International Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities Invention 12(11): 8843-8849, 2025
DOI: 10.18535/ijsshi/v12i11.03
ISSN: 2349-2031
https://valleyinternational.net/index.php/theijsshi

Tracing the Historical Roots of Cattle Rustling Conflicts Among Pokot, Turkana And Karamojong

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Abstract:

The objective of this paper is to examine the causes, impact and transformation of cattle rustling practices among Pokot of Kenya, Karamoja from Uganda and Turkana from Kenya. It provides a global perspective of cattle rustling to document other countries' experience to juxtapose with the regional, national and local experience. It highlights from a historical bird view the relations among the neighbouring communities and how they were affected by the advent of cattle rustling practices. The paper also analyses the perception of the colonial governments on the pastoralist's communities in the region and it impact on policy decisions and resultant effect on their livelihoods. Introduction and acquisition of small arms and light and its implications has been discussed in this paper. It also discusses the causes of cattle rustling during pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial periods. Due to the dynamic nature of the conflicts, it is imperative to epistemologize these changes for evidence-based policy decisions to address the conflict in the region.

Keywords: **Cattle rustling, historical transformation, cross border conflict,**

An overview of cattle rustling from a global lens

Cattle rustling practices have not only been experienced locally but its tentacles spread across the world. In Australia, cattle rustling is popularly known as duffing while the perpetrator is referred to as duffer (Baker, 1945:32). On the other hand, in North America it is referred to as 'rustling' and 'rustler' the individual who engages in the practice. Cattle rustling menace in Argentina could be traced to widening markets in Europe due to industrialization; there was great demand for skins and hides (Brown 1978:160). In Israel most of the stolen livestock are reportedly taken to the West bank, slaughtered and then smuggled back into Israel. Cattle rustling is a major problem in South Sudan especially the state of Jonglei. These communities have been involved in cattle raids for social and cultural reasons. The proliferation of small arms, commercialization of livestock and a sharp rise in bride price has metamorphosized cattle rustling into a more violent and lucrative venture in South Sudan (Christopher, 2011:125).

In Kenya, cattle rustling has mutated with the use of sophisticated weapons (Mwaura 2005:4). The conflict has taken a global dimension because small arms and light weapons. The proliferation of arms is not only an African problem but also global that results into a complicated web of arms flow in the Horn of Africa (Mkutu, 2005:25). The incidences of cattle rustling are often reported among the Pokot, Turkana and Karamojong communities in northern western Kenya and Uganda. The raiders have discovered the monetary value of the stolen cattle, that is why some of the stolen cattle find their way to slaughterhouses in cities in the country. This creates a vicious cycle of raids and counter raids. This new development has made cattle rustling a lucrative business, leading to it commercialization (Mburu, 2002:1).

Cattle rustling conflicts, raids, and counter-raids in the region

The historical origins of cattle rustling has put scholars at crossroads in epistemologizing the unending raids and counter-raids in northwestern Kenya and eastern Uganda. Historical and archeological evidence indicate that the appetite for raids can be tied to the contact between pastoralists and long-distance traders in the 15th century. The contact between pastoralists and ivory traders marked an important departure from the worldview of the pastoralists and the beginning of acquisition of small arms and light weapons. Interestingly, in this period pastoralism was the highly renowned source of livelihood, but over time its centrality diminished and these communities were dominated, underprivileged, and impoverished (Van Zwanenberg and King, 1975:1).

Different schools of thoughts argue from a conflicting standpoint whether the origin of cattle rustling is pre-colonial or post-colonial. According to Lamphear, cattle rustling among pastoralists in north-western Kenya date back to pre-colonial period (Lamphear 1988:27). It is important to note that before the advent of colonialism, the main reason for conflict in these areas was mainly territorial expansion. Correspondingly, by entrenching ethnic boundaries, the colonial governments inhibited their further territorial expansion (Waller 1985:347). Despite the measures put in place by the colonial governments to regulate free movement of pastoralists cattle raiding continued unceasingly (Anderson 1986:399). The post-independence period marked an important phase of cattle rustling; the increase and circulation of firearms especially from the mid-1970s (Markakis and Fukui 1994:1-11).

Conversely, in the 1970s, there focus shifted to cultural factors as the fulcrum of the persistence of cattle raiding among pastoral

communities in the region. An array of authors located the nexus between cultural cattle rustling ((Fukui and Turton 1979:3). In unpacking cattle rustling and culture, Gray argue that in the order of priority in pastoralist cultural environment cattle is placed above that of human beings (Gray 2003:3). On the other hand, there was emergence of scholars who believed ecological rather than cultural factors were the root causes of cattle rustling (Rada Dyson-Hudson and Neville Dyson-Hudson 1980:15-61).

Introduction of Small Arms and Light Weapons

The intensity of cattle rustling practices in this region was compounded by the introduction of small arms and light weapons. The appetite for the weapons can be hinged to the contact of the Pokots with Egyptian and Abyssinian ivory traffickers and later Arab and Swahili traders in the late 1890s. Their main interest was ivory; therefore they exchanged guns for ivory. The acquisition of firearms by the Karimojong enabled them to poach elephants and introduced a new dimension in the competition for scarce resources. At the same time, the Turkana were also acquiring weapons from the prowling bandits in Northern Kenya. These weapons found their way to the Kenya-Uganda border. Due to the porous borders it was easy to transport the arms to both Kenya and Uganda. Since the 1990s, researchers have emphasized the changing nature of cattle rustling (Hendrickson et al 1998:1). Attempts to explain this have pointed particularly to the increased proliferation of sophisticated automatic rifles such as the AK-47. Authors working with data from the 1990s add to this another dynamic: the professionalized marketing of stolen animals. While in previous decades the stolen livestock was redistributed or used to pay bride prices, rustling has more recently turned into a form of organized crime.21 This involves the commercialization of stolen animals, and includes actors from outside the pastoralist system. Dylan Hendrickson and colleagues describe this as a shift from 'redistributive raiding' to 'predatory raiding'.

Historical background: Communal Relations in the Period 1894-1920

The historical event which culminated into the actual arrival of colonial rule in eastern Uganda and western Kenya was the declaration of the British protectorate over Uganda in 1894 and Kenya in 1895. This was in fulfillment of the Anglo-German Agreement of 1890 (Heligoland treaty) in which Uganda became a British sphere of influence. At this time, western Kenya formed part of the wider region of eastern Uganda. Consequently, it was the 1894 declaration that ushered in British imperialism in Karamoja and Kenya thereafter. This led to significant administrative changes through the imposition of British imperial authority over the various communities in the region (Kwamusi, 1996:12).

The colonial officer's perceptions and Act of Marginalization Right from 1894, the early British Colonial Officers in Kenya and Uganda had intolerant ideas and views about West Pokot and Karamoja. For instance, William Grant, Hesketh Bell and Colonel Colville (the British colonial officers in Uganda) described northern Uganda and Kenya as areas where the British will only fritter away their resources without any reward. Consequently, the extension of the British imperialism into northern Kenya and Uganda took a gradual process that was completed much later than was the case in the southern regions (Ogot 1968:25).

According to Ogot (1968) and Kabwegyere (1981), these areas were perceived as marginal in two main ways. First, they are dry and sparsely populated and thus did not strike the British as regions that could offer any economic value. For instance, when the new British Commissioner to Uganda Hesketh Bell visited the regions in 1906, he was not impressed by both northern Uganda and North western Kenya describing them as regions with little or no promise of successful development.

Second, the inhabitants of the regions particularly the Pokot and Karamojong were perceived by the colonizers as uncivilized, war like, and hence had little to contribute to the development of their areas. In most cases, they were unwilling to submit to colonial authority. Therefore, in the colonizers' view, the two northern areas only offered heavy expenditure without any economic reward. Besides, their decentralized and small scale political organization did not impress the British at all. As Barber (1968) puts it,

"No tribe in northern Kenya and northern Uganda had an effective Central political leadership to make it powerful enough to capture attention of the British. At best, they were seen as potential threats to British interests and as potential allies to share the burden of administrative expansion." p86.

The point to note here is that the change of guard where Lord Lansdowne succeeded Salisbury at the Foreign Office in London also came with a change of heart and policy on the British expanding to the north. On the same note, James Hayes Sadler who succeeded Sir Harry Johnson and Fredrick Jackson as the new Commissioner in Uganda had favoured Johnson's policy of expansion but was forced to abandon it very quickly due to opposition from London. Likewise, the British East African territory which bordered north east Uganda had little or no British activity (Ingham, 1957:12). For instance, Sir Charles Elliot who was commissioner in British East Africa between 1900 and 1904 had mixed feelings about expansion. With the exemption of the administrative post at Lake Baringo also known as "the place in the wilderness," Eliot never advocated for expansion for its own sake or administering an area because it is there Barber (1968). He vividly expressed this when he wrote to Lansdowne saying that,

I am convinced that it is useless to spend lives and money on subduing the barbarous inhabitants of barren deserts… not unless it is absolutely necessary to protect our borders to allow the general movement of the protectorate not to be retrogressive (Barber 1968:46).

In effect, what Eliot had in mind was that given the fact that northern Kenya and northern Uganda had little if any economic value, they could only be brought under British control if there was external threat to the borders and for easy movement of the British officials and perhaps troops. Consequently, British activities in northern Kenya and northern Uganda were marked by a fierce

opposition. For instance, by 1905, the position was still the same as Sir Donald Stewart, Eliot's successor in British East Africa had London's policy confirmed to him in a dispatch which read,

It is not the policy of His Majesty's Government to extend their practical administration over the remote parts of the protectorate until it is thoroughly consolidated around existing centres and stations as the advantages of getting small tax is not commensurate with the risks and expenses which such expansion would entail (K.N.A FOCP 8357,1904:2).

However, as time went by, it became necessary for the British to extend their control in the areas north of Elgon and between the Nile and Lake Rudolf which is now Lake Turkana. This was in accordance to Johnson's view that expansion to the north was in itself desirable. On his part, Sadler had expressed the same view but stated that it should only be undertaken if it could not be avoided (KNA, 1906). It was not until there were ethnic based wars and constant attacks on the British officials by the Suk and Karamojong, the people referred to as 'quasi civilized', that the British made their control felt by pacifying them. The point to note here is that right from the beginning, the British imperialism in northern Kenya and northern Uganda was marked by poor relationship between them and the local people. This arose from the mistrust and how they perceived each other. To the Pokot and the Karamajong, the British were viewed as intruders or (Ngiserukale) in Karamojong out to interfere by maligning them in the context of entrenching their political authority and their way of life. To the Pokot and Karamojong, this was un-acceptable hence vehemently resisted. On their part, the British colonizers perceived the Pokot and Karamojong as pockets of disgruntled "primitive" people trying to resist the British "superior civilization" that had been "accepted" by the majority. It was for this reason that the two communities engaged the British colonial authority in persistent wars.

Even though the Pokot and Karamojong were perceived as primitive, their regions were gradually incorporated into colonial Kenya and Uganda respectively. For instance, in 1897, the British were compelled to abandon their halfhearted policy of occupation of East Africa. This was after the Sudanese troops, presented their grievances of low pay at Eldama Ravine in the Kalenjin territory, inadequate, and delayed basic needs to Macdonald who was a British official in the area (Karugire, 1980:32). When their grievances were not settled, they killed three British officials on their way to Buganda with the intention of toppling the British and establishing themselves as rulers of the region. According to Karugire (1980), the British only managed to defeat the Sudanese in 1899 after receiving assistance from Nabongo Mumia and Nandi mercenaries when he stated that "the idea to ask for reinforcement from Mumia and the Nandi came about after it emerged from the British colonial circles that the Sudanese could easily team up with the 'war like' communities of Pokot and Karamojong". To ensure that the British remained in control of northern Kenya and northern Uganda, Colonel Colville who was in charge of the colonial administration in Uganda, dispatched Valvet Spire in 1894 to establish an administrative post in Mumias and Karasuk.

The setting up of administration posts in Mumias and Karasuk areas was purposely for opening up the Kavirondo and the turbulent Rudolf region even though they were perceived as areas with little or no economic significance to the British. However, the major turning point in the colonial government's attitude to the Pokot was in the years after 1900. This was prompted by fighting in the region. First, was the colonial government's report of 1900, which revealed the fierce ethnic fighting to control the lucrative ivory trade that had been on going in the region. This report indicated that the British interest in the two protectorates was under intense threat from the Ethiopian Emperor, the ivory hunters as well as from the fighting communities (Ochieng, 1986:41).

The Ethiopian threat to the British was made real when, in 1891, Emperor Menelik sent a circular letter to the European powers (Britain included) declaring that he intended to extend his empire to its traditional limits of Khartoum in the west and Lake Victoria in the South. This was confirmed by Sir Rennell Rodd who had been sent by the British government in 1898 to negotiate with Menelik when he wrote to Salisbury:

"I am convinced of the fact that Menelik is straining every effort to bring under his sway all the countries he lays claim to in his proclamation of 1891" (National Archives Entebbe, A106).

It is important to note that Menelik's claim and threat went into the years after 1900.It was this that compelled the colonial government to change its policy of 'concentration' or keeping the British occupation to the more "economically viable" south to that of "expansion" into the north. Subsequently, Governor Fredrick Jackson in 1902 extended the British authority and control in Karamoja and Rudolf areas by sealing the administrative loopholes and vacuum that were initially exploited by poachers and Menelik's forces. In 1903, Jackson reported that the entire country lying West of Lake Rudolf and for some distance south is continuously swept by raiding bands of Abyssinians or Ethiopians and this had to be stopped (Barber, 1968:50). From this time onwards, the colonial government then viewed the North more positively as a source of revenue though not for a long time. This was because most fortunes from ivory trade went to individuals and not to the government. Besides, the colonial government could not rely on revenue from ivory as the elephants had been depleted through destruction by poachers.

Second was the prevalence of inter-ethnic raids, which forced the colonial government to change its attitude towards the pastoral communities in the region. The emphasis was then not how economical the region was to the British but how effectively the areas could be put under British control. The point to note here is that the colonial governments in Kenya and Uganda did nothing to end cattle raids and inter community fighting except for 1919. In 1919, the only attempt to curb or probably end the incessant inter-ethnic wars in Northern Kenya and Uganda, the colonial government called for a peace conference in Karamoja (Gulliver, 1955:13). This conference failed to achieve its objective of bringing harmony between the hostile communities particularly between the Pokot, Karamojong and Turkana .Two reasons have been advanced for the botched conference. According to Mkutu (2008:12), the first

reason for the failure of the conference was the fact that the colonial government lacked viable alternatives to cattle raiding and commitment to African livestock development. He argues that the latter was vehemently opposed by the colonial government due to the competition it was imagined it would offer to the white settlers. Now, the white settlers were the colonial administrative partners in revenue generation for the colony. As such, the development of the African livestock sector as a way of ending cattle raiding and the insecurity that it caused was regarded by the colonial government as a 'minor factor" in their development agenda. In fact, they were comfortable with the status quo. Karugire (1980) argues that the second reason was the use of administrative variant of chiefships as the full- blown village based despots.

The chiefs were meant to replace the council of elders in the case of stateless societies like the Karamojong and the Pokot. In Uganda for instance, chiefships were only instituted in communities that could not adapt the Kiganda model of political administration which the British had wanted to export into all parts of the protectorate (Karugure, 1980). The Kiganda Model had received a lot of accolades from the colonial administration as probably the most viable and cheapest political organization as compared to the decentralized system. To the British colonial administrators, the latter was defined in terms of what political institutions they lacked rather than in terms of how they organized their political life. Consequently, the Pokot and the Karamojong systems of governance, which fell in this category, did not strike the colonial officials as appropriate for collective presentation of law and order, administration and the protection of human rights among people.

The British use of indirect rule with local chiefs as their main instruments of administration in East Africa Protectorate and Uganda only epitomized their politics of manipulation and division in these areas. As a result, the appointed chiefs were an integral part of the new system of alien rule but were hated, ridiculed and rebuked by their subjects. This kind of situation was caused by the fact that the colonial authorities in Kenya and Uganda had mandated the chiefs to undertake administrative and executive functions for which there was no precedent in their ethnic organizations. Cases in point were, first, when they presided over judicial cases in the villages, a privilege that was accorded only to the elders' poy in the case of the Pokot. Second, was when they forcefully carried out the colonial government's disarmament order on their subjects. This came about after the British signed the Brussels Arms Regulation Treaty in 1890. Consequently, the British colonial governments in the two protectorates implemented what became known as the firearms ordinance in 1903 as a way of fulfilling the Brussels Treaty (National Archives Entebbe, 1911). Therefore, the 1903 firearms ordinance permitted the colonial chiefs to disarm the Karamojong and Pokot to what these locals referred to as an 'acceptable level'.

The worst scenario was that the chiefs acquiesced the new political arrangement to exacerbate division in West Pokot and Karamoja areas (Mamdani, 1996:19). Besides, the chiefs retained their firearms as they maintained a monopoly of force in northern Kenya and north Eastern Uganda. A church leader from Alale indicates that in contrast to what was expected, the chiefs used their firearms as instruments of vengeance on their old and new rivals and not for ensuring peace and order. As such, the colonial disarmament in Karamoja and West Pokot areas created serious imbalance as not all people in possession of illegal firearms were disarmed and this enhanced rather than curbed the raids and violence between these communities.

The large presence of the colonial chiefs at the Karamoja Peace Conference meant to create harmony between fighting communities only led to failure of the conference even before it commenced. The problem of the acquisition and misuse of small arms in northern Kenya and northern Uganda was due to the European, Swahili, Ethiopian and Nubian incursions into these areas in search of elephant tusks. These foreign traders gave the local people guns to hunt down elephants while others exchanged them with elephant tusks. As a result, almost every community in northern Kenya and northern Uganda that were in contact with these ivory traders became armed with guns, hostile to each other and later to the British. It was this kind of situation that was used to justify the stereotyping of the Pokot and Karamojong as being "war mongers", yet this was the outcome of their interaction with foreigners such as ivory traders.

Given the fact that northern Kenya and northern Uganda areas largely remained arid or semi-arid, sparsely populated and relatively "volatile" to the British colonizers, between 1902 and 1960 the two regions remained "closed districts" (Zwanenberg, 1975:37). Consequently, apart from the established administrative and military outposts, who were purposed to pacify the local people, there was little if not nothing in terms of development that the British colonial government did in these areas. In any case, the leaders of the two protectorates and later colonies, Sir James Hayes, William Grant, Charles Elliot, Edward Northey, Fredrick Jackson, and C.W. Hobley, were all under instruction from the British Foreign Office in London to concentrate on the "economically viable" areas in the two colonies. This kind of situation drew support from a detailed Foreign Office dispatch to the commissioners of East Africa and part of it, which read,

"You will bear in mind that in the opinion of His Majesty's Government, it will not be desirable to push too quickly amongst tribes in outlying districts who have little to offer of commerce and have not yet accustomed to the sojourn of the white man. Such tribes should rather be attracted to larger centres where they will see the work of civilization in progress and begin to appreciate its advantages" (National Archives Entebbe, 1930).

Based on the foregoing, the northern Frontier District of Kenya and Karamoja remained not only peripheral but also marginalized throughout the era of British colonization in Kenya and Uganda. This not only hardened the Karamojong and Pokot ethnic consciousness and belief but also changed their perception both on the colonizers as well as the citizens. The situation was that they considered themselves heroes who were able to block the White man from interfering with their culture or as second rate citizens

who were abandoned during the White-man's development moments.

Consequently, the Colonial government's position of classifying these areas as either "closed" or "restricted" not only interfered with the ties between neighbouring communities, but also with how these communities perceived colonial administration as well as those of the post independent regimes. It is perhaps this that has led to cross-border incessant raids and rustling that has persisted to date. Due to the colonial marginalization policy, the idea of attracting the peripheral communities to centers of "civilization" or development was self-defeating. In addition, the colonial government's introduction of land tenure system in Kenya and Uganda had far reaching effects on both the Karamojong and Pokot. For instance, the 1954 Swynnerton Plan introduced the concept of title deeds for the first time in Kenya. It was purposely meant to integrate the pastoralists by creating group ranches where the title gave security to each group while circumventing their ability to accesses pasture (Mkutu 2003). As a result, the creation of group ranches meant confining the Pokot of Kenya to small pieces of land, which was detrimental to their pastoral activities. It also meant that they were to keep only few herds for themselves.

The two regions have remained predominantly pastoralist in orientation like many other parts of Kenya and Uganda. Their economic disparity with other parts in the two countries are discernible poor infrastructure, poor roads in vast areas, inadequate and dispersed health facilities, poor telecommunication services, bad schools and no electricity to mention but a few. The regions seems to be so neglected that one hardly identifies government presence in the remote villages. The day to day life of the inhabitants of these regions is in reality a tale of constant interaction with poverty and insecurity appears in multiple forms; the incessant conflict with neighbours over land, water and pasture, fear of famine and starvation, fear of destruction and loss of life among many others. In other words, the majority of people in the regions are destitute, poor and lack the means of empowerment.

The historical foundation of cattle rustling conflicts and its cross-border nature necessitated this study to analyze the historic relations among the communities bordering West Pokot County in order to appreciate social, economic, and political realities. Prior to the 18th century, Turkana County was inhabited by a diverse group of pastoralists, including the Samburu and the Merille (then referred to as the Dassenech). The entry of the Turkana into the region occurred during the second half of the 1890s CE and continued through the middle of the 1900. The Turkana, having separated from their brethren, the Jie-Karimojong (now living in Uganda), expanded their territory in all directions, displacing the Toposa, the Dongiro, and the Dassanech in the north, the Dodoth and Karimojong in the west, the Pokot in the south, and the Samburu in the southeast. Displacement by the Turkana occurred over an extended period. Many but not all of the defeated groups were assimilated. According to P.H. Gulliver (1955), the Turkana were strong economically and militarily, since they were in possession of guns. Although stable relationships historically existed between different groups, these relationships fluctuated according to the degree of conflict over grazing and water resources (Gulliver, 1955:10).

For instance, the Pokot established symbiotic relationships with the Karimojong, which allowed them access to dry season grazing across the border with Uganda. In contrast to this arrangement, the Turkana not only had wet-season pastures in a drought-prone zone, but their traditional dry-season grazing lands were also along the border with Uganda—yet were insecure due to raids by the Dodoth sub-clan of Karimojong. They therefore used force to gain access to "their" dry-season rangelands.

It was evident that these three sets of communities had to move temporarily from one place to another to exploit key resource patches and that such mobility required some resolution of land use and management conflicts between these groups. Traditionally these methods included raids and counter-raids or negotiations. Since the last century, however, patterns of land use were slowly changing. After colonization, borders were fixed and access to key resources was curtailed. Worse, the Turkana communal area was split between more than one political entities, which conflicted with indigenous resource use strategies. This meant that within the new fixed ethnic boundaries, the environment was placed under even more severe pressure.

During the pre-colonial period, livestock transactions served to maintain social interactions that cut across tribal boundaries and linked neighboring ethnic groups. What were called "bond friendships" grew out of mutual economic interests between groups that lived near each other (Sobania, 1991:11). Such relationships were very beneficial in securing individual survival in the event of disasters such as raids, drought, and diseases. However, pauperization occurred whenever this system of reciprocity broke down.

During the latter part of the 19th century, following a series of livestock epidemics, even wealthy stockowners were reduced to poverty. The worst-affected groups were forced to seek assistance from neighboring communities. On occasion, the Karimojong went to seek food among the Pokot (Dietz, 1987:12), while the Turkana went and sought food from Dassenech in Ethiopia (Sobania, 1991:10), where the Dassenech allowed them to cultivate food. No individual kept all of his animals in one place, but always had some loaned to friends.

During the pre-colonial period, land tenure and management were customary. There were a few variations from one community to another given differences among lineages vis-à-vis inheritance. As far as communal land was concerned, it was understood that this was for use by the whole community (Kisamba, 1992:10). Conflicts over water and pasture were very rare, if they occurred. Agro-based communities never bothered with title deeds since these were irrelevant to them.

Reasons for Cattle Rustling

Introduction

This section provides information on the causes of cattle rustling during pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial periods. Due to the dynamic nature of the conflict it has been changing over time. It was important to understand these changes in order to give recommendations on how best to resolve the conflict. In Pokot society there were periods of peace and good relations, and where no cattle raids between warring groups were witnessed. There were cases where joint raids were carried by Pokot and Turkana warriors. These groups attacked either side and it was difficult to know who was who. Social conflict theory was used to explain the significant increase in cattle rustling in West Pokot County against the Turkana, Marakwet and Karimojong since 1920s. The reasons were varied and some are enumerated below.

Replenishing Depleted Resources

One of the most serious consequences of the enormous changes that took place in Kenya, especially, West Pokot County in the past 100 years was that pastoralists lost access to key dry season grazing areas because land was alienated for other uses and/or occupied by other people (Grey 2000:405). The imposition of colonial boundaries in many cases cut off pastoralists in the county from their traditional dry season and drought reserve areas. With time some wealthy native pastoralists in West Pokot claimed ownership to land in their particular communities restricting access to them by other pastoralists by fencing. Over a century ago, Pokot pastoralists grazed their herds on the plateaus of the western highlands of Kenya. The majority of land on these plateaus was used for mixed farming, ranging from small plots to large commercial holdings eliminating an important safety net for pastoralists during dry seasons.

Pastoralism was practiced almost entirely in semi-arid and arid areas in Kenya and Uganda. A per capita decline in cattle was evidenced due to large numbers of pastoralists being crowded onto more marginal lands with decreased access to adequate dry season grazing areas, herd size diminished. Prolonged periods when rainfall was below normal exacerbated the problem, affecting the amount, type and nutritional value of pasturage. Grazing in such areas had harmful effect on herds. For the Pokot pastoralists whose livestock could not naturally replenish themselves under such conditions artificial meant they devised hence the cattle raids on or by the people of Pokot (Grey 2000:405).

Traditional Pastoralists Cultural Values and Practices

Cattle raiding in many areas remained a culturally accepted activity. Traditionally, livestock raiding was not considered a crime and successful raiders were respected. Killing an enemy in battle earned one respect (Grey 2000:405). The cost of getting married was another factor that promoted raiding. In some areas, the family of a young man paid a very high bride price to the family of the chosen bride.

Bride price a generation ago was around 25 head of cattle per bride in Pokot; by 2000 it ranges from 50 – 100 head of cattle. Sandra Gray (2009:73) says that in the late 1990s the bride price was frequently over 100 head of cattle and she put this down to the extraordinary success Pokot warriors had as raiders. (Interview with Daniel Loyelel, DPC member, 5th January 2011). The high bride price required for marriage existed alongside declining per capita livestock holdings and deepening poverty. It was extremely difficult for a young man or his family to obtain the required number of livestock through normal means. Sometimes the bride price had to be paid all at once (putting the potential bridegrooms at risk of raiding!), instead of over a period of time. This encouraged unmarried Pokot men to steal or raid from neighbouring communities.

Mocking by girls and women was another factor driving the Pokot youth to raid and mount counter-raids on the Turkana, Sabiny, Marakwet and Karimojong. Females, in song and dance, sometimes encouraged young men to prove their bravery and gained wealth by raiding for livestock. Local prophets and soothsayers of the Sabiny also encouraged the youth to raid, as they themselves received their (variable) share if the raid was successful.

Conclusion

This paper dealt with relations between the Pokot and neighbouring communities. During the pre-colonial period, pastoralists communities in the region lived peacefully with their neighbours and few cases of conflicts were reported. But during colonial period many cases of inter-community conflicts were reported, especially, between Pokot and Turkana on the Kenyan side and Pokot and Karimojong from Uganda. In the post-colonial period government propagated legacies of the colonial government which led to further marginalization of pastoralists in Kenya and especially West Pokot County. The restriction of movement imposed by the colonial government restrained the free movement of pastoral communities thus straining the available resources; pasture and water. The pastoralists resorted to cross border raids to restock depleted resources. Pastoralism was seen a primitive venture therefore the government put in place measures to depastoralize the region.

This paper has highlighted on the causes of cattle rustling and its transformative nature in the region. It has also provided information on the causes of cattle rustling in pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial period. Dynamic natures of cattle rustling, especially, from social to commercial aspects have been discussed. Government policies have been highlighted and it has shown how government policies either controlled or enhanced cattle rustling.

The main causes of conflict discussed in this paper include; replenishing of depleted resources, cultural activities, structural factors

such as poverty, availability of small arms and light weapons, weakened traditional authority structures and commercialization of conflict. The objective of this paper was to ascertain the historical causes of cattle rustling conflict in Pokot, Karamoja and Turkana which have been achieved.

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