750	89,000	-11
Camels	8,900	9,600	7
Donkeys	2,200	2,600	8
Indigenous poultry	94,500	95,500	1
Dairy cattle	12	20	60

Source: Ministry of Livestock Chemolingot, 2009

* Figures based on 90%-95% presentation of livestock for vaccination

According to the 2009 population census East Pokot population was 63,649 (21,931 female and 41,718 male). The population growth rate is 2.65% with a literacy level of 66% male and 55% female. East Pokot District has 64-74% of the population living below poverty line and contributes 1-2% poverty to national poverty level (Republic of Kenya, 2005). Of the district population 34,438 are classified as poor. In terms of ranking, the district ranks 109 out of maximum of 210. A 58% of the total population have no education, 39% have primary and 33% secondary and above education (Republic of Kenya, 2005).

The study area has many seasonal rives – Nginyang, Kositei, Suguta Marmar, Chesanja while Kerio which is the only permanent river is on the extreme westerly side bordering the Marakwet. All the rivers flow to the northerly direction to drain into Lake Turkana. Most of the rivers rise from the Tugen hills but Suguta Marmar rises from the easterly direction along the Laikipia escarpment. The higher grounds include mountains. Silali, Tiati and the Kerio valley escarpment. All the higher grounds constitute the bulk of the dry season pastures. However, most of them are on the outer edges of East Pokot, hence always insecure.

The East Pokot Culture and Economy

Stewart (1950) quoted in the republic of Kenya (1950) termed people of East Pokot as the Suk and that they were roughly 60% pastoral and 40% agricultural. They broke off from the original Nandi settlement on Mt. Elgon and represent the most primitive form of Nandi. Their language is Nandi in structure as is much of their vocabulary. The Suk call themselves Pokot (*pronounced Pokaut*). Suk is the name given to them by the Maasai because they lived in the hills and carried a "chok" which is a short curved bill-hook, probably for cultivation. Suk is also a relative Maasai name for ignorant people who were living in the hills. This shows

they were agriculturalists, but now entirely pastoralists. Initially they lived in the territory towards the Western end of Cherangani Hills at Mt. Sekerr (most probably Mt. Elgon). After some experience of the Karimojong and Turkana they acquired many of their customs, such as the singing, baboon dance and *sapana* rite of passage before they moved to the lowlands. Their diet consisted of finger millet, honey and game. They dared not come to the plains because the Samburu would not allow them in the Kerio Valley and the Turkana to the north west. Later the Samburu left Kerio Valley and moved eastwards. This allowed the East Pokot to descend from the hills and occupy the land vacated by the Samburu. They eventually pushed as far as Tiati Hills but were prevented from going further by the Maasai. Beech (1910) described the Pokot as,

intelligent but surprisingly honest, exceptionally vain but very generous. Suspicious of one's motives, selfish and without affection. A savage and uncivilized people to whom death is the greatest evil and who have but a short span of life

Later on an unnamed and undated colonial District Commissioner said this of the East Pokot

The East Pokot are very backward and conservative to a degree and it will be a long uphill task to win their confidence and secure any active interest and support from them to any scheme which may be inaugurated for their benefit

The Pokot are divided into two sections, the agricultural and Pastoralist. This study focused on the pastoralist group. The difference between them is clear, including their customs and physique. The pastoralists (now the East Pokot) are rich in cattle, goats and sheep and look with disdain upon the agriculturalists to whom they refer as "the men of the seed". The agriculturalists (the West Pokot) who have infused crop based cultivation with livestock husbandry hence pass more accurately as the agro-pastoralists. The agriculturalists are very inferior to the pastoralists in physique due to the fact that their diet consist almost entirely of sorghum (and now maize) varied occasionally with little goat meat. The pastoralists (East Pokot, in Baringo District) are in the plains. Their mode of living is simple and befits a people who are constantly moving with families and herds in search of water and grazing. Their food consists of blood and milk varied by a little grain. Republic of Kenya (1951) reported of the East Pokot that their wealth of cattle makes them rank with the Maasai as the most opulent Africans and their wants outside their stock are negligible. They are divided into four main clans. The Talai/Kasait clan is predominantly in Churo area, Cheprai/Kaprai occupy the central part including Chemolingot/Nginyang region, the Kolowa clan is in Kerio Valley while Cheman clan in Chepkalacha region.

Ethnic specific cultural interpretation of conflict

The East Pokot – Samburu conflict

The conflict is bedeviled with territorial, livestock, murder, attempted murder and kidnapping claims and counter claims. According to the East Pokot elders in FGDs held in Churo and Amaiya areas, the conflict between them is traced to Uasin Gishu when Samburu and East Pokot bulls fought resulting into a Samburu bull breaking the front leg of the East Pokot bull. This incidence infuriated the East Pokot bull owner who demanded compensation from the Samburu. Consequently he was given a heifer. This incidence marked the historical origin of the conflict. Amaiya area has been an East Pokot residence from about 1816 though it was traced to a Ndorobo chief, Loratia Lesidala in 1943 who ceded it to a Mr. Ataule Kipterer, an East Pokot chief who requested for water during drought but after the drought did not go back to his territory. To them, there were no Samburu people in that area at that time. Although the two communities became allies against the Turkana, it was until 2003 when open conflict broke out. The Samburu now openly claim Amaiya area and threaten to evict the East Pokot (GOK Report, 2006).

In March 2003 at Mallaso area, an East Pokot herder, Mr. Kakuko Lochalei (GOK 2006) was shot and injured in the left arm at a watering point and shortly afterwards the son of Mr. Loriongoreng was shot by a Samburu *moran*, when herding livestock. He was taken to Maralal District Hospital by two East Pokot *moran*, Mr. Kameri Yukka and Mr. Lokwiakood Ayonni. On their way back, at Poror Market they were killed by the Samburu after alighting from a public service vehicle. This incident angered the East Pokot in Amaiya who retaliated to avenge the murders. A day later an East Pokot named Mr. Tuglon was robbed of his shopping wares and knifed on the shoulder by the Samburu at Poror Market. On a Friday (a market day) at Poror Market, an East Pokot, Mr. Sapich Assile was attacked by Samburu until he fell and died at Mallaso cliff. The East Pokot's Mr. Lomerii Didi, Mareit Didi and Warata Didi of Amaiya visited their Samburu in-laws in 2003 but were murdered in the homestead (*kau*) they had visited. At Losuk area, Mrs. Chepotetel, an East Pokot woman visited her Samburu lady-friend but on the way back, her baby boy was kidnapped and killed by the Samburu *moran*. Another incident involved a young Samburu boy looking for a lost goat but on meeting an East Pokot elder, a Mr. Tanap, a fight broke out. A day later, the son of Mr. Tanap and Mr. Lang'ha Lokwiinag were killed by the Samburu at Nakum water point. A Mr. Komol Angopa was seriously injured by Samburu *moran* when he attempted to separate two fighting Samburu boys at Amaiya (GOK Report, 2006).

In 2006 at Poror Market, an East Pokot (a Mr. Korimuny's) left hand was chopped off by a Samburu Moran. On April 18, 2006 Samburu raiders attacked the East Pokot at Ol Moran, killed a Mr. Chepochonyir Wialamus and made away with 4 cows and 200 goats. In the same month there was a Samburu attack on the East Pokot at Nakum Village and Kanjul area leading to loss of 200 cattle. In May 2006 the Samburu raided the East Pokot at Nakum area and made away with 329 cattle. A quick response by the Kenya Army recovered the cattle but in the process of handing over to the East Pokot, a government administrative officer allegedly ordered their return to the Samburu thereby infuriating the East Pokot leading to a devastating counter attack. On the loss of livestock and lack of government support, one FGD participant said,

when the East Pokot take Samburu livestock the Government readily comes with force until the livestock are returned, but when the Samburu take our livestock the same government does not intervene. The government of Kenya is always against the Pokot

At Sukuroi area, a Samburu *moran* killed and mutilated the body of a Mrs. Cheparwas and drove away 300 cattle. Many East Pokot living in Bois, Sukuroi, Ireria, Karanjira and Kwanambuzi areas of Laikipia District migrated to Ratia. However, they were attacked by the Samburu *moran* who made away with 1,450 cattle. More recently, and which has heightened conflict is the East Pokot is the realization that the Samburu intend to evict them from Amaiya area to make room for the creation of Altungai Conservancy (GOK Report 2006).

Therefore there are many killings and maiming that are emotional and remain unresolved; threats, intimidation and harassment, impending eviction and lack of consultation, all of which fuel the conflict leading to a cycle of violence that has seriously affected the East Pokot livelihood systems.

Although the livestock figures may not be accurate or sometimes even exaggerated, or negated either way, they nevertheless give a picture that the conflict leads to loss of livestock and land leading to pauperization and the need to make social adjustments for livelihood.

East Pokot – Njemps conflict

According to FGD participants at Tangelbei, Chepkalacha, and Churo, four explanations account for the conflict between the East Pokot and Njemps. The first explanation revolves around the collapse of the 1913 Kapiel Oath administered at Katulbei (now Tangelbei). According to East Pokot elders, the oath bound the East Pokot, Njemps and Samburu not to fight each other. Four white rams and four black rams were slaughtered and their blood together with tripes buried in the ground. Those present at the ceremony were smeared with ram fat to symbolize a new beginning and burial of the hatchet. This oath has also been recorded as part of the proceedings between the East Pokot, Samburu and government meeting to find peace (GOK, 2006). According to the East Pokot elders, each community contributed milk, knife, drywood, tree branches, blood and a spear which had at least been used to kill a human being to this oathing ceremony. The oath was taken, items were mixed and buried in the ground at Tangelbei area, after which the people left the spot running. Thereafter the Maasai Laibon decreed that the stone used to sharpen the spears should never be returned to the East Pokot nor to the Maasai for peace to be sustainable. To the East Pokot elders, they went against the Laibon's decree and bought guns initially for self defence against the Turkana, but later sold them to the Njemps, who now use the very guns to attack the East Pokot who in turn attack the Njemps. The gun is the modern similarity to the sharpening stone. The eclipse of the generation that was the custodian of the agreement/oath on both sides, and the rise of a younger one keen on exercising their power oblivious of the past commitments accounts for the existence of conflict between them. A participant in the FGD at Tangelbei said,

the younger generation does not understand the importance of the oath hence conflict is punishment the East Pokot will suffer

The second explanation and which marked the first modern war since 1913 between East Pokot and Njemps, concerns a real incident in 1940s when an East Pokot woman, Mrs. Chepotang'olom from Amaiya, wife of Kiyenile of Churo, was abducted by the Njemps *moran* and eventually married by a Njemps elder. East Pokot elders who followed up to demand her release were allegedly beaten by the Njemps. The East Pokot mobilized and attacked the Njemps until they surrendered Kiyenile's wife. In the process of fighting, the two twin sons of a Mr. Lokichap who were part of the Njemps *moran* group, were incidentally killed by the East Pokot. The Njemps held a grudge against the East Pokot from that time, until now when, it is expressed in open conflict. At Chepkalacha, one elder said,

ever since the sons of Lokichap were killed, there has never been true peace with the Njemps

The third factor is contested territory which simmered since the mid 1980s but escalated around the period 2003-2004 and reached the peak from 2005-2006 onwards. From 2000, livestock rustling also began. In 2005 the Njemps allegedly stole East Pokot livestock in Rukus area. In that year again they stole Mr. Chechetum Lopodo's livestock in Kotulpoi area along their territorial boundary. However, an unknown number of cattle was stolen by the Njemps but which East Pokot elders say were 500.

In retaliation, the East Pokot stole 4440 goats, 1493 cattle and 30 donkeys in a series of raids from February - April 2005 in Rukus, Mukutany, Kiserian and Olarabel areas. On government intervention, the East Pokot returned only 450 cattle. Consequently, the Kenya Army, General Service Unit, Anti-Stock Theft Unit, Regular and Administration police backed by helicopter and military vehicles forcibly confiscated 3837 cattle and 500 goats from the East Pokot living in

Tangulbei, Komolion and Mukutany areas, and drove them to Ng'ambo Primary School in Marigat Division from where they were handed over to the Njemps. A leading daily newspaper headline reporting this incident read "*Robbing Pokots to pay Njemps? Outcry over compensation system*" adding that "*it does not augur well for both communities. It was hurriedly done to please a section of the population and definitely does not solve the problem (East African Standard April 25, 2005)*". According to East Pokot elders, some of the livestock were sold by senior Kenya Army, Kenya Police and Provincial Administration officers. Many Njemps, including those who did not have livestock but claimed they lost, were given the livestock which they quickly sold to invest in buildings at Marigat Township. Some of the livestock confiscated belonged to senior government officers, military officers and teachers who only suffered because of being East Pokot. A teacher who teaches in one of the primary schools in the area said,

at the time of the Pokot attack I was in school. But when the government came to recover Njemps cattle they took my 41 cows yet I had not participated in the theft and none of my cows was identified by the Njemps as theirs. It was painful. My protest and identification as a teacher fell on deaf ears. Even cows of Pokot people who serve in the army, even DOs, theirs were taken. It was unfair.

To East Pokot elders, they lost 4700 cattle and 10,000 goats. This communal punishment of the East Pokot still remains a potential source of revenge. As a consequence of this operation, the Njemps have created many restrictions against the East Pokot not to graze or water their livestock in Rukus, Lesamarieti and Longicharu areas, Lekirati and Mukutany rivers. The East Pokot have also been banned from living in Kiserian and Losukuro areas, besides being denied passage through Mukutany and Kiserian to Marigat township which is much shorter but now forced to use Tangulbei - Chepkalacha – Loruk-Marigat route which is about 30 km longer.

The fourth explanation sounds political and culturally hegemonic. According to East Pokot elders, the Njemps are administratively in Marigat division and Baringo Central Constituency and therefore were in the former President Moi's bastion while the East Pokot are in Baringo East Constituency. The Njemps feel superior, have support of senior government officers and are more educated hence undermine the East Pokot who are scarcely educated, have no friends in higher government offices and are strongly attached to cattle. The Njemps attempted to shift their administrative boundary from the Mukutany River westwards into Tangulbei Division. They allegedly chased away East Pokot children from Mukutany Primary school and set on fire East Pokot houses at Mukutany Market on the pretext of controlling cholera. Subsequently, Mukutany primary school was transferred to Marigat division from Tangulbei division. On the East Pokot intervention, the Njemps allegedly retorted that they were in the President's territory. They also reminded them that the 1940's East Pokot annihilation of the Njemps has never been resolved. This territorial dispute over the extent of the official Njemps, and East Pokot territories today remains unresolved, a ticking time bomb and a source of conflict.

East Pokot – Tugen

Their conflict is historical. According to FGD participants in Chemolingot, Nginyang and Kolowa, in 1907 the East Pokot and Tugen fought over access to Chepkasing River which the Tugen had denied the East Pokot access. Chief Louwalan of the East Pokot called for a peace meeting to resolve the dispute amicably but the Tugen did not attend and proceeded to deny the East Pokot access to the river. Tired of Tugen intransigence, Chief Louwalan called for another peace meeting

and gave conditions for attendance of the meeting. The Tugen were to come with arrows but no bows or strings while the East Pokot would come with spear sticks without the spear on it and arrows without bows and strings. Chief Louwalan had secretly instructed his people to come ready for war, attack the Tugen as soon as he called the meeting to order. Once chief Louwalan called the meeting to order by saying,

all the people have arrived for the meeting of peace over water. The meeting
now begins

The East Pokot pounced on the Tugen using concealed spears and savagely killed many of them. From then on, the Tugen never trust the East Pokot and vowed to teach them a lesson. Hence for the East Pokot, the absence of a tarmac road which terminates at Loruk (the boundary of Tugen and East Pokot), denial of electricity until the former president Moi, a Tugen retired in 2003, absence of motorable roads, bridges, few schools, no hospital in East Pokot, two boarding schools all in an area of 4440km². Yet East Pokot district is one quarter of the total Baringo district land mass hence this is interpreted by the East Pokot as a Tugen revenge for the 1907 humiliation.

More recently in 2002, two East Pokot men went to Bartabwa region of the Tugen to sell guns. They were welcome by the Tugen host, fed and given bedding, but at night they were forced to surrender their guns and burnt alive in the house they were sleeping. To avenge the killings, the East Pokot have between 2002 - 2008 consistently attacked the Tugen for livestock until a peace meeting was held to resolve the matter in late 2008. In Loruk area, there is a boundary dispute between the East Pokot and Tugen. According to the East Pokot elders, their boundary is at *Kampi ya Samaki* on the shores of Lake Baringo. However, the Tugen favouring administration had pushed the boundary 15 Km away from the lake shore to Loruk. Further, the Tugen were allegedly claiming East Pokot land up to Chesirimioni area, about 15 km from the present day already disputed boundary at Loruk Market centre.

The East Pokot also accuse the Tugen of consistently shifting the colonial boundary between them along the Tugen escarpment. The white beacons erected in the 1930's to demarcate their land have been removed and new ones erected inside East Pokot territory especially in Cheso area where it is alleged the Tugen have created a group ranch.

East Pokot- Marakwet conflict

Based on FGD participants and key informant interviews in Kolowa, region, the conflict originated from a 1967-1968 Mwal Market affray in Marakwet during which an East Pokot, son of Lonyirit was stabbed in the stomach. Although he was assisted to cross River Kerio into East Pokot, he later died. In 1968, Adapal, the son of Toritor, a pupil at Marigat Primary School, was sent to visit a Marakwet relative whom his father had loaned cattle to collect one cow to be sold for his school fees. On his way back, a Marakwet shot him dead as he crossed Kerio River. Appalled by the death of Adapal, his friend Yarangole Lutiang vowed to revenge. He crossed Kerio River at night unnoticed, entered a Marakwet homestead, killed two people, injured a third one and escaped back to East Pokot. Immediately afterwards, he warned fellow East Pokot to be ready for war with the Marakwet. These two incidents marked the origin of the conflict.

From the 1990s to the present, the conflict has intensified with devastating consequences on both sides. Marakwet markets of Chesegeon, Tot, Krol and Mungil have become the hot spots with frequent affrays on market days whenever the East Pokot are present. Usually the Marakwet attack

the East Pokot on the markets or on the way back from the market, who retaliate with venom. According to East Pokot elders in Kolowa, the turning point in their conflict is centered on a Mr. Lodokou from West Pokot, who sold modern guns to the East Pokot of Kerio Valley to fight the Marakwet with outstanding success. The gunshots had deafening noise and also led to the annihilation and devastation of the Marakwet. This overwhelming success led to the composition of a song among the Marakwet, but sang by the East Pokot women to mock the Marakwet of East Pokot superiority over them.

Kichero Tot aa wecha wechayi : The gun had too deafening noise that I ran so fast

Kicheri kiyona materanen x2: I did not want to hear that sound again

Keru yono aa Lodokou : Where did you sleep yesterday? I slept in Tot yesterday

Keru yono korua Tot a mang'aa: I could not stand the guns of Lodokou

The song was composed to reflect the trouble the East Pokot have subjected the Marakwet to. The Marakwet have bows and arrows against the powerful guns of the East Pokot. The East Pokot rever Lodokou for assisting them to extinguish the Marakwet menace.

East Pokot – Turkana conflict

Much of the existing literature about the Pokot-Turkana relationship is recent and biased that their relationship has always been conflictual. According to anthropologist Lamphear (1992) the East Pokot and Turkana were allies as they frequently combined to raid the Samburu to push them further south of Lake Turkana, and must have come together to push the Samburu again from the Kerio Valley.

The expulsion of the Samburu from Kerio Valley allowed the East Pokot to descent from the hills to the valley they presently occupy. Lamphear further indicates that there was active trade between the two communities. In particular, the Turkana Keebotok (considered a poor clan) played a middlemen role between them. By 1900 there was considerable cultural exchange, linguistic and economic affinities. Many East Pokot and Turkana became bilingual, a fact which mis-informed colonial observers who mistook Suk for Turkana language (Barton, 1957). Sir Harry Johnson (1904) indicated that there was intense intermarriage between the Pokot and Turkana to the extent that the two communities could almost be described as one people. In the process, the East Pokot adopted the *sapana* from the Karimojong, song and baboon dance from the Turkana.

Colonial administrators' interests rudely punctured this beneficial exchange between the Pokot and Turkana while the British were determined to bring the Turkana under their control and thwart the expansionist ambitions of King Menelik II of Ethiopia. They dragged the East Pokot to stop the Turkana's southward drive and hold British territory. Hence the conflict between the Pokot and Turkana was a consequence of greed for empire, and today remains the genesis of the conflict between the East Pokot and Turkana. The conflict was man-made, but not natural. In 1918 the British led an expedition against the Turkana largely to protect the interests of the nascent settler community in Trans Nzoia and the slopes of Mt. Elgon. The settler community deprived the Pokot of grazing land, hence forced them to move nearer the Turkana, leading to more frequent conflicts over limited resources. In 1911, the forced deprivation of Pokot land in Trans Nzoia began until 1919 when they were finally humiliated and dispersed hence the infamous "*konyi kwenda*" or the years of exodus Pierli, *et.al.* 2006).

In the records it was clear that conflict between the East Pokot and the neighbours has been on for a long time, and that the East Pokot were for a long time the underdogs in their conflict with the Turkana. Drought and land degradation due to overstocking have been permanent features in East Pokot (Maher, 1937).

Today the East Pokot – Turkana conflict is the most explosive, intensive, devastating and complex of the conflicts the East Pokot are involved in with their neighbours. According to the East Pokot elders, their conflict with the Turkana began in the 17th Century. The Turkana acquired guns from the Arabs in Sudan in order to capture slaves for them. They were unable to capture the East Pokot so they used the guns instead to get their livestock. The second explanation is that the Turkana were employed by Menelik II of Ethiopia as home guards to extend Ethiopian territory southwards. Menelik II supplied them with guns and trained them on how to capture territory. However, the East Pokot successfully resisted the Turkana's southward advance, and refused to be recruited into Menelik II's army against the British. The failure of the Turkana to enlist the East Pokot humiliated them and they vowed to revenge which culminated in the 1918 livestock raid hence the current conflict. As a result of Turkana military superiority, the East Pokot were pushed southwards, losing the flat grazing areas in Kamuke, Lokori, Kalongol, Loteruk, Kolosia and Arawa until the hilly areas where they currently live. In 1918 the Turkana raided the East Pokot and took away hundreds of thousands of cattle, sheep, goats and donkeys (GOK, 1919). This was the largest single livestock raid ever to be undertaken by any ethnic group in Kenyan history. Up to 1996, the Turkana had pushed the East Pokot southwards from Akoret to Chemolingot, a distance of about 80 Kms. It is only from around 2000 that the East Pokot have begun to settle in Akoret region. The raids for livestock have persisted from 1918 to the present, including 2010 with devastating consequences.

Territorial disputes especially over ownership of Kapedo Centre, is an emotive source of dispute that has witnessed claims and counter claims. The contest is whether Kapedo centre administratively falls in East Pokot (originally Baringo) or Turkana District. According to the East Pokot participants and key informants, the colonial administration decided to move the few Turkana families that were in East Pokot into Turkana District in 1917 so that all the Turkana are administered under Turkana district. In that year they were left at Kapedo, which was an important East Pokot watering point until the drought subsided and would be moved further north.

However, the Assistant District Commissioner for Baringo District, who was charged with the responsibility of moving the Turkana did not come back to proceed and finish the task when the rains came. This explains Turkana presence at Kapedo. However, according to key informants and FGD participants, the Turkana came to Kapedo in 1967 following severe drought in Turkana South to take advantage of the famine relief and medical facilities provided by the Full Gospel Church, which had established a base at Kapedo in 1964. They built a manyatta adjacent to the centre but never went back after the drought.

The Turkana population superiority at Kapedo compared to the East Pokot is explained that the East Pokot shun urban lifestyle and begging while those attributes remain the lifestyle of the Turkana at Kapedo. Kapedo is an East Pokot name and therefore cannot be a Turkana settlement. Administratively, it was administered from Eldama Ravine, Kabarnet and later Chemolingot all in

Baringo District. Politically it is in Baringo East Constituency. It is in the interior of East Pokot while Akoret division of East Pokot District is about 70 km north therefore cannot be a Turkana settlement. Kapedo, from the colonial period, was administered under Kapedo East, Kapedo North and Kapedo West locations of Baringo District. One key informant in defence of Pokot ownership of Kapedo said,

the Turkana always lie about Kapedo. When I was in standard five in 1967 I remember seeing old and emaciated Turkana men and women being fed by missionaries under a big acacia tree. When they heard there was food and medicine in Kapedo many of them came to benefit and thereafter they built shelters to stay. They eventually multiplied very fast. They are still living in the centre in a filthy settlement. If they claim Kapedo is theirs why do they only live in the centre? Kapedo is in East Pokot

According to one key informant living near Kapedo centre, the Turkana elite in 1997 created Kapedo Location with several sub locations under Turkana District overlapping onto the same territory of Baringo. During the 2002 and 2007 general elections the Turkana people living in Kapedo Centre were registered to vote in Turkana South Constituency and in 2010 they were registered for referendum under Turkana South. The East Pokot were registered under Baringo East constituency. I have never seen confusion like this before yet government sits idly by

The overlapping claim over Kapedo is very emotive to both sides and remains a key source of East Pokot Turkana conflict. The East Pokot also claim the Turkana are encroaching and pushing them out of Nadome in Silale, Kulal mountains, Akoret, Kapau and Lokis areas which are administratively in East Pokot District, Baringo East Constituency. These conflict-prone areas also constitute the main *korieri* (dry season) pastures. To the East Pokot, the government's reluctance to intervene or resolve it makes the East Pokot think government is against them and supportive of Turkana encroachment onto their pastures and territory.

To the East Pokot, the Turkana menace in the *wolopokoo* (north), especially over Kapedo, is largely due to two factors: one is the Pokot disdain for living in an urban environment which made the Turkana population outnumber theirs in Kapedo Centre, which they lay claim to account of population superiority, and secondly their high level of illiteracy has made them not able to influence high levels of government, unlike the Turkana. One key informant indicated that there is national dislike of the Pokot:

Look at even the newspapers. Many times they are biased against us just as the government is. Many newspapers always show Turkana pictures of suffering which elicits national sympathy but hardly of the East Pokot. Even when the Turkana steal our livestock they do not report, but when we go to recover our livestock it becomes national news

The proliferation of guns and the Kenya government's biased participation in the conflict has equally fuelled it among the East Pokot and her neighbours. According to the East Pokot, the Turkana, Marakwet, Tugen, Njemps and Samburu have been recruited as Kenya Police Reservists (KPR) and supplied with guns. The East Pokot allegedly are not recruited as KPR because the government argues that they already have guns. The KPR are not trained, hardly monitored, and demoralized. They use the guns to steal livestock from the neighbours and are involved in a bristling bullet trade in the region. Due to lack of accountability on bullet use, they usually report

that they were used in gun battles with livestock raiders. To the East Pokot, being surrounded on all fronts by armed communities forces them to buy guns for self defence.

Overall cultural interpretations

Two explanations are presented by the East Pokot that account for persistence or intensifying conflict. Although the East Pokot have had turbulent relations with the Turkana, their association with the Marakwet, Tugen, Samburu and Njemps was largely harmonious until recently. The recent fallout is explained as follows:

Revival of the sharpening stone

In the context of the Samburu and Njemps in particular, it is traced to the East Pokot chief Louwalan who sent a Tugen man from Kamasia Hills with a message to the Maasai. The Maasai, then were living in the area around present day Nakuru. The Tugen was given a heifer as a reward for accepting to take the message. The message was:

take this sharpening stone to the Maasai to sharpen their spears if they had none so that they can come to reclaim from the East Pokot cattle that they had taken from them. The cows have now multiplied many times

The Maasai Laibon saw a vision of a man coming, carrying green leaves. This turned out to be the Tugen messenger sent by Chief Louwalan. The Tugen was welcomed and delivered the message. The Maasai took the message as a challenge. They mobilized the Moran who made four circles around Mt. Longonot and proceeded to attack the East Pokot. Most East Pokot women and livestock were taken while most men were killed by the Maasai. The last group of East Pokot women were saved and returned back when a short Pokot man, mistaken to be a woman speared to death a tall Maasai man who was leading the group. The East Pokot captives managed to escape back to form the present day population. The Maasai were appalled by the level of devastation on the East Pokot.

Consequently a peace meeting was concluded and the sharpening stone was thrown into a flowing river (believed to be Molo River) so that the stone could never be used again for war between the two communities. The East Pokot later acquired guns and sold them to the Njemps. Among the East Pokot, the acquisition of guns is interpreted to mean reviving the sharpening stone that was thrown into the river. The East Pokot went against the peace meeting and oath, hence the current war with the Njemps.

Misbehavior and Carelessness by the middle age group

The persistence of conflict between the East Pokot and her neighbours is interpreted that *Tororot* (God) is unhappy with the whole community. According to East Pokot culture, whenever there is trouble or an impending one such as war, sickness or drought, the middle age group are expected to formally request elders to pray to *Tororot* to remedy the situation since prayer is only done when there is need. The middle age group meet on their own, prepare *arimor* (presents) which include beer, *kiruk* (bull) and *kwagha* (he goat) which are given to the elders as seduction for them to accept to perform the prayer. The *arimor* are presented in a *Kokwo* (council of elders). On agreeing to receive *arimor*, it takes a week or two of planning before the prayer is held. Usually *kiruk* is slaughtered in the early hours of the night (a female cow would be demeaning to *Tororot*) and the *kwagha* just before dawn. The prayer is done around 4-5 a.m led by an unblemished elder as soon as

topogh (morning star) rises. *Topogh* is *Tororot*'s messenger who witnesses the prayer and takes the message early morning before being obstructed by anything else that wakes up with *Asis* (sun) light.

East Pokot elders lamentation is that the middle age group that is supposed to prompt the elder is careless, not touched by the mass murders in their midst, hence elders have not offered prayers to *Tororot*. The middle age group has been corrupted and confused through excessive consumption of alcohol, women have equally taken up uncontrolled alcohol consumption therefore *Tororot* is annoyed with the East Pokot who must be punished until they right their ways. Hence the elders interpret the many conflicts, most of which began recently as punishment for deviant behaviour.

Conclusion

The conflict situation among the East Pokot and her neighbours has both historical and contemporary causes. There is no end in sight as the situation is currently. The intensity of the conflict is not uniform. It is more intensive on the Turkana and Samburu sides which also form the dry season pastures. This has led to more and more stress on the central regions that are relatively safe. Territorial claims and counter claims, perceived government bias and cultural interpretations of conflict account for the persistence of conflict which puts into jeopardy the future of pastoralism in East Pokot.

In this context, following the colonial expeditions in Turkana around 1916-1917 which led to the decimation of Turkana livestock and rendered them poor, they attacked the East Pokot in 1918 as a redistribution of East Pokot livestock wealth, which in itself was a kind of questioning of the legitimacy of the prevailing system. Feelings of deprivation and alienation ran high among the East Pokot and who in revenge have persistently attacked the Turkana on one front, the Marakwet, Samburu and Njemps on the other fronts and occasionally skirmishes over territory and resources with the Tugen. The unifying message among the East Pokot remains that they are in the centre and surrounded on all fronts by hostile communities, hence they must fight their way to avoid being swallowed and/or their shrunk territory encroached on. The more violent the conflict, the greater is the amount of structural change within a society in terms of social organization. Applying this to the East Pokot, the intensity, frequency and violent nature of conflict has led to far reaching changes in terms of livelihood alternatives on a scale never envisaged before. As Marx conceived of a society made up of social classes and unequally distributed valued but scarce resources clearly mirrors the East Pokot-Turkana, East Pokot- Samburu, East Pokot- Njemps, East Pokot- Marakwet and East Pokot- Tugen situation.

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