

Conflict and Conflict Mechanism in the Colonial Period, 1895 to 1963 Between Turkana and Pokot Communities in Kenya

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Abstract

This study delves into the intricate conflicts that unfolded between the Turkana and Pokot communities during the colonial period from 1895 to 1963. Through an exploration of historical records, oral histories, and archival materials, the study aims to uncover the underlying dynamics of these conflicts and the mechanisms that sustained them. The colonial era marked a period of profound change, as both external forces and internal factors reshaped the socio-political landscape of Kenya. Amid this transformation, the Turkana and Pokot communities grappled with territorial disputes, resource access, and cultural variations that fueled tensions. The study investigates the strategies employed by the colonial State to manage and resolve these conflicts, addressing questions of effectiveness and impact. By shedding light on the complexities of these historical tensions, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the historical origins of present-day inter-community dynamics in Kenya.

Key Words: Conflict mechanism, Colonialism, colonial period, Conflict Management, Turkana Conflict, Pokot Conflict, Conflict Resolution

INTRODUCTION

The period from 1895 to 1963 marked a significant era of historical transformation and interaction between various communities in Kenya, including the Turkana and Pokot (Smith, 2007). These two ethnic groups, each with their unique cultural practices and territorial claims, found themselves entangled in a web of conflicts during the colonial period (Johnson, 1999). The Conflict and Conflict Mechanism between the Turkana and Pokot Communities during the Colonial Period, 1895 to 1963, delves into this complex narrative to explore the dynamics of conflict, the strategies employed by the colonial State, and their implications on the relationship between these communities. The study aims to unravel the intricacies of the conflicts that arose between the Turkana and Pokot and to dissect the mechanisms that perpetuated these disputes during a time when external forces were exerting their influence on the African continent (Brown, 2012). The colonial era witnessed the imposition of new political and administrative structures, economic exploitation, and cultural changes that significantly impacted the socio-political landscape of these communities (Johnson & White, 2003). Amid these changes, the Turkana and Pokot communities found themselves grappling with conflicts rooted in territorial disputes, access to resources, and differing cultural norms.

The investigation of this historical period is essential not only for understanding the tensions that shaped the interactions between the Turkana and Pokot but also for shedding light on the strategies employed by the colonial State to manage and resolve these conflicts (Bennett, 2010). By analyzing primary sources (National Archives of Kenya, 1960), oral histories (Smith & Johnson, 1985), and archival materials, this study seeks to offer a comprehensive understanding of the various factors that contributed to the conflicts between the Turkana and Pokot during the colonial period. Additionally, it investigates the effectiveness and implications of the conflict resolution mechanisms employed by the colonial State. Through this exploration, the study sheds light on the legacy of these conflicts and their influence on the post-independence era, contributing to a deeper comprehension of the historical roots of tensions between the Turkana and Pokot communities in Kenya.

THE CONFLICT AND CONFLICT MECHANISM

In the dynamic interplay of historical transformation and cultural interaction, the period from 1895 to 1963 stands as a pivotal chapter in Kenya's history. Within this time frame, the Turkana and Pokot communities found themselves embroiled in intricate conflicts that resonated with the complex web of colonial influence, territorial claims, and cultural disparities. Mkutu (2003) and Leff (2009) argue that the restriction of free access to grazing pasture and water was a direct result of the establishment of fixed ethnic borders in Turkana and Pokot. Nonetheless, it widened the scope of territorial disputes and ethnic tensions between the Turkana and the Pokot. This influenced the movement and fostered the idea of differentiation between the Turkana and the Pokot. In response to rising tensions created by these divisions, the colonial authorities instituted Lapai/fines (Nyanchoga, 2000).

The colonial system established borders as a strategy to limit inter-ethnic conflict. Northern Kenya. In 1895 Uganda and British East Africa (Kenya) Protectorates were established, and the Uganda protectorate embraced parts of western Kenya, northern Turkana land, and extended eastwards to the lake of Naivasha. The Northern Turkana land was placed under the Eastern province (Mongol) of the protectorate, Uganda, and southern Turkana remained under the British East Africa protectorate (Lamphear, 1992). In 1899, the colonial office appointed Harry Johnstone, special commissioner to Uganda, replacing Ernest Berkeley. The colonial office instructed Johnstone to bring territories adjoining the Uganda protectorate within 'the British sphere of influence'. (Salisbury to Johnstone, 1st July 1899, Barber, 1968:21). Johnstone understood a policy of expansion into the Northern areas (Northern Turkana land) of the Eastern province of Uganda protectorate as a means to ethnic control and limiting inter-ethnic conflict. In November 1901, the colonial office transferred Uganda's Eastern province to the British East Africa protectorate. Consequently, the Southern Turkana land and areas adjoining lake Nyanza, the rest of Mt Elgon, and areas around river Turkwell and the western shores of Lake Turkana fell under the British East Africa protectorate. The Northern sections of Turkana land remained under Uganda protectorate (Barber, 1968). To a large extent, the creation of the border did not deter inter-ethnic animosity because of the continuation of the conflict. In 1908, Turkana's Ngissiger and Ngamatak section intensified raiding activities against the Samburu, Pokot and Karamajong. This was due to the outbreak of rinderpest and bovine pleuropneumonia and

prolonged drought, leading to the loss of pasturage and herds. The Ngissigar and Ngamatek Turkana who lost their stock encroached on El-Barta grasslands of the Samburu, Pokot and intensified raiding to replenish the lost stock (KNA, TURK/159: TURK3/1:30, Nyanchoga, 2000).

The colonial government went further by facilitating the movement of the Pokot into Uganda to an area that was part of Karamojong territory to ease pressure on land and minimise inter-ethnic raids. However, contrary to the expectation of government agents, it did not ease pressure on the Pokot since the Pokot were sandwiched between the settlers and Turkana. The movement increased the chances of violent conflict between the Pokot and the Turkana, Pokot and Karamojong, and between the Turkana and Karamojong. The colonial government also garrisoned troubled areas of Turkana territory and subjected mobility of the people in the south to surveillance by garrisons of KAR and police to render the Turkana incapable of raiding the Pokot with impunity. While the policy met limited success, the colonial government also instituted military expeditions against the local community as a dilution policy of colonial pacification. In order to de-escalate inter-ethnic conflict from the foregoing discussion, the creation of boundaries in the region was aimed at limiting inter-ethnic interaction. The colonial government could limit conflict by separating and controlling access to grazing and water based on ethnicity. Ironically this was not the case (Nyanchoga, 2000).

The use of the military in the colonial era served several purposes: pacification of resisting communities, the entrenchment of colonial rule, and as a sign of colonial state sovereignty. In some localised situations, the military became an instrument of conflict management, especially between two or more warring communities. The use of the colonial military machine against the Pokot and Turkana served the double-pronged strategy of resolving inter-ethnic conflict and bringing the communities under colonial administration. Several military expeditions were organised during the colonial era against the communities (Omara-Otunnu, 1987). The military strategy was, therefore, a hegemonic control that combined the use of violence, intimidation, and forced disarmament over the Pokot and Turkana people (Nyanchoga, 2000).

The colonial government instituted military expeditions against the Pokot and Turkana under Hyde-Baker in 1900, who led a military expedition of 50 Nubian police officers and 25 porters and established a post at Ribo Hills among the Suk (Pokot) in the North West of Baringo to serve as a buffer zone separating warring communities. The post also served as an advance point towards the realisation of colonial administration in Northern Turkana land (KNA, Johnstone – Salisbury, 27, April 1900, Barber 1968). The Pokot attacked the post, and the military personnel and porters were almost wiped out. In 1901, the surviving military personnel and porters were withdrawn, and the post was relocated to the southern shores of Lake Baringo (Lamphear, 1992). Colonial relations of domination and subjugation were entrenched and legitimated, thereby laying a phenomenal foundation for colonial rule and reducing conflict between the Turkana and Pokot people (Nyanchoga, 2000).

The British colonial military strategy understood that combining livestock confiscation and punitive raids effectively forced the Turkana and Pokot into submission (Lamphear, 1976; OduorNdege, 1992). Through the conquest, the colonial state aimed at instituting social and economic control over the Turkana and Pokot. It also accounts for the role of the colonial state in shaping social relations of production in favour of the colonial regime. The conquest of the Turkana land established colonial political domination and created a conducive atmosphere for capitalist penetration. Despite the military strategy the Turkana and Pokot intensified hostilities and counter raiding (KNA, DC/TURK/3/1:30). However those who continued to raid and refused to pay taxes were tracked down, arrested and, at times, deported from the Turkana and Pokot land. For example, LoolelKokoi, a diviner of the Ngissiger section and Akales, a war leader of the Ngamatek section, were arrested and deported to Eldoret, where Kokoi died in 1926 (Lamphear, 1992).

The colonial military strategy spiced with diplomacy "carrot and stick" type of administration worked quite favourably in the southern Turkana, where people cooperated with chiefs, paid taxes and ceased large-scale raiding activities against the Pokot Samburu and Karamojong. However, many ignored colonial s orders in the Northern Turkana land and continued large-scale forays against their neighbours (Lamphear, 1992). The tactics of disarmament left the Turkana vulnerable to their neighbours. Between 1923 and 1924 and in 1929, the Turkana were persistently raided by the Merille, Samburu, Karamoja, Pokot and Ethiopians. Through the raids, the Turkana lost most of the surviving stock to the raiders from the rinderpest and pleuropneumonia epidemics of 1918 (Nyanhoga, 2000).

Native courts were re-established after the protectorate was set up. The competence of native courts extended to the enforcement of local customs and laws. However, these courts also had the authority to enforce a handful of specialised Ordinances like the Pell Tax Ordinance. The indigenous legal systems were fundamental to indigenous governments. The colonial administrators served as district officials and oversaw the native courts, which were presided over by chiefs who were recognised as the native authority under the Native Authority Ordinances.

Pokot-Turkana cattle raiding was criminalised through the legal system. Hopley, a former District Commissioner in early twentieth-century western Kenya, shared a sentiment shared by other British officials: "It is required at all costs to repress the pernicious practise of inter-tribal raiding, the curse of this district [Turkana] for so many centuries....All true progress is impossible until inter-tribal fighting and raiding end" (Matson, 1972, p.218; Mazrui, 1977, p.252; Ellis, 1976, p.557; Davidson, 1968, p.182).

To help village chiefs mediate disputes, the colonial authorities established native courts. Chiefs presided over courts that heard cases arising within their territories. In addition, the colonial administration mandated that the African leaders hold barazas to address crucial subjects. When it came to resolving conflicts and tackling major issues facing the community, the chief relied on the counsel of the council of elders. One village elder was chosen to serve on the council and

was responsible for mediating conflicts and blessing the community. African rulers often acted as mediators in land and marital conflicts. In either an acquittal or conviction, the opinions of the elders from native tribunals would be cited. No decision reached was intended to have any bearing on local laws. Murder trials were heard in European courts. After being found guilty by an indigenous court, the lawbreakers faced fines and maybe imprisonment. This responsibility was carried out by the police (KNA/DC/TUR.4/1 Turkana District Political Record Book up to 1910), which consisted of a select group of African natives supervised by a senior colonial officer.

The criminals accused of horrible atrocities were not able to get a fair trial in native courts. However, in sentencing the lawbreakers, the European courts took the counsel of native court elders. The chief and the group of elders, the complainant, and the accused all took part in a native court judgement in session. During the colonial era, the disputes between indigenous were settled by native tribunals created by the chief. Several Turkana and Pokot prophets and diviners were brought to court, punished, and even deported after being found guilty of inciting interethnic hostility. For instance, Lytton Milbanke of KAR Patrols heard testimony from Chief Abong of the Ngibellei portion of southern Turkana, who accused Turkana war leaders LooleKokoi and Akaales of the Ngamatak section of coordinating attacks into Pokotland. Also, between 1918 and 1921, Akaales was held responsible for the killing of Von Otter, the military officer in charge of northern Turkana country (Nyanchoga, 2000; Lamphear, 1992), under the Witchcraft Ordinance. Kokoi died in 1926 after being deported to Eldoret (Lamphear, 1992; Nyanchoga, 2000) after being arrested and charged with ordering attacks on the Pokot and fomenting inter-tribal hostility (KNA/DC/BAR/5/1).

The colonial administration chose chiefs and gave them responsibilities including collecting taxes, protecting their territory from raids, and enforcing colonial law. The chiefs' unpopularity within their people stemmed in large part from the policies they enacted. Among the Turkana, some of the chiefs included Ngisekona of Ngamatak and Chaki of Ngibellai. Chiefs Ng'eleyo and Lobon were among the Pokot who were appointed to high positions by the government. Their major duty was to prevent raids and keep the peace. This conformed to established British policy regarding the status of colonial governors. Economic, political, and social progress on the part of the British was expected of the colonial chiefs (Nyanchoga, 2000). The chiefs issued final and binding directives to end the land conflict between the Pokot and Turkana communities. The chiefs also facilitated land boundary delineations and public forums to promote peace and harmony between the warring Pokot and Turkana groups. Cattle raids were another source of tension between the two communities, and the chiefs helped to reduce their frequency (Nyanchoga, 2000).

The British colonial administrators in the Turkana and Pokot land adhered to the policy of anti-raiding, and government-appointed chiefs were instructed to stop raiding activities in their areas of jurisdiction. Nevertheless, the Turkana and Pokot war leaders and diviners who would not raid did not worth much status. Many were not able to fathom it and ignored it. For example, in 1912, Ebei resigned after a brief assignment as government chief and continued to raid the Pokot,

Samburu and Merille. Similarly, Lobwin, appointed in 1906 as chief of the Ngisseger section, defied the ban on raiding and, with the support of Koletiang, a diviner of the Ngeseto section, organised raids against the Pokot and Samburu (Lamphear, 1992).

The colonial government applied the policy of economic subjugation. While policy did not eliminate the prospect of Pokot-Turkana warfare, it did significantly reduce the likelihood of raiding and counter-raiding, especially in the latter four decades of colonial rule. As time went on, the colonial government's stance in Turkana and Pokotland became one of continuing subjugation (Good, 2007; Pavitt, 1997). Their economy was weakened as a result of the policy (Spencer, 1983). The Pokot, and the Turkana all seem to have been affected by structural violence as their livelihoods were subdued by taxation and other punitive measures (Nyanchoga, 2000).

The policy of collective punishment ordinance involved the seizure of livestock from the community as a form of punishment for failure to pay taxes or for engaging in raids against neighbours. The Turkana and Pokot land colonial administrations invoked the ordinance and seized much livestock. For example, in 1915, a military expedition was launched against the Turkana people in which 400 Turkana people were killed, and a lot of livestock confiscated and seized (KNA, DC/TURK/3/1:18). The colonial administrators in the Turkana and Pokot districts recruited levies from among the Samburu, Pokot, Maasai and Karamojong. (1951) KNA, DC/TURK/211:4). Disarmament made the Turkana and Pokot people vulnerable to raids and attacks from hostile neighbours, such as Merille and Rendille (Nyanchoga, 2000).

It was crucial during the colonial era to downplay the significance of the age system's military components. Those of the same age group were considered to be on equal footing with one another, whereas those of older and younger age groups were accorded deference and submission. Individuals of the appropriate age within a certain territorial unit are tasked with performing their jobs in accordance with the requirements and external regulations of that unit. Turkana and Pokot tribesmen conducted raids, stocked food supplies, and defended their communities from outside threats. The local colonial authorities actively discouraged ethnic strife, but age-set organisations encouraged it (Low, 1963). Almagor and Baxter (1977) and Bollig (1990) compared the ageist organisation to a military structure.

Before and after the beginning of age sets, the colonial administration forbade raiding and fighting (Jacobs, 1968; Boran (Baxter, 1979). The colonial-appointed chiefs downplayed the importance of the generational ideology of combat and the real sociopolitical organisation of warfare. Reporting of the raids via the antiquated networks was banned. Colonial authorities downplayed the significance of rituals and authority figures that had previously offered useful frameworks for talking about and planning interethnic conflicts. The local colonial authorities singled out and prosecuted the age group spiritual leaders for their roles in authorising raids that stoked ethnic tensions between the Pokot and Turkana. Lukas Pkech and WeroKipkolo of the Pokot (Kipkorir, 1973); Lobwin of Ngamatak and Ebei of Ngeseto of Turkana (KNA, NED/143/1918); and others. One example is Kolloa Affray, a Pokot from the 1950s. During the

colonial era, Affray became incredibly famous thanks to Lukas Pkech and weroKipkolol. The raids on Turkana by Pokot warriors were officially approved. In 1948, Pkech was caught and given a severe sentence of two and a half years in jail. Pkech evaded police after his 1949 jailbreak until April 1950, when he joined anti-colonialist movements as a member of the Dini YaMsambwa (Kipkorir, 1973).

Conflicts were often resolved with the help of missionaries. Gerald Verner Maxell, Chief Native Commissioner in the 1920s, defended missionaries' presence in rural areas by arguing that they helped advance agricultural programmes like water distribution, education, tree planting, church establishment, and peacemaking in addition to their evangelistic goals. As a result of competition for water and pasture, a number of missionaries from the British Church Missionary Society, the African Inland Mission, and the Roman Catholic Church were encouraged to launch development projects among the pastoral communities in Great Britain in 1920. Thus, it was the job of the missionaries to convert the warring tribes into productive citizens of the colonial state. They were also tasked with eliminating native cults and superstitions by imposing their own faith. Except for the Marsabit regions, the Church was unable to freely practise its faith in northern Kenya due to the region's status as a closed district. It wasn't until the 1950s that the Catholic Church dared to enter this "protected" region in order to share the Christian religion with the locals, and the effects of this lasted for decades.

In the latter half of 1961, the Irish St. Patrick Missionary Society (also called the Kiltegan Fathers) established the first station in St. Peter's Parish, Lorugumo. Moroto in Karamoja, Pokot, Dongiro, and Turkana all benefited from their evangelism and health fairs. The Apostles of Jesus (A.J.) and the Sisters of Mary (ESM) came after them, and then the Comboni missionaries. The missionaries set up schools, offered vocational instruction, offered medical care, catered to those with unique needs, and created permanent mission stations. They were also fluent in the native tongues of the communities they aimed to influence. They educated the first band of native converts and sent them out to spread the word of peace among their neighbours. To this end, local evangelists were tasked with teaching new believers about peace and explaining the gospel to them (Mugambi, 2000). Reading, writing, arithmetic, and Christian education were the cornerstones of the classroom experience. The idea behind this strategy was that if people were literate, they would be able to read the Bible for themselves and be more likely to follow the colonial rules, since Christianity was seen as a scriptural faith. The Christian missionaries convinced the locals that the education they received in these institutions would help them further the missionary agenda and provide the new converts a leg up when looking for work in the secular sector. Construction, masonry, painting, and farming were all taught to the locals.

The local population was drawn to the gospel through the missionaries' dispensaries and hospitals, and the gospel itself became a tool for peacemaking. In this light, the opportunity to provide medical aid was a great way to spread the gospel of peace through adherence to the commandments. Christian missionaries' provision of medical care was a powerful argument in favour of civilising the tribes they were working with. Thus, the missionaries became the catalyst for societal transformation among the Pokot and Turkana (Vyhmeister, 2001).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the colonial era in Kenya witnessed a range of conflict resolution methods that were often misguided and counterproductive. The introduction of foreign strategies like border fixation, military aggression, buffer zones, and legal imposition frequently exacerbated tensions within communities, causing economic and political exclusion. The Turkana and Pokot communities bore the brunt of these interventions, leading to unintended consequences that went against the communities' expectations. While the colonial government attempted to mediate conflicts and provide essential services like healthcare and education, these efforts often fell short in addressing the root causes of violence. The emergence of new conflicts driven by geopolitical changes and resource competition further demonstrated the limitations of colonial strategies. Moreover, the imposition of Western norms and the suppression of indigenous conflict resolution methods disrupted traditional systems and practices, ultimately reshaping conflict dynamics in ways that were detrimental. It is evident that the colonial approach to conflict resolution had far-reaching and complex effects on the communities it aimed to help. While some aspects of colonial intervention had positive outcomes, such as buffer zones protecting against external threats, the overall impact was one of economic, political, and social exclusion. Moving forward, any efforts to resolve conflicts between the Turkana and Pokot communities must take into account the deep-rooted factors that contribute to tensions, and strive for a comprehensive approach that respects and integrates indigenous methods while addressing the broader socio-economic context.

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