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### **Culture as the Cause of Conflict. A Case study in west Pokot District, Kenya**

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The pattern of conflict in the North Rift of Kenya involving mostly the ethnic community of the Pokot and their neighbors is a complex one. Scholars have interpreted various factors that contribute to violence and conflict in the region. These included: proliferation of illegal arms, inadequate policing and state security arrangements, diminishing the role of the traditional government, competition over control and access to natural resources such as pasture-land and water, political incitements, ethnocentrism, increasing level of poverty, idleness among the youth, and territorial control. The concept of the Pokot culture however has been inadequately explored. Culture, taken in a broader sense, is the way of life of a people as Mary Clark puts; “it includes socially acquired knowledge, beliefs, art, law, morals, customs, and habits ... Culture is a life thought system, which influences the people’s lives, activities and behavior towards others”<sup>1</sup>. A cattle rustling is a cultural aspect of the Pokot founded on their myth of origin and a belief that all cattle belong to them. This research hypothesizes that the cultural belief in raiding is perpetuated by people (seers) who have an economic and political interest in promoting the very cultural system that places them in a powerful position. To test this hypothesis the following research question was posed: how central are Pokot seers to the phenomenon of raiding? In other words, do the Pokot seers play a central (main or primary) role in perpetuating the cultural

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<sup>1</sup> Mary, C. (2002) *In Search of Human Nature*. London: Routledge publishers. P.1

belief that (1) raiding is acceptable and (2) raiding is to be rewarded by consulting a seer? And how can the Pokot cultural belief that all cattle are theirs be transformed? This is based first on the assumption that cattle's rustling is cultural practice and all cultures are dynamic and can change. Secondly, that education is one of the tools in conflict transformation and can be used to bring about that change.

The purpose of this research was to explore the relationship between culture and conflict in North Rift, with special emphasis on the Pokot culture and the cultural phenomenon of cattle rustling and the fortune telling of the seers.

To achieve the above objectives the research employed a qualitative method, which is explanatory and exploratory. The researcher collected data from 20 people through interviews from the Sook Division that included women, men, and the youths from different social, political and economic backgrounds. The qualitative method was used to analyze the data collected from the field and during the discussions.

The significance of this research was to highlight the role of the seers in the conflict as an overlooked party and thus provide recommendations that can be used to change them and transform the conflict. It also sought the link that exists between the Pokot culture and cattle rustling. This research has also added new ways of conflict transformation to the existing pool of knowledge and given suggestions for areas of further research.

### **Background of the Study/ Statement of the Problem**

According to documented sources<sup>2</sup>, in Kenya, pastoralist communities occupy the largest percentage (70%) of the countries' total land area. The population of the livestock keeping pastoralist communities in Kenya is estimated at about 20% of the total population of the country. Most of these people occupy the vast arid and semi-arid region of northern Kenya.

The northern Kenyan pastoralists are nomadic ethnic groups that are highly mobile. These are mainly Turkanas, Samburu, Pokot, Borana, Rendile, Orma, and Somali clans. They move from one area to another in search of water and pasture for their livestock. Their movements are not restricted to one area or even country. They move into and out of the neighboring countries such as Somalia, Ethiopia, Sudan and Uganda. These movements are one of the major sources of misunderstanding and conflict between them and their neighbors. The vastness and remoteness of the area, inadequate road networks and scarcity of resources goes hand in hand with lapses in security occasioning frequent misunderstanding and conflicts among these pastoral communities.

The Pokot community is seen as hostile and aggressive by their neighbors. Often the Pokots are the ones who raid their neighboring communities, causing conflicts. The Pokot community lives in the Pokot Districts North Rift valley Kenya. The Pokot attitude and perception of cattle can be compared to that of gold or money in modern society. The Pokot base

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<sup>2</sup> land privatization and pastoralist communication-Kenya, retrieved on May, 18,2010 from website: <http://www.comminit.com/en/node/1473/306>

their perception of richness or wealth on cattle, their traditional rites are cattle centered, and their food is mainly livestock oriented (blood and milk). Every generation is taught to perceive a cow as an important treasure that the community cannot do without. Consequently, this leads to desperate searches for livestock, using all means available. For example, after a circumcision ceremony there is always a dire need for cattle to pay dowry during marriage.

While most of the research publications and media reports cover the political conflicts, little research has been done to indicate the extent to which ethnic conflicts are influenced by culture. The research strongly shows that the element of cultural disposition of the Pokot pastoral community is a violent escalatory one against their neighbors. It was therefore important to carry out a critical analysis into the cultural facet of cattle rustling and conflict in North Rift Kenya.

### **The Purpose of the study**

The purpose of this research was to explore the relationship that exists between the Pokot culture, cattle rustling and conflict in the north rift of Kenya. It has also critically explored how the culture and other conflict escalation factors are mutually reinforcing. This has led to recommendations on conflict transformation strategies that can be utilized to manage ethnic tribal conflicts in this region in addition to what other researchers have given in the past.

In the recent past, there have been numerous efforts to try to understand and manage conflicts in the North Rift, especially among the Pokot and their neighbors. Indeed these enterprises bore considerable fruits but did not completely resolve conflicts in the region. This study which deals with culture as a source of conflict adds to the existing pool of knowledge from a unique perspective of the Pokot cultural practice. Therefore, the insights advanced in this study will help transform the violent cultural practice into a more accommodative culture. The study explored the correlation that exists between cultural values and conflicts in North Rift Kenya and proposed recommendations for their resolutions and for further research.

### **The Pokot World View**

This section explores the Pokot and their culture in search of identity, the value of cattle and how this forms their worldview. Apart from life being centered along their cattle, we have other important variables that actually dispose the Pokot community to look livestock as the only solution to their problems thereby making cattle rustling conflict the normal way of life in North Rift region.

#### *Exploring the concepts of “We” and “They” among the Pokots’-Identity*

There are various reasons attributed to causes of conflict within the Pokot borders in the North Rift Kenya. These are culture, limited resources of pasture and water, political incitement and moranism.<sup>3</sup> Most of these causes are based on the concept of “we” and “they”. The Pokot people have no word or term for a visitor. Anybody who is not a Pochon- one of them is

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<sup>3</sup> Moranism is used as a generic term referring to Pokot men after undergoing the cut (rite of passage) that qualifies them to be warriors and defenders of their community. They are the ones who go raiding.

described as an enemy. This is used to differentiate an insider “we” Pokots and the non-Pokots “they”. Due to this perception, therefore, all the cows belong to “us” insiders and not to “them” outsiders. This is also embedded in their myth of creation story which has it that God created the first Pokot man and gave him the cattle. They usually use this kind of explanation to justify cattle rustling. They don’t call cattle rustling stealing since they believe that they are bringing them back to where they belong. The researcher was looking into the possibilities on how such a cultural belief can be transformed. This kind of thinking is part of their cultural belief system, and it is passed on from one generation to the other. As Mary Clark argues; “...cultures are the shared values and assumptions on which rest the customs, norms, and institution of any particular society. These world views formed are tactfully communicated through myths of origin, narrative stories, linguistic metaphors, and cautionary tales.”<sup>4</sup>

Jeffery, Seul in one of his articles notes that; “culture is an essential part of conflict and conflict resolution. He argues that our culture is like underground rivers that run through our lives and relationships, giving us messages that shape our perceptions, attributions, judgments, and ideas of “self” and “other”.<sup>5</sup>

Though cultures are powerful, they often unconsciously influence conflicts. Thus anyone who attempts to resolve intergroup conflicts must be aware of their cultural beliefs. When we talk of culture, it is more than food, clothes, and customs. It is quite possible for culture groups to share race, ethnicity, or nationality but they also arise from cleavages of generations, social economic class, sexual orientation, ability and disability, political and religious affiliation. It is important to note that cultures are not fixed; they are in the state of flux or change they relate to the symbolic dimension of life. Therefore I strongly believe that claims about Pokot identity, traditions, and creation myths, can change but the question is how? This research explored whether there is something from within the culture that can be used to bring the transformation. Bearing the fact that the symbolic dimension of culture is the place where we are constantly making meaning and enacting our identities. Cultural messages from the groups we belong give us information about what is meaningful or important, and who we are in the world and in relation to others. It gives us our identity.

The concept of “we” and “they” has succeeded in keeping the Pokot community and their traditional practices such as “ptengowo” and “menjo” (clitoridectomy for females and circumcision for males respectively) intact. These practices are surrounded with a lot of secrets aimed at shielding the outsiders (they) from knowing what goes on, since they are referred to as enemies. The secrecy mainly involves oath taking during the seclusion period after circumcision. Scholars have further held that cultural messages simply refer to what everyone in the group knows that outsiders do not know. Michelle Le Baron asserts to cultural influence; “they are like

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<sup>4</sup> Mary, C. (2002) *in search of human nature*. London: Rountledge publishers. p.1

<sup>5</sup> Seul, J. (1999) “*Ours is the way of God: religion, Identity, and Intergroup Conflict*” in *Journal of Peace Research* vol: 3b issue:5 Thousand Oaks: Ca: Saga Publications, p. 43

the waters fish swim in, unaware of its effect on their vision. In shaping our values, cultures contain starting points and currencies”<sup>6</sup>

She postulates further that culture is largely below the surface. “Cultures are a shifting dynamic set of starting points that orient us in particular ways and away from other directions”.<sup>7</sup> When others do not meet our expectations, it is often because our cultural expectations are different. Cultural messages shape our understandings of relationships and of how to deal with the conflict and harmony that are always present whenever two or more people come together. Le Baron believes that culture is multi-layered. What you see on the surface may mask differences below the surface. Therefore, cultural generalizations are not the whole story and therefore are no substitute for building relationships and sharing experiences, coming to know others more deeply over time. However, culture is constantly in flux as conditions change. Cultural groups adapt in dynamic and sometimes unpredictable ways. Therefore, no comprehensive description can ever be formulated about a particular group. Any attempt to understand a group must take the dimensions of time, context and individual differences into account. Le Baron describes well why some conflicts become more violent than others. I would describe her explanation on culture and world view as the lens in which we perceive reality. Our cultures influence our way of thinking and our response to issues.

When two different parties view the same reality they might end up giving different interpretations, which might become the source of their conflict. The truth behind it is they perceive it from two different world views. In her detailed explanation of world view and culture and their effects in conflict resolution and prevention, Le Baron postulates many important points. Two of them are very important in relation to understanding Pokot culture and world view:

“World view can be resources for understanding and analyzing true stories, rituals, myths and metaphors used by a group, we can learn efficiently and deeply about group members’ identities, which they see themselves to be, what matters to them and how they make meaning. When we do this each side to a conflict, places of connection and divergence may become clearer, leading to a better understanding of the conflict in context. World views with their embedded meanings can be the seedbed from which new shared meanings emerge. These shared meanings may arise as people co-create new stories, designing rituals and find inclusive metaphors to contain their meanings.”<sup>8</sup>

It can arguably be said that most attempts to solve the conflicts among the Pokots and their neighbors in the North Rift Kenya have, in a way, overlooked the effect and influence of the Pokot Culture. Their culture which is deeply rooted in them and passed from one generation

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<sup>6</sup> Le Baron, M.(2001) *Essays on Cultural Conflict in an Age of Complexity*,” Bergh of Research Center for constructive conflict Management 200-12-01 retrieved on April, 20,2010 from website: <http://www.berghof-handbook.net/>

<sup>7</sup> ibid

<sup>8</sup> Le Baron, M. (1999) “*Essays on Cultural Worldview: frames and communication tools for understanding cultural differences*,” San Francisco: Goffery and Boss Publications, 1999 p.34

to the other gives them their world view. The Pokots perceive things and interpret issues based on what they hold in their culture.

In his book *“Beyond War”* Douglas Fry advances an argument that we can transcend violence even in the worst form of conflicts. He provides a new dimension by “surveying another set of disciplines namely cultural anthropology.”<sup>9</sup> He calls for an exploration into cultures and their social mechanisms for sidestepping group violence. This will reveal the mistake in classifications that have given rise to the erroneous labeling of certain societies as warlike. This kind of labeling of the Pokots as warlike by their neighbors has always made them feel hated by others and thus influenced the need to arm themselves against their perceived enemies. The researcher assumes that this is not a true form of the Pokot culture; they are not war-like, since the word Pokot or Pochon denotes peace. Even their greeting, poghio (how are you) calls for an inquiry if there is peace and the response kalya (there is peace) means affirmation of the prevailing peace.

### *Value of Cattle among the Pokots*

We can only understand why the culture of cattle rustling has been carried all along for centuries by understanding the Pokot world view. As mentioned earlier the world view of a group influences them on the way they do things and behave. Viewing the Pokot culture as “a lens” within which they perceive their world, the research looked into cattle as the center of their lives, and how their lives revolves around and is defined by their cattle.

This part elaborates more on the value of cattle which is embedded in Pokot culture that is the cause of conflict, and how the place of a cow in building a harmonious community has turned to be the cause of conflict with their neighbors.

The cow also referred to as (tany) in Pokot is the greatest valued animal. This is because it is practically the life line of the Pokots. It is their source of livelihood. From the cattle they get food i.e. milk, blood and meat. They make their household items such as cups from cattle horns and plates from their hide and skin. It is also from the cattle that the Pokots get to pay the bride price for their wives and pay fines for the mistakes they commit in their society and give cattle out as gifts to their beloved ones. In order to carry out all this, the wealth of a Pokot person depends on the number of cattle he has. Cattle define not only the wealth for a Pokot but his status in the society and his very existence. A Pokot with many cattle commands respect from the community and his family is held with a lot of dignity. “Cattle are the objects of raids on the neighboring tribes. They are a form of legal tender and considered a mobile bank. They give a man prestige and wealth. They give him meat and clothes. They are the means for blessing and purification”.<sup>10</sup>

Due to this a Pokot child is taught the value of cattle, how to love and take care of them and also how to defend them against any aggressor (be it wild animals or human). They are also

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<sup>9</sup> Douglas, F. (2007) *Beyond War. Human Potential for Peace*. New York: Published by Oxford University Press, p.11

<sup>10</sup> Visser, J. (1982) *“Toward A missionary Approach About the Pokot (Zoandijik)*. Netherlands.,p. 102

taught the myth of their origins and how God in Mt. “*Mtelo*” (a pokot sacred mountain) gave them the cows. This makes them feel that the cow is sacred because it was given them by God and they have to cling to it even if it means death.

From the myth and beliefs about their origins the Pokots are told that all the cows were given to them by God and no other community were given them as mentioned earlier. This means any of their neighboring communities that keep cattle have stolen from the Pokots. With this in mind, the young boys while under the period of seclusion during circumcision are prepared to go and raid as a sign of heroism. They are referred to as ‘Morani’ which literally means warrior or heroes. They are told to go out and bring back their stolen cattle.

A cattle rustling is therefore an honorable art of courage of bringing back to the community what rightfully belongs to the community. A young circumcised man after the cut is considered a warrior when he successfully goes out to raid and bring home what the Pokots call the strayed cattle. If Cattle rustling has to be transformed then it is this cultural belief which has to be transformed. The researcher’s main task will be to find ways on how it can be transformed.

Bride price in Pokot culture has been a major reason for cattle rustling among the young men. This gives an interesting relationship between women and cattle in the Pokot marital system. It is surprising that a Pokot man cannot marry if he has no cattle. This is because he is considered poor and cannot pay the bride price. The researcher also will carry out a quattitative research to establish whether there is a difference in dowry payment. For example how many cattle are paid for an educated girl and uneducated girl and look into alternative ways of paying dowry other than depending on cattle.

## **Theoretical Framework**

This study employed Dennis Sandole’s good three pillar approach, in mapping out the cattle rustling conflict, and give a resolution through some intervention methodologies. According to Sandole’s approach, the *first pillar* constitutes; what is the conflict? And who are the parties? In the *second pillar* it looked into; what are the causes and conditions of the conflict? This is where a critical analysis of the conflict was carried out. His third pillar looks at the conflict intervention perspectives and processes. This pillar constitutes a preliminary step to designing and implementing an effective intervention into the conflict. It evaluates other researchers’ interventions and their limitations and gives new ways of intervening in the conflict. The study analyzed Pokot culture as the main cause of conflict in cattle rustling in North Rift Kenya and look into effective intervention methodologies that can be applied.

It can be concluded that the life of the Pokot community rotates around their cattle. From their cattle they get food which includes milk, blood, and meat. They also get clothes and beddings from their hides and skin and also pay dowry for their marriage. The literature suggests that culture is a lens through which reality is perceived and the group’s worldview is formed.

## **Methodology**

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The research applied a qualitative method. interviews in Ten villages within Sook Division of west Pokot District, including women, men, and youths from different social, political and economic backgrounds were conducted. Basing on the guiding research question on the Pokot belief that all cattle belong to them, the researcher hypothesized that: people who have very strong traditional Pokot beliefs are more likely to view cattle rustling as acceptable. The qualitative research method was also used to test the hypothesis that the cultural belief in raiding is perpetuated by people (seers) who have an economic and political interest in promoting the very cultural system that places them in a powerful position. The researcher was looking for: what is in it for the seer? What are their interests? Is it connected with the Pokot belief that all cattle are theirs? To get to this the researcher asked open ended questions to the seers, ex-seers, and ex-raiders:

- a- I know this is a very honorable profession, but isn't it hard to make a living?
- b- How do people in the community see you?

For the ex-seers the same questions were asked but in past tense form. Other questions for them included: is being a seer a calling from God or a profession? How did you come to the decision of leaving? This was conducted in a formal interview.

Through discussions or informal interaction the researcher gathered information from both active and ex-seers. In order to carry out a successful interview the researcher established a relationship with his subjects to build trust. He assured them to maintain condition of confidentiality, by not mentioning of names or other identifying information and rather used pseudo-names. Details about individuals and locations of interviews were also withheld. Other groups that were interviewed included Pokot elders and the NGO officials who work in peace building in sook division.

### **Instrumentation**

*I would like to speak with you today about your views on cattle rustling in west Pokot District. Am specifically interested in what you know and how you feel about cattle rustling occurring within the west Pokot borders. If you feel uncomfortable with any of the questions I ask you may choose not to answer them. Assure those to be interviewed that their names will be withheld for confidentiality sake.*

- c- I know this is a very honorable profession, but isn't it hard to make a living?
- d- How do people in the community see you?
- e- Is being a seer a calling from God or a profession?
- f- How did you come to the decision of leaving? (ex-seer)
- g- I understand that God created the Pokots and gave them cattle, tell me about it
- h- Should other people posses cattle?

Questions for ; Elders, Police, Ngo officials,

- Why do think cattle's rustling is happening? Who do you think is responsible?  
Can you raid from your fellow Pokots or only from others?
- When did you become aware of cattle rustling?



- What measures if any have you done to intervene?
- What recommendations/suggestions do you have for other ways to make things better? (for stopping or decreasing cattle rustling)
- How hopeful are you that things will get better in the near future.

### **Research Assumptions**

- That there is a significant relationship between culture and cattle rustling in North Rift parts of Kenya
- That the role of the Pokot seers who foretells whether the raiders will be successful or not has been overlooked in conflict resolution in the North Rift Kenya.
- That the best and lasting solution to the conflict will come from within the Pokot people themselves

### **Scope and limitations of the study**

- The study was limited to the concept of culture and its impacts on conflicts among the Pokots in North Rift Kenya.
- The research method that was adopted was qualitative research methodology.
- The study acknowledges the fact that there are other dependent variables on ‘conflict’ in the north Rift however for manageable scope and the amount of time allocated for research only culture was be considered.
- Due to the limited amount of time allocated for this research, the study concentrated only in the Sook Division of West Pokot District though cattle rustling affects the whole north Rift Province.
- Some of the challenges the researcher faced was how to get to interview the active seers due to the culture of secretes in the Pokot community.

### **Interviews**

#### *Cattle rustling, the community perspective*

The purpose of the interviews was to explore the role of the Pokot seers also known as the *Werkoyon* as a forgotten party in the cattle rustling conflict in North Rift parts of Kenya. Their role in blessing the raiders, foretelling of their success and failure and how this contributes in conflict escalation. The interviews were also meant to establish the relationship between Pokot culture and Cattle rustling conflict.

#### *The role of the Pokot Seers (Werkoyon)*

The role of the Pokot seers (*Werkoyon*) is part of the rich Pokot culture to the extent that the Pokot culture seems incomplete without the seers.

From the interviews carried out during data collection which was inform of discussion involving five people, Ezra, Joshua, Kiptoo, Maria and Jeniffer<sup>11</sup>, who among them Ezra was a seer, it came out clearly that there are two types of seers among the Pokots. Those born seers, and those that inherit the gift from the family, which means the seer comes from the lineage of seer.

In response to the first question, “I know this is a very honorable profession, but isn’t it hard to make a living? Four out of the five including the seer (Ezra) agreed that since being a seer is a gift to the community and for their good, the community takes care of their seers. Since the questions was aimed at getting to know if there is any economic or monetary gain, the researcher made a follow up question, “Do the community reward them and if yes, how?” The answer was in affirmative. They responded in unison, “*Pesa Ya Kuangalilia*”( meaning literary; money for foretelling). “They are paid money for them to foretell and what amount of money is not specified. It’s upon the community to decide. It depends on whether he is foretelling an imminent danger from their enemies after raid, or foretelling good fortune like rains or showing directions, which to follow and recover their stolen animals. According to the five in the discussions, Ezra was of the opinion, “Yes, sometimes it’s hard to make a living out of being a seer because we largely depend on the good will of the people to give us gifts for our services but if they don’t trust you, then it is hard to make a living.” And Jennifer (a school teacher) had a different opinion. “It is very difficult for the seers to make a living out of it because today many people are civilized. The influence of religion and education is very high especially near the towns. There is also influence as a result of intermarriages and such families, no longer consult the seers? ” But in respond to Jennifer, Ezra was not fully convinced that it was civilization and education that has great influence but rather it’s about trust. “We get good gifts from the politicians during the election year. They are learned and go to church. Once we win their confidence and trust definitely they will reward you.”

How do people in the community see the seer? The response to the question varied. Three of them who were born and brought up in the remote parts were of the opinion that people in the community respected the seers because of the services and their age while the other two said it was not so much respected but fear, “People in remote places are made to fear the Werkoyon (seers). Sometimes, they fear them because the people think they will use their “occult” powers to harm them or curse them if they don’t respect them and what they say, ”It’s about ignorance of the people because they have not gone to school.

The researchers wanted to know if there are qualities for one to be a seer like education, or there are families that are reserved or destined for that role by asking this question. “Is being a seer a calling from God or is it a profession? And can a seer decide to leave or quit?” The whole group of the respondents agreed that not everyone can become a seer. One of the respondents (Joshua) Said; “This is for a specific clan among the Pokots, and it is passed on from generations to generations. It is hereditary. Although if a seer comes from a certain family, it does not mean that all members of that family are seers.” It is more of a calling from God rather

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<sup>11</sup> Pseudonyms are used in place of the real names for all respondents to protect their confidentiality.

than a mere profession. It's only unfortunate that most people nowadays take it as a profession because they need payments first which should not be the case." But Maria was of the opinion that, "It largely depends on the person with this gift of being a seer." Kiptoo contributing on the same said, "Right now it is a profession, but in the old days, I think it was a calling. It is a profession because there are many false seers everywhere and what they say never comes true.

The researcher intervened and asked, "Can one leave the calling or the profession?" The majority of the responses were, "Once a seer always a seer." But there are those who are advised by the community to leave, some are banished from the community, and even some are killed. These are the ones who mix witchcraft and being a seer. It is worth noting that witchcraft in Pokot community is not allowed and the punishment is death or being ostracized from the society. There are some who leave because of religious influence or education.

In trying to find out if there is a direct connection between seers and the raiders the researcher asked; Do the warriors who go raiding have any connection with the seers and if yes, what exactly happens?" The whole group agreed that this was a very sensitive question, and they were not ready to respond to it, but Ezra who is now a staunch Christian believed that it was important to share what exactly happens.

The raiders are first separated from their families and lives in seclusion for two weeks in the forest. They arm themselves and putting all they need for a successful raid. Later they pass by the house of the seer who slaughters a black goat and interpret the intestines. If the seer finds out from that ritual that the raid will be successful he gives them a road map to follow. He tells them where to follow and what they will encounter. The seer goes ahead to smear the raids with red soil and ties their wrists with a piece of the black skin from the goat as a sign of good luck, or a charm that they will not be harmed. The mothers to the young raiders also tie the black skin on their wrists, until their sons come back home. Failure to follow the seer's road map and instructions leads to killing of the raiders by their enemies. This was a clear indication that the role of seers cannot be overlooked for any successful interventions without the seers the raiders cannot go raiding.

Responding to the question, "why raid from other people and not from fellow Pokots?" They gave a narration of their myth of creation story. It's explained in Pokot creation story that in the beginning God created the first Pokot man on top of Mt. Mtelo and gave him the cattle. By saying so they meant not other persons in the world are entitled to own the cattle. This was a communal consensus passed down as a tradition from one generation to the next. Because of this tradition, they believe they don't steal but rather they return the lost or stolen ones.

#### *Relationship between culture and Cattle rusting.*

The second part of the interview targeted the elders of the Pokot, the police as law enforcers and the non-governmental organization officials, especially the world vision staff who

over decades have been promoting education in the Pokot district. The aim was to understand and analyse the conflict from those in moral, economic, religious and political authority's perspectives. The Pokot elders "kokwo" are highly regarded in the community because they are the custodians of the Pokot traditions and cultures in fact they are "the coffers of truth" and traditionally what they say is final and cannot be challenged.

The interviews were also aimed at evaluating the different kinds of intervention carried out by the different parties such as the police, the non-governmental organizations, and the Pokot elders themselves. It was aimed at looking into other recommendations or suggestion, towards ending the conflict.

The responses from the three Pokot elders, Patrick, James, and Peter indicated that cattle rustling take place because of prestige and fame. This is because riches in Pokot culture is based on how many cattle one owns not by how much money one has in his bank account. They also said that there has been a cycle of revenge and counter revenges from their neighbors hence creating an endless cycle of rustling. This has made it a very dangerous venture due to the proliferations of small arms from the unstable neighboring countries such as Sudan, northern Uganda, and the Somalia. When asked who is responsible for raiding, James who is a Christian said, "The young warriors are responsible. The cultural practice has been used to prove their courage after undergoing the rite of initiation into adulthood. They are expected to go and bring home the lost cattle. Also we have to blame the culture of dowry. For a young man to get married one has to pay a lot of cattle and their parents cannot afford these. They are advised to go and raid or no marriage for them." Peter also confirmed the same sentiment. When asked the cause of cattle rustling, he said, "An educated Pokot woman is very expensive, "ni kama kununua gari" (It's like purchasing a car). You are asked for more than 30 cows. But they also acknowledged that this is changing due to the influence by religion and education. He gave an example where a young man went raiding and killed the owner of the cattle but when the cattle were presented to the father of the bride as dowry, the father of the bride refused to take them since he was a Christian. This led researcher to ask more questions to the elders, "Why do the seers (Merkoyon) bless the raiders to go and kill?" The three were very categorical. The seers do not bless the raiders to go and kill because our culture does not allow killing, but rather they foretell the success or failure of the raiders. Any seer who contradicts their role is at once ostracized by the community.

The police officers who were interviewed attributed the cause of cattle rustling to the fact that the Pokot districts have been neglected by the government over the years. The roads are impassible, and following the raiders after the raid becomes difficult. They also acknowledged that raiders have more sophisticated arms, and attributed this to failed state of Somalia.

When asked, "If there is hope for bring the conflict to an end?" The police like the others interviewed before were very optimistic that education is one of the best tools of cultural transformation and so far more schools are needed in the remote parts where the cattle rustling cultural practice is deeply rooted. From the non-governmental organization staff, they gave the history of change and transformation over the past twenty years. They cited education and

religion as major contributors toward transformation of the cattle rustling cultural practice. The majority of the interviewees were positive that the culture will eventually be transformed!

## **ANALYSIS OF THE RESULTS:**

Analysis of eleven interviews carried throughout research revealed several themes, and sub themes of agreement a cross interviews in response to the questions, such as the role of the Pokot seers in cattle rustling conflict, Pokot traditional and cultural beliefs embedded in their creation story that all cows are theirs and their hope that education and religion has been the best tools in transformation. They were also able to link cultures with other conflict escalating factors.

### *Culture and other conflict escalations factors:*

During the interviews carried out the researcher noted the following links between the Pokot Culture and other causes of conflict escalation factors.

Since the colonial period and the three consecutive presidents has neglected the Pokot districts in terms of development programs hence impoverishing the people. This is manifested by lack of educational facilities and those that exists lack capacity and adequacy to support the growing population. This has led to the high rate of illiteracy in the Sook division. The researchers noted that the Sook Division which covers approximately 30 miles square has only one boy's secondary school, which was established five years ago, and no girl's secondary school to date. The researcher also noted that health facilities were lacking and those present were almost collapsing. This has empowered the Pokot seers who come up to foretell the cause of illnesses and sometimes attributing them to curse and witchcraft which only adds demands for more cattles for cleansing for such families.

Due to being labeled as war like by their neighboring communities the Pokots believe that the outsiders are enemies and thus the need to be armed in case of any attack. This has led to importation of small arms to defend their wealth.

There has been destruction of biodiversity due to overgrazing and overcrowding in places presumed safe. This has led to the exhaustion of the limited natural resources of water and pasture. This in turn created a need to search elsewhere hence accelerating conflict with their neighbors.

Poor infrastructure and road network has turned to be the biggest challenge for the police officers to provide better security services to the people. Above all, the role of the pokot seers (Werkoyon) took the majority of the blame for their role in giving road map to the raiders, blessing them, and giving them charm meant for protection during the period of raiding. From the interviews, the seers stand to benefit in a successful raid in the sense that they become more famous and earn themselves respect. They are also given gifts which include a big bull thus it becomes a source of income to them.

The cultural practice of giving dowry before marriage also was cited by all interviews as a major cause of the conflict. It was very clear to the researchers that these contributing factors have had a major impact on the escalation of the culture of cattle rustling and conflict in the north Rift part of Kenya. This cultural practice has made Pokots to think that conflict and cattle's rustling is a normal way of life.

It should be noted that marginalization is the result of distributive injustice in a nation. The government uses its resources in already developed areas and neglects to give the same to the Pokot districts which need preferential consideration in budgetary allocation. This has resulted in poverty, despair and crime which accentuate the culture of cattle rustling. Consequently, the Pokot community remains stuck in their traditional culture without socializing with other wider culture. They remain a closed society not out of their wish but because there are no other opportunities to enable them to grow and change. Thus the culture of cattle rustling remains. It has become the only means to some and an alternative to survival among the Pokots.

## **Recommendations**

When at least more than two groups manifest contrary claims, they have incompatible goals, they are in conflict. Frequently, one or both sides will try to coerce the other to accede to its wishes. This is what is happening in the north rift parts of Kenya. The pokot pastoral community is trying to force other neighboring communities to believe that all cattle are theirs, while the other communities believe it is not the case. The two incompatible beliefs lead to different incompatible goals that eventually flare up into conflict. The conflict may then escalate destructively as it has been over the years. With this background the research postulates the following recommendations which I consider applicable in addressing the problem of culture of cattle rustling and conflict in the North Rift Kenya.

### *1) Education*

Just like any other myth including the Biblical myth of creation story the different myths of origin have a loophole and one cannot question the internal logic in the myth for it ceases to be a myth when subjected to the critical court of reason. This makes education one of the best tools of cultural transformation. From the interviews carried out most of the respondents acknowledged the role of education and repeatedly offered the same as a recommendation towards eliminating the Pokot myth of creation that all cattle are theirs. Building of a girl's secondary school in Sook Division will be a big boost to the girls who are the first teachers of morals and faith to their children as mothers to the future generation.

### *2) Peace building from below<sup>12</sup>*

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<sup>12</sup> Miall et al op.cit p. 217

Miall, Ramsbotham, and Tom argue that peace building from below or from the grassroot levels is the best way to a lasting conflict resolution. This should involve an outsider partnership with the local people. According to William Ury in his talk on the role of the third sider he emphasized on the external third siders helping the internal third siders in coming up with a solution and not imposing the solution on the local people. This is what the government has failed in handling the cattle rustling among the pokot. For the conflict to be resolved the government should seek to understand the pokot leadership, including the role of the elders (*kokwo*) who are the decision makers; the government should partner with them in order to secure peace. This should be in conjunction with other stakeholders such as NGOs in training them. The government should also set aside funds towards the community dialogue and dispute management activities.

3) *The intervention must include all parties.*

There has been a group of very important persons in the pokot community that has never been addressed in conflict resolution and these are the seers (Werkoyon). These are the ones who fore-tell whether the raid will be successful or not. They also give traditional blessings and instructions to the warriors before they go to raid. This group must be addressed. From the research carried out it was clear that religion has a big role in transforming them by converting them and reawakening their conscience.

4) *Use of coercive and non-coercive methods.*

Sometimes coercive methods in conflict management can be used. This leads to negative peace for a while as other methods of peace building are being put in place. The Kenyan government needs to come out strongly in enforcing the rule of law to avoid self redress by the victims. The pokot community for a long period of time has taken the advantage of lawlessness in their region to cause harm and even endanger the lives of their neighbors. The government should disarm the pokot community and other pastoral communities who are in possession of the guns and in-return assure them of security from the government. By so doing the government will be acting in accordance to the Kenyan constitution which prohibits illegal arms. If this does not happen and the status quo remains then the culture of cattle rustling will continue, and fighting and poverty in the region will never be resolved. To effectively bring this proposal to fruition the government must work closely with our neighboring countries which are the source of proliferation of small arms. Also security measures in the borders to contain the influx of the arms into the country must be put in place. Non-coercive methods could yield much fruits in peace building in north rift region. Some of the non-coercive methods the government could use are: strong non violent campaign message of peace at all levels, peacemakers and its administration in helping transform the culture of the pokots and other pastoral communities. They should begin to help people understand that culture should grow and change with time in order to remain relevant, for example looking at other ways of paying dowry during marriage. One way of effectively transforming the culture is to introduce peace studies in the school curriculum in addition; nonviolent, social interactions between the Pokots and their neighbors should be encouraged. This could be done through sports' drama, religious activities, trade and

use of media in peace education programs. Non-coercive strategies could be done through persuasion. Persuasive inducements are efforts to influence an opponent by communicating arguments or appeals that alter their perception of the conflict. Disarmament of the pokot community can also be done in a very humane manner without use of force. For example collecting weapons from the Pokots nobody will be willing to surrender a gun he bought from the sales of his ten bulls so the government could use incentives to those who return their guns willingly. It could use rewards, “you give us your weapon’ we pay you something.” This non-coercive tactics should be accompanied with promise for a better future. If the government can be trusted to keep them secure, the involvement of the elders (kokwo) in the process will legitimize the operation since they are highly regarded in the Pokot community.

5) *Strengthen legal institutions.*

To fight self redress through revenge, which leads to cycle of conflict, the government should strengthen its legal systems in north rift. This will help solve disagreement, complains, problems, or contention. Parties should be encouraged to make legitimate claims on the other party through institutionalized methods of judicial proceedings. The adversary should be made to be responsive to the claims, within the legal framework in solving the conflict.

6) *Intergroup contact*

According to Yehuda Amri<sup>13</sup> intergroup contact is commonly believed to reduce prejudice and intergroup tension. Since most of the pastoral communities belong to what Karl Popper refers to as closed society category through intergroup contact a room for sharing and making friendship among the warring community is created. This will encourage intermarriages and thus reduce tensions since the Pokots will take their in-laws as part of their community and the culture prohibits stealing from their own. It will also reduce the stereotype thinking that exists among their neighbors that Pokots are warlike by nature. As it came out clearly from the interviews that the cultural practice is more common in urban centers than interior because of education, business interaction and intermarriages.

7) *Alternative livelihood*

The government should enhance better use of natural resources to prevent conflict among the pastoral communities. West Pokot district in known to be rich in minerals such as cement, and by putting up a cement factory in west Pokot will be a viable way to employ idle youths and would provide an alternative livelihood. This will in turn empower the community towards self reliance and self sustenance and move from depending on cattle only. It will also provide the seers with a source of income and thus avoid taking their role in the community as a means of livelihood.

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<sup>13</sup> Yehuda Amri.( 1988) in the hand book of interethnic coexistences, Ed; Eugene Weiner, New York: Continuum Publishing.



## 8) *Preventive measures*

There is a saying that goes “prevention is better than cure.” The government should create and implement policies that actually counter intractable conflicts expressed through cattle rustling. Such programs as listed below can be beneficial in preventing conflicts:

- Constant disarmament of any person armed in the region
- Strengthening or starting alternative livelihood like crop farming
- Developing of water resources by building dams as a way of storing the rain waters for drought seasons.

## **Further research**

It is clear from the research that there is need for economic empowerment in the transformation of the Pokot seers, the raiders and the culture of rustling. the researcher would recommend for further research on how micro-finance institutions can be used in development and empowerment of the Pokot community in this cultural transformation endeavor.

## **Conclusion**

Cattle rustling and conflict in the north rift Kenya have led to loss of lives, destruction of property and even displacement of people when conflict turns violent. Cattle raid is accompanied by indiscriminate killing of innocent people, the majority of whom are women, children and the elderly who are unable to run or hide. The practice has undergone tremendous transformation from normal cultural practice of replenishing to a more militarized, predatory and destructive practice. Conflict resolution in North Rift demands concerted efforts from both the government and other development partners in supporting programs whose efforts are geared towards conflict resolution and peace building. Without such programs being in place then cattle rustling becomes a norm which leads to conflicts.

Conflict in this region has also led to serious environmental degradation and real threat to water catchment areas in the north rift Kenya. Due to lack of alternative livelihood and increase in poverty level after some communities lost their cattle, many have resorted to felling the few trees that in the semi arid area of north rift burning and selling charcoal to earn a living. This has resulted to lack of rains due to interference with the ecosystem and water catchment areas. This implies scarcity of both water and pasture. Conflict in the north rift has increased economic hardship as the people’s only livelihood option, pastoralism has been ravaged. Cattle rustling in the past have increased the vulnerability of the poor pastoralists to hunger , malnutrition and poverty.

Basing on the recommendations the targeting of the transformation of the Pokot seers through religion and education and also through economic empowerment through micro finance institutions, and creation of employment through constructing of a cement factory in Pokot

Districts will create alternative source of livelihood. This will help transform the Pokot culture from violent culture to non violent culture since am convinced cultures grow and change with time and the Pokot culture too can change.

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## Appendix

### Interview guide-Questionnaire

*I would like to speak with you today about your views on cattle rustling in west Pokot District. Am specifically interested in what you know and how you feel about cattle rustling occurring within the west Pokot borders. If you feel uncomfortable with any of the questions I ask you may choose not to answer them. Assure those to be interviewed that their names will be withheld for confidentiality sake.*

- i- I know this is a very honorable profession, but isn't it hard to make a living?
- j- How do people in the community see you?
- k- Is being a seer a calling from God or a profession?
- l- How did you come to the decision of leaving? (ex-seer)
- m- I understand that God created the Pokots and gave them cattle, tell me about it
- n- Should other people possess cattle?

Questions for ; Elders, Police, Ngo officials,

- Why do think cattle's rustling is happening? Who do you think is responsible?  
Can you raid from your fellow Pokots or only from others?
- When did you become aware of cattle rustling?
- What measures if any have you done to intervene?
- What recommendations/suggestions do you have for other ways to make things better? (for stopping or decreasing cattle rustling)
- How hopeful are you that things will get better in the near future.