

INTERNAL TRIGGERS AND THE ESCALATION OF CONFLICT IN NORTHERN KENYA 1990-2014

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ABSTRACT

The article analyses the internal dynamics that were happening in Kenya and the impact they had on pastoral communities. This article argues that with the coming of Moi into power in 1978, and with political and economic liberalization happening in the late 80s and early 90's, a trend emerged where traditional pastoral conflict was increasingly being used for political and economic gains. In order to find out if multiparty contributed to the rise of conflict, the survey was conducted in Samburu, Pokot and Turkana. The study concluded that the transition from cultural to commercial raiding has tremendously escalated conflicts. The cultural raiding had rules that governed the number of cattle to be raided, the manner in which to carry out the raids and prohibited any killing especially of women, children and the

elderly. This assisted to control escalation of conflicts. The weapons used were inferior and incapable of mass destruction. With introduction of more sophisticated weapons like AK-47 rifles, conflicts resulting to deaths, mass displacement and annihilation of some villages became a new phenomenon. This in turn encouraged more arming of communities and cyclical retaliatory attacks. The cattle industry out of cattle rustling is a huge one supplying meat in urban areas. It is controlled by business people who are not necessarily pastoralists but very well politically connected. This has in turn increased black market for the meat out of stolen cattle thus further enhancing the illegal industry and demand for more cattle leading to more rustling and conflicts.

Key Words: *internal triggers, conflict, Northern Kenya, 1990-2014*

INTRODUCTION

Local political leaders have tended to encourage their people to continue with the age-old cultural practice of cattle rustling. These politicians fear that any attack on the practice of cattle rustling may be politically suicidal. Previous governments have recognised the importance of pastoral communities only when it requires their political support, such as during election time, thus the emergence of the political entrepreneurs. These political entrepreneurs reached their peak in the early 90's especially with the advent of multipartyism and the calls for majimboism. The second section of the article discusses the emergence of economic entrepreneurs.

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LITERATURE REVIEW

Emergence of Political Entrepreneurs

In 1978, Moi, assumed the office of the president following the death of Jomo Kenyatta. Moi came from a small semi-pastoral community, the Tugen of Baringo district. Most of the pastoral communities welcomed the political changes, hoping that it would bring good tidings to them since their son was now head of state. They claimed that Kenyatta's government had ignored them in the distribution of the "fruits of independence" or national resources. The pastoralists therefore hoped to obtain favours in terms of economic and political dispensation from the new government. These high expectations were never realised to a large extent. However, in the aftermath, new forms of banditry and cattle rustling sprung up in northern Kenya, apparently perpetrated by warlords with different sinister motives. Among the Pokot, the warlords are allegedly led by a senior politician in Moi's government, who in the 1980s had been jailed for two years after conviction in a court of law for engaging in "uncontrollable activities".

The bone of contention was the feeling by pastoralists that the government had taken them for granted for too long. This introduced new political and economic dimensions to cattle rustling and banditry. Politically, pastoral communities during Moi's era were staunch supporters of the government and the ruling party. However, some communities within the pastoralists especially the Pokot grumbled that they had been given a raw deal although they were part of the "KAMATUSA", a conglomeration of pastoral ethnic groups. Moi's appeasement were clear when dealing with the pastoral communities. He engaged in systematic appointments of personalities from the region to strategic and plumb positions. For example a lot of Kenyan Pokot and Samburu were appointed to security related dockets including the military, provincial administration and foreign affairs and international co-operation's dockets. Further, Moi made efforts to mend fences with key figures from the region whom he had fallen out with previously. General Lenges, a Samburu- also a pastoralist- was appointed as the Kenya Army Commander. Ismail Chelanga, another figure from the pastoralist was also appointed to the powerful docket of provincial commissioner in charge of Eastern Province, Kenya's second largest province. Francis Lekool, another personality from the pastoral community was appointed as provincial commissioner in charge of Kenya's capital city-Nairobi City.

In the early 1990s, clashes started in many Rift Valley Districts with multi-ethnic populations. Maasai and Kipsigis morans raided neighbouring Kikuyu, Luhya, Kamba and other farming communities in rural areas like Molo and the Naivasha hinterland (Daily Nation, 2012). The clashes subsequently spread to Laikipia, where Samburu and Pokot started attacking Kikuyu, who had settled there as small-scale farmers as a result of the post-independence land reforms. The clashes in Ol Moran, a small town in Laikipia, escalated in January 1998 when Pokot and Samburu morans raided Kikuyu farmers, killing two of them, stealing their livestock and burning down their houses. A counterattack of the Kikuyu farmers on pastoralist settlements was ambushed by well-armed Pokot and Turkana morans who killed 39 Kikuyu youth.

Majimboism, originally intended as a form of federal regionalism, was turned into a quest for ethnically exclusive territoriality and became vehicle for ethnic mobilization. Political campaigners from the Rift Valley's pastoralist groups, who became known under the pseudo-ethnic acronym of KAMATUSA (Kalenjin, Maasai, Turkana and Samburu), played a central role in pushing the idea. Majimboism was propagated as an alternative to multi-partyism, which was seen as a threat to KAMASUTA interests. Within weeks after the first rallies were started, violence erupted against non-KAMASUTA minorities in the Rift Valley, particularly against Kikuyu, who were branded as aliens and land-grabbers. The clashes, which were instigated by political leaders and carried out mostly by young men in traditional pastoralist dress, claimed about 1,500 lives and displaced an estimated 300,000 people between 1991 and 1993. The electoral violence of 1997 largely followed the same pattern (Anderson, 2010).

In contrast to their 'formerly passive role in national affairs,' pastoralists were prominently involved in these politicized clashes of the 1990s (Günther, 2009). Militant majimboism, which stirred up the violence of the 1990s as well as the post-election violence in 2008, also has repercussions for more localized conflicts between pastoralists. It fuels conflicts over control and access to territories that had formerly been used in a more flexible and less exclusive manner.

In the late 1990s and around 2000 local patterns of conflict among pastoralists in the north were influenced by national politics or regional politics in other parts of Kenya. In order to mobilise the government for their own causes, local leaders had to find out which degree of ethnicisation had become usual and subsequently legitimate elsewhere. There the ethnicisation of politics and the tolerance towards or even promotion of ethnic violence proceeded in giant steps, and the idea that every group had a homeland and the right to expel minorities by force gained ground (Günther, 2009).

Moi's decision to lift the curfew in Northern Kenya in 1997 was a politically calculated move to appease Northern Kenyan communities most of whom the government had neglected since independence. The government did this to wade off competition from the opposition who had promised to develop a Marshall plan for the development and transformation of the Northern Kenya region and to bring at par with other parts of the country. The lifting of curfew, however, came in the wake of other dynamic unfolding in the greater Horn of Africa region. Free movement of people in the region allowed for cross-border movement between Kenya's North Eastern province and Somalia.

The conflict between the Pokot and the Turkana, is among the oldest conflicts in Northern Kenya (McCabe, 2004). New waves of conflict escalated in 1995 when Turkana tried to occupy part of Pokot country and were defeated 'devastatingly (Bollig & Österle, 2007). Since then, the conflict has turned more and more openly into a boundary dispute that, in early 2012, involves mutual killings and large-scale displacements on an almost daily basis (Andae & Bii, 2012). One of the hotspots of violence is the village of Kapedo. A Memorandum to the Interim Independent Boundaries Review Commission (IIBRC) describes in great detail the Pokot claims to the place,

and particularly to the Primary School which was supposedly built for them by Finnish missionaries but ‘mischievously’ transferred to Turkana District in 1985 (East Pokot leaders, professional groups and community council of elders, 2010). In the last decade the Pokot have conquered territory that stretches far into former Turkana territory and turned Kapedo into a virtual Turkana bridgehead, which, according to many Pokot, had to be eliminated. Matthias Österle mentions that at times Pokot snipers shot at Turkana who dared to leave the village in search of water or firewood (Österle, 2007). Only recently, new factors have emerged onto the scene to fuel the on-going conflicts along the Pokot-Turkana border. Successful oil prospecting missions and a proposed geothermal power plant increase the desirability of areas of land that are claimed by both sides.

About three decades ago, Tornay noted that there is ‘no conscious, explicit territorial strategy’ behind pastoral warfare (Tornay, 1979). This view was shared by many of his colleagues of his time and after. Viewed in the light of current trends, however, tremendous changes in the drivers of such warfare become obvious. Presently, territorial expansion and boundary adjustments are at the core of many, if not most, conflicts. The expansionist tendencies now pursued through the act of raiding recall accounts of pre-colonial warfare among pastoralists. As outlined at the beginning of this article, many authors suggest that in the past raiding was used as a means of territorial expansion, until this was contained by the colonial administrations. In contrast to the current dynamics, raiding without territorial aspirations might be considered to have been a product of the colonial order. It began to revert to a semblance of its original form once the state lost the capacity to control boundaries, which in Kenya was noticeable when Daniel arap Moi’s grip on power began to fade (Greiner, Bollig, & McCabe, 2011).

While the political dimensions of inter-tribal violence are largely explicable, the nexus between political leaders and the actual raiders is much less clear. There is evidence that Kalenjin politicians were actively involved in the distribution of modern firearms to the Pokot in the mid 1990s. Sometimes this is also reported in the media (Barasa & Kipkoech, 2006). Yet finding out exactly which politicians are involved has proven challenging. This does not come as a surprise because since the post-election crisis of 2008 and the subsequent prosecution of Kenyan politicians by the International Criminal Court (ICC), more public attention is being devoted to politicians instigating ethnic hatred. In private talks, people mostly blamed area MPs and local councillors as culprits. Both are elected by the public and have to compete hard for their positions and balance different claims. Bollig, for example, describes how MP hopefuls were judged according to their capacity to guarantee organized provision of relief food (Bollig, 2006). In order to safeguard their positions, MPs must shield raiders from prosecution, while at the same time fearing that their raids may lead to a devastating government response and disarmament campaigns by the security forces, which they must also prevent.

In this context, it is also important to mention that, at least in East Pokot, most politicians are former herds-boys, and are familiar with the dynamics of violence. One active politician, once a cattle rustler himself, confirmed that during the 1990s booty from raiding was used to finance

political campaigns, and that today continuous raiding is particularly used to push people out of places that are perceived to have an economic benefit. Livestock raiding is an excellent strategy to this end for several reasons. It undermines their enemies' livelihoods to such an extent that it very often results in large-scale displacement. Acquisition of livestock provides sufficient incentive in itself; and thirdly, in light of this fact, it is very easy for politicians to blame cattle raiding on forces beyond their control. Yet there seems to be no clear chain of command between politicians and raiders, and therefore the raiders can hardly be described as militias in an emerging system of warlords, which appears to be the situation in West Pokot.

Apart from territorial expansionist, the politics of majimboism and political pluralism in Kenya in the early 1990's also played a huge role in the transformation of traditional cattle raiding to cattle rustling. The re-introduction of multi-party politics in Kenya had a number of far reaching consequences one of which was the eruption of ethnic clashes especially in the Rift Valley province. This was partially a fulfilment of President Moi's earlier prediction that a return of the country to a multi-party system would result in an outbreak of tribal violence that would destroy the nation (Human Rights Watch/Africa November, 1993). It was also because of the misconception of pluralism and majimboism by leaders from the ruling party and opposition parties as well as the general public. Beginning with the late 1980s, after the 1988 rigged elections and early 1990s many Kenyan political elites started questioning propaganda perpetuated by the ruling party. They began viewing pluralism as a cure-all for bad governance. They believed that pluralism could offer a forum for competitive politics and hence guarantee freedom of choice.

The Moi government had for long resisted multiparty claiming it would bring divisions and conflicts as Kenyan society was still not cohesive enough. With the 1992 election period approaching, the ruling elite realized that all was not well with them as the support was turning more to the opposition. To scuttle this, the government instigated tribal classes ostensibly to deny the opposition victory. The calculation was to unleash fear and scatter potential voters from their voting bases especially in opposition strongholds. Those behind this plan had recruited and gave special training to Pokot Kalenjin youths who were later released to various parts of the country to create mayhem (Report, 1992).

Conflict transformation in the North of Kenya could also be attributed to the calls by high ranking KANU officials for the re-introduction of a majimbo (federal) system of government based on ethnicity. In the built up for the 1992 elections and after, advocates of majimboism often called for the expulsion of all other ethnic groups from land occupied before colonialism by the Kalenjins and other pastoral ethnic groups (Weekly Review June, 29 1993; Kenya Times May 20 and 21, 1993; Daily Nation June 30th, 1993). The majimbo debate proved to be a recipe of chaos, ethnic animosity and conflict that befell Kenya between 1991 and 1995. The country's political history has it that the clashes began shortly after the infamous Kapsabet and Kericho majimbo conventions held by prominent Kalenjin and KANU politicians like Joseph Misoi, Nicholas Biwott, Kipkalya Kones, Henry Koskey, Ezekiel Barngetuny, Wilberforce Kishiero,

among others. The majimbo meetings were conducted later on in numerous places in the Rift Valley and it took Moi a long time to comment on this disastrous and loop-sided debate.

The KPRs (Kenya Police Reservists) avail sophisticated weapons to the community and even participate in the raids without community members. They also train the civilians on how to use the weapons and advice raiders on the best tactics to use to win the battle. In rural areas, especially in Northern Kenya, KPRs have always played an integral part of the administrative structure. Throughout their history, the KPRs have metamorphosed to become an important, if not the only, security agency in Northern Kenya. However, beginning in the mid to late 90s, the KPRs gradually became more of a private security. Increasingly, politicians and business people started requesting KPR as their security. This transformed a force that was meant for the community to be a private force controlled by a few who were able to pay for their services.

Emergence of Commercial Entrepreneurs

Escalation of pastoral conflict in Northern Kenya has also been attributed to the emergence of economic (warlords) entrepreneurs in pastoral conflict. This is referred to as the commercialization of cattle raiding. Commercialization of raiding cattle has affected pastoralists' warfare practices in three main ways. First, has been the introduction of hired fighters. This has provided an environment where rich people can hire fighters. These fighters may necessarily not be from the same community. This phenomenon should be seen as directly linked to structural changes within pastoral economy, and not just as a consequence of its exposure to the market. This transformation is supported by cases such as that of the Pokot, who on certain occasions have hired groups of (more feared) Karamojong morans to fight for them in clan raids.

Since independence, throughout to the 1990, state control over northern Kenya has been at best weak. Over time this has resulted in the emergence of cattle warlords who run armed militias to protect their interests. The emergence of cattle warlordism was first experienced among the Pokot and Turkana communities from the 1980's onwards. The first cattle warlord emerged in the 1980's from the West Pokot community. He mobilised a group of about 500 youths by promising them security and livestock. Most of the youth were recruited from the nearby trading centres where they were eking out a living as night watchmen, farmhands, or by performing odd jobs. These young men underwent some vigorous military training under the supervision of ex-military men.

After undergoing the training the morans were sent on raiding missions against the Tugen, Marakwet and Keiyo. Through several similar raids, the warlord and his retainers managed to replenish their stocks. Later more raids were organised further afield against the Turkana and Karamajong of Uganda. Most of these raids yielded good results. This marked the emergence of economic entrepreneurs to pastoral conflict in Northern Kenya. Due to the region's systematic marginalisation since independence and the natural calamities experienced in the late 80's and

early 90's compounded by a serious state of permanent insecurity created by bandits and to some extent by government security forces, the warlords have managed to win strong support from the people for their own personal gains.

The warlords created strong and heavily armed private armies which, apart from providing local security, also went for cattle raids, near and far. The warlords therefore have very many retainers whom they can send on raids, while they maintain and supervise the raiding party. The warlords have become the final authority on cattle relations, overriding the traditional powers of the elders. Available evidence shows that there are links between warlords and livestock traders from Kenya and neighbouring countries.

The system of cattle warlordism has gained prominence over the years for various reasons. First, there is the fact that the high numbers of destitute, uneducated youth who are desperate to make a living by any means necessary have proven an easy recruitment ground for the warlords. The warlords keep the youth as retainers who are in turn used for livestock theft for financial gain of the warlords. The second reason is due to the Government's failure and/or unwillingness to curb the spread of warlordism through its security systems. Cattle warlords work hand in hand with some government security agents in propagating livestock theft. The warlords have become increasingly powerful and that even in instances where stolen livestock has been intercepted by non-convicted junior security officers, the same have been called with express "orders from above" to let the stolen livestock free.

Secondly, commercialization of raiding has resulted in a gun culture and a thriving gun market. Guns give status. As a key informant stated 'one with a gun is not the same as one with a spear'. The gun culture has introduced a system where a few raiders, acting outside societal sanction can raid independently without much consequence.

Thirdly, commercialization of cattle enables people who are not herders to profit from livestock raiding. It has also enabled the morans themselves to raid independently from the social constraints. The resultant effect is that this form of independent raiding excludes reciprocity as marketed cattle cannot be raided back as the raided cattle are normally disposed off very quickly to the market.

Traditionally, within an economy based on reciprocity, livestock and military strength were independent variables. Indeed, one of the reasons for raiding used to be the need of restocking. Thus raiding was by and large a cyclical process in which groups in a restocking phase raided enemies that happened to be momentarily better off. The introduction of the market and the new links between the commercialization of cattle, weapons and labor created within this process, enable the transformation of livestock capital into military strength, which can then be used to further increase livestock capital in a cumulative process. Conversely, the ability to raid effectively increases long term differences between groups in marketing strategies. In Pokot, particularly, marketing of animals was liberalized and taken out of the hands of local councils,

which used to control the organization of cattle and goat auctions. Shortly after, control of local markets was taken over by Somali traders and powerful businessmen.

The transformation of cattle raiding into a commercial and entrepreneurial activity has increased the intensity of that raiding and is leading to major changes in economic, social and political structures in the border area. It is creating a black market for commercial cattle trading that straddles the localities, urban areas and the wider region. Access to small arms has become essential to successful commercial cattle raiding.

Since the mid-1990s, the main form of cattle raiding has become that which is driven by commercial considerations. There is a lot of evidence linking businessmen and politicians to this raiding, many believe that they are powerful and well-connected people in authority in Kenya, who are also characterised by their ability to easily access weapons. The financing of cattle raids for commercial purposes appears to originate in the towns and cities, with local organising 'agents' in the rural areas. Migration from rural to urban centres in Kenya has increased demand in the towns and cities for nyoma choma (roasted meat). This has increased the demand for cattle, which must be accessed by all means.

DISCUSSION

In order to find out if multiparty contributed to the rise of conflict, the survey was conducted in Samburu, Pokot and Turkana. The findings in the figure below revealed that yes indeed multiparty political contributed to the rise of conflict in the region.

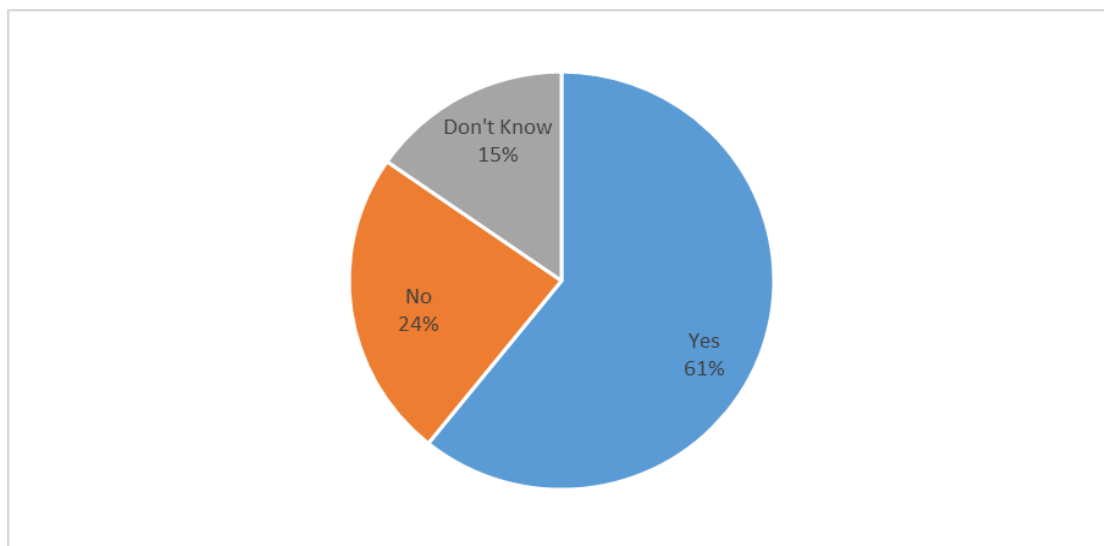


Figure 1: Multiparty Politics Contribution to Crime

In an effort to consolidate the votes of the pastoral communities, Moi formed the KAMATUSA-euphemism for Kalenjin, Maasai, Turkana and Samburu in response to the already existing agro-cultural formation called GEMA. Although this project was dropped after facing heavy

criticisms, Moi had already raised the consciousness of the pastoral communities of the need not divide their votes in the multi-party era. Moi's efforts appeared to have paid off since he emerged victorious though with allegations of rigging in both the 1992 and 1997 general elections. Further, his party KANU won the majority seats in the national assembly. Similarly, pastoral communities remained steadfast in KANU even as other regions were embracing multi-party democratic politics. The region only appeared to join other political parties following the crumbling and fatal defeat of KANU after Moi exited power in 2002.

The article also found that the conflicts between these communities were instigated by 'unsavoury and inflammatory statements by politicians (Daily Nation, 2012). It is noted that the Kikuyu of Ol Moran complained of repeated livestock raids before and received unsigned letters asking them to leave the area. The Akiwumi Report states that the violence was instigated by politicians of the Kalenjin faction to clear the area of oppositional voters with respect to the elections in 2002. This escalation of violence was related to more general shifts in the political landscape that are part of Kenya's troubled nation-building process (Branch & Cheeseman, 2010). Anderson describes in detail how the pressure for multi-partyism in the early 1990s led to the revival of majimboism as a defensive reaction, particularly by Kalenjin and Maasai politicians loyal to President Daniel Arap Moi, who had been in power since 1978 (Anderson, 2010). They use incitement to start conflicts in the region and supply weapons like guns and bullets to the community as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Explanation of the contribution by Politicians

	Frequency	Percent
Supply of sophisticated weapons/bullets	85	21%
Facilitation (food/water/market)	103	26%
Political influence(inciting)	208	52%
Promoting tribalism	2	1%
Others	1	0%
Total	399	100%

People outside Samburu, Pokot and Turkana who are the beneficiaries of the cattle from the regions also contributed to the escalation of conflict in the region. The survey that was done revealed the external people had a role to play in ensuring that they get cattle for their businesses even if it included war as shown in the figure below.

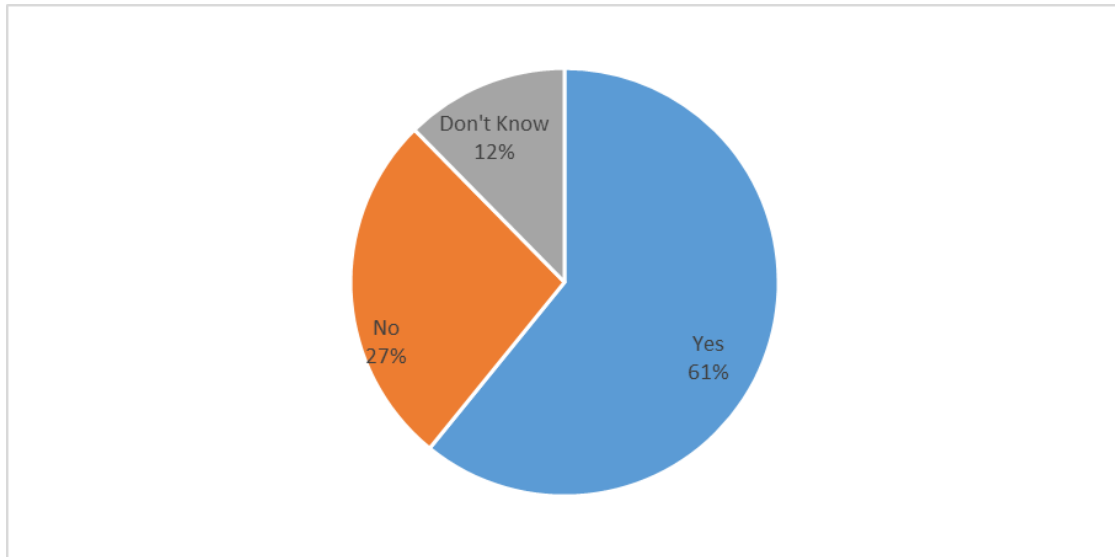


Figure 2: Contribution of People outside Samburu, Pokot and Turkana

From the findings in Figure 2, majority of the respondents (61%) were in agreement that there is contribution of people outside Samburu, Pokot and Turkana in ethnic conflict. However, 27% of the respondents stated that there is no contribution of people outside the three communities. The article further sought information on the explanation to the contribution of people outside Samburu, Pokot and Turkana.

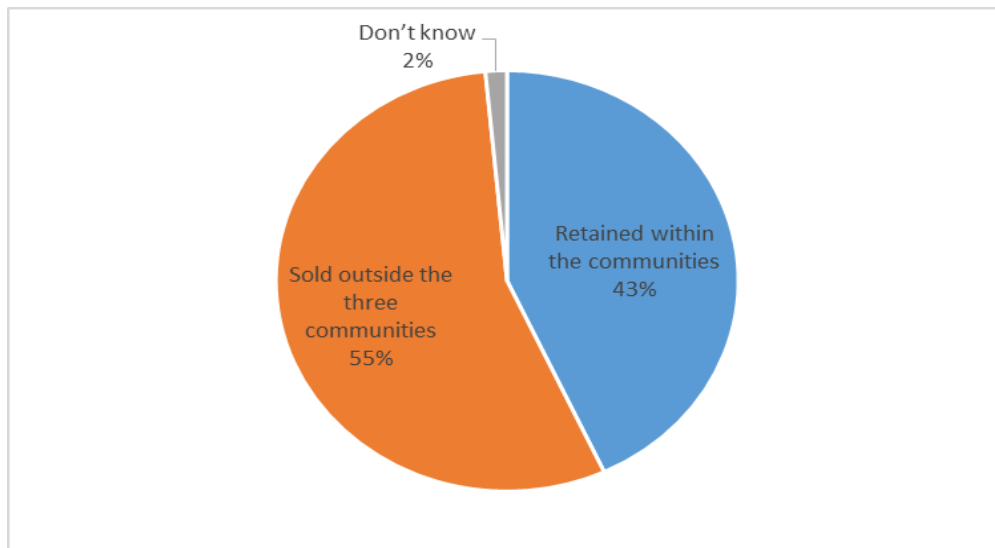


Figure 3: Location of Raided Cattle

The raided cattle, as shown in Figure 3, are sold outside Pokot, Samburu and Turkana since 55.4% of the respondents stated so. However, 43.1% of the respondents indicated that the raided cattle are retained within the communities. Traditionally raided cattle were kept within the three Nilotic Pastoralist Communities.

Key informants spoke of a meat seller very widely known in Kacheliba town in West Pokot. He possesses many lorries and apart from trading in cattle, has also traded in guns in the past. He is one trader whom the people speak in harsh tongues as a very rogue cattle rustler. However, because of the immense power he wields, he is 'untouchable'. In Samburu, it was discovered that many of the raided cattle ended up for sale in Dagoretti or Isiolo. Some have suggested that some of the raided cattle meat from Samburu could be being sold as far away as South Africa and Saudi Arabia. This implies that co-ordinated trading cartels on a transnational scale are operating. The increasingly organised and militarised nature of commercialised cattle raiding in the Northern Kenya and its links to wider trading networks means that the authorities face a tough struggle to combat it. This struggle has been rendered all the more difficult because some politicians and officials have become part of that trade themselves.

CONCLUSIONS

Politicians have been accused of instigating cattle raids and conflicts. They have done so through funding of the raids and verbally igniting the youth to engage in conflict during political rallies. Politicians have been accused of their active involvement in distribution of firearms to the Pokot in the mid-1990s. The transition from cultural to commercial raiding has tremendously escalated conflicts. The cultural raiding had rules that governed the number of cattle to be raided, the manner in which to carry out the raids and prohibited any killing especially of women, children and the elderly. This assisted to control escalation of conflicts. The weapons used were inferior and incapable of mass destruction. With introduction of more sophisticated weapons like AK-47 rifles, conflicts resulting to deaths, mass displacement and annihilation of some villages became a new phenomenon. This in turn encouraged more arming of communities and cyclical retaliatory attacks. The cattle industry out of cattle rustling is a huge one supplying meat in urban areas. It is controlled by business people who are not necessarily pastoralists but very well politically connected. This has in turn increased black market for the meat out of stolen cattle thus further enhancing the illegal industry and demand for more cattle leading to more rustling and conflicts.

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